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The Great Miners' Strike 1984-85

pages 8-9



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THE WAR ON IRAQ WAS ILLEGAL

KICK OUT THE WAR CRIMINAL BLAIR



David Blunkett wants to reduce the burden of evidence needed to prove terrorists guilty from what is true "beyond reasonable doubt" to what is true "in the balance of probability".

But by any definition of guilt, Tony Blair is a war criminal.

According to Dr Brian Jones and Dr David Kelly, two of Britain's top weapons experts, Saddam did not have the capacity to threaten his neighbours, and Tony Blair's dossier to take Britain to war was "over-egged", "sexed up" - a pack of lies.

According to international weapons experts on the ground - Hans Blix, Mohamed El Baradei, David Albright and David Kay - Iraq has not had weapons of mass destruction since the 1990s. An out-of-date student research paper and a widely discredited piece of intelligence, which even the CIA said was unreliable, kept up their pretence that Saddam was an "imminent" threat.

No WMD have been found in Iraq in 10 months of occupation.

Whistle-blowers Katharine Gun, Clare Short and David Kelly have all been threatened with legal and

disciplinary action - against the rule of international law, which protects those exposing illegal acts.

Gun's trial was halted when she sought access to the government's legal advice.

Indeed, Attorney General Lord Goldsmith's legal opinion on the war was changed - just days before the invasion - to support it. Tony Blair still refuses to publish it. Lord Hutton's whitewash of the government defied the evidence presented to him in public; the new "inquiry" led by Lord Butler will meet in secret.

Britain's judiciary, stuffed with Lords, is not politically independent, violating all our human rights.

British forces in Iraq are accused of murdering at least nine Iraqi civilians and of torture: hanging suspects on forklifts, kickboxing prisoners while calling out footballers' names, and simulating sexual intercourse in front of them. The occupation armies have killed over 10,000 civilians. Britain has held seven Arab nationals illegally in Belmarsh prison - without charges or access to due process - since December 2001.

Beyond reasonable doubt and in the balance of probability, Blair is a war criminal. Kick him out.

THIS GOVERNMENT IS ILLEGITIMATE

Leicester College: backroom deal threatens bold strike

By Bernard Harper, Leicester College Natfhe

After four weeks of all-out action, members of the lecturers' union Natfhe at Leicester College have suspended their strike. The dispute was sparked by a management attempt to enforce a new contract which would remove all limits on teaching hours and cut holidays by four days. Having imposed the contract on all new staff, college principal Maggie Galliers tried to win over existing staff with a one-off bribe of £1,800. Although 130 took the money, the vast majority rejected it. Faced with such a threat, the college branch realised that one-day strikes would be ignored and rightly decided on indefinite action. Management stooped to all kinds of dirty tricks to try to break the strike. Students were phoned and told their classes were on only to arrive and find either old hand-outs or an unqualified stand-in. One psychology lesson was taken by the head of hair-dressing and an A-level biology class was

taught by an aromatherapy lecturer! Management's filthiest ploy was an attempt to persuade the media to interview a group of special needs students about the strike - having told NUS representatives that they weren't allowed to comment on the strike! From the start, the strike was marked by a high level of rank and file involvement and democratic decision-making. The branch committee broadened into a strike committee, which met daily and involved many new members. Packed branch meetings took place twice a week and over 100 members picketed the four main sites daily. In addition, strong links were made with other unions. Several unions sent delegations to the picket lines and branch members joined other trade unionists in struggle, including the AUT and PCS. Natfhe members spoke to union branches in Leicester and farther afield, winning much admiration and significant financial support. The turning point in the strike came when the union's national "college officer", Barry Lovejoy, proposed a new round of

talks. After negotiations broke down in the second week, the management had insisted they would hold no more talks while the strike lasted but now they agreed to a meeting - provided branch officers were not present! After that meeting, Lovejoy proposed a suspension of the strike in return for new negotiations, which was simply what management had demanded all along. This was overwhelmingly rejected by strikers at a mass meeting. But, instead of building on this show of strength and insisting that management had to negotiate with branch officials before any return to work, Lovejoy agreed a deal himself, behind their backs. The outcome was a statement that committed management to a negotiated contract for all staff but also agreed in principle to an increase in teaching hours and the loss of holidays. The confusion and misleadership over these two days contributed to growing unease among the strikers. When the full branch met, the strike committee agreed that the final decision should be taken by secret ballot rather than a show of hands.

Strikers voted the deal down 2-to-1. But they were also asked whether they would remain on strike. A minority indicated they were intending to return to work whatever the vote. In the light of this, a proposal was made from the floor to suspend the strike for four weeks to allow negotiations and this gained a majority. How does the balance sheet stand? The decision to suspend the strike is undoubtedly a set back. It has taken the pressure off management just when it should have been increased. The danger now is that management will present the statement agreed by the national officials as binding on the branch, even though its own elected officers had no say in reaching it. The statement itself has been published jointly - but an accompanying 11-point agreement has not yet been. In fact, very few branch members had even seen it at the time of last week's meeting. The four-week suspension of strike action must be used to build on the gains in membership and union organisation at the college. The strike was solid because of the democratic involvement of all members in

running it and the crucial issue now is to maintain that involvement. Above all, the branch now has to wrest control over negotiations away from the full-time officials. The actions of Barry Lovejoy, not so long before a leading light in the Socialist Lecturers' Alliance, have given a salutary lesson to strikers about the nature of the union bureaucracy as a conservative cast whose interests are rather different from those of the rank and file strikers. The strike committee should take sole responsibility for negotiations and report back to members via regular bulletins in defiance of management's insistence that only joint statements be published. No agreements should be reached without a majority vote at a branch meeting. The links with Unison, the NUS, and other unions and campaigns should be developed through the work under way to establish a Leicester Social Forum. With one eye on management and the other on the Natfhe bureaucrats, the branch needs to prepare itself for the next stage of the fight to defend union organisation and resist worsening of conditions.

Lecturers fighting for real deal

By Sue Thomas, Natfhe

Natfhe members in seven colleges mounted a one-day strike on 26 February because their local managements had not implemented the nationally negotiated 2003-4 pay rise of 3.5 per cent. In all cases there was strong, well-supported action. The strikes embraced colleges as diverse as the traditionally militant and well-organised Bradford College, through to rural Evesham. In a number of other cases, such as Oxford, just the threat of action was enough to secure the payment. Most colleges received increases in funding for 2003-4 following the "Success for All"

package launched by Education Secretary in 2002. The promise of this money resulted in a two-year nationally negotiated pay deal, which is supposed to deliver 3.5%, followed by a further 3% and transfer onto national scales in August. This package was recommended by the union's national executive last autumn but rejected by a delegate conference. The left, organised in "Natfhe Rank and File", correctly argued that the pay increases were inadequate and that there was no guarantee that the deal would be binding on all colleges. Many employers would seek to either maintain or introduce forms of banding and performance related pay (PRP) to prevent progression up the pay scales. In other words

the deal failed to meet the original claim for parity with schoolteachers. Abandoning the national pay campaign left branches to fight on their own. However, given the NEC recommendation, the membership voted heavily in favour of the deal. The solid support for the strike in the colleges which have not paid up shows that the members now expect the money. The real test will come in the next few months. First, can the union ensure that every single college pays up this year? To ensure this happens, the union will have to support members taking more determined action including walking out and staying out. Even more significant will be the fight around the second part of the settlement. Not

only will branches have to guard against any form of PRP, but they will also have a fight on their hands to get the new national scales in place. Most college managements aim to retain as much local control as possible and the corporate status of individual colleges allows them to do this. And the effect of the "Success for All" package will become more apparent: some of the heralded money isn't new, but has been moved from other budgets in a typical New Labour smoke and mirrors operation. Secondly, funding comes via the Local Learning and Skills Council with various strings attached. Colleges have to show they are meeting the needs of local businesses, that they have "reward strategies" for their staff; money can be taken

from "failing" areas and given to "excellent" ones. This could leave colleges unable to sustain community provision, a situation made even worse by the attacks on Adult Education. (Don't dare sign up for an evening class just because you might enjoy learning - you must get an approved qualification). It will leave more colleges vulnerable to closure. And it will also mean more colleges refusing to honour the national pay deal. As it becomes clear that colleges are not implementing the second phase of the deal, or worse are introducing new or extended "instructor" grades, then Natfhe members will have to demand that the union returns to fighting nationally for a real national pay agreement.

Ireland: apprentices campaign against fees

By a Revolution supporter, Galway

In the early 1990s a Labour Party minister of education, in the then Coalition Government and under pressure from the unions, abolished third level student fees under the slogan "Education - a right not a privilege". Yet in the last five years the present Government has reintroduced such fees under the guise of registration charges and has now provoked a new wave of resistance. Apprentices, who are young workers who come on block release to the Polytechs (regional technical and further education colleges), had these fees of 223 Euros imposed on them for the first time ever, when they arrived for their 12 weeks in

January. The apprentices felt that fees were especially unjust for them - for three reasons. First, the Polytechs imposing the fees get allocations from Fas - the State Training Authority - to cover the expense of servicing (you could hardly call it educating) the apprentices. Second, the apprentices, as workers, are already liable for both pay PAYE and PRSI (pay-related social insurance) taxes. Third, they are now charged one-third of the standard registration fee, for the third of a year in their block release. They correctly see the fees as an unjust triple charge or tax on them by the Ahern Government. The student unions have, in general, ignored the apprentices' needs.

These bodies were effectively doing nothing. The key change occurred when the TEEU, the main electricians union in the South, called a day of apprentice strike action on 25 February. Though very few apprentices are, at the moment, members of this or any trade union the response was good. So good that one could talk of the first Republic-wide apprentices' strike since the early 1900s. As expected class boycotts and mass picketing of colleges were biggest in Dublin - leading to a march on the Dail building in which several apprentices were attacked by the police and a few arrested. In Galway, the walkout from classes was slow to develop and mass picketing uneven initially. But due to the presence of experienced

trade unionists from the TEEU and the Teachers Union - one of them from Workers Power (Ireland) - the pickets began to grow as the morning rolled on and to move in ever bigger elliptical orbits across the entry grids. This lasted for half a day aided by apprentices' cars equipped with ghetto blasters which the apprentices - already masters of electrons - linked to car engines so that they were able to impose their own rhythms on the songs. A massive flow past of celtic tiger juggernauts, their drivers inspired by the great cacophony, blew their horns - sometimes till they went out of range. The Galway Polytech's managing director, whose office was close by, reportedly had to get a new office for the morning. A key issue now will be to get the

TEEU officials to stick to their promises and support the apprentices - with a strike in the power stations etc if necessary to force the Government to cancel the fee on apprentices in its entirety. And, as an immediate issue apprentices should force Emergency General Meetings in each Poly by circulating petitions. Such meetings should decide days of student strike action and other activities in support of the apprentices and for the abolition of all fees for all students. Finally, the hunger of these young workers for radical ideas was shown in Galway - a small and not especially progressive city - as the young strikers purchased 30 copies of Revolution. ● For more details, solidarity, etc. tel Galway: (00 353) 091 757890

There is something rotten in the state of Britain

The truth is closing in on Tony Blair. And the truth is, he ordered British troops to invade Iraq knowing the war was illegal. Only a last minute change in the legal advice from Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, gave Blair the green light for war. They knew in their hearts it was illegal; they knew in their hearts there were no WMD there worth worrying about; they knew they had to go to war because Blair had promised it to Bush six months before.

The way the truth has filtered out has further damaged the credibility of a government that is increasingly seen to be built on lies. Katharine Gun's trial was halted because "securing a conviction was impossible". Impossible without revealing the truth, that Blair declared war on Iraq in the full knowledge that it was illegal.

Gun's lawyers would have called the Attorney General as a witness. The document they intended to present to court contained lines of blacked out writing. There is little doubt that the text behind those lines is all that separates Tony Blair from his last ministerial car ride through the Downing Street security gates. It revealed that the Foreign Office thought the approaching war was illegal. This was confirmed, once the case had collapsed, by the former Foreign Office legal adviser Elizabeth Wilmshurst, who resigned on the eve of war.

Military chiefs had already expressed political opposition to the war. In a private meeting with Blair, it has been reported that at least one of them threatened to resign. In the days before the war, commanders lower down the chain of command were refusing to send troops into Iraq without the cast iron defence of legality.

Goldsmith obliged – just as he obliged again 12 months later by ordering Gun's case



Blair has to go

to be dropped. The protestations that this was not a political decision, and taken purely on legal grounds, were the kind of desperate lie governments tell when they are on the brink of disaster.

But the Gun case exposed more lies than this. Britain was asked to spy on the UN diplomats who would throw out their demands for a resolution that would make war legal. Not just "spy": GCHQ was asked to take part in a "surge" against the UN. Who can doubt that this listening surge was not accompanied by a surge of political pressure – legal and illegal. Claire Short's most damning revelation was not that Britain spied on the UN too: who would be surprised? It was the revelation that she had to prevent Baroness Amos from offering the illegal use of aid to gain political support for the war.

Short has been condemned from all sides for revealing the secret. Pious prigs from the Tory right to the so-called Labour left are outraged that she broke her Privy Council

oath. In doing so, Iraqgate throws light on yet another institution of British "democracy" that is shadowy, unaccountable and undemocratic. The Privy Council is a body of ministers and ex-ministers appointed by the Queen. Its governmental function is, in ordinary circumstances, ceremonial – allowing Ministers to get Royal Assent for legislation that does not go through parliament, like raising the minimum wage. But in extraordinary times it functions as part of the unelected state that really runs Britain.

It is a secret, cross party body, you have to have been a minister to get on – though not all ministers get on. Left wing Labour ministers have traditionally been excluded. To get on you take an oath drawn up in Tudor times. An oath of secrecy.

According to its website: "it is only in very special circumstances nowadays that matters will come to a Privy Counsellor on 'Privy Council terms'. These will mostly concern matters of the national interest where it is important for senior members of opposition parties to have access to Government information."

The Butler inquiry into the Intelligence Services, currently beavering away trying to exonerate Tony Blair, is being held 'on privy council terms'; Iain Duncan Smith was shown the intelligence on which Britain went to war on the same terms. No doubt, as Blair slides deeper into trouble – and more is revealed

about the lies and cheating that took Britain to war – Blair will speak to Howard on Privy Council terms about how they get out of this mess without undermining faith in British governance.

The Privy Council is not a Tudor relic. Like the monarchy, it is a powerful anti-democratic institution that should be scrapped – along with the other secret committees of state that the Hutton Inquiry put under the spotlight.

It's a rule of politics that the more we hear about the Privy Council, the bigger the crisis really is. And this is a big crisis.

Blair has lost the trust not only of a large section of the Labour Party. The Tory right is banging away through its favourite organs – The Telegraph and the Spectator – on the theme that Britain went to war on a lie. This is not just political opportunism; some on the Tory right actually did oppose the war. But they're being driven by a powerful lobby within the military that resents being bogged down in a futile occupation of Iraq and, quite rightly, does not want to find itself in the dock at the International Criminal Court, which, if the war were proved to be illegal, they could well do. "I was only obeying orders" – as every general has been taught since 1945 – is not a defence for war crimes.

So, with the Tory right chasing Blair like a weary fox, where have the Labour left and the unions been? Cowering in horror. Iraqgate has always been a problem for union leaders like Derek Simpson and Kevin Curran: their plan is for an orderly transition to Gordon Brown, bought at the price of political concessions on "trade union issues" and the commitment to "move on" from the Iraq issue. But the Iraq issue threatens to bring down this government. Gordon Brown and his cowardly clique of number crunchers will go down with it, if it falls.

Derek Simpson – who opposed the war and helped the Labour conference defeat Blair on tuition fees and PFI – has now slammed Clare Short: "I can't understand why and what it has added to the discussion except to create anger about a subject that is, at the moment, probably the least relevant. We really need to ensure that a Labour government is kept in power."

This is the kind of thing you can only write if you spend your working day in a trade union headquarters, surrounded by ageing bureaucrats. The subject of Iraq is, of course, the least relevant if you are engaged in a bargaining process with Gordon Brown over minor improvements to the minimum wage or new defence contracts to your members' shipyards. But once Labour Party members get out onto the doorsteps in the 10 June elections it will seem a bit more relevant: "Blair's a liar on the war, he's running down and privatising our services, the government can't be trusted" will be something they hear from friend and foe alike. Pointing out you've saved the jobs of 3,000 engineers at British Aerospace will not make it go away.

Blair has to go. Give him another five years and the Blairites will finally dismantle the NHS, the civil service and – no doubt – embroil us in another senseless and illegal war somewhere down the line. Simpson's argument that we can't bring down Blair without letting the Tories in is beside the point.

Our reply is clear: it is not that there is no difference between Labour and the Tories; Labour is a capitalist workers party and has delivered some reforms in response to pressure from its working class electoral base. But it has done many times more in response to the pressure from its real masters in the City, on Wall Street, in the White House. On the baiting of asylum seekers it has run Howard neck and neck.

To stop these anti-working class attacks we do need to drive Blair and the Blairites out of Number 10 and the leadership of the Labour Party, whilst recognising that to get Brown in exchange will be scarcely any improvement at all.

What is important is mobilising mass forces on the streets, in the workplaces for struggle against the policies of Blair and Brown, Howard and Kennedy. If Labour were to lose an election due to "losing control" of the unions and giving in to their demands, through failing to be able to continue the demolition of the health and education services, through failing to be able to deliver new wars for George Bush, then so be it. A reviving and militant mass movement can fight any government. The idea that Thatchers' victories in the 1980s prove that any Labour government is better than the Tories is a counsel of cowardice and surrender of all our gains.

What the 1980s does show is that a demoralising anti-working class Labour government, a reformist Labour Party, a bureaucrat-led union movement certainly hamper and cripple the fight for our basic needs and lead to defeat. But there was and there is an alternative to this. Fighting unions, local councils of action (social forums) and above all a new workers party that can lead and unite the struggles – and re-educate a generation of young people, cynical about politics, with socialist ideals.

By building a mass campaign to kick Blair out today, we can at the same time lay the foundations of an alternative to Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Michael Howard. The 13 March Labour Party Conference must be surrounded by anti-war protesters, demanding Blair's head; delegates inside should drown out his conference address.

The 13 March should become a dress-rehearsal for the following week's huge global protest against the illegal occupation of Iraq. A massive show of strength that day can finish off what the great marches of 15 February 2003 started:

KICK OUT THE WARMONGERS!

March 2004 © 3

NEW L5I WEBSITE LAUNCHED www.fifthinternational.org

The new League for the Fifth International site is on line. Reflecting the decision taken last year at our Congress to rename our international tendency, the new website can be found at:

www.fifthinternational.org

It continues to carry weekly updates on the key international political events, first posted by our weekly newswire. It also gives a central focus to the debates and mobilisations of the global anti-capitalist movement (including the ESF and WSF), the resistance to the US-led "war against terror", especially in the Middle East.

It draws together resources on the history of the international workers' movement – including the L5I – allowing visitors to access more easily the arguments that press the case for building a new, Fifth International.

You will also be able to access the websites of the sections of the L5I from the home page.

You can make online purchases of our current publications, download out-of-print ones, make a financial donation and join an online web forum with other visitors. A new site map will make navigation easier and clearer.

It will replace www.workerspower.com as the L5I's main international internet portal and that site will be transformed into the website of the British section of the L5I. In time much of the archive material of workerspower.com will migrate to the new L5I site, leaving Workers Power Britain to revamp the site to carry more on campaigns, more downloadable resources (e.g. leaflets, stickers) and access to the full monthly paper.



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Civil service striker speaks out

Workers Power spoke recently to Jackie Dutton, branch secretary of the Lambeth and Southwark Department of Works and Pensions branch of the Public and Commercial Services union. Union members have just taken part in the biggest strike in the civil service in nearly 15 years as part of an increasingly bitter pay dispute

WORKERS POWER: How effective do you believe the strikes were on the 16 and 17 February and why did people support them?

Jackie Dutton: The union said that nationally about 75 per cent of the workforce came out on strike, so it was a success. In this office, and others like it, most of the members are on lower grades and some receive benefits, a number of them are also single parents so they backed it.

WP: Do you believe the work-to-rule will be effective?

JD: If it is done properly and if it is solid then it will have an impact. Employers rely on the goodwill of staff to do work beyond their duties and beyond their hours.

WP: What was the mood in the office during the strike and since?

JD: The mood in the office during the strike was good. Building up to it there was little bunking off and on the day the turn out [on the picket line] was very good. Now people are waiting to see what happens. Staff are aware that just because the employers have said they will re-enter negotiations nothing may come of it - just like last time. We are talking about how to make the work-

to-rule work for us and seeing what the employers come up with.

WP: What do you think about the argument that striking will only harm the unemployed?

JD: There are some things we can do to minimise the effect of the strike on claimants. We told people we were on strike and if they wanted anything done they would have to come in beforehand, which they did and the days before the strike were very busy. As a trade union, what we do is to get involved in the unemployed workers' groups around the country, and have them at our national conference. What the employers should do, and don't do, is that if they are going to have massive disruption on certain days they should treat them like Christmas or Bank Holidays and inform people of alternative arrangements and pay their benefits earlier. Management did it in this area but other places around the country they didn't.

WP: What did you think of the suspension of the action on the 29 and 30 January because of management saying it was willing to talk?

JD: Speaking for me and for people in this office, I was extremely nervous about informing members about it. The mood of the mem-

bers was very angry in this office and at other offices in the branch. Now, as a union representative, whatever we thought of it we had to go out and build the biggest strike on the 16 and 17 February, which is what we did. But it did create hurdles, which we had to overcome with a lot of talking to people in the run-up to the strikes in February. One of the common things was that people were coming up to me in the week before the strike and asking: "Is it definitely on, it's not going to be called off is it?" Once we overcame these initial feelings, things began to solidify but we had to do a lot of work to get things back to where they were in January.

WP: What are the next steps in the dispute, in the DWP and civil service more generally?

JD: What really encouraged people in this office was that they were going out on strike with other civil servants. That is why people were vexed about the calling off of the strike in January. But we are pleased that other parts of the civil service are also balloting over pay. After the suspension, activists made it very clear to the members all the way down the line that management's offer was inadequate and if that was all they were offering we had to go on strike.

In terms of taking it forward, some of those discussions have yet to be had in some workplaces. We have also been kicking around ideas like striking for a half a day, every day in a particular week in this office. None of that is official, we are just discussing action that will be effective but won't adversely affect a low-paid workforce.

WP: Apart from through the national trade union structures, have there been any other co-ordination between the departments?

JD: We don't have as many links as we should or we did. There used to be links, which were built up over time, between the benefits agency and the employment services but we

could do with more co-ordination between departments at the local level. This DWP is different because a lot of the offices are 'out in the field' unlike where I previously worked where we had the tax office next door and had better links.

WP: What do you think of the Gershon Review, which said that there were far too many civil servants?

JD: There is a common thread to all the reviews of the civil service and that is they believe you can cut back on the jobs without affecting the service. Obviously, this is not the case in the job that I do and my members do. We provide front-line services for vulnerable people and cutting back on the number of staff doing the job in these offices, which are already badly understaffed, is going to have an impact on the services we provide. This is just short-sighted; most civil servants do an excellent job and provide good services. The idea that private is better and cheaper has been proved wrong. Even in my own department, where we have had contracts going to private sector firms, such as Reed, to get people into jobs they have gone to the public sector to get them into jobs.



Low Paid Women on Strike

What next for the campaign?

Civil servants are faced with a Government determined to impose real pay cuts and slash jobs under the guise of the Gershon review. In response, Workers Power believes that PCS members urgently need to:

- Restart strike action as soon as possible on the widest possible basis - a stop/start approach is a recipe for defeat and demoralisation
- Ensure that no section settles its pay dispute until all sections have reached a

satisfactory agreement ratified by members

- Gain control over the running of the dispute through elected strike committees and structures to co-ordinate action across the sections
- Campaign publicly, like FBU members in their 2002-03 pay battle, alongside local government and other public sector workers to highlight the reality of low pay for our members and mobilise public pressure on Government bosses.

Journalists uncowed by threats of the BNP

By an NUJ member

The fascists of the British National Party (BNP) demonstrated outside the headquarters of the Commission for Racial Equality and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) on Monday 16 February. This was their most brazen display in the capital since 1996.

At the NUJ's Acorn House, they were opposed by a lively, 200-strong counter demonstration called at short notice by the union and Unite Against Fascism. Camden Unison and NUT members joined college lecturers, as well staff from the offices of a number of national unions, including Natfhe, the RMT and TSGWU.

While the BNP claimed that 100 people attended its "two successful protests... calling for justice for murdered white teenager Gavin Hopley" only 30 BNP supporters actually stood outside to complain about "political correctness" in the media.

Gavin Hopley was killed in a mainly Asian area of Oldham in 2002, but police have closed the case without charging anyone for his murder. The BNP, with a nudge and a wink, suggest he was killed by Asians and claim that the police dropped the case because of the system's "institutional racism" against white people.

The BNP is not concerned with

Gavin Hopley's death or the failure of the police investigation.

The demonstrations were about intimidating its critics, either those in the establishment such as the CRE, or more importantly those in trade unions such as the NUJ.

In January, the BNP called on its members to collate information on journalists who expose the party.

Fascist websites have been making threats against journalists. On a site called Redwatch, NUJ members Peter Lazenby and Paul Robinson were threatened for their coverage of the BNP for the Yorkshire Evening Post, with Lazenby being informed that his address will be published if he doesn't stop.

Despite claiming it's "not racist" and "only concerned with standing up for white people", the BNP is a viciously racist party with a fascist core. They are dedicated to intimidating and attacking black and Asian people, and trade unionists. That is why trade unions such as ASLEF have already taken action by expelling known BNPers from their ranks.

The left and trade unions must unite with black and Asian people to drive the BNP and other fascist organisations off our streets. While the BNP provocation went ahead, the mobilisation at the NUJ's offices was still an encouraging start.

Nursery nurses say "Low pay, no way"

Nearly 5,000 nursery nurses across Scotland were set to mount an all-out, indefinite strike from 1 March in a major escalation of their long-running pay dispute with the Labour-dominated Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla). The indefinite action by the overwhelmingly female workforce, organised in Unison, comes in the wake of a four-to-one "yes" vote on a turnout of 69 per cent in their most recent ballot.

The nursery staff figure among the lowest paid workers in local authorities. The starting salary for a new qualified nursery nurse in Scotland is currently barely £10,000. Workers with nearly a decade's experience in nurseries make as little as £13,800. Their anger is clearly undiminished after a campaign of one and two-day strikes, lobbies and protest marches over the past year. The women were also fed up with the failure to extract any meaningful concessions from the Cosla bosses - hence, the exceptionally strong support for all-out action.

In the words of one Edinburgh nursery nurse: "We are very determined. We feel that we can't back down now. We've lost too much money already."

A fellow striker from Ayrshire added, "We are going to take our case to the public and other workers. With their help I believe we can win."

● For further information and to invite a speaker to your union branch, please contact Carol Ball of Unison (chairperson, Nursery Nurses Working Party) on 07803-952 263

Stop the War protests

New Labour are holding their Spring Conference in March, in Manchester... and so Greater Manchester Stop the War Coalition will be having a protest. They've been building for it for weeks already, so it looks set to be a big one.

It's on Saturday 13th March, starting at 12 noon, All Saints Park, Oxford Rd, Manchester.

Transport from London - There's a minibus leaving Euston at 7.00am on the 13th March to return Sunday afternoon. Cost £15. Accommodation to be provided by Manchester University Stop the War group.

Phone/Text Revolution - for details: 07951-493 232

NO MORE BLOODY WAR LIES MR BLAIR

National demonstration, central London from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square Saturday, 20 March, 12 Noon

INTERNATIONAL DEMONSTRATIONS

Europe: Amsterdam, Athens, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, London, Oslo, Ramstein, Rome, Sevilla, Tarragona, Warsaw
Latin America: Mexico, Santiago
Asia Pacific: Adelaide (21/3), Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Wellington
Asia: Bangkok, Dhaka, Tokyo
North America: Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver

Unite - but to do what?

Dear comrades

The North West represents the British National Party's (BNP) best chance of winning a seat in the European parliament on 10 June. If the turn-out is low, say around 18 per cent, then the BNP candidate and leader Nick Griffin will only need around 150,000 votes in an area stretching from Crewe to Carlisle, to get elected.

The campaign to stop the BNP is obviously vital, and organisations in the region are already busy trying to counter the fascist threat. Many local campaigns already exist, and then there is the national initiative, Unite Against Racism.

At a meeting in late February of the Merseyside Coalition Against Racism and Fascism it became clear that whatever else happens we cannot just let every campaign become a branch office of Unite. Imra Shaobi, president of the Oldham TUC and a leading figure in its campaign against racism in the town, explained how having solid roots in the localities and the workplaces (Imra is an engineering factory convenor) is vital if the BNP are to be stopped from building local bases. Here his message was in contrast to that of another speaker, Weyman Bennett,

joint secretary of Unite and a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party.

Bennett more or less argued that Unite was the only show in town. Its strategy of uniting everyone from Tories through to the far left around the simple issue of stopping the BNP on 10 June was the only way forward. His emphasis on the campaign being aimed at exposing the BNP as Nazis and of defending "our multi-racial and multi-faith" society through a huge leafleting operation led to a lively debate at the meeting.

Speakers from the floor argued that this was not enough because it wasn't in touch with the reality that was leading white workers in places like Burnley to vote BNP. The need to tackle, head on, the racist furore over asylum seekers and immigration, the need to address the real problems of deprivation that are driving workers to despair and into the arms of the BNP and the need to build a working class alternative to the BNP and New Labour all came up in the discussion.

And to all of this Unite could only say, yes, but we can unite. Nobody was disputing the need for unity in action - though many questioned the idea of unity with the racists of the Tories and Lib Dems. But much more

than an agreement to spend a morning putting glossy leaflets through doors is needed if we are to smash the BNP menace once and for all.

Workers Power argued for a mass counter publicity campaign to mobilise working class unity against the fascists. We stressed that a new, anti-racist working class party could address the wider issues of poverty. And finally that we needed to organise self-defence against fascist attacks and to deny them any platform for their filthy message. Our points were well received.

It is clear that there is scope to win these arguments in the local campaigns. Even if they are operating under the umbrella of Unite many are more than happy to go beyond its simplistic and primarily electoral response to the BNP and can provide a basis from which we can move towards an offensive against the BNP across the whole of the North West. This is especially true in those areas like Oldham and Merseyside where the impetus for and driving force of the local campaigns is the labour movement itself.

Mark Hoskisson
Liverpool



UK National Conference



by Joy in London

Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, held its third national conference on the 21-22 February in London. It was a great success with 60 people participating in the wide range of workshops and debates. What was very impressive was the geographical spread, with Revo members coming down from across the country. Close to half the members were from outside of London: including Yorkshire, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Ipswich, Leicester, Brighton and Portsmouth.

The first day discussed our major campaigns: anti-war, anti-capitalism, anti-racism and our education. The ideas centred on how we can take these campaigns forward, with workshops feeding into a resolution outlining our main tasks over the coming year. We agreed to focus our campaigning activities on combating the racist lies and anti-asylum legislation of the Labour government, and stopping the fascist BNP. These initiatives will be grouped under a new logo: "Revolution Organising Against Racism - ROAR".

Later in the afternoon, we organised practical workshops on first aid, writing articles for the Revolution magazine, public speaking and developing the Revo website.

We ended the first day with fraternal greetings from Donny of the Scottish Socialist Party Youth, who gave us an account of the political situation in Scotland; John from Revo Berlin; Paraic from Galway; and a guest from SEGI, the Basque youth group.

That night we organised a benefit gig for Mario Bango, a Revolution member imprisoned in Slovakia for defending himself and his brother against a fascist attack. Many Revo members were spinning the decks and rapping to the beats, plus we got a wicked surprise when DJ Rubbish turned up to do a set. We raffled off some absinthe and a few t-shirts. All together we raised over £250 for the FREE MARIO Campaign. It was a fab night!

The second day was a bit harder, for it was the day that the decisions had to be made. We started off the morning workshoping contentious issues that people were debating out on the web board. Then we moved to amendments to the ROAD TO REVOLUTION (our manifesto).

One of the most heated discussions was over animal rights. We agreed to call for the banning of bloodsports, an end to the abuse of animals in the entertainments industry and to support animal welfare. But a majority did not agree that animals should enjoy rights, in the same way that people should have human - i.e. political - rights, or that we should promote veganism. In the end, most Revo members felt that only humans were capable of fighting for their freedom, marking them out from other animals.

We then moved onto the debate about the constitution. The debate focused on whether we needed one and, if so, what would we should put in it. There was also a debate about the national council - a structure that would represent different regions and meet between conferences to facilitate the development of Revo UK. The majority voted for a constitution and for a national council.

The day finished off with the election of the representative to the World Revolution International Co-ordination Committee - which unites the Revo groups across Europe, and may soon be expanded to include Revos India, Indonesia and Revo OZ!

We ended with an inspiring closing speech about building up through the year towards the European Social Forum, in London in October. Here we are planning, with other youth organisations, to convene a "Youth Space" to co-ordinate actions across Europe. This will be another step towards an anti-capitalist Youth International.

Forward to the future!
We have a world to win!

Where next for the RMT?

Dear Comrades

It took four years of Blair's New Labour rule for the RMT to recognise that this government was not going to honour its commitment to re-nationalise the railways let alone reverse the Tories' anti-union laws. At our 2001 AGM a motion was passed which stated that unless New Labour changed direction and committed itself to the aspirations of railworkers the union would no longer support them financially or politically.

In the last three years instead of a change of direction we have seen this government step up its attacks on railworkers, privatise large chunks of London Underground and direct the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to bankroll private companies to break disputes with our members. The gulf between RMT members and the Labour Party has been stretched to breaking point. While Labour continues to lose members, partly reflected by the fact that there are just 500 Labour card carriers left in

our ranks, our membership has risen to 70,000 from fewer than 60,000 at the start of the decade.

Finally, at last year's AGM, the union agreed to let branches affiliate to organisations and campaigns that reflected the union's key policy objectives. This led to several Scottish branches affiliating to the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), a party with six representatives in the Scottish Parliament. New Labour threatened the union with expulsion unless these affiliations were revoked. A special General Meeting was convened and the vote was 42 to 8 to abide by our AGM's decision. Thus, we were duly expelled by the New Labour.

So what now? General Secretary Bob Crow has made it absolutely clear in two newspaper articles in which direction he'd like us to go: "the union still wants the Party to be reclaimed and return to its traditional roots." But this would be a disaster and squander an historic opportunity

that has come out of the recent Glasgow conference.

When the Doncaster branch of our predecessor, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, proposed that the unions should set up a workers' party it was because they had had enough of the betrayals of the Liberal Party whose politics were wholly for the bosses. Today it is clear to millions of workers that the Labour Party's interests are opposed to theirs. What we need now is a new workers party. The union should call a special conference inviting trade unionists from across the movement to discuss the formation of that party. The right wing will be banging on about losing influence. It is up to us to seize the initiative so that we never again have to rely on "influencing" the likes of Blair for the pitiful crumbs so lauded by some trade union leaders.

Yours in solidarity
Pat Spackman, RMT member
Bristol Rail branch

Lock 'em up Labour

Dear comrades

Last month the prison population reached record levels. 75,000 people are locked up in prisons in England and Wales. This is a staggering 55 per cent up on the 1992 prison population. This gives us an incarceration rate of 141 per 100,000 of the population. In contrast Germany jails 98 per 100,000, while France jails 93 per 100,000 of the population. In fact we outstrip Turkey, Libya and even Burma in imprisonment rates according to the world prison population list.

New Labour came into office promising to be "Tough on crime, tough on the

causes of crime". They have of course only implemented the first part of this soundbite. First Jack Straw and then David Blunkett, for all the talk of new alternatives to jail, have continued the policies put in place by Michael Howard when he was Tory Home Secretary.

There are two simple reasons why the prison population is rocketing upwards. Offenders are being imprisoned who previously would have received community sentences (between 1991 and 2001 custody rates for magistrate courts rose from 5 per cent to 16 per cent, while at the Crown Courts it went from 46 per cent to 64 per cent) and

those being sent to prison are being given longer sentences.

So who is being jailed and for what? It is the poorest sections of the community and in particular those with drug habits, who have to fund their problem through petty crime. Nearly half of the current prison population is there for committing crimes that involved no violence - offences like theft and handling, robbery, burglary and drug offences. The male prison population for drug offences has trebled in the last 10 years. More and more women are being jailed for these low level crimes. The female prison population has risen over the same period

by 450 per cent for robbery, 350 per cent for burglary and 414 per cent for drug offences.

All this has been happening while general crime levels have remained stable or gone down. As with the immigration and asylum question, New Labour's policies on crime are driven by the reactionary tabloid editors who constantly scream for harsher sentences and tougher measures against "anti-social behaviour" and drug taking. Just legalising recreational drugs and treating hard drug addiction as a medical problem, with drugs available in NHS centres, would massively reduce the prison population. It would take a whole section of the young population out of the criminal justice system and out of the hands of the criminal underworld.

But crime is a problem and it is problem largely for the poorer sections of the working class. The majority of robberies and burglaries take place in working class areas.

The middle classes can protect themselves with alarms and expensive security measures and they receive a better service from the police. It is on the council estates, in communities ravaged by the destruction of industry and mining, where drugs and robbery are major everyday problems, a symptom of the hopelessness and despair prevalent amongst many young people in these areas.

To be "tough on the causes of crime" it would be necessary to be tough on capitalism - a profit driven system that is happy to discard whole workforces and destroy whole communities in its relentless search for "shareholder value". New Labour is incapable of even thinking such a policy - instead it will continue to lock up the casualties of the system and embark on evermore large-scale prison building programmes.

John McKee
London

Labour's U-turn exposes immigrant workers to even greater exploitation

Trade unions must do more to organise immigrant workers put at risk by discriminatory laws, argues *Rekha Khurana*

With 10 states set to join the European Union on 1 May, the existing members have gone into a frenzied attack on the rights of workers from these new countries. All EU citizens will have the right to "travel freely" within the EU, but governments will be able to set their own rules on the kind of jobs and level of benefits available to workers from the new member states.

Last month, the UK government did a U-turn on its policy towards immigrant labour from the Eastern European countries joining the EU. Succumbing to the racist hysteria whipped up by the tabloids and the Tories, Blair did not want to be seen as a "soft touch" for people who "just want to come here to claim benefits". The government announced tough measures: work-

ers will not be able to claim jobseekers allowance and housing benefit or use the NHS during their first year in the UK.

However, a study by the European Commission suggested only 1 per cent of the working population of the 10 new countries would be likely to migrate to one of the existing EU states, even if they enjoyed full freedom of movement. If correct, there will be about 220,000 immigrants a year into all 15 current countries; the government's original estimate of 5,000 to 13,000 a year coming to the UK is realistic. So why the new measures?

The real reasons are that the new restrictions will allow British bosses to exploit workers who will have little or no rights when they arrive here.

Workers will be wide open to super-

exploitation, as many will be forced to work for low wages in unregulated conditions just to find money for food and shelter. New Labour, which wept crocodile tears for the Chinese cocklepickers killed at Morecambe Bay last month, is about to hand the very same gangmasters responsible for these deaths a steady flow of cheap, vulnerable labour.

The twilight world of migrant workers in Britain has been recently highlighted by the Transport and General Workers' Union. They found a number of migrant workers packing fruit for supermarkets for just £4 an hour, less than the minimum wage. But they were being further exploited by the gangmasters, who feed off their fears and lack of knowledge about their rights. The migrants were left with just 78p

an hour after rent and transport costs were deducted.

Immigrants have always been a vital element of the workforce in Britain. They are used to fill skill shortages and also to perform the unpleasant and low paid work that many people refuse to do. And with the ageing population of Britain, this is set to continue.

The TUC estimates that around 2.6 million immigrant workers currently work in the UK. Many public services would cease to function if these workers weren't here, the NHS being one of them. The argument against allowing immigrants access to benefits is that they would drain our resources. But the reality is that immigrants pay out £2.5 billion more in taxes each year than they receive in benefits and services.

Trade unions currently represent less than 1 per cent of newly immigrant workers. This is changing though, as unions such as the TGWU are trying to recruit more immigrants. As well as giving them more rights, unions must also campaign to break down the prejudices of "native" workers, who see "foreigners" as stealing their jobs, housing and benefits. The trade unions can potentially play a huge role in building the solidarity between workers, that is needed to combat the racist lies churned out by the government, media, and, more dangerously, the BNP.

We need to go out and challenge racism and the system that allows the free movement of big business but restricts the movement of people - happily allowing them to be exploited and starved.

Roma fight for food and jobs

Benefit cuts and racism have forced the Roma into defending their communities, writes *Libor Blaha*

On 18th February, in the Slovak town of Levoca, 80 Roma attacked a Billa supermarket to appropriate food. This event was a first in a series of "shopping without money" in a number of towns in Central and Eastern Slovakia. Similar events were reported in Hucin, Sivenice, Caklov, Trebisov, Trhovce, Kamenany and other towns. In Trebisov around 400 Roma youth clashed with riot police who came to arrest "thieves" from previous riots. 126 people were arrested, 55 were detained.

Background

Over the past couple of years Slovakia has witnessed a brutal neoliberal offensive by the government of Mikulas Dzurinda. One of his "reforms" was to cut social benefits by 50 per cent to the equivalent of £17 per month. Dzurinda defended his government on television, claiming it was threatened with collapse.

"We have come through the harsh times and now improvements are clear. This is not the time for the government to resign."

These "improvements" have however brought hundreds of thousands to the brink of hunger and despair - particularly among the Roma community. An estimated 400,000 Roma live in Slovakia, 90 per cent of them unemployed with little or no chance to get a job.

This is especially true in eastern Slovakia. Hundreds of thousands of long term unemployed and their families are totally dependent on social benefits. Some Roma communities have a 100 per cent unemployment rate and many subsist without running water, electricity or proper sanitation facilities.

The World Bank in 1996 reported that 6.3 per cent households and 8.6 per cent individuals live under the poverty line in Slovakia (\$4.3 per person per day). Since then, the situation has deteriorated dramatically. In particular, West European capital and the EU has played a disastrous role in Slovak politics, demanding neoliberal attacks and cuts in public spending

(and hence welfare payments) as the price of entry to the union.

Even president Schuster felt the need to criticise the government's socially insensitive policies, warning that the desperate position of the unemployed, pensioners and families with children could lead to further social unrest. He identified repressive policies as a source of the riots in eastern Slovakia.

And the situation of the Roma in eastern Slovakia is even worse than it is for the rest of the poor. Wide-spread racism gives Roma no chance to get a job. Moreover, in recent years a mafia has developed by lending money to poor Roma on extraordinary interest rates. Many Roma, desperately in need of money to feed their children, have fallen victim to these criminal gangs.

Response

The government has responded by sending huge police contingents to all Roma populated areas in eastern and central Slovakia. In some cases, the police have built fences around the Roma villages and quarters of towns. Police have also gone house to house "in search of criminals", brutally beating up locals, breaking into their homes, etc.

Scenes on the TV news were horrific. "Give us jobs! We are hungry!" - chant desperate Roma; police, using a batons and water cannons, tear into peaceful demonstrations. There are 20,000 police on emergency stand-by, while the government has sent 2,100 policemen to the region and 1,000 troops to support the police - the biggest movement of armed forces in Slovakia since 1989. The police are now defending all the major supermarkets.

In Trhoviste one young Roma shouted, "There will be a war. We have guns. We have no other choice, our children cry from hunger. We don't want benefits, we want jobs." He says he is a trained car mechanic but he cannot get a job because he is Roma.

Slovak media coverage is a disgusting piece of racism. Media claim the rioters

are mainly concentrating on stealing cigarettes and alcohol, and that the riots are organised by the money-lending mafia, afraid that, with benefits cut in half, Roma will not be able to pay their debts. Daily SME even criticised the police for not intervening faster.

Opposition leader Robert Fico said that he doesn't understand the inactivity of the government in this tense situation, "I am afraid that people will take justice into their own hands and form home-defence groups and set their accounts with Roma."

This is somewhat strange statement since nobody has been physically attacked by the Roma rioters, with only one shop assistant being lightly injured. The riots are clearly not directed against "whites" as Fico has tried to suggest. Indeed, they are not really riots, as such, but a justified uprising by an oppressed people demanding their rights, similar in content to the uprisings in British inner cities in the 1980s.

Fico is aware of this. And eager to prevent the uprising from spreading to ethnic Slovak areas, he is encouraging pogroms and racial hatred.

Where next?

Scandalously, Roma leaders have called off a day of protests, scheduled for 25th February. However the demonstrations are still expected to take place in Humenne, and on 1st March in Spisska Nova Ves. The only demand the traditional leaders have raised is to set a quota of Roma for bosses to employ.

Roma need to get organised on a rank and file level. They need to get a rid of their leaders - they are not the ones who are starving. In fact they often belong to a privileged, small minority of Roma intellectuals whose main role is to give the racist Slovak state a thin veneer of anti-racism.

Roma need to organise mass meetings to decide on actions and elect committees of struggle against racism, repression, hunger and unemployment. They also need self-defence groups against police and army

violence, operating under the discipline of the democratically elected committees.

The protests must continue to spread to western Slovakia. Already in Plavecky svrtok Roma women came to Town Hall and hand over the petition asking for extraordinary benefit to feed their children after Roma leaders called off the protest on 24th February.

At the same time, the Roma committees need to make links with the wider Slovak population: the Roma will have to lead the fight against their own oppression, and should not wait for the rest of the working class to come to their assistance; but it is equally true that they cannot win without the Slovak working class joining in the fight against the government's neoliberal policies.

Already Czech TV reported that in some places "white" Slovak poor joined the uprisings.

● We call on Slovak unions and workers' organisations to build mass demonstrations against the repression of the Roma. They should organise blockades to stop the deployment of police forces and troops to eastern and central Slovakia. Transport workers should refuse to move them.

● For the immediate withdrawal of army and policy from eastern and central Slovakia, from all Roma villages and areas! Immediate release of all who have been arrested during uprising, drop all charges against them!

● Restore all social benefits to previous levels! For a programme of public works to provide useful employment to Roma and rebuild their communities! For a minimum wage for all and a minimum income for the unemployed, set by the Roma committees, unemployed organisations and trade unions!

● To finance these measures: Tax the rich! Cancel foreign debt! Expropriate the large foreign and Slovak companies like Volkswagen and REWE (Billa) without compensation and under workers control!

● All European Union countries, open your borders! Provide aid to Eastern European countries with no strings attached!

Free Mario Bango

On 20 November last year, the Bratislavan County Court sentenced Mario Bango to 12 years in prison for attempted murder. Mario, a young Roma, was defending his brother Eduard from racially motivated attack by Branislav Slamka on 10 March, 2001, when he injured Slamka with a knife on the bus.

The element of self-defence was completely ignored by the court. The defence lawyer was unable to find a witness who dared state publicly that Slamka was a member of the "National Socialists" and had previously participated in neo-nazi attacks.

The court also ignored the fact that no relationship could be established between the knife wounds caused by Mario and the head injury that led to Slamka's death. Nor could Mario's intention to kill Slamka be established. Yet this tough sentence was meted out to Mario, who had no previous criminal record.

This sentence clearly expresses the racist, political prejudice of the court. Slamka's defence was conducted by Robert Fico, chairperson of the populist party, Smer. The Slovakian parliament even held a minute's silence for Slamka.

Mario's defence immediately appealed the case. However, the behaviour of the district and county courts, as well as the participation of Fico, leave little hope of a fair trial.

The international campaign to free Mario Bango is now more important than ever. Mario has already received support from cultural, trade union, political, human rights, and anti-racist organisations. Workers Power urges all our readers to build the campaign.

Write to Mario at:
Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982
Ústav na vy'kon väzby
priečinok 1077
Chorvatská 5
812 29 Bratislava
Slovensko/Slovakia

To celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March, *Mark Hoskisson* looks at the struggles of women in the 1984-85 NUM strike

'We are the women of the working class!'

When the Great Miners Strike of 1984-85 began, Workers Power immediately produced an emergency *Pit Special*. One article was headlined "Women must back the strike".

The *Sun* and other antistrike rags had given star treatment to the story of a tiny group of women who had gathered to shout abuse at Yorkshire NUM pickets at the Nottinghamshire colliery, Ollerton. "Pit wives smash picket invasion" was the *Sun's* headline.

Many young women today won't remember, but such stories of "petticoat power" were common in the press in the 1970s and early 1980s. Usually the press would find a handful of scabs and then approach their wives with the promise of pictures and interviews in the national press if they "stood up" to the "bully boy militants".

To counter this sort of sexist rubbish working class women have, time and again, organised themselves and their families into support movements for men on strike. In the mining communities, the *Sun* sponsored a demonstration at Ollerton – and provoked an immediate response from striking miners' wives around the country.

Already wives had begun to organise networks to ensure that the welfare of the strikers – food supplies, communal kitchens and so on – was maintained. But within a very short time the wives began to organise more than just collective cooking. Women from Kent and from Doncaster organised their own demonstration in Leicestershire to show support for the striking minority there and boost the campaign to spread the strike.

From the beginning these women were clear that they wanted to be involved in the strike in their own right and not just be regarded as providing welfare support in the background. Wives of the Hatfield Main miners explained: "We're trying to get the women together from the community and involved in the strike. It's so they don't have to ask their husbands what's



Women from pit village Edlington try to break through police lines during the miners' strike

going on. It's so they know what's going on for themselves... It's the first time working class women have been organised like this since the fight for the vote."

The actions of the Kent and Doncaster women inspired thousands of others across the country. Networks began to take shape. More women's demos followed, women's support groups were formed in every mining village and a working class women's movement was forged.

The achievement of the women in building a fighting movement so quickly from scratch was even more remarkable when you consider that despite the generally progressive politics of the NUM its record on women's issues was poor. Attitudes among many miners, including key leaders like Scargill, were backward at the start of the strike.

The paper, the *Yorkshire Miner*, was one of the best and most militant union journals around at the time. It played a vital role in organising and campaigning for the strike from the outset. This same paper had, for years, also run its own "Page Three Stunner". Every month a miners' wife or girlfriend would be pictured in a bikini or scanty underwear, accompanied by suggestive captions.

Following a campaign by socialists, inside and outside the NUM, to get this sexist rubbish out of the paper, Scargill went on television to defend the Page Three slot. He claimed it was a way of getting miners to read the rest of the paper and dismissed the campaign against it as "a storm in a B cup".

At a mass demonstration of miners' wives a few months into the strike the very same

Arthur Scargill announced to rapturous applause that he had been wrong, that the women of the mining communities were not eye candy for his members but working class fighters in their own right and that the Page Three slot in the *Yorkshire Miner* would be abolished forthwith. Thousands of husbands joined in the applause, their view of women changed forever by the action of the women themselves.

The whole movement answered, in one fell swoop, all of the complicated theoretical arguments that had gone on among socialists and feminists about self-organisation and whether or not men were the enemy. The women organised themselves, as allies of the striking men. Their organisation gave them the means to participate in a common struggle with the men – a class

struggle against their class enemies, whether female (Thatcher) or male (MacGregor). The working class women's movement organised women as a detachment of the class struggle not as a means of separating from that struggle.

The movement became national with conferences and an elected leadership. There were political battles between rank and file women committed to militant tactics and reformist women leaders, like Betty Heathfield and Anne Scargill, who wanted to channel the movement into useless activities like petitioning the queen.

The impact of the militant women was felt, however, when the movement called a national demo and 20,000 women marched, when the two national conferences issued calls for women to organise picketing, and when a campaign was launched to give women associate membership of the NUM itself.

The legacy of the miners' wives movement is a precious one. It proves that real working class unity can only be created when the outdated and reactionary prejudices that persist amongst all too many male workers are transcended. It proves that it is working class women who can achieve that unity through their own militant self-organisation.

And it proves that the goal of self-organisation need not be the prosecution of a separate women's struggle against men, as many feminists at the time had argued, but a common class struggle against sexism, against women's oppression and against capitalism itself.

On the 20th anniversary of the Great Strike and on International Women's Day 2004 we should commemorate that legacy, best summarised by a miner's wife, Eileen, from South Wales: "That year was hard, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world... It's shown me the courage we have as people, and I hold my head up high as a working class woman who supported working class men."

Women's rights under attack in Iraq

By *Houzan Mahmoud*, Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq

The unelected, US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council has decided that instead of International Women's Day taking place on 8 March, Iraq is to have a national women's day on 18 August. That date has been chosen because it is the birthday of Mohammad's daughter, Fatima Al-Zahra.

Under Saddam's regime, 4 March was deemed to be Iraqi Women's Day. The regime created the day in opposition to International Women's Day as a way to deny that Iraqi women had anything in common with their sisters in the rest of the Middle East. Under the Ba'athist regime the struggles of women were subordinated to national aims of the Ba'athist regime. On the Iraqi women's day, women were asked to sacrifice themselves and their rights for the sake of the nation.

With the new change of date women's groups in Iraq are fearful that the rights of women, once framed into the context of the nation state, will now be framed in the context of Islam.

There are other signs that what rights women had in Iraq under Saddam's regime are being undermined by the US occupation and its puppet

appointed Iraqi Governing Council.

In a vote on 29 December the IGC voted to abolish The Secular Family Status Law that Iraqi women had fought for in the 1950s and which gave them more rights and freedoms than enjoyed by any other women in the Middle East. Under this law women had rights regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and alimony.

The new law would have meant that marriage, divorce, custody, and child support, inheritance and all other aspects of family law will be dealt with by Shari'a courts.

Only under pressure of mass demonstrations, did Paul Bremer, Iraq's US-appointed civil administrator, veto the IGC's new Islamic Shar'ia law.

The Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) has called a demonstration outside Downing Street on Friday, 5 March to protest against the role of the Iraqi Governing Council and the US/UK occupation forces in undermining the rights of women in Iraq.

● For further information see www.equalityiniraq.com

The beginning of International Women's Day

On the 23 February, 1909, the women socialists in the USA organised huge demonstrations and meetings all over the country demanding political rights for working women. This was the first "Women's Day".

In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Working Women, Clara Zetkin, a German Socialist, brought forward the question of organising an International Working Women's Day. The conference decided that every year, in every country, they should celebrate on the same day a "Women's Day" under the slogan "The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism".

The decision taken at the Congress was not left on paper. It was decided to hold the first International Women's Day on the 19 March, 1911.

This date was not chosen at random. German women picked the day because of its historic importance for the German working class. On the 19 March, 1848 – the year of revolutions – the Prussian king, faced with an armed uprising, had promised many reforms. One reform, which he later failed to keep, was the introduction of votes for women.

In the lead up to International Women's Day in Germany nearly a million leaflets were distributed calling for the right to vote for women.

According to Russian revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai, "its success exceeded all expectation. Germany and Austria on Working Women's Day was one seething, trembling sea of women."

Meetings were organised everywhere – in the small towns and even in the villages, halls were packed so full that they had to ask male workers to give up their places for the women."

This was certainly the first show of militancy by the working woman. Men stayed at home with their children for a change, and their wives, the captive housewives, went to meetings.

During the largest street demonstrations, in which 30,000 were taking part, the police decided to remove the demonstrators' banners: the women workers made a stand. In the scuffle that followed, bloodshed was averted only with the help of the socialist deputies in Parliament.

In 1913 International Women's Day was transferred to 8 March. This day has remained the working women's day of militancy.

1984: when two cla

Twenty years ago there were almost 200,000 miners working for Britain's nationalised coal industry. Today, a few thousand work in a handful of privatised pits. This wasn't the product of natural wastage. It was the result of one of the hardest fought class battles in 20th century Britain. In the first of a series commemorating the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85. *Mark Hoskisson* looks at how the ruling class prepared to fight the miners

In 1974 the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), under the leadership of Joe Gormley – a right winger who allegedly had links with MI5 – plunged the Conservative Party into crisis. The NUM went on strike. The Tories responded by calling a general election. The miners won. The Tories lost. And the ruling class was divided and on the run.

The sound of celebrations in workplaces and trade union offices around the country was deafening. Organised labour had driven a pay-cutting government from office. Trade union power seemed unassailable. Almost eight years of rising militancy had seen union ranks swell, union victories accumulate and union influence over government policy increase to unprecedented levels.

Thanks to the ensuing Labour government and its allies in the trade union bureaucracy, like Gormley, but also left leaders like Jack Jones of the TGWU and Hugh Scanlon of the then AUEW, the bosses won a breathing space. Labour demobilised the working class movement, undermined the militant rank and file leaders and set about salvaging British capitalism at the expense of the working class.

Labour's reward for the services it rendered to British capitalism was to be cast into the wilderness for 18 years, following its election defeat at the hands of Margaret Thatcher's new model Tory party in 1979.

Thatcher emerged as the victor in the contest to succeed the discredited leadership of Ted Heath. She had used her time in opposition well. She built a powerful right-wing faction in the party espousing what are today called "neo-liberal" economic policies.

To pursue these policies and so turn around a chronically feeble British capitalism she had to succeed where Heath had failed. She had to take on and defeat the British unions. She had to ensure that her policies of job cuts and privatisation, of restoring "the right of managers to manage", of allowing the market forces to rule unchecked by the state could triumph against working class resistance.

So, while the working class movement



Thatcher

allowed itself to be weakened by Labour the ruling class grew ever more united around a class warrior, the likes of which it hadn't seen since the heyday of Winston Churchill. But this time, as Thatcher herself famously said with regard to striking miners, her main war was to be waged against "the enemy within".

Thatcher's war plan was predicated on two documents drawn up by two of her key allies. The first was a pamphlet by Keith Joseph called, 'Solving the union problem is the key to Britain's recovery', which set out the case for irreversibly shifting the balance of class forces away from "the militants" and towards the bosses by "changing the framework, the rules of the game".

The new rules were introduced not as a single package (the mistake Heath had made) but as a series of legislative measures, normally introduced once every two years, which in their totality made effective trade unionism unlawful. Thatcher's success in this regard was to give us the most draconian range of anti-union laws in the western world, laws that Blair has carefully preserved.

But changing the legal framework could not be done without undermining the capacity of the union movement to resist those changes. Here Thatcher drew on a docu-



Ian MacGregor chairperson of British Coal

ment that became known as the "Ridley Plan", named after one of her acolytes, Nicholas Ridley. Once again, learning from the mistakes of Heath, the idea behind Ridley's plan was to ensure that the potential for generalised resistance to the Tory attacks was minimised. Workers would be taken on one section at a time. The issues would be apparently purely economic and sectional ones. And in each case the ground would be carefully prepared by dividing the working class through temporary concessions to one group, by building up reserve supplies and by ensuring that the state machine was reorganised in order to carry through brutal repression where need be.

Destroying the NUM

At the heart of the Ridley Plan was the objective of taking on and actually destroying the NUM. Of course, the Tories' hatred of the NUM was fuelled by the humiliation the party had suffered at the hands of the union in both 1972 and 1974. But there was much more to it than that.

First, the privatisation of the pits would be a key element of the general Tory plan to privatise the entire economy. If they could get away with it in the coalfields they could get away with it anywhere. Second,

the NUM – despite its leadership at the time – were regarded by the entire labour movement as the working class' "guards regiment", the vanguard, the section to which all others looked for a lead. Smashing the NUM would represent a strategic victory over the entire working class. And such a victory was exactly Thatcher's aim.

Ridley's strategy was geared to achieving such a victory. From 1979 on the Tories – at a ridiculous cost to the public purse and in total defiance of their stated economic policies – spent millions simply building up coal stocks as well as shifting more and more energy production to nuclear power stations. There would be no power cuts or three-day working weeks (as there had been under Heath) if the miners struck.

At the level of the state, the police were reorganised into a national strike-breaking force, with officers from different regions being deployed, in military style operations, wherever there were mass pickets. To co-ordinate this operation the National Reporting Centre, directly accountable to Thatcher and run by the Association of Chief Constables (ACPO) was established. In the context of a strike Britain could, effectively, become a police state without the government having to declare a state of emergency. At the same time the weaponry available to the police was improved and increased.

Within the coal industry itself Ridley believed that it was necessary to clear out all of those managers who had grown up in the industry itself following nationalisation. They were too soft, too tied to "consensus politics" and above all too soft on the NUM. A marketer was needed at the helm, a true neo-liberal who had no compunction about going on television and telling the nation that thousands of jobs had to be slashed "for the good of the industry".

In September 1983 Ian MacGregor, an American industrialist who had recently helped Michael Edwardes slash and burn jobs in British Leyland, victimise militants and destroy union organisation, was appointed chair of British Coal. He was a close personal friend of Thatcher's and would later publicly admit that he was

appointed by her to take on and defeat the NUM, savage the industry and prepare it for privatisation. The only issue, he said, was when to do it. The launch of the fight was an "exercise in timing".

The last element of the Ridley Plan was to ensure that the miners would be isolated. This was achieved in two ways. First, by taking on and defeating other key sectors of the class. A series of defeats for the unions would, the Tories rightly reasoned, sap morale and undermine the potential for widespread solidarity action, especially if such action was now deemed to be illegal under the anti-union laws. Car workers in 1979, steel workers in 1980, rail workers and civil servants in 1982 and the print unions in 1983 were all defeated. In each case their strikes were left isolated by the leadership of the labour movement – which was shifting ever further rightwards under the Tories and which was busy panicking at its own growing marginalisation in society at large.

At the same time the Tories started to cultivate sections of the union bureaucracy who were open not just to the treachery that is their stock in trade, but to actual organised scabbing. They wanted union leaders who would operate on the basis of "business unionism" and who would form a powerful business-friendly axis in the union movement.

In Frank Chapple of the electricians (and his successor Eric Hammond) and in Gavin Laird of the AUEW they found such allies. The Tories also began to look for allies in the NUM itself in the "moderate" areas – that is, those that had enjoyed huge pay rises thanks to the productivity deals of the 1970s and who had voted against national strikes in three ballots prior to 1984. In Nottinghamshire they found some such men. Though to call these future scab leaders "men" would assign these vermin to the wrong species.

Only when each of these components of the Ridley Plan was in place did Thatcher give the order for the opening shot of the war against the enemy within to be fired. Indeed, she showed she was not afraid to retreat until she was ready. In 1981 a series of pit closures were announced in South

How Labour divided and weakened the NUM

An amazing example of the 1974-79 Labour government's servitude to the ruling class and its strategy of demobilising the working class was the way in which Labour, in close co-operation with Gormley, set out to weaken the mighty NUM.

Tony Benn is a darling of the left, partly because of his tireless support for the Great Strike. He is sincere. But he is also a reformist, trapped by the logic of maintaining loyalty to his fellow reformists when they are in office. Thus, he put loyalty to James Callaghan's Labour government above the independent needs and interests of the working class. No one should ever forget that, as Minister of Energy in the Labour cabinet of the late 1970s it was Benn's productivity scheme that set miner against miner, region against region.

In his diary entry at the time Benn reveals that he suspected he was being "set up" by right wingers in the cabinet. Moreover, he

reports that Gormley advised him to keep quiet and leave it up to him:

"I am now locked into an extremely difficult situation and there are many who will greatly enjoy the sight of me engaged in a fight with the miners; I am determined to avoid that."

The only way to have avoided it would have been the scrapping of the whole plan. But this would have meant going up against the cabinet, something that Benn, at the time, was not prepared to do. So he went ahead with the scheme, with Joe Gormley's support.

The idea of the scheme was simple. The more coal your pit produced, the more you got paid. This idea was also a despicable attack on miners. Certain pits – with extremely valuable coal – took much longer to extract it than others. According to Benn's productivity scheme miners at these pits were worth less than those working seams where cutting (cheaper) coal was a lot easier and faster.

The end result of the scheme was clear.

National pay bargaining and with it unity around a common claim for all miners were replaced by regional bargaining with one area being played off against another. The union was divided against itself. Since the scheme's introduction in 1977 the NUM has not staged a single national pay strike.

For a ruling class reeling from two solid national miners' pay strikes (1972 and 1974) such a productivity deal was a godsend. For right-wing bureaucrats fearful of their own rank and file and of the left's growing influence within it was no less a godsend.

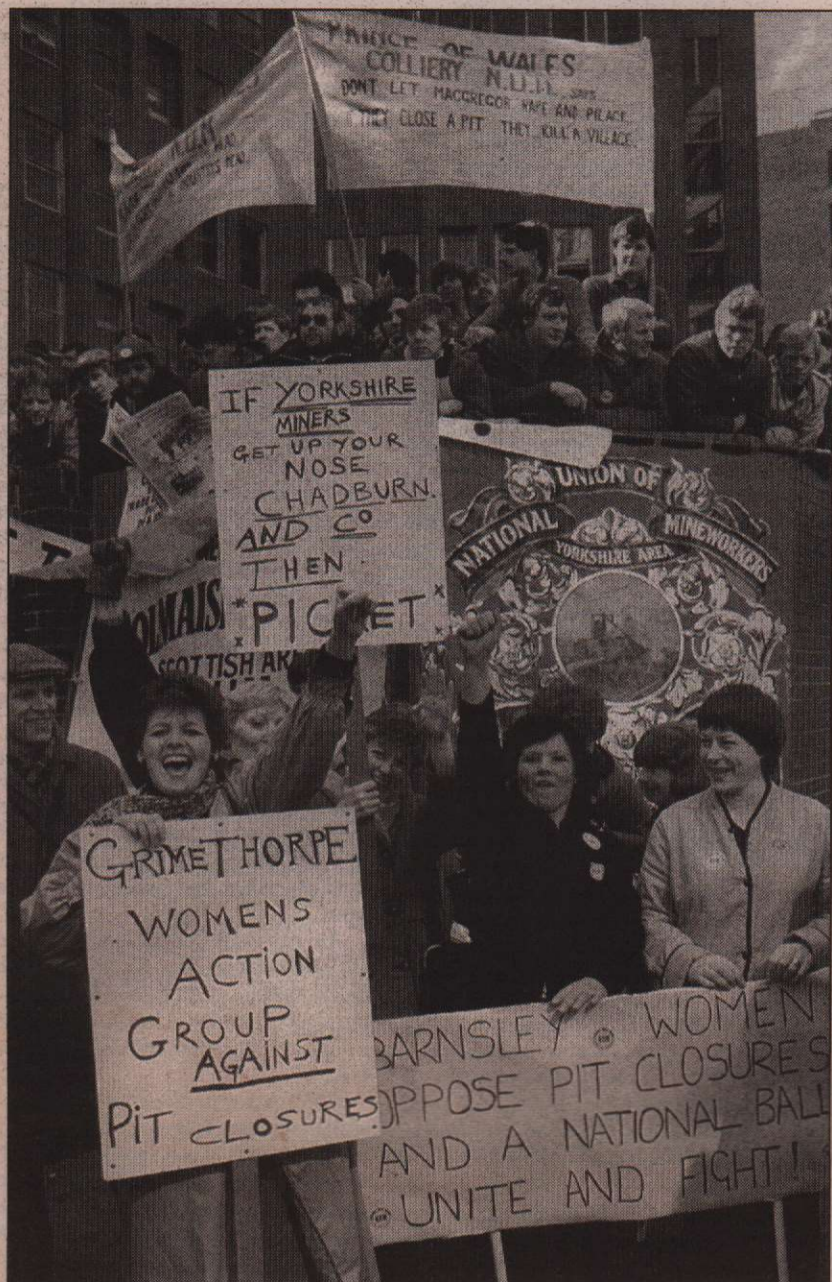
That is why, in two national ballots the overwhelming majority of miners voted to reject Tony Benn's regional productivity deals. The recently elected leader of the Yorkshire area, Arthur Scargill, played a key role in defeating Benn's proposal. But he was unable to prevent Gormley and Benn forcing the deal through via a series of regional ballots. In the end Scargill was reduced to taking the matter

to court where, unsurprisingly, a top judge ruled in favour of Benn and Gormley.

This was but one example of the way in which the Labour/union bureaucracy axis set about ripping away the many joists that underpinned rank and file militancy in the 1970s. The full extent of the damage done was not evident until 1984. The very areas that had voted for and benefited from the productivity deals (most notably the large Nottinghamshire coalfield) became the centre of scabbing during the Great Strike and proved a crucial factor in the union's eventual defeat.

Today a bunch of corrupt scabs still lead the tiny Union of Democratic Mineworkers, a vile organisation concocted in Conservative Central Office for the purposes of smashing the NUM. But its formation would have been considerably more difficult had it not been for the divisions in the union's ranks originally sewn in a sad but revealing irony by the key figure of the Labour left, Tony Benn.

sses went to war



Miners support groups demonstrate outside the NUM executive in Sheffield on 12 April 1984

Wales and in Kent. The announcements were met by rolling strikes in these areas that threatened to go national. Coal stocks were low. The police were not ready. The scabs hadn't been lined up. And Thatcher stepped in to announce that she was intervening to keep the pits open!

By this time Arthur Scargill, a left wing-Yorkshire leader, had succeeded Joe Gormley, beating the right-wing candidate hands down. Scargill had been personally responsible for organising the hugely effective flying pickets in the 1972 strike and was regarded by the entire ruling class as their public enemy number one. He made it clear that he expected there to be a fight to the death with Thatcher.

Unlike Thatcher with her unanimous ruling class support, he lacked the labour movement's undivided backing. The majority of the TUC's General Council hated him and the Labour Party's leading lights regarded him as a liability. Nor did he himself have any equivalent of the Ridley Plan – a strategy for putting the entire labour movement on a war footing for the battle that was about to commence.

Of course, he began preparations inside the NUM, including sensible precautions to preserve union funds from the courts, a propaganda campaign to prepare miners for the fight that was coming and so on. But all his preparations were based on the idea that the miners, and the miners alone, would defeat Thatcher, bring her down and restore the glory days of 1974. The problem was, 1974 was a distant memory and in between many things – not least the fighting organisations in the workplaces – had changed dramatically.

So, although Scargill in 1981 could claim round one to the NUM, the contest had not really started as far as Thatcher was concerned. After her military victory over Argentina in the South Atlantic, followed by her massive election victory in June 1983, she was ready. The Ridley Plan could now be put into operation against the miners. In early 1984 *The Economist* magazine hinted at what was to come:

"For three years the government has been afraid of tackling its biggest industrial headache – the coal mines. Now is the time."

The campaign for a national strike

On 1 March 1984 the Coal Board announced the closure of Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire. Scargill had argued that MacGregor's plan was to launch a huge pit closure programme – beginning with 20 designated "uneconomic pits", but going on to close down 70, with around 70,000 job losses.

Everybody, including fellow trade union leaders, thought Scargill was lying in order to provoke a strike. He wasn't. The Tories and the Coal Board were the liars. And Cortonwood proved it.

The strike that followed was the most important industrial struggle in Britain since the 1926 General Strike. For a whole year the miners and their supporters battled against everything the Tories and the state threw at them. The press smeared them. The Tories tried to starve them. The police killed and maimed them. The

courts imprisoned hundreds of them. The Coal Board sacked hundreds more.

The striking miners and their wives and families met every one of these attacks with dignity, courage, humour and a cast iron will to win. They knew, as did every class conscious worker, that what was at stake was not just their jobs but the future of whole working class communities, the future of the trade union movement and the ability of the that movement to defend itself against capitalism's remorseless onslaught.

The miners and their families showed remarkable creativity and imagination in everything from the organisation of pickets to, towards the end of the strike, the organisation of Christmas parties for their children. They fought pitched battles with a militarised police force with scant regard for their own safety. They addressed meetings of thousands in the campaign to win support for their action.

In every respect the year-long strike was a year of working class heroism. It was a year that changed all who fought through it forever. It drew thousands into Miners' Support Committees all over the country and it earned the respect of workers throughout the world who came in their hundreds to join the demos and pickets that were a daily feature of the strike.

But amidst the heroism there was politics. And the politics of the NUM leadership, including its most militant and left-wing member, the president Arthur Scargill, were shaped by left reformism – in either a Labourite or Stalinist form. These politics played a decisive role in the strike and its ultimate defeat.

Of course, unlike many bureaucrats, Scargill was a fighter and never had any intention of selling out. That is why militants, wherever he went, adored him and greeted him with the song, "Arthur Scargill walks on water". But Scargill's politics never transcended those of left reformism – albeit of a very militant variety. Where a revolutionary communist approach was required Arthur Scargill deployed either a form of left-wing bureaucratism (for example his refusal until the very last days of the strike to appeal over the heads of his fellow bureaucrats for rank and file solidarity) or a syndicalist belief that trade union action by his union alone could defeat the state's overwhelming might.

The first evidence of these weaknesses was revealed in the campaign at the start of the strike, 20 years ago this month, to ensure that the action was truly national.

Within three days of the announcement of its closure Cortonwood was on strike. Within two days the whole of Yorkshire was out. Pickets were sent to other areas and most responded. Scotland, South Wales, Kent, the North East and North Derbyshire were soon on all out strike.

Throughout the Midlands, however, the action was patchy. In Nottinghamshire the right wing began to hit back with calls for a national ballot if there was to be a national strike. The militants answered this wavering with more pickets.

The battle line had been drawn and it was crystal clear that the call for a national ballot coming from the right wing of the NUM executive was a way of avoiding a fight. The NUM had an old rule that stipulated that there had to be a 55 per cent majority in a ballot (as opposed to a simple majority) for a strike to take place. In two previous ballots Scargill had won a majority just short of 55 per cent and as a result no strikes had taken place. As the Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey put it, "we will not be constitutionalised out of our jobs".

With a rolling strike underway a return to work in order to have staged a ballot would have been a disaster. The momentum of the

struggle would have been lost. And pits would have been closed while the ballot was underway. The rolling strike, bringing out each area and then sanctioning the action and coordinating it nationally via the executive was, under the circumstances, the correct way to go forward.

But this did not mean that Scargill used the right strategy to undercut the potential for scabbing in areas like Nottinghamshire. Indeed, both he and his two closest allies in the NUM leadership – Peter Heathfield and McGahey (a left Labour and a Communist Party member respectively) – spectacularly failed to utilise the weapon of workers' democracy in order to achieve a really effective national strike.

In the first place the NUM executive refused to call a national strike. Their motive was that they did not want to get bogged down in a protracted ballot procedure. But while the motive was good the decision was bad. For what they actually did was announce that it was up to the regions themselves whether or not to strike.

This gave the right-wing leaders in the non-striking areas an ideal opportunity to develop their campaign against any strike action at all, unless sanctioned by a national ballot. It also meant that many Midlands miners believed that they were not scabbing, because their region had not called them out. This was the excuse they were able to shout at the mass pickets who were increasingly being herded behind impenetrable police lines.

Divisions harden

It was a fatal mistake that allowed the lines of division inside the NUM itself to harden. Had the executive called a national strike from the outset it would have deprived the right of this opportunity and ensured that the NUM loyalism, which was still strong even in the "moderate" areas, especially Nottinghamshire, could have led to more widespread action.

In the event a month was lost. And it was a critical month for it allowed the right wing, with unprecedented media support, to whip up hysteria over "democracy" and the ballot. Once again the NUM leadership's solution to this problem smacked of bureaucratic leftism – a direct political consequence of Stalinist affinities. The leader orders, the rank and file act. Unfortunately, this was never going to break the hold of the scab right wing in the Midlands coalfields.

In the early days of the strike there were large numbers of miners in favour of action in Nottinghamshire as well as in some of the smaller "moderate" areas, like Lancashire and Leicestershire. The key was to link up with the striking minority in these areas and get representatives of the striking miners to address pithead meetings at every colliery. This was particularly important through March and April when the entire strike was dominated by the question of the ballot. The press were running a virulent pro-scab campaign throughout this period and access to pits that were still working was becoming increasingly difficult because of the police operation against pickets.

Nottinghamshire in particular was becoming a no-go area for pickets as the National Reporting Centre deployed road blocks, roving picket-busting squads and massed ranks of police at working collieries to batter any pickets that did get through – resulting in the tragic death of a young striker, David Jones, early in the dispute. In one infamous incident cars carrying Kent miners bound for Nottinghamshire were stopped and turned back at the Dartford Tunnel near London. In all some 10,000 police were used as scab protectors and a total of 167,000 people were turned away

from the county at road blocks with the Attorney General ruling that such limits on freedom of movement were perfectly legal. They weren't legal, but the state was now prepared to do anything it could to split the union.

Of course, all of this should have been met by organised picket defence – and in part it was. But in order to break the strike-breakers more than this was needed. The militants needed to get to the pitheads to call mass meetings. As Workers Power argued at the time:

"The NEC must organise for pithead meetings to be held in every colliery in every coalfield. They must hear speakers from the areas that are immediately under MacGregor's axe. They should hear from workers taking action in support of the miners. All NEC members, and the National President in particular should address mass rallies – most vitally in the Midlands – to urge maximum support for the NEC's call [for a national strike]... At pithead meetings a show of hands should precede the constitutionally prescribed ballot. These should be organised in the shortest possible time. Days not weeks." (5 April 1984)

This course was not followed by the NUM leadership. Instead, the leadership convened a national delegate conference, which declared the strike national and ordered the Notts miners and others to stop work. This was far less effective than the pithead mass meeting strategy we proposed. But once the conference made its decision it was necessary to enforce it.

At this stage it was necessary to show to the then large minority of NUM members in the Midlands areas who abided by the conference decision that the union – including the officials in the "moderate" areas – was serious. Every member who scabbed was now in breach of union policy and should have been disciplined. If the threat of expulsion didn't persuade them to join the strike there was every chance that actual expulsion could have broken the back of the scab movement.

Once again, however, the NUM leadership decided on a half-measure. They agreed to a new rule giving them the option to discipline the scabs, but they did not enforce it. This gave the hard-right scabs the chance to organise, which immediate expulsion would have stripped from them. They were now backed by key ruling class figures like David Hart, who poured money in to help them organise.

Hart, who was personally close to Thatcher, financed a series of court cases by the scabs in which the NUM's call for a national strike was deemed illegal. Then he financed a scab election campaign in the NUM which saw hard-right business union men elected in place of NUM officials who – however right wing and however much they had failed to rally the members in the first place – were nevertheless loyal to the conference decision. Then, as the strike continued and as attitudes hardened, Hart conspired with scab leaders to form a breakaway union, what became the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), an organisation founded for the sole purpose of scab-herding.

Over the course of the next few months the Tories were not only able to use the huge coal stocks they had built up to keep the country free of power cuts, but could also rely on scabs to keep the coal coming, and they had engineered a split in the union itself.

Despite all this, however, the striking miners stood firm. Lessons were learnt. And after a month and half on strike the struggle took a new turn. From shutting down the coalfields the miners turned their attention to shutting down British industry and a second phase of the Great Strike began.

The People's Forum at the People's Palace

By Jeremy Dewar

The European preparatory assembly of the ESF will meet on 6-7 March to decide on the venue and timing of the next European Social Forum. Around 300 representatives from trade unions, local social forums, campaigns and NGOs - from right across the continent - will gather in London. They will hear some good news. As we go to press, the Greater London Authority looks set to book Alexandra Palace, a large Victorian venue with spacious grounds in north London, to stage the third ESF on 16-18 October. Although London Region Unison, with a £50,000 donation, is the only organisation yet to pledge finance, the GLA seem confident that further cash will be forthcoming. It now seems that the TUC General Council will support the event.

If this is the case, activists will be soon be able to start campaigning to get maximum participation by a wide range of different organisations, networking to put on seminars and joint initiatives. Just as importantly, we will at last be able to reach out and build grass roots support for the ESF in local workplaces, council estates, schools and colleges.

The site - which has a long connection with the labour movement - is also good news. To host the bulk of the event in one spot is of tremendous importance, as participants of the previous ESFs in Florence (on one site) and Paris (several all over the city) will testify. A greater sense of unity, more fluidity between the different strands of the movement and increased opportunities to develop joint initiatives, all flow from being closer together. It will also allow for more spontaneous collaborations: ad hoc forums, demos and building links.

Another important issue is the Assembly of the Social Movements and Activists, held at the end of the ESF. This was the body that, in Florence, drew up the call for the great anti-war demonstrations on 15 February 2003. In Paris, this Assembly called for another world-wide antiwar demo on 20 March and a Europe-wide day of action on 2-3 April.

Redmond O'Neill of the GLA reported to the UK Organising Committee that the TUC really hated this declaration. No surprise there since, weak as the declaration



Alexandra Palace to stage the third ESF in October

was, it did call on the European union movements to mobilise their members against the EU-inspired wave of social cuts. The British TUC has done little or nothing to fight these and shows no interest in a pan-European campaign of action to defend workers' rights.

O'Neill had previously responded to a criticism from a member of Workers Power that the TUC had totally ignored the call for action against neoliberalism on 2-3 April: "The TUC won't affiliate - and you won't have an ESF - if you want to discuss what's wrong with the TUC".

Obviously we will have to make sure that TUC support does not lead to behind the scenes attempts to limit what the ESF itself or the Social Movements' Assembly can dis-

miss. The Florence and Paris Social Movements' Assemblies - limited as they were - were the only means whereby activists could focus their demands into plans of action.

The recent proposal of the SWP to hold the Assembly on the Monday morning would shunt it into the sidelines altogether. By the Monday many Europeans and most British workers will have to return home or be back at work. This SWP proposal shows a worrying lack of concern for the Assembly. In fact it must be held on the Sunday with maximum time and a system developed for drawing in proposals from the seminars and the women's, youth or trade union meetings, held throughout the ESF.

It is vital that the European preparatory assembly makes it clear that this must

happen. The SWP has no real commitment to creating a body able to mobilise international actions and adopt the planks of a new political strategy for the anti-capitalist movement. As in other areas of its politics, it wants to recruit individuals but not build up a mass movement.

The attitude of the SWP to the involvement of youth in the ESF is likewise a disgrace. The youth movement Revolution has proposed a youth space at the heart of the ESF where young people can meet, stage political and cultural events, all under their own control. The SWP blocked "consensus" on this without saying why.

The SWP's approach is not so different from that of Attac and many NGOs as they pretend. They see the ESF as primarily a

"space", a forum to advertise their own wares and draw non-aligned activists towards them. No one objects to this in itself but it is a low horizon indeed for our movement. The stepped-up offensive from the globalisers and imperialists requires an answer at an international level.

Watch the leaders

There is nothing wrong with the ESF accepting funding from the trade unions and municipalities like the GLA. On contrary it is to be welcomed. Without it a huge event like the ESF will be impossible. After all, this has been the case with all previous ESFs and World Social Forums. But the paymaster must not be allowed to buy "consensus". Our movement is not for sale.

Many unions, the TUC, and even the London Mayor have little or no record of supporting the anticapitalist movement and its mobilisations. They are still closely linked to Blair and his party. At the same time the British anticapitalist movement has no network of democratic local social forums. The SWP has doggedly opposed their creation to preserve a monopoly for its front organisation, Globalise Resistance - which has now lost all its prominent independents.

It is vital that the that democratic and open European preparatory assemblies retain complete control of the programme: the major themes, the plenary debates, the seminars and workshops, the role of the final assembly, the slogans of the main demo.

Any attempts to marginalise or silence critical voices or minority strands within the movement must be spotted and swatted. Any attempts to block decisions on action or bold statements of policy must not succeed.

We must say to the unions and Labour-affiliated mass organisations, we warmly welcome your involvement, we want to open up a dialogue, we want as many of your members as possible, at local as well as national level, to get active. The best way to do this is to build local social forums. Such an approach, combined with vigilance to prevent any behind the scenes censorship, can make the ESF 2004 a turning point for the British anticapitalist and labour movements.

An unprincipled manoeuvre

There was a flurry of emails in the run-up to the 6-7 March European assembly as a group of British - and some European - based activists tried to assemble a rebuff to the assumed and real shenanigans of the union bureaucrats, the GLA and the SWP. What emerged was an eight-point 'Call for democracy in the ESF process'.

Unfortunately, the call, initiated by 'libertarians', does not contain a single legitimate basis for action. On the contrary, it is an unprincipled manoeuvre, designed to draw in partners to the right of themselves and the SWP - NGOs like Friends of the Earth and World Development Movement, the Attac France mandarins, roving representatives of the Brazilian PT. On no point do they say what they think is the solution to the shortcomings of the ESF organisation.

For example, their first point says, 'Ways [must be] devised in which individuals and loose networks of

activists can participate fully in the Organising Process'.

Of course we want to open the doors to such people, but the answer is to build local social forums with rank and file trade unionists, political and campaigning organisations, oriented towards the working class and action. What we don't want is local forums that try to exclude far left political organisations and limit themselves to an endless diet of metaphysics.

Similarly on point two, which calls for the process to be 'less London-centric and more accessible to all sectors of the movement, not just large trade unions and the Greater London Assembly'. This is a disguised attempt to place such demands on the unions (e.g. that the T&G has the same weight in the democratic process as an individual from Nottingham) as to drive them out of the ESF, not simply loosen the bureaucracy's grip. Again, the motivation is to turn the movement away from mass organisations, which, for anyone who wants to change the

world, is a dead end.

It is dishonest and unprincipled to simply list problems and seek the unity of the right and the left in order to unseat the SWP. Workers Power does not agree with such an approach - though we will bloc with anyone on specific proposals that are unambiguous and take the movement forward.

But the crucial point that the libertarian activists make is that 'the role of political parties within the process must be clarified'. Workers Power and the League for the Fifth International have been fighting for the social forum movement to drop the blanket ban on political parties since the Porto Alegre Charter was first published in 2001.

The ban fails to block the powerful influence of large social democratic and Stalinist parties who use their trade unions and community organisations to participate at will. The ban merely disguises this influence and shields parties like the French Socialist Party, Labour and

the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) from pressure from below and any form of accountability to the movement. At the same time, it could (though as yet it hasn't) be used to exclude those 'parties' - in reality, propaganda groups - that have consistently opposed neoliberalism and imperialism.

The ban is also completely undemocratic. Not only has the Charter of Principles never been debated and adopted by any mass or representative meeting; it is also impossible to amend since you have to be a jet-setting (and unelected) member of the WSF International Council and Secretariat - which is itself stuffed with PT members and liberal academics.

'Clarification' of this position is not necessary - opening it up to debate and change is. We will not sign away our right to participate in a movement that we have been part of since 1995 - long before the Porto Alegre principles were concocted by the PT bureaucracy!

What the L5I fights for

The League for the Fifth International - of which Workers Power is the British section - has made the following proposals for improving the effectiveness of the ESF.

- The number of plenaries should be reduced, with fewer speakers, and focused on real debates over the major issues facing us (space or movement, taking power or surrounding it, etc.)
- Seminars should be grouped around themes (e.g. women, youth, anti-racism, workers, war, etc.) centred on marquees at Alexandra Palace, and be self-organised by the social movements.
- There should be a debate - and indicative vote - on the Porto Alegre Charter of Principles.
- The Assembly of the Social Movements and Activists should take a whole day, with the self-organised spaces and seminars feeding in proposals to it; all major contentious points in its declaration should be voted on by the Assembly, rather than fudged by the Co-ordination.
- The youth should run their own section of the ESF, not in order to ghettoise them, but to amplify their voice and to free them from the constraints of the 'adult' event.

Iran: clerical dictatorship rigs general elections

By Dave Stockton

The supreme leader of the Iranian Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared the elections to the seventh Iranian parliament, held on 21 February, a great success for the existing regime and a blow to Iran's enemies, namely George Bush.

Iranian conservatives scored a total victory over the "reformist" supporters of President Mohammed Khatami, claiming over two thirds of the 290 seats in the parliament.

Before the elections, the Council of Guardians, the highly conservative, 12-man appointed watchdog body which supervises both legislation and elections, disqualified some 2,500 candidates, mostly reformists, including all the top vote-winners from the 2000 election.

The election turnout of around 50 per cent was the lowest ever since the Iranian revolution of 1979. Even though the turnout was nothing like the boycott which the reformists had called for, reports suggest widespread discontent with the poll, including riots in Firouzabad and Izeh where eight demonstrators were killed after police opened fire. In the capital Tehran, a stronghold for the reformists, the turnout was 28 per cent of eligible voters.

Among the candidates returned there was not a single woman even though there were 13 in the outgoing parliament.

The elections was condemned by the EU for not being held according to international standards. As part of its campaign to bring Iran firmly back under US dominance, the Bush administration also declared:

"These actions do not represent free and fair elections and are not consistent with international norms."

This is pure hypocrisy since Bush himself lacks democratic legitimacy after being appointed by the US Supreme Court.

The poll follows seven years of attempted "reforms" by President Khatami, who sought to allow increased freedom of the press and the loosening of some Islamic cultural and social restrictions. Even with a "reformist" dominated parliament, his achievements, in terms of liberalisation



have been meagre. This is due to the entrenched position of the ayatollahs and senior clerics, their continued ability to use the police and the army to break up demonstrations, and the use of large gangs of thugs, paid for via the mosques and religious foundations, to attack demonstrations such as last year's mass student demonstrations which called for widespread reform.

The reformists have been unable to harness the mass discontent with the Islamic regime. They mistakenly look to the United States and Britain to pressurise the regime into limited reform. But in so doing they reinforce the fake "anti-imperialist" credentials of Khamenei and the reactionary forces within Iran.

Attacking the clerical dictatorship from the standpoint of pro-Americanism, or the dream of restoring the Pahlavi monarchy, or by calling for the country to be opened up to "western culture" is a self-defeating strategy. The regime cannot be

reformed: it must be overthrown. This cannot be done hand in hand with US or EU imperialism: it will have to be done in a struggle against imperialism.

The clerical dictatorship rests on the mass social base of the urban poor. This base is only too aware that allowing the entry of the multinationals will spell an even greater deterioration of life for them. Only sections of the middle class and the intelligentsia would benefit from this.

If the students and youth who worked to bring the reformists to power want to see real democracy and the independence of Iran from imperialism, if they want to see the conditions of the urban poor dramatically improved at the expense of the rich and the privileged, they must turn to the working class as the principle force for change.

Iranian workers continue to struggle heroically against their own exploitation and, when they do so, they immediately

come under attack from the regime. There are many recent examples of this.

On Saturday, 24 January 2004, four workers were killed and over 40 injured when the special police force ended an eight-day sit-in at the Nazkhaton copper smelting plant in the city of Shahr-e Babak, in Kerman Province. Workers had taken strike action and occupied the plant in protest against temporary contracts, layoffs and long delays in the payment of wages and benefits. Following the killings over 80 people were arrested.

Despite the most savage and brutal conditions, Iran's workers continue to resist. But to turn these episodic acts of bravery into a mass social upheaval, that no police force, army or gangs of thugs can crush, the Iranian working class will need to build a revolutionary workers party.

Such a party must link the courageous students and youth to the worker militants. It must be armed with an action pro-

gramme of social and economic demands for the workers, the urban poor and the poor peasants. Such a programme must, of course, demand unhampered democratic rights, free of the clerical "guardians" must defend the rights of women to free themselves from all Islamic legal restrictions and for the rights of the minor nationalities - Kurds, Arabs and Baluchi etc. - to self-determination. It must demand the immediate convening of a sovereign constituent assembly, guarded by a workers' militia, which can debate and adopt solutions to all the country's problems.

But this programme must at the same time totally oppose the entry of the North American and European "benefactors", who will only plunder the country as they did under the Shah.

Only the strategy of permanent revolution - the goal of a revolutionary workers' and poor peasants' government based on democratic shoras (councils) - can achieve the immediate and burning needs of the masses. Such a government could establish democracy for all and an agrarian revolution by the peasants, enact an emergency programme of providing decent housing, healthcare and schools for the dwellers of the shantytowns.

Iran has a very young population and tens of thousands of students are entering a job market in which there are few jobs. Overall, the country is in desperate need of investment to alleviate the growing unemployment, falling wages and a decaying infrastructure.

Increasingly we will see sections of the "pragmatic" conservatives looking to the outside world for investment while trying to maintain a stronghold over the Iranian masses. This will only further increase the simmering social tensions that are evident in Iran today.

Though the Islamic republic looks strong at the moment, its foundations rest on shifting sands. It is conservative, corrupt, bureaucratic and vicious. The young women and the workers will undoubtedly continue to challenge it and the growing social tensions will provide a basis for the development of a revolutionary situation similar to the one that led to the fall of the Shah.

Berlusconi under siege from mounting protests

By Eddie Bell in Bologna

The Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi was not invited to a meeting in Berlin, on Wednesday, 18 February, where Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder met to pledge themselves to a campaign against the European working class.

A sulking Silvio replied to this calculated snub by denouncing the triumvirate for an attempted takeover of the European Union. Doubtless he felt badly let down by his dear friend Tony Blair. After all hasn't he been doing his best to carry out the agreed neoliberal onslaught on Italy's workers?

Trying certainly, but not succeeding. Berlusconi was forced to stay at home and deal with the escalating labour unrest, his fractious coalition partners and his own collapsing popularity.

In February, doctors, judges, steelworkers, and bus drivers have been venting their rage against Berlusconi.

A one-day strike of some 150,000 doctors and other medical workers forced the cancellation of nearly 700,000 non-emergency operations and appointments on 9 February. They were striking because the government has not renewed their contracts, and is trying to replace the national healthcare system with a strictly regional one. This is an attempted carve-up that will facilitate the marketisation and then privatisation of Italy's healthcare system.

This regional carve-up is a step towards the US model that Europe's bosses are trying to impose in order to cut healthcare costs and boost profit rates. Workers in the health system will repeat the strike action for two more days on 8-9 March, and hold a mass demonstration in Rome on 2 April.

The strike was just the latest in a lengthening list of workers' action, including walkouts by Alitalia employees who will strike on 5 March against the airline's three-year Rescue Plan. This is meant to "rescue" profits by sacrificing 2,700 of its workforce. Trade unions have grounded hundreds of flights in a series of strikes since the plan was unveiled in October. Workers' action and opposition within the cabinet to the restructuring plan has forced Berlusconi to sack Alitalia's chief executive and look for an alternative.

There is continuing wildcat action by public transport workers against years of salary freezes and threats of more job cuts. In Genoa Terni steelworkers clashed with police over some 900-1,000 expected layoffs. Also, angry magistrates demonstrated about a proposed "reform" of the justice system by the criminal premier, and have called a strike for next month.

Berlusconi has denounced the protests. "Many are political strikes, promoted by leftist unionism," he said during one of his increasingly rare television interviews.

Berlusconi swept into office in 2001, touting a "contract with Italians" that promised lower

taxes, higher pension benefits and a long list of new public works projects to mop up unemployment. Now his empty promises are coming back to haunt him.

His coalition allies - a disparate mix of "post"-fascists, former Christian Democrats and the racist and regionalist Northern League - are biting at each other and Berlusconi. European and local by-elections, due on 12 and 13 June, have served to intensify the infighting. Berlusconi launched his election campaign with an open justification of tax dodging. He stated:

"If you ask for taxes of 50 per cent or more, then the demand is not fair and I consider myself morally justified to do everything I can to avoid paying them."

A communist parliamentarian replied slyly, "If high taxes on big salaries morally justify tax evasion, then low wages justify stealing."

Berlusconi's candidacy comes days after his arch rival, the European commission president and former prime minister Romano Prodi, launched a campaign to re-stitch together the centre-left, Olive Tree Coalition.

On the left of the parliamentary spectrum, which Prodi is trying to unite, stands Rifondazione Comunista which recently voted against renewing support for the occupation of Iraq. RC's leader Fausto Bertinotti has suspended coalition talks because the other potential partner, the Democratic Left (the main reformist workers' party), refused to vote on this question.

Bertinotti is once again talking left. On 6 February speaking at Terni, the steel plant threatened with closure, he said:

"The opposition has the obligation of facing the social conflicts of varied nature, addressing the societal evils, and turning them into political energy to be used to topple the Berlusconi government."

This, according to Bertinotti, this is the first step toward something bigger. "The left" added Bertinotti, "has to make the transformation of this capitalist society its top priority".

All good rhetoric as usual but without any intention of transforming it into action.

What the Italian working class needs is a focus to unite the struggles into a campaign of action to bring Berlusconi's crumbling House of Liberty to its knees.

The meeting of Italy's social forums on 6 and 7 February endorsed the call from the European Social Forum for a European day of action against neoliberal attacks on 2 April, already the date set for the healthcare demonstration in Rome.

This call to action should be used to unite the various disparate anti-government protests into a general strike to drive Berlusconi from power. That will mean breaking with the tradition of the one-day "general strikes" of recent years and staying out until the government resigns.

If the workers can force their unions to do this, Berlusconi and his allies would be gone within a week.

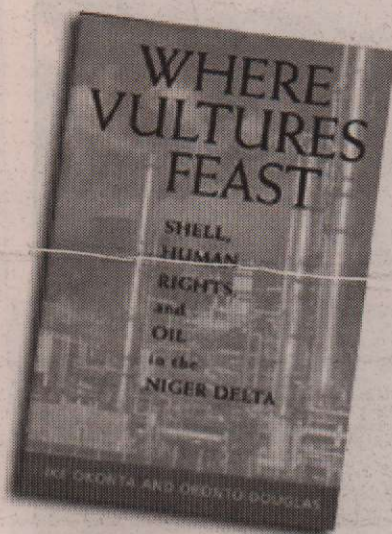
Shell, human rights and oil

Keith Spencer

reviews

Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in the Niger Delta

by Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, Verso, 2004



In 2003 the Nigerian government was forced into a partial retreat over plans to massively increase the price of oil for the Nigerian public. It aimed to double the price of oil by removing \$2 billion in subsidies. Two general strikes took place which forced the government to back down over the size of the oil price hike. For the workers cheap fuel is the only benefit of living in Africa's largest producer of oil.

So why is it that a country that is the 13th biggest oil producer in the world has a workforce where the average wage is less than £180 a year? The answer is in *Where Vultures Feast*. The authors examine the role of Shell, and its friends in successive Nigerian governments, in sucking the country dry of its wealth. In return, Shell poisons rivers, destroys forests and farmland, and impoverishes hundreds of thousands of people. Shell has been in Nigeria since 1937. It currently owns 30 per cent of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) with the Nigerian government owning the majority share of 55 per cent through the National Nigerian Petroleum Company.

- Shell has
- Concessions on 31,000 square kilometres of land.
- Owns 5,000 miles of pipeline.
- Employs more than 5,000 staff directly and another 20,000 on temporary or sub-contracts.
- And by its own very conservative figures, the company earns \$200 million profit a year by pumping between 800,000 to one million barrels a day from Nigeria.

It is Shell's third biggest operation after the North Sea and the USA. In the words of Shell's chairperson Mark Moody Stuart: "Nigeria is a low cost operation. It is strategic to the future of the group." (*Financial Times* 1999).

The authors also estimate that between 1972-89 Nigeria's military leaders and their civilian supporters corruptly siphoned off an astonishing \$70 billion from oil. By supporting and rewarding successive military regimes so well, Shell and other oil companies have ensured that 92 per cent of the fine, light oil flows into the USA and western Europe.

The vast majority of the oil in Nigeria is taken from the Niger Delta. The people of this area have faced massive environmental damage as a result largely from oil spills and gas flaring.

According to the Nigerian-based National Human Rights Commission, the 20 years from 1976 saw 4,835 spills, which discharged 2.4 million barrels of crude oil into the Delta. As a comparison, the Exxon Valdez spilled 257,000 barrels of oil onto the Alaskan coast in what was then recognised as the world's worst environmental disaster caused by oil. Exxon used 10,000 workers and spent more than \$2 billion to clean up the shoreline. But no one cares

about Nigeria so Shell doesn't have to spend anything.

Gas flares, an enormously wasteful burning off of the natural gas that comes with oil extraction, accompany 87 per cent of oil extraction in the Delta. In Shell's other area of major operation, the USA, the figure is 0.6 per cent. The World Bank estimates that in 1996 Shell spewed forth 50 million tons of carbon dioxide and methane into the Delta's air. The book gives voice to the human tragedies. One spill in Rivers state in 1970 was still

polluting the area 25 years later. At the time villagers said: "We no longer breathe the natural oxygen, rather we inhale lethal and ghastly gases. Our water can no longer be drunk...we no longer use vegetables they are all polluted." A court case in 1996 held Shell responsible and rejected its claims that it had cleaned up the area. A journalist from the Nigeria Guardian described a blow out in March 1994 in the Delta: "There was evidence of heavy oil pollution in the air. The surrounding blocks of mangrove forest looked vacant, deathly, and partially scorched...Soon the entire surface of the creek was coated in a thick layer of glistening, brown crude oil."

In 1995, BBC journalist Alice Martin reported the following effects of opening up a new oil pumping area: "The fishes have died in the creeks and rivers...crops have died and great stretches of land have become infertile...the water is polluted, 'sometimes purely green and sometimes purely blue'." Shell claims most spillages are caused by sabotage but it uses old oil pipes and does little to upgrade its equipment. Most pipes need replacing after 10-15 years but Shell's overland pipes were put in place in the

1960s. In 1995 the company admitted that 75 per cent of spillages were due to old and corroded pipes.

In 1983, before the eyes of environmentalists were upon it, inspectors from Shell's partner, the National Nigerian Petroleum Company, wrote: "We witnessed the slow poisoning of the waters of this country and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural land as a result of oil spills associated with the petroleum industry...There has been no concerned and effective efforts on the part of the government, let alone the oil operators, to control the environmental problems associated with the industry."

In Scotland, Shell carried out 17 environmental assessments to put in one pipeline, in Nigeria, by its own admission, it carried out two in the whole of the Delta from 1958 to 1999.

The authors sum up Shell's attitude: "All available evidence suggests that Shell's destruction of the Niger Delta is informed by near-total disregard for the welfare of the local people."

To maintain its operation in the face of opposition, Shell has its own security force, the Shell Police. It is armed and also has an intelligence section that sets out to bribe and divide communities in the Delta and to spy and report on their activities.

It also has a long and fruitful relationship with the Nigerian military. It was the army that

helped repress the Ogoni revolt in 1993-4 with hundreds killed and nine Ogoni's executed. This included Ken Saro-Wiwa a leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, which had organised demonstrations of 300,000 for Ogoni rights and against Shell's destruction in the region.

The officer in charge of the military crackdown in Ogoniland, Paul Okunhimo, told the Sunday Times in December 1995 that he was paid by Shell to "sanitise the region". He later retracted the claim but other agencies, such as Human Rights Watch, have pointed to the contacts between Shell and the Nigerian army throughout the period. Shell admitted that it paid the army the equivalent of two meals a day for each soldier.

The movement against Shell continues. In August 1997, the Southern Minorities Movement was set up, representing 28 ethnic groups in the Delta including the fourteen million strong Ijaw nation, the fourth biggest ethnic group in Nigeria. In December 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council issued the Kaiama declaration, which demanded all troops to get out of the Delta and for the oil companies to stop working.

The Youth Council called for January 1999 to be the month of Operation Climate Change to campaign against pollution. The army replied by deploying 15,000 troops to the area to put down the campaign. For the first time in 30 years a state of emergency was declared and young people were attacked and killed in the major cities such as Yenogoa, including some in hospital. In Port Harcourt, the major oil exporting terminal in the Delta, a demonstration of women was attacked with teargas and dogs. Towns were besieged and the area was still under military occupation six months later. In Kaiama, local chiefs and leaders were arrested by the army and tortured. Within a week the place had become a ghost town as the inhabitants fled.

The oil company Chevron lent the military helicopters to terrorise the locals. About 200 people were killed in a week, many more wounded and tortured, women raped and towns and villages under military occupation.

The struggle continues. Last year the military deployed 3,000 soldiers in Ijaw areas to guard oil installations and to combat what Shell and the government call ethnic conflicts with the Itsekere people - although the authors point to evidence that in 1999 the military sparked ethnic conflicts by dressing as people from rival ethnic groups. Hundreds more were killed.

What this book shows is that the Nigerian army uses force and repression to defend Shell's polluting but very profitable operations.

But it fails to put forward any strategy to combat the oil companies and their government supporters. It neglects to mention the struggle of the oil and gas workers or the wider union movement against Shell and the oil companies. To the people of the Delta, and especially the youth of the Ogoni and Ijaw, it offers a purely environmentalist alternative. Stop flaring gas, bury pipelines, share rent and royalties and get compensation for land and property.

Indeed the movements in the area have already gone further than this in challenging Shell, its police force, the Nigerian army and the government. The radicalism, energy and the bravery of the youth need to be united with the power and the organisation of the Nigerian workers, especially the oil and gas workers. Together the workers and youth can challenge the environmental disaster in the Delta, the power of the multinationals and the grip of a government and army in the pay of imperialism.



Even more misery

Shell has made much of its recent attempts to repair its battered reputation in the Delta. However, a recent report from Christian Aid, *Sustained Misery, Shell in the Niger Delta*, has examined some of Shell's claims about its projects.

It saw six projects in Umuechem, a town blighted by pollution and the victim of an army attack in 1990 when the later was called in to attack a demonstration against Shell's operations. It found that not one of them was working. The hospital, post

office, school and so on all stood empty and unused. The report claims that this is not untypical.

Furthermore, the report claims that Shell and other oil companies are paying gangs to intimidate opposition. It highlights Shell's payments to leaders in Gbarantoru to ease through an application for drilling and the role of gangs in attacking activists. The report says that these payments are only fuelling more violence and preparing the way for "an even more violent state crackdown."

A constant call of NGOs has been for more transparency in Shell's operations. It is still impossible to have independent verification of its supposed clean up operations, its spending on schools and hospitals and the implementation of its "corporate social responsibility" values. It is even impossible to find out how much it actually makes in profit from the Delta. Secrecy, violence and bribery, those are the real values of Shell in Nigeria and the oil multi-nationals worldwide.

Haiti: imperialists decide to oust Aristide

By Stuart King

At the end of February, with most of Haiti in rebel hands and the capital under siege, the French and US governments called on the popularly elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to step down.

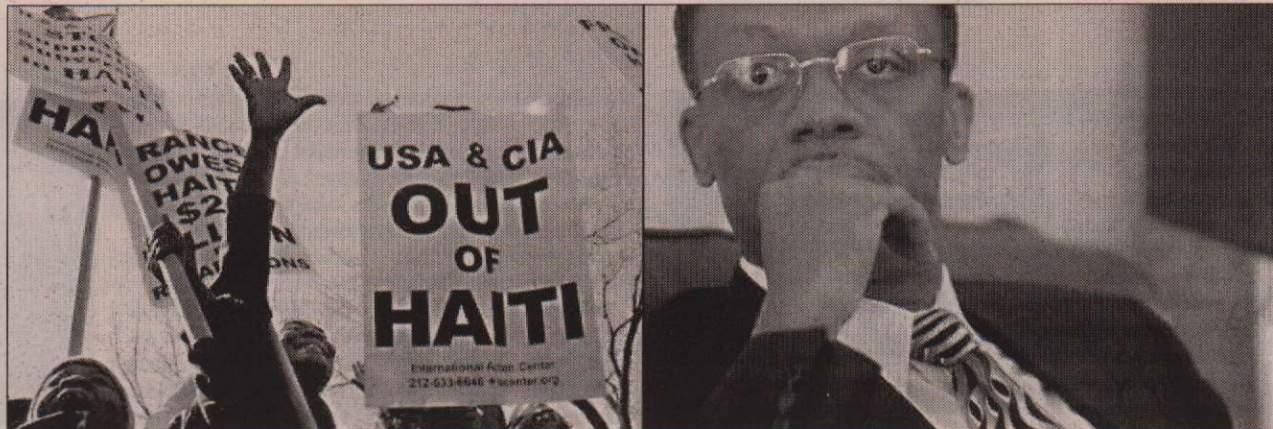
This was no popular revolution. The rebels of the National Liberation and Reconstruction Front (NLRF) was a group of no more than 300 heavily armed combatants, led by former officers of the disbanded armed forces of Haiti. Their success was a result of a growing economic and political crisis within the country.

In 1990 President Aristide became the first popularly elected president since the 1950s, when Haiti fell into the iron grip of the Duvalierist dictatorship of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son "Baby Doc".

Aristide was a priest who took up the cause of the downtrodden and oppressed in Haiti. Following the overthrow of Baby Doc, Aristide won the 1990 presidential elections with 67 per cent of the vote. The favoured candidate of the US and World Bank trailed far behind. In less than a year, however, he was overthrown by a military coup and fled the country. About 1,000 people died in the ensuing terror campaign by the military. A UN economic embargo, growing repression and mass waves of refugees heading for Florida led the US to intervene militarily in 1994 and put Aristide back into power.

But the US ensured that Aristide was under strict control, faithfully fulfilling the demands of the IMF and World Bank, honouring the enormous debts built up by the dictatorship and promising to step down when his term ran out in February 1996, after just over two years in office.

In May 2000, Aristide's Lavalas Family Party won a large majority in the parliament but the elections were disputed and the opposition cried fraud, backed by the



Pro-Aristide march in Brooklyn, New York

Ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide

A history of colonial exploitation

1492 Christopher Columbus lands on the island. Within 40 years the indigenous population is wiped out by slave work in the gold mines and African slaves are imported en masse to replace them.

1780s Saint-Domingue, as it is called, is now controlled by the French. It is an enormously profitable sugar-producing island with 40,000 white settlers and 450,000 black slaves on the plantations.

1789 French Revolution unleashes growing conflict amongst the settlers. In 1791 a general slave revolt takes place and Toussaint L'Ouverture becomes its leader. Settlers invite in the British, who occupy the island.

1794 French Convention abolishes slavery. Toussaint's army of ex-slaves rallies to the revolution and drives out the British.

1801 Toussaint establishes the island as a

French dominion.

1802-03 Napoleon Bonaparte comes to power in France and seeks to restore slavery and control over Saint-Domingue. 60,000 troops sent and fought to a standstill. Toussaint offered negotiations, tricked and taken back to France. Imprisoned in an alpine fortress he is deprived of food and dies of disease.

Dessalines, also an ex slave, takes over the struggle. The French are defeated, losing 50,000 troops.

1804 1st January Dessalines declares independence and re-adopts the Indian name for the country, Haiti.

1825 Independence of Haiti recognised by France but only in return for a huge indemnity of 150 million French francs paid to the plantation owners, a debt only paid off in 1922.

1914 Detachment of US marines lands, seizes government gold deposits on behalf of National City Bank of New York which is in dispute with the Haitian Government over debt repayments.

1915-1934 US marines occupy country to 'stop chaos', crush peasant risings against them and firmly place Haiti in US sphere of influence.

1957 Francois Duvalier elected President. His regime rapidly becomes a dictatorship with a feared secret police, the Tontons Macoutes.

1987 Baby Doc flees to France after 16 years as dictator.

1990 Aristide elected president, ousted by military in 1991, brought back to power after US military intervention in 1994. Leaves office 1996.

2000 Aristide elected again as President.

US and the EU because of the "irregularities". The imperialists' real concern was their need to constrain Aristide. He had enormous support among the poor, and his Lavalas party was made up of a series of semi-mass

organisations. There was always the fear that under pressure from his supporters he would adopt policies threatening imperialist interests in Haiti.

But Aristide did not challenge imperial-

ism, or mobilise the masses. Instead, he tried to win back the favour of the international donors and the IMF. A harsh austerity programme was introduced in 2003, ending fuel subsidies and cutting expenditure on edu-

cation and public administration. Growing opposition amongst students saw them joining the opposition in protests on the streets. Opposition radio stations financed by exiles from abroad started calling for armed action against the "tyrant" Aristide. Lavalas supporters, often in organised street gangs, attacked the student demonstrators, denouncing them as supporters of the counter-revolution; several students were killed in the clashes, others went into hiding.

In this growing crisis, the remnants of the old dictatorship launched their military attacks in the north of the country on 5 February. Aristide had disbanded the old armed forces in 1995 and set up a new police force. But this force is no match for the well financed and trained NLRF which have targeted it, attacking police HQs and murdering all those they lay hands on. Pro-Aristide supporters have fled or have been subject to beatings and killings. Only in the capital did Aristide supporters feel strong enough to take over the streets, arming themselves and building blockades.

Aristide called for outside help but the imperialists had no intention of bailing him out unless they had him firmly under control. Instead, with the French in the lead, a "peace plan" was put forward, backed by the US, Canada and the Organisation of American States. Aristide could stand on, providing an independent Prime Minister acceptable to the opposition was appointed.

The opposition refused this compromise. As the rebels took town after town, the clearly thought Aristide's days were numbered and they could insist on his removal. As armed Lavalas militias took to the streets of the capital, the imperialists quickly decided that they too should get rid of this dangerous man. The French offered to lead an international armed "peacekeeping force" and called on Aristide to step down "to avoid an uncontrollable spiral of violence". The US sent ships laden with marines towards the capital, saying they were ready to intervene in days. Once they do they will become the main enemy.

Haiti, just like Iraq, shows once again the imperialists' hypocritical attitude to democracy. Elections are acceptable as long as the right candidate is elected. "Unsafe" elected candidates – a Chavez or an Aristide – must be removed at the first favourable opportunity.

Only when the masses of Haiti take power into their own hands, and exercise it through their own direct democracy – through workers' and peasants' councils – will they be able to finally settle accounts with imperialist oppression and their own exploiters.

Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution

Haiti has just celebrated the 200th anniversary of the revolution that brought about its existence as a formally independent state. Anyone who wishes to study this revolution can still do no better than to turn to a classic of Marxism, Trotskyism and Black Liberation: *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*

In 1938, the Jamaican-born CLR James first published this remarkable work, openly intending his book to "stimulate the coming emancipation of Africa". And indeed it did. As an account of a vast popular revolutionary war, it is a revolutionary book.

James says of its subject: "The revolt (1791-1803) is the only successful slave revolt in history, and the odds which it had to overcome is evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement."

Haiti is a huge island rich in natural resources. The Spanish, later joined by the French, turned it into a plantation colony where coffee and sugar plantations and mines

were worked by huge numbers of Black slaves, seized from west Africa and carried off to the Caribbean with indescribable violence and suffering. By 1789, there were half a million in St Domingue, the French western half of the island. The export trade from this colony made up two-thirds of France's entire gross national product.

The slave colony was kept under the heel of France and the local elite of white planters by a regime of terror and sadism. Individual slaves passively or actively resisting their super-exploitation were faced with horrific punishments. Groups of slaves revolted, fleeing into the mountains, but the system remained intact.

In 1789, however, news came from France of revolution, the storming of the Bastille. Spread through newspapers and pamphlets, the ideals of this revolution – human rights, citizenship, liberation – reached the huge colony where so many were enslaved, oppressed and exploited.

The ordinary "field slave" could not read these, but a small number of freed former "house slaves" had been educated by their masters. One such was Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743-1803). Freed when about 30, he had learned various "European skills" including medical and military ones. Toussaint adopted the name L'Ouverture after

the "opening" of the struggle for liberty.

Meanwhile in France, the National Assembly granted limited voting rights to free "coloureds" in May 1791, at the urging of the abolitionist organisation, Les Amis des Noirs (Friends of the Blacks). This was too much for the white planters. Beginning on 22 August 1791, slaves rose in arms, massacring plantation owners.

Toussaint L'Ouverture joined the rebels as a medical officer. His remarkable organisational and military capacities soon became apparent. He became aide-de-camp to the foremost black general, Jean-Francois Biassou, and then a general of his own troops.

In September 1792, a fleet arrived from France with the order to enforce the decisions of the assembly but also to restore order and the exploitation of the slaves. Turning to the rebellious slaves for mass support against the counterrevolutionary planters and the circling wolves of the British and Spanish forces, the revolutionary commission leader Leger Sonthonax offered freedom to all black slaves joining the cause of the French Republic.

On 29 August 1793, slavery on Saint-Domingue was abolished. On 3 February 1794, the Jacobin-dominated National Assembly declared slavery itself abolished. Toussaint found his first genuine allies in the Paris sans

culottes. He was never really to waver in his loyalty to the French revolution, with tragic consequence when the revolution in France experienced a series of conservative coups and counter-revolutions.

In 1793, the British and Spanish entered the fray. Toussaint L'Ouverture now really came to the fore as a general, defeating first the Spanish (1794), and then the British (1795). Britain lost 80,000 soldiers to disease and the rebels, a small remnant holding on until 1798. By 1799 Toussaint controlled much of the island.

But in France, the radical Jacobins had been driven from power. The conservative Thermidor regime, then the semi-dictatorships of the Directory and the Consulate began to roll back the political gains of the revolution, including the abolition of slavery. The French bourgeoisie demanded their human property back, and above all their fabulously wealthy Caribbean colony.

After provoking the middle-class "mulattos" (people of mixed black and white ancestry) into waging a bloody civil war in St Domingue, the First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte launched a direct reconquest, sending 60,000 soldiers to restore slavery. Toussaint, after his heroic leadership of the liberation struggle, stumbled at this critical stage.

He fatally hesitated over a final con-

frontation with a France that he still identified with revolution. Enforcing labour discipline on the former slaves to revive the economy and refusing to fully expropriate the plantation owners, he provoked black labourers' revolt which he ruthlessly suppressed. He rapidly lost the confidence of much of his army.

Toussaint's misplaced trust in France led to his own downfall. In 1802, entrusting himself to the French commander Leclerc, he was seized and transported to France, to die in a cold dank prison high in the Jura mountains.

Before boarding the ship to France Toussaint declared "in overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo the tree of Liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep."

CLR James's *Black Jacobins* sees Toussaint as a heroic and ultimately a tragic figure. He credits him with uniting the revolutionary forces, as well as winning many of the most important battles. When he was captured, he was most powerful generals, Moise and Jean Jacques Dessalines, completed the revolution by defeating the French troops sent by Napoleon. In November 1803, Haiti was declared an independent republic, the world's oldest black republic and the second-oldest republic in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States.

From new vangu

Last month, an RMT delegate conference voted to allow its Scottish branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party, prompting the Labour Party to expel it. Jeremy Dewar exposes the flaws of both "Reclaim Labour" and Respect to argue that it's now time to launch the fight for a new workers' party

the capitalist system that promote social cohesion and dampen down social conflict. This does not always have a friendly face. In times of capitalist crisis the stick – anti-union laws, "modernisation" of the workplace, anti-asylum laws, illegal wars – can be much bigger than the carrot – family tax allowances, the minimum wage, foreign aid. In this, it is a liberal party, just like the Liberal Democrats.

Where Labour differs from the other two main parties is in its social base. In a parliamentary democracy, all parties have to establish a base among the people – otherwise, they could not hope to win an election. Labour's mass base is among the organised working class, especially the trade unions. In this respect, and this respect alone, Labour is a workers' party.

But Labour is – and has always been – a distorted workers' party. It does not reflect the working class historic need to overthrow capitalism, to take control of the economy and plan production according to the needs of the masses and the planet itself and to rule through democratic workers' councils protected by accountable defence guards. Instead, Labour defends the narrow interests of the trade union officials, the parliamentarians and the municipal councillors.

These careerists rest for their support, not on the great majority of workers, but only on the most privileged and middle class layers who are in secure employment who think of themselves as professionals, those who have made their peace with the capitalist system, through which they seek their advancement. In particular, Labour is the natural embodiment of the political outlook of the union leaders who seek to "solve" workers' social and, hence, political problems within the framework of capitalism, not socialism. It was and even now remains the party of the trade union bureaucracy.

In short, Labour is a "bourgeois workers' party" – a phrase coined by VI Lenin to describe the inner contradictions and turmoil that exists beneath the often deceptively calm surface of the party. It is a half-step forward from the 19th Century when workers supported the Liberals in that it established in the minds of millions the need for political independence from the bosses; but ultimately it has never been a party that stands resolutely against the bosses.

It is this contradiction that explains and underscores the inherent instability of Labour. Unlike other pro-capitalist parties, Labour cannot carry out its anti-working class policies without attacking and – over time – eroding its own social base. This tends to lead to a cycle: the party serves the bosses in government, thus breeding discontent among the workers. It unleashes a wave of union opposition that culminates in its removal from office, as in the winter of discontent in 1979. The party rebuilds its electoral support in conditions of openly bourgeois rule, in this case Margaret Thatcher's.

The ensuing internal battles within Labour are a form of class struggle. And as with the war on Iraq, this has its own dirty tricks. Leon Trotsky described it as "the hidden, masked but no less fatal dictatorship – the bourgeois 'friends' of the proletariat, the careerist parliamentarians, the drawing room journalists, the whole parasitic coterie which permits the ranks of the party to speak 'freely' and democratically but tenaciously hold onto the apparatus and in the final analysis does anything it pleases. This kind of 'democracy' in the party is nothing but a replica of the bourgeois democratic state".

Could a better description of the Blair regime be written? What makes Blair's clique particularly hated is that it has emerged from massive working class defeats in the unions in the 1980s and the party itself in the 1990s. By the time Labour was elected in 1997, it already had the most right-wing programme in living memory. Contrary to how the jingle of the time went, "things could only get worse".

The expulsion of the RMT on 7 February, one day after the railworkers' union voted to allow up to seven Scottish branches and the region to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party without so much as a hearing shows a contempt for democracy in the Blair regime. Key unions are blocking votes on disaffiliation and democratisation motions, and stifling debate under



From top left clockwise, Asian youth, firefighters, anticapitalist. A new workers' party is needed to unite these forces to fight

the vacuous end-of-discussion reports. Even the RMT has failed to discuss motions to target support solely for parties that fight for union policy, and to campaign for a new workers' party.

Reclaim Labour?

However, the union leaders cannot simply repress working class anger at New Labour. They also need to show that they are not simply the helpless playthings of Blair and his friends; they need to provide some leadership in the fight against neo-liberalism and imperialist aggression inside the party. There are two reasons for this.

First, Tony Blair shuts out the union leaders; "fairness not favours" has meant, in practice, they enjoy next to no influence whatsoever inside Number 10. Gone are the days when the Labour prime minister would call in the TUC barons and negotiate a deal which – though derisory in content – did offer something that they could "sell" to their members. This is why all bar a few general secretaries would prefer to see Gordon Brown (who backed the war, supports privatisation and so on) in the top spot. At least, he talks to them. Blair makes their job of placating the militants more difficult.

Second – and decisively – the rolling bandwagon of rank and file activists demanding the democratisation of their political funds threatened to career

with some success, especially in crumbling industrial towns and cities that were often Labour heartlands.

Last, but not least, rank and file members of the unions have, in Blair's second term, begun to re-organise and flex their muscles. As New Labour's neo-liberal policies of privatisation and commercialisation of social services, of wage and job cuts and of anti-union laws, continued to hit the working class, union members began to strike against "their" government. As Blair's second term began, they were questioning why their leaders should back him, why their

What makes Blair's clique particularly hated is that it has emerged from massive working class defeats in the unions in the 1980s and the party itself in the 1990s. By the time Labour was elected in 1997, it already had the most right-wing programme in living memory

money was being spent supporting the party that was attacking them in office.

First, a new breed of union leader – the awkward squad and centre-lefts like Tony Woodley – were elected on the promise of a more confrontational approach. Then, campaigns to democratise the union's political funds so that some money could go towards supporting candidates standing against Labour were launched. Finally, rank and file networks – in the post, on the rail, among the firefighters – started to regroup and lead fights that the new "lefts" were ducking.

Of course, many activists straddled several of these areas of struggle: the do-it-yourself spirit of the anti-capitalists inspired trade unionists; the anti-war movement proved to anti-globalisers that small was not always the most beautiful, big could be more so. Most important of all, the global movement, which started with the international anti-summit protests and coalesced around the World and European Social Forums, provided a melting pot in which strategies for building "another possible world" could be debated.

But the question that this vanguard, for all its achievements, has not answered is how do we move from protest to power? How do we plug the democratic deficit?

The key to understanding why it is proving so difficult to launch a socialist alternative to Labour lies in the nature of the Labour Party itself.

What is Labour?

The Labour Party's policy can be summed up as the defence of private property (corporations) and the extension of the capitalist mode of production (the profit system). In the current period of globalisation this can only come through neo-liberal measures of deregulation, privatisation, extending and consolidating UK businesses' international reach. In this it is like all capitalist parties, even the Tories.

Labour seeks to achieve this through reforms to

Britain is witnessing a historic crisis of parliamentary democracy. The collapse of the case against Katharine Gun and the subsequent revelations from Clare Short have highlighted again the democratic deficit at the heart of British politics. These once trusted guardians of the British state – one an officer at the spy headquarters, GCHQ, the other a member of Tony Blair's war cabinet – cannot be punished because Blair and key elements inside Britain's secret state dare not risk further revelations about Britain's role in the war against Iraq.

These revelations have created a crisis between the pro-big business, pro-war Labour leadership and its working class and popular social base. Seven years of Blair's rule have disillusioned millions of Labour voters and members of affiliated trade unions to the extent that many of them no longer see the party as reformable but want its replacement.

These activists and campaigners are acting as a new vanguard of the British working class. The term "vanguard" is much feared in the workers and anti-capitalist movements because it is associated with self-selected sects and undemocratic manoeuvring. But, for Marxists, it has nothing to do with either. It merely recognises that there are many strands of political opinion within the working class, and that there is a layer of activists and thinkers who have a more sophisticated understanding of, and opposition to, capitalism than others.

Far from being a sect, today's new vanguard numbers hundreds of thousands. And rather than being unified, yet, around any political project, there are four distinct but related strands

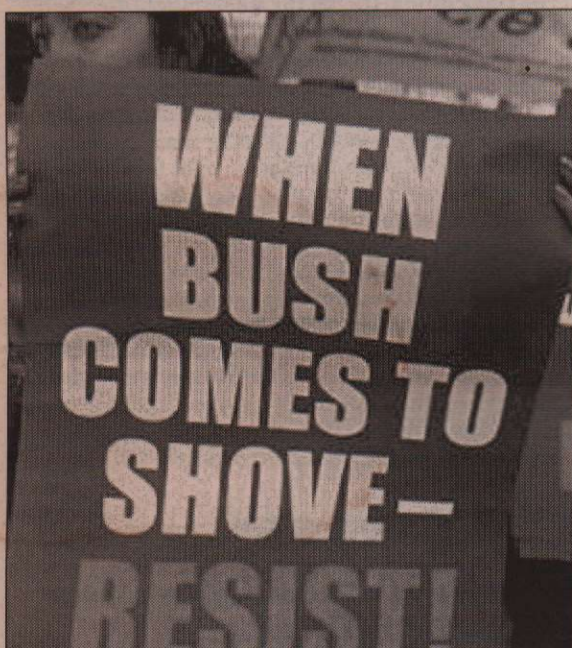
The new vanguard

The first to oppose George Bush Senior's new world order were the young guard who saw that globalisation spelt poverty, grinding debt and the destruction of social services for large parts of the world. Horrified by the increased pace and scope of environmental destruction, financial speculation and "mono-culture" these campaigners first raised the banner of anti-capitalism just two years into the reign of Tony Blair, in the City of London, Europe's capital of finance capital, on 18 June 1999.

Next up were the anti-war campaigners – young and old – who increasingly saw through Britain's "humanitarian" wars in Bosnia and Serbia. As Bush (Jr) and Blair extended this imperialist aggression with a "war on terror" directed at Afghanistan and Iraq, the anti-war movement answered 9/11 with its own 2/15 last year, a huge international mobilisation against the impending invasion of Iraq. Further, the core of this mass movement saw and explained the link between anti-imperialism and anticapitalism: the West's multi-nationals' economic domination was being backed up with a military domination. And last November, up to a quarter of a million united on a weekday demo against the Toxic Texan and Bomber Blair.

Within the broader anti-war movement there was a large component of Asian youth, which is further angered by the racism and Islamophobia lodged in David Blunkett's attacks on civil liberties waged in the name of "combating terrorism". Some of these youth are already engaged in anti-fascist activity in response to the resurgent British National Party, which has seized on Blunkett's rhetoric around asylum and immigration to scapegoat immigrant communities old and new

ard to new party



demonstrators and anti war activists failed by New Labour. against oppression and poverty and for socialism.

out of control. The Brent East by-election in September last year provided the wake-up call: Labour lost a safe seat to the Lib Dems with a huge collapse in its vote. Blair was becoming a liability, and moves to set up an electoral alternative to New Labour were gathering pace. If the bureaucracy did not organise a palace coup, they could face a new Tory government and even a revolution in British working class politics.

So they launched a campaign to Reclaim Labour: part self-preservation, part damage limitation.

Who is behind the campaign? Almost all the leaders of the biggest trade unions – T&GWU, GMB, Unison, Amicus, CWU – plus the left and centre-left MPs grouped around the Socialist Campaign and Tribune groups. These MPs have been responsible for the various rebellions in the Commons. After a split on its central committee, the Communist Party of Britain (Morning Star), which is influential among a whole layer of union officials, decided in January to throw its lot in with Reclaim Labour.

Yet, the campaign has, so far, been a dismal failure. At the party conference, they decided not to challenge Tony Blair on the question of the war, where he was most vulnerable after the death of David Kelly, but on foundation hospitals. Result: Blair gets a standing ovation for leading the country to war and occupying Iraq and is declared a brilliant tactician by the media pundits. He duly ignores the vote on commercialisation of the NHS. In January, with Blair facing a “dou-

ble whammy” over the tuition fees vote and the publication of the Hutton report, Reclaim Labour again failed to deliver the goods, which allowed Blair to win on both counts. These principled defenders of working class interests fear a spell in opposition more than they fear life under Blair.

Yet there is another reason for Reclaim Labour's failure. They have failed to win the argument with the new vanguard, the large majority of whom see no mechanism left in the Labour Party to constitutionally oust Blair and, furthermore, fail to see much if any advantage in replacing him with Gordon Brown. Reclaim Labour has failed to stem the tide seeking alternatives to the Labour Party as a whole.

In the postal workers' union, the CWU, the 4,300-strong Edinburgh No. 2 branch has voted to affiliate to the SSP. A further push to democratise the union's political fund will take place at its annual conference. The FBU leadership clique around Andy Gilchrist has cynically ruled out of order a motion to disaffiliate from Labour, but is still likely to lose the vote to democratise the fund. He has already indicated that the FBU will cut its affiliation fee to Labour and may entertain a position similar to the RMT's that led to its expulsion from the party. Meanwhile, in the civil service union the PCS, and the journalists' NUJ, campaigns to set up political funds are reaching a climax.

Dangerous adventures

But, if Reclaim Labour looks down in the dumps now, it could yet be revived. Certainly, if Blair is unseated by revelations about the dirty tricks surrounding the Iraq war, a heightened period of flux inside the party could focus the working class' attention on renewing the leadership, with Brown putting on a left face. Equally, electoral adventures – particularly with non-working class alternatives such as the Respect coalition – could eventually frustrate and exhaust the vanguard, providing a wing of the union bureaucracy with more room to manoeuvre.

This is particularly true of those union leaders who have been most outspoken about Labour's irreformability: the RMT's Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka of the PCS. It is no secret that Crow is in discussion with the Welsh nationalists, Plaid Cymru, and has openly toyed with the idea of supporting the Greens in England. Neither of these parties rest on the working class and tying the unions to these false “friends” of labour would represent a step back, away from independent class politics.

Since the RMT's expulsion, Crow has gone out of his way to stress that the union still wants to be part of Labour: “Affiliation to the Labour Party is still enshrined in our rulebook and will continue to be our policy. The RMT is still embedded in the fabric of the party...Let me make it absolutely clear that the union still wants the party to be reclaimed and returned to its traditional roots. However, the challenges involved are huge.” (Morning Star, 20.2.04).

Serwotka, meanwhile, has given his personal support to the Respect Unity Coalition.

Respect is the brainchild of George Galloway and the Socialist Workers Party. Its manifesto and strategy were drawn up behind closed doors with a few selected allies from the anti-war and anti-capitalist movements, and the coalition was launched in January in a convention packed with SWP members cheering every retreat from socialism and jeering every principled point of opposition. If Respect was supposed to fill the democratic deficit in British politics, it got off to a pretty inauspicious start.

Politically, too, Respect represents a step backwards from the now defunct Socialist Alliance. Time after time at the founding, and decisive, convention, amendments to the manifesto seeking to give it a working class and socialist character were brushed aside: we can't abolish the monarchy because we may want the votes of monarchists; we can't open the borders because some voters might believe the Daily Mail's racist lies; no tying Respect's elected representatives to a skilled worker's wage because Galloway would leave.

The core problem with Respect's manifesto is that

it fails to brand capitalism as the social system at the root of these social ills, let alone proposes a socialist solution. In this, Respect is a step backwards not just from the Socialist Alliance, but also from the anti-capitalist movement. If the Socialist Alliance was a coalition of self-styled revolutionaries masquerading as reformists, Respect is a coalition of reformists and revolutionaries masquerading as liberals.

Little surprise then that liberals like George Monbiot and the Green Party saw Respect as a threat to their own particular brand of populism rather than an opportunity to unite around someone else's leadership – and promptly decamped. The CPB and most of the union leaders likewise saw Respect as a diversion from their campaign to reclaim Labour – and declined its overtures. Far from representing the anti-war movement at the polls, as Galloway likes to pretend, Respect has split the anti-war movement at the polls.

It is far from a foregone conclusion, therefore, that Respect will do well in either the Greater London Authority or the European Parliamentary elections. Indeed, the choice of standing only in the most irrelevant poll in the political calendar gives the game away that Respect's leaders know they cannot attract votes in a serious contest and are only hoping for a protest vote.

On the other hand, a low turnout and proportional representation may just deliver Respect the two or three seats it so desires. If so, however, it will find itself in another dilemma: where to go from here?

George Galloway has made it clear that his preferred option is to return to the Labour fold. If he becomes an MEP, he could desert Respect at the first opportunity. The various Muslim representatives – Salma Yaqoob, Dr Siddiqui – would certainly pursue their preferred agendas, if elected, and, on issues of abortion and education, both likely to be high on the EU's agenda in the coming years, they would back reactionary positions.

Finally, what would John Rees of the SWP do if he were elected? Would he push for an end to Fortress Europe and an open borders policy? Or would he – as SWP leaders have done time and again on issues of principle – stick to the policies of the united front for fear of breaking with the reformists and liberals? Either way, the SWP's refusal to campaign for a new workers' party as the way forward for the Socialist Alliance would surely prevail in the new alliance. It does not want to build a new workers' party because it believes that its 2,000 activists already are the revolutionary party. And, of course, a genuine workers' party with a substantial base in key unions would be beyond the control of the SWP's leadership, which has suffered an especially bad bout of control freakery in the past year. Once again, sectarianism is simply the other side of the coin to opportunism, not a separate currency.

The new workers' party

The slogan for a new workers' party, on the other hand, is the only policy that can give a clear answer to the political crisis of leadership facing those hundreds of thousands across UK, who are looking for a genuine, lasting alternative to Blair and New Labour. In fighting for it, revolutionaries and reformists can unite in struggle against the bureaucracy of the unions and the Labour Party, without either having to abandon their ideology or programme.

Trade unionists, anti-war campaigners, social forum activists, anti-fascist fighters – even dissident Labour members and wards – should discuss and pass motions calling for local working class conventions to discuss standing socialist candidates against Labour and the launch of a new workers' party. At this spring's conferences, every current in the unions in favour of a new workers' party should host united fringe meetings to discuss the tactics needed to win the demand and debate out the structure and programme such a party should adopt.

With a rolling petition and a website to co-ordi-

nate the support, alongside more traditional methods of visiting picket lines, calling factory gate meetings, leafleting the estates and so forth, we can begin to cohere a movement for the new party. Anyone who has been on a picket line recently will know that workers currently are seething with anger at New Labour, how easy it is to win the argument for a new party. The campaign should reach out to every area of struggle – whether it is to counter the BNP on run-down estates or to save a primary school from closure – we need to present a political solution to the crisis of Labour.

If we start this campaign now, we could be in a position by September to call a national convention to launch the party. We are not talking here of simply stitching the existing left together – that would be a recipe for falling apart again at the first real test of struggle –

The slogan for a new workers' party is the only policy that can give a clear answer to the political crisis of leadership facing hundreds of thousands of activists across the UK

but a united front of far greater proportions, involving union branches and regions, and hopefully one or more national trade unions. This is a real possibility, but the opportunity to launch such a party will not last forever; we need to strike while the iron is hot.

During this campaign, Workers Power will argue that the new party needs to be as democratic as possible, but as centralised as necessary; that it should not subordinate everything to winning votes, but that it uses elections as a means to win new workers and activists to the fight for socialism and mobilise people for action; that its programme should provide a bridge linking today's necessary struggles for reforms to the overall goal of workers' power and the revolutionary struggle for a socialist society.

We know that others, even those such as the Socialist Party and the leadership of the SSP, who call themselves revolutionaries, will not agree with us. We know we may well find ourselves in a minority. However, no one else will argue for a complete break with reformism and a consistently anti-capitalist strategy if the revolutionaries boycott their own policies; and if the new party is formed on the basis of “old” Labour with a nicer internal regime, then it will be destined to repeat the same old pattern of degeneration as the current party.

Trotsky's advice to American socialists in the 1930s faced with a similar opportunity to found a new party based on the unions is worth repeating: “Are we in favour of forming a reformist Labor [i.e. workers' – WP] Party? No. Are we in favour of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party – it depends upon the development. Here the question of programme comes in.”

The prize – even if it comes at the expense of a political split in the working class movement in Britain – of establishing a revolutionary party with a large part of the new vanguard in it is well worth the struggle. Workers Power believes that despite the substantial obstacles in the path of such a development, there are also powerful forces in favour of it, too.

Not only are there the thousands of activists in the UK previously mentioned, there are also hundreds and hundreds of thousands more across Europe and globally. The crisis for Blair and the British Labour Party has unique dimensions, but the traditional parties of the working class are in deeper trouble generally. In Germany and France a similar process is under way with the social democratic, socialist and communist parties all attacking their working class base or in disarray as a result of having recently done so.

Indeed, the outcome we fight for is not just a new workers' party based on the organised working class and armed with a revolutionary action programme, but one that has in its constitution a commitment to building a new world party of social revolution, the Fifth International.

A year after the war began there is still misery, poverty and no democracy

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END THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ NOW

The United States and its allies are hopelessly bogged down in Iraq. The cost in terms of casualties and money is rising remorselessly. The much trumpeted capture of Saddam Hussein has made no difference. Suicide bombs, attacks on "softer" US targets like Black Hawk helicopters and humvees, continue to take a heavy toll.

The US government admits that 547 US troops have died in Iraq. This figure is probably correct but the Pentagon's claim that there have been only 2,604 service personnel wounded in action and just 408 "non-hostile wounded" is clearly bogus.

The US Air Force itself admits that more than 11,000 medical evacuees have passed through Andrews Air Force base on the outskirts of Washington DC in the past nine months. Retired colonel David Hackworth claims that "Our armed forces have taken 14,000 casualties in Iraq."

The United States has about 132,000 troops in Iraq and about 87,000 in support roles outside the country. The average monthly cost has been running at about \$4.4 billion. The cost of the whole war and occupation is \$104 billion so far.

The attempt to shift responsibility onto Iraqi collaborators has also suffered serious setbacks. More than 300 Iraqi police officers have been killed since the new police force was established.

Just as the end of "major hostilities" in Iraq on 1 May did not put a stop to US army casualties, so it has not meant an end to Iraqi civilian casualties resulting from the military actions by the US, UK and their other allies. In this period, 10,000 civilian casualties have been reported. Hundreds, if not thousands, of claims have been filed against the US and UK authorities for wrongful killing, injuries and property destruction.

It is clear from all reports that the daily lives of the Iraqi people have not improved in the 10 months since Saddam's regime was overthrown. In many cases, things are even worse with no improvement in sight. In Iraq's hospitals the wards are filthy, the sanitation shocking, the infections lethal.

Iraqi women complain that their daily lives are dogged by violence and incredible hardship. Many who had jobs under the old regime are now unemployed.



British troops detain Iraqis outside Basra

The puppet Iraqi Governing Council has decided to abolish the "Personal Status Law", a set of rules which provided opportunities for employment and protected the democratic and social rights of women.

Iraqi women will have to rely on religious institutions on issues such as marriage and divorce, rather than relying on civilian courts for these matters.

There are still officially some 5,000 Iraqi detainees held without trial but most journalists think this is a gross underestimate. Many of them are imprisoned indefinitely and without charges. Abu Graib Prison, on the south western edge of Baghdad, was once Saddam Hussein's most feared detention centre. It now has different occupants and has been renamed the Baghdad Correctional Facility but things remain much the same as before.

The Bush administration has handed out huge numbers of lucrative reconstruction contracts: such as a \$1 billion deal it signed with Bechtel and the \$3 billion contract with Halliburton, the oil services company U.S. vice-president Dick Cheney ran before taking office.

It has appointed a Virginia based corporation to design an overall plan for the privatisation of the hundred largest Iraqi state-owned enterprises and to open the country's trade to "the world market", that is to US corporations. Iraqi agriculture is to be re-oriented

to luxury crops for North American and European markets. "If it all works out, Iraq will be a capitalist's dream", gushed the Economist on September 25 last year.

In fact investigative reporters have already found massive waste, fraud and abuse by U.S. companies receiving multibillion dollar reconstruction contracts in the country, including staggering over-charges for projects, shoddy work or a failure to complete them.

The occupation authorities have rigidly refused to employ Iraqi state firms, even where, as in irrigation, water supplies and other public works, they clearly know the terrain, have skilled workforces and could do the job cheaper and better. Meanwhile, about 70 per cent of Iraqis have been unemployed since the US invasion and another 440,000 Iraqi soldiers and large numbers of civil servants have been sacked.

The Americans, after six months of incredible arrogance, are getting desperate as to what sort of political solution will allow them to withdraw with their investments and control of the country's vast mineral wealth intact. In short, they are still searching for a stable puppet regime. This has forced them much closer to the Shiite ayatollahs.

The big headache facing the US proconsul Paul Bremer is how to get the three great sectors of Iraqi society, the Shi'a majority, the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds

to agree a basis for elections and an interim constitution. The Americans have come up with a really bright idea – Lebanonisation. Divide the spoils of state power in strict proportions between the ethnoreligious communities. Never mind the democratic rights of the secular majority, of women, of the politically aligned. But this has simply led to an unseemly brawl over the spoils between the self-appointed community leaders.

The Kurds want a three-man presidency comprised of a Kurd, a Shi'a Arab and a Sunni Arab; the Shi'as want a five-man presidency comprising three Shi'as, a Sunni Kurd and a Sunni Arab, to underscore their ascendancy; and the Sunni Arabs have put forward a compromise four-man presidency consisting of two Shi'as, a Sunni Kurd and a Sunni Arab. Others have proposed a Sunni president, a Shi'a prime minister and a Kurdish speaker of parliament.

In fact, this approach will at best ensure the installation of Sharia law, a return to patriarchal tribal authorities, and the rule of existing warlords and "ex" Ba'athist bureaucrats. At worst, as UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has warned it will lead to an ethnic civil war that will rip the country and its people apart.

In short all the claims that the US and UK invasion was to restore democracy and prosperity to Iraq have been shown to be a complete pack of lies.

That is why the workers and anticapitalist movement worldwide need to redouble their efforts to get all the occupation forces out of Iraq.

It is why we must support all forces fighting to drive them out. We must support the struggles by women, by trade unionists, by the unemployed for their rights and basic needs.

We must support women's rights to work, to dress how they chose, to free choice in all personal and sexual matters. We support those who fight for a completely secular Iraq and against an Islamic republic.

We must support the Kurds' right to self-determination – not only to enjoy their present near total autonomy but to complete separation if they decide that is what they want.

Only if the Iraqi working class is able to create a party that can come to the head of the struggle against imperialism and domestic reaction, will the ordinary people of the country hope to create a bright future for themselves on the basis of the country's enormous natural wealth. This will only be done in close co-operation with the Palestinians and the workers and peasants of the Arab countries plus Iran and Turkey.

WHAT WE SAY

- Solidarity with the fighters against imperialist occupation.
- All occupation forces out of Iraq now. All US and UK bases out of the region.
- All multinational corporations out of Iraq.
- For a socialist Iraq as part of a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

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 and Paris, in Asia at Hyderabad and Mumbai, 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.

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