

# workers power

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## As Reid and Straw are blaming Muslims... **Blair and Bush are the real terrorists**



### INSIDE

- Six page special on revolution in Latin America
- British troops losing in Afghanistan
- Shop stewards conference: which way forward?
- Can capitalism reverse climate change?



League for the  
Fifth International

## EDITORIAL

# Stop the war on Muslims

## The war at home

Jack Straw has launched a vicious campaign against Muslim people. The former Foreign Secretary, has revealed he asks Muslim women who visit his constituency surgery to remove the niqab, a veil which covers the entire face apart from the eyes. He attacks the niqab as “a visible statement of separation and of difference” which makes “better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult.”

Straw was carefully following on from John Reid's demand that Muslim parents spy on their children and report their “radicalism” to the police. Their aim is to create a climate of fear.

The gutter press lapped it all up. Sun reporters claimed to have boarded a plane in a niqab, without being searched. Their purpose is to suggest that women who wear it are a strange and alien presence on “our” streets and a threat too, since they may be carrying bombs.

This so-called debate was taken up on the street. In Liverpool a man ripped a veil from a 49-year-old woman's face after shouting racist abuse at her. In Blackburn a young Muslim woman wearing a veil was harassed by three white youths shouting, “Jack has told you to take off your veil”. In Windsor “white residents” allegedly rioted against the building of an Islamic community centre, which they claimed would be a centre of “fundamentalism” and terrorism.

The “liberal” press does its little bit by cheerfully discussing the reactionary character of Muslim women being obliged to wear the veil. Of course Marxists as well as feminists recognise in the veiling of women a symbol of patriarchal oppression - even if the women concerned accept it. We would defend women who shed it against pressure or intimidation - as would many practicing Muslims.

But what is at stake here is the stigmatising of Muslims as “other”, “alien”, “oriental” - much as the orthodox Jews, who wore long coats (caftans) and fur rimmed hats, long beards and ringlets, were singled out at the beginning of the twentieth century. In short it is a racist campaign, with street thugs and “intellectuals” taking part, and we must



Muslim women take their place on the Time To Go demo

break it up, ideologically, politically and - where necessary - physically.

## The war abroad

Britain is beginning to pay a heavier price in the US-led wars of occupation. Since Nato took over Helmand province in southern Afghanistan three months ago, 33 British soldiers have been killed. They are isolated in forts, facing wave after wave of insurgent attacks. One, in Sangin, has been under attack for weeks. Its garrison calls it “the Alamo”.

The attempt to clear Helmand of “the Taliban” - in fact a coalition of tribal militias and radical Islamists - has plainly failed. A sure sign of this is that the Army and media spinning the fact that they themselves have not been driven out as a victory. But Nato commander General David Richards has warned that the country is at tipping point and Afghans are likely to switch their allegiance to the Taliban if Nato forces cannot win in the short term.

In fact, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the territory that the occupiers control is shrinking. Morale is sinking, as unofficial blogs and emails from the frontline reveal. One British major - who had received a bronze star from the US during earlier fighting - said “many of [his] men were exhausted and had,

at times, been reduced to tears”.

In Iraq 2,715 US troops have been killed and 42,005 seriously injured; UK forces have suffered 118 fatalities. Many more soldiers - British, American, Canadian, Italian - will return home their health and lives blighted by the experience, ignored by the army and the government.

Needless to say, “Allied casualties” are dwarfed by the numbers of Iraqis killed: between 43,000 and 48,000 civilians have been killed by coalition actions.

Added to this, the so-called democratic Iraqi regime is also a nightmare. The United Nation's special investigator Manfred Nowak reported at the end of September, “The situation as far as torture is concerned now in Iraq is totally out of hand. The situation is so bad many people say it is worse than it had been in the times of Saddam Hussein.”

A sign that these brutalising wars are effecting the army can be seen not only in the tremendous work of Military Families Against the War, but also in the emergence of the semi-official British Armed Forces Federation. Although this association is clearly the result of pressure from below, it is also an attempt to head off an independent soldiers' union. Its 10-point plan places the federation firmly within the “ethos and robust traditions” of the armed forces, while its website proclaims: “Not a trade union”.

But that is precisely what working class rank and file soldiers need: an independent union that fights not only over pay and conditions, but for the right to elect and deselect their officers, the right to disobey illegal orders, and the right to discuss the war and to agitate for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

## Revolutionary integration

The racist campaign against Muslims in Britain and the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan are linked in so many ways.

The aim of the demonisation of Muslims is to distract attention from the mounting death toll and bloody quagmire of the “war against terrorism” in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. Its aim is to break up the coalition of socialists and trade unionists, youth and Muslims that put 100,000 on the streets of London in August, and 50,000 on the streets of Manchester in September. We have to defeat this racist campaign at home and put an end to the wars of plunder in the Middle East and Central Asia.

It is an enormous gain of the antiwar movement that Muslims - including women who wear the veil - feel able to participate and use their democratic rights to protest against the oppression of fellow Muslims in Iraq or Palestine.

The demand that Muslims assimilate into “our society” by abandoning their beliefs and practices for ours is in fact a demand that they do not side with the oppressed against British imperialism. That's what's behind Reid's demand that parents watch their children for signs of radicalisation. It's a threat to the Muslim community: police yourselves or we'll come down on all of you like a ton of bricks.

Instead of this forced, reactionary assimilation, we fight for voluntary, revolutionary integration. Together against the racist thugs and attacks on civil rights. Together against the imperialist occupations. Together in solidarity with the resistance abroad and with all those fighting back against the government and bosses' offensive at home.



**“D**own with Blair, No to Brown! Drive New Labour out of town!” This was just one of the slogans that rang around the streets of Manchester on the Time to Go demonstration on 23 September. It was the biggest protest in the city for 150 years, and the largest mobilisation outside a Labour Party conference ever.

Fifty thousand antiwar activists from all over the country converged to give warmonger Blair and his cronies in government the welcome that they deserved. On the demo was a large and lively contingent with flags, banners and loudhailers organised by the socialist youth group Revolution and Workers Power numbering nearly one hundred, includ-

ing school and university students from Manchester, London and Leeds. The contingent (see above) was one of the largest on the demo. Afterwards, Revolution held a successful meeting in the students’ union. We hope to build on the success of the weekend. **• To contact Revolution or Workers Power turn to page 19**

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4** After the Labour conference, *Jeremy Dewar* looks at the prospects for left wing MP John McDonnell in the leadership context.
- 6** Two conferences on trade unions are coming up. *Bernie McAdam* will be arguing for a rank and file movement and a new workers party.
- 7** NHS Logistics striker *Brian Loader* talks to *Workers Power*, while *James Roberts* looks at the deal offered to Merseyside firefighters.
- 8** Latin America is in the grip of revolution. Over six pages we look at the struggle of the Popular Assembly of the People or Oaxaca against the state governor and the federal government; the recent elections in Brazil, which saw Lula and the Workers Party take a battering; and the struggle in Bolivia between the popular movement and the oligarchy.
- 14** Some capitalists are waking up to the impending environmental catastrophe. *Mark Booth* asks whether they can be part of the solution.

- 15** Fifty years ago, Hungarian workers took to the streets to fight against the Stalinist dictatorship and the intervention of Soviet troops. In the first of two articles, *Joy Macready* look at the origins of the uprising.
- 16** The military coup in Thailand has put a brake on mass protests writes *Simon Hardy*, while *Martin Suchanek* reports on the Berlin elections.
- 17** The Pope’s latest outburst against Islam is part of the ruling class attacks on Islam, argues *Michael Proebsting*.
- 18** Interview with *Ibrahim Avcil*, a Turkish activist, about the wave of oppression in that country.
- 20** *Spotlight on Religion* Why Marxists oppose state attacks on Muslims and other religions but but argue for the separation of religious institutions and the state.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### GATE GOURMET

Tony Woodley, general secretary of the TGWU, is down to speak at the the RMT sponsored conference on shop stewards later this month. Last month his union had to pay out £600,000 to shop stewards, Pat Breslin and Mark Fisher, who organised wildcat strike action at British Airways in support of the Gate Gourmet workers in 2005. Both stewards said they were following orders from the TGWU to organise the action. Both were sacked by BA after the union called off the action and negotiated a deal with Gate Gourmet. The treacherous trade union leaders are willing to sacrifice and undermine their activists and members. Trade unionists need a rank and file movement to combat the bureaucracy not lessons from Woodley (see page 6 for more).

### SWEDEN

Sweden saw a turn to the right in last month’s elections. A poor turnout in working class areas saw the Social Democrats punished as, apart from a dental care programme, all they could offer was more cuts in welfare and attacks on jobs. Sweden may be feted by some as a social democratic paradise. But in some areas, such as in Malmo, three out of four people are unemployed, and child care and youth centres have been cut. Now we can expect the right wing governing alliance to intensify these attacks. The Swedish section of the League for the Fifth International, Arbetarmakt, will address the workers and youth with a programme to defeat the government attacks and for the working class to go on the offensive against the capitalists.

### TEEN REPELLANT

Howard Stapleton has won the 2006 Ig Nobel Peace Prize for his “electromechanical teenager repellent”, a device, whose screeching sound can only be heard by under 25. This disgusting piece of technology literally treats youth like rats and has been used by shopkeepers in Wales and a theatre in Swindon to terrorise bored teenagers out of hanging out around their premises. Although this oppressive attitude to youth has been encouraged by Tony Blair’s Respect Agenda, none of the users of this anti-social device have yet received an Asbo!

## LABOUR IN CRISIS

# Can the working class

The one candidate in the Labour leadership contest standing against neoliberalism and war may not even get on the ballot paper. Jeremy Dewar asks whether workers can intervene in the party.

“We can’t just be pro-labour we’ve got to be pro-business too... the renewal of New Labour must and will be built upon these essential truths: a flexible economy, reformed and personalised public services, public and private sectors not at odds but working together...”

“And Tony you taught us something else... that the world did change after 11 September. That no one can be neutral in the fight against terrorism... the need for global cooperation in the fight against terrorism, never anti-Americanism...”

On 25 September, Gordon Brown delivered his most Blairite speech ever.

Yet Brown’s union backers, who should have been angered, were fawning in their praise. “A visionary speech from a great chancellor,” said Tony Woodley of the TGWU. “A great unifying speech... very uplifting,” declared Amicus chief, Derek Simpson.

## Manifesto for a fourth term

Gordon Brown had a bad conference. His entourage’s inept coup, aimed at forcing Blair to name the day for the handover, backfired. The Blairite and Tory tabloids spun this with opinion polls “proving” Brown’s unpopularity. Once again the far from iron chancellor buckled and humbly proved his New Labour credentials once again. His “Big Four” union backers had to swallow hard and pretend they loved it.

The Blair clique went on the offensive, touting several alternatives to Brown and outlining an ultra-right wing agenda for the fourth term. Alan Milburn set out his manifesto “to determine Labour’s post-Blair purpose and policy”

- Parents’ right to remove children from “failing” schools – and take government funding with them
- Tax breaks to encourage more people to take out mortgages
- Employee share-ownership to be the main route out of poverty



**Tweedledum and Tweedledee  
Agreed to have a battle;  
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee  
Had spoilt his new rattle**

**Just then flew down a monstrous crow,  
As black as a tar barrel;  
Which frightened both the heroes so,  
They quite forgot their quarrel**

- Sanctions to force single parents into work.

Stephen Byers also demanded the abolition of inheritance tax and Patricia Hewitt the lifting of any limit to privatisation in the NHS. John Reid met Muslim representatives to criticise them for failing to spy on their children and to ask them to report their radicalism to the police.

Brown’s supporters in the trade union leadership as usual got the smallest crumbs from Labour’s table. Oh, but surely they won four motions against the party leadership’s wishes: on privatisation in the NHS, state pensions, corporate killing, agency workers’ rights and investment in council housing.

Even Derek Simpson knows the value of this. He commented in *Tribune*, “Which of the motions the big four [unions] got through the Labour Party conference has

ever been implemented? The answer is none, so this power [of the unions in the party] doesn’t amount to much.”

## What kind of party is Labour?

Lenin famously characterised Labour as a “bourgeois workers’ party”, meaning that it rests on the working class for its support, but politically serves the capitalist class. But what precisely does it mean to say that the working class supports Labour, sees it as its party? *Workers Power* has always argued that a combination of factors defines this support.

First, the foundation of the party by the trade unions, their continued affiliation and their provision of most of its funding. Second, the adherence of most of its rank and file activists to a pseudo-socialism that a series of Labour governments leads somehow to

the eventual transcendence of capitalism. Third, and the belief that the party will implement reforms that reflect working class aspirations for dignity and fairness at work, for a reduction in poverty, and the taming of capitalism’s worst excesses – war, racism, attacks on democracy, and so on.

Of course, in power, Labour has repeatedly disappointed these hopes and governed as a bourgeois government, loyal to capitalism and imperialism. The persistence of this view is certainly “the triumph of hope over experience” but such illusions have been renewed by long periods in opposition when Labour adopted left wing programmes – as in the early 1970s and the early 1990s.

This contradiction has historically made the Labour Party prone to occasional eruptions of struggle for its soul. One of the highest



# still influence Labour?

points of this struggle came in September 1981, when Tony Benn came within one percentage point of winning the deputy leadership against the right wing leader Dennis Healy. The historic weakness of the left is that it sees absolutely no alternative to the Labour Party as the vehicle for achieving “socialism” by electoral means.

Thus it can always be blackmailed into submission by the prospect of electoral defeat, by the defection of the right or by its own expulsion from the party. At the very height of their strength in 1981 – when the unions were in the hands of the left, the constituencies overwhelmingly so and a large minority of the Parliamentary Party too – they yielded to the blackmail of the right about leaving and the pressure of the union leaders to compromise to win the 1983 election.

By January 1982, fearing that Healy and the right might walk out and join the Gang of Four, who had already formed the Social Democratic Party and were flying high in the polls, the left caved in and reached the Bishops Stortford Agreement – a truce (as they thought) with the right. De-selection of right wing MPs stopped; the forward march of the “Labour Party Democracy” movement was halted.

The left insisted this was a truce, a pause for consolidation. In fact it was the decisive turning point. They failed to take over the party out of fear of victory. The right had no such inhibitions. Helped by ambitious and unprincipled left turncoats like Neil Kinnock, they were soon witch-hunting Militant Tendency (the fore-runner of the Socialist Party) and then other leftists, supporting Thatcher’s Falklands War. And still the left were blamed for the shattering election defeat of 1983. The next year, during the great miners strike, Kinnock denounced the violence of the miners, not the police. The long march to New Labour began.

The basic problem is that the Labour left are strategically dependent on the right. The left feel deep down in their hearts that they cannot survive without the right, cannot win power in elections without them – in short cannot actually lead the Labour Party. Thus, when push comes to shove,

the right, because they consciously represent the capitalist class and are its well rewarded agents. The right will always do the shoving and the left will let itself be shoved aside in the name of unity, believing that “better days will come”.

Blair and Brown’s removal of Labour’s constitutional commitment to “common ownership of the means of production” (Clause IV), the reduction of the unions proportion of funding by courting donations and loans from wealthy businessmen, the experience of nine years of Labour’s attacks on public ownership, an unprecedented support for US imperialism’s wars have all weakened workers’ illusions in the party and driven away over half of its 1997 membership.

This does not mean that the Labour Party has yet become another capitalist party, indistinguishable from the Tories or the Lib Dems – it still depends to an important degree on the union leaders for funds, for getting its anti-working class measures passed and tolerated, for providing activists to get it elected. But the enormous rightward shift, the historically unprecedented degree of the party’s “bourgeoisification” does explain why the only candidate in the forthcoming leadership election, who is standing against Blairism, is unlikely to gain the support of 44 MPs, the minimum requirement for entering the leadership race.

## **New workers party**

Despite this, however, a distinct layer of activists in the trade unions and the antiwar movement believe that a McDonnell campaign can, if not beat Brown, force the new leader to take up some of their demands.

This too is an illusion. Brown, to win against a Blairite, will lean upon the big four union leaders for support, but what would they ask for in return? Derek Simpson has called for a “Warwick Two” agreement, that is another worthless backdoor deal that will meet the same fate as the original Warwick accord, struck before the 2005 election: the dustbin.

Another problem McDonnell faces is that much of his natural constituency has already left the party in disgust. Not one of the three union leaders who have

## **John McDonnell for leader?**

McDonnell’s campaign highlights six key pledges

- Troops out of Iraq
- End privatisation
- Abolish tuition fees and support state comprehensives
- Restore civil liberties and trade union rights
- Turn to renewable energy sources
- Increase the state pension and link it to earnings.

His campaign website, [john4leader.org.uk](http://john4leader.org.uk), also directs visitors to the Labour Representation Committee’s Programme for a Real Labour Government for “more policy ideas”.

The LRC calls for top tax bracket to be raised to a mere 60 per cent, i.e. the same rate that Margaret Thatcher levied. The multinational corporations, the banks and the pension funds are all left in the hands of the capitalists. Market forces, under real Labour, will determine what is produced and how it is distributed, rather than a rational plan based on peoples’ needs.

Crucially, real Labour will hardly reform the judiciary, the police or the armed forces at all. These key elements of the capitalist state will remain in place to defend private property and ruthlessly attack any movement that threatens its rule.

The programme does not even mention capitalism or socialism. It is left at the level of reforms to the system, offering no way out of the endless cycle of exploitation, oppression and wars.

This is an incoherent list of reforms. Its weakness compared to the Bennite programmes of the early 1980s is quite simply that it does not even take itself seriously. It cannot even imagine a left Labour government.

After Brown or whoever else wins, it will disappear into the waste paper basket. What the working class needs – and in the conferences upcoming this autumn it has an opportunity to seriously debate it – is an action programme for struggle against this Labour government and whatever succeeds it.

come out for McDonnell – Matt Wrack, Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka – are Labour Party members, or lead unions that are affiliated to it. Similarly George Galloway, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Resistance also support McDonnell. True, they represent something in terms of activists on the ground. But it’s called Respect, not Labour.

Two hundred thousand people have left Labour since 1998. Two unions have been expelled or disaffiliated. Four million have stopped voting for it. They are not wrong. New Labour is not for turning. It needs to be dumped. And we need to form a new working class party, one that goes far further than the Labour lefts like John McDonnell are proposing, one that seeks the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist society.

So, while we call on Labour Party members and members of

trade unions that remain affiliated to the party to vote and campaign for McDonnell if he gets on the ballot paper, we will not hide our criticisms of his policies, nor the central flaw in his strategy.

Further, we will pose a clear question to both McDonnell and his supporters: what will you do when you lose? Will you call on us to vote for Brown? If so, we will condemn you and call on others to break with you. Will you call for an abstention? If so, should we stick with a neoliberal Labour Party for another five or 10 years until, after an election defeat, it is possible to climb back onto the old hamster wheel of “recapturing” Labour?

This is a hopeless perspective and one, which diverts militants away from the real practical possibility staring them in the face – building a new working class party to wage the class struggle right here and now.

**FIGHTBACK**

# Rank and file need revolutionary answers

Two conferences are coming up that will attract trade unionists searching for strategies to combat Labour's attacks at home and abroad. *Bernie McAdam* outlines our contribution to this debate

The RMT has called a National Shop Stewards conference for 28 October. A fortnight later Respect hosts one for Fighting Unions. Both highlight the crisis of leadership afflicting the British labour movement.

The leaders of the big four unions and others beside have failed miserably to mobilise a fight-back against the attacks on public services and pensions, and the anti-union laws. They have done little to recruit millions of low-paid workers. They have allowed Blair and Brown to use the Labour Party as an instrument for neoliberalism and aggressive wars. Conference resolutions demanding a fight on these issues are dropped as soon as delegates go home.

Militant rank and file organisations, capable of challenging the trade union leaders, and an alternative workers party to Labour are key issues that need to be thrashed out at both forums.

The National Shop Stewards Conference will no doubt reflect current debates on political representation within the RMT. Bob Crow leads a union that has broken from Labour and has supported alternative parties at elections. But he maintains that a shop stewards movement needs to be built before establishing "a political party that can represent working men and women".

**RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT**

There are two problems with this. First, a shop stewards movement in and of itself does not guarantee a fighting rank and file movement, not hamstrung by union bosses. Second, there is no automatic route from a shop stewards movement to a party.

Undoubtedly a new shop stewards movement would be a major revitalising campaign for militant trade unionism in Britain. However, to be really effective for workers, shop stewards would need to build rank and file organisations to politically challenge the current



**Bob Crow speaking on the crisis of working class representation**

crop of union leaders. Such a rank and file movement would not just be network of shop stewards; it would mobilise workers in action against the bosses' offensive.

As class struggle unfolds, sections of workers will see through their leaders' treachery. Hence the necessity for a rank and file movement.

From day one this would run into the opposition and sabotage of most union officials. Thus a shop stewards movement cannot avoid fighting for the wholesale transformation of trade unions into democratic class struggle organisations.

Such a scenario would not appeal even to left leaders like Bob Crow. Yes, left leaders can be supported critically, where they represent the views of the rank and file, and give a lead to more militant policies and tactics. But they are usually committed to containing struggles within a trade union framework.

It is very good that Bob Crow has called for a shop stewards movement. But we need something more than a support network for left officials, the policy which in the

1970-80s was known as "broad leftism". Sure, it helped left officials, like Hugh Scanlon, Jack Jones and even Arthur Scargill, into office. But they did nothing when in office to undermine the power of union officialdom to control and sell out strikes.

They too "ruled the unions from their offices". In the literal sense they were bureaucrats. Yet this rule by officials – paid three or four times the wage of their members, elected for long terms, irremovable when they sell out – is not a natural or inevitable state of affairs. The union bureaucracy as an uncontrollable caste, always looking for compromise with government and the bosses, can be dissolved and replaced by the democracy of the membership.

Finally, there is no Chinese wall dividing the tasks of organising a rank and file movement and those of building a new workers party. Indeed, an alternative workers party, committed to the revolutionary transformation of capitalism, would set about organising a rank and file movement right away!

**REVOLUTIONARY ANSWERS**

Revolutionaries will support every move to set up opposition networks with a view to prosecuting struggles to victory and in order to take the unions out of the hands of the bureaucrats in the struggle to prepare the class for power.

Our goal is the dissolution of the trade union bureaucracy as a caste. All officials must be elected for short terms of office and be accountable – if need be recallable – at any time by those who elected them. They must be paid the average wage of their members.

All disputes must be under the democratic control of mass meetings of the members. The national, regional and local union bodies must be dominated by lay delegates (elected working union members) not by officials. In short the full time officials must be servants of the union not its masters. The unions must have a broad class wide and international outlook, fighting racism, sexism, and imperialism.

Last but not least the unions must be free to create and support a working class political party. Political parties are needed to take the power at the highest level of society, to overthrow the capitalist system, which is based on exploitation, demands oppression, and breeds war, and to open the road to socialism. Trade unions, which by their nature cannot incorporate the whole of the working class nor unite around a political programme, can never take on this task.

The project to transform the unions, therefore, must include the struggle to break them from Labour and use or establish political funds to found a new mass working class party. We believe that if this process is linked to a vigorous pursuit of the class struggle from day one, if it is democratic and not afraid of political debate, then we, the revolutionary minority of today, will win it to a revolutionary programme.

• See page 19 for conference details

# Strike to defend the NHS

On 26 and 27 September, Unison members working for NHS Logistics (NHSL) were on strike again, fighting government plans to hive the stores and distribution service off to DHL/Novation.

Brian Loader, Unison NHSL Alfreton, spoke to *Workers Power* in a personal capacity.

## Workers Power: Brian, can you tell us about the strike?

Brian Loader: We had a solid picket line, starting at 10pm. The following morning a dozen of us went to lobby the Labour Party conference.

We were outside the conference, with members from the Runcorn depot and a BBC crew, when health secretary Patricia Hewitt came walking down the road. She couldn't walk past us with the BBC there so she had to stop.

We asked her why an in-house bid wasn't allowed and pointed out that US company Novation are being investigated by the federal government at the moment. She replied that the money DHL claimed they could save was too good to refuse.

We asked why the depots were only guaranteed to stay open for five years, yet DHL/Novation's contract was for 10 years. But she wouldn't extend the guarantee.

We asked her whether the £35 million that DHL said they would save over 10 years, and the money from the sale of the NHSL depots,

would go to front-line services? Of course not. She would use it for "capital expenditure". But we know this will mean PFI-type schemes where big business will be the main beneficiary.

We continued to leaflet the conference but some delegates reported that the security staff were confiscating our leaflets on the basis that they hadn't been passed by the conference arrangements committee! They were further infuriated when they got back to their seats and found leaflets from the NEC saying don't vote with the trade union resolution criticising Labour's health service policies.

## WP: What do you think we need to do in order to stop the creeping privatisation in the NHS, and get services like yours back in-house? How can different sectors under attack be drawn together?

BL: I believe all the trade unions and organisations, such as Keep Our NHS Public, should be mobilising support for the "NHS Together" lobby of Parliament on 1 November. This should include supporting the feeder march assembling 11am at the South Bank organised by the National Pensioners Convention.

Although being a weekday, the whole day would be a tremendous encouragement to all the campaigns around the country against the closures and privatisation of NHS services and an important platform in building for a Nation-

## We say

By John Bowden

The NHS Logistics strike has not been the only struggle against NHS privatisation. There has been a recent victory in Derbyshire against privatisation of a local primary care trust. A petition against the removal of A&E services to Bury and Oldham from North Manchester drew 10,000 signatures. Protests have taken place in Sheffield, Liverpool, Nottingham, Pontefract and Lancaster.

The GMB members at DHL are now balloting for strike action. They could link up with Unison members at Logistics.

Another strike is on the cards at the NHS blood service. Staff are angry at the potential closure of 14 blood

centres. Kevin Coyne, national health officer for Amicus said the cuts will mean "delays for the vital testing of blood for many thousands of people, putting lives at risk".

But there is only so much local petitions, legal action and local demonstrations can achieve against Labour's offensive. We need a national campaign.

The TUC has launched "NHS Together", but has so far restricted it to lobbying MPs on 1 November. Strike action – like NHSL's during the Labour Party conference – would have sent a far stronger message.

In every town, city and district, healthcare workers, trade unionists, service users and anti-privatisation activists must immediately form *action committees* to mobilise for the lobby and plan what to do next.

Left to themselves, the union leaders will not lead an effective campaign. We must!

al Demonstration/Day of Action in the beginning of 2007.

## What political lessons can be drawn from your dispute?

BL: The industrial action taken by NHSL members across all five depots will be a catalyst for health-workers across the country. Many NHSL Unison members will be following closely which way the Unison hierarchy will lurch in the

Labour leadership contest. If their strategy is to hope against hope that the main players in the contest will simply change their spots, then I think members will draw conclusions. The battle to save the NHS is a political struggle as well an industrial one.

That requires a new political voice for working people, in other words, a new trade union-based mass workers' party.

## Liverpool firefighters must fight on

As 1,000 Merseyside firefighters return to work after a 26-day strike, James Roberts asks what have they won

The strike had been provoked by a £3.5 million cuts package. Merseyside Fire Authority wanted to cut 120 firefighter jobs and 15 control room staff, remove four pumps from the busiest stations in the district, and reintroduce a 96-hour shift pattern, which the FBU had negotiated away in 1940, during the blitz!

During the dispute it became clear that the Fire Authority was intent on busting the union. Fire chief Tony McGuirk put together a team of 170 strike breakers and

called in non-union "specialist rescue volunteers" (put together as part of "the war on terror"!)

This came alongside revelations from the New Zealand FBU that McGuirk had boasted of his union breaking ambitions a year previously.

As the strikers' popular t-shirt proclaimed, "McGuirk... probably the worst fire chief in the world".

But the deal the strikers went back on does not look good. The FBU has accepted the £3.5 million cuts figure, providing job losses are voluntary. While the 96 hour shift

seems to have disappeared, part-time working and hence casualisation are in the deal, especially in the control room.

Even worse, days after going back, three strikers were suspended for calling a scab... well, a scab.

At the moment, the agreement remains "in principle" and the dispute has not been signed off. Militants need to sharpen their demands and relaunch the strike as soon as possible.

- No cuts! Tax the rich to pay for the fire service we need.
- Sack McGuirk now! Fight for a workers veto over all management decisions.
- Reinstate the three! Drop all dis-

ciplinary charges arising from the dispute.

Workers need to organise regular station meetings and demand rank and file control of all negotiations. The strike committee should produce regular bulletins. At the first sign that management is seeking to renege on its commitments, they should relaunch their action and link up with other fire services in dispute, such as nearby Staffordshire.

Last but not least, Labour councillors are sitting on the Authority that is demanding these cuts, while the FBU's political fund lies idle. It should be used urgently to build a working class alternative to Labour.

**LATIN AMERICA: A CONTINENT IN FLAMES**

# Mexico: revolution

By Keith Spencer

As we go to press a possible deal may have been brokered between the masses of Oaxaca and the federal government. Even if such an agreement is made it will not remove the hated governor of Oaxaca or solve the underlying problems of Mexican society. Mexico is still in the grip of a revolutionary situation.

After the fraudulent elections returned the right wing's candidate for President, millions took to the streets, refusing to accept the result. The left wing populist candidate, Luis Obrador, set up what he calls a "rival government". There have been huge rallies and a series of street clashes.

But it is in Oaxaca state that the struggle has reached its highest level, with the formation of a delegate based assembly - the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) - which operates as a rival government of the workers and peasants. It is like a Soviet in the early months of the Russian revolution or the Paris Commune of 1871 - indeed, in a direct reference to this, the masses themselves call it the Oaxaca Commune.

However, like the Paris Commune, it faces a huge test: either go forward to organise delegate based councils across the whole country and take all power from the hands of the capitalist state by force, or be bloodily repressed. It is this great political question which will determine whether the Oaxaca Commune ends up like the Paris Commune that was drowned in blood, or like the Russian soviets, which seized power and opened a new era in history.

The revolution in Oaxaca is in danger. The past few days have seen the deployment of more troops, including marines, tanks and helicopters, and aircraft reconnaissance of the city and the popular mobilisations. The notorious Federal Preventive Police have been quartered in the area, alongside the hired thugs of the ruling party in the state, the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI). As one of the leaders of the APPO said: "Fox (the Mexican president) is going to stain his hands with blood."

### State clampdown

The military are being deployed because the people of Oaxaca have stood firm against the corrupt state governor, Ortiz, and the central government. They have developed their own power in the APPO which is now calling for a country-wide constitutional assembly.

It appears that a clampdown was



Delegates to Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca

planned for the 28-29 September to coincide with a two-day shutdown by business in support of governor Ortiz. Flyovers by aircraft and troop deployments were seen. It was rumoured that transportation workers attached to the PRI were meeting to plan attacks on the APPO and its supporters. One taxi driver, who has now gone into hiding, revealed that the plan was to work with plain clothes police to attack protesters while the two-day strike was on. Aguilar Robles, a leader of the PRI's thugs, told the transport workers "you are all going to co-ordinate with local union leaders [of the PRI] to figure out at what specific time we'll go in and rip these bastards up."

However, the strike came to nothing, governor Ortiz ran away, and the federal government backed off. But now they are redoubling their efforts to destroy the rebellion in Oaxaca.

The 200 delegate-strong APPO now controls transport, government buildings and offices, has its own mobile police force and organises barricades and the arming of the workers and peasants against Ortiz and his thugs. It has helped set up local assemblies. It has run the lackeys of the governor, such as officials and police, out of the state and has now banned Ortiz.

That is why the APPO is such a threat to the ruling class - it poses a different way of ruling, one that involves the workers and peasants in controlling their own

lives. And the bosses recognise this. That is why they are preparing to smash it. One US reporter expresses the bourgeoisie's terror perfectly: "Militants with clubs roam Oaxaca, raiding government offices and dragging out employees who refuse to leave. Barricades and torched vehicles block the streets. Police have fled the city and the governor is in hiding." Worst of all, the wretched tourist adds, "The once-beautiful downtown is covered with revolutionary graffiti." (Detroit Free Press 17/9/06). Any revolutionary will recognise from this feeble propaganda a city where a revolution is taking place and the masses are taking power into their own hands.

### Dangers of negotiations

Hand in hand with the violence go the government's attempts to negotiate with a "reasonable" section of the leadership of the APPO. Delegates have gone to Mexico City to demand Ortiz's sacking. A deal attempting to buy off the teachers with a sectoral pay increase was thrown out by the APPO. Attempts to get the government to hand over Ortiz's powers to the APPO have failed, despite Obrador interceding on behalf of the masses of Oaxaca.

At the end of September, the Senate proposed a deal that promised better pay and a review of governmental structures - but still no removal of Ortiz.



# on a knife-edge



This prompted the masses to declare that their “massive and united struggle will continue until Ortiz is gone and all political prisoners released”.

The rules of the constitution mean that, if Ortiz is sacked or resigns (as opposed to just hiding) before 1 December, a new election will be held in which the APPO can stand on its own as governor. After the 1 December deadline, the government can simply appoint a replacement. President Fox and his successor, president-elect Calderon, need the votes of the PRI to get their legislation through the Senate; so they cannot be seen to sacrifice Ortiz. Meanwhile, by offering a negotiated settlement, the government can bide its time and hand the whole matter over to the interior ministry and its thugs in the police and army.

## Where now for Luis Obrador?

On Sunday 16 September, nearly two million people (including a million people who were registered as delegates over a two month campaign!) assembled in the centre of Mexico City in support of Luis Obrador for president. President Fox failed to close down the meeting and could not deliver his traditional Independence Day speech within the capital.

The rally declared Obrador president and shouted down those members of his party, the Party of Democratic Revolution, (PRD) who tried to stop the vote taking place with cries of “traitor, traitor”. Sections of the PRD are already trying to sell out Obrador in return for cabinet posts.

The National Democratic Convention (as the rally was called) set out a plan of resistance including a day of action against the privatisation of energy and a week of action for defence of education in October. The convention also supported the creation of a legitimate Obrador government on 20 November and mass mobilisations against Calderon when he takes power on 1 December.

However, all this is inadequate, it is limited by the populism of Obrador and his desire to get into the presidential office. As such it will lead the masses to defeat and snatch away a historic opportunity to take power into their own hands. Struggles are taking place in other parts of Mexico, as well as in Oaxaca. Workers are striking in their thousands against neo-liberalism. Mexican farmers have, along with their poor Southern US counterparts, come out against the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is destroying their livelihoods as the agribusinesses enrich themselves.

The convention should be linking up all these struggles in a mass campaign of a general strike and the occupation of lands and factories. Such a campaign should set out to paralyse Mexico and rid it of Fox/Calderon and put in their place a workers' government supported by the poor farmers and peasants, based on delegate councils like the APPO, with recallable representatives directly elected by the workers and peasants themselves.

If the plan for the convention is inadequate, even worse are the actions of the post-modernist Zapatista guerrilla movement and its leader sub comandante Marcos, who has now earned the nickname Sub-Comedian Marcos for the irrelevance of his so-called “other campaign”. Marcos has said that the Zapatistas are “not here to talk to the millions but to listen to those who are not heard”. Thus, in one sentence, he has condemned his movement to being bystanders while millions make history. He has gone further and said that: “Those above us are discovering that the government is shit and institutions are lousy.” - And those below are discovering the same thing about the Zapatistas.

If they are not willing to involve themselves in the struggles and the fights of the masses they should hand over their weapons. On the 1 October, 2,000 Zapatistas met in Mexico, Marcos said Oaxaca was an inspiration for all. But what did the Zapatistas decide? To carry on with their 54-day tour of the north. The post-modern notion of “changing the world without taking power” has condemned itself as a harmful delusion.

## What needs to be done

The masses of Oaxaca have shown great ingenuity and courage in fighting Ortiz and his police and creating the APPO. But that is not enough. Soon the struggle will come to a head and the APPO must make sure that it is the workers and peasants who win.

The APPO should immediately demand of Luis Obrador that he support the people of Oaxaca in actions, not just words. The march from Oaxaca has arrived in Mexico. Obrador and all his supporters should go out onto the streets in their millions to occupy the capital, greet the marchers and join the call for a constitutional assembly. Whether he does this or not, the APPO should issue the call directly to the masses itself. Bring Mexico City to a standstill and replicate this throughout the cities and towns of Mexico.

The APPO should immediately begin to expropriate private property: the factories, ranches and banks etc. Journalists in the APPO have already called for the nationalisation of the media: This should be done now and must be followed up with similar measures across industry and farming. Give the land to the peasants and let the workers control and operate the factories.

The APPO must call for a general strike in defence of the rebellion in Oaxaca and against the government of Fox/Calderon. The workers should take control of the strike out of the hands of the leaders, set up strike and factory committees, control the unions themselves and help build a mass movement against Fox/Calderon and to prevent a sell-out by the likes of Obrador.

The APPO must immediately arm the workers in Oaxaca. Already it has set up its own police force and popular militias and begun arming them. It must continue to do this and plan the defence of the city, the people and the state, set up barricades, take over strategic points in the city and towns. It should also call on support from other states, and carry out agitation in the army to break the rank and file soldiers from their officers and the rule of the bosses.

The Zapatistas should either go and defend Oaxaca or hand their weapons over to people who are willing to use them in defence of revolution.

The armed workers and peasants should prepare an insurrection to take over the state before the army crushes them. It is the only way to defend their struggle and the APPO and to convene a Constituent Assembly under the control of the masses.

In effect, the APPO must organise an insurrection to defeat the capitalists before the army and police clampdown and begin to kill people in their thousands.

These measures would give the masses of Oaxaca a breathing space in their fight against the local state and the central government and inspire similar actions throughout Mexico. But to oust Fox/Calderon and expropriate the bosses needs a mass revolutionary party. A successful rising and assumption of power by the workers will not happen spontaneously. Only an organised political force, campaigning within the mass assemblies for this perspective, can lead the workers and peasants to victory. A revolutionary party can generalise the lessons of Oaxaca, overthrow capitalism and its state in Mexico and open the road to social revolution across the whole of Latin America.

**LATIN AMERICA: A CONTINENT IN FLAMES****Brazil: Lula falters as left makes a breakthrough**

By Dave Stockton

The Brazilian presidential elections on 1 October saw the surprise failure of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to win outright. Lula, an ex-car worker, is the historic leader of the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Workers' Party), the reformist party that has the support of the mass of the Brazilian working class. That he will win the second round on 29 October is now far from certain.

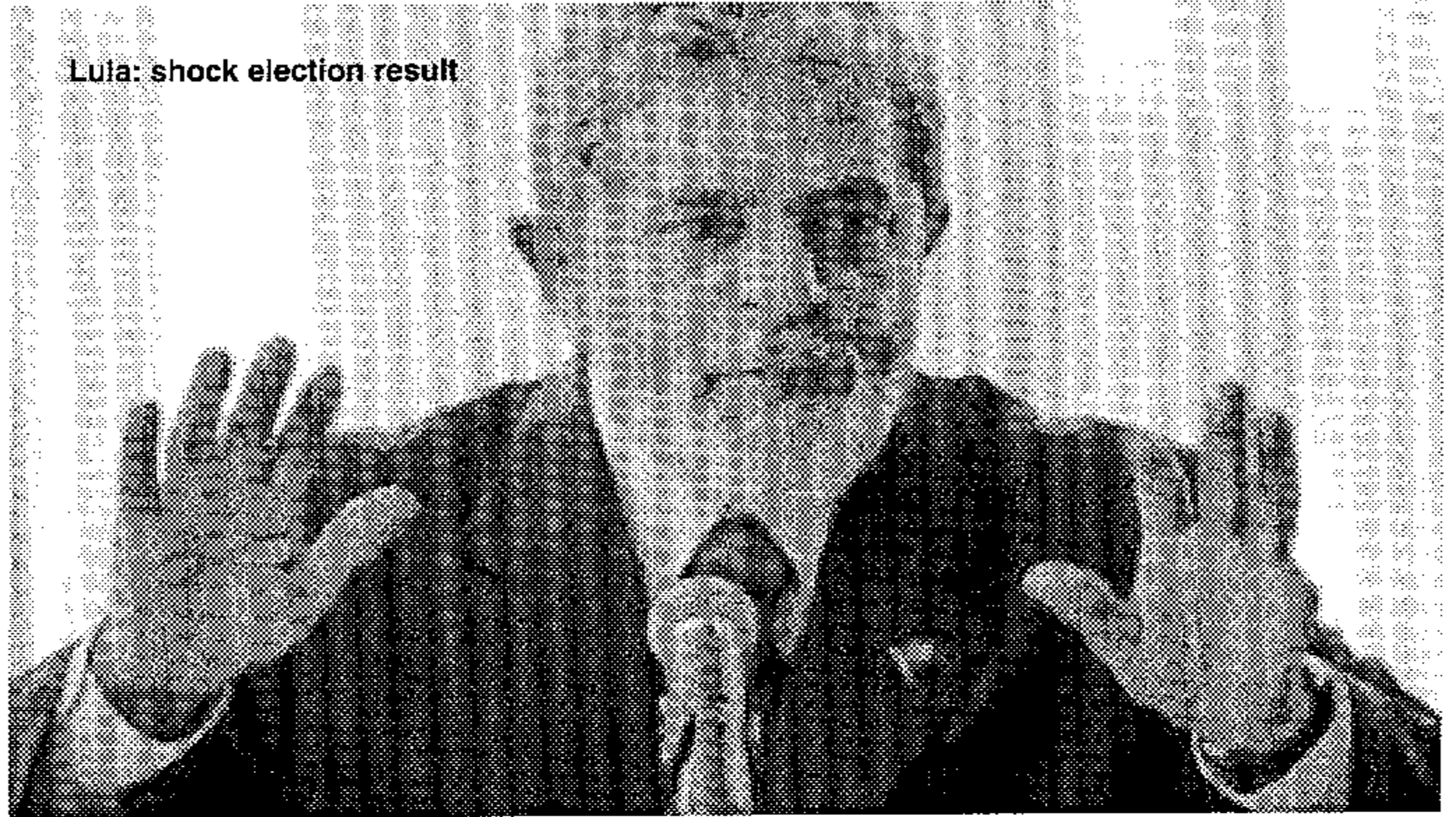
An equal shock was the level of support for the far left candidate, Heloisa Helena, who gained a national average of 6.8% and reached double digits in some of the PT's working class strongholds. This demonstrates that, after just one four-year term in office, the PT's broken promises have radicalised an important section of the Brazilian workers and landless poor. This opens an enormous opportunity for the left to help transcend reformist politics - but the programme Helena stood on was far from promoting such a break.

Helena stood as the candidate of the Left Front, and came third with over 6.5 million votes. The Left Front was made up of three left parties: P-Sol, PSTU and PCB. The P-Sol (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, Party of Socialism and Freedom) was founded in 2004 after Helena, a senator, was expelled from the Workers' Party, along with three parliamentary deputies, for opposing Lula's neoliberal attack on pensions.

The Left Front includes significant groups that claim adherence to Trotskyism but in practice vacillate between revolutionary and reformist politics. The Brazilian section of the Fourth International, loyal to the Paris-based international committee/executive bureau, dominates p-Sol. The party has also attracted large numbers of disillusioned PT militants in the old strongholds of the party. Thus the P-Sol represents a unification of the supposedly revolutionary and the openly reformist left, on a non-revolutionary programme. Another supposedly Trotskyist party in the Front is the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado, Unified Socialist Workers Party), the largest section of the "Morenoist" LIT-CI. The third component - the PCB - is the now small, formerly pro-Moscow, Brazilian Communist Party.

The reasons behind the electoral success of the Left Front lie in the deep dis-

Lula: shock election result



appointment the Lula government has aroused amongst the vanguard of the working class movement - the rank and file militants of the CUT (the Brazilian trade union confederation), and the landless peasants of the MST, who together formed the core of his support. Lula's programme was already a severely pruned-down version of the militant reformism advanced by the PT in the 1980s and '90s.

But the PT government did promise serious measures to address poverty, increase literacy and improve health care. Indeed, addressing the crowds after his 61% victory in the second round of the 2003 elections, Lula declared, "We are the ones who can guarantee an agrarian reform and that people can eat three times a day." In fact, this has turned out to be empty demagoguery. The agrarian reform has been pathetically minimal - provoking sharp criticism from the MST. The CUT bureaucracy has proved more loyal, but at the cost of losing or expelling sections of the most militant and well-organised workers. As a result, in Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo provinces - the PT's working class heartland - Lula's vote slumped. In Rio, Helena won 17.13% of the vote. In contrast, Lula's vote in the hitherto conservative-influenced but poverty stricken North East, increased.

Lula's social programme, centring on the Bolsa Familia (family grant) has provided the most impoverished families with a small monthly payment in return for sending their children to school, to

health clinics and so on. A recent survey showed that 37% of the population were able to spend a little more on food than in 2002. But three meals a day? Certainly not. The reason for this is plain enough. Together with this modest reform, the PT has carried out strictly orthodox neoliberal economic policies. These do not reduce poverty - they make the rich richer and the poor even poorer.

The Bolsa Familia is actually a consolidation of four pre-existing cash payments to the very poor. The number of families covered has increased substantially, from over three million in 2003 to nine million today - a total of 36 million people in a country of 186 million. But the Bolsa is set at only 6% of the country's minimum wage - US \$24 for a family of four, or 19% of the income the World Bank considers the poverty line. The cost of the whole scheme represents only 0.5% of Brazil's GDP.

In short, though the very poor are undoubtedly glad to receive anything which improves their lot, the idea that such measures will abolish poverty, or even seriously ameliorate it, is nothing more than a sick joke. The Bolsa is a typical "social liberal" measure, a fig leaf for neoliberal macroeconomic policies which, meanwhile, are increasing inequality on a massive scale. Lula is the Gordon Brown of Latin America. No wonder he was so warmly received in Downing Street.

It is a tight clique of US-trained, hard-line neoliberal, bankers in the finance

ministry who run the economy. Lula claims that their orthodox deflationary policies are absolutely essential to maintaining "foreign confidence" in the Brazilian economy. The consequence is that the country has one of the highest domestic interest rates in the world - 17 to 18%. It also has a huge and steadily expanding public debt of around R\$1 trillion (£250 billion). To pay the interest, the government has to issue high yield public bonds, snapped up by the 20,000 families of the super-rich, enabling them to get even richer.

Carlos Lessa, president of Brazil's main development bank, BNDES, who was dismissed by Lula, has attacked this policy: "This means that R\$100 billion of public money goes to this tiny group of very rich people, compared with the R\$7 billion going to the very poor. So the government is practising the most brutal policy of wealth and income concentration on the planet."

Nor has this neoliberal medicine led to serious economic growth, even in a period of a cyclical upswing in the world economy. During the four years of Lula's presidency, GDP per capita has risen by 1.4% annually, slightly less than it did under his predecessor right-winger

and popular speaker who concentrated heavily on condemning Lula's betrayal of his promises, denouncing his neoliberalism and his toleration and cover ups of corruption. A long term supporter of the Fourth International, she is nevertheless a devout catholic who does not hide her opposition to abortion. Despite the powerful presence of those who call themselves revolutionaries and Trotskyists in the Left Front, its programme was reformist.

Nevertheless, it started with a bold declaration: "The Left Front wants to liberate the country from the clutches of finance capital and imperialism."

It then went on to outline a series of radical reforms: suspension (though not cancellation) of the payment of the foreign debt, rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA), doubling of the minimum wage, a "substantial" reduction of working hours without loss of pay and a programme of public works to reduce unemployment, placing oil, telecommunications, energy and steel under the control of the Brazilian people.

But on the democratic and social rights of women it was vague, perhaps for obvious reasons given a candidate who

country."

In fact, the Left Front Manifesto was a programme for a government brought to power solely and exclusively by means of an election, not by the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses, which found no mention within it. It accepted - tacitly - the framework of a capitalist economy and made no call for the forcible smashing of the capitalist state and its permanent repressive apparatus of police and army set up against the people.

In the elections to the lower house of parliament, the "far left" did less well than in the poll for the presidency. As a measure, the PT got 13,989,859 votes - 15.0% and 83 deputies. Left Front parties gained 1,315,692 votes in total. The P-Sol was by far the strongest of the parties within the Front. It got 1,149,619 votes (1.2% of the poll) and three deputies. The PSTU got 101,307 votes (0.1%) and the PCB 64,766 votes. Neither elected any deputies.

The distribution of votes is revealing. Lula won in 16 states, and kept his support among the poor in Brazil's deprived north and northeast. But voters, including many trade unionists in the large working class centres, are abandoning the PT and even moving to the P-Sol.

Thus the Brazilian "far left" has an enormous opportunity and responsibility: to break the militant Brazilian working class, the landless rural workers and the urban poor of the favelas away from the PT and from reformism. At the moment, the strategy of the P-Sol does not accord with this. Whilst we in the League for the Fifth International would certainly give critical support to Helena in the first round of the presidential elections and to the PSol and PSTU candidates in the parliamentary elections, and would also refuse to back the Lula-Alencar ticket in the second round, we believe it is urgent to create a revolutionary party of the Brazilian working class committed to the class struggle, not primarily to electoralism, and to the revolutionary overthrow of the Brazilian state.

Elections are important arenas for revolutionary propaganda and agitation, but winning the maximum number of votes must never be the determinant of the content of a party's programme or election manifesto.

Can a revolutionary party emerge within the framework of the P-Sol? Possibly, but only on two conditions. The first is that the party remains democratic, open to hearing all pro-working class views. And the second is the existence within its ranks of an organised current fighting openly and honestly for the party to adopt a revolutionary programme and become a Leninist combat party capable of leading a revolution. The League for the Fifth International campaigns for the formation of such a political current on the Brazilian left.



**Partido Socialismo e Liberdade candidate Heloísa Helena**

Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1.6% a year). Indeed, in Lula's presidency real wages have actually fallen by 9%.

Lula has continued to follow the IMF's policies loyally, paying the external debt and carrying out marketising reforms, including attacks on public sector workers' pensions. Another factor leading to disillusionment has been the corruption charges that have dogged the government. It appears that ministers were operating an illegal slush fund, largely bribes from private companies in return for government contracts, to buy the votes of federal deputies in Congress and, most recently, funding a dirty tricks campaign against Lula's main electoral rival. Lula's choice for a vice-presidential running mate in 2006, as in 2002, was José Alencar, the country's wealthiest textile magnate and the leader of both a small right-wing party and an evangelical church.

Heloísa Helena of P-Sol is a powerful

accepts the teachings of the Catholic church on abortion: "In defence of the working woman, we demand the creation of crèches for children from 0 to 6 years. We fight against all forms of racial or sexual discrimination."

As to the "property question", the acid test of any programme claiming to be socialist, there was no mention of expropriating the property of the big corporations and the super-rich or establishing a real socialist alternative to the madness of the market economy. The P-Sol manifesto was limited to measures of redistribution and control, not expropriation and a planned economy.

"... We recommend severe taxation of the big fortunes and profits of the banks and big companies. The public control by workers and consumers of the production of essential goods is a necessity so that the redistribution of wealth is a reality and to put an end to the enormous inequalities which are the shame of our

**LATIN AMERICA: A CONTINENT IN FLAMES****Bolivia: revolution and the shadow of civil war**

By Keith Spencer

**B**olivia is in revolutionary situation. Strikes, blockades shutdowns by workers and peasants, right wing threats of civil war and of the secession of whole provinces all bear witness to this. So too does over two months of paralysis of the Constituent Assembly – a sovereign body elected to redraft the country's constitution and decide issues such as the ownership of the land and Bolivia's rich oil and gas reserves.

This turmoil, where the forces of counter-revolution are mobilising, is a sign of increasing class polarisation. The question for the working class and poor in town and countryside is how to break the logjam; how to decisively shift the balance of forces against the right; how to take power.

The reformist policy of Evo Morales and his government of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) is being pulled apart by the real forces of class power and class struggle. The central policies of Morales – land reform and the oil and gas nationalisations, both to be legislated through a Constituent Assembly (CA) – are in serious trouble.

The CA was convened on 6 August in the old capital of Sucre. Morales had already conceded to the right that all measures had to be passed by a two-thirds majority – a grossly undemocratic measure, aimed at thwarting the will of the workers, poor peasants and indigenous communities, who look to it to meet their demands for fundamental change.

However, at the beginning of September the voting system was changed to a simple majority, with the proviso that the final draft of the constitution still had to be approved by a two-thirds majority. The debate in the CA on the issue left one activist from the social movements in a coma after fighting with right wing delegates.

The result was a walkout of the Assembly by the right. Recent concessions to them, such as reinstating the two-thirds majority rule for votes on regional autonomy, have come to nothing. At the end of September the right also objected to the CA taking powers over the government and courts – a move backed by Morales. This led to more walkouts and fistfights.

The landed and financial oligarchs based in the four richest provinces of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando



**Workers from the Huanuni mine block the road to La Paz**

responded on 8 September with their own road blockades and business strike. In Santa Cruz city centre this was total but in the shantytowns and the countryside the masses defied the oligarchs. The right wing also deployed the armed thugs of the Crucenista Youth Union, which has a history of racist provocations against indigenous people, and clearly has a proto-fascist character. But they were met by armed supporters of Morales and the MAS.

Further polarisation in the rich provinces has taken place with parallel civic committees to those of the Santa Cruz – or Cruceño – bourgeoisie being set up by MAS supporters. Two weeks after the shutdown, pro-MAS forces blockaded the roads to Santa Cruz in revenge for the oligarchs' blockage of the land reform bill.

The right's provocations are definitely aimed at preparing the overthrow of the government. It was reported that after Morales' election the military high command met with top civil servants, businessmen and leaders of the Podemos party to work out a new constitution for when Morales fell, which they expected within a few months. Podemos (Poder Democrático y Social) is a right wing party, formally known as Acción Democrática Nacionalista, founded by former president and dictator Hugo Banzer. Jorge Quiroga, whom Morales defeated for the presidency in 2005, now leads it. No doubt more such meetings have occurred since.

But rather than resolutely exposing and mobilising against the plotting and sabotage of the right, the government of Morales and the MAS have been indecisive and conciliatory. The nationalisation

of the gas and oil industry, announced in May, has fallen far short of full nationalisation. The measure simply increased taxation on the oil companies and allowed for the state oil company to buy a 51% share in the foreign ones. It is now entangled in negotiations, legal challenges and repeated postponements.

The Brazilian government of Lula, who Morales fawningly refers to as his "big brother", has blocked the takeover of the Bolivian refineries owned by Petrobras (the Brazilian state oil company) and curtly rejected Bolivia's request for a fairer price for its gas. Again Morales caved in.

As a result his radical energy minister Andres Soliz – who wanted to take greater control of the industry – found himself blocked by Morales and the vice president Álvaro García Linera and was forced to resign. Soliz denounced "a sector of the government" that did not want things to get done. Unfortunately this "sector" included the president, Evo Morales.

Morales has also faced down strikes from transport workers over fuel hikes, miners fighting for state investment in the mines and teachers demanding better pay and conditions. Education minister Felix Patzi denounced a recent teachers' strike in La Paz, and supported parents marching on strikers' houses. He also attacked the teachers for being politically motivated – in their leadership were some left wing critics of Morales.

Over the summer, the government sent in police to attack peasants in the Movement without Roofs and Movement of the Landless (MST) who had taken over land, not waiting for Morales' land decree – a pathetic half-measure that will not meet the burning needs of the rural poor.





Evo Morales

It calls only for nationalising land not presently being used by the big land owners – the latifundista – rather than seizing all the estates and ranches and giving them to the peasants and agricultural labourers.

Most recently bloody clashes, with nine dead and over 40 injured, have taken place at the big Huanuni mine near Oruro, between “cooperative” miners, trying to take over the richer seams from miners employed by state-company Comibol. The cooperativistas have a powerful ally in the Minister of Mines, Walter Villarroel. The state miners’ union, FSTMB, and the Bolivian trades union confederation, COB, have complained about the delays in the promised development of the mines.

There is still hostility and obstruction from parts of the government towards Morales, to the extent that he continues to base himself on the popular movements and talks about handing Bolivia back to the masses and the indigenous people. Linera is seen as more of a gradualist social democrat but even he made a speech in September calling on the masses to arm themselves and defend the government against the oligarchs.

The government party, the MAS, is composed of many social movements from the town and the country, indigenous, peasant, worker and intellectual. The multi-class nature of the MAS, which makes it a more of a coalition than a party, has led to its members denouncing each other in the press. In La Paz recently there was even a fight among members at a meeting where the police had to be called. In this it has similarities with Venezuela, where the Bolivarian movement is composed of revolutionaries, radicals and people who want to create a modern capitalist economy.

Meanwhile, the trade union federation, the COB, seems to have swung more in Morales’ favour at its conference in June. It replaced its left wing leader Jaime Solares, who earlier in the year had denounced Morales as a traitor and tried to organise a general strike against him.

All of this shows that the populist government of Evo Morales is caught between the plots and threats of the right and the masses’ demands for radical change. The right is preparing an offensive, either the secession of the four richest states – taking with them nearly all the country’s oil and gas reserves – or even a military coup against the government. Indeed one could lead to the other – with the military intervening to “protect the unity of the country”.

The workers and peasants must be prepared to fight for their own interests and not rely on the misleadership of Morales and the MAS. Given their record of self-organisation, in popular assemblies, in bodies like the Federation of Neighborhood Councils (Fejuve) and the Regional Workers Central (COR) in El Alto this is a real possibility. The burning issue is one of revolutionary leadership.

Morales acts as a bonapartist figure, focusing the aspiration of the masses on himself, delaying and demobilising the masses. If he gets away with this and the mass movement declines, then the right will move. The alternative is to launch a mass offensive to force the measures that can meet the needs of the workers and poor, expropriate and disarm the right and open the road to a workers’ and peasants’ government. Burning issues in this mobilisation can be summed up in a programme of action:

● The masses who elected their delegates to the CA must now ensure that it becomes a weapon of social revolution,

not a blocking mechanism for the right. The workers and peasants should demand that all decisions be passed by simple majority – no more two-thirds rule – and that the CA be sovereign over the government, senate and courts.

● Demand Morales carries out the total nationalisation of the gas and oil industry with no compensation and put it under the control of the workers. Other industries such as mining should also be nationalised under workers’ control.

● Land to the peasants now. All the estates, ranches and agribusinesses must be expropriated. The movements of poor peasants and landless should be supported in their occupations and takeovers of the land.

● Last year’s revolutionary offensive was led by the El Alto Fejuve, a soviet-type body; this must be relaunched and similar delegate councils be set up around the country to coordinate the various mass movements of the workers and peasants. These councils must exercise control over the delegates to the CA, including recalling and replacing them immediately if they fail to support revolutionary measures or conciliate to the right. The councils can also become an alternative centre of power and government, one that can form the basis of a new type of state – a workers’ state.

● Arm the masses in workers’ and popular militias and win over the rank and file of the army. Such militias need to be built to defend workers and peasants against the attacks of right wing thugs, such as the Crucenista Youth Union, the police and the army. Furthermore, appeals must be made to sections of the army to take the side of the masses and remove their officers and the high command – nest of a future coup.

● The workers need their own party, not a populist amalgam like the MAS. The COB, which debated the idea of a party again at this year’s conference, should immediately convene a congress to launch a party. It should have a revolutionary socialist programme and draw its support from the unions, the poor peasants and the social movements.

● Such a party needs to organise for power – a mass armed insurrection – to install a workers’ and poor peasants’ government. This government should rest upon councils of workers and peasants.

Bolivia is in the midst of a revolutionary situation – but this cannot last for ever. Morales is making concessions – now to the right, now to the masses. The right is preparing to bring down the government and crush the struggles of the masses. The only way to defeat this is for the workers to overthrow capitalism and start the revolutionary socialist transformation of Bolivia, spreading the revolution on a continental scale and creating a federation of workers’ states in Latin America.

## ENVIRONMENT

# Does capitalism have a solution to global warming?

A new report demonstrates the government has not cut carbon emissions; in fact they have risen and drastic action is needed. *Mark Booth* argues that revolutionary action is needed

**F**riends of the Earth's report, *Living Within A Carbon Budget*, shows how, despite government claims to the contrary, UK carbon emission levels have not fallen since 1990. Government figures have hitherto ignored carbon emissions produced by the shipping and aviation industries. This is like overlooking the (flatulent) elephant in the living room!

Disregarding these figures has allowed the government to give New Labour a coat of "greenwash" when it has reneged on the promises made in the Kyoto treaty, and continues to put off all attempts to impose environmental taxes. It hides this behind doctored figures.

*Living Within A Carbon Budget* is the first comprehensive study of how Britain can make the transition to a "low-carbon" economy. We need to cut emissions by 90% by 2050 to avoid a 2C rise in global temperature - 50% more than previously estimated.

So how did the government respond to the report's proposals? "Politically unrealistic" is how one government minister described them: politically unrealistic under capitalism maybe, but a possibility and burning necessity for those fighting to prevent an environmental catastrophe.

## CAPITALIST SOLUTION?

The report is another attempt to influence the government's stance on climate change. But, as in all other areas, Labour prefers to take orders from big business.

The multinationals and massive industrial conglomerates will not sit back and accept "green" taxes, or the forced introduction of expensive technology to reduce emissions. Nor will BP and Shell allow oil driven economies to be replaced with ones powered by renewable energy. Nor will the government regulate the building industry to adopt greener technologies: better insulation, solar panelling, and so on. Nor will it subsidise the sale of energy efficient appliances to make them affordable.

These things are possible. But they will have to be forced upon industry.

George Monbiot has pointed out that some companies are ready to switch to greener technologies, but the government is holding them back by effective-

ly protecting the polluters. Many of the oil companies, for example, are beginning to diversify so they can, potentially, shift profits from oil to hydrogen and biofuel. But capitalist competition means this remains only a potential.

But a capitalist "solution" to the crisis poses more questions - and dangers - than it answers.

First, the market cannot and will not solve the problem. Self-regulation and cut-throat competition do not mix. Only if a higher body - the state - intervenes, will capitalists cut carbon emissions and switch to greener technologies. But this flies in the face of neoliberal ideology.

Second, it would be very dangerous to side with the "good" capitalists against the "bad" ones. Capitalism, particularly in the imperialist epoch, is inherently destructive, wasteful and shortsighted. It will always tend to make expensive changes too little, too late.

## NUCLEAR POWER

Take energy production for example. The government's energy review - published in July, and using the now discredited figures on carbon emissions - backed a new generation of nuclear power plants. Labour immediately gave the go-ahead, regardless the inherent dangers in nuclear power production and the as yet unsolved problem of nuclear waste disposal.

The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority estimates cleaning up the current Magnox generators will cost £56 billion, and take 25 years to complete. The NDA has found no solution to the problem to the storage of even low-level radioactive materials; the current site in Drigg, Cumbria, could be underwater in the next few hundred years, even without global warming. In August the NDA discovered a leak at Sellafield, which could have been caused a year earlier.

Currently this is all semi-nationalised. British Energy was privatised in 1995, but the government had to bail it out with over £3 billion in 2004. It is now categorised as a public body (though shareholders still collect their dividends). Since British Energy has now bought the contract for all of Britain's clean-up costs, we can expect taxpayers to be handing money over to these profiteers for decades to come.

So when industry secretary Alistair

Darling told the Commons that "it would be for the private sector to initiate, fund, construct and operate new nuclear plants and cover the costs of decommissioning and their full share of long term waste management costs" he was essentially condemning Britain to 75 years of unsafe energy production and endless expensive state subsidies.

Nuclear energy must not be run for profit. We call for nationalisation of the industry, for workers' inspection of all plants, and closure of those found to be unsafe. We are for the fullest workers' control of security - involving representatives of the employees, the local communities, the trade unions and environmental groups. While we do not rule out nuclear fission, we are against any new plants being built and run by the private sector.

## GLOBAL REVOLUTION

Finally, there can't possibly be a national solution to global warming. There has to be an international plan to shift resources to undo past damage and to sustain the population in regions already suffering from the depredations of climate change.

But in a world of increasing rivalries between imperialist countries, and of multiplying colonial wars, this is simply not going to happen. If the EU and USA cannot even agree on the trading of bananas, then they aren't going to come to an agreement over sharing and distributing the most vital commodity of all: energy. The fate of the Kyoto agreement was the inevitable consequence of the rivalry between capitalist nation states.

This is not to say that we should not do everything in our power to commit our government to shift away from fossil fuels now, to regulate industry now, to tax the polluters now. But we must link these demands to a strategy for global revolution.

In the end only a revolution, placing the working class in control of society, allowing it to implement a socialist plan of production to meet the needs of society, will we be able to avert climate change and prevent the permanent destruction of our environment.

• See page 19 for Climate Change demo

## WORKER'S HISTORY

# Hungary 1956: 'Now or never'

This month sees the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, when workers rose up against the Stalinist bureaucracy. In part one of a two-part article, *Joy MacReady* looks at how the revolution began

In mid-October 1956 students in Szeged marched for the right to form their own organisation independent of party control. They also struck against the compulsory learning of Russian. The students of Budapest's Technological University followed with a demonstration on the 23 October in solidarity with Poland.

The 23 October demonstration was the spark that lit the Hungarian revolution. The government asked the leaders of the Petofi circle, a discussion circle led by members of the Communist Party's youth organisation that had been banned just a few months earlier, to lead the demonstration.

Balazs Nagy (later known as the Trotskyist Michel Vargas) said: "At this time, and subsequently also, the Petofi circle curbed rather than encouraged the movement, considering that the hastening of events could lead to a catastrophe."

From 1953 the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party was split between Mátyás Rákosi, the leader since the Stalinists came to power after the war, and Imre Nagy who wanted to pursue a policy called the New Course, which called for greater spending on consumer goods and would allow farmers to leave the collective farms. This struggle was given added impetus by the death of head of the Soviet Union Stalin and his denunciation by his successor Krushchev in February 1956.

Throughout Eastern Europe, the Stalinists had expropriated capitalism after the war but created regimes that had no workers' democracy and were instead ruled by Stalinist bureaucracies. Under Stalinism workers had been denied democratic rights including the right to strike or to form their own organisations, and faced repression for criticising the regimes. In the factories, members of the party militia and trade unions policed workers, and suppressed any fightback against exploitation.

Krushchev's speech gave the green light to the opposition in Eastern Europe to take to the streets. In June and July 1956, there were a series of strikes in Sepal and Budapest. On 28 July the workers of Poznan, Poland, demonstrated but were brutally fired upon by the internal security forces which killed 54 and wounded at least 300.

In Hungary it erupted again with the student demonstrations of October. "Now or never - Most vagy Soha - became one of the slogans of the uprising. The students presented 16 demands, including "New leadership, new direction, require new leaders!", "We shall not stop halfway - we will destroy Stalinism", and "Worker-peasant power!". The masses also called for Imre Nagy, who had been expelled from the central committee at the beginning of the year, to be reinstated.



Hungarian workers topple a statue of Stalin

The 23 October demonstration moved to the radio station where the crowds wanted their demands broadcasted. There the ÁVH (secret political police) opened fire on the demonstrators who returned fire from arms provided by fraternising Hungarian troops.

Now Nagy appeared, after refusing to attend the demonstration. His speech to the crowd showed how alien his bureaucratic outlook was from that of the students and workers. He said: "It is by negotiation in the bosom of the party and by the discussion of problems that we will travel the road that leads toward the settlement of our conflicts. We want to safeguard constitutional order and discipline. The government will not delay in arriving at its decision."

Faced with a massive demonstration, active fraternisation between workers and soldiers, including soviet soldiers, and armed clashes with the ÁVH, the Stalinists called on Soviet troops to restore order in Budapest and declared martial law. They also called on Nagy to head a new government.

Meanwhile groups of workers were already doing battle with Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest. Throughout the length and breadth of Hungary, the workers responded to the Soviet intervention with strike action. By 26 October, virtually all work had stopped. Moreover these days saw the formation of workers' councils in every factory and mine and also the link up of those councils into the regional revolutionary committees in major industrial centres, such as Gyor and Miskolc.

The revolutionary committees of Gyor and Miskolc also controlled local radio stations

and broadcasted messages of solidarity to the Soviet troops.

Miskolc declared: "Our people did not revolt against you, but for the achievement of legal demands. Our interests are identical. We and you are all fighting together for a better socialist life."

Gyor workers committee addressed soviet soldiers with:

"Soviet soldiers! We the workers from the railroad factory in Gyor inform you that in our democratic state, workers are the guardians of the socialist achievements. That means with all their might, they are speaking out against returning factories and banks to the capitalists. At the same time we are against any Rakosite Stalinist restoration."

These statements were typical of the workers: on the one hand wanting to preserve socialism against the capitalists but also fighting for democratic and political rights against a military clampdown.

In most areas the workers' councils busied themselves with local or factory problems involved in maintaining the general strike and giving critical support to Nagy. The leaders of the movement saw their committees as alternative local government but ceded central political power to Nagy and his reformist faction in the Communist Party.

While the working class base of the party and certain elements of its apparatus went over to the insurrection, its leading circles sought desperately to diffuse the crisis and re-establish bureaucratic rule - behind Soviet tanks.

• **Next month: The crushing of the Hungarian uprising**

## INTERNATIONAL

# Thailand: throw out the generals

By Simon Hardy

A military coup in Thailand has removed the corrupt president of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra. But it has also suppressed a mass movement against him. Since late 2005, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) has been campaigning against Thaksin and planned in September to hold a huge rally in Bangkok - but the coup took place the day before.

While the PAD leadership of Thaksin's ex-friends, Buddhists monks, monarchists and various bits of the ruling class, have welcomed the coup, it is clearly an attack on all democratic rights and especially on the workers' and peasants' movements.

The military has banned all new political parties and meetings. The

generals have said they will be in power for a year, write a new constitution and appoint every minister - all with the blessing of the king.

Thaksin was elected on an anti-IMF platform in 2001 and again in 2005, introducing debt relief packages for farmers and cheaper health care for the poor. But he also used his position to enrich himself and became involved in corruption scandals. There has also been an insurgency movement of Islamists in the south of the country, which has been badly for the Thai military.

The PAD, based on a mass movement of the urban middle classes, who had been heavily affected by a 50 per cent increase in household debt since 2001, forced Thaksin to dissolve parliament after two indecisive elections earlier in the year. The King then declared that new elections would be held in the

autumn thus demobilising the mass movement.

The only power that can challenge the King and the army is the working class, supported by the mass of the peasants. The workers must fight for a general strike against the state of emergency. The general strike would pose the question of power - who controls society: the king and his army or the workers and their allies?

The masses should demand a constitutional assembly (CA) that would be a sovereign body. Councils of workers and peasants should be created to elect and control delegates.

#### THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY SHOULD

- Abolish the monarchy and the reactionary constitution of the generals and form a workers and peasants' government.

- Confiscate the land of the landlords and give to the poor peasants and rural workers.

- Immediately end the reactionary war in the south and give the right of self-determination to the Muslims.

- End privatisations and the dictates of the IMF and World Bank. Nationalise industry and the banks under workers' control. Annul the foreign debt.

These policies can only succeed if they are made permanent and that means smashing the capitalist state and overthrowing capitalism. That is why the Thai workers urgently need a revolutionary communist party to fight for power.

Only a movement that breaks the power of the army and creates a workers state can end the cycle of corruption and military coups in Thailand.

# Germany: after the elections where next for the WASG?

By Martin Suchanek, WASG Berlin and Arbeitermacht

Forty thousand people - about 3 per cent of the electorate - voted for the new left-wing alternative WASG in the elections for Berlin city council.

Because of undemocratic electoral hurdles, the WASG (Electoral Alternative for Social Justice) did not make it into the Berlin's parliament, but is represented in several districts in the city.

This result occurred despite the sabotage of the WASG's national leadership, which opposed WASG standing in the Berlin elections! Backed by the political cowards of Linksruck (the British SWP's sister organisation in Germany), they supported the PDS (the reformist successor to the Stalinist governing party in the old east Germany) which promised to continue its coalition government in Berlin with the SPD, the social democrats who are committed to neoliberal policies.

These attacks on working class

living standards cost the PDS half of its vote - dropping from 360,000 five years ago to just 180,000 this year.

Even though the WASG gained the vote of about one in 10 of the unemployed (about 10,000), most of the unemployed and poor workers abstained. Another important reason for this was the largely electoralist character of its campaign.

The WASG stood on a thoroughly Keynesian and reformist programme - a programme co-drafted, endorsed and supported by much of the left inside the WASG - the SAV (sister organisation of the Socialist Party in Germany), the ISL (Fourth International) and the German Communist Party.

Arbeitermacht (German Section of the League for the Fifth International) was the only organisation in the WASG Berlin that had its own revolutionary election programme, which our supporters in Spandau stood on. In this district the revolutionary WASG candidates received 2.6 per cent for the city council and 2.9 per cent for the district council.

Obviously Arbeitermacht's campaign did not significantly affect the election result - but it helped to gain supporters for our politics and for the WASG-branches our comrades work in. Our election campaign was mainly directed towards the unemployed centres, where we distributed our election programme and handed out thousands of our leaflet: "Unemployed, but ready to fight!"

Also our comrades and supporters of the international youth group Revolution worked hard to mobilise for the school student strike in Berlin on 13 October - a strike that the PDS denounced as "undemocratic", because it "interfered in the elections"!

Since the elections, a debate has started in the WASG on its direction. Some, like Linksruck, want to just enter the PDS and continue their uncritical support for the WASG's reformist and bureaucratic leadership.

The SAV, who played a leading role in Berlin, wants to maintain Berlin as a bastion outside the PDS. At the same time it rejects organising a

national left opposition in the WASG, which could fight the bureaucratic fusion with the PDS and the imposition of the reformist programme but which could build local and regional structures that would allow it to organise the members.

We, on the other hand, believe this is essential. The leadership of the WASG and the PDS are preparing for a bureaucratic fusion, and the purging or taming of all socialist, communist and independent elements. They want to build a party that is prepared to take part in governing for the capitalists against the workers.

But this means not only rejecting these policies - it also means preparing for a possible split. And this means fighting against the proposed bureaucratic fusion and to utilise the formation of left opposition to cohere the forces to make the WASG a real fighting party of the class struggle party, a party that will struggle not just against the neoliberal attacks but to overthrow the capitalist system itself in a social revolution.



# Pope Benedict's new crusade

By Michael Proebsting

In his speech to the University of Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI argued that Christianity is a superior religion to Islam. He justified this by reference to a quote from a 14th century Christian Emperor of Byzantium, Manuel II: "Show me what was new that Mohammed brought and you will find only that which is bad and inhuman such as this that he favoured spreading the beliefs that he preached with the sword".

This led to justified outrage amongst Muslims the world over.

The Pope's defenders argue that the quote has been taken out of context. But anyone who reads the speech will see that Benedict does indeed regard Islam as an inferior religion.

The Emperor's argument, which the Pope clearly accepts, was that conversion through violence is absurd and irrational and to act irrationally is to contradict the essence of God. The Pope then went on to quote, again approvingly, the comment of Catholic theologian Theodore Khoury that this idea would have appeared self-evident to the Byzantine emperor who had grown up with Greek philosophy but that for the Muslim teachers, against whom he was arguing, God was absolutely transcendent and therefore his will could not be limited by human categories, including "rationality".

In other words, what the Pope was saying was that Christianity is a rational religion and therefore rejects violence, while Islam is an irrational religion and is, therefore, prepared to use violence. Whichever way you look at it, this is certainly a falsification of history. At the very latest, since the year 325, when the Emperor Constantine made it the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity has been anything but a peaceful religion. On the contrary, it has always served the ruling classes by justifying their wars.

It was the Christian Church that called for the Crusades against the Muslims and, incidentally, against Christian "heretics" such as the Albigensians of southern France. It was Christianity rather than Islam that was more intolerant and violent towards other religions.



Although Christians and Jews in the Islamic Empire were disadvantaged with regard to taxation and entry to the professions, they were free to practice their religion and were not subject to forced conversion.

By contrast, the Catholic Church attempted to wipe out other religious communities. For example, when the Spanish monarchy conquered the Moorish south of the country in the 15th century it suppressed Islam. Through the Spanish Inquisition, Pope Benedict's "rational" Catholicism persecuted both the Moors and the Jews. Significantly, most of the expelled Jews found refuge not in Christian Western Europe but in the Ottoman Empire. A further example of the supposedly "humane" and "rational" character of Christianity is the genocide of the Indians of Latin America, some eight and half million of whom were killed by the Spanish conquerors with the enthusiastic support of the Catholic Church.

Incidentally, as the American professor Juan Cole has pointed out, and contrary to the Pope's assertion, there is no reference in the Koran to Holy War. This doctrine

was first developed sometime later in the context of the wars between the Islamic Umayyaden dynasty and the Byzantine Empire.

Ultimately, the real message of the Pope's speech is not about the

clarification of a theological dispute but about ideological justification of political interests. It is a reformulation of Christianity as the true ideological justification of the imperialists' struggle to achieve the complete subordination of the semi-colonial peoples, in particular the Muslim peoples of the Middle East

The conclusion that the imperialists can draw from this reactionary speech is obvious: peoples and minorities who are not capable of a rational view of the world and, as a result of their religious convictions, are inclined towards violence, are dangerous.

They endanger our civilization, which is based on reason and peace. Therefore, we must take steps to "defend ourselves" from this threat. Therefore we have the "war against terror", the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the sending of European soldiers into Lebanon, the increased control and repression of immigrants in Europe and the expansion of the state apparatus and its surveillance agencies. It lends justification for solidarity with the apartheid state of Israel, which is always defended by the imperialist powers as well as their puppets in the labour movement as an outpost of civilisation. The supposedly theological statements of the Pope are inseparably bound up with the politics of the imperialist powers.

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## TURKEY

# Stop the attacks on the Turkish left

The Turkish state has launched a wave of arrests on the left. Since 21 September hundreds of left-wing activists and journalists have been detained and arrested under the new Anti-Terror Law (TMY).

Here we interview *Ibrahim Avcil*, a supporter of the Socialist Platform of the Oppressed (ESP) in Turkey, and of the banned newspaper, *Atilim*. Despite our differences with Ibrahim and his organisation, which is from the Stalinist tradition, we believe it is important to publicise this latest wave of oppression and campaign for the widest possible support and solidarity.

**Worker Power:** Can you tell us about the wave of arrests of journalists and activists connected with the Socialist Platform of the Oppressed (ESP)?

**Ibrahim:** The Turkish state attacked the *Atilim* newspaper and the Socialist Platform of the Oppressed on the 8 September 2006, and arrested 20.

The wave of state terror coincides with the anniversary of the 12 September 1980 military coup. The new military chief stated that: "We will show them all, not only the illegal ones, but also the ones who try to look democratic." The bosses' media declared that the police had rounded up an illegal left communist organisation and the courts banned *Atilim* newspaper from publishing for 15 days.

The ESP, with other groups, fought back with a nationwide campaign of protests, meetings, demonstrations and vigils in every city.

On the 21 of September, the police detained 118 people linked to the ESP, *Atilim* newspaper and other organisations. The reason being in relation with an illegal left communist party, Marxist Leninist Communist Party. After four days of physical and psychological torture, 46 of the detainees were arrested. The wave of arrests and detentions is still continuing.

**WP:** How have the new terror laws affected prisoners' rights to legal defence and treatment in jail?

**Ibrahim:** The new Anti-Terror Law demolishes all the democratic rights the people of this country have gained with blood. The freedom of speech has ended, and opposition newspapers and democratic organisations face closure without any guilt or crime directed towards them. Stating anything about the Kurdish freedom movement would be a reason to be arrested and sent to prison. Criticising the state ideology would be a reason to be sent to prison for years.

The new Anti-Terror Law has provided the police with extreme powers. Detainees have been denied the right to speak to their solicitors or see their families, they have been denied the right to know why they have been detained or arrested and overall there is a secret decision on the files of the detainees, given by the interior minister, that denies all the rights a detainee should have.

**WP:** Why has the Turkish state chosen this moment to clamp down on the ESP?

**Ibrahim:** After the 12 September 1980 military coup in Turkey, the revolutionary struggle was defeated. The state continued with its repression towards the Kurdish freedom movement and other progressive forces.

In 2002, the ESP was established as a legitimate democratic mass organisation. It supported the Kur-



dish freedom movement and led the struggle against the war on Iraq. *Atilim* has been sold on the streets since 2002 and taken the lead with agitation, demonstrations and protests – that is why the state is attacking.

**WP:** Is the Turkish military at one with the Erdogan government in pursuing this repression?

**Ibrahim:** Yes. Although the Erdogan government in Turkey is trying to look democratic in many ways it's not difficult to look back to their policies and see that this government is no different from the previous ones.

**WP:** What can activists do to protest against this attack? Have you had much support from the trade union movement and the European Social Forum? Do you think we can use Turkey's attempt to join the European Union to embarrass the government into

releasing the prisoners and dropping the charges?

**Ibrahim:** There are many things that could be done to protest against this attack, it should not be forgotten that this attack of the Turkish fascist state is not only towards the ESP but also towards all revolutionary and progressive forces.

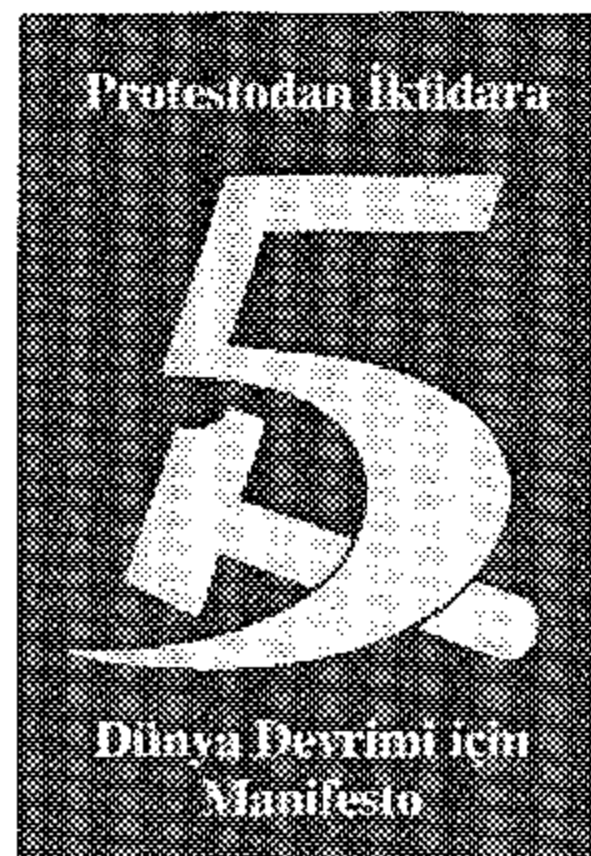
We have had a lot of support from democratic organisations, revolutionary groups and intellectuals in Turkey. We have also had very good support internationally.

The support of the trade unions in Turkey is very good from the branches and there are also international trade unions that have written to us with solidarity messages.

We call all workers, democratic, revolutionist and progressive people and organisations to take urgent action in support of democratic rights and all those arrested.

● Messages of support go to [www.atilim2.org/index.php](http://www.atilim2.org/index.php)

## Programme of the League for the Fifth International £1.50 € 2.50 available in English and Turkish



All history proves that the capitalists will never relinquish their property peacefully – to claim otherwise in the age of 'Shock and Awe' is either hopeless naivety or wilful deception. There is only one way: their apparatus of state repression must be overthrown by force. The capitalists' monopoly of military power – armies, police and security forces, prison systems, civil servants, judiciaries – must be smashed to pieces and replaced with the rule of the working people themselves.

This can be done – the majority of humanity can cast off the tiny minority of parasites. It will take mass organisation, an unambiguous strategy and, when the hour strikes, courageous and ruthless action.

Some may baulk at this, but the alternative to revolution is not decades of undisturbed peace. Basing a global civilisation on the empowerment of a few thousand and the impoverishment of six billion is like lodging depth charges in the planetary core. If the logic of capitalism is left to unfold, our world will be torn apart by starvation, disease, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and war.

In the struggle against capitalism, greater energy is equivalent to greater humanity. For with the suppression of our exploiters and an end to the tyranny of profit, human history can truly begin.

# WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
- Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
- Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
- Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
- Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.

This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. Though

these parties still have roots in the working class, politically they defend capitalism. We fight for the unions to break from Labour and form for a new workers party. We fight for such a party to adopt a revolutionary programme and a Leninist combat form of organization.

We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must, therefore, be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a socialist political revolution is the only way to prevent their eventual collapse.

We reject the policies of class collaboration: "popular fronts" or a "democratic stage", which oblige the working class to renounce the fight for power today. We reject the theory of "socialism in one country". Only Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring victory in the age of imperialism and globalisation. Only a global revolution can consign capitalism to history.

With the internationalist and communist goal in our sights, proceeding along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International.

That is what Workers Power is fighting for. If you share these goals - join us.

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## WHAT'S ON

### NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS CONFERENCE

Sponsored by the RMT  
1.30am - 3.30pm Saturday 28 October  
Camden Centre, Bidborough Street  
London WC1H 9JE  
To register, email j.croy@rmt.org.uk  
or write to RMT, Unity House,  
39 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD

### CLIMATE CHANGE MARCH

2 noon Saturday 4 November  
Part of the international demonstrations  
Rally at US Embassy, Grosvenor Square,  
London  
March to Trafalgar Square at 1pm

### FIGHTING UNIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday 11 November, Shoreditch Town  
Hall, London. Registration fee £10 per  
delegate. Organising for Fighting Unions,  
100 Old Street, London E1 6JX.  
Email sam@respectcoalition.org or  
phone 020 7613 5624 for more details

## Anti-Imperialism

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## Marxism and Religion

### Against the persecution of Muslims

By Richard Brenner

Of all the writings of Karl Marx, the phrase that has entered most widely into popular awareness is his description of religion as the "opium of the people". These words aimed to explain not only the effect of religious ideas in dulling and obscuring the consciousness of working people of the society that oppresses and exploits us, but also the reason for the enduring popularity and depth of religious feeling among the people. In a world of suffering and alienation, religion offers hope and consolation – it numbs the pain of living in class society.

No wonder that religion is growing around the world today. When we add to this the fact that from Palestine and Lebanon to Iraq and Afghanistan, Muslim forces are putting up brave resistance to the invasion and occupation of their countries by US, British and Israeli forces, there is no doubt that Islam is exerting an ever greater influence over radical youth – especially of Asian and African origin – around the world.

Today there are many journalists and writers (such as Nick Cohen, David Aaronovitch or Christopher Hitchens) who, while claiming to be of the left, support the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and engage in attacks on the "threat of radical Islam". They reserve particular hatred for the left who combine the militant atheism of Marx with a resolute defence of Muslims against persecution and attack. How can these two things be combined, they ask. Is this, they imply, no more than an example of the cynicism and hypocrisy of the left, of a realpolitik prepared to sacrifice principle for short-term political gain?

In fact, revolutionary communists have always combined criticism of religion with defence of religious believers from persecution. Lenin's Bolsheviks vigorously defended the Jews and the non-conformist Christian sects from pogroms and repression by the Tsar, the Cossacks and the Orthodox church. The revolutionary Fourth International of Leon Trotsky struggled against anti-Semitism in the 1930s and wrote resistance to the murderous attacks on Jews in Europe into its programme in 1938, declaring anti-semitism to be "one of the more malignant convulsions of capitalism's death agony."

Today there is no doubt that the pro-war propaganda of the US and British government is targeting Muslims not only abroad but also at home – it is the modern-day equivalent of the anti-semitism that spread across Europe between 1880 and 1945. At the same time that the British and US imperialists aim

to conquer the Middle East and plunder its resources, the very people mounting resistance to them are presented as unthinking fanatics bent on the destruction of all that is civilised and good. So the cowardly campaign moves on, from Basra to Blackburn, as senior Labour Party figures such as Jack Straw demand that Muslim women cease to cover their faces and John Reid calls on Muslim parents to spy on their children for signs of radicalism.

This campaign against Muslims is designed to shift blame for the horrors in the Middle East from US and British policy onto its victims. It aims to terrify non-Muslim workers at home and present Muslim workers as the enemy, to divide the mass opposition to war and to prop up the weakening Labour vote by appealing to racist prejudices among whites.

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That is why it is atheist communists, not God-fearing Christians like Bush and Blair, who unconditionally defend the right of Muslim women to wear whatever they wish, including the veil if they choose. It is why we oppose racial profiling of air passengers, the random searches of Asians and Arabs on the streets of America and Britain, the demands on Muslims to "integrate" into white western culture, the constant dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda by the western media.

Certainly Marxists regard religious ideas as illusions. But they do not exist merely as a result of some inexplicable misunderstanding. They are an expression in the minds of human beings of real distress. Persecution does not free the persecuted from religious illusions but reinforces them, attaches them more strongly to genuine grievances that will persist for as long as class society exists.

By championing the right to practice religion free from persecution, communists aim to rouse downtrodden believers to struggle against the system that oppresses

them. At the same time we advance the ways and means through which oppression and exploitation can be brought to an end. To the religious believer who wishes to fight back against racism, imperialism and the US/British campaign against Islam, we pose a simple question: why is that the atheist communists support the fight against imperialism, while devout believers like Bush and Blair are in the forefront of the imperialist campaign? Plainly there is some force other than religion at work here – it is class struggle.

At the same time as opposing all persecution of religious believers, communists resist all privileges for religion, all persecution carried out in its name. Just as we support the right to wear hijab if a woman chooses to do so, so we support the right of women to choose *not* to cover the heads. We support the right to immediate divorce at the request of one party to a marriage, an end to the persecution and suppression of consensual sex outside marriage, an end to all bans on homosexuality, an end to all legitimisation of domestic violence against women. We oppose calls for blasphemy laws to ban criticism of religion. We vigorously fight for the right for atheists to promote their views – including in Islamic countries. We oppose all connections between religion and the state and fight for the disestablishment of all state religion. In particular, we oppose all provision of support for religious institutions from taxation. Just as we believe that all education should be publicly owned and controlled and oppose private schools, so we oppose any ownership and control of schools by religious organisations. Religion must be a private, voluntary affair – it must have no official privileges.

Communists believe, with Marx, that humans created god and not the other way round. As we wrote in 1993, in religious thinking, "qualities are taken from human social life – moral ideas, virtues – but then transformed into absolutes, turned into the qualities of an imaginary transcendent being whose perfection in turn condemns and annihilates the worth of real men and women" (*Trotskyist International* no. 12).

Therefore we aim not to abolish religion through a mere process of propaganda that will somehow dissuade people of the existence of God, but to struggle for the overthrow of the conditions that breed religious consolation and illusions. As Marx wrote: "The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs has as its condition the demand to give up a state of affairs that needs illusions."