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British section of the League for the Fifth International

Troops

United States soldiers, CIA agents and private mercenaries have been caught red-handed. They are guilty of torturing Iraqi prisoners of war - most of whom are innocent civilians.

One prisoner was hooded, fitted up with electrodes and made to stand on a cardboard box for hours. He was told that he would be electrocuted if he lost balance and fell off.

Others were stripped and arranged to make it look like they were having sex with each other. All were photographed alongside grinning GIs giving thumbs-up signals.

The pictures forced US President and commander-in-chief George Bush to make an uncharacteristic apology on television. When faced with similar pictures of British troops urinating on captives, Tony Blair was obliged to voice his disgust. Both claimed these were total aberrations.

They are lying.

These abhorrent acts of humiliation are the inevitable result of the racist culture endemic in the occupying forces. In fact, the British army beat Baha Mousa, a 26-year-old hotel worker, to death back in July. They tried, in vain, to bribe the family into keeping quiet.

The truth is that, in order to motivate ordinary soldiers to implement this illegal occupation, they have to be immunised against Arab people in general. They have to start believing that Iraqis are lesser human beings in order to have the stomach to shoot down women and children.

This attitude is being promoted and reinforced from the highest ranks of the armed forces. The US army has suspended the commander in charge of the prison, General Karpinski - no rank and file soldier. And even those accused are reported to have said that they were told to "soften up" the prisoners before they were handed over to the CIA.

British Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Michael Jackson, claims that British soldiers who torture are not fit to wear the "Queen's uniform." But despite a series of accusations of torture and the

deaths in custody of Iraqis held by the British army virtually none, according to Amnesty International, have been properly investigated.

Anti-racists and anti-war campaigners must reject any mealy-mouthed offers of a "full inquiry" into these matters. The only reason they are offering this is that the entire Iraqi people, indeed the entire Arab and muslim world is outraged. But we've had Hutton and Butler, what use would another "in house" establishment inquest be?

Neither would a change of command do any good. Bush suggested sending the commander of Guantanamo Bay to Iraq! Was this a act of stupidity and insensitivity or a calculated insult?

The Iraqi people - even before they saw these ugly images on their TV screens - have clearly rejected their "liberators". The armed resistance is more popular than ever. The best support we can give them is to increase the pressure on Bush and Blair to pull the troops out now!

Out

Now!



VICTORY TO THE IRAQI RESISTANCE

Support the nursery workers

On 20 April full-time officials of Britain's biggest union, Unison, thought they had ended the bitter dispute over poverty pay. The officials issued a press release indicating the union was no longer pursuing a pay claim across the whole of Scotland in talks with the employers' umbrella body, the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities.

Scandalously the Unison officials' statement was given to the media before delegates representing the strikers had even considered the question of retreating from a national pay claim.

No doubt the Unison officials are more concerned that the dispute has become a major embarrassment for First Minister Jack McConnell and the rest of the New Labour leadership of the Scottish Parliament. Even worse for these bureaucrats was the thought of it continuing just as the campaign for the European Parliamentary elections was due to begin. These bureaucrats seem to be unconcerned that their duty should be to the rank and file of the union.

Although the 20 April delegates' meeting voted to continue the campaign, it is no longer clear whether the action is for a national, or a series of local settlements. But more than a week later, nearly 4,000 nursery staff from across 17 of Scotland's 32 local councils are still out, having entered the third month of their indefinite strike to gain regrading and a substantial increase in their basic pay.

It is vital that the delegate meeting be reconvened to state clearly that the action continues in pursuit of a national wage claim and to demand that the union officials carry out the democratic wishes of the strikers.

The strikers walked out on 1 March. After nearly a year of lobbying, protests and limited industrial action the workers had extracted few concessions. They voted by a 4-to-1 majority to strike indefinitely in early February and have shown determination to win their demands ever since. Most major



cities and towns have seen large and vibrant demonstrations, while strikers have lobbied both the Scottish Parliament and the STUC spring conference.

First and foremost, the nursery nurses' fight has been about poverty pay. Even for those with qualifications, annual pay on the basic grade is only £10,000, rising to £13,896 - after a decade in the job!

In short, their salaries are abysmally low. The last review of the grading structure for nursery nurses took place nearly 16 years ago and since then there have been dramatic changes in the demands of their jobs, with an increasing emphasis on child protection and support for vulnerable families.

While some local authorities had reached

agreements with union negotiators even before 1 March, most still have not settled, including Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. Strikers in Edinburgh voted by a 70-to-1 margin on 26 April to reject an offer made by the City Council and so have remained a solid link in the national chain. In fact, there appear to be yawning gaps between the local pay offers tabled thus far, with basic wage rates varying by as much as £1.70 an hour.

A stark indication of the attitude of Unison's national leadership towards this historic strike has been the dearth of coverage it has received in the union's fortnightly newspaper, Focus, which is distributed to some 38,000 shop stewards

and convenors. During the first two months of the strike the only substantial piece in Focus about the dispute consisted largely of a photo of Unison general secretary Dave Prentis addressing a 5 March strike rally. Likewise, the weekly email, "News from the General Secretary", has barely mentioned an indefinite strike involving the union's core membership of low-paid women in local government.

The vital task of fundraising has fallen largely on the strikers themselves and left activists elsewhere in Unison, grouped largely in the SSP or Unison United Left. Topping up the £15 a day in national strike pay is an immediate priority, but it has become increasingly obvious that the fight for solidarity action in the teeth of opposition from Unison's full-time officials will be essential over the next few weeks. As inspiring as the nursery nurses' courage and determination have been, the strike cannot continue in isolation month after month.

Maximum pressure must be brought to bear on the Unison bureaucracy through emergency motions, lobbies and the like on both sides of the border to renew the original commitment to securing a Scotland-wide agreement on the basis that the members had demanded at the outset. The strikers and their supporters in the union's ranks must also push for the leaders of the STUC to turn the rhetorical support of the conference top table into a national demonstration on the Scottish Parliament, and other meaningful forms of industrial solidarity including a call for a day of strike action across the whole of the Scottish public sector.

The nursery nurses urgently need money to continue their struggle. Send donations and messages of support and solidarity to: Unison, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX. Please make cheques payable to "Nursery Nurses' Campaign Fund" To arrange for a speaker from the strike at your union/community group phone 07986 422203

SOLIDARITY

Workers Power supporters have been to the fore in boosting the profile of and fundraising for the nursery nurses' fight south of the Scottish border. In London, for example, a Camden Unison convenor has helped raise £200 in the borough's Town Hall, in addition to a £500 donation from branch funds, while NUT activists at St Paul's Way school in East London have collected more than £300 and hosted a meeting with two strikers.

"We have come too far now to give in to the pathetic offer, which was on the table 10 months ago. Unison is there to represent its members and should do what we are asking them to do - not what the Labour government is telling them to do. I feel disappointed and disgusted at Unison officials wanting us to go for local deals, but it makes me more determined to carry through to the end and get a national pay agreement"
Irene Lang, striking Glaswegian nursery worker

Stop management attacks on civil service activists

More than 1,000 civil servants staged wildcat walkouts across south west Scotland and Lancashire on 29 April after Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) bosses suspended several PCS union activists.

The actions marked the culmination of a week of unofficial strikes in support of local supervisors, who were suspended for refusing to implement a deeply divisive and discriminatory performance appraisal system.

The Performance and Development System includes a quota system, which limits access to the top two box markings and automatically dumps the majority of staff into the bottom two. Leaked management documents showed the intention in future was to base pay increase, progression, cost of living and performance, on the box marking. As a result most staff can look forward to a 1.5 per cent annual increase over the next three years.

The quotas mean that 50 per cent of staff will be branded "poor" irrespective of their actual performance. PCS members in the DWP had already overwhelmingly rejected the scheme in a ballot last December and it's part of the reason 90,000 workers went on strike in February and April, affecting job centres, benefits offices, pensions

centres and the Child Support Agency.

The current wave of action has seen social security and pensions offices in Sheffield, Leicester, Scarborough, London and Glasgow affected by walk outs and so far 20 people have been suspended for refusing to implement the scheme:

- Four PCS members in Leeds were suspended on 26 April and 500 workers in two offices, Hume House and Park Place, walked out in response;

- Eight offices in East London struck unofficially on 27 April after management suspended Nigel Prendergast, a union activist in Hackney.

This new phase of the conflict with DWP bosses began in Irvine, Ayrshire on 22 April when management suspended John Cook for refusing to implement the scheme. Angry members called a meeting and voted overwhelmingly to come out in Cook's support. Ayr, Dumfries, Stranraer and Cumnock and Laurieston offices all walked out - a total of 1,000 people. Union activists suspect that John Cook was deliberately targeted as he is a regional trade union officer. The following day management suspended another PCS member in Morecambe. Morecambe and Lancaster offices then walked out.

The union nationally, though, needs to give a clearer lead. The DWP group execu-

tive committee (GEC) has a policy that says that members should back down when threatened with suspension. The GEC urgently needs to change that policy and back members under attack. The PCS should be giving official backing and strike pay to those branches that have mounted wildcat action. The Government has remained on the offensive against the Civil Service workforce over both jobs and pay. The Department for Education & Skills has confirmed that it will be pursuing Chancellor Gordon Brown's plan to cut more than 40,000 posts by axing 1,460 jobs over the next four years, cutting the department by a third. The PCS union leadership now has a stark choice between escalation and capitulation. There have been two well-supported strikes in past three months, including 13 and 14 April. The Office for National Statistics, where workers were on strike for the first time ever, had 90 per cent on strike and many benefit offices and job centres were closed. But there are no dates for further action and no indication that the leadership is preparing any upping of the stakes.

As Alan, a PCS member in Leeds, told Workers Power: "We forced the managers back to the table, they didn't want to negotiate but they've been forced back on that."

Clearly we have to counter the employers' offensive with an offensive of our own.

Bolton teachers kick-start resistance to pension attacks

Members of the National Union of Teachers in Bolton voted overwhelmingly last month for a day's strike action in an indicative ballot, writes *Jason Travis (Bolton NUT, personal capacity)*. Four out of five teachers voted "Yes" on a 39 per cent turnout after a packed meeting of 60 teachers unanimously called for strikes in response to a major attack on the national pension arrangements (see box).

An activists' meeting has now asked the national union to proceed to a ballot. The Bolton association has received messages of support from other NUT associations in Ealing, Islington, East London, Lewisham, Oxfordshire and St Helens, who have indicated they too will be considering action.

At present, however, the union leadership has opted for a passive lobbying campaign of MPs, rather

than fight for a course of action that would really rock New Labour.

In a positive development, both Bolton and Liverpool Unison are considering similar action, to be linked with Bolton NUT's. Unison members in local government are facing a similar attack on pension rights on top of their bosses' attempt to ram through a three-year pay deal that would entail a dramatic erosion of existing terms and conditions.

The development of links between Unison and NUT members, including joint action committees, will be crucial over the coming period. We must step up the pressure on the leaders of both unions to support effective action to defend pension rights, and begin to organise from below for local unofficial action, if that support is not forthcoming.

What is at stake in pensions fight?

The Government is pushing to increase the normal retirement age for teachers and other public sector workers from 60 to 65, while the level of pension benefits currently payable at age 60 will be cut by 10 per cent.

Both existing staff under the age of 50 and all future recruits to teaching will be hit. While the threatened changes won't bite until 2013, now is the time to fight back, as both public and private sector bosses across Britain and Europe have launched an offensive to slash the pensions bill. The TUC has finally called a national demonstration over the pensions issue for Saturday 19 June, assembling at the Embankment, London from 11a.m.

Europe's constitution is an exploiters' charter

Tony Blair's Iraq policy turned to dust in Fallujah and Najaf. Then he was forced into a humiliating climbdown on the referendum on the European constitution. The press is once more asking: Can Blair survive to run again in 2005?

Blair, when he came to power, boasted he would put Britain at the heart of Europe, would offer it what it was really yearning for - British leadership. Blair's miserable failure to take Britain into the euro-zone, or even to campaign for a referendum, revealed that this "great communicator" and "world statesman" was a man of straw.

His clownish "me toos" to the US president meant his influence in the European Union plummeted. It hit the bottom when he played second fiddle to Donald Rumsfeld's attempt to mobilise the "new" Europeans (the eight former Communist states) against "old" France and Germany.

Now having once again mimicked Thatcher, saying that he "had no reverse gear", he has suddenly performed a u-turn on the issue of the European constitution, just in order to rob Michael Howard of a stick to beat him with at the upcoming European elections.

Faced with the chauvinist, racist campaign by the Express, the Mail, the Sun and the Star about an influx of over a million job-seekers, benefit and health service tourists and "bogus" asylum seekers - Blair panicked again. He had complained of the racism of the tabloids on immigration. Now he virtually apologised, agreeing that their campaign "was not racist", that there were indeed serious concerns of "abuses". He vowed that he would undertake a major rethink of Britain's immigration policy.

In fact Blair and Blunkett always respond to the campaigns of racist rags and the "respectable racist" Tories. And New Labour's strategy to prevent the "disreputable" BNP taking advantage of this is heavier and heavier doses of state racism.

Blair is thus not a protection against the racist poison of Desmond, Murdoch, Howard and Nick Griffin. Instead, they lean on him to get their policies adopted.

But in the name of wriggling out of an electoral debacle on 10 June he has effectively scuppered the possibility of getting the UK to agree to the constitution - at least this side of a general election. A Daily Telegraph poll, the first since the referendum was announced, found that just over half of voters would vote no, while only 23 per cent would vote to ratify the constitution.

Many EU workers are staggering from an onslaught on their job security, pensions, health and welfare systems. Of course in the case of Britain it was Thatcher, Major and the Tories that launched and carried through these attacks from the 1980s onwards. But Blair did nothing to reverse them and, under the verbal smokescreen about "internal markets", "the third way", "stakeholding" and so on, he continued to push neoliberalism.

Blair: Europe's privatiser-in-chief

Nowhere was this done more brazenly than in the European Union itself. Blair became the apostle of "market reform", of the need to "Americanise" the EU. Blair is, more than any single European leader, the originator of the neoliberal "Lisbon Agenda" which is now leading to upheavals in mainland Europe.

In March 2000, Blair persuaded the European Union "jobs summit" in Lisbon to adopt the US economy as their model. This, he claimed, would bring growth, job creation, and win the battle to attract inward investment. The Lisbon Agenda called for wholesale privatisation and deregulation. Telecommunications and transport, employment policy, health and pensions, all had to be opened up to market forces. The aim was to make the EU into "the most

competitive region in the world" by 2010.

The Lisbon Agenda dictated a five-year postponement of the retirement age: to 65. Pensions must be based mainly on private savings rather than on progressive taxation. Employers must be freed of their "crippling" obligations to their retired workers.

Resistance to this onslaught in France, Germany, Italy, Greece and Spain has been so vigorous that, after four years, progress has been much slower than Blair and company hoped for. The pension reforms have provoked mass resistance, including one-day general strikes.

At the EU summit in March 2004 Blair, Schroeder and Chirac called for the Lisbon process to be speeded up. They called for a special EU enforcer to be appointed to chase up the economic, labour market, pensions, health and employment "reforms". These were all couched in terms of benefiting "industry and competitiveness". In short, they are cuts aimed at benefiting profit and lowering wages, including the social wage. Every working class gain made in Europe in the second half of the 20th century is now a target of these political corporate raiders.

The Centre for European Reform, a London-based neoliberal think-tank, produced *Scorecard IV - The status of economic reform in the enlarging EU*. This comments, "Germany deserves special credit for its Agenda 2010 package of labour market measures, which included cuts to unemployment benefits, the lessening of employment protection laws and reform of its job-seeking agencies". France too came in for praise for its "painful" pension reforms. Even Denmark, Finland and Sweden "score well", but top marks go to "Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain, (which) are highly committed to the Lisbon process".

Transport and communications was the first target of the privatisers, and they have made major inroads. But attempts to de-regulate the continent's ports ran into massive

resistance by dockers, especially in the Low Countries. The EU Commission, faced a revolt in the European parliament, has, temporarily at least, backed off. Plans are also afoot to privatise the railways but the glaring example of Britain is a tremendous counterincentive.

EU Constitution

So what is the European Constitution for? It is necessary so that the leading imperialist powers are not hog-tied by the commitments they gave to one another in the twentieth century. If these treaty obligations, subsidies, veto rights, etc. are accorded to the new entrants, then there could be chaos. A more centralised, federal union is needed. This is also needed to stand up against the ever more aggressive USA in the decades ahead.

In short, it is a constitution for seeing through the formation of a new united imperialist superpower at the expense of the continent's workers, poor farmers, youth, and national and racial minorities.

The draft constitution makes its commitment to capitalism perfectly clear:

"Member States and the Union shall act in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition."

It is dedicated to demolishing Western and Southern European workers' social and economic gains, and to super-exploiting the highly educated, but lower paid workers of Eastern Europe. The big firms can do this either by relocating their factories wholesale, making new investments there whilst downsizing or closing plants "at home", or by encouraging skilled and unskilled manual and white collar workers to come west. By denying them social rights and job security, Blair thinks he can use these workers to undercut the wages and undermine the conditions of workers in Britain, France, Italy, Spain and Germany.

For a workers' Europe

There are two ways of responding to this "threat". One is reactionary and, in the conditions of globalising capital, completely utopian. That is, to demand more and more immigration controls, to strengthen the national state and try to make it a bulwark against "the foreigner". The other is the exact opposite: an active working class internationalism, a class struggle that recognises and respects no borders.

To workers from Eastern Europe - just as to workers and refugees from outside Europe - we must say "Welcome to the workers' movement here, welcome to our struggle. We want you to add strength to our unions and political organisations by joining them."

Together we will fight for your social and civil rights. We will defend you against "our" sweatshop bosses, "our" media witch-hunts, "our" police and state harassment, "our" fascists. In return we ask only that you do not allow yourselves to be used to break our strikes or undermine our gains."

In the Euro elections - and a referendum on the constitution, if Blair does dare to call one - we have to reject the Europe of the monopolies and say "NO" to its capitalist constitution. But we must not say "YES" to a Great Britain or a little England either. We must not wrap ourselves in the flag of a revived national chauvinism. The flag of Saint George, just as much as the Union Jack, is not our flag - any more than the blue banner with its circle of stars.

We are not against European unity, just as we are not against "globalisation". If Europe's rulers were democrats, which they are not, they would call elections to a European Constituent Assembly and allow it to decide on the fundamental basis of a European state. They will not, because they know that they would never get their commitment to capitalism, privatisation, social cuts, and racist laws through an assembly, where the workers representatives would expose and oppose all these measures.

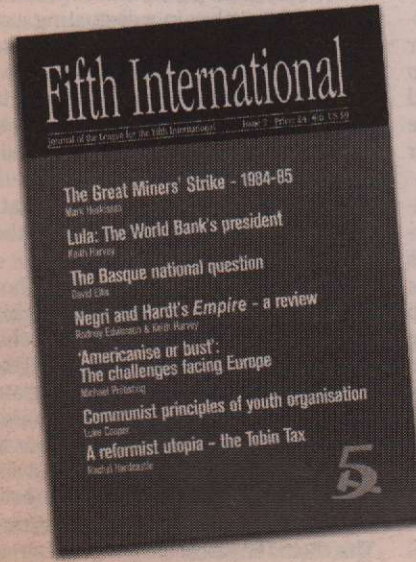
The working class and anticapitalist movement needs to oppose the present Europe of the monopolies with the concrete goal of another Europe in another world. This other society can only be based on the political power of the workers, and social ownership and control of the economy. With both we can build a new economy, an environment, a society fit for human beings. We can achieve equality and freedom.

We must proclaim a new, yet old goal for our movement - and the ESF in London in October is as good a time and place as any to do this - for a Socialist United States of Europe and a Socialist United States of the World. If we do, this hope and belief in the future will seize hold the hearts and minds of millions.

They will stand up and fight against the Blairs, Berlusconi and Schroeders, with the determination to get rid of them for good, knowing that there is an alternative and what it is.

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FOR A MASS NEW WORKERS' PARTY

The desire for a new mass working class and socialist party has grown in each of the seven years that Labour has been in office. And it is no wonder.

The most right wing leadership of Labour ever, the clique around Blair, has betrayed the hopes of millions who thought that the election of a Labour government in 1997 would see an end to the decades of attacks on the working class and the beginning of a more equal society.

Instead Britain has become more unequal than ever. And attacks have rained down on workers here and abroad. Privatisation has been extended to sectors that even the Tories left in public hands. Higher education is being turned into a privilege open only to the wealthy. Asylum seekers have become the victims of a cruel and sustained racist onslaught. The Tories' anti-union laws have been kept intact. Workers who have fought back have been subject to vicious attacks - firefighters, post workers, civil servants, teachers and rail workers.

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Roma: still second class citizens in enlarged EU

by Keith Spencer

May the 1st saw 10 countries join the European Union. A big party was held in Dublin to celebrate the event. Politicians welcomed the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Malta, Cyprus and Slovenia into the EU and smiled at the greater opportunities for business.

Other parties were held in the new accession states. One Polish businessman at the celebrations in Warsaw spoke for many when he said: "We will no longer be second-class people from a second-class country."

But there is one group of people who have been second class citizens and who will remain second class citizens in the expanded EU: they are the Roma.

In the countries now entering the EU, the Roma face persecution from police and racists, and discrimination in jobs, housing and in the law.

- In Slovakia more than 2,000 troops, the largest mobilisation since 1989, were used to put down a rebellion after Roma had their benefits cut (see Workers Power, March 2004)

- In Hungary and Slovakia, Romani women have been sterilised without their consent. Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights said about the Slovakian cases that the "Roma population of eastern Slovakia is particularly at risk".

- In the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, Romani children are put into so-called special schools separate from mainstream schooling. These special schools are supposedly for children with learning difficulties, however they have become a dumping ground for Romani children. This practice was slammed in a report from the Hungarian government's ombudsman for minority rights. It found that in one county in the north east of the country nine out of 10 children in special schools were Roma.

Those Roma who do attend mainstream schools are often forced out by racism by teachers and other

students. In one infamous case in 1998, Miklós Filép, a head teacher at a Hungarian primary school, attacked Romani children with a knife. He was awarded a medal a year later for outstanding educational achievement.

The charity Save the Children estimates that in the Czech Republic Romani children are 15 times more likely than non-Roma children to be placed in special schools. This means that three out of four Romani children are segregated in a substandard school system. Roma organisations and human rights organisations have protested against many of these abuses and have called on the EU to ensure that the Roma are treated with equality. However, the EU has done nothing to combat this racism. Instead, a few vague documents about social inclusion have been published and the accession countries have had to come up with some statements about fair treatment of the Roma.

In practice, the EU has accepted that its own human rights laws, which are supposedly to ensure that all EU citizens are treated the same, do not apply to the Roma.

Roma already living in the EU fare little better.

- In Germany, Romani children have been forcibly expelled, sometimes back to Kosova where they face even more persecution. Also, the UN has criticised the treatment of Romani women, saying that they "suffer from multiple forms of discrimination based on sex, ethnic or religious background and race."

- Roma camps in Italy are often raided and broken up by the police. In 1999 the far-right National Alliance party (formerly the fascist MSI) called for the arrest of anyone protesting against these attacks including any officials or politicians for "allowing a demonstration, indeed a protest march by Gypsies right in the city centre".

- In the UK a number of Roma were deported in the run up to the 1 May. Under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, Roma were sent back if the country they came from was on a "white list", these were countries deemed to be safe and included the accession countries. In

the Czech republic, the British embassy was refusing visas to Roma and there were instances of them being thrown off of planes.

Meanwhile a vicious racist campaign in the UK's tabloid newspapers has pushed the government into withdrawing all support to Roma who are claiming asylum. Newspaper stories about "thousands of Gypsies" coming to Britain to live off "our generous benefits system" prompted the Labour government to crackdown on migration and withdraw all support to asylum seekers from Europe.

Early last month, the government stated that all asylum seekers who originally came from the accession countries, about 2,750 claimants plus their families and mostly Roma, would from the 1 May lose all rights to the meagre benefits and housing handed out by the National Asylum Support Service (Nass) or from social services departments. This ruling would take immediate effect on the 1 May including evictions from Nass housing.

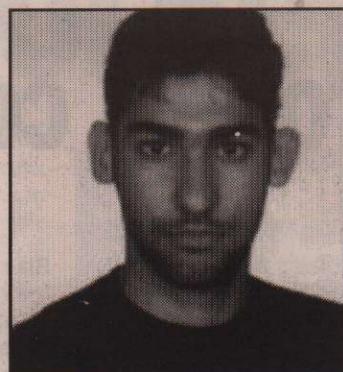
However the day before this was due to take effect the Home Office changed its mind after pressure from refugee organisations which warned of families being made destitute. At the time of going to press, however, all the government has promised is not to evict people immediately and to carry out an urgent review in the first week of May. There is still no guarantee that these asylum seekers will not be destitute in the near future.

The government also rushed through new benefit restrictions, the day before the accession, introduced to prevent migrants from claiming benefits or housing when they come to the UK. Under a new workers registration scheme, migrants from the EU will have to prove that they have an employer and be in work before they are eligible to benefits including housing.

Roma who had claimed asylum were barred from working; now they are expected to find jobs from the 1 May. They might be able to still claim asylum but their case will almost certainly be turned down as being "unfounded" as the new countries of the EU will be on the "white list" and be deemed safe.

It seems in the new expanded EU there is still no place for the Roma.

Free Mario Bango



Human rights activists across Europe are using the date of EU expansion (1 May) to highlight the case of 21-year-old Slovakian Roma Mario Bango. On 20 November 2003, Mario was sentenced to 12 years in a Slovakian prison for defending his brother against a racially motivated attack. He was convicted of attempted murder, despite the fact that he did not initiate the attack and his brother's attacker died later from head injuries that medical experts have testified were of unknown cause.

12 DAYS OF ACTION FOR MARIO

We are asking that all supporters of the FREE MARIO BANGO CAMPAIGN attempt to organise actions in their localities on these days.

12 DAYS FOR MARIO BANGO

Day 1: MAY DAY: Day of National Action for Mario

Day 2: hold a meeting explaining Mario's case

Day 3: press day - send press releases to every paper

Day 4: day of posterling

Day 5: send postcards of protest to the slovakian authorities

Day 6: day of graffiti

Day 7: day of petitioning for Mario's release (at work/school)

Day 8: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LOCAL ACTION

Day 9: day of fundraising for Mario

Day 10: day of stickering

Day 11: day of letter writing to mario

Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982

Ústav na vy'kon väzby

priečinok 1077

Chorvatská 5

812 29 Bratislava

Slovensko/Slovakia

Day 12: hand in petitions to embassies/govt offices

For more details call:

Joy Knight on 07866 695 839

or e-mail freemariobango@yahoo.co.uk

or visit www.freemario.org/

Use local elections to fight for services we need

The June local elections show the burning need for socialists to fight for a new workers party. With the Socialist Alliance effectively dead, and its SWP-dominated leadership preventing local groups from even standing, there is no nationally organised alternative standing against New Labour in the interests of working class people.

In some areas there will be local socialist candidates standing opposed to Labour, Tory and Lib-Dem control of local councils. Where these candidates have significant support and oppose the policies of privatisation, stock transfer of council housing, teacher redundancies or other attacks on local services Workers Power will be working with them and supporting them.

Clearly, we will say where we disagree with these candidates' policies, where they do not go far enough, and how we can take these campaigns beyond elections into building a new fighting workers party. In other areas there will be no such candidates and we will be giving critical support to Labour. Here we should aim to use the election campaign to argue with Labour supporters to join the fight against the Blair/Brown policies and leadership of the

by Stuart King

party and to join with those in and outside the party to fight for an alternative. Above all, local trade unionists, especially those in unions affiliated to Labour, should demand that Labour candidates commit themselves to break from the policies of New Labour and lead a fight for the services the local working class need.

The outlines of a fighting alternative at a local level are clear. Since Labour has been in power since 1997 it has done little to reverse the damage inflicted on working class communities under the Tories. Local councils, always under the thumb of central government, were stripped of many of their powers under Thatcher. The fact that so few people vote in local elections is a reflection of this reality - people know local councils cannot change much. Even now Labour is using Tory laws to cap local councils' spending, leading to severe cuts in local services like old people's clubs and youth services. Socialists fight for as much decision-making power as possible to be devolved to local level - control over our housing, transport, schools and colleges and

health service and for providing the finances to run them properly. We want to take control away from the quangos and faceless bureaucrats who now run our local services, replacing them by our elected representatives.

To tackle the chronic state of repair of the council housing stock, to build large numbers of new, affordable houses, councils need to have proper powers to raise their own revenue. The council tax is a deeply unfair tax, where multi-millionaire house owners pay only marginally more in tax than the average householder. It should be abolished and replaced by a steeply progressive local income tax - where the highest income earners pay up - together with a local wealth tax. This could provide local councils with the billions of pounds they need to provide decent services for all their citizens.

Up to a third of councils' income goes directly on servicing debts to the banks and finance houses which have made billions out of such lending and had their capital returned many times over. We stand for the cancellation of such debts and the nationalisation of these institutions under workers' control. We should be clear in these elections that the struggle for decent services

at a local level cannot be separated from the struggle to transform society at a national level.

Labour's answer to the dilapidated state of the council housing stock is to privatise it or offer millions for repairs only if tenants agree to 'stock transfer' - moving control to un-elected Housing Association officials and raising rents by 20% over the next decade. Such measures have to be fought with estate groups being formed to take the campaigns against it into the council chambers and into the local Labour parties.

Central government direction over education has completely eroded any democratic control over local schools. Blair has carried on the divisive policies of the Tories - well-off parents ship their children off to private or state selective schools leaving comprehensives in working class areas to sink with inadequate resources. Even the paltry promise to reduce all primary school classes to under 30 has not been kept, yet at the same time the primary sector was reduced by 800 teachers last year. The government plans to fill the gaps in secondary schools with 'class room assistants' rather than with properly trained

teachers. Teachers, parents and school students must come together to fight for more teachers, better resources and an end to divisive school selection policies that discriminate against working class families.

New Labour, the Tories and the millionaire owners of the yellow tabloid press have all joined together in a disgusting racist campaign, first against asylum seekers and now against migrants from the new EU countries in eastern Europe. "They are taking our jobs, swamping our schools and housing provision" they tell their readers day in and day out. It is little wonder that the BNP is an ever growing threat in council elections, particularly in northern towns like Burnley and Oldham.

Labour's failure to provide decent housing, jobs and schools in these areas plays into the hands of the fascists who, chiming in with the racist tabloids, blame all these problems on 'foreigners' and 'immigrants'. To beat the fascists we must not only aim to drive them out of our communities and off the streets but offer a real socialist alternative to workers who are fooled into believing the BNP is defending their interests. This should be part of the campaigning work of socialists in these elections.

Refugees: taking it to the streets in Leeds

Dear comrades

The Day of Action in defence of refugee rights, called by Leeds Social Forum (LSF) for April 24th, was a success. Aided by a warm, sunny day, around 30 activists came together on the Briggate to start a dialogue with the general public on why refugees are not to blame for the growing poverty in Britain. A big banner "Refugees are welcome here!" and "subverted" fake-newspaper headlines set the scene, while street theatre caught the shoppers' attention. Activists dressed as Tony Blair and his spin doctors plotted to blame asylum seekers for cuts to welfare services they were planning to make before getting chased away.

Most of the day was actually spent talking to shoppers about the facts regarding asylum, poverty and the media in Britain. The LSF leaflet "Britain flooded by lying newspapers!" exposed the fact that multi-millionaire right-wing media

owners are the ones whose papers argue against things like the minimum wage, more NHS funding, and social housing, while scapegoating refugees for all society's ills. We used a survey with questions that probed what people really thought about asylum seekers, as a way to begin to pull apart the myths with questions such as "what proportion of the world's asylum-seekers does Britain take?" (Polls say one-quarter, the reality is less than 2%). And that great favourite of the tabloids, "is Britain a soft touch for refugees?"

All in all it was a fun and very positive day. Some people gave us grief. But most were pleased to discuss the subject, interested to learn the truth, and gave us the thumbs up for coming out on the streets and making some noise about the issue since you don't see many people standing up in public for refugees these days. Everyone agreed it was worthwhile and that we

should do it again.

Thanks to everyone who came along and made it a success, and to the socialist youth organisation, Revolution, for the street theatre. Let's make this the start of a massive campaign of truth and solidarity, to counter the lies of the media and support our brothers and sisters from other countries, who come here simply seeking a safe haven or a decent life.

Next stop for the Leeds Social Forum is a meeting on the subject, including the rise of the BNP, and discussing our next activities. An activist from Leeds Unity against Racism and Fascism have been invited to speak, along with others, and we will be discussing the rise of racism and the BNP in Britain, and how the fight against both connects to movements against poverty and privatisation. Come along and get involved!
Andy Yorke
Leeds

Christopher Alder, 1961-1998: Still no justice

Dear Comrades

Christopher Alder's horrible death in police custody is back in the news with the airing of the BBC1 documentary *Death on Camera*. The documentary showed some of the 11 minutes of CCTV footage of Christopher dying on a Hull police cell floor. Home Secretary David Blunkett has agreed a review of the case by the recently established Independent Police Complaints Commission. This is an attempt to limit the damage caused by the documentary's revelations as Blunkett has pointedly refused the Alder family's demand for a public enquiry.

The CCTV footage showed Christopher being dragged from a police van, his hands cuffed behind his back, his trousers and boxer shorts around his ankles, to the cell. He was unconscious at this point, and was left face down on the floor. During the next 10 minutes he can be heard gasping for air every few seconds. The police are seen checking him through the cell door but they do not release his restraints or administer medical attention; in fact they dismiss his breathing difficulties, one of them saying "he has been acting up all night".

The programme did not include those parts of the CCTV footage where monkey noises and laughter can be heard through the cell door.

Christopher had been involved in a fight outside a Hull nightclub in 1998; he had been hit, and was taken to hospital where he became aggressive - probably as the result of a serious head injury. The police were called, arrested him and took him away. He would be dead less than an hour later.

Janet Alder, Christopher's sister, has led the brave and often lonely campaign to reveal the truth about her brother's death and secure a measure of posthumous justice. "He spends his last 11 minutes on that floor, with no assistance whatsoever, with no dignity, no respect shown to him," she said. "I can't get my head round the fact that we're living in a society where we're not safe in police custody."

This case was not an isolated event or simply evidence of a handful of police officers not doing their job properly. It reflects an inherent racism within the police force, a racism that has resulted in:

- Black people are eight times more likely than white people to be stopped under stop-and-search (SUS) laws.
- Black people account for 25 per cent of the UK's prison population, despite only making up less than 9 per cent of the overall population.
- 200 black people have died in UK police or prison custody in the past 15 years.

The treatment of the Alder case shows the lengths the police and state will go to cover up their crimes. No police officer has ever been convicted in connection with a death in custody. The officers involved in Alder's death wiped blood from the police van, dry-cleaned their own clothes and destroyed Christopher's before full forensic tests could be carried out. An inquest jury in 2000 returned a verdict of unlawful killing, but the judge decided that there was not enough evidence to convict. An internal police disciplinary hearing cleared the five officers involved of wrongdoing and all are still with the Humberside force. Four are on sick leave, while the fifth has made a partial return to work.

Though we do not believe that any number of enquiries or reforms will root out the racism endemic in British policing, all socialists should support the Alder family's campaign for a full public enquiry into the death of Christopher Alder. The officers involved should be brought to justice to send a clear message that if nothing else racist police everywhere that they will not get away with acts that add up to murder.

Simon Hannah
Sheffield

Iraqi resistance: Stop the War evades the issue

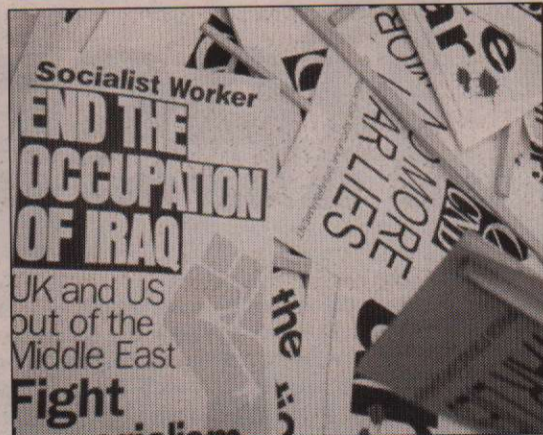
Dear comrades

Up to 80 people attended the 24 April national council of the Stop the War Coalition in Birmingham. Coalition chairperson, Andrew Murray of the Communist Party (Britain) led off the discussion with a brief analysis of the current situation of escalating turmoil and resistance in Iraq.

Murray urged local groups to organise lobbies of MPs' surgeries and hustings for the 10 June Euro elections to put parties on the spot. He also called for the organisation medical aid/assistance for those then besieged in Fallujah by the US Marines.

Many contributions from the floor including the SWP's Chris Bamberg 'Iraq for the Iraqis' and Lindsey German (Respect's London mayoral candidate) who stated that she supported the armed resistance but that could not be the message of the Coalition campaign. In my contribution I argued the need to refocus our message away from 'Blair is a liar' to troops out now, and developing a common basis for action to end the occupation. With Spain already withdrawing quickly, there is no need to phase the pull-out of UK forces. While I agreed with Lindsey German that support for the resistance should not be the precondition of a "troops out" campaign the Coalition should issue a public statement in support of the fighters in Fallujah and Najaf and of course the Iraqi resistance in general.

We need to nail the lie that resistance is largely foreigners, pro-Saddam, etc but is instead a national liberation struggle and we should



End the Occupation Of Iraq...but how?

support a call for local protest demos already mentioned.

There was also a brief discussion around civil liberties questions raised by the Bush and Blair "war against terrorism". Explo (a Ghanaian socialist and refugee) argued persuasively that we should take up Stop and Search issue and other relevant matters concerning Black African and African Caribbean communities since we are already committed to fight against loss of civil liberties and racist backlash. His contribution also linked the question of Iraq to imperialism's attitude towards Africa.

Andrew Murray, in summing up, said it was right to take up arms but our formulations must not be "self-indulgent", as we need to dig the biggest ditch between Blair and people in Britain. While some Iraqi organisations are certainly against the occupation they are not in favour of armed struggle therefore we can't say support the resistance instead

'support for people in Fallujah and Najaf'. This apparently not in the least self-indulgent formulation was meekly put to the vote and passed more on a nod of heads than a vote.

Alan Simpson, the Campaign Group Labour MP, spoke late in the day and noted in passing that Andrew Murray had a meeting with Campaign Group MPs where he had proposed that they set a timetable for withdrawal of British troops. As far as I can remember this

was the only time phased withdrawal was mentioned on the day, apart from my earlier speech. Murray had never disclosed this in his earlier speech. One thing for the Coalition another for the MPs!

Simpson also hoped that Coalition would support all those MPs who had stood firmly against the war - reply from Murray that we would support any politician who stood against the war. He indicated that the Coalition does not support any one party - presumably, a reference to Respect when in this context.

The Coalition clearly has an enormous amount of work ahead of it over the next few weeks, but has seen its capacity to mobilise mass protests diminish dramatically. The lack of clarity around key political questions thrown up by the occupation and the renewed resistance to it is unlikely to have improved matters.

Bernie McAdam
Birmingham

Obituary: Des Warren

Dear all

The labour movement has lost a heroic class fighter who was central to the fight for union rights and safer working conditions on building sites in the 1970s.

Des Warren, the Shrewsbury picket, jailed under the Heath government and then left inside by Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees for three years, died of pneumonia on Saturday 24 April. Actor Ricky Tomlinson (imprisoned at the same time as Des) and his wife were with him. Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson were at the Construction Safety Campaign's AGM in Liverpool earlier this year.

Des's experiences were recounted in his book "The key to my cell". He had suffered from Parkinson's Disease and got an out-of-court settlement from the Home Office arising from his claim that the cocktail of drugs administered to him in prison had brought this on.

Des's historic speech from the dock in his 1974 trial ended with the words: "The jury in this trial were asked to look upon the word 'intimidation' as having the ordinary everyday meaning. My interpretation is 'to make timid', or 'to dispirit' and when the pickets came to this town to speak to the building workers it was not with the intention of intimidating them. We came here with the intention of instilling the trade union spirit into them and not to make them timid, but to give them the courage to fight the intimidation of the employers in this area."

The first public event which commemorated Des' life and work was International Workers Memorial Day on 28 April, which included a march to the Wembley Stadium construction site, where Patrick O'Sullivan was killed on 15 January this year after falling 100 feet.

Comradely,
Dot Gibson

The betrayals of New Labour have led workers around the country to discuss the alternatives to Blair. Here **Stuart King** looks at recent attempts to set up alternatives to Labour and argues for a new workers party, while **Mark Hoskisson** examines the policies of the Respect coalition, which is standing in the Euro elections, and finds them a diversion from the struggle for socialism

For a new mass wor

The desire for a new mass working class and socialist party has grown in each of the seven years that Labour has been in office. And it is no wonder.

Blair and his clique have betrayed the hopes of millions who believed that the election of a Labour government in 1997 would see an end to the decades of attacks on the working class and the beginning of a more equal society.

Instead the UK has become more unequal than ever and attacks have rained down on workers here and abroad. Privatisation has been extended to sectors that even the Tories left in public hands. The introduction of fees and loans for higher education has impoverished students and in the long term ensure that only the wealthiest students will go to the best universities. Asylum seekers have become the victims of a cruel and sustained racist onslaught. The Tories' anti-union laws have been kept largely intact. Workers who have fought back have been subject to vicious attacks – firefighters, post workers, civil servants, teachers and rail workers.

And to crown it all, Blair has acted as the loyal lieutenant to imperialism's commander-in-chief George W Bush. In Afghanistan and Iraq, UK troops have stood shoulder to shoulder with the US in pursuit of oil, plunder and the establishment of the New American World Order. The cost in innocent lives soars every day that Blair remains in office.

The left of the Labour Party, in parliament and in the local organisations, has failed to fight Blair. Backbench rebellions come and go, but Bomber Blair remains firmly in command. He will remain so until his orderly handover of the party to Gordon Brown goes ahead. Many of the best socialists have left or been driven out of the Labour Party.



The RMT has been expelled from the Labour Party

The rail workers' union, the RMT, has opened up its political fund to enable it to support political organisations that support its policies. For this democratic decision it was kicked out of Blair's party. Many other trade unionists who have suffered attacks at the hands of Blair's government, hundreds of thousands in the anti war, anti-racist and anticapitalist movements, are looking for a new party that can represent them.

We believe that such a party needs to be a Workers Party, founded on socialist principles and rooted in the workers' movement.

Working class, because only the workers have a consistent interest in getting rid of capitalism and only they have the power to achieve this. Socialist, because only a socialist revolution can achieve the abolition of a system and a state based on exploitation, oppression, war and racism.

Such a party could unite all those on the left who have opposed Blair and rally them

to a fight not only against him and his policies but against the system that he and his policies serve.

Lessons from the past

We need to learn the lessons of three recent attempts to forge an alternative to Labour if we are to take the campaign to build a new mass workers' party forward.

Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) broke with Labour after Blair ditched Clause Four. It attracted widespread support and in Scargill it had a leader who had led the miners heroic struggle against Thatcher. But it was rapidly transformed into a bureaucratic monster, totally controlled by Scargill and incapable of reaching out to new forces coming into struggle. The SLP shrank into irrelevance.

The experience showed that a new party could not be built without internal democ-

ocracy, that the discredited methods of bureaucratic "socialism" (in fact, Stalinism) will always repel genuine working class fighters.

The Socialist Alliance was another attempt, one of the most hopeful recent developments on the left. Its failure showed two things:

- An alliance that only ever made an appearance around election times was not going to win the allegiance of workers looking for a party that could fight their corner on a day to day basis, one that leads the struggle in all walks of life and at all times. Workers who previously looked to Labour to defend their interests quickly saw that the SA was not a serious alternative.

- The Socialist Alliance showed that an organisation dominated numerically by one large grouping, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), could not survive when that party imposed its decisions and perspectives irrespective of the opinions of the non-SWP minority. The decision of the SWP leadership to collapse the Socialist Alliance into Respect was only the final act in a series of disastrous decisions imposed on the rest of the Alliance (see below). The SWP actively blocked the Socialist Alliance from moving towards the formation of a party.

The Respect Unity Coalition, thrown together for the June Euro elections does not represent a step forward towards rallying workers, students and anti-capitalist activists into a new working class party. It is a diversion from it.

Indeed an all-class, populist and non-socialist "appeal" is the heart of the Respect project. This is based on the SWP's idea of turning the anti-war and peace movement into a vote-gathering machine. Ironically, it means that come 10 June the Labour Party of Blair will have more progressive policies on issues such as abortion and gay marriage than Respect.

No vote for Respect

In the Euro elections on 10 June, the Respect Unity Coalition is hoping to open its electoral account. According to its newly published European manifesto, the Euro elections will be a referendum on Tony Blair, in particular on his role in the invasion of Iraq: "This election, therefore, is not only about getting MEPs into the European parliament who will represent the interests of working people. It is also about expressing our view on Blair's role in the war and the appalling record of New Labour in office. It is time for Blair to pay the price for his support for Bush, as well as his own domestic policies of privatisation and deregulation."

Is voting for Respect the best way to "punish" Tony Blair and will a victory for it really ensure that we will get MEPs "who will represent the interests of working people"? Unfortunately, the answer to both questions is no.

Respect is led by the prominent anti-war MP, George Galloway. He decided to set it up after being expelled from the Labour Party for his principled stand against the war on Iraq. Without any organisation of his own to build anything, Galloway turned to his allies in the anti-war movement for support.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) were willing takers. They had, for some months, been looking to create a new electoral front. Their first hope was a brazen popular front style lash-up with the Mosques in a "Peace and Justice" movement. But the Mosques

were reluctant to join in. Galloway's post-expulsion idea – for a broad coalition embracing Greens, the Communist Party of Britain, the Muslim Community and even (he initially hoped) Lib Dems, some Tories and disaffected Labour supporters – struck SWP leader, John Rees, as a much more hopeful proposition.

The SWP membership, under strict orders to break all records for standing ovations at any meeting that Galloway spoke at, were directed to build this new coalition. The Socialist Alliance was terminated.

The usual bureaucratic methods – packed meetings, newly enrolled members, lies, distortions and bullying – were all used to remove opposition within the Socialist Alliance. Steve Godward, a Birmingham firefighter sacked for his role in the FBU strike and a respected Socialist Alliance leader, was the most prominent victim of the SWP's bureaucratic offensive.

Requests from local groups of SA members to be allowed to stand in local elections as Socialist Alliance candidates have been refused. They have been unconstitutionally prevented from standing in these elections since this may get in the way of building Respect.

Respect founded

Following a meeting between a handful of SWP loyalists and Galloway a programme was drawn up, a conference convened, a leadership selected and an organisation established. There was not a shred of

democracy in this process. There was not a single attempt to involve wider forces in the elaboration of the programme or the organisation of the new coalition. No local branches were formed, no democratic structures put in place. Rather there was a stitch up between Galloway and the SWP. Respect was duly founded in late January at a London conference where anyone could turn up and vote. The conference, as usual packed with SWP party faithful, duly approved the proposed platform, with anyone arguing for socialism and a working class party – as Workers Power did – booed and jeered by the claque of SWP hand-raisers.

But for all of this misplaced and unprincipled effort the organisers reaped few rewards. The hoped for allies – the very reason why socialism had been kept out of the manifesto – rejected the advances of Respect. The Communist Party of Britain, the Greens, Forward Wales all told Respect to get lost.

Since the conference, only nine branches of the RMT have voted to support Respect at the elections – a much smaller impact on the unions than that made even by the Socialist Alliance in both the 2000 GLA elections and the 2001 general election. Indeed, given that the RMT itself has just been expelled from the Labour Party for voting to give its members the right to support parties other than Labour this really is a poor showing. And it shows little sign of improving given the RMT leadership's fair-

ly open hostility to Respect.

So far the only locally prominent Labour Party activist to defect to Respect is councillor Elaine Abbot, the former "minister" for housing on Preston Council. Naturally Respect are delighted at this. Though they – and Abbot – are staying silent on this particular councillor's record as the architect of a privatisation plan for all of Preston's social housing stock. Wonder why? Abbot has certainly not made clear that she now opposes the plan she drew up and drove through.

No breakthrough

Even some of the more significant individuals who originally expressed support for the project, like George Monbiot, have now abandoned it. Mark Serwotka, leader of the civil servants' union, the PCS, has maintained a remarkable silence on his role in Respect and has certainly not attempted to mobilise his union behind it.

Moreover, on the ground Respect has made far less of an impact in the working class than the Socialist Alliance did. Reports from every single region reveal that the meetings have been around the same size or smaller than those during the height of the Socialist Alliance's election campaigns.

Persuaded by George Galloway into believing that because they had him at their head they should now "think big", Respect's membership – aka the SWP and its hangers-on in the International Socialist Group

– went on a binge of booking huge and expensive venues. In Liverpool they booked a thousand-seater venue for a meeting that mustered 71 people – and many of them came from outside of the city!

Now, judging from the diary of activities, the organisation is spending much of its time trying to pay its way by organising a series of expensive "Dinners with George Galloway".

In Birmingham, around one hundred "guests" were treated to "a three-course gourmet Asian meal". They were addressed, according to Respect's report, by "Midlands faith leader Dr Mohammad Naseem" (Respect thinks the term 'faith leader' will be more acceptable than 'religious cleric'). The theme of Dr Naseem's speech was that "There is no morality in our political culture. Now, if there is no morality in this society, we cannot have trust. If we cannot have trust, we cannot have peace in our society."

Now lectures about an absence of morality are to be expected from a "faith leader". If you'd been forced to go to church every Sunday as a kid you'd have heard this message time and again. But the idea that you can dress this sort of stuff up as radical politics in 21st century Britain speaks volumes about Respect.

Following Galloway's speech his £7 book was sold – with an autograph – to one punter for £160! And therein lies an important point. The SWP are turning this whole project into a George Galloway one man show, but one

Workers party

SIGN OUR CALL FOR A NEW WORKERS PARTY

The way forward

Many on the left and in the trade unions have not abandoned the struggle to build a new socialist party. We welcome the Merseyside initiative to launch a "campaign for the establishment of a working class party". Up and down the country there are groups of socialists and trade unionists willing to take part in such an initiative. And everywhere RMT members are asking the same question – which party can our union back?

We should learn the lessons from our two previous recent attempts – both of which Workers Power has participated in and sought to build in a non-sectarian way, while never hiding our view that the working class needs a revolutionary party to defeat capitalism. We need to build the campaign for a new Workers Party in the workplaces and on the estates, in the anti-capitalist movement, in the black and Asian communities, in the universities and schools – in every town and city.

It would be a crime not to attempt this. A crime that would directly benefit the BNP scum who are prospering in areas that the traditional labour movement has abandoned and that have suffered at the hands of Blair's policies. Defeating the BNP means building an alternative to them.

We should not rush into establishing detailed structures, policies and programmes. Many of us have our opinions and surely in the process of building a new mass party we will all have the right to convince one another of who is right and who is wrong. That is what democracy is all about.

But we should come together around the goal of building a new mass working class socialist party and aim to win ever more people to this project. Without mass forces such a movement will inevitably fall apart.

This means we should work together to

combat privatisation, to support migrant workers and refugees, to smash the fascists, to help the students fight the fees, to support those on strike, like the civil servants and the rail workers. And we should step up the fight against the war in Iraq.

We should enshrine internationalism into our movement, beginning with an energetic push to build the forthcoming European Social Forum in London in autumn 2004. We should build it into a fighting anti-capitalist forum, with local social forums to take the struggle forward.

We should take this struggle into the unions, mobilising the rank and file to force the union leaders to break with Blair and his policies. Where we have the support in the working class communities we should challenge new Labour at the polls with the aim of drawing new forces into our campaign.

We should also work alongside those who want to "reclaim Labour", in these struggles. They too must finally come to the realisation that Blair and Brown would rather expel 90 per cent of the membership and break the link with the unions, than submit to policies that the working class demands. We will try to convince these comrades in struggle, and welcome them when they join us.

If we can build a real class struggle movement to build a new Workers Party, then in local and regional conferences, alongside the trade unions won to such a policy, we can start discussing our policies. We can then decide on a structure that suits the building of a new workers party and adopt policies and programme that takes the struggle for workers power and socialism forward.

We call on every militant to join us in this campaign, put their name to our call and win their trade union, party or group, to the campaign.

In 1997 a Labour Government was elected by millions of voters who wanted to see an end to decades of attacks on the working class and the introduction of a more equal society.

Instead Tony Blair's government has continued where the Tories left off, retaining the anti-union laws, extending privatisation and attacking unions, cutting services, and hiking taxes and tuition fees. Blair has repeatedly sent troops abroad or gone to war, most recently invading Iraq hand-in-hand with George Bush to seize its oil. His government has scapegoated asylum seekers and the Black and Asian communities.

Whether under Tony Blair or under Gordon Brown, this Labour government will never submit to the policies that the working class demands. There is no democracy in the Labour Party, and no opposition has developed that can mount a fight to reverse these policies. Tens of thousands of workers and youth are looking for a new party that can represent them.

We believe that such a party needs to be a Workers Party, founded on socialist principles and rooted in the workers movement, to unite all those on the left who have fought against Blair's policies.

We will take the struggle for a break with Blair and his policies into the unions and workplaces, the working class and multi-racial communities, the universities and schools, the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. We will work alongside those who want to "reclaim Labour" in these struggles as the best way to convince them of our aim.

We will champion the fullest democracy in our campaign for a new Workers Party and in the debate of its policies and structure. Discussing and working together in the course of the class struggle will build the strongest movement for such a party, and lay the best basis for creating one when the time is right.

We welcome the Merseyside initiative to start a "campaign for the establishment of a working class party". Up and down the country there are groups of socialists and trade unionists willing to take part in such an initiative.

We call on every militant to join us in this campaign. To put their name, to win their trade union, party or group, to this call. Let us go forward together to build a new workers party and a socialist future.

You can sign our call online and download sign up sheets at: www.workerspower.com



draped in semi-religious garb; specifically, Islamic garb. The reason they are doing this is that they hope – despite having been given a collective brush-off from virtually every hoped for ally – that this will give them the electoral breakthrough they long for. They are hoping that Galloway's high profile and support from the Muslim community – alienated, quite understandably, from Labour

by the latter's racism and warmongering – will combine to give them some MEPs and possibly a few seats on the London Assembly.

The cost of these hoped-for votes is one, however, that no socialist or militant worker should ever pay. The SWP have jettisoned the fight for socialism at the polls and embraced a populist pro-

gramme that is not even adequate for the immediate attacks facing workers and youth, let alone capable of advancing society towards a socialist future. Indeed, Lindsey German's programme for Mayor of the Greater London Authority, her "vision" as she calls it, rambles on for hundreds of words without once mentioning socialism.

The problem with all of this is that if you give up on the socialist programme you let the de facto leaders of your movement – and George Galloway is a bit more than that – set the political agenda. So it is George's admiration for Fidel Castro that captures the headlines not German's plan for more trams in London!

And, far worse, it is Galloway's anti-abortion stance, enthusiastically backed in press releases by the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), that appears to define the line of your organisation. This is especially so given that while MAB have implied that this is one reason they are supporting Galloway the SWP have remained totally silent. Where is Lindsey German or John Rees's press release explaining why a woman's right to choose is an absolute democratic, let alone socialist, principle? Why have they not explained that this principle is part of their campaign to win support from working class women across Europe?

They are silent because they do not want to offend their "vote winner" Galloway and their hoped for voters in the Muslim community. These socialists have sold their souls in return for votes.

Galloway in his typically modest manner told the *Observer*: "We could win four seats or even five. But I suppose the most likely outcome is that I win and a few of the others come close." In other words Galloway recognises that the elections won't actually inflict the sort of damage on Blair that he once predicted they would. The official reason for this is lack of time. The actual reason is lack of politics. The Respect Unity Coalition is not making headway in the working class. It is attracting support from some sections of the Muslim community but because it has tied itself so closely to Islamic religion and to the Mosques it is not at all appealing to others. There are countless secular-mind-

ed Asian youth in the Muslim community who are not at all enamoured of an organisation that explicitly favours the views of the Mosque over the many and different views of the street.

Likewise, there are countless workers in the black and white communities who know that churches play a reactionary role in society and find Respect's obsession with "faith communities" frankly sickening. The democratic right to religious freedom is something socialists have always defended. But the elevation of the "faith communities" to the political front row is actually a betrayal of socialism.

This is part of the same betrayal that led the SWP to vote down a socialist programme that Workers Power proposed at the Respect founding conference. It also led these "socialists" to vote down individual socialist policies, including demanding that any Respect MPs be paid no more than the average skilled workers' wage, proposed by the Democratic Platform of the Socialist Alliance. It will be interesting if, as Galloway is now suggesting, Respect forms a party at a conference in the autumn, to see how these socialists insist on including a woman's right to choose in Respect's programme.

Nothing will surprise us as far as the SWP are concerned. Their refusal to help build the Socialist Alliance as the basis for a new workers' party, their increasing obsession with "maximising the vote" – as though that is an end in itself – and their shameful bureaucratic methods have all earned them huge distrust throughout the British left and labour movement. This distrust, quite rightly, extends to their Respect project.

We will not be alone in refusing to vote for Respect. Thankfully we are not alone in fighting for a new workers' party either. More and more forces are coming to the conclusion that we need a real alternative to Blair, not Respect's populist diversion.

Crisis in the Middle East

As the US suffers its first major defeat in Fallujah Where next for the resistance?

By Jeremy Dewar

April is the cruellest month, not only for the hundreds of Iraqis gunned down in their homes and on their streets, but also for their American and British torturers and murderers.

Over 130 American soldiers were killed last month, and 900 wounded. Not only is this a dramatic increase on previous months, embarrassingly marking the first anniversary of president George Bush's infamous celebration of a "Mission Accomplished", it makes April 2004 the bloodiest month for US and "Coalition" troops since the invasion began.

What precipitated this terrible outcome for the US is well known and undisputed: they opened up two fronts on the Iraqi people, choosing to attack the city at the centre of the Sunni resistance, Fallujah, while declaring their aim to kill a relatively obscure Shi'ite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr.



Residents of Fallujah celebrate as US troops pulled out of the city

The result was to ignite an Iraqi intifada (uprising).

It soon became clear that the American military could not match their rhetoric, or

at least not without endangering their overall command of the country. 2,500 US Marines surrounded Fallujah in a medieval-style siege. But they could not enter, fearing

the hundreds of bodybags that would emerge from street-by-street fighting. And these are the kind of bodies the US media counts.

Nor, indeed, could they maintain the siege as their supply lines came under constant attack. More importantly, for the people of Baghdad - Sunni and Shi'ite alike - Fallujah became a symbol of Iraqi national resistance. This unity, which the occupying forces feared so much that they have constantly exaggerated divisions and cast dire warnings of an impending civil war in Iraq, was cemented by the Americans' 20 March decision to ban an obscure but militant Islamist newspaper, al-Hawza, for the crime of "indirect incitement" to violence.

The following assaults on Karbala and Kadhemiya led to Sunnis donating blood for their fallen Shi'ite brothers and sisters, just as Shi'ites from Sadr City in Baghdad offered blood and shelter to those fleeing Fallujah. The siege of the holy city of Najaf, where Muqtada al-Sadr and his supporters in the Army of the Mahdi were based, made

a perfect symmetry with Fallujah, from which a resurgent Iraqi nationalism blossomed.

By the end of the month reports were coming in of Sunnis carrying portraits of al-Sadr, while Shi'ite clerics declared that the people of Fallujah should be forgiven for their role in the massacre of the marsh Arabs in 1991.

In these circumstances, the newly recruited Iraqi armed forces were never going to be reliable. According to US Major General Martin Dempsey, "about 40 per cent walked off the job because of intimidation and about 10 per cent worked against us". According to more reliable eye-witnesses, the real figures could be double. Added to which, Spain withdrew its troops, while every other member of the coalition, aside from Britain and the US, is prepared to do the same.

To sign off what was by any standards an abysmal month, the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council unfurled its new nation-

Gaza withdrawal: "a punishment, not a reward"

By Marcus Chamoun

On 17 April, three weeks after the cold-blooded assassination of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, Israel killed his successor Abdul Aziz Rantisi as he drove his car in Gaza. This should be taken as a sign of what Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon meant when he promoted his Gaza "disengagement plan" to his Likud party as a punishment, and not a reward, for the Palestinians.

In fact, despite the official welcome given to the planned Gaza pull-out by those, like Tony Blair, who still pay lip-service to the now-dead "Road Map For Peace", there were no Palestinian celebrations of the impending Israeli withdrawal, such as those that greeted Arafat's triumphal entry into Gaza following the 1993 Oslo accords. They have little to celebrate.

Israel's redeployment from the world's biggest open-air prison will serve merely to consolidate its grip on the West Bank. The Gaza Strip, surrounded by electric fences and sniper-posts, will be cut off from the outside world, its fragile economy dependent on the whims of Israel's periodic border closures, its unemployed workforce unable to travel to find jobs. It has been announced that Gaza residents under the age of 35 will be forbidden from leaving under any circumstances, even in humanitarian cases. The 7,500 Jewish settlers, who controlled two-thirds of a tiny sliver of land that they shared with more than a million Palestinians, will be amply compensated with the expansion of the West Bank settlements. Israel will abdicate any responsibility for Gaza's worsening humanitarian crisis to a bankrupt Palestinian Authority.

Nor will the withdrawal mean any lessening of the violence of the occupation. Sharon has indicated that Israel will feel free to use greater force than at present in response to Palestinian "terrorism" coming from Gaza, as the Palestinians will no longer be able to use the excuse that they are being occupied. A Gaza controlled from the outside by fences, remote-control bombs and Apache attack helicopters will serve as a model for the Palestinian ghettos being created in the West Bank.

There are, however, two flies in the oint-



Sharon casts his vote during a Likud party referendum on his plan to pull Israel out from the Gaza Strip and remove the settlements

ment of Sharon's plan. One is the likely opposition to a withdrawal from Gaza from within his ruling Likud party and its right wing coalition allies, and the more extreme of the Jewish settlers in Gaza. This Sharon has tried to neutralise by posing tough on security issues and killing the Hamas leaders. Moreover, he will press ahead with his disengagement plan regardless of the results of a referendum of Likud party members on the issue, and will probably find accomplices in the Israeli Labor Party if he does so.

The other potential problem was arranging the acquiescence of the "international community" - i.e. the United States - to his annexation of Palestinian land. Here, however, Sharon has had a stroke of good luck. His visit to Washington on 15 April saw US President George W Bush endorsing his plan for "unilateral disengagement", even to the point of denying the Palestinian refugees' "right of return" to the lands in pre-1967 Israel from which they were expelled. Bush went so far as to state that "in light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centres, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return" to the 1967 borders.

In other words, Bush has endorsed the illegal settlements, giving Israel the right to claim at least the major settlements in any future "final status" talks. This has earned him condemnation in the Arab world. It has angered and weakened America's Arab allies, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

While the pro-Zionist positions of the "neo-conservative" hawks in the Bush administration are well known, it is difficult not to see this provocative turn in the context of America's increasing isolation over its occupation of Iraq, and its consequent increased dependence on its Israeli ally. This isolation extends to Bush's junior partner-in-crime, Tony Blair, who gave his own endorsement of the Bush-Sharon position at a joint press conference with George Bush the following day.

The Palestinians will doubtless continue in their resistance to the occupation and their rejection of "solutions" designed to frustrate their national self-determination. However, the failure of an intifada now in its fourth year to dislodge the occupation, and the evident physical weakness of the armed Palestinian resistance following the wave of Israeli assassinations poses the question of what form this resistance needs to take to achieve victory.

The strategy of a purely military resistance conducted by small armed groups without the active involvement of the masses has reached its natural limits. The targeting of Israeli civilians, in particular, has done the Palestinians more harm than good, damaging their much-needed international sympathy, while allowing Sharon to rein Israel's Jews into a reactionary bloc obsessed with the need to protect "Israel's security". Israel can speak the language of force much better than the unarmed and occupied Palestinian people, no matter how many would-be martyrs are willing to volunteer their lives in such an unequal struggle.

What Israel cannot do is control, indefinitely, four million people who reject its rule. Nor can the Israeli state indefinitely suppress the dissent of its own citizens to an occupation that has proved costly both in terms of lives lost and the plummeting living standards of an Israeli economy hit hard by the Palestinian uprising. The best weapon that the Palestinians have is a mass resistance that makes Sharon's plans for land theft and ghetto walls impossible to

realise. Such a resistance can intersect with the consciousness of those Israeli Jews who are tired of the conflict.

If every town or village whose lands are to be expropriated to build the Apartheid wall can present the bulldozers with mass demonstrations of people willing to stand and resist the destruction of their homes, then no-one will be able to present their actions as anything less than legitimate self-defence. The role of the armed organisations in any programme of mass resistance will be to protect the mass actions from the lethal force Israel will inevitably unleash.

That Israel has managed to get away with such violence in the past is due in no small part to the blank cheque written by its imperialist backers. The global solidarity of the workers, youth and progressive intellectuals in the imperialist countries is therefore vital to the success of the Palestinian resistance. We should take every opportunity to expose Israel's crimes, and to prevent our governments from continuing their complicity with them. We should call for an end to all aid and arms sales to Israel; workers should refuse to handle military goods destined for the Zionist state.

The Palestinians can also call upon the solidarity of the workers and peasants of the surrounding Arab countries. Following the invasion of Iraq, however, the Arab regimes have become even more reticent in their support for the Palestinians.

The struggle for Palestine is therefore inseparable from the struggle to unseat the Arab dictatorships, and therefore from the struggle for social revolution in the Middle East. Such a revolution, by offering a vision of a Middle East in which foreign, imperialist and domestic exploiters have no place, will be able to offer all national grouping, like the Kurds and even the Israelis, their own "place in the sun". In this way, it can also begin to undermine the poisonous unity of the Israeli Jewish workers with their own exploiters against the Palestinians.

In place of an imperialist "Road Map For Peace" or racist "disengagement" we therefore counterpose a road map for permanent revolution and the unity of all the oppressed and exploited against imperialism, capitalism, and its local agents.

Camel corps get the hump

The Sharon-Bush plan provoked 52 British former diplomats to issue a declaration noting their "deepening concern" at Blair's slavish coat-tailing of George W Bush. They, predictably, were dismissed as the "camel corps", Foreign Office Arabists who had "gone native", despite the fact that they included amongst them a former British ambassador to Tel Aviv. However, there is nothing "pro-Arab" or "pro-Palestinian" about their views. They have merely noted the harm that Blair's policy has had upon British imperialism's interests.

Like their counterparts from the US State Department, who issued a similar protest of their own, they stop short of calling for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, arguing merely for greater UN involvement. They also state that "military actions of the Coalition forces must be guided by political objectives and by the requirements of the Iraq theatre itself, not by criteria remote from them". That is to say, that secondary objectives such as the protection of Israel, or the promotion of a new "Middle East" must take second place to British (and US) imperialism's real material interests in the region.

In Palestine, naturally, this means reviving the "Road Map". Revolutionary socialists, however, should neither mourn the death of the "Road Map", nor imagine that enlightened "liberal" imperialists will somehow be able to "restrain" the US or Israeli killing machines. The only restraint upon the behaviour of the occupiers of Palestine and Iraq will be that imposed on them by the resistance of their victims.



Communists and anti-capitalists lose their bearings

al flag (which was duly copied freehand around the country, and burned) and Staff Sergeant Ivan Frederick blew the whistle on systematic torture and abuse in Saddam's notorious Abu Ghraib prison. As the pictures of humiliated and tortured Iraqi civilians and combatants were beamed around the Arab world, news of the maltreatment of prisoners in British-controlled jails also began to leak out. A major retreat seemed the only way out.

US Strategy

It is tempting to think that this series of military and political blunders could only be the result of massive subjective failings on the Americans' part. And undoubtedly there were such mistakes. But, essentially, all the imperialists' errors stemmed from the application of their strategic goals.

The 30 June handover date cannot, both Bush and Tony Blair insist, be delayed. Both politicians face mounting domestic criticism of their handling of the war - with Bush's ratings on this question now showing a 48-46 per cent disapproval for the first time - and both have elections coming up. With no weapons of mass destruction to be found, and no links with al-Qa'ida, they have to show that they have taken some steps towards democracy and self-determination in Iraq.

So, it follows, they have to eliminate all opposition, or potential opposition to the handover before the end of June. They have failed. They have instead galvanised and unified opposition.

As a result, they have completely scaled back the "handover" plans: The US will retain absolute control over all "security", i.e. the occupation will remain in place; the US-written interim constitution, which privileges imperialism's multinationals' rights to buy up the Iraqi economy, will remain in place; the new parliament will not be elected, nor will it have any law-making powers; the US will retain full control over Iraq's oil revenues.

The only handover that will take place on 30th June is from one US viceroy, Paul Bremer, to another, John Negroponte, and his 3,000-strong embassy staff.

However, the US will attempt in the next few months to give the appearance that Iraqis are taking more control of their country. Firstly, they need to take their soldiers out of the firing line. Secondly, they want an "Iraqification" of the conflict. Just as the British recruited Irish troops from the most reactionary section of the population to patrol the streets of Belfast and Derry in the 1980s - a policy known as Ulsterisation - so the Americans are now re-arming the Ba'athist army, sending 1,100 troops into Fallujah under the command of former Republican Guard general, Jasim Mohammed Saleh.

But just as Ulsterisation led to some of the worst atrocities in the war in Northern Ireland, so too Ba'athification will not lead to greater peace, but more bloodshed and terror. Why? Because Bush and Blair, despite their temporary retreats on the military front, are fully committed to eliminating all opposition to imperialist control before any democratic elections can be held.

Iraqi strategy

Nevertheless, the imperialists have suffered their first major defeat in Iraq. It is of vital importance the Iraqi people take full advantage of this fact to reorganise and strengthen their resistance.

Firstly, no weapons must be handed over

to either the occupying forces nor the Iraqi stooge army and police. Any force that takes orders from the US High Command is an enemy of the Iraqi people.

However, the resistance, as it is currently organised, remains weak; it is capable of embarrassing the US and British armies, but not of driving them out of the country. The resistance must do two things: unify its command structures, and arm the people.

Lack of co-ordination between the different guerrilla units can and has led to terrible mistakes - like the bombing of two school buses - and a lack of penetration. However, simply co-ordinating the resistance under its existing leaderships will leave it as an armed elite, separated from the workers, urban poor and small farmers, whose role remains passive.

An armed people, on the other hand, can exert mass democratic control over the armed struggle, while also providing far superior cover from US-led incursions. Provided they adopt a correct policy, an armed people can defeat any standing army. But it is politics that wins or loses such wars, and the armed struggle needs to be subordinated to a political struggle.

The first and central demand of the resistance has to be for immediate elections, held under the control of the armed people and their grassroots organisations, to a fully sovereign constituent assembly. Such elections cannot be fair and open so long as foreign troops remain, occupying the land. The demand for democratic rights and national self-determination, therefore, needs to be linked to the demand for all troops out now.

At the same time, there is no denying that the Iraqi people, emerging after decades of cruel tyranny, have deep, unresolved social questions, which need to be addressed now:

- Women's rights to work, to dress in the fashion of their choosing, to legal guarantees regarding marriage, divorce and contraceptive measures, including abortion
- Workers' rights to free trade unions, to decent wages and conditions, to control over all aspects of production and distribution; cancel the contracts of the imperialist multinationals and expropriate their enterprises, placing them under workers' control
- Self-determination for the Kurdish people up to and including the right to form a separate state; drive a wedge between the Kurds and the USA
- Full rights for all to practice the religion of their choice; no privileges for any particular religion.

If these issues can be taken up by the resistance, it can totally isolate the occupation forces while drawing more and more forces into its struggle. It can turn April's defeats into a rout of the imperialists. The role of the anti-war movement, around the world, must be to solidarise with every step taken in this direction, and to capitalise on every setback for the occupation.

The burning democratic questions facing the Iraqi people can only be solved satisfactorily by revolutionary action. The working class must play a leading role in this struggle, not only because it can rest control of the economy from the imperialists, thus releasing the funds needed to rebuild the country, but also because it is the only class in Iraqi society whose interests lie in the fullest democracy.

The Iraqi working class, in other words, can and must press ahead with a strategy of permanent revolution, opening up the road to a socialist reconstruction of their country and the whole region.

The Worker Communist Party of Iraq has been at the forefront of those who are building trade unions and women's organisations. However, their attitude to the resistance has always fallen short of support. Indeed, the WCPI's latest statement seems to say the resistance and the occupation are as bad as each other:

"On one side of this conflict there is America, terrorising through its occupation and militarising the whole society as well as bombarding through tanks and airplanes, and having armed soldiers. On the other side of this conflict there is political Islam and its forces, which are kidnapping people, carrying out suicide bombing, and killings that are terrorising the people of Iraq. Both sides of this conflict have held people's lives hostage and are

driving the society into more chaos and bloodshed."

This is a disgraceful position, which not only demands that the resistance supports the WCPI's policy before it is supported, but will also have the opposite of its desired effect: it will drive the people - including women and children - into the arms of the Islamists, who at least are fighting back while the "communists" give effective support to the status quo, i.e. the occupation.

Anti-capitalist writer and champion of "horizontal" anti-state politics, Naomi Klein, has also lost her bearings in the past month. In *The Guardian* on 1 May, she called for an interim regime, based on Iraq's 1970 Ba'athist constitution, with neighbouring states in control of security with a UN mandate.

While she rightly doubts that the Iraqi people want to live under

Sharia law, Klein's Islamophobia prevents her from calling for an Iraqi solution. Will a capitalist constitution which enshrines exploitative property relations and curtails democratic rights really provide the best springboard for a fight for freedom? Will the armies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey - all drenched in the blood of their own people - really secure a democratic breathing-space for secular forces?

Of course not.

All Naomi Klein reveals here is that, for all her rantings against "authoritarian state socialists", she has more faith in the most repressive regimes of the region and their legacy than she has in the people of Iraq.

Luckily, neither Klein nor the WCPI will find much of an echo for their views in Iraq today.

League for the Fifth International

Draft declaration for the ESF European Preparatory Assembly and the International Anti-war Assembly, Istanbul April 2004

Against Bush and Blair's Empire - Long live Fallujah and Najaf!

The European Social Forum preparatory assembly meets at a time of grave danger for hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens in Iraq. The siege of Fallujah has already cost over 500 lives, overwhelmingly women and children. Now 2,500 US troops threaten the same collective punishment on the people of Najaf.

The heroic and popular resistance to these atrocities has united Iraqis against a common enemy. Sunni and Shi'a, worker and farmer, employed and unemployed, men and women are rallying to the resistance. Their aim is simple and just: an end to the illegal, imperialist occupation and the right to elect their own government.

We, the social movements of Europe, condemn these assaults. We declare our total opposition to this occupation, which still shows no sign of delivering democracy or human rights to the people of Iraq.

Indeed, the only thing the USA and its allies are delivering is the wholesale privatisation of Iraq's economy, for the benefit of the same multinational corporations that have profited from privatisation of industries and services across the globe.

The invasion of Iraq was an act of armed globalisation.

We offer our solidarity with all those resisting the occupation: from trade unions and women's organisations to armed resistance fighters.

The social movements of Europe, gathered at the ESF preparatory and anti-war assemblies in Istanbul, pledge ourselves to redouble our efforts in the coming weeks and months to get all foreign forces to withdraw from Iraq now. In particular, we call on all the social movements of Europe and the world to

- Organise demonstrations
- Picket and protest at military bases and offices of the occupying forces and their governments
- Obstruct the war effort - movement of troops, supplies, paper work etc. - through strikes, direct action.

On 15th February 2003, we mobilised at least 20 million people worldwide in opposition to the war about to take place. We warned that it would lead to occupation, privatisation and resistance. We were right then, and we are right now. We were unable to stop the war then, but we are able to end the occupation now.

We renew our solidarity because a defeat for the occupying forces and a victory for the Iraqi intifada (uprising) will be a victory for all the social movements and the working and oppressed peoples of the world. All those suffering under the WTO's unfair trade rules, whose economies are crippled by huge debts to the IMF and the Western banks, who are resisting privatisation of essential industries and services under the GATS regime, whose environment is being polluted thanks to Bush's tearing up of the Kyoto agreement - all these victims of globalisation stand to lose even more if the US and British plans for the Middle East succeed.

In particular, the Palestinian people, whose oppression stands at the heart of the world's instability, will suffer a historic defeat, unless we - the global social movements, together with the Iraqi resistance - can defeat the forces of global capital.

All foreign troops out of Iraq!

Democratic rights for the Iraqis now!

Victory to the Iraqi resistance!

website: www.fifthinternational.org email: lfioffice@btoopenworld.com phone +44 20 7820 1363

L5I gives revolutionary lead

An international assembly of anti-war activists greeted a statement of solidarity with the armed resistance in Fallujah and Najaf with applause and cheers. Although a clear majority of the assembly voted for this statement (see page 9 for text), drafted by the League for the Fifth International, representatives from the Fourth International (the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire) and the International Socialist Tendency (SWP) blocked its adoption by loudly invoking the "consensus" rule.

Undoubtedly they did so "only" to protect their reformist allies and the unions they "represented" in Istanbul, i.e. they actually "voted" against their own views. Thus it seems their "revolutionary" positions on the war have to remain the private property of their own organisations and certainly not taken up by the broader movement. Thus a great opportunity to send a message of hope to those fighting and dying in Iraq to drive out the imperialist occupiers was squandered thanks to sheer centrist spinelessness at the thought of what the centrists' reformist masters in

Attac and the union bureaucracy might do when they got home. In other sessions of the ESF Assembly, the L5I's proposals also struck a chord with those delegates who wanted to deepen the political work of the movement, and encourage the self-organisation of its most radical component, the youth. We made dozens of new contacts on a whole range of issues, from the Free Mario campaign to interest in the L5I and what it is fighting for.

The European Social Forum assembled for its most easterly-convened meeting ever on 16th-18th April, in Istanbul. Of the several hundred activists present to plan for ESF 2004, to be held in London, 14th-17th October, a far larger proportion than usual came from Turkey, Greece, Hungary and the Balkans.

This fact alone justified the decision to go to Istanbul; however, much of the dialogue and networking with the East European activists was confined to the corridors and refreshments area. This not only reflected the relative newness of the procedures for these militants, but also the sheer impenetrability of a

process which rarely sees written proposals presented, refuses to structure its debates and effectively privileges the larger Western-based organisations who, behind the scenes, act as the unelected leadership.

Despite this, some real progress was made in Istanbul.

On the Friday and Saturday morning, the assembly agreed to focus the ESF agenda along five axes:

- War and peace
- Citizenship and democracy
- Neoliberal policies and the struggle against them
- The environment and sustainable society
- Racism, discrimination and identity.

In addition, there was a proposal for four cross-cutting themes - Eastern Europe, gender and Europe's Mediterranean neighbours - though no final agreement was reached on this.

This, at last, gives the ESF 2004 some political direction. All meetings - from the large plenary sessions down to the self-organised seminars and workshops - will be grouped under these major "axes", in an

attempt to encourage networking and collaboration. A large minority of the delegates also agreed with the L5I proposal that these meetings should then feed proposals into the final declaration of the Assembly of the Social Movements.

On the Saturday afternoon, the procedure for registering and merging proposals for seminars was agreed. This process is necessary because an estimated 1,000-plus proposals will have to be whittled down to around 200 actual meetings. Organisations can start making their proposals for meetings now.

Finally, some practical agreements:

- The timetable for the ESF was agreed. An opening ceremony-come-rally will greet participants on the Thursday evening, and the ESF proper will commence on the morning of the Friday. The Assembly of the Social Movements will take place on the Sunday morning. Some delegates, like Chris Nineham of the SWP, suggested that other meetings - seminars, and workshops - should run concurrently with it. Other delegates, including the L5I,

thought this would seriously distract from the only part of the ESF - the Assembly - which can make decisions on action and policy. A demonstration is planned for the Sunday afternoon.

- The event will be focused at one major venue: Alexandra Palace, in North London, with a supplementary cluster of sites in central London. This will benefit participants who want to network and build links, as well as allow the ESF as a whole to get a measure of its own size and diversity, its strengths and weaknesses.
- Progress was also reported on finding cheap and free accommodation for the 20,000 visitors from across Europe and the world who are expected. Representatives of the Mayor of London were also hopeful of securing subsidised travel cards from Transport for London.
- Sunday in Istanbul was given over to an assembly of the social movements (ASM) and anti-war assembly.

The quite artificial divide between the social forum and the assembly is maintained in order to keep within the World Social Forum's Charter,

Schroeder's attacks pose need for new party

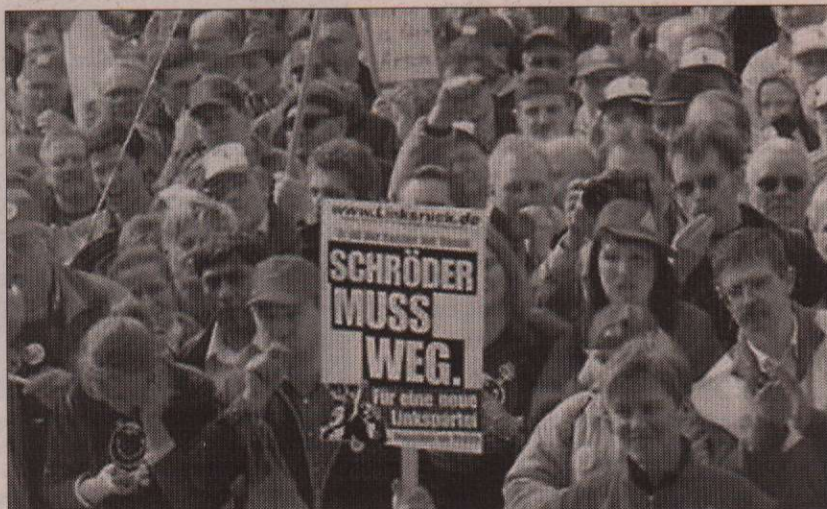
By Frederik Haber

More than half a million demonstrators against "Agenda 2010" took to the streets on 3 April, one year after Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder had announced this savage programme of social cuts. It was the largest mobilisation against the Social Democratic government's attack on their own supporters. The motto of the left, especially in the trade-unions, over the last year or so has been, "Let's learn Italian". Rank and file militants have always envied the readiness of Italian workers to take action on the streets. Now there was an air of Italy in the streets of Berlin, Cologne and Stuttgart, ironically just as Schroeder was heading for Italy, to celebrate his 60th birthday and to meet Silvio Berlusconi.

How has this mobilisation of workers against "their own" government come about? After 100,000 demonstrated on 1 November, far exceeding all expectations, the union bureaucracy finally started to move. It dared no longer leave the fight against Agenda 2010 to the left wing militants, unemployed groups and social forums who had set it going. The majority current in the union leadership actually took up the proposal for a European Action Day brought forward at the European Social Forum in Paris - ironically just as the "left" union leaders who participate in the ESF (CGIL, SUD, Cobas) dropped it.

The German union bureaucrats acted not out of a sense of internationalism, but because they felt it left space for manoeuvring. Putting the emphasis on the need "for a social Europe" they hoped they would get their social democratic party comrade Schroeder out of the firing-line. Thus "Europe - free, social and just" is the motto for Mayday this year and you can bet the SPD will have a slogan like this for the European election.

But time has not stood still and things did not go at all as the bureaucrats planned. The bosses themselves intervened to spoil



"Schroeder must go"

their plans. They launched their own campaign, starting from the government attacks but going even further. One of their central demands is the reintroduction of the 40-hour week in the metal industry along with increased working hours in the other industries and public services.

Their declared goal is to reduce labour costs by 30 per cent and get rid of regional and federal collective agreements. These agreements are the framework that keeps the unions together in Germany. Frequently workers in one workplace have given in, under their own employer's pressure, but gained the strength to counter-attack when the unions clashed with the employers as a whole in a national dispute.

Over the last few months with both employers and government attacking workers' economic and social gains on a broad front, people have increasingly seen through the government's propaganda about "cuts necessary to save our welfare state" or "cuts that would initiate an economic upswing to the benefit of all". No sooner has one "reform" been put in place than the employers' association demands the next.

So since Autumn the ground for a massive mobilisation was being prepared. Under

increasing pressure, some reformist union leaders switched from trying to spare Schroeder to mobilising on the street to put pressure on him. Of course they did not want not to overthrow him, but to force him into serious negotiations with the bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that on 3 April 250,000 marched through Berlin, 140,000 in Stuttgart and 120,000 in Cologne, the government declared they would hold fast to their cuts programme. So what now?

The reformist union leaders are still talking radical, needing to preserve the new respect they gained amongst their members by the mass demonstrations. But their deeds are quite different. In the two largest unions, IG Metall and Ver.di, the leaders have proposed a "workers' referendum" aiming to collect over a million signatures for a handful of key demands by October. But no amount of signatures is going to impress the government or the capitalists. Only escalating and decisive action will do this.

What really can stop Schroeder's Agenda dead in its track is a general strike, a more and more realistic prospect in the eyes of many rank and file militants. We

need a campaign and a debate in the vanguard as to how we can get such a general strike and how we can prepare for it. It is very clear that the reformist leaders will twist and turn every way to avoid advancing in this direction. They would far rather organise another defeat.

Preparing a general strike inevitably raises the question of what will happen to the government? "Do you want to prepare the ground for Stoiber, Schroeder's opponent in the last elections?" the leaders repeat. This is the strongest argument in their armoury. Indeed it was the last minute mobilisation of the trade unions in the last elections, despite the disappointment of Schroeder's first four years, that secured him the chancellorship.

This political impasse shows that revolutionaries need to argue for a workers' government to stop the neoliberal demolition of social gains and the employers' attacks on wages and hours and decisive action by the working class to break the bosses' power. For this we need not the SPD, nor even a reborn "sincere" reformism but a revolutionary workers party. How do we get this?

Recently a serious and widespread discussion of the need for a new workers' party has emerged from different sectors of left reformism. Support for the social democrats has declined dramatically over last year, so that any prospect for their re-election seems totally unrealistic. A tenth of the membership has left the SPD in 2003 alone.

So some former social democrats, members of the PDS and trade union full-timers have launched initiatives for a new left party. Their main focus is the next federal election in 2006 and they stick loyally to the ideas of parliamentary reformism. The trade unions, they say, need a partner and representative in parliament.

But a real debate has opened and revolutionaries have to fight to keep it open and participate in it. What sort of party does the working class need? A party for the fight against the Agenda, for preparing a general strike and against the attacks on working hours. A party to fight the disastrous

policy of the social democrats in the unions, and against submitting to the demands of capital to improve its "international competitiveness". A party to fight the attacks against the unemployed, a party against racism and war and for defence of public education and democratic rights.

Revolutionaries have to advocate building up a party in struggle and for the struggle. This implies from the very beginning a debate over the overall perspectives of such struggles and the methods needed to win them. Can we make capitalism and the bourgeois state more human or do we need to undermine and to abolish them?

What prospect do we present to the workers' vanguard? A never-ending series of struggles against the bosses' attacks? Preventing the worst outcome but always losing something important? Or should we recognise that the only real solution is ending the power of capital for good?

Already some leaders have declared that their new party is not even to be "left reformist". Centrists, those who claim to be revolutionaries themselves but who put forward only left reformist objectives for the masses, offer the same perspective. Linksruck, the German affiliate of the SWP, has insisted that "revolution is not on the agenda".

A historic opportunity exists in Germany to break the political monopoly of the SPD over the working class. This monopoly has existed since the surrender of the Communist Party and the Communist International to Hitler in 1933. In the last decades this held up largely via the control of the reformist trade union bureaucracy. Today the working class is awakening from its decades-long resting on former victories, on its sheer social weight and its high level of organisation. It is re-learning the lessons of class struggle.

Such historic opportunities don't fall from the trees every year. When they are missed, this is burnt into the consciousness of the class for a long time. For this reason revolutionaries in Germany have to do everything possible today to take this opportunity to fight for a revolutionary party.

at Istanbul ESF Assembly

which explicitly outlaws any declarations of policy or calls to action. However, the right wing liberals and labour movement bureaucrats who safeguard these restrictions failed (with one or two exceptions) to turn up, and many activists were keen to integrate the two aspects of the movements.

This became clear when Hermann Dworzak and Hugo Braun from the Austrian and German Social Forums both pointed out that the days of action called against the social cuts (2nd-3rd April) had hardly been taken up at all outside of Germany, and proposed that we set up a special working group to prepare for the ASM. The working group should also review - and encourage - the progress made on the calls of last year's declaration, in particular on

the question of the EU constitution.

LSI delegates welcomed these proposals and agreed to collaborate inside the new working group, by email, in our home countries and at the next European assembly in Berlin. We made the specific proposal that we should start work on the final declaration of the ASM, and even presented our own draft declaration.

We made it clear that others could amend our draft, or even produce alternatives, but, by making the declaration part of a democratic process rather than a hurriedly cobbled together and inadequate document read out to a rally, the declaration could be better informed, more radical and a living programme of action for the movement.

Predictably, trade union leaders

from the CGIL (Italy) and CGT (France) complained about the more radical parts of the movement "setting the agenda" (surely the prerogative of the union bureaucracy alone!). So too members of Socialist Action, well represented in the administration of London Mayor Ken Livingstone, complained of "small groups" and libertarians frightening off the British TUC. The TUC hardly needs to be frightened away from the anticapitalist movement: they have never been part of its events and, if they noticed its mobilisations, condemned them.

Socialist Action and IST leaders also spoke against the idea of even needing to prepare the work of the ASM. One even claimed that the declaration should not be drawn up, let alone published until the eve of

the ASM itself, because a rally of 30,000 activists was more democratic than a working group. Chris Nineham claimed that we could not know what the main issue would be until shortly before the ESF.

This is pure demagoguery. A working group would be open and transparent. It can publish all its deliberations and working proposals on the net and email organisations (like the unions) to ask for their input. In fact, if the draft declaration is published early, in the programme of the ESF, then participants will be far more likely to feed in information, ideas and proposals. A daily-meeting co-ordination at the ESF can then sift through these and ensure that the uncontroversial proposals are collated and spoken to en bloc, leaving as much time as possible for

debate and - yes - voting on disputed policies.

The LSI is encouraged by the emergence of forces within the ESF, who want to transform the ASM into something more than a talking shop, an international organisation which decides on policy and initiates real action. We state openly that we want the end-result to be an anti-capitalist party of social revolution, the Fifth International. We recognise that others only want a reformist or at best centrist action network to emerge. So long as we are all committed to democratic procedures, however, this should not impede our working together in the coming months to ensure that the ASM marks a serious step forward for the movement.

Nationalise FIAT and Alitalia now!

By Dave Stockton

Italy has once more been in the forefront of the European class struggle. In the last two weeks of April a mass blockade of FIAT's Melfi plant by young metalworkers halted production right across the factories of the Italian car-making giant. At the same time Alitalia workers defied anti-union laws and came out on wildcat strike for three days.

The Melfi workers blocked roads around the factory preventing parts made there from getting to other plants in Italy, throwing Fiat's "just in time" working system into disarray.

Melfi, in the poor southern rural region of Basilicata, is the jewel in the crown of FIAT's October 2003 recovery plan. Whilst FIAT plans to downsize other plants it is making a 640 million euro investment in Melfi over the next three years.

When FIAT set up its state of the art plant it hoped to take advantage of the lack of militant working class traditions in the area. It got two of the three major union federations to accept longer and more flexible working hours and lower wages for the new workforce - workers earn 25 per cent less than those in the north. In addition Melfi is in the middle of an under-populated, mountainous area where many workers have to drive for up to two hours each way to get to work.

But the pace of work, longer hours, unsociable shift patterns and low wages have taught the young workforce the necessity of struggle. Workers are demanding an alteration of the shift times and a rise in wages towards those of other FIAT workers.

The vulnerability of the company's just-in-time production to disruption by wildcat action and the fact that Melfi is not threatened by closure encouraged this militant action. The metalworkers' union FIOM, the most militant section of the CGIL, itself the most militant of the three major union confederations, took the lead in the plant and gave it support nationally.

Nevertheless riot police brutally attacked the pickets at Melfi, injuring nine people, one seriously, smashing a way through a picket of over 1,000 for two buses carrying scabbing workers into the factory. Helicopters were used to lift parts out of the besieged plant.

Workers at several other Fiat plants called strikes in solidarity with Melfi. FIOM called a national half-day strike and tens of thousands of their members demonstrated in cities with FIAT plants across Italy.



Police attack workers who successfully prevented scabs from crossing picket lines at FIAT

From the beginning the remaining two major union confederations, the pro-catholic CISL and the formerly social democratic UIL, condemned the strike outright and called on workers to return to work. Unlike FIOM-CGIL, they had signed up to the FIAT recovery plan, and their cowardly bureaucrats entered into "negotiations" with the management over the heads of the Melfi strikers.

The attitude of FIOM-CGIL was initially much more militant and they supported the Melfi workers. But, as judges declared the Melfi picketing unlawful and the threat of a long shut-down of other FIAT plants loomed, even of a major political clash with the Berlusconi government, the CGIL bureaucrats began to run scared.

Giorgio Crenaschi, a leading "left" in FIOM and general secretary Gianni Rinaldini attended a mass meeting of strikers in Melfi to persuade the workers to remove the blockade. After much persuasion, and using all their militant credentials, they finally succeeded, by a majority of three to one. The strike will continue during negotiations but the real stranglehold on the company has been relaxed.

It was young workers at the mass assem-

bly who correctly opposed removing the pickets, pointing out that it was only this blockade which had forced FIAT management to come to the negotiating table. "If we give up our strongest weapon then we can still lose everything we fought for."

Despite Rinaldini's claims that "these 11 days of blockades and protest... will lead to positive results", the bureaucrats may yet snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by their unwarranted weakening of the strikers' position.

Instead of conciliation, what is needed is a struggle for the occupation and takeover of FIAT by the workers themselves, its nationalisation without compensation, and the recognition of workers' control of production.

Alitalia

In the last week of April hundreds of Alitalia flights were cancelled as the result of a three-day wildcat strike. At Rome-Fiumicino airport, pickets forced the cancellation of 90 per cent of Alitalia flights. The strike was called by almost all the aviation unions, ignoring a law compelling them to give 10 days' strike notice. The militant "rank and filist" Cobas is also strong amongst the airport workers. The Employ-

ment Minister Roberto Maroni denounced the strikers, calling on them to end their "illegal blockade".

Alitalia faces a financial crisis after registering pre-tax losses of 510.6 million euros last year, compared with 260.5 million the previous year. The strike was sparked by management plans demanding that 3,200 out of 21,000 jobs be axed to restore profitability. The Italian government, which holds more than 62 per cent of shares in the airline, is trying to avoid providing state aid for the industry.

As with the ailing FIAT what is needed is nationalisation, and workers' control. If the capitalists have shown that they cannot run these important industries they must be forced to make way for those who can - the workers.

Crisis of leadership - need for a new strategy

These strikes show that the level of resistance by workers in Italy remains very high. However they underline the fact that neither the union federations or left political parties such as Rifondazione Comunista (RC) have a perspective for focussing workers' direct action against the tottering

Berlusconi government.

The last six months have seen militant sectional strikes, one-day "general strikes", huge mass demonstrations against the war. Revolutionaries should be fighting for an all-out general strike, co-ordinated by the chambers of labour and social forums, and especially by the militant vanguard of FIOM and Cobas workers.

If Berlusconi - Bush and Blair's closest war ally - can be driven from power by a mass workers' uprising then the balance of class forces can be shifted heavily in favour of the European working class and against the present EU neoliberal offensive. The syndicalists like Cobas, who dominate the militant rank and file, as "horizontal" libertarianism dominates the No Global youth and the social forums, are chronically unable to lead workers onto the terrain of mass political direct action.

In the end - unconsciously and no doubt unwillingly - they play into the hands of the bureaucrats of the three union federations and the rightward-moving electoralist Fausto Bertinotti of RC. Bertinotti has recently been lauding pacifism and non-violence, opposing solidarity with those struggling against the occupation forces in Iraq and counselling Italian workers to avoid the dangers of a head-on clash with Berlusconi in favour of re-running the disastrous Ulivo (Olive Tree) coalition of the 1990s with the Democratic Left (DS) and the Christian Democrats.

Bertinotti, having broken last autumn with the European Anticapitalist Left bloc, is now proposing the formation of a Party of the European Left on a reformist basis - one which refuses to even call for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. As this article was being written the daily La Repubblica reported the presence at an international conference in Rome, hosted by RC, of a delegation from RESPECT and the Socialist Workers Party. Electoral cretinism makes strange bedfellows!

The left within Rifondazione, in particular the "Trotskyists" of Progetto comunista, and FalceMartello, Italian section of the Ted Grant-Alan Woods tendency, have opposed Bertinotti's rightward turn. But they are positively evasive on the central need for an all-out class struggle to drive out Berlusconi.

The intensity of the social crisis in Italy over the last few years and the chronic crisis of leadership of the working class and anticapitalist movement shows the burning need for building a revolutionary communist party as part of a new Fifth International.

ANC romps home in elections but workers need another party

By Lesley Day

The African National Congress (ANC) won another overwhelming victory in the April elections in South Africa, capturing nearly 70 per cent of the total vote and winning the most seats in all the regions. This was the third election victory for the ANC and its best ever results since first sweeping to power 10 years ago.

The Inkatha Freedom Party, a Zulu-based party that had collaborated with the apartheid regime, polled only 7 per cent of the vote, even trailing the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal, its regional base. The New National Party (the rump of the old Afrikaans National Party and architect of the apartheid system) could muster only 2 per cent. The modern home of white-led opposition, the Democratic Party, polled a more respectable 12 per cent.

What does this victory represent? To some it is a ringing endorsement of the "moderate" pro-capitalist policies the ANC and its Communist Party coalition partners have followed in the past decade. To others it is a testimony of the immense patience of the South African masses and their loyalty to the party of national liberation. Neither of these explanations is adequate.

It is true that the vast majority of the South African masses – the urban working class and rural poor – are loyal to the African National Congress. For some of the black working class, there have been real improvements in their living standards in the past decade. But these improvements fall far short of those promised, and many millions still live in poverty.

Many black families in the years between 1994 – and 2000 saw a drop in real income. At the same time the gap between rich and poor increased. In 2000, the poorest half of



ANC supporters celebrate victory

all South Africans earned less than a tenth of national income – down from 11.4 percent in 1995. This meant that the gap between the black and white population increased as well, despite the growth of a black middle class. The economic recovery of the past few years appears to have stopped the increase in absolute poverty but the gap between rich and poor, and black and white, remains stark. Unemployment, high crime rates and the AIDS pandemic make life a constant struggle for survival for the black majority.

The government has increased public spending and cut the old forms of discrimination, which saw large proportions of public spending going to the white minority. In 10 years the numbers receiving welfare benefits of various kinds has trebled. Some 1.5 million new housing units have been constructed. According to the government's statistics, nine million more people now have piped water and 70 per cent of homes now have electricity.

However, many of the improvements come with a catch. These publicly funded projects

have gone alongside privatisation of parts of the state sector and a huge reliance on Public Private Partnerships and PFIs. This has increased costs, so that in 2002, the poorest households earning less than \$70 a month were spending 30 per cent of their income on water and electricity. Millions have suffered water, electricity and phone disconnections as a result of being unable to pay the privatised utility bills.

Many of the economic successes that the government boasts about are the kind that please the bankers and the International Monetary Fund, rather than most of the population. Inflation has fallen dramatically, the Rand has stabilised, the national debt has been slashed, there is less dependence on gold exports and productivity has increased. But the very "restructuring" of the 1990s that produced those productivity gains, led to thousands losing their jobs. Unemployment now stands officially at 31 per cent with the real figure closer to 40 per cent. So while state benefits, particularly the Child Support Grant, now reach much more of the black popula-

tion, more families are now without a regular bread winner. This situation is exacerbated further by the AIDS crisis.

The government's starkest failure has been its refusal until recently to deal with HIV/AIDS. Probably four or five million South Africans are affected directly and many more indirectly. The refusal to issue anti-retroviral drugs until recently has allowed the epidemic to grow unchallenged, slashing average life expectancy and disproportionately affecting young adults – the key group of the working population.

However, the ANC has held onto power because it has delivered some improvements and holds out the hope of more. It also commands the support of both business and the leadership of the working class. Its political and material patronage reaches deep into all areas of society. It has faced considerable opposition – from the poor of the townships facing rising bills, from AIDS campaigners, from workers at the sharp end of employer productivity drives – but this has not yet coalesced into a working class political party that could offer a real alternative.

During the past decade, the ANC modified or abandoned its promises for massive public works and spending to raise the living conditions of the black majority. Instead it adopted the policies laid down by gurus of economic liberalisation. In these policies it has been able to count on the continued support of both the major trade union federation Cosatu and the South African Communist Party, both of who remain crucial partners in the Alliance.

This is despite the fact that the 1.2 million strong trade union federation, and other unions, have organised mass protests and stay-aways against government policy and especially against privatisation. Cosatu leaders have warned that the Alliance is "strained". They have responded to pressure from their

members, using strikes and demonstrations to 'let off steam', while attacking and demobilising any serious threats to their alliance with government. Many of the trade union leaders and former communists now derive considerable privileges in government ministries, tri-partite bodies and so forth, while others have moved into the ranks of big business.

At the same time, the ANC leadership has been careful to keep elements of corporatism and co-option rather than follow wholesale a 1980s style neo-liberal agenda. In fact at least some wholesale privatisations have been either postponed or abandoned, with the government and local authorities turning to the preferred PPP and PFI models.

The trade union leaders tell supporters that they have more chance of influencing government policy by sticking with the ANC. And a recent poll suggests that two-thirds of Cosatu members are convinced by this. Only 6 per cent believed the trade unions needed to form a new workers party.

The lack of a clear political alternative means that oppositionists like the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF), which have organised mass boycotts and successful protests against water charges and metering, were forced to fall back on calling for a boycott of the elections.

It was absolutely right to deny a vote to the ANC – but the black working class needs its own voice and own organisation. Only a minority of trade unionists may now be convinced, but the struggles over privatisation, to defend jobs, to bring services to the rural poor, to give the youth a future will surely present new opportunities to start the process of building a party that represent the workers, the poor farmers and the dispossessed. This task cannot wait till the next election.

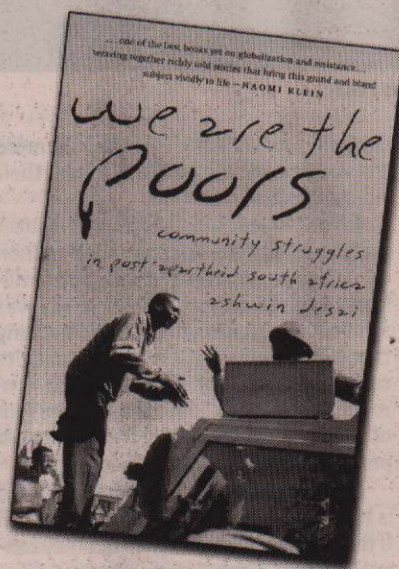
From anti-apartheid to anticapitalist

Jeremy Dewar reviews *We are the Poors* by Ashwin Desai, Monthly Review Press, \$19, 153pp

"One of the designer-bedecked (African) councillors began castigating the crowd. She had once lived in a shack, she screamed. Why were Indians resisting evictions and demanding upgrades? Indians were just too privileged. One elderly aunty, Girlie Amod, screamed back: 'We are not Indians, we are the poors.' The refrain caught on as councillors hurried to their cars. As they were leaving they would have heard the slogan mutter as Bongiwe Manqele introduced her own good humoured variant, 'We are not African, we are the poors.' Identities were being rethought in the context of struggle and the bearers of these identities were no respecters of authority." (p44)

In this scene from Ashwin Desai's first-hand account of social struggles in post-apartheid South Africa, we catch a glimpse of how the racial conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s have been transformed into class struggles in the 1990s and 2000s.

Central to this transformation is the changing role played by the African National Congress and its coalition partners, the South African Communist Party and the trade union federation, Cosatu. Whereas these organisations had fought apartheid to a standstill in a heroic struggle, they now ruled the same townships and factories, that had provided their mass support, with the iron fist of neoliberalism.



Nowhere is the spirit of "new South Africa" (as Desai calls it) more sharply contrasted to the past than in Mpumalanga.

In the 1980s this township was enveloped in a five-year civil war as Inkatha Freedom Party thugs and the ANC-aligned Hammarisdale Youth Congress fought.

Desai describes Mpumalanga now as a community where yesterday's foes are united in their demands for decent, affordable housing and free water supply. Former ANC,

Inkatha and black consciousness activists celebrated together when they forced the local council, in March 2002, to accept just 10 rand for their monthly water services instead of back payment of arrears, built up over the apartheid years, of around R10,000.

Indeed, *We are the Poors* starts with a small group of ANC activists descending on the Chatsworth township in May 1999, hoping to get out the Indian vote in the forthcoming elections. They expected lingering hostility due to the ANC's perception as an African party; they discovered growing hostility to the ANC as a party of evictions and water and power disconnections.

To their credit, the activists turned their organisation, the Concerned Citizens Group, over to the fight for dignity and basic rights against the ANC government.

Soon, the example of Chatsworth began to inspire other townships to fight back against the government's neoliberal policies: privatisation, high prices for basic needs such as healthcare, water and electricity, and transport, crippling long hours for poverty wages, and rising unemployment as cheap imports drove local textile firms to the wall. The struggles of Mpumalanga, Isipingo, Soweto and Tafelsig are all documented as well as the their developing ties.

And as the struggles multiplied, each one brought new tactics. "Struggle" plumbers and electricians followed the privatised con-

tractors around, reconnecting those who had been disconnected. Huge crowds gathered to intimidate bailiffs and fight police reinforcements attempting eviction. South Africa's constitution was used imaginatively in the courts to block cut-offs. Leading politicians were doordropped in a neat reversal of the evictions. Landless workers seized disused farms. And, good old-fashioned rucks with the police also had a role to play.

Desai contrasts two strikes. One at Volkswagen, where the workers had to strike against their union because it had handed back the gains made in the 1980s in the name of neoliberal "flexibilisation", went down to defeat. The other at the chemical plant Engen, linked up with the CCG, drawing the local community into the fray. As a result, they stemmed the potential flow of scab labour, freed their arrested strike leaders and won their demands – with the company even paying them for going on strike!

The book ends with the World Conference Against Racism in Durban. Inspired by Genoa 2001, the activists set up the Durban Social Forum to organise a peaceful 20,000 to 30,000 strong demonstration and a blockade. Their numbers dwarfed the official Cosatu and ANC mobilisations. South African anticapitalism had arrived – and was beamed around the world.

Desai is rightly hostile to the ANC and the other capitalist parties joining the forums and action committees. But he wants

to extend this ban to Cosatu, rather than use the social forum movement to draw in union militants and place demands on the union leaders – to support workers' demands and to leave the government. Although, activists building the London ESF would do well to build in some safeguards against Ken Livingstone and the TUC's attempts to deradicalise our movement.

Desai is also wary of dogmatic and bureaucratic parties such as the ANC and supports social forums, which expand into mass organisations in times of struggle and contract to a few individuals when nothing much is happening. This, he claims, stops them becoming captured by sectarian parties.

However, it also stops them from challenging for power. As last month's election showed, the ANC remains in office precisely because South African workers and the poor have not built their own party. Sure, the party they need must learn from the past: it must be committed to a programme of direct action against neoliberalism and to empowering the grassroots organisations of the working class; it must be fully democratic in its internal life, while centralised in its blows against the enemy; it must be revolutionary in its methods and socialist in its aims.

Only such a Trotskyist party will be able to bring to fruition the full potential lodged within the vibrant and heroic South African social forums.

Ten years ago, nearly a million people were killed in 100 days in Rwanda. This genocide is blamed on tribal conflict but *Rekha Khurana* argues that its causes are rooted in Rwanda's colonial past and its capitalist present

Rwanda: the genocide the West ignored

“I could feel blood coming from under my right shoulder and I did not know whether I was hit or not. I could not feel any pain then, my mind was occupied with the terror of being hacked to death”, Hamis Kamuhandu, genocide survivor

The 6 April 2004 saw the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, where between 850,000 and a million people were hacked, burned or shot to death in just 100 days. Many who have written about the genocide suggest that there was something uniquely African about the killings. But the reasons behind it lie not in the racist myths of African “savagery” but in the historical reality of brutal intervention by imperialist forces.

Divide and Rule

During the “Scramble for Africa” Rwanda was seized by Germany and remained part of German East Africa from 1899 until 1916, when it became directly ruled by Belgium. Although German colonialism began to transform the relations between the Hutus and Tutsis by using the Tutsi elite to run the country and giving them privileges, it was Belgian colonialism that succeeded in transporting the ideology of racism and racial superiority and adapting it to develop a hierarchy of “racial” differences among Africans.

Rwanda's population was mainly made up of Hutus, (around 85 per cent), and Tutsis (about 14 per cent), along with a much smaller grouping, the Twa. Even though both Hutu and Tutsi spoke the same Bantu language, Kinyarwanda, and largely followed the Catholic religion, the Belgians created the theory that the Tutsis were a superior race to the Hutus – taller, thinner and generally ‘less African’ in appearance.

Before Rwanda was colonised, Hutu and Tutsi moved between each other's groups mainly through intermarriage. The cattle-owning Tutsis were the wealthier group; however, if a Hutu came into possession of cattle and therefore wealth, he too could become a Tutsi by undergoing a ceremony. In other words, the distinction between Tutsi and Hutu, originally a racial division, was well on its way to becoming a class division.

This flexibility was lost when the Belgians introduced ID cards, fixing their colonised subjects' ethnic group and creating further divisions between them. During the genocide, it was not physical appearance but these cards that enabled militiamen to identify Tutsis.

The divisive measures of the Belgians meant that the Hutus were deprived of political power and lived in poverty. However, outside of the European-educated royal family and entourage, most Tutsis were just as poor as their Hutu neighbours.

In 1962 Rwanda became independent but the divisions created by the colonial powers remained and inter-ethnic strife continued. By 1973, a Hutu-chauvinist dictatorship was in power which used propaganda against the Tutsis and periodic campaigns of terror and killing.

In 1989, a collapse in coffee prices on the commodity exchanges in London and New York effected the Rwandan peasants, who formed 85 per cent of the population, which led to big increases in water, health and school charges. Like many poor countries, Rwanda only had one commodity to export, coffee, and



Rwandan refugees in camps in neighbouring Tanzania

was vulnerable to market fluctuations. At the same time, the IMF imposed a structural adjustment programme to “cure” the country's crippling debt problems, which resulted in privatisation, job losses and the removal of food subsidies. The government responded to the crisis by scapegoating the Tutsis. Hutu anger at their hunger and unemployment was channelled by the government against the Tutsis.

Some Tutsis had escaped to Uganda and formed the Rwandan Popular Front (RPF) which also had support from non chauvinist Hutus. In 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda and over the next few years gained ground against the government. In 1993 a peace deal between the government and the RPF, known as the Arusha Accords, was brokered by Tanzania. Under the agreement, the Rwandan government was to share power with Hutu and Tutsi opposition parties. To ensure the deal's success and the return of the Tutsis, the UN was deployed as peace keepers.

The genocide

When a plane carrying president Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down on 6 April 1994, the country descended into genocide. The killings were initiated by the Hutu-dominated army and the Interahamwe militia (“those who kill together”). In the first two days, not just Tutsis, but anyone with ties to the opposition – critical journalists, human rights activists and lawyers – were killed. Most of these were of Hutu origin.

The ferocity of the massacre, the speed with which it took place, along with the initial targeting of those Hutus who wanted power-sharing with the Tutsis, all point to the fact that this was not a spontaneous outburst of racist hatred: it was a planned genocide. Habyarimana was in fact flying back from Tanzania, where he had signed the power-sharing pact. That's why those who had everything to lose from such an accord had to shoot down his plane – and blame the Tutsis.

Once the opposition had been eliminated, the focus shifted. The new leaders sent out the message that the enemy was the Tutsis. All Hutus were instructed to participate in the war against the enemy. Hutus that didn't would also be killed.

Radio propaganda was used to dehumanise the Tutsi. In a poor country like Rwanda, where many are illiterate and the population is scattered in small hillside hamlets, radio is the most effective form of mass communication. The radio station RTLMC (Radio-Télévision Libre Des Milles Collines) spewed out messages of hate: the Tutsis were “inyenzi” (cockroaches) vermin ripe for extermination. It even published names and addresses of prominent people that should be killed.

Many ordinary people ended up participating in the genocide, increasing the horror and revulsion it evokes. But immense intimidation, terror and pressure were exerted on them. Many Hutus also protected Tutsis and hid them from the Interahamwe; many were killed for helping Tutsis or for refusing to kill.

Hutus were told that by exterminating the Tutsis they would get their land and possessions and have a better life. Many poor Hutus who have spoken of the part they played say that they feel as though they had been brainwashed into hating and killing.

The role of the West

The United Nations is widely held up as the force for good that could have stopped the killings had it been given the chance. But the UN is not an impartial world police force. It is a tool of the imperialist powers.

After the deaths of 18 American soldiers in Somalia in October 1993, the US decided not to participate in any more UN military missions. The Clinton administration further decided that no significant UN missions were to be allowed in Rwanda at all, even if US troops were not involved. Due to the delaying tactics of the US, after 100 days of genocide not a single reinforcement of UN troops or military supplies reached Rwanda. Clinton's special assistant Richard Clarke said in the aftermath of Somalia “Peacekeeping was almost dead. There was no support for it in the US government and the peacekeepers were not effective.”

Clinton later gave a very carefully worded apology but his claims that his administration was not aware of the real situation are lies that have been exposed by a three year investigation in the US which has uncov-

ered mountains of evidence that the US and the UN were aware of what was happening. The documents have been released on the National Security Archive website under the Freedom of Information Act.

For example, in 1993 a UN commission and a body of human rights organisation both warned that Hutu extremists were planning genocidal attacks. However, the commander of the UN peace keeping force in Rwanda, French-Canadian major general Romeo Dallaire, was not informed of these warnings.

Dallaire told the UN office in January 1994 in New York that he had received information that Hutu extremists were registering all the Tutsis in Kigali the capital of Rwanda. But the UN office of Kofi Annan told him not to take any action.

The real reason for non-intervention was given by George W Bush during his 2000 Republican presidential nomination: “We should not send our troops to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide outside our own strategic interest. I would not send troops to Rwanda.” Coffee is not oil.

Even as the genocide was occurring US politicians uttered the same sentiments. On the 10 April, Republican leader Bob Dole said: “I don't think we have any national interest there.” The same day the US ambassador and 250 other Americans left the country, 35 Rwandans who worked at the Embassy were killed.

Only days after the genocide began, 2,500 Tutsis and opposition politicians crowded into a school in Kigali, seeking protection against the militia and government soldiers outside the compound from the Belgian UN troops stationed at the school. In the middle of the stand-off, the Belgian soldiers were ordered to leave the school to help evacuate foreign nationals from the country. They did this without making any arrangements for the safety of those in the school and, as they moved out, the killers moved in. By the end of the afternoon all 2,500 civilians inside the school had been murdered. The Belgians later withdrew from the UN mission after 10 of their soldiers were killed.

The French role was even more despicable. Its officials were senior advisers to the Rwandan government and military in the

years leading to the genocide, giving unconditional support as well as considerable arms to the Hutu elite. After six weeks of genocide, when the Tutsi-led opposition invasion began to turn the tide against the Hutu army, France suddenly decided to intervene, deploying 2,500 soldiers. Operation Turquoise created a safe haven in the south-west of the country for many leading Rwandan Government officials and large numbers of retreating soldiers and militiamen. The only fighting done by the French troops was against the RPF in July.

At a commemoration to mark the genocide last month, France's representative left early following accusations by the Rwandan president Paul Kagame of “training and arming the government soldiers and militias who carried out the killings”.

The utter indifference of the agencies of global capitalism to the terrible suffering that took place is revealed in the response of the World Bank. Following the genocide, it withheld a \$160 million programme of aid to Rwanda until \$9 million in interest incurred by its predecessor was paid. As a bank official said: “After all, we are a commercial enterprise and have to adhere to our regulations.”

The genocide ended after the victory of the RPF. But this force, from which the present government originates, cannot bring the peace and stability Rwanda so desperately needs and deserves. It is crippled by its acquiescence in the very neoliberal policies that helped plunged the country into such chaos in the first place.

As we said at the time in *Workers Power* (May 1994): “The RPF is committed to a capitalist solution for Rwanda. But capitalism cannot deliver consistent democratic rights for the workers and peasants of central Africa. The whole history of the twentieth century proves that. Working together, Hutu and Tutsi alike, the workers and peasants of Rwanda and its neighbours must chart a course towards the only lasting solution to ethnic strife in the regions: a socialist federation of central African states.”

What happened to the survivors?

Today, the survivors of the genocide are haunted by memories of a horror that will stay with them for as long as they live. Many suffer from mental health problems because of their experiences. But, although the international community cries “Never Again” on this grim anniversary, the reality is that many of the survivors will die in their tens of thousands in the coming years of another silent genocide. One that, again, the West is fully aware of but chooses to ignore.

The killer in this new genocide is Aids. Many women taken by the militiamen were subjected to daily gang rapes. One surviving woman who was gang raped for days on end said: “No matter what I am doing these days, work, cooking, whatever, I can never get the smell of semen out of my nose”. Many of these women were infected with HIV and are now suffering from the lack of the anti-retroviral drugs that are needed to help them survive. In the words of one survivor: “The world is watching again. If you have not protected someone in 1994, at least stop her dying now. The unjust let people die, and now it's watching as the survivors die”.

Turning the heat up

Pete Ashton reviews *High Tide – News from A Warming World* by Mark Lynas, published by Flamingo 2004



Road to nowhere...Main road into the Yukon wilderness in Alaska now a target for more oil drilling

In his book *High Tide – News from a Warming World*, Mark Lynas begins by reminding us that in the summer of 2003, temperatures in Britain broke through the crucial 100°F level for the first time in recorded history, peaking at 100.6°F (38.1°C) on 10 August at Gravesend in Kent.

Meanwhile, continental Europe experienced its highest temperatures for 500 years, sparking catastrophic forest fires in Spain, France and Portugal, and killing thousands of elderly people in the sweltering cities. In France alone almost 15,000 died in the heat wave, sparking a national political crisis. Even the cooler UK saw around 2,000 deaths.

Last month, the UK government's Office of Science and Technology published a report stating that disasters due to rising sea levels and climate change are "now inevitable, no matter what we do to try and prevent them". This stark warning was the main finding of a group of 60 experts, led by the government's chief scientist Professor David King.

King had already charged Washington in the leading American journal *Science* with not taking climate change seriously. It is "the most severe problem we are facing today, more serious even than the threat of terrorism," he wrote. For telling this truth he was immediately gagged by Downing Street and restricted on what he could comment on in interviews.

So at a time when governments and corporations are constantly challenging the existence of global warming and its links to carbon emissions, Mark Lynas's book is to be welcomed. It is written by a long-time environmental campaigner and is packed with useful quotes, references and web sites.

Global impact

Lynas takes us on a three-year trip around the globe, visiting the global warming hotspots, where whole communities and ways of life are being destroyed and puts together a very readable, informative and impressive case for the existence and growing threat of global warming.

Some of the most dramatic evidence of climate change comes from the Polar regions, where an area of Arctic sea-ice one and half times the size of Wales is being lost every year. In Alaska, temperatures are rising 10 times faster than in the rest of the world, a stark warning of what lies ahead. Even the permafrost is now starting to thaw, leading to buildings subsiding and roads collapsing. Entire communities are being moved inland because of sea erosion caused by rising sea levels.

Meanwhile, the debate on opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil extraction continues. While most Americans want the area protected, their politicians, most notably George W Bush, are intent on further developing the oil fields. The stakes are high. The North Slope oil development is one of the biggest industrial developments on earth, covering an area of more than 250 square miles!

To maintain support locally, oil money that pours into the state coffers goes to every citizen of the state. In 2002 this amounted to a cheque for \$1,500. Combined with jobs and better housing, it's not surprising that most Alaskans are pro-oil industry, even denying there is a connection between climate change and the burning of oil.

Moving to the other side of the world, the tiny Pacific coral atolls making up the country of Tuvalu are threatened with extinction within the next 10 years, the first complete country to be a casualty of glob-

al warming. The corals, already devastated by pollution, cannot grow quickly enough to compensate for the rising sea levels and the islands are flooding. The Tuvaluan government appealed to Australia for assistance in migration but was turned down by the right-wing Howard government, which had refused to ratify even the very limited Kyoto protocol on climate change.

Droughts and hurricanes

Global warming leads to an intensification of the water cycle, with heavier rain in some places (and at some times), balanced by reductions elsewhere. Such an area is north east China, where rising air temperatures, leading to lower rainfall and increased soil erosion, has caused increasingly frequent and severe dust storms.

The threatened disaster can most clearly be seen in the fate of the Yellow River (Huang He), the second largest in China after the Yangtze. In June 2003, the government announced that the river's flow had reached its lowest level for 50 years, leaving 12 per cent of the Chinese population short of water.

The lower rainfall combined with the needs of the rapid industrialisation is sucking the river dry. Related factors, including over-grazing of farmland and deforestation, worsen the situation. Every year 2,500 square hectares of China turn to desert, the rate having doubled since the 1950s. The sand dunes are now only 70 kilometres from Beijing itself! As the rivers and lakes dry up, whole villages and agricultural land are abandoned to the desert.

Another effect of global warming is a rise in sea temperatures, and with it an increase in the intensity of hurricanes, which usually originate at sea. The potential damage caused by hurricanes can be seen in the effect of the 1998 Hurricane Mitch on Honduras. A Red Cross World Disasters Report estimated that more than 10,000 people were killed. Total economic losses in affected central American states were £7 billion, only 2 per cent of which was covered by insurance.

Lynas finishes his world tour with a visit to the melting tropical glaciers of the Andes mountains in Peru. The glaciers are retreating on average 10 metres a year. The same is happening in the Alps, Himalayas and other mountain ranges. It has been estimated by the United Nations "that half the

population of the world rely on mountain-generated water to grow food, generate electricity, sustain industries, and most importantly, to drink". Peru's capital, Lima is faced with the prospect of no water supply for half the year. While the rich can afford to have water trucked in, the poor urban masses (up to 10 million people by 2015) will have to move or die.

Just when you think the news can't get any worse, we are informed that all the above changes have occurred after a global warming of only 0.6°C over the past century. According to the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, composed of 3,000 top scientific experts, global temperatures will rise by between 1.4°C and 5.8°C over this century.

Kyoto Protocol: a dead letter

Lynas gives a useful overview of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The participants agreed that in the industrialised countries greenhouse emissions would be cut to about 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012 (environmental groups had wanted an 80 per cent reduction). By 2000 the Protocol remained implemented, thanks to a powerful oil lobby comprising the Opec nations and the United States.

One of the big issues of debate was "carbon sinks". For the convenience of supporters of carbon sinks, all tree plantations are assumed, wrongly, to be net absorbers of carbon dioxide. Therefore they can state that simply planting (or not destroying) forests is equivalent to cutting back on oil or coal consumption. "Trading" carbon emissions was also allowed, so Russia, for example, can sell "carbon credits" thanks to the collapse of its industrialised economy. Economies like the USA who actually increase emissions can buy these credits to "fulfil" their obligations.

But this was not enough for Bush and the Republicans. The Kyoto Protocol was dealt a near-fatal blow when the Bush declared in March 2001 that he was taking the US out altogether, saying: "I will not accept anything that will harm our economy and hurt our American workers". A month later vice President Dick Cheney announced the building of at least 1,300 new power plants over the next 20 years, mostly fuelled by coal and gas with no regulations on carbon dioxide emissions for these or the existing 1,082 plants.

Bush also forced the amendment of last year's Energy Policy Act to remove all references to global warming as a threat to the environment and to public health.

Bush's plans for a second term include increasing domestic oil drilling, primarily in environmentally-sensitive areas. This is payback time for the oil and gas industry that put a massive \$1.9 billion into the 2000 Republican election campaign.

Meanwhile, in Bonn in 2001 a much-weakened and more voluntary-based version of the Kyoto Protocol was agreed by a coalition of European Union and non-oil producing developing countries. In this scenario the world first agrees an atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration to limit global warming within safe boundaries. This is translated into a global emissions budget, which is then divided on an equal per capita basis across the whole world. These entitlements would be tradable, both to ease the transition and to generate revenue flows from rich to poor countries – as the rich industrialised countries would need to buy credits from less developed ones.

Reformist perspective no answer

Like many environmentalists Lynas'

reformist approach leads him to propose a series of utopian demands on governments – utopian because no government would agree them and he offers no methods of struggle to impose them. He sees the full implementation of Kyoto as the "only solution to the problem of global warming which is both workable and logical".

Lynas argues for a policy of so-called "contraction and convergence" – Kyoto-type policies combined with a demand for ending of all exploration for new coal, oil and gas fields, and a move to alternative technology and "lifestyle changes".

The problem is that capitalism is environment-unfriendly by its very nature. In the name of greater profits resources are used up without regard for peoples' needs and those of future generations. Capitalists are reluctant to conserve resources, control pollution or re-cycle as these options are considered "too expensive". It is much easier and a lot cheaper to dump pollutants into the environment than to try and clean it up.

The working class and poor peasants of the world have a vital interest in stopping the capitalists destroying our world. But they also have an interest in "development" not contraction. They need electricity, heating, better homes, transport and so on and only if we offer them this alongside a defence of the environment can we carry them with us against Bush and the multinationals.

Humanity clearly needs a huge shift away from energy production based on the burning of fossil fuels, and a massive investment in alternative technologies such as wind, solar and wave power. We need a huge programme of reforestation. We also need massive expansion of public transport to combat the pollution caused by ever-increasing use of the private car. To combat the effects of global warming now we need planned investment in sea-defences and re-housing away from vulnerable river flood plains.

Given the nature of capitalism, it is clear that none of the above demands for a sustainable environment can be permanently secured on a national basis, or without the seizure of economic and political power from the capitalists themselves. In the struggle to combat global warming and to safeguard our environment we need to fight for workers' control, the expropriation of the capitalist corporations and a democratic global plan of production.

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Fascism: a weapon for smashing the labour movement

David Ellis and Rachel Hardcastle explain the origins of fascism and its relationship with the capitalists

The British National Party presents itself as a respectable right-wing electoral alternative to the establishment parties. But electoral success is not the leaders' real goal - the BNP is a fascist party. Nick Griffin does not march around in public wearing a black shirt, a swastika and with an armed bodyguard, but his estate in Wales is used for paramilitary training exercises. Among the party's prominent members and national officers are individuals who have served prison sentences for rape, murder and assault.

Behind the sharp suits and ties, the fascists are organising to bring terror and intimidation onto the streets. BNP gangs are already involved in provoking and attacking black and Asian people with racist attacks - Griffin just makes sure that in the media he can deny any connection with them. The BNP is not a "normal" racist party seeking parliamentary power, it aims to build a mass fascist party to destroy democracy and the workers movement.

To stop the BNP leadership we must be clear what fascism is and what strategy socialists, workers and youth need to defeat it. We must understand why the BNP is not just a party that advocates an extreme version of the racism New Labour and the Tories are happy to use, but is something different that requires other tactics.

Historical roots of fascism

Some people use the term fascist like a swearword to describe anyone they don't like. Others use it to describe anyone who is racist or who hates democracy. But for revolutionaries, fascism has a particular meaning. Under capitalism the working class is driven to form trade union organisations and political parties to fight for its rights, including the right to organise and the right to free speech.

When capitalism goes into economic crisis the bosses try to claw back from the working class its hard-won gains. Usually the ruling class finds it sufficient to rely on the leaders of the workers' movement to demobilise and betray the workers, allowing them to make the workers pay for the crisis and increase profits through mass unemployment and wage cuts.

There are times when even the reformist leaders of the workers' parties and trade unions are not able to hold back the struggle of the masses. In such periods, the ruling class deploys the police and even army as means of repression. But when the whole system is in such a social and economic crisis that the ruling class can no longer tolerate an organised and combative working class it looks for a movement that will destroy all the organisations of the working class and deny them any rights - that movement is fascism.

Fascism aims to build a mass political movement. It aims to recruit and bring into action those classes squeezed between the working class and the capitalists. These middle classes are often ruined and impoverished by economic crisis. These sections of the population look for radical solutions as do the workers. But if the working class is unable to offer a clear lead, an alternative to the poverty, decay and despair of a crisis-racked capitalism, then the middle classes will be increasingly open to the ideas of every populist demagogue.

Fascism does not automatically grow into a mass movement in times of political and economic disorder. It requires that the workers' movement is unable show a revolutionary way out of the crisis. Indeed, in both Italy and Germany, the Fascists and the Nazis grew after the failure of the revolutionary movement of the workers to take power. Without the workers' organisations



BNP leader Nick Griffin with Le Pen. Griffin wants to portray the BNP as a respectable party for British people. But its leadership and core members have a history of admiration for the Nazis and their stormtroopers (right).



fighting for radical solutions, much of the middle class will be drawn into fascist organisations. So too can the unorganised and the most politically backward layers of the working class. Unlike with right-wing parties, the fascist movement aims to mobilise these new recruits on the streets.

This can be dangerous for the capitalist class as well; it can lead to instability that would get in the way of orderly capitalist recovery. It hands over state power to a supreme leader, a dictator, who draws support both from the reactionary mass movement and from the capitalists - a leader who the capitalists cannot easily dispense with. It is one reason they prefer to use the fascists as a very last resort.

Even though the mass movement of the fascists is based on the ruined middle classes it always, in the end, serves the interests of the big capitalists. In Germany the years of the revolutionary struggle after the First World War left their mark on the German bosses: "During an entire year, 1918-1919, I felt that Germany was going to sink into anarchy...It was then I realised the necessity...of fighting all this radical agitation [of the left socialists and the Communists]. The memory of those days did much to dispose me, later on, to offer my help to National Socialism [the Nazis]."

These words from the major German industrialist Thyssen sums up the reasons why the German capitalists began to fund the Nazis.

The Nazi Party organised its army, the brown-shirted storm troopers to attack offices, meetings and demonstrations of the workers. When Hitler came to power in 1933 he finished the job for the ruling class. The ranks of the storm troopers swelled to 400,000 and they began to destroy the workers' parties and trade unions. The communist and social democratic parties were banned along with the trade unions. Members and organisers of these parties and unions were rounded up and put into concentration camps. Many of them were shot.

Hitler's regime of terror had begun. It was a regime that went on to build the death camps like Auschwitz and to carry out systematic genocide.

Fascism is not just a racist, nationalist or extreme right-wing movement. It can and does use racism and xenophobia to build its movement as the BNP is doing today. Hitler and the Nazis used anti-Semitism as a way of whipping up the anger of the middle class-

es. Using the scapegoat of the Jews helped to divide the working class and to turn the blame for the crisis in society away from its real cause - capitalism.

But Mussolini and the Italian Fascists did not use anti-Semitism or racism to build their movement. Instead Mussolini talked of being for the "little man" and against the big trusts. He talked of the need for a national revolution.

What was common to both German and Italian fascism was the civil war they carried on against the working class. In both Germany and Italy, the organised gangs of brownshirts and blackshirts were used to terrorise the workers' movement before the fascists took power. After taking power these fascist street gangs were fused with the army and the police.

The essential feature of fascism is that it works in the interests of the ruling capitalist class. The working class must see it as a deadly enemy. And there was nothing peculiar about the German or Italian ruling class that made them prepared to use fascism. Any ruling class will be prepared to use it if it has to. Any idea that the British capitalist class is inherently anti-fascist must be rejected.

Winston Churchill was supposed to be a great anti-fascist and democratic leader. Speaking in Rome in 1927 he said to Mussolini: "If I had been an Italian I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle...against Leninism." Churchill was not opposed to fascism in principle at all. His priority, like all of the ruling class, was to save the capitalist system and if that meant using fascism, even as a last resort, then so be it.

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BNP tactics today

Today the BNP is not about to take power nor is it growing primarily around fascist street tactics. At the moment it is relying on the fertile ground of racism. Of course, it is not mainly the BNP that has caused this but the policies of the Labour government, especially over asylum and immigration.

Labour has run scared before the racist hate campaign of the daily newspapers such as the Mail, Star and Express, conceding to their demands and encouraging the view that Britain is being "swamped" by illegal immi-

grants and asylum seekers. It is this that has fuelled the growth of the BNP.

Of course, all the leaders of the main political parties speak against the BNP. At this time, the BNP are a problem: British capitalism is not in crisis; the growth of fascism can provoke the Asian and black youth to fight back, to take to the streets and, to organise self-defence. This is the last thing the forces of "law and order" want. But still, in the future, the capitalist class may want to use the fascists.

This is why we cannot rely on the forces of the state to crush fascism. Certainly, the home secretary or local council leader may ban this BNP march or that BNP rally - especially if s/he is worried that the counter-mobilisation may embolden workers, immigrants and youth to organise self-defence.

But, faced with a choice between a united and organised front of anti-fascists on the one hand, and the fascists on the other, the capitalists and their political supporters know which they prefer: the ones dedicated to preserving their property and profits. Even if they are not about to seize power, the nucleus of a future fascist party is a useful weapon in dividing the working class and intimidating its organisations.

While crushing the BNP must be an immediate aim of workers and youth, we must also tackle the racist lies that are giving it an increasingly popular base. The policy of the new anti-fascist organisation Unite in defence of refugees is a disastrous decision because it weakens our ability to challenge the fascists on their most popular message.

British capitalism is not faced with the same deep structural crisis that German and Italian capitalism faced in the 1920s and 1930s. But this does not mean we should be complacent. The use by the BNP of the racist climate to build up a base of popular support, to give cover to and encourage the growth of its gangs of thugs is alarming. Even though it may not be about to take power the fascists will use these gangs to launch attacks on blacks and Asians, on immigrants and the left and trade unions - and they are already doing this.

As soon as it can, the BNP launches attacks on its enemies. This is why they are different from the mainstream parties that play the racist card. Faced with the violence we can already see from the BNP we have no option but to defend ourselves.

This is why we are in favour of denying the fascists their democratic rights. A movement that will use any strength it has to launch a war against us must be stopped from organising from the beginning. The fascists of the BNP should be given no platform from which they can speak. This means breaking up their meetings and demonstrations. It means stopping them from putting out their propaganda. It means driving their organisers from the workplaces, schools and colleges.

Trotsky was clear that for the fascist movement to be weakened and defeated it would require resolute action from the workers, not liberal hand-wringing about how evil they are: "Nothing increases the insolence of the fascists so much as 'flabby pacifism' on the part of the workers' organisations. Nothing so destroys the confidence of the middle classes in the working-class as temporising, passivity, and the absence of the will to struggle."

Even Hitler said in 1933: "Only one thing could have broken our movement - if our enemies had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed the nucleus of our movement with extreme brutality."

We should remember the words of Hitler and make sure we crush the BNP now.

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British section of the League for the Fifth International

Manchester sends Le Pen packing

In April militant antifascists in Manchester showed how the BNP and its allies should be dealt with. They bombarded the car of Front National (FN) leader Jean-Marie Le Pen as he tried desperately to get away from his hotel, with police and Nazi honour-guard Combat 18 desperately working together to protect him.

The fascist British National Party (BNP) had hoped for very different images to launch their Euro election campaign. They aimed to present themselves as respectable figures on the European scene, with Le Pen as the elder statesman - rather than the fascist boot boys they are. But the mask soon slipped as the day descended into farce for the BNP, with fascist bullies lashing out with fists and weapons.

It was a tremendous victory for militant action against fascism. Unite Against Fascism's hopelessly pacifist approach to fighting the fascists was shattered by the determined actions of workers and youth, who had decided not to yield an inch to the bigots, suits or no suits. The militant action to show that Le Pen and the fascists were not to be allowed the normal 'democratic rights' to spew their racist poison was also a blow to the SWP misleaders who had argued against a policy of organised self-defence against the fascists.

The day started shrouded in secrecy as the BNP attempted to keep the location of Le Pen a mystery. Clearly they were not confident he would receive a friendly reception. In a ridiculous media run-around, fascist publicity officer David Jones arranged a press rendezvous point in the car park of a Stockport stationery shop. However, it was soon disrupted by shouts of "Smash the BNP!" led by Manchester Workers Power supporters. Farcically, a BNP spokesperson punched antiracist activist Bill Jefferies just for taking one of their leaflets. Stupidly, the fascist lashed out in front of TV cameras and journalists giving the lie to their respectable pose, in an instant!

We then sped to the "top secret" press conference at a hotel in Altrincham, already



guarded by dozens of police. Despite attempts by some of the self appointed stewards to limit the demo to peaceful photo shoots and a bit of shouting, it was clear that lots of people were up for invading the press conference and disrupting the proceedings. It was equally clear that the police were determined to stop this from happening.

Some prior organisation and planning could have led to some success as scouting operations revealed several breaches in security. At one point, a fire door was opened setting off alarms, leading to kitchen staff walking out. Unwitting guests quickly left as it became apparent that the hotel was under siege.

After a stand-off of several hours the arrival of the notorious police squad, the Tactical Aid Group, signalled the opening of the next scene of battle. The arrival of these bully-boys, the jewel in the crown of the bosses' police, was the signal for upping the ante. It also signalled that Le Pen, Griffin and their

entourage of Nazi scum were about to flee.

As they did, angry anti-fascists burst forward shouting abuse, hurling rubbish from the bins and hastily erecting barricades from scaffolding and debris. The Combat 18 and FN "security" literally pulled no punches. They assaulted members of the crowd and threw missiles. The police, of course, did nothing to restrain the violence of the fascists. On the contrary, they enthusiastically joined in as they gripped demonstrators in dangerous neck holds, shoved us to the ground and beckoned forth the car containing the cowering fascist filth. The police instructed the car to move forward over protestors' feet and limbs.

For a good twenty minutes demonstrators threw themselves again and again into the scrum. One anti-fascist was bludgeoned over the head with iron scaffolding by a BNP thug. But this did not stop us in our anger and determination to get to the fascist leaders. At the end of it all, we emerged

bruised and triumphant, wearing our scars of battle with pride, as we'd taught the cowards of the BNP, and their invited Nazi celebrity, a lesson they won't forget in a hurry: they're not welcome here in Manchester. We will not let them spread their racist filth and vile propaganda. We will stop them using organised and justified self-defence.

Nick Griffin later stupidly claimed that if they'd wanted to provoke confrontation they would have held it in Oldham. The truth is that they knew what reception they would have got there from militant Asian youth and anti-fascists who joined with them in kicking the fascists out last time. In fact, they had hoped to avoid a humiliating retreat, by holding their vile publicity stunt in a leafy sleepy suburb.

The BNP have been becoming increasingly arrogant, even having the audacity to picket the offices of the National Union of Journalists. It is now of the utmost importance that whenever and wherever the fas-

cist BNP assembles to march, meet, picket or intimidate us, they are sent flying. In times of capitalist crisis, fascism offers itself as the part of civil war for the bosses - targeting black people, trade unionists and the organised left - offering to smash all centres of resistance to the rule of capital. We are not in such a situation yet but we must not allow the fascists to grow in confidence. That means dealing with them now and not allowing them to hide and recruit behind a mask of electoral respectability.

We need to smash the BNP, to make the slogan into a reality. It is imperative now to organise delegate-based community and anti-fascist committees, on the basis of 'no platform for fascists anywhere' - in private hotels election meetings, in the media.

Unlike Unite Against Fascism, we do not call for a state ban on fascist marches and meetings. When the state acts, deploying the police to "keep order" on the streets, it invariably targets anti-fascist demonstrators, not the fascist thugs. The police who laid into the Asian youth of Oldham and the state that handed down punitive sentences for their temerity in revolting against their oppression are no allies in the fight against fascism. They are part of the problem, not of the solution.

We need to campaign against state racism, such as the Blair-and-Blunkett-led media hysteria over asylum seekers and migrant workers, and to campaign for positive class and socialist solutions to poverty and racism.

Out of these struggles we can link up with those campaigning to form a new workers party, to begin to build a party with working class and revolutionary answers to the real problems of poverty, lack of housing, poor education that the fascists latch onto and blame on immigration. We must tackle head-on the lies about asylum seekers and migrants from Eastern Europe and other regions. Immigrants don't cause poverty: capitalism does.

We must build a movement that can stop the fascists in their tracks. Sunday 25 April 2004 was a step in the right direction.

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