

# workers power

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Monthly magazine of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

ria...France...Greece...Iceland...Rus

## GLOBAL FIGHTBACK AGAINST THE CRISIS



- It's their crisis – make them pay
- Don't let the bosses divide us
- Strike against the bosses, not against foreign workers
- TUC: call a national strike against job cuts and closures
- Link up with the strikes in Europe



League for the  
Fifth International

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## Bolivians win new rights

**B**olivians voted for a new constitution last month which, for the first time, gives rights to indigenous people. The debate over the constitution has divided the country, leading to violence and almost causing civil war on several occasions. But 60 per cent of Bolivians voted for the constitution – with opposition being strongest in the lowland areas where the right wing oligarchs and their fascist gangs operate.

Also, Bolivians voted by 75 per cent to limit future land ownership to 10,000 acres a person. Originally the law was to limit all land ownership but, in a concession to the right, president Evo Morales decided to leave existing holdings alone.

The Bolivian people have been campaigning since 2003 for a new constitution to enshrine more democratic and social rights and have now succeeded, despite the concessions and prevarications of Morales.

The Bolivian right will not respect the vote – they have spent the past three years beating and killing their opponents. The workers and peasants now need their own revolutionary workers' party to defend their gains. No more concessions – now is the time to go further, defeat the oligarchs and the multinationals and fight for socialism.

## Oxfam warns as hunger grows

**T**he international charity Oxfam has released a report saying that a worsening global food crisis endangers the lives of hundreds of millions, with a billion undernourished people – one in six humans – in need of urgent help as a result of volatile food prices and increasing energy and water scarcity.

The report blames climate change and “decades of underinvestment in agriculture” pointing out that while food prices have recently fallen, they are still well above previous levels and may rise sharply again soon.

Oxfam has pointed to food insecurity in Afghanistan, where war has displaced tens of thousands; in Zimbabwe, where Western sanctions have helped cause hyperinflation and five million depend on food aid; and countries like Ethiopia, Kenya and Mozambique, where privatisations and neo-liberal policies imposed by bodies like the IMF have made people especially vulnerable to droughts, poor harvests and rising prices.

But the crux of the problem is capitalism – the world produces enough food to feed the global population but it is not distributed equally. The economic crisis is going to exacerbate this inequality and the next few months will see more food riots, with growing anger and desperation as people fight to feed themselves.

## Yorkshire shop stewards meet

**O**n Saturday 31 January Yorkshire and Humber Shop Stewards Network held a successful day event with 35 trade unionists attending. They addressed the crisis and have begun to build a network of trade unionists in the region. There was sharp and pointed debate on the nationalist wildcat strike wave and whether trade unions should continue to support Labour.

The meeting unanimously agreed a proposal from a Workers Power member to set up local trade union coordinations to organise actions and solidarity around the crisis and to hold a regional May Day demonstration around the slogan: “We won’t pay for their crisis”. Coordinations, like the one in Leeds, need to be set up in towns and cities across the country.

Pete Johns from the Yorkshire Evening Post NUJ branch, spoke about their ballot for industrial action against job losses, while a CWU postal workers’ rep reported on his union’s current campaign against the privatisation of Royal Mail.

The meeting was lively and comradely. Clearly, there will be plenty of opportunities for the National Shop Stewards Network to get stuck into and grow in Yorkshire and Humberside.

# Police: an institution racist to the core

By Jeremy Dewar

**S**ir Paul Stephenson used the occasion of his appointment as Metropolitan police commissioner to pledge his intention to continue to “stop and search” black and Asian youth. He admitted the operations were “pretty intrusive” but, when asked by *The Guardian* if they would go on forever, he replied, “If it’s the right tactic to keep people safe, that’s exactly what we have got to do.”

### STOP AND SEARCH

Clearly, this is the kind of response that won the support of Labour’s home secretary Jacqui Smith and Tory mayor of London Boris Johnson, who jointly appointed him. But for those at the sharp end of the Met’s *Operation Blunt*, the massive stop and search clampdown launched supposedly in response to an increase in knife crime in the capital, it spells more harassment and fear on the streets.

Let’s look at the facts. Between May and December last year, 209,269 young people were stopped and searched by the police. During this time, black men were 5.3 times more likely to be interrogated than white youth and young Asian men 1.6 times more likely.

Yet, according to information released to *The Guardian*, only 4,223 knives were recovered by

these searches. The fact that only 7,355 arrests were also made simply reveals the truth that these personal raids are used as an excuse to randomly search black and ethnic minority people for whatever they can find.

At the same time, just two per cent of these arrests led to the recovery of knives, and 3.5 per cent to an arrest. The cops may have intended the code name *Operation Blunt* to refer to its public anti-knife initiative, but it serves as a useful metaphor for its effect on the community. That means 201,914 youths – 96.5 per cent of the total – were completely innocent.

### INSTITUTIONALLY RACIST?

It is now 10 years since the Macpherson report, which looked into the police mishandling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a 17-year-old black man, by racist thugs, branded the Met “institutionally racist”. Asked if he still thought this to be the case today, however, the head of the Equalities Commission Trevor Philips replied, “I don’t think so. That would imply that nothing has changed.”

But he is wrong: over 200,000 times wrong. How else could one explain the inherent racism in stop and search laws today?

But don’t just take our word for it – the National Black Police Association also says so. They point in particular to a press confer-

ence last August, when Stephenson turned on Asian officer, Tariq Ghaffur, who had just launched a discrimination claim against the force, and told him to “shut up” and “get on with the job”.

If the police commissioner reacts like that to one of his senior officers, imagine what he and most coppers would say to a young black suspect, who had been picked up and randomly searched.

The truth is that the police force is not neutral. It is an arm of the capitalist state, there to protect the interests of the British ruling class. And this means dividing the workers along racial lines in order to prevent united resistance, just as it involves attacking our demos and picket lines.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

We should intervene wherever the cops single out black and Asian people for harassment and demand our union leaders take a stance. We should demand an end to stop and search, which was introduced as an “exceptional measure” but is now being used routinely and indefinitely to harass black youth. And we should demand the sacking of all racist police officers, while arguing that the police force cannot be reformed – it needs to be dissolved.

## EDITORIAL

# Workers' struggles sweep the world

It is now clear to hundreds of millions that the banking crisis was just the opening of a massive global economic downturn.

A great world recession has begun, with scores of millions of jobs threatened. Not content with pocketing trillions in government bailouts, the bankers and the bosses are now demanding that workers be made to pay the price of the crisis.

A swath of job cuts and pay give-backs has been announced. The International Labour Organisation predicts 51 million job losses and "painful pay cuts" across the world.

But workers are not taking this lying down. A wave of rebellion and resistance has begun.

A general strike in France on 29 January saw millions down tools and flood out of the factories and offices and onto the streets. The slogan of the day sums up what workers everywhere are thinking: "We won't pay for the capitalists' crisis."

In Russia workers are marching across the country against unemployment and the effects of the downturn. A huge demonstration in the eastern port of Vladivostok called for an end to the repressive regime of Vladimir Putin.

Across Eastern Europe, countries that claimed to have benefited from the restoration of capitalism after the collapse of the USSR are now suffering at the hands of the market system's crisis. From Latvia and Lithuania to Hungary, Ukraine and Bulgaria, there are marches and street battles as masses of workers refuse to pay the price of a crisis they never caused.

In Greece young people, workers and farmers are marching in the streets and fighting with the police.

In Ireland workers at Waterford Crystals have occupied their factory rather than let the bosses shut it down.

Even in Iceland the collapse of the banks tipped the whole economy over the edge: now workers and youth are taking to the streets, the government has fallen and a left-wing anticapitalist party is ahead in the polls.

The new anticapitalist party just

launched in France is winning serious support from workers and youth sick of the insecurity and injustice of the capitalist system that can't guarantee jobs and a decent living to working people.

What about Britain? The country's huge dependence on debt and finance has left the economy extremely vulnerable. The IMF predicts that the UK economy will contract by 2.8 per cent this year alone; unemployment is expected to reach three million on par with the Thatcher years.

In the steel industry, car industry, retail, on the tube, in banking and finance, every day seems to bring yet another announcement of massive job cuts.

But in Britain our trade union leaders have not called a single action against job losses. Tied to Gordon Brown, they have not even called a march, let alone strike action, against the jobs massacre.

Now anger has erupted into action, with a wave of unofficial strikes of construction workers in oil refineries and power plants across the UK. But with no clear lead, with no loud voice blaming the capitalists for the job losses, with no large socialist party and after years of right wing papers blaming foreigners and migrants for Britain's ills, the oil workers are blaming the wrong target.

It is a terrible fact that the wave of wildcat strikes is being directed not against the bosses, but against workers.

The strikers are opposing the employment of Italian and Portuguese workers in Lincoln. They are demanding "British Jobs for British Workers" – a clear and wrong-headed call for British citizens – to be given privileged access to jobs over and above foreign workers.

If this demand grows, it will divide the working class and terribly weaken the potential for a real fightback against the crisis. There are two million migrant workers in the UK – the task of the rest of the working class movement is to fight for their pay to be levelled up, to oppose all job losses and to mount a united fightback.

The last thing we need is for the

workers of every country to turn on one another. If every single foreign worker in the UK was thrown out of work, it wouldn't stop a single job cut. The bosses would literally be laughing all the way to the bank as we fought among ourselves.

That's why Workers Power opposes the nationalist strike in the oil refineries and opposes the reactionary slogan of "British Jobs for British Workers." The working class is international and needs unity across borders against the bosses.

Instead of going along with these dangerous slogans, our trade union leaders should call a national demonstration and a national strike against all job losses and all pay cuts.

Workers facing closures should occupy their workplaces – like the workers in Waterford in Ireland. We demand that instead of giving hundreds of billions to the banks, Brown should nationalise all firms declaring redundancies. Across industry, job sharing with no loss of pay could absorb unemployment, cutting the hours and not the jobs.

The worldwide crisis of capitalism is once again spurring workers in our millions to take action against the bosses and their system. Given a lead, workers would quickly see through the lies of the right wing press and realise that it is the bosses, not their fellow workers, who are to blame.

But who will give this lead? Across the country there are many thousands who see the need for working class action and who don't buy the lie that foreign workers are to blame; they need to be organised in a united political party. The socialist groups, the anti-racist trade union militants, and the thousands of youth who marched against war – they are the ones who can set up a new party.

Many on the left agree but are worried that such an initiative might fail because of past mistakes. But time doesn't stand still. If the crisis is not to be exploited by right wingers with divisive fake answers to the crisis, a new socialist party will need to be formed without delay.

The situation is pregnant with opportunities and dangers. The time to act is now.

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## ENERGY WORKERS

# No to the nationalist strikes

Around 3,000 construction workers at oil refineries around the country are taking wildcat, unofficial strike action. Another 900 workers at Sellafeld nuclear power plant may join them on Monday 2 February.

Normally *Workers Power* would energetically support strike action by workers – including unofficial strikes taken without the formal support of the union leaders.

But this strike is different. We unreservedly oppose it.

Why? Because the strikers' target is not their employers but 100 Italian and Portuguese workers at the Lindsey oil refinery in North Killingholme, Lincolnshire.

## BRITISH JOBS FOR BRITISH WORKERS?

The strike wave of construction workers in energy and oil refineries started on Wednesday 28 January. Eight hundred Unite members at Lindsey oil refinery in North Killingholme, Lincolnshire walked out in protest at the employment of 100 Italian and Portuguese workers, with the prospect of at least 200 more joining them, for the construction of a desulphurisation unit. The workers are being housed in makeshift accommodation aboard a ship moored at Grimsby docks.

No British worker has yet been sacked. The employers claim these are new jobs. But they were not advertised locally at a time when hundreds of construction workers with the relevant skills were unemployed because of the slump in the building trade. The migrant workers were employed under the rules of the European Union posted workers' directive, which allows a company – in this case, Italian based IREM – in any EU state to use its own employees on temporary projects within the EU.

As we go to press, there are unconfirmed media reports that IREM says the foreign workers' wages are in line with those of UK workers and that they had negotiated a deal with Unite. It is claimed that Bernard McAuley, regional officer of Unite, attended three meetings in January and secured a deal that the Italians would get the same pay as the British engineers, electricians and pipe-fitters on the site. A Unite spokesman confirmed to the press: "Bernard did negotiate to get a properly agreed deal for the



Workers outside Total's Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire

Italian workers."

Shop steward Garry Scales told the BBC: "We are angry that workers have been taken on from outside the UK when people here are out of work." Another shop steward, Kenny Ward, was even more explicit: "There are thousands in this country that are victims to this discrimination, this victimisation of the British worker", and Bernard McAuley said at a rally at Lindsey: "There is sufficient unemployed, skilled labour wanting the right to work on that site and they are demanding the right to work on that site."

Of course workers are quite right to be angry about mounting unemployment. The unions should have been giving a militant lead over the last year, when unemployment began to rise. They should be calling marches and strikes for the right to work – for jobs for every unemployed worker. Instead union leaders have accepted lay-offs and closures, with fatalistic sighs of regret.

What is wrong is to take the small number of jobs on offer on this project (300) as the grounds for a fight with fellow workers on nationalist lines. To present the whole issue as one of a conflict with immigrants is to direct the struggle in an utterly reactionary direction.

Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of Unite, is quoted on the union's website: "The union is doing

everything in its power to ensure that employers end this immoral, potentially illegal and politically dangerous practice of excluding UK workers from some construction projects."

This may be more cautious (hypocritical) than the homemade placards of some of the protesters, but its only possible meaning is the same: British labour should have first refusal of any job and to hell with the rights of migrant labour. Simpson's only real difference is that he wants to shield the Labour government from the anger of workers – and if that means indirectly deflecting it towards "foreign" workers, then so be it.

The TUC and the big unions should not be expressing sympathy with nationalist slogans but getting off their backsides and launching a militant campaign to defend every job. They could start by calling a nationwide general strike and mass demonstration like the French unions did on Thursday 28 January. A few simple clear slogans should be raised:

- Not a single job must go.
- Jobs for all the unemployed.
- No pay cuts.
- No to subcontracting and outsourcing.
- No to racism and nationalist divisions – for workers' unity.
- The bosses and the bankers should pay for the crisis – not the workers.

## LEFT COVER FOR NATIONALISM

Some on the left, to their shame, support the action under the guise of the right to work.

The Communist Party of Britain's *Morning Star* blamed it all on the "the bosses' freedom to exploit as enshrined in EU law" (as if British law outlaws this), which, it claimed in shocking nationalist language "has effectively deprived British workers of the right to seek employment in their own country" (editorial 30 January).

This is a shameless whipping up of nationalism. There are two million unemployed in Britain. No more than a few thousand jobs are taken up under this particular EU directive. It is overwhelmingly British bosses who are destroying livelihoods and wrecking communities, but they are being let off the hook by the CPB, who want a national solution, rather than a class solution.

What would the CPB say if German Communists launched a campaign against British workers working on contracts in Germany? This policy is the bitter fruit of their long-term anti-EU mania, the belief that they can unite with progressive British bosses to build up industry and jobs on this little island. For these false communists "Workers of the world unite" has been dropped for "Workers and patriotic bosses of the UK unite!"

George Galloway, Respect MP, has denounced "attempts to con-

fuse and mis-report, the fundamental issue that's led thousands of construction workers to defy the anti-union laws and walk off the job." Their objectives, he claims, is simply "decent jobs, open for all to apply for." (*Respect Renewal* website). Of course the underlying motives of the workers are indeed a concern for jobs and a fear of mass unemployment, but the target they have chosen and the slogan they have adopted are disastrously wrong ones.

#### LEFT AVOIDS STANDING FIRM

Galloway is backed up by his fellow *Respect* member and challenger in the forthcoming general secretary election in Unite, Jerry Hicks, who also supports the strikes, whitewashing their nationalism. He says: "The employers have deliberately and actively been looking for ways to exploit cheap labour," and links the Lindsey strike to widespread union-busting and blacklisting of activists at construction sites in the energy sector – see *Socialist Unity* website.

Yet no one can show that anyone has been replaced by cheaper labour, that any union agreement has been broken, or that derecognition of a union has taken place. That being the case – and given the overwhelming calls for British jobs for British workers – it is clear that Hicks is simply trying to avoid having to stand firm against the reactionary movement.

Hicks has been involved in the wider, shop steward led campaign against subcontractors since last November. He claims this has been instrumental to the strike's spreading to the Shell gas plant and Grangemouth oil refinery in Scotland, AES Kilroot power station in Northern Ireland, Aberthaw power station and Milford Haven gas terminal in Wales, and the Marchwood plant on the south coast. Of course a campaign against employing non-union contract labour at levels below those agreed with the unions has to be fought,

But surely, if these are the issues and not the nationalist right of British workers to seek work in "their own" country, as the *Morning Star* so foully puts it, then Hicks could have chosen a much clearer target than the employment of an isolated group of European workers. Instead, the "little Englanders and downright racists" that Galloway correctly warns against are given an open field to champion the movement.

Despite their militancy, their rank and file organisation and their real grievances, the workers who have taken up this strike and the shop stewards who have worked to organise the wildcat action have chosen the wrong slogans and the wrong objective. It is plain from the placards and the interviews that the workers on the picket lines believe "foreign" workers are taking their jobs, and that the solution to this is for

these and all future jobs to be transferred to British workers thrown on the dole in the recession.

As the recession begins to bite, workers may be deflected from fighting the real enemy – the capitalist class and its loyal Labour government – and instead turn on the millions of migrant workers in the UK. That is certainly what *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Express* want them to do. But these workers are not the cause of mass unemployment. The bosses, who were happy to make millions in profit from whatever source of labour it could during the upturn, are now cutting and running.

There is no evidence that we are aware of that the workers involved are active racists, let alone influenced by the fascist British Nationalist Party. Nevertheless, it is no surprise that the BNP has been quick to try and capitalise on the confusion caused by the lack of clear leadership.

It is tragic that the first sign of a militant fightback against the effects of the recession has been misdirected. To those who would like to attribute this to some inherent "backwardness" of the workers, we say: no, it is due to the appalling leadership that the British workers' movement is saddled with. We should not forget who imported into the labour movement the BNP-coined slogan "British jobs for British workers". It was Gordon Brown at the 2007 Labour Party Conference.

To this must be added the support for such nonsense by the likes of Unite's Simpson and the TUC's Brendan Barber. Eager supporters too are the union-jack waving CPB. And bringing up the rear – a little shamefaced it is true, but full of excuses and cover-ups for the strikes and their slogans – are *Respect* and the Socialist Party. Their self-appointed task is to shield the strikes from internationalist criticism.

The Socialist Party, in a weaselly-worded statement on its website, says: "The main issue is not that "foreign" workers are being brought in by the employers, as reported in the media, but that there are thousands of unemployed construction workers." It adds that it has one of its members on the six-person strike committee.

They say they are "raising the demand that any worker should be part of the national engineering construction agreements that cover the wages and conditions on the sites".

In fact any socialist on such a committee would call for the committee to renounce the call for British jobs for British workers and – if this were not carried in a mass meeting – would oppose the action and speak for its immediate end, while opposing any attempt by the bosses to use the opportunity to smash the union.

As Leon Trotsky explained in 1939: "A

trade union led by reactionary fakers organises a strike against the admission of Negro workers into a certain branch of industry. Shall we support such a shameful strike? Of course not. But let us imagine that the bosses, utilising the given strike, make an attempt to crush the trade union and to make impossible in general the organised self-defence of the workers. In this case we will defend the trade union as a matter of course in spite of its reactionary leadership."

The Socialist Workers Party, to its great credit, has taken a principled line. But whatever different groupings' attitudes to these strikes, it is the failure of the reformist and centrist Left to create a new mass party of the working class over the last decade of Labour rule that has left these workers without a clear anticapitalist programme of action and open to the poison of nationalism.

#### POLITICS AND INTERNATIONALISM

It is not surprising that workers' first serious rebellion in this new period of conflict should display the terrible political legacy of the previous period. Nor is it fatal, as long as it is fought. But it is a sharp lesson, a major wake up call to the left.

We need to actively promote internationalism: British workers have a hundred times more in common with Italian and Portuguese workers, with Polish and African workers, than they do with any of their bosses. We need to give this organised expression too by building links for common struggle across national borders.

We need international rank and file trade unions, free from any bureaucratic stranglehold; we need common actions across Europe, like those planned during the meeting of the G20.

We need a new working class party. The time for delay is well and truly over – the absence of a new mass working class party is no longer just a missed opportunity but is now a terrible danger.

The whole left should throw off its caution and bruised feelings following the failed initiatives of recent years and convene a conference for a new party as soon as possible. This has to be part of a process of bringing the British class struggle closer together with the struggles of workers in Europe and beyond. In splendid isolation, all the reactionary vapours of British national ideology will be far hard to fight. But hand-in-hand with the great struggles of the more class conscious French, Italian and Spanish workers, a new internationalist and anticapitalist workers' resistance can take shape here too.

This can and must be part of the fight for a new International – a world working class party able to provide revolutionary anticapitalist political leadership in these times of great crisis.

## WORKPLACE

# Jobs massacre hits the UK

Unemployment is back in the news in a big way, with the *Financial Times* reporting 75,000 global job losses in a single day last month. As the jobless total in Britain tops two million and thousands joining them every day, **John Bowman** and **Jeremy Dewar** ask what can be done

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that “global unemployment in 2009 could increase over 2007 by a range of 18 million to 30 million workers, and more than 50 million if the situation continues to deteriorate.” This is on top of 11 million jobs destroyed last year.

That could mean 230 million people – 7.1 per cent of the world’s workforce – will be looking for work, according to the report, *Global Employment Trends 2009*. Director general, Juan Somavia, said: “The ILO’s message is realistic, not alarmist.”

This could push another 200 million workers into extreme poverty, while swelling the ranks of the “working poor” to 1.4 billion – just under half the world’s workforce – as wages are depressed. But it is the West that will witness the fastest growth in joblessness, with Britain particularly vulnerable.

### DOLE QUEUE BRITAIN

Job cuts are taking place in every sector of the UK economy, with more household company names tumbling down and layoffs being announced every day – at the rate of 1,500 a week and accelerating.

Government statistics show unemployment accelerating sharply, with 1.92 million people of work in the three months up to November 2008. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber pointed out that these “figures do not take into account the redundancies announced over the past eight weeks at companies like Woolworths, Santander, Barclays, Denby, Land Rover, JCB, Burberry, Zavvi, Grattan and Empire Direct.”

At the same time, the number of job vacancies have fallen to 530,000, the lowest figure since records began in 2001, busting the lie that the unemployed are just work-shy or lazy.

The finance and business services sector has been the hardest hit, with 72,000 workers being shown the door in the three months to November. Most recent-



ly, Spanish bank Santander has called for voluntary redundancies at Alliance & Leicester as part of a plan to cut its staff at its UK operations by 1,900.

Even those banks that have been bailed out by the government have cut thousands of jobs. Royal Bank of Scotland, in which the Labour government has a 70 per cent shareholding, wants to shed 3,000 jobs; Lloyds TSB, 43 per cent government owned, has announced its intention to make £1.5 billion efficiency savings, following its takeover of HBOS. Since the most variable part of any company’s costs is its wage bill, expect this figure to translate into many thousands of job losses.

### MANUFACTURING BODYBLOW

Plus, as this sector contracts, with fewer transactions taking place and the credit crunch squeezing firms that seek to renew their loans, so manufacturing, distribution and retail companies feel the pinch. And they are passing the pinch on to their workers.

Manufacturing jobs fell by 86,000 to 2.82 million in the quarter to November compared to the previous year – another new low, the smallest total since records began in 1978.

These losses could leave experienced industrial workers with few options for alternative work in towns where local economies are based on large plants.

One of the biggest culls was at Corus, the huge, privatised steel

company, which is downsizing its workforce by 10 per cent – 3,500 jobs. Workers are incensed because the company has been making huge profits recently and management openly admit that the current round of cuts and closures are designed to boost profits by £200 million a year – not cut losses.

Management has decided to “mothball” an entire plant in Llanwern in Newport, Wales, leaving it derelict for the next two or three years.

The tragedy of Llanwern is that the unions, Community and Unite, first nearly made a deal to accept pay cuts, then signed up to an agreement to send half the workforce home on half pay and accept a 30 per cent cut for the rest. But none of this saved the mill. This shows that conciliation – offering “givebacks” to the bosses in exchange for job security – does not save jobs, but simply encourages the employer to be bolder and take more.

And it’s not just the big firms: small and medium-sized manufacturing companies are shedding staff at the fastest rate since the early 1990s, according to research from the CBI. Thirty-eight per cent of UK firms surveyed cut jobs during the final three months of 2008. The bosses’ federation expects the first quarter of 2009 to be even tougher.

### WOMEN AND YOUTH HIT HARDEST

Massive retail chains, such as Woolworths, MFI, World of Leather, Zavvi, Whittards, Adams,

and Priceless, have either closed or announced they are in serious trouble.

Outside the larger cities, town councils and local businesses warn that if the big shops disappear in smaller market towns, independents will be the next casualties as shoppers follow the brands to larger centres. Some research institutes have estimated that over 100,000 retail jobs will be lost in 2009.

Job cuts in retail spell a disaster for underpaid and badly treated workers. Last year, 53 per cent of new workers in retail were paid the minimum wage. With many workers on flexible and zero hours contracts, these workers have no savings and barely enough money to last a few days.

Women and single parent households will be hardest hit. Martin Mansfield, Wales TUC’s general secretary, pointed out that in this recession, women will be particularly disadvantaged as jobs are lost over all economic sectors, not just in male-dominated construction and manufacturing. In fact, women are losing their jobs at 1.5 times the rate as men – and there is evidence that this is leading them to take on more, but worse paid, part-time work to compensate.

Union leaders have been notable for their passivity over the closures. The website of Usdaw, the shop workers union, reads like a bad news bulletin with officials expressing their “shock and distress”. But how many times can you be

shocked by the same old news? Surely our leaders should be preparing a fightback.

#### START THE FIGHTBACK

Instead of feigning surprise when firms declare short time, lay-offs, redundancies or outright closures, why not demand that they be compelled to open its books to workers' inspection?

Let's see where the money has gone or if - like Corus - they're using the recession as cover to boost profits. If the work isn't there then let's reduce the hours with no loss of pay and impose a 35-hour maximum working week.

The most urgent thing is to stop closures or workers going down the road. Here there is no better way than to occupy the workplace - take the bosses property hostage, open managements' records, call on local trade unionists and youth to join the struggle and defend the plant against the police and the courts, including taking solidarity action if they move to expel the workers.

If firms really are bankrupt, then we should demand the government nationalises them, without compensation to those who ran them into the ground, and place under the control of the workers, who know how to run it best.

Many commentators argue for a drastic restructuring of the British economy, but their plans always centre on workers sacrificing jobs, wages, and pension rights to restore profitability. Why don't we draw up a workers' restructuring plan, democratically, based on meeting social need?

It should centre on new houses - say 200,000 a year for a start, new schools, colleges, hospitals and clinics and new public transport links. This should easily employ out of work building workers and factories can reorient to equipping them all. New staff and apprentices can be trained in the colleges.

And who can fight for this? The employed and jobless together. Both have a common cause in stopping cuts and closures, fighting for more council homes, schools, hospitals to put the unemployed to work and improve our communities and environment.

Capitalism has proved itself incapable of providing for the needs of millions of workers being turned out of their jobs. It's now time for trade unions to unite with the unemployed and fight for an end to the system that regularly visits such misery on us all.

# Strikes can stop mail privatisation

Forget headlines about the people's bank, writes a *CWU rep*, Peter Mandelson is pushing through privatisation, 50,000 job losses and wage cuts

**B**usiness secretary and architect of New Labour, Lord Mandelson, has wasted no time in preparing the postal service for partial sell-off - and with it the further erosion of workers' pay and conditions.

The Communication Workers Union leadership launched an early day motion (EDM) to oppose the move and gained over 100 MPs and peers to back it.

This is good as far as it goes - which is nowhere near far enough. It gives Mandelson the opportunity to try and defuse the campaign by announcing that threatened post offices could offer a range of cheap banking services and thus be saved from closure.

#### NATIONAL STRIKE ACTION

There is an alternative. Decisive mass action can trump the massive pressure from the City of London for privatisation. We can start

with protest strikes, but they will need to be swiftly turned into an all-out indefinite strikes to succeed. We have the wildcat tradition - we know we can do it.

But it is rank and file union reps and members that will have to take the lead. Now is the time for workplace and town meetings, where strike committees can be elected to pressurise the leadership and prepare the membership.

Will the courts rule this illegal? Sure, they did that to us in October 2007, but a strike against privatisation would be popular with millions of workers facing similar cuts and closures, effectively giving a lead to unions. If the judge ruled against us, we could rally the most militant parts of the labour movement behind us in defiance.

Finally, we need a political solution to the threat of privatisation. We should demand Labour closes the postal market - which was

always rigged in favour of the private sector - and nationalises TNT, UK Mail and the others without compensation. The postal service could then be run by workers in the industry and working class customers, with pricing, delivery and collection determined according to need, rather than what turns a profit.

If Mandelson claims he favours a "people's bank", why not a "people's mail" service?

We predict that Labour would never take such socialist measures, which is why we support the unions founding a new workers' party. But so long as the CWU and other unions are affiliated to Labour, our leaders should fight within it for working class policies.

- No sell-off!
- Close the postal market - nationalise the private carriers!
- For strike action to stop privatisation!

# NUJ leader says he will defy anti-union laws

By Joy Macready

**N**ational Union of Journalists general secretary Jeremy Dear told more than 140 NUJ members at a jobs summit on 24 January that he would back any action in defence of jobs, including occupations, walk-outs and wildcat strikes.

Now is a critical time in the media industry. The Financial Times has announced 80 jobs to be axed; Newsquest in Scotland plans to cut 70 posts; ITV is slashing 500 editorial positions; and Trinity Mirror is imposing a pay freeze and announced massive cuts to its local papers.

And yet the company figures tell a different story. ITV made £311 million profit in 2007; Trinity Mir-

ror returned over £520 million to shareholders in the past 10 years; and FT announced a 20 per cent increase in profits last year.

#### ACTION TO SAVE JOBS

At the summit union executive members reported a wave of strike ballots in the next few weeks, such as at the Financial Times, Yorkshire Post, and Shropshire Newspapers.

The summit unanimously adopted a motion focusing on four proposals:

1. Industrial action across the media, as well as other activities such as a recruitment drives.
2. A union-wide day of action.
3. Co-ordinating action with Bectu, Unite and other media unions.
4. Linking up nationally and inter-

nationally with other workers fighting back against job losses. The task of militants working in the media must be to ensure the motion is implemented to the full. The NEC now has a clear mandate and should call a day of action soon - linking up with other unions to generalise the fightback. The lesson of the past few years is that we need determined and sustained industrial action, up to and including all-out indefinite strikes, if we are to shift the employers.

That's why rank and file members have to take control of the campaign and not rely on the union tops, even when they are talking a good fight. Time to turn words into action!

• For more on the Jobs Summit: <http://workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1820,0,0,1,0>

## ECONOMY

# Global recession deepens as economic crisis spreads

The future looks bleak for the world economy as bailout plans fail and the crisis spreads to every corner of the globe. **Richard Brenner** argues that we must fight to ensure that the bankers and bosses are made to pay for a crisis caused by capitalism, not the workers

**I**t is now clear that the scale of the global recession is vast and that in every country, workers are confronted with the urgent need to fight back against job losses and real pay cuts.

The International Monetary Fund warns that in 2009 the world is heading for the first year of zero economic growth since 1945 and the devastation of the Second World War. As many as 51 million jobs could go, warns the International Labour Organisation, bringing official global unemployment to 240 million by the end of this year. ILO director general Juan Somavia warned of “painful” pay cuts which “will erode the real wages of many workers, particularly the low-wage and poorer households.”

In the USA, the world’s largest economy, output is plummeting. Figures for the fourth quarter of 2008 revealed a staggering 3.8 per cent fall in gross domestic product when compared to the last quarter of 2007 – the worst decline since the depths of the Reagan-Thatcher recession in 1982.

In November a further 500,000 workers were axed – in December another 500,000. All in all 2008 saw 2.6 million US workers lose their jobs. Quite apart from the outright misery this brings for them, their families and their communities, it has also massively aggravated the crisis by reducing spending on consumer goods and increasing still further the number of workers defaulting on their mortgages. This works like a vicious spiral.

In the last quarter companies’ spending on infrastructure like software fell by 28 per cent – cuts that haven’t yet filtered through into the growth figures. Yet despite all these cuts in jobs and other areas of spending it seems companies have still not cut enough to keep pace with falling demand. Despite all the cuts, stocks of unsold goods actually rose sharply in the last



Russian workers demonstrate against government reaction to global recession

three months of 2008, so we can expect even deeper declines to come.

In Europe, Deutsche Bank predicts that the entire 16-nation Eurozone will contract by 2.8 per cent this year. In industry the picture was even grimmer. Eurozone industrial production was down by 7.7 per cent in November compared to a year before – the worst fall on record. Unemployment in the 27 states of the EU is expected to rise to 8.7 per cent this year and 9.5 per cent in 2010.

In Germany, the biggest European economy, GDP contracted by 2 per cent in the final quarter of 2008 – the collapse of its export markets and the falling value of the dollar delivering a really fast decline. All major economists predict a fall of between 2 per cent and 2.8 per cent in 2009: far and away Germany’s worst performance since 1945.

Italy reported that in November industrial production fell by nearly 10 per cent – Italian car manufacturing fell by a staggering 46.4 per cent. And the Bank of Spain

announced a 1.1 per cent decline in the last quarter of 2008, accelerating from its third quarter decline of 0.2 per cent. The government now predicts a decline of 1.6 per cent this year.

In Asia, the picture was just as grim if not grimmer. In Japan, the world’s second biggest economy, industrial output declined 9.6 per cent in December – the biggest contraction since records began. Kaoru Yosano, Japan’s Economics Minister, called the situation ‘unprecedented’ and said the drop in industrial output is “likely to continue”. Job losses are rising, with 2.7 million out of work, 400,000 more joining the dole queue last year.

In the previously fast-developing economies of China and India, which were ceaselessly held up by the capitalist press and economists as examples of the dynamism and healthy future of the market system, growth is also slowing sharply.

In 2007, at the peak of the credit-fuelled boom in the West, with cheap exports flooding out of

China’s new factories in the coastal provinces, GDP grew by 13 per cent – following five years of growth at 10 per cent and over. Last year it fell to 9 per cent, but the fourth quarter of 2008 recorded growth of just 6.8 per cent. The rate of decline is fast: China’s imports and exports actually declined in November 2008, with imports falling by more than 17 per cent.

The picture across what the capitalists hopefully call ‘emerging markets’ is similarly bad: the IMF says that growth in ‘emerging and developing’ economies is expected to fall from 6.25 per cent in 2008 to 3.25 per cent in 2009. This should finally shatter the so-called ‘decoupling’ thesis, which fondly imagined that fast growth in India and China would be sufficient to ‘take up the slack’ of a fall in production in the USA and maybe even save the world economy from a deep recession.

Can the capitalists quickly recover from this steep global decline? It doesn’t look like it.

Even during the credit-fuelled



boom and bubble of the period 2004-2007, real industrial production in the USA was declining, and this left huge numbers of workers with falling real wages unable to pay their mortgages. The collapse of the mortgage market punctured all the credit instruments that US (and global) banks and finance houses had secured on a steady flow of mortgage repayments and rising prices. This paralysed the banking system, with banks withdrawing credit from businesses and consumers alike.

Ever more companies found themselves unable to refinance – ever more ordinary people tightened their belts and bought fewer basic and luxury goods. The Western governments attempted to stave off recession by cutting interest rates down to almost zero and letting the dollar and the pound plummet in value – exporting recession to export led economies around the world. The sharp decline in world trade that resulted has further pushed companies into declining production and even bankruptcy – discouraging banks from lending to businesses whose future is uncertain. All the trillions given to the banks won't force them to lend to companies and people who they don't think will pay it back – so all the bank bailout plans have failed to get the capitalist economies moving again.

The underlying cause for the falling profitability that hit US industry and can now be seen around the world is what Marxists call the 'over-accumulation of capital'. As we have shown in article after article since as early as March 2007, the underlying tendency for the rate of profit to fall appears every seven to 10 years in the form of a crisis in which there is 'too much' capital – not enough of which can be invested to make a worthwhile profit in capitalist terms. This leads to a withdrawal of credit and then a destruction of 'excess' capital – companies, plants, equipment, goods and workers' jobs – until the conditions for sufficiently profitable production are restored.

A struggle then begins over who will pay the price of the destruction (or 'devaluation') of capital: the bosses, or the workers. Sometimes the bosses fight among themselves, forcing other countries to bear or share the burden. Sometimes, tragically, the workers even fight among themselves, as is happening in the reactionary strikes in Britain for 'British Jobs for British Workers.' But very often, the capitalists and the workers square up to each other in fights over jobs, pay, services and conditions.

It is now clear that the USA began its downturn in late 2006, as repossession soared, house prices fell and the projected profits of non-financial corporations declined sharply. Yet at first the US and UK financial and monetary

policymakers were sanguine; they imagined that the same or similar devices they had deployed in 1998 and 2000-2001 could be utilised again either to offset recession or to switch the impact of devaluation elsewhere once more. The first inkling that this was unlikely to work emerged in March 2007 when the crash of the Shanghai stock exchange was followed by a sharp fall in share prices on western exchanges. Attention focused on the vulnerability of US policy's assumption of a continued deflationary effect of Chinese development. As output prices from China rose sharply in April 2007, realisation set in that the period of temporary equilibrium that had created simultaneous cheap credit without inflation was coming to an end.

Bond markets and then credit markets focused on the long-term impact of the new inflationary environment in driving up commercial and inter-bank interest rates. They realised that this would aggravate the mortgage repayments crisis in the USA, and that this meant that a vast proportion of mortgage-backed lending that has expanded exponentially in the boom was chronically overvalued. The credit crunch ensued, banks ceased lending and there was a dash for the highest quality money, driving banks first into a crisis of liquidity and then into a crisis of solvency. This fed back into corporate and consumer spending. Aggressive state refinancing of the financial sector began, bank runs and bailouts ensued.

Central bank interest rate cuts and recapitalisations failed to restore credit lines. The process continued to deepen and spread for over a year, culminating in the great collapse of September-October 2008 and the historic (and criminal) \$3 trillion socialisation of banking losses in the Paulson and Darling plans, matched and followed around the world. None of these measures – including even outright nationalisations and the purchase of government majority stakes in the leading UK clearing banks – forced banks to re-extend credit. Now, as many non-financial corporations face falling profits and approach their decennial refinancing rounds, cheap credit is simply not available, massively exacerbating the trend towards corporate bankruptcy and collapse, as we see in the effective collapse of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

The 'stimulus packages' announced by Obama and Brown show no sign of being capable of acting as anything other than a weak parachute slightly slowing the tempo of descent. The crisis of national finances being created by the vast expansion of state debt to finance the bank bailouts and the stimulus packages will have no appreciable effect on the scale of devaluation in progress – nor can it halt a massive rise in unemployment without further undermining national currency and even hugely limiting the

ability of the next recovery phase to restore equilibrium of stability. The crisis in China, India and Russia will heavily impact on world trade and dispels for good the illusion that 'decoupling' will allow 'emerging markets' to 'take up the slack' of a collapse in US profits, outputs and consumption.

### CLASS STRUGGLE

The epic scale and visibility of the bank bailout strikes quite a contrast with the demands being made on Labour and the refusal to commit the public finances to the protection of jobs, pay and services. In Germany, France, Spain and Ireland students are marching. In Italy and Greece the youth rebellion is feeding into a workers' strike movement as one-day general strikes take place against the impact of the crisis. In France, 2.5 million workers took to the streets to say 'we won't pay for the bosses' crisis'. This shows that notwithstanding the chronic crisis of proletarian leadership, working class resistance will impede the ability of capital to effect devaluation at the speed it requires: though the stranglehold of the reformist bureaucracy may allow givebacks in wages and job cuts to go through in many places.

The conclusion to be drawn is that this crisis cannot be reduced in impact or switched away from the metropolises as before: it is a powerful world recession. What is more, there are no signs that it could be brought to a swift conclusion because of the volume of overaccumulated capital, the removal of previously effective policy options, the continuing restriction of the credit system and the currency crisis. No single mighty world hegemon exists that could swiftly restructure the world market and re-establish a new expansionary equilibrium. There is every reason to expect a very severe world recession, one that will take years to complete its devaluing business, and that the new global economic environment is one in which the next recovery phase will be anaemic and weak.

The one great factor that can speed capital's restoration of equilibrium by assisting them in making the workers pay the price is the reformist political and trade union bureaucracy: the effect of social democratic, Stalinist and populist-nationalist bureaucracy in demobilising the resistance or even diverting it down tragic nationalist and reactionary dead ends. We are well aware that unless their hold is broken, the working class will be unable to convert its resistance into a revolutionary challenge for power and the overthrow of capital – but we do not for one minute imagine that in each of the main centres of class struggle, the bureaucracy will be able to abolish resistance altogether. It is to this contradiction and this political struggle within the heart of the struggling mass-

## EUROPE FIGHTS BACK

On 29 January 2.5 million workers struck and huge numbers marched in 200 towns and cities right across France to protest against the consequences of the economic crisis and against the “reforms” being imposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy. Called by all the trade union federations, with an unusual degree of unity, the general strike has been a clear success and has put the working class, its anger, and its demands to the centre of the political life.

In Paris 300,000 workers marched from the historical Bastille square. The contingents were very diverse. Huge demos also took place in Marseille, Toulouse and Bordeaux. While the main forces came from the public sector (teachers, health workers, postal workers, transports, public services), many private sector workers joined the demo, some of them for the first time in their life. Unusual sectors like helicopter pilots, Paris stock exchange workers and ski-lift operators also joined the strike, proving the breadth of the discontent. Thousands of youth from the banlieues joined the demonstrations.

According to opinion polls, more than two-thirds of the public supported the strike. Anger against Sarkozy and its government, and more generally against capitalism, were palpable in the demonstrations. A few months ago, Sarkozy had declared, “today, when there is a strike, nobody notices it”. Today, millions have given him his answer.

What are the reasons of this powerful day of strikes and street mobilisations? The first reason is the fact that million of workers are worried about the effect of the economic crises. While technically France has avoided sliding into a recession in the last quarter of 2008 by a few tenths of a point, the unemployment figures have soared by 100,000 recently. Production in several automobile plants has been suspended for a few weeks, sometimes for over a month. Other factories are simply being shut down and the workers sacked. But this is the tip of the iceberg. All over, the companies have been cutting the temporary contracts thereby increasing the “precarité” (insecurity) for hundred of thousands of workers.

The second reason lies in the politics of the government. Since his election two years ago, Sarkozy

# FRANCE: MILLIONS STRIKE

General strike challenges president Sarkozy.

*Marc Lasalle reports from Paris*



has been attacking the working class and imposing his “reforms”, which amount to the destruction of the public services and workers rights. He has done this while promising that workers will be able to “work more to earn more”, that he will be the “president of the purchasing power” (pouvoir d’achat). He has also promised to preserve full employment. Today all these promises are exposed for what they were: gigantic lies.

While for years the official argument was that there is no money for any social projects, the governments has found on the spot 360 billion euros to rescue the banks, and many billions more to help the major corporations. In what sounds like the sheerest provocation, the privatisation of the postal service

will continue unabated.

More than 10,000 jobs will be cut in the schools. Yet another reorganisation of the health system is in the works, involving closures of hospitals and job cuts. All this comes on top of a situation that is already difficult for millions of workers. Low salaries and insecure jobs make life intolerably difficult for many of them. In one of the richest countries in the world basic necessities like food, health and decent accommodation are often too expensive for those on the minimum wage of 1,200 euros a month.

Today workers have shown that they do not want to continue in this way. Today many think that it is high time the other side feels the fear. And indeed for several months, the fear of a social explosion has been the

major worry of the government.

In December, after weeks of a mounting movement in the lycées, the government postponed the education reform for fear of a “Greek scenario” (i.e. the December uprising of youth and trade unionists). The most recent speeches of Sarkozy outside Paris were either interrupted by chanting demonstrators or had to take place behind massive police ranks.

While the major union federations will meet next week to discuss their next actions, little is to be expected from them since in all major crises in the past the bosses and the state could always count on the assistance of these bureaucrats to divide the workers, stringing out the struggle into irregular days of action.

The hope must lie in building co-ordinations of delegates from all the unions, from the lycées and universities to build a massive social movement, culminating in an all-out general strike. Vital too is to recognise that political leadership is needed in any major struggle with the bosses and their state. The traditional reformist parties of the working class, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party are in chaos and confusion.

But next week will also be marked by the founding congress of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (the New Anticapitalist Party), a project launched by the far-left Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. NPA has attracted more than 10,000 activists organized in more than 300 local committees.

Clearly, NPA could be the key factor to change the balance of forces. To do so, it will have to organize itself around an action programme of transitional demands, that strike at the heart of capitalism, making the bosses pay the cost of their crisis, not the workers.

On this basis the NPA must intervene strongly in the class struggle during the next months. The self-organisation of the movement and a clear-cut action programme should be the two pillars of the NPA intervention. The 60,000 people in Bordeaux marching behind the banner which read “la crise c’est eux, la solution c’est nous” (they are the crisis, we are the solution) had the right idea. Today is a step towards the solution, that is revolution in France, provided the French working class rearms itself with a new political leadership equal to the tasks of the struggle, aiming at overthrowing the power of the capitalists and bringing about a state plan of production.

## ANTICAPITALISM

# Mobilise to shut down G20 summit

As the G20 prepares for a summit amidst global economic meltdown, *Joy Macready* calls for mass mobilisations to shut them down when they meet in London

As the world nosedives into what is tipped to be the worst year for global trade in three decades - a worldwide contraction of 2 per cent - world leaders and policymakers at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland are scrambling for a lifeline to save the capitalist system. But stimulus packages and interest rate cuts in the world's bigger economies have not eased the credit crisis, and the working class, especially in the developing world, is bearing the brunt.

Attention has turned to the next G20 meeting in London on 2 April (see box). But how can the great powers push the idea that the crisis will be solved by mutual cooperation, that they will figure out a plan beneficial to all, without consulting the world's other 170-odd countries?

In fact, the rich G8 countries are really trying to find a way to offload the crisis onto the developing world, including to those nations that have "earned" themselves a seat at the imperialist table, and onto the working class. But they cannot abolish the drive towards competition between nation states, an integral mechanism of the capitalist system.

For example, at the crisis summit in Washington last year, G20 leaders pledged to limit the broader economic damage from the worst financial crisis "since the 1930s", and to resist any temptation to protectionist measures. But

## What is the Group of 20?

- The G20 was created in September 1999, after the East Asian financial meltdown, as "a new mechanism for informal dialogue in the framework of the Bretton Woods institutional system, to broaden the dialogue on key economic and financial policy issues among systemically significant economies and to promote cooperation to achieve stable and sustainable world growth that benefits all".
- Countries include: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK, and US.
- Other participants: European Union (European Council and the European Central Bank), International Monetary Fund and World Bank.
- They are 19 of the world's 25 largest national economies.
- Collectively, the G20 economies comprise 90 per cent of global gross national product, 80 per cent of world trade (including EU intra-trade) and two-thirds of the world population.
- Of the current top 19 economies by purchasing power parity, Iran and Taiwan are notably absent. Spain, Poland, and the Netherlands are included only as part of the EU. Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and South Africa are included while ranking in the range of 21-25. Thailand is passed over although ranked one position above South Africa.
- The G8 began as the G6 in the oil crisis of the 1970s and then added Canada and Russia. It now routinely meets the G5 (China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico).

within days, Australia, India, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, the UK, EU, and US were all "forced" to adopt measures to prop up domestic manufacturers.

In bringing on board underdeveloped countries, the advanced nations want hard currency-rich countries like China, and big oil producers like Saudi Arabia, to bolster the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) coffers. The IMF is running out of money - it needs hundreds of billions more to offer

more strings-attached debt programmes to struggling economies.

In light of the G20 Summit, Chancellor Alistair Darling indicated that the UK Budget could be postponed until April - hoping to ride the coattails of Barack Obama's mammoth \$825bn (£568bn) stimulus package and his popularity as the candidate of "change".

Brown and Darling are trying to present themselves as leaders in fighting a worldwide problem. But public opinion is hardening against

Brown's handling of the economic crisis. An ICM poll puts the Conservatives on 44 points, with Labour on 32 and the Lib Dems on 16. The public are also critical of bank bail-outs: only 43 percent backed Brown and Darling's decision to spend further billions on large stakes in the banks.

With anger reaching boiling point, we need to tap into the mood and mobilise thousands of workers in Britain against the G20 plotters. We need action to shut down the G20 summit and expose the bosses attempt to solve their crisis at our expense. Join the struggle!

## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

- **2 APRIL** Protest against the G20 Summit. Called by Stop the War Coalition and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. See [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).
- **3-5 APRIL** Anti-NATO Summit protests, Strasbourg. CND and Stop the War Coalition are putting on coaches. Come with Workers Power and protest against the warmongers. Contact: [info@workerspower.com](mailto:info@workerspower.com)
- **8-10 JULY** G8 Summit, Italy. Join the League for the Fifth International's delegation at the protest. Contact [info@workerspower.com](mailto:info@workerspower.com)

# World Social Forum meets in Brazil

At the same time that businessmen and bankers were acrying on each others' shoulders at the World Economic Forum (WEF), over 100,000 activists have gathered together in the Amazonian city of Belem, Brazil for the ninth World Social Forum (WSF). Under the often repeated slogan of "Another World is Possible", the WSF 2009 is expected to counter the world economic crisis with alternative development models.

Brazilian president Lula da Silva has snubbed WEF, and is instead

expected at Belem to rub shoulders with Venezuela's Chavez and Bolivia's Morales. His Workers Party (PT) has been heavily involved in the WSF process since the beginning in 2001 - but it has also been carrying out IMF policies in Brazil, which may explain the weak-kneed and reformist nature of the WSF. Instead of challenging the capitalists for power and becoming a real organising network for action, the WSF confines itself to being a "space" for the actors in the anti-capitalist movement. What is laughable is that it banned political

parties from participating openly, so even the PT has to hide behind its "social movement" front organisations.

Far from being a radical voice, Lula - governing for capitalism in Brazil - applauded the results of the emergency G20 summit in November which tried to offload the burden of the financial crisis onto developing countries. His answer is just more regulation of the financial system and a breakthrough in the long-running Doha round of world trade talks.

Workers Power has consistently fought within the WSF and the European Social Forum for a permanent coordinating body to unite the struggles, for the right of political parties to participate openly, and the need to fight for political power in order to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with something better - socialism. To do that needs an international political party, which is why we fight for the formation of a Fifth International, a new world party that would wage a global struggle for working class power.

## OBAMA

# The hope and the hype

In the face of the worst economic crisis for decades, US president Barack Obama is promising to use his power to protect ordinary Americans. At the same time he is calling for workers to be ready to make “sacrifices”. *Andy Yorke* and *Dave Stockton* look at Obama’s first days in office

Barack Obama’s 20 January inauguration, before crowds numbering two million, was an historic occasion. A nation where black people still suffer from the systemic racism engendered by slavery and the genocide of the indigenous people had finally elected a black man as president. The crowds waiting in the freezing cold included African-Americans of all generations, veterans of the 1960s civil rights movement and young Obama campaigners. Their joy and tears were understandable.

Yet the crowds’ euphoric hopes contrasted starkly with his sombre speech, which tried to dampen expectations rather than arouse them. Obama stressed the tremendous crisis facing the country, the “gathering clouds and raging storm” of an historic recession.

Obama made only a cursory reference to “greed and irresponsibility on the part of some” – which millions will have understood to mean the billionaire bankers whose bailout only a few months earlier had provoked street demonstrations. He immediately went on to blame “our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age.” How millions of workers, who have seen their real wages shrink over the last twenty five years are to blame, for the crisis of US capitalism, is hard to fathom. This was a call on the great exploited majority of Americans to pay the price of a crisis they never caused.

## A CHANGE... OF IDEOLOGY

Obama’s speech denounced “worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics”, a reference listeners undoubtedly understood to mean the neoliberal free-market ideology that has held sway since Ronald Reagan’s presidency in the 1980s. He plainly indicated a break from the anti-interventionist policies of previous administrations, both Democrat and Republican, stressing the need for more government initiative, on environmental action, health and education.

Top priority for Obama will be jobs, with 11 million already out of work and new layoffs and sackings announced every week. Congress has approved a second bailout for ailing banks worth \$350 billion (£254 billion), and an economic stimulus bill worth \$825 billion is making its way through Congress. Despite Obama’s appeals for a bipartisan approach, not a single Republican backed it at the first vote in the House of Representatives. Their opposition is based on the old neoliberal argument that it will undermine the free market: the only alternative, the Republicans say, is massive cuts in taxes and government spending – i.e. more money for the rich and less for the poor.

By contrast Obama’s \$825 billion is a full-blown Keynesian stimulus package, aimed at projects to mop up unemployment and to undo the neglect of infrastructural projects over the last three decades. In his inaugural address he described it in these terms:

“We will act not only to create new jobs but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together.”

Yet at the same time Obama insisted that there can and must be no fundamental challenge to capitalism:

“Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched.”

And in precisely the same spirit as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair – who combined targeted reforms with huge cuts in universal welfare programmes – he warned:

“The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works... Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programmes will end.”

The \$825 billion stimulus package making its way through Congress aims to save or create three to four million jobs. Yet economists estimate that over the next two

years unemployment will rise by twice this number. Nor is this programme anything like Roosevelt’s expansion of the public sector in the New Deal in the 1930s, as it contains no proposals for major public works projects. Ninety per cent of the jobs will be in the private sector, meaning a huge slice will be wasted in profits for the private contractors of government-funded programmes. A third of the package is dedicated to tax cuts, half of these for big business.

Obama’s much-touted green investment also looks like chicken-feed. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that it would cost at least \$1.6 trillion to bring the country’s crumbling bridges, flood defences, roads and schools back to “good condition.” Yet Obama is promising just \$30 billion for roads and \$10 billion for transit and rail – along with \$7.7 billion in grants for investors in renewable energy.

He also made it quite clear that he wants workers to “sacrifice” wages and benefits. He praised “the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job, which sees us through our darkest hours.” But of course those cutting hours are also getting a pay cut – so either way workers are being made to pay for the bankers’ crisis.

What of the vast and continuing legacy of racism in the USA? If Obama seriously wanted to right historic wrongs it would require a major new civil rights act to give all black people (and all Hispanic and poor white Americans too) the unchallengeable right to vote, to have their votes counted, to be represented on juries and to have major spending programmes targeted at the chronic deprivation in African-American and Hispanic communities.

In a recent interview, Obama’s senior adviser Valerie Jarrett said in patronising tones, “You don’t need to have demonstrations in front of the White House to convince this president that there is a disparate impact in the African American community around issues such as health

care and education. He’s got that.”

Yes, but what does he intend to do about it? Given the timidity of Obama’s healthcare proposals, which fall far short of universal free healthcare and will therefore leave the poorest communities at a massive disadvantage, demonstrations on the White House lawn calling for action would be a huge step forward.

## STILL IMPERIALIST

In his inaugural address Obama indicated that under him America will not repeat the human rights abuses of the Bush administration. Obviously in his audience’s mind were the abused and humiliated prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo: “As for our common defence, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expediency’s sake.”

Obama has announced that the Guantanamo Bay camp, which still holds 245 men, will close within 12 months. The military commissions, universally condemned by human rights lawyers, will not be reinstated. He also promised to close CIA detention centres and end the practice of “extraordinary rendition,” although without a clear timetable.

Moazzam Begg, former British Guantanamo detainee, urged Obama to go further and faster: “For myself and other former detainees, until we see something tangible happening, we are going to reserve judgement. That is because we have been here before – Bush has stated he wanted Guantanamo closed.” Clearly pressure needs to be kept up on Obama to ensure that the whole apparatus of detention without trial, torture, and kidnapping is stopped as speedily as possible.

But the more wide-ranging aspects of Obama’s foreign policy tell a different story to his cautious liberalism on Guantanamo. Highly significant is the continuity of personnel taken over from the Bush administration, including Defence Secretary Robert Gates. This hierarchy inherited from Bush are to be tasked with shifting the focus of

the “war on terror” to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Central are Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and the “political general” David Petraeus, who Bush appointed top military commander for the Middle East and Central Asia.

Obama exploited the antiwar movement to win nomination and then election, especially with his promise to withdraw US combat troops from Iraq in 16 months. But even here there is the proviso that it must not undermine the gains made in Iraq during the “surge” – the massive increase in troops on the ground in Iraq made by Bush in his last years in office.

In reality there is no significant difference between Obama’s priorities and those of Bush and the US Chiefs of Staff. All want to shift the military focus to Afghanistan, where the Taliban have been powerfully resurgent. How little had changed was clear on Obama’s third day in office, when cross-border drone attacks on Pakistan killed 20 innocent civilians, including three children.

The Wall Street Journal warmly applauded Obama for his “clear declaration that we are indeed fighting a ‘war’ against terrorism”, rejoicing in the discomfiture of antiwar voters who brought him to power. “Many of his supporters on the left, and around the world, have been hoping that Mr. Obama will return US national security policy to its pre-9/11 assumptions. The Democrat was warning our adversaries and some of our allies that his foreign policy will have as much continuity as change, and that he isn’t about to jettison policies that protect Americans.”

Far from a wind-down of the US war-drive, we can expect its renewal as Obama and Petraeus try for victory in Afghanistan. As under Clinton, we can expect this to be accompanied by hypocritical expressions of concern for human rights, rather than Bush’s imperialist bragging, but in substance there will be no difference. The “Afghan surge” will further destabilise and wreck the lives of that unhappy country’s people, as will dragging crisis-racked Pakistan even further into the conflict, by wantonly violating its sovereignty. And where such bloody colonial wars are fought then, as surely as night follows day, torture and human rights violations will continue.

What can the Palestinians expect from an Obama presidency? He has named former senator George



Millions in America and across the world believe Obama’s presidency will bring real change. Socialists must help them draw the right conclusions when he inevitably lets them down

Mitchell, broker of the Northern Ireland Peace Deal, as his Middle East envoy. Doubtless this will mean a peace initiative on the model of the Road Map – one where Israel has a veto on any offers with regard to a Palestinian statelet, and where the Palestinians have to disarm totally and accept (“recognise”) most if not all of Israel’s land seizures and ethnic cleansing, leaving the Israeli settler-state to break even this agreement at the next opportune moment.

#### JUSTICE FOR PALESTINE?

On 22 January when introducing George Mitchell to the State Department, Obama began by setting out the bedrock of his policy. “Let me be clear: America is committed to Israel’s security. And we will always support Israel’s right to defend itself against legitimate threats.”

As president-elect, Obama’s silence (“there is only one president”) while Israel was engaged in killing upwards of 1,300 Palestinians, most of them civilians, destroying their homes and schools, was truly a scandal and a betrayal of the hopes of his electorate. And in fact he was not entirely silent, breaking his vow of silence to indicate support for Israel’s genocidal crimes, saying “if missiles were falling where my two daughters sleep, I would do

everything in order to stop that.”

Clearly this fond father’s concern did not extend to the little Palestinian girls at that very moment being blown into fragments by rockets from US-donated Israeli F16s. Gaza was an acid test for Obama’s anti-war credentials and he failed it miserably.

Obama also praised the Saudi-Egyptian Peace Initiative and the wretched pro-American quisling Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas: “Now is the time for Arab states to act on the initiative’s promise by supporting the Palestinian government under President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, taking steps towards normalising relations with Israel, and by standing up to extremism that threatens us all.”

Despite calling for an opening of Gaza’s borders, he has tied it to inspection and stopping the use of the tunnels through which the Gazan resistance is able to receive arms and provisions, and indicated there must be no recognition of the elected Hamas government. In other words Obama’s line is the same as Israel’s and of the former Bush regime.

In short, it is plain from his words and actions that Barack Obama does not represent any radical break from the fundamental policy of Bush and Cheney, at least as far as the war on terrorism goes. Hence

his endorsement of the war’s central doctrine in his inaugural address: “Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.”

It is already becoming clear that Obama, for all his promises of change and hope, remains the chief executive of the most powerful and reactionary state in the world. The billionaire rulers of this state eventually backed him with millions of their dollars for a purpose. That was to restore class peace and “racial harmony” in their homeland at a time of great economic and social crisis, thus securing their wealth and privileges.

#### US WORKING CLASS

Within the USA his anti-crisis measures will bail out the big corporations whilst demanding and applauding sacrifices by workers – getting them (or rather their union officials) to agree to cut their hours, wages, pensions and jobs in order to save “their” companies. In return Obama has announced an intended compact with the AFL-CIO union leaders and has publicly announced his support for trade unions; workers should respond to Obama’s rhetoric by demanding the abolition of the USA’s sweeping anti-union laws and the establishment of a legal right to organise and to strike.

The rank and file of the labour movement and the communities of the racially oppressed certainly have great hopes in Obama – hopes which there is every reason to believe will be cruelly betrayed. We cannot and must not hide this. But there is no reason just to wait for this to happen. The fact that huge masses expect something to be done to meet the crisis, expect a change in the racism and the poverty, should be the starting point for huge mass mobilisations to demand Obama takes action, to brush aside the excuses, to refuse to be the ones to make sacrifices.

Millions in America – and around world – have profound illusions in Obama. The way for socialists to dispel these illusions is not merely in writing, but to mobilise alongside Obama’s working class supporters to fight for the measures they believe he might carry out. And when he does not, socialists must help workers to draw the conclusion that we need unions free of the Democratic Party shackles and the leaders that impose them, that they need a party of their own, a party of American workers of all races and origins, a party of the third American revolution – the socialist revolution.

## GAZA

# Another murderous battle

Israel's recent invasion of the Gaza strip has led to thousands taking to the streets and hundreds occupying universities in outrage. Here we print a speech, given by *Marcus Halaby* in London, outlining the background to the war and the tasks of socialists

As if guided by an annual timetable of slaughter, Israel began its latest bombardment of Gaza almost exactly a year after a previous round that saw tens of thousands breaching the Egyptian border to escape Israel's murderous siege. In 25 days, 5,450 Palestinians were injured and 1,330 killed, including 437 children and 108 women, while rockets fired from Gaza in eight years have killed a mere 20 Israelis.

Israeli military action has targeted schools, the education and justice ministries, clinics, picnic parks, residential apartments, fishing boats, police stations and, indeed, the whole of Gaza's social and economic infrastructure. This cannot be compared with the randomly fired Qassam rockets, whose main effect seems to have been to disturb people's sleep and to damage the occasional balcony. As if to prove that Palestinian lives are less important than those of animals, Israel's Agriculture Ministry announced on 6 January that it would help pay for the medical care of pets injured or stunned by rocket fire.

We should, however, not place too much emphasis on the evident disproportionality of Israel's barbarity. Should we, after all, be grateful if Israel were to limit itself to merely firing artillery shells at the most densely populated piece of land in the world apart from Hong Kong, and refrained from using entire families as human shields in its ground operations? Should we commend Israel on the proportionality of its actions if it desisted from using the burning white phosphorus, whose use against civilians is banned under international law, but which it justifies by claiming that it is entitled to use it as a smokescreen?

The lie that Israel's actions are a response – “proportionate” or otherwise – to Hamas' rockets, that the Palestinians are attacking Israel and that Israel is acting in self-defence, rather than the other way around, has never been more transparent.

Nor should you take our word for it. The Israeli news website Ynetnews reported on 29 December that 500 residents of Sderot (the Israeli town most affected by Hamas' rockets) had signed a petition calling for an end to the Israeli Defence Force's attack on Gaza and a renewal of the truce, effectively blaming Israel's government for its breakdown. This is 2.5 per cent of the town's population – and, given the huge pressure in Jewish-Israeli society for conformity on “security” issues, they doubtlessly represent many more.

They, after all, should know that Israel's politicians would happily sacrifice them to the “national cause” while using their position to justify the unjustifiable. They should know that there was a ceasefire, which had been hold-



More than 100,000 people marched in support of Gaza in London, 10 January

ing, that only 20 rockets had been fired in four months, as against several times that per day.

Israel broke the ceasefire on 4 November, while the world's attention was fixed on the US presidential election, when the IDF killed six Hamas militants in a raid into the territory. Even so, Yuval Diskin, director of Israel's secret police, the Shin Bet, reported to the Israeli cabinet on 23 December that Hamas wanted a renewal of the truce in return for an improvement in its terms (chiefly, the lifting of the near-total siege imposed on Gaza).

The US academic Nancy Kanwisher has shown that this is part of a pattern. Defining “periods of calm” as periods of one day or more without deaths on either side, she found that of all periods of calm between the start of the second Intifada in September 2000 and October 2008, 79 per cent were brought to an end by Israeli violence, including 96 per cent of those lasting a week or longer, and 100 per cent of those lasting nine days or more.

## HAMAS: ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Even before Hamas won the parliamentary elections in January 2006, following Israel's disengagement from Gaza in September 2005, Israel placed Gaza in a total lockdown, intended to strangle it economically. PLO legal adviser Diana

Buttu recalls that the Palestinian Authority had to appeal to US state secretary Condoleezza Rice and the president of the World Bank simply to ensure that food deliveries were allowed in. She adds that Gaza was assaulted militarily by air and by sea throughout the recent ceasefire.

Maybe this is what then Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon meant when he said that Israel's “withdrawal” would be a punishment and not a reward for Palestinian resistance. Israel's redeployment, one should recall, saw the removal of 8,000 Jewish settlers controlling 25% of the land in which 1.4 million Palestinians lived – only to be followed by the settling of 12,000 Jews in land illegally seized in the West Bank. Dov Weissglass (who famously commented that the purpose of the siege was to put Gazans on a “diet”) explained at the time that the purpose of the disengagement plan was to put the peace process “in formaldehyde”: that is, to prevent it leading to any form of Palestinian state.

When, after sanctions and huge international pressure, the elected Hamas government agreed in March 2007 to share power with Fatah in a government of national unity, Israel and the US immediately set about trying to provoke a Palestinian civil war. The end result was Hamas rule in Gaza.

Fatah's role has been an increasingly openly

# in Israel's genocidal war

collaborationist one, buying time for Israel to continue settlement expansion and providing it with the cover of "negotiations". The Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority has attacked demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza, at Birzeit University and in the West Bank towns of Ramallah and Hebron, with clubs and teargas.

In Cairo, Kuwait, Amman and Beirut, tens of thousands have protested against the inaction of Arab governments. Over 100,000 protested in London, 30,000 in Paris and 20,000 in Germany on 10 January, while reportedly 150,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel (about one-tenth of Israel's Palestinian minority) demonstrated in Sakhnin.

Following this, Israel announced that its Arab minority's two main parties, Balad and United Arab List, would be banned from standing in the Israeli general election in February.

Why has Israel launched this war? The stated aims of stopping Hamas' rocket fire and the smuggling into Gaza through tunnels from Egypt simply do not hold water. The former could have been achieved by adhering to the ceasefire, and the latter by pressuring the Egyptian government.

Certainly the timing has been dictated by the US and Israeli elections. Following their 2006 failure to defeat the Lebanese Hezbollah, Israel's ruling coalition needs to look tough to win votes, while simultaneously trying to set the terms of any "change" that Barack Obama might want to introduce in US policy towards Israel.

Learning from the Lebanese debacle, foreign minister Tzipi Livni has been careful not to state too many measurable political or military objectives in advance. But then, why should they need an objective? Israel, as a state and a society, has decisively set itself against even the most minimal form of Palestinian self-determination. The success of the Zionist project – of settling Arab land in order to create a homeland for a globally dispersed "Jewish nation" – has therefore come to depend on abolishing the Palestinian nation as a collectivity capable of claiming political rights. In this endeavour, terrorism in the crude sense, the terrorising of a whole people, becomes an end in itself.

## TWO STATE SOLUTION?

This, then, is the death of the "two state" solution. Israel will try to prevent the development of any Palestinian institutions capable of acting as a focus for national aspirations, or of displaying the potential to act as the core of a future Palestinian state, and will try to reduce them to a mere "humanitarian" problem. The illusion of the possibility of a negotiated settlement is being shattered – notwithstanding the existence of a small but brave minority of Jewish-Israelis willing to speak out against their state's violence and barbarity.

In the short to medium term, time works against the Palestinians – every day that the occupation continues means another piece of land grabbed for Jewish settlement, another

**In 25 days, 5,450 Palestinians were injured and 1,330 killed, including 437 children and 108 women, while rockets fired from Gaza in eight years have killed only 20 Israelis**



Palestinian killed, another family or community displaced, another day for Israel to encircle the Palestinians and squeeze them into ghettos.

However, the clock is ticking for Israel also. Within our lifetimes, Palestinian Arabs will be a majority in their historic homeland – barring an Israeli holocaust of the Palestinians or the mass arrival of Jews from one of the few remaining countries where large Jewish communities exist.

Israel's huge strategic advantage against the Palestinians, at least since the 1967 six-day war, has been the enormous well of sympathy it has enjoyed in the West, due to the myth that it is a poor beleaguered nation, surrounded by hostile Arab regimes, and therefore has the right to defend itself pre-emptively.

The size and militancy of the Palestinian solidarity demonstrations in January may signal that this era is also now drawing to a close. From another source – that of the economic crisis in the US – so too may the days of unlimited military and economic "aid" from America, which has kept the Zionist state afloat and the cross-class alliance at its heart mostly intact.

Finally, the more impossible Israel makes the creation of a separate Palestinian state, the more necessary it will become to advocate the alternative, of equality of rights for both peoples in the land that they both have to live in.

Does any of this mean that we should not criticise Hamas? Not at all. We can and should criticise them for their religiously inspired programme which, if ever implemented, would be a disaster for Palestinian women, secularists, minorities and workers. For all their denunciation of certain Arab regimes, Hamas' defence of capitalist private property makes them incapable of understanding the regimes' role in supporting imperialism in the Arab world. A measure of this is that Hamas did not evacuate security installations because the Egyptian regime assured them that Israel would not attack – shortly before Israel killed scores of policemen at a passing out parade.

Similarly, they placed such confidence in the

good offices of the Saudi regime, with which they have a historic relationship, that they wasted a whole year pursuing illusory negotiations for a "unity government" with Fatah – instead of preparing mass Palestinian resistance to the inevitable Israeli assault.

In short, Hamas, while currently being the only Palestinian force capable and willing to defend the people against Israeli aggression, is, nevertheless, an obstacle to their final victory. A new leadership is needed, a revolutionary communist party that can lead the national struggle and pose socialist solutions to the burning social and economic questions – nationalisation of the land and the economy under workers' control, the full separation of mosque, synagogue and state, equality for women, etc. Such a leadership would not flinch from arousing the anger of the Arab masses in countries, like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and direct it against their vicious and collaborationist regimes and towards the creation of a socialist united states of the Middle East.

The only true "road map for peace" – for the Israeli working class and minorities as much as for the Palestinians – runs through a permanent revolution, leading from today's struggles against Zionism, social and democratic struggles in Arab countries, through to the fight for workers' power across the region.

However, we cannot join in the chorus of those condemning Hamas for launching rockets at Israel. Unlike the BBC, we have to recognise that there is a difference between the violence of the oppressor and of the oppressed.

Our place is to confront the complicity of our governments, by calling for an end to privileged Israel-European Union trade relations, for an end to UK and US arms sales to Israel, and for the cutting off of diplomatic relations. By isolating Israel in the same way that apartheid South Africa was once isolated, we can play our part in pushing the unfavourable balance of forces against the Palestinians into their favour – and provide them with the message that they are not alone in their struggle.

## PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

# Outrage at Israel leads to global explosion on streets

By Kam Kumar

Israel's massacre on Gaza enraged millions – and hundreds of thousands around the world took to the streets to protest against the Zionist terror state and their own governments' inaction to stop the slaughter. The mass mobilisations were loud and angry and many were prepared to confront the police protecting Israeli embassies and government buildings. Despite brutal police repression, protests continued with mobilisations on a scale not seen since the build up to the Iraq war.

In the UK, tens of thousands protested in all the major cities – on 3 January, over 50,000 protested in London in response to the IDF troops embarking on their killing spree. Anger grew when Israel stepped up its terror tactics by deliberately bombing children in a UN

school that was clearly marked. Israel's blatant disregard for Palestinian life was displayed almost gleefully by Israeli ministers on TV, unwilling to show any remorse as the death toll rose to over 1000.

Further outrage erupted on 10 January into the biggest ever international protest organised in solidarity with Palestine – over 150,000 in London, twinned demonstrations in most European cities and all other continents, including 15,000 in Washington. There were at least 250,000 in Madrid, which was the biggest demonstration in Europe; around 100,000 in Barcelona; over 30,000 in Paris, over 5,000 in Belfast; and over 10,000 in Frankfurt.

In the Middle East, over 50,000 protested in Cairo, 30,000 in Amman, and 20,000 were mobilised mainly by Hezbollah in Nabatiyeh, Lebanon. In Tel Aviv, 5,000 demonstrated in the face of severe repression.

There were also similar numbers in Algeria, Turkey, Sweden, Canada, Belgium, Rome, Greece, and Hong Kong. In Norway, not only were there militant demonstrations in many of the smaller towns, but also the Norwegian Locomotive Union and the Oslo Tram Workers Union organised political action – striking for two minutes in solidarity.

Police attacked protesters with tear gas, water cannons and batons, particularly in Nairobi, Amman, Baghdad and Algiers. But police violence has not deterred people from showing their solidarity with their Palestinian brothers and sisters.

During the mass upsurge, the BBC decided to refuse to broadcast the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal to raise money for Gazans in desperate need of aid. The DEC estimated that this refusal to broadcast would cost around £10m in donations, and that it was

the first time in 48 years that a humanitarian appeal had been refused. Protests have now turned on BBC headquarters as people were outraged at this pro-Israeli decision, ironically claiming it was to retain political neutrality. Ten thousand demonstrated on 17 January, and protesters occupied BBC buildings in Glasgow and London.

Throughout Israel's bombing and use of white phosphorous and other illegal weapons, militant students led occupations at British universities, such as UCL, LSE, Leeds, Essex, Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College, London, Essex, and Warwick. A number of their demands were met – such as disinvestment in Israel – and the solidarity movement for Palestine is growing. End the siege of Gaza!

Read more about the student occupations at:  
[www.worldrevolution.org.uk](http://www.worldrevolution.org.uk)

# Students occupy campuses in defence of Gaza

By Dan Edwards

The current wave of university occupations has taken place in more than twenty institutions across the UK including Kings College, SOAS, Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds, Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Newcastle and Bradford.

The student occupations and sit-ins have been driven by widespread horror and anger at the Israeli state's merciless attacks on the people of Gaza, who are facing collective punishment for daring to elect Hamas as their political representatives. Even the "unilateral ceasefire" has failed to demobilise the protests because people see it for what it really is – Israel demanding that the Palestinians end their resistance against aggression, occupation, displacement and starvation.

Indeed, the campus occupations

have continued to spread, with more occupations cropping up since the ceasefire ended. Many occupations have made demands both on the universities and the British government. The inaction of educational institutions and the state to stop the murdering of innocent civilians has exposed the pro-Zionist bias of many British institutions.

The National Union of Students (NUS) has refused to condemn the Israeli atrocities but this shouldn't come as a surprise to any student activist. For many years the Labour Party's youth wing has been consolidating their hold over student politics and student unions. The NUS recently passed the national Governance Review, which aimed to further entrench these bureaucrats. A board of trustees now has the power to veto any action taken by the national executive (the elected leadership) if there are financial or legal objections.

This wave of occupations, and the coordination between them on a regional and national level, has demonstrated that a student movement outside the NUS can be built. On 24 January, many representatives of the occupations met at a national Stop the War (StW) activist meeting and planned further joint action on the issue of the Israeli occupation. On 7 February, another StW national meeting (this time solely for student activists) will discuss the possibilities of building an alternative student movement to replace the rotting corpse of the NUS.

During the wave of occupations, representatives from one campus were sent to occupations at other universities to share advice and discuss joint action and demands – this is the beginning of a new network of activists. It is the first time in years that protests have happened not merely on an individual campus level, but as part of a national movement.

The ability of these occupations to reach out to other students' and workers' organisations is inspiring. At Manchester Met, the UCU defended the occupation against attempts to besiege the students and deny them food or water; at Kings College, the students invited a Living Wage campaigner to address the occupation.

This movement is just taking its first steps – the structures are not yet fully formed – but it is growing and becoming more organised and able to extend its power.

Every student activist should come to the meeting on 7 February and fight for a new national student organisation which can stand up for our rights – against privatisation, imperialism, and discrimination. As the economic crisis cuts deeper, students and workers will face an onslaught of attacks on their rights and it has never been so important to have organisations which can fight these attacks.



## SRI LANKA

# Army victories will not end Tamil liberation struggle

By Sean Ambler

The Sri Lankan Army's (SLA) six-month offensive against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) is reaching a bloody culmination. The LTTE's last major stronghold of Mullaitivu has fallen just weeks after government forces captured the administrative centre of the Tamil Tigers, Kilinochchi.

The Sri Lankan army barrage has obstructed the work of the UN and World Food Programme, leaving 300,000 civilians without access to food supplies or drinking water. A "safety zone" has been set up by the SLA, but this is being repeatedly attacked by artillery fire and no shelter, food or medical supplies are being provided to those who are forced to move from unsafe areas.

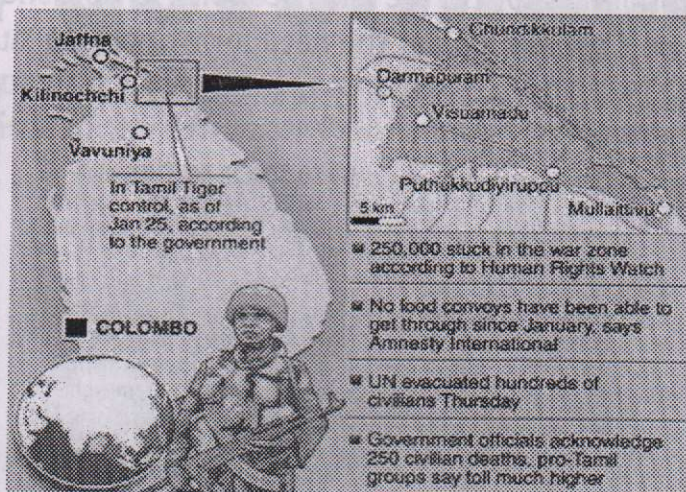
While this goes on the UN and most countries are silent or actively supporting the SLA. A statement from the US embassy in Colombo has welcomed the SLA's attack on the LTTE, and rejected the latter's call for negotiations, stating that: "The United States does not advocate that the government of Sri Lanka negotiate with the LTTE, a group designated by America as a foreign terrorist organisation since 1997."

An unholy alliance of the US, India, Pakistan, China, Iran and Israel, has provided military aid and intelligence to the government of Mahinda Rajapaksa. While we do not politically support the LTTE, the defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan government represents a reactionary victory.

It is one the Sinhala workers will soon feel the evil results of too. Already the government is attacking democratic rights across the country as it moves towards victory. The constant attacks on prominent members of the media who have criticised the government by shadowy assassins are sinister pointers to the growth of anti-democratic forces in the country.

Nevertheless, whatever the fate of the LTTE, the Tamil people's legitimate fight for national liberation will not end because their oppression will continue under present conditions.

The post independence years saw



anti-Tamil pogroms in 1958, 1961, 1977, 1981 and 1983, involving thousands of murders, and creating serious internal displacement, including 80,000 to 100,000 refugees in Colombo alone. These pogroms can be clearly linked to an attempt to deflect class conflict into ethnic conflict by the Sinhalese bourgeoisie. As recently as 7 June 2007, 375 Tamils were evicted from Colombo by police and soldiers.

The terrible sufferings of the Tamil people since the early 1980s are also in part the product of the historic failure of the once powerful and revolutionary workers movement on the island. The great majority of the trade unions and so-called socialist forces, such as the ex-Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the ex-Maoist-Guevarist JVP, offered no principled opposition to communalism. The LSSP entered governments in the 1960s and 1970s that began the process of discrimination against Tamils.

The LSSP misled the major trade union federation into a historic defeat in the general strike of 1980, after which the unions fragmented along local and party lines, with the bourgeois parties gaining predominant influence. The JVP on the other hand turned into an actively Sinhala chauvinist organisation, actively encouraging attacks on Tamils, while its trade unions hold back the class struggle in the interests of the "national war effort".

The strength of reactionary Sinhala nationalism, with over 80 per

cent of Sri Lankans supporting the war against the Tamils, combined with the defeat of the LTTE makes ever more urgent the tasks of winning progressive sections of the Sinhalese working class to defence of the Tamils and their national rights. A starting point is the defence of the Tamils against the genocidal attacks of the government, to continue to call for an end to the fighting and the withdrawal of SLA from all the majority Tamil areas.

Only class unity and independence provides a political basis from which the present reactionary situation can be rescued. The world wide economic crisis that is hitting Sri Lanka and the need for unity to resist it provides the objective basis for doing so. The chauvinist intoxication of Rajapaksa's "victory" will eventually wear off, revealing to millions their worsened economic situation and the high price of subordinating their class interests to "national unity."

The LTTE's strategy of an extended people's war has proven that it cannot liberate the Tamil people. Understandable as a reaction to army and police repression and brutality, putting guerrilla and then full-scale military actions at the centre of their activity marginalised large sections of the Tamil masses. It always left out of account, and therefore out of the struggle, the Tamil workers in the plantations of the central highlands and the large numbers of Tamils who live in the cities of the south.

By ignoring the centrality of the class struggle, they lost the opportu-

nity to win Sinhala workers to support for Tamil self-determination. Military elitism also meant an unwillingness to train large numbers of the Tamil people in self-defence militias. The LTTE attacked other political and armed groups fighting for Tamil freedom. Furthermore, their tactics of attacking Sinhalese civilians, including workers, in settlements in Tamil areas, were dictated by a narrow nationalist perspective and did not assist the process of winning the Sinhalese working class to support for Tamil self-determination.

The tasks of revolutionaries in Sri Lanka are to consistently defend the rights of Tamils and to win the Sinhalese working class to defending this position. Only a united working class can fight for a socialist revolution in Sri Lanka. The Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (SPSL) is fighting for Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution that links all democratic questions – such as national and women's liberation, democratic and workers rights, land to those who work it – all the way to the creation of a workers' and poor farmers' government, which will carry through all these measures while putting an end to capitalism.

We call on all class conscious Sri Lankan workers to join them. Mahinda Devage, the national secretary of the SPSL, states that: "The main bourgeois opposition forces keep quiet in this situation – not many people are willing to come forward and speak out. The anti-war movement is small and isolated. It is hard now to make the case for an anti-war position, but it must be done."

There are only five trade unions with anti-war positions in Sri Lanka and our comrades are central to several of these. With a mounting economic crisis caused in part by the reckless spending of war by the Sri Lankan government, these unions are in desperate need of funds for equipment and organisers. We are calling on all working class internationalists to donate, or get their union branch to donate to the Sri Lanka Trade Union Solidarity Campaign\* in order that the essential work of winning Sinhalese workers away from a chauvinist anti-Tamil position can be taken forward.

\*www.srilankaunionsolidarity.com

## IRELAND

# Celtic tiger on the brink as Irish workers face onslaught

Once praised for its fast economic growth, the Irish economy is now sliding into recession. **Bernie McAdam** and **Darren Cogavin** look at the need for workers to launch a fightback

Ireland's economy became the first in the EU to fall into recession last year. Having boasted the fastest growing economy in Europe, the Celtic Tiger now looks like the lame duck of the eurozone. The European Commission (EC) has predicted a decline in GDP of 5 per cent for Ireland by the end of 2009 – rather different to the 6 per cent growth in 2007.

Unemployment rose to 8.3 per cent in December, the highest rate since 1993. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Unemployment, some 3,350 redundancies were announced in December 2008, a 94 per cent increase on 2007. Job losses are predicted to rise to 11 per cent this year, which means about 400,000 will be out of work.

Employment in the once dynamic construction and building industry has fallen by more than 20 per cent. Construction employers are now demanding a 10 per cent pay cut. Ireland's massive housing bubble has well and truly burst – property prices are down by more than 30 per cent since 2006.

Next to be hit was the export-oriented foreign sector, the driving force behind the Celtic Tiger. Labour costs are no longer so competitive for foreign capital, so the sector is scaling down. Computer company Dell, which is the largest exporter and accounts for five per cent of GDP, has just announced the transfer of manufacturing from Limerick to Poland with a loss of 1,900 jobs. And Dell is not alone.

Ireland is also in the grip of a major financial crisis. The government had recapitalised the major Irish banks – Anglo Irish, Allied Irish and the Bank of Ireland – to the tune of 7.5 billion euros in December. This wasn't enough, so at the beginning of this year the state completely nationalised Anglo Irish, the third biggest bank. Its assets had collapsed in value and its reputation plunged on the back of a scandal involving undeclared directors' loans. Increased costs of the Anglo Irish nationalisation mean that government borrowing has spiralled to 23 billion euros.

Ireland's financial system reflects its exposure to the property and construction sectors. Manufacturing is in trouble too, as it depends on exporting 80 per cent of its product. As the euro strengthens against the pound and dollar, this makes exports too expensive.

The fragile nature of the economy, despite the 15-year boom, reflects the semi-colonial nature of the 26-county state. Ireland still has a weak indigenous industry and is highly dependent on international capital and trade, in particular US and EU imperialism. In this most open of economies, Ireland's slump is on course to be particularly severe.

## GOVERNMENT ONSLAUGHT

The Irish government brought forward the 2009 Budget and announced in November cuts to public sector spending of 2 billion. Huge opposition followed – with pensioners pouring onto the streets, followed by students. Then a series of massive demonstrations against educational cuts around the country culminated in 60,000 marching in Dublin in December.

Means-tested pensions were toned down as a response but a one per cent tax on incomes was imposed. Students are still faced with higher registration fees. More than 1,000 teachers will lose their jobs and many more cutbacks in education are in the pipeline.

Even with the massive cuts, the exchequer will still be 18 billion euros in the red at the end of the year. Now another 2 billion euro cut has been announced. The Fianna Fail/Green Party government is bringing the "social partners" together to implement these cuts and agree a deal, which most likely will see the agreed 3.5 per cent wage increase in September ditched.

The drop in economic confidence has been accompanied by a major drop in political confidence. There has been a huge decline in approval for the government (down 15 points to an historic low of 27 per cent). Leader of the coalition, Brian Cowen, had to fend off a backbench mutiny after his hastily-prepared budget and

has yet to recover from his loss of authority.

## NO TO SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Social Partnership has seen trade union leaders agree deals with business and government over 20 years, never challenging wage restraint or the massive privatisation of state assets. They have swallowed the lie that if workers lie down then foreign capital will see them right. Of course, multinationals have ripped off Irish workers and now that times are rough, they will quit the country.

In January, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) rejected suggestions that involved basic pay cuts for public sector workers. However, the ICTU has now agreed to discuss how to implement the cuts. David Begg, general secretary, proposed solutions that could "include conditions for deferral of pay increases, restrictions in overtime working, incentivised career breaks, flexible working hours and other innovative measures."

Begg's "sensible compromise" is a sell out – deferral of the September pay rise is a pay cut. Further noises about foregoing increments and unsocial hours pay also cuts into pay. But workers have not caused this crisis of capitalism – the greed and speculation of financiers and their friends in government are to blame. Why should working class communities have to shed their jobs, their wages and their services to bail out the banks and capitalism?

## STRIKE AND OCCUPY

Trade unionists who are appalled by their leaders' complicity in this attack need to organise a movement against Social Partnership and the cuts. We need to use all tools at our disposal: demonstrations, lobbies, local meetings and industrial action. Rank and file opposition needs to be built in every union to pose the issue of cross-sector strike action to defeat the government and bosses' plans. Action councils need to be built in every locality to tap into the anger and get support from pensioners, students, the unemployed and migrant workers, as well as trade unionists.

## Occupation at Waterford Crystals

Around 200 workers have occupied the visitors' centre at Waterford Crystals in a protest at the plant's closure. Waterford Crystals is part of the Waterford Wedgwood group which had already gone into receivership in early January. The receiver announced on Friday 30 January that 480 jobs out of 708 would go as the company would cease manufacturing immediately. Workers' anger exploded as the news came out and scuffles with security followed as the occupation got underway. A *Starry Plough* (flag of James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army) now flies over the plant and over 2000 people staged a rally outside the plant within 24 hours.

The fight back needs to start now – the government has already given notice of more attacks ahead. The massive anger displayed against the draconian budget has not been turned into effective action that can stop the cuts. If the trade union bureaucrats won't take a fighting lead, then they should make way for those who will. Workers should follow the example of Calcast workers in Derry who occupied their plant last year.

Workers will also need a political alternative to challenge the pro-capitalist parties on offer in Ireland. A new workers party is needed to give a fighting lead and connect to the struggle for socialism. Any mass struggle against the government and bosses will inevitably pose the questions of power and the need for a government that can genuinely side with the workers, based on their mass democratic organisations on the ground.

As Ireland's economy takes a direct hit, it is imperative that a new workers party is built on a revolutionary basis that can take a lead in launching a serious fight back, hastening the day that capitalism in Ireland is replaced with a Workers' Republic!

## ICELAND

# Financial crisis brings down government

The right-wing government of Geir Haarde has fallen, the first European political casualty of the world economic crisis. *Richard Brenner* reports on events leading up to the resignations

The pressure had been growing on the government. After five straight days of mass demonstrations outside the Icelandic parliament in Reykjavik, there were violent clashes as riot cops used tear gas against the marchers for the first time since Iceland's Nato entry in 1949.

On Thursday 22 January, protesters surrounded Haarde's car and pelted it with eggs. He resigned the next day citing ill health – but he is widely viewed as having given in to the mounting calls from the protesters for his resignation.

Haarde's government – an alliance between his right-wing neoliberal Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance – was looking increasingly weak in recent days. The Reykjavik branch of the Social Democrats had voted for the SDA to withdraw from the coalition government, and both parties are behind in the polls to the growing Left-Greens, a radical left-wing environmentalist party.

Iceland has not been known for sharp class conflict, especially after years of credit-fuelled expansion delivered very high rates of growth for the small Nordic island state, with a bubble in property prices and the very rapid expansion of its investment banking sector. But the impact of the crisis – or the "krep-*pa*" as they call it in Icelandic – has been very hard indeed.

When Iceland's finance system collapsed in October 2008, the country owed foreign creditors more than US\$40 billion. Britain and Holland both demanded that Iceland guarantee holdings in their banks, which had offered very high interest rates to depositors, based on the fact that bank rates were pegged to inflation. The level of savings and investments in Icelandic banks expanded wildly to 10 times the country's GDP. But Iceland secured these investments against international loans that were themselves exploded in the global cred-



Protesters in Iceland forced the government to resign

it crunch. The bubble burst and Iceland could not pay.

The tiny country – with a population of just 320,000 – now has a debt exceeding its gross domestic product. As Jon Danielsson of the London School of Economics has pointed out, this is more relative to GDP than the reparations payments demanded of Germany following World War I (which were 85 per cent of GDP).

Iceland's economy is now expected to contract by 10 per cent this year and unemployment is rocketing. With the Icelandic krona in freefall and prices rising by 20 per cent, poverty is a growing issue. Workers laid off last autumn have only now been paid – and the value of their wages has plummeted in the meantime.

## VIKINGS VANISH

Of course, the bankers and financial parasites responsible (called 'Viking Raiders' by the people) have vanished with the loot. No wonder people are angry, and that the peaceful demonstrations that began in October have mushroomed into a militant challenge to the regime.

As Eiríkur Bergmann, professor in political science at Bifrost University in Iceland said: "The people of Iceland [are] starting the first revolution in the history of the republic." And the Huffington Post quotes the head of research at Iceland's Kaupthing Bank: "Today, the Icelandic people are calling for revolution, literally."

No wonder the financial capitalists and their journals are eyeing developments in Iceland very nervously. Alongside Latvia, Bulgaria and Greece, the street protests in Iceland herald new days of confrontation and mass struggle against the effects of the crisis on ordinary people. And although Iceland was one of the first countries to feel the full socially destructive force of the crisis, it certainly won't be the last. Other countries that have witnessed the sudden end to the financial bubble, such as Ireland, are aware that they could follow. A popular joke doing the rounds in Ireland these days runs: "What's the difference between Iceland and Ireland? One letter and six months."

The *Financial Times* – the house rag of British finance capital –

reports in shocked tones that the Left-Greens are ahead of both the Independence Party and the Social Democrats in the opinion polls and could win the May elections. They are especially alarmed that the Left-Green programme is anticapitalist and says "All natural resources shall be public property and utilised without reducing them".

However there are clear signs that the Left-Greens intend not to abolish capitalism but to set out on the utopian path of establishing a small-scale capitalism less integrated into the world market. The party's manifesto says only that "It is necessary to prevent monopoly and centralisation of capital, enable the conventional industries of Iceland to develop themselves and make use of Iceland's special status to create jobs of all kinds for all the inhabitants."

## IMF TALKS

The party's leader, Steingrímur Sigfusson, told Reuters he is ready to become prime minister and that rather than simply renouncing the country's huge debt to the IMF "we would be supported by many to try and reopen negotiations with the IMF to at least adjust these programmes better to Icelandic needs and circumstances".

Workers, socialists, anticapitalist and youth in Iceland should organise their own council of delegates to maintain control of opposition politicians and demand the complete cancellation and repudiation of the debt, nationalisation under workers control without compensation of all banks and industries, guaranteeing jobs and expropriating the super-rich. They should fight for a workers' government based on popular mass democratic organisation on the ground. And they should look to the workers of the rest of Europe – whose struggles will surely mount in the months ahead – to link their struggles against the crisis to a joint fight for a Socialist United States of Europe.

## DEBATE

# Socialist Workers Party: programme and class

The recent debates in the Socialist Workers Party have led its members to seriously consider of its tactics and methods. *Luke Cooper* argues that the problems lie in the party's fundamental misunderstanding of how revolutionaries intervene into the working class struggle

The recent divisions in the SWP are the most serious the organisation has faced since the early 1970s. Although the crisis was sparked by the decision of the central committee to propose the removal of John Rees from its number at the party's annual conference in January, the debate widened to include significant sections of the SWP questioning the methods and principles that have guided their work over the past period and the organisation's hyper-centralised way of working.

In the pre-conference discussion, Alec Callinicos describes the SWP's failure to grow out as a "really interesting one". He says: "If a decade ago someone had told me that we would help lead a movement that would organize a demonstration of two million, I would have predicted that the party would grow to 20,000 or 30,000".<sup>1</sup> Callinicos then points to unfavourable features for a lack of growth; a lack of resonance for Marxist ideas, a relatively dynamic economy and weak working class organisation.

John Rees, however, points to the SWP's insufficient energy in building itself and its fronts. But this, of course, is hardly convincing. Everyone on the left knows the SWP are excellent activists. Time and time again they have shown their energy and organising capacities in building political movements. But this has proved to be insufficient for the growth of the party.

John Molyneux takes Alex Callinicos' argument further, to more angular conclusions, arguing that the party's failure to make a breakthrough derives entirely from the objective situation; in particular, the strength of the economy over the past decades, the low level of industrial struggle and the depressed state of working class consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Marxists would accept these fac-

tors have an influence but do they really explain the SWP's failure to grow given their size, influence and position within the mass movement? There is a powerful tendency in the debate to explain the SWP's failure to grow and present a revolutionary strategy to the class by continual reference to obstacles in the objective situation.

Instead, it is the SWP's wrong conception of the united front and the lack of a revolutionary political programme that has prevented it from growing and led to the current crisis.

## THE UNITED FRONT

The reason proposed for the removal of John Rees from the central committee was his mishandling of the Respect project and its subsequent split. The debate on Respect spurred SWP members into a discussion of the method that underpinned the tactic in the first place, which developed into criticisms of the organisation's anti-war and anti-capitalist work over the past decade, and their concept of united front work that has guided these interventions.

Some of the documents complain of anti-democratic practices, heavy-handedness, a bureaucratic top down regime and criticisms of tactics and methods stretching back to the first gulf war and the anti-Poll Tax campaign of the late 1980s. However the most important debates are on the question of the united front, building a new party of the left and the effects of the objective situation on the opportunities of creating a revolutionary party.

The document from Neil Davidson, a leading SWP member in Scotland, is the most significant because it raises differences of principle with the 'united front of a special type' method developed by John Rees, Lindsey German and Alex Callinicos at the beginning of this decade. The 'united front of a special type' was conceived of as a long-term alliance

with a detailed political programme such as the Socialist Alliance and more recently Respect. However, the programme was a compromise, the Socialist Alliance's People Before Profit left out the necessity of revolution and advanced a left reformist programme. Respect dumped key socialist demands such as a woman's right to choose, and lesbian and gay liberation in order to attract middle class Muslim voters.

Davidson supports the formation of Respect but argues the SWP should have done more to win it to revolutionary positions and were inhibited from doing so due to their erroneous treatment of it as a united front. He writes: "Respect was a political party which, by definition, must seek to intervene across the entire range of political, social and economic issues facing the workers and oppressed groups it wants to influence". Instead of attempting to win Respect to their politics, Davidson says, the SWP adopted an approach "involving no real sense of mutual challenge or discussion, simply an unsustainable agreement not to mention certain issues which broke down as soon as the initial momentum of electoral success was spent."<sup>3</sup>

It is not the first time such special united fronts, which blur the differences between distinct political strategies, have been formed. In the 1930s, Trotsky had many arguments with those of his supporters who advocated this type of special united front. For instance, in 1935, a minority of the French Trotskyists set up a newspaper (*La Commune*) and associated bodies called "revolutionary action groups". Trotsky argued that this confused the distinct political programmes of the Trotskyists and the left social democrats. He said: "...the united front is an alliance of the forces of the mass organisations with a view to concrete action. In the case of *La Commune*, there are neither forces nor

action."<sup>4</sup> For Trotsky, the united front had nothing to do with setting up semi-revolutionary political groups, but was about fighting for the mass workers' organisations to take action in defence of their members interests. This required no concessions on programme or agreement to 'keep quiet' about the revolutionary criticisms of the reformist leadership.

Unfortunately, Davidson goes onto define the united front in very narrow terms as an alliance for action around delimited goals that all participants can agree on, and concludes from this that it should involve revolutionaries suspending their criticism of reformist allies; "where sectarians", he says, "seek the point of difference, we seek the point of agreement."<sup>5</sup> For good measure, Davidson accuses Trotsky of "speaking complete rubbish" when he described trade unions and soviets as forms of united front. Trotsky had argued insofar as they unite the mass of the working class for action in defence of their interests, these were a form of the united front. For Davidson this is incongruous because such bodies necessitate argument over strategy. He writes:

"In a united front revolutionaries and reformists agree to put aside their differences in order to concentrate on the achievement of one or more key issues upon which they agree; in a worker's council... reformists and revolutionaries debate their differences in order to persuade delegates to endorse one or the other position as a basis for action"<sup>6</sup>

But the mistake here lies with Davidson, not Trotsky. Even where a united front is struck for the most minimal of demands, revolutionaries put forward different methods of struggle and forms of organisation to win. In this way revolutionaries can provide an alternative leadership and illustrate in practice

the inadequacy of reformist methods of the struggle. Such arguments over strategy will always occur on any terrain. Davidson gives the example of opposing a fascist party as a legitimate united front activity that poses few differences with reformists. But while the “No to the BNP” slogan can unite many forces, differences will – or, at least should – quickly emerge on how exactly to oppose them, whether to use violence, whether to raise other political demands like ‘defend refugees’ in the course of the mobilisation, and so on.

#### NEW PARTIES AND THE FARMER-LABOR PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Davidson’s minimal and narrow concept of the united front means he refuses to see it as something that can apply to fighting for or building new political parties. Davidson notes that in a recent article for International Socialism Alex Callinicos identified the farmer-labour party tactic in the United States as providing a precedent for Respect. Davidson points out this is an unfortunate comparison; it was, he says, “an early example of right manoeuvring” that “represented in embryonic form the catastrophic centrist position imposed by the Comintern later in the decade”.<sup>7</sup> Davidson is right on this: the comparison is certainly unfortunate from the point of view of the SWP. The American communists made a series of programmatic concessions to the radical farmer’s movement – encapsulated in conceding to the idea of a dual-class party – and accepted a programme that positively defended small property holders and advanced limited social reforms. In other words, the American communists made a series of unprincipled concessions to petit bourgeois forces. But after having made these they then bureaucratically attempted to pack a conference in 1923. As Simon Hardy observes:

“The whole experiment revealed a fundamental weakness in the labour party tactic as conceived by the American communists. From a sectarian abstention from the real labour party movement in 1919, the communists eventually arrived at a position that regarded the formation of a dual class party, farmers and workers, on a reformist-populist programme, as the object of the tactic. This necessarily led them to accept the role of friendly midwives to it, avoiding all political criticism of their reformist partners’ politics. Yet, when faced with losing organisational control, they resorted to ‘taking it over’ by behind the scenes manoeuvres. They became not midwives but backstreet abortionists.”<sup>8</sup>

Some comrades in and outside the SWP might find this scenario familiar. The whole episode contains striking similarities to the Respect fiasco; where, similarly, key parts of the socialist programme – gay and lesbian rights, secular educa-

tion – were dropped so as not to put off middle class forces, in this case, the Muslim community leaders. And, like the farmer-labour party, Respect split amid accusations of bureaucratic chicanery on the part of the communists (the SWP). In Chris Harman’s response to Davidson he also notes that, “the incident shows incredible similarities with our experience with Galloway in Respect.”<sup>9</sup> But Harman does not register the mistake of the American communists over the conference or the unprincipled programmatic concessions they made, but identifies their principle error as: not being “prepared for its reformist allies to turn against it.”<sup>10</sup>

Davidson is clearly right to identify what is negative in this historical comparison, he is wrong however to argue the experience of the farmer-labour party tactic shows the united front has nothing to do with a new party movement. Although the US communists implemented the policy opportunistically, they were right to see the fight for a workers’ party as a united front. The labour party tactic in the US, where there were no existing mass workers parties, put the revolutionaries inside the movement for working class political independence. It was perfectly possible to fight for a united front for a new party from “above and below”, i.e. address the call for a new party to both the leaders and the rank and file, and argue for revolutionary politics as its basis. Trotsky wrongly rejected the workers’ party tactic initially, although, he correctly identified it with the opportunistic policy of the American communists. Only in 1938 did he realise the movement for a new party could be turned against the reformist leadership of the class.

This argument is relevant today because, owing to social democracy’s adoption of neo-liberalism, the far left has found itself in movements for new parties. But all too often, the SWP – although they are not the only culprits – has refused point blank to fight for revolutionary politics in such parties or movements. Had the SWP’s sister organisation in Germany done so it could have obstructed the consolidation of the German Left Party as just another reformist party. The Respect experience in Britain was particularly damaging for two reasons. First, it involved an unprincipled abandonment of class politics from its inception, which was very similar in its nature and longer-term effect to the farmer-labour party debacle of the 1920s. Second, its inevitable break up under the pressure of its class contradictions inspired widespread disillusionment because many on the left, particularly in the unions, saw it as a litmus case for whether a break with Labour was possible.

Once the united front policy is understood as a policy towards working class

organisations, one that necessarily involves a fight with their existing leaderships, it is obvious that a principled alternative existed to the Respect manoeuvring: fighting openly and honestly for a new workers’ party.

#### THE PRACTICE OF THE UNITED FRONT

Neil Davidson’s refrain that a united front necessitates the “putting aside” of differences with reformists is similar to an argument Alex Callinicos had used against the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) in the late 1990s, who were at the time the SWP’s American sister organisation. The ISO had argued that, within the coalition opposed to the bombing of Serbia by NATO in 1998, the SWP had a principled duty to defend the right of Kosovan Albanians to self-determination while opposing the bombings. Callinicos dismissed this call for criticism of pro-Serbian allies within the united front, arguing that such criticism was not necessary to win militants to the party. He said:

“You make concessions to the misconception that the way in which revolutionaries differentiate themselves within united fronts is by ‘putting the arguments’ which set us apart from other forces within the united front. In our experience it is more often through being the most dynamic and militant force in building the movement in question that we distinguish ourselves and draw new people towards us. Of course, this process leads to arguments, but these develop from the concrete situation rather than being produced by some abstract “duty” to disagree with everyone else.”<sup>11</sup>

Another example is Unite Against Fascism, which won a host of signatories from the ruling class to its founding statement, including Conservative Party leader David Cameron, along with the right wing Labour and Liberal MPs. To win such support meant making sacrifices over the politics – the UAF mantra was ‘use your vote’ to stop the BNP, not smash the BNP. On the ground this wide spectrum of class forces were nowhere to be seen and it was SWP members who were asked to distribute the bourgeois UAF leaflets. Rather than a united front for action, the SWP found themselves in the position of principal propagandists for a liberal anti-fascist campaign.

Similar concessions were made in the Stop the War movement. The task the SWP faced in the spring of 2003 was to identify what was necessary to stop the war and fight for it, regardless of whether their united front allies were willing to accept it. Clearly this posed agitating across the movement for a general strike. While it may sound pie in the sky now, we should remember Bob Crow promised from the platform on 15 February to “go to the TUC”. Clearly a fight for a general strike, as the SWP had pushed for in the early 1990s over pit closures, both

within the unions and within the Stop the War Coalition could at least have won the backing of a militant minority.

The SWP did not do this; they feared a split in Stop the War and wanted to keep the union leaders on board on a minimal basis. In fact, this is half-recognised in the pre-conference discussion where Alex Callinicos says: "It costs a trade union general secretary nothing to make a speech at an anti-war rally and only money to make a donation to Stop the War. But united fronts are about action and action against the recession means, for example, resisting the public sector pay limit or fighting pay-cuts in the private sector. Leading trade union bureaucrats are only going to sign up to that under immense pressure from below."

Callinicos, unwittingly, admits that the SWP refused to call for action over the war that went beyond demonstrations and denunciations of the war. So the strategy pursued by the campaign was of more demonstrations that became increasingly smaller as the war continued with a series of platform speakers making noises against the war but proposing not one concrete action to stop it.

Workers Power's strategy in 2003 started from asking what methods of struggle are needed to stop the war? How can we bring maximum pressure to bear on the union leaders? And how can we use the radicalisation to strengthen workers' organisation over the longer term? If, in contrast, we start from a concern for what our reformist anti-war allies are going to accept and tailor our demands accordingly then no militant is going to go away with an understanding of how revolutionary methods of struggle are different to the reformists.

Chris Harman in his reply to Davidson criticises him from the left on this question of the united front. He emphasises, correctly, that demands have to be "concrete and specific" enough to put reformists to the test of practice and says that too often reformists have been able to make abstract radical appeals for change without lifting a finger to fight. Thus he warns: "A united front around such calls, far from drawing their followers into action, only serves to provide a left cover for the leaders' inaction." Harman reminds Davidson that it is important to know when to break the united front too, he argues;

"It also has to be remembered, at every moment, that the leaders will seize every opportunity to back off from their commitment even to the minimal points of agreement with us. For this reason no united front will last forever. Neil is therefore overstating the case when he writes that the "cases where revolutionaries simply have to stand alone on a point of principle... should be the exceptions, at least in the current period." We have to assume in any united front that a breaking point will come. Our responsibility is to build links with those influenced by reformism so that when the break comes, we do not break alone."

Harman's comments are striking for the disparity between their relative orthodoxy and the actual practice of the SWP over the past period. The question he raises – when is it necessary to break the united front? – is clearly one of tremendous importance. In France, for example, it is to the credit of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) that they made the principle of "no coalition government with the Socialist Party" a pre-condition of their moves to form a radical left party. This was a call for a split with the French Communist Party; one that was warmly received by radical activists as the popularity of the new party project testifies.

The SWP have faced this problem, when to challenge the reformists in action, on each terrain of struggle, one exacerbated further by their leaders' tendency to put forward non-Marxist politics from the top table of their various initiatives. In Globalise Resistance they popularised a kind of anti-corporate radicalism, in the Socialist Alliance it was left reformism.

#### THE MISSING LINK? PROGRAMME, PROGRAMME, PROGRAMME

Chris Harman may position himself to the left on the united front, but he swings back rightwards when asked to consider how the fight for an alternative to Labour might proceed in the period ahead. Neil Davidson suggests the SWP should start to discuss how they might treat a new party formation in the future and relate to it as a revolutionary component. Harman claims, this is "pie in the sky since we have no ideas of under what circumstances and with what forces we would be working".<sup>12</sup> Indeed he concludes his response to Davidson by refusing to offer any lead, initiate any action or campaign, or even to lay down basic principles in forthcoming struggles: "Denying that what is involved is

some form of united front – one which creates special difficulties – is not helpful. Nor is it helpful now for us to try to delineate in detail in advance, long before the conditions for a new formation exists, how we would respond."<sup>13</sup>

While Harman emphasises the importance of learning from debates in the pre-war communist and Trotskyist movements, it is hard not to see this statement as rejecting the idea that holding to certain general principles may be the best guard against either sectarian or – more likely – opportunist errors. Indeed the debate inside the SWP remains striking for the lack of reference to such programmatic concerns; it reflects the IS/SWP tradition's long-term rejection of the transitional programme.

Instead, as we have noted above, blame is put on the objective conditions as militating against the growth of a revolutionary party. Many a positive reference is also made in the various documents to the theory of "the downturn". Tony Cliff's downturn theory argued that a long period of defeat and retreat of the class that began in the mid 1970s and had continued right through to the early 1990s. Never mind the great struggles of the engineers, steel workers, health workers, civil servants, printers, seafarers, dockers and the great miners strike of 1984-5 against the Thatcher government. According to the arbitrary pre-determined schema of the SWP, the struggles were doomed to fail because they were in the downturn. The idea that events could have taken another course had the interaction of actions and conditions occurred differently is hugely important for Trotskyists. We need it to understand the revolutionary potential of class struggles like those we see in the 1980s and their defeat owing to the continued dominance and prevalence of reformist ideas in the working class.

The SWP take their objectivism about historical change to its logical conclusion; seeing the development of revolutionary consciousness in the working class as in the final analysis a spontaneous process. They famously reject Lenin's dictum, which he took from Kautsky, that revolutionary consciousness has to be brought into the working class "from without" by the active intervention of communists. Tony Cliff once said, accepting Lenin's position means there is "precious little left" of Marx's premise that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself.<sup>14</sup> But

this of course confuses two different things; the conscious work necessary to imbue the working class with revolutionary ideas, and the act of working class emancipation in a revolution.

In rejecting Lenin's emphasis on the conscious political intervention of revolutionaries, the SWP also reject the role of the revolutionary programme. In the past this led to them being defenceless in the fight against reformism. But over the past decade the development of a distorted conception of the united front led to them doing little more than reproducing reformist-populist arguments themselves, in Respect and elsewhere.

The debate inside the SWP can be a tremendous step forward if sections of the membership really address the methodological errors at the heart of the IS/SWP tradition. The scale and depth of the global economic crisis, naturally gives the discussion a new urgency and focus too. We look forward to continuing discussions with comrades in the SWP through the course of these historic events.

**A longer version of this article can be read at:**  
[www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)

- 1 Alec Callinicos, 'What's going on? A reply to John Rees', available on [www.socialistunity.com](http://www.socialistunity.com)
- 2 John Molyneux, 'Response to Neil Davidson', available on [www.socialistunity.com](http://www.socialistunity.com)
- 3 Neil Davidson, N., 'Leadership, membership and democracy in the revolutionary party', available on [www.socialistunity.com](http://www.socialistunity.com)
- 4 Leon Trotsky, *The Crisis in the French Section*, p. 117
- 5 Neil Davidson, *ibid*
- 6 *ibid*
- 7 Davidson, *ibid*
- 8 Simon Hardy, 'James P Cannon and the fight for Communism in the USA' *Fifth International*, vol. 3, no. 1, autumn 2008
- 9 Chris Harman, 'Some comments on Neil Davidson's document' available on [www.socialistunity.com](http://www.socialistunity.com)
- 10 *ibid*
- 11 Cited in Callinicos, "An American tragedy: the International Socialist Organization", *The anti-capitalist movement and the revolutionary left*, 2001
- 12 Harman, *ibid*
- 13 Harman, *ibid*
- 14 Cited in Luke Cooper, 'The road to Respect: the SWP's march to the right' *Fifth International*, vol. 1, no. 3, winter 2005

# 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 organisation.

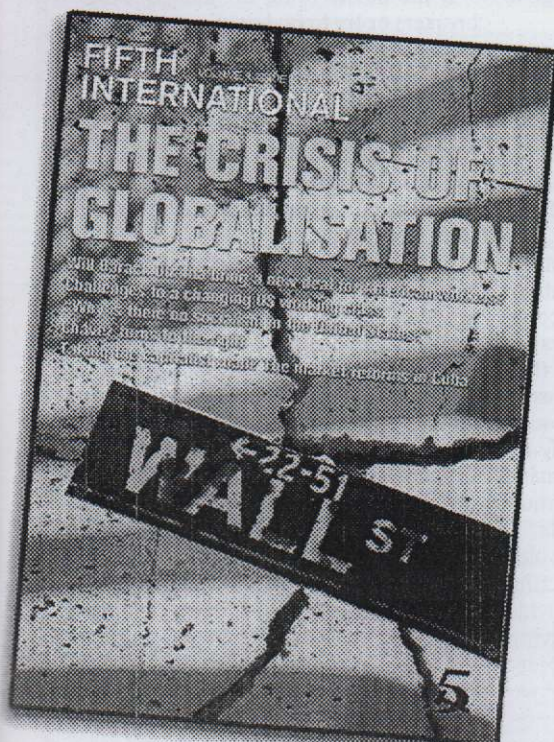
We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a 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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# Internationalism

By Dave Stocking

The eruption of a series of strikes among energy sector and construction workers opposing the hiring of foreign workers brings the question of the meaning of workers' internationalism to the fore. While some militant trade unionists argue that, regardless of the demands of the strikers, socialists should always support the workers, communists disagree.

The slogans "Put British workers first" and "British jobs for British workers" challenge the fundamental basis of a working class attitude, no matter how impeccable the trade union credentials of those who resort to them. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* – as well as coining the slogan that has appeared on countless trade union as well as socialist banners "Workers of all countries unite!" – also said:

"The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: in the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

For the founders of the modern labour movement, internationalism was rooted in their understanding of capitalism as an international system of exploitation and the position within it of the working class – upon whose unpaid labour the entire vast edifice of capital rests. *The Communist Manifesto* again and again points to the inherently global character of capitalist development:

"The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood... They are dislodged by new industries... that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe... In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations."

Even defenders of the capitalist system have praised such passages as a brilliant foresight of globalisation. But Marx and Engels drew from this the conclusion that any attempt to reverse this internationalising dynamic of capitalism in favour of preserving national or local economies was reactionary. Such attempts expressed the viewpoint of classes in the process of being crushed by modern capitalism: feudal landowners, small farmers, shopkeepers, family based handicraft workers.

In contrast to these classes, the modern working class is a necessary, constantly changing product of large-scale capitalist industry and commerce. It has had only one direction it could take to escape its exploitation – forwards. It must complete the social organisation of this production by taking it out of private ownership, not by returning to more primitive forms of production. And it must do so on an international scale, as well as a national one.

## CLASS STRUGGLE

This reality must affect the way the class struggle is waged from its earliest stages. Just as the workers cannot limit themselves to a trade union struggle against a particular employer or to local disputes, if they are to raise themselves to the level of nationwide, political class struggle; so, too, must the working class transcend national boundaries and conduct an international struggle, if it is truly to wage a class struggle.

And Marx and Engels put their theory into practice – or rather they won serious mass workers' organisations to this outlook. In the *Inaugural Address* – a programmatic statement – Marx wrote for of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) in 1864, he made the same point:

"One element of success they [the workers] possess – numbers; but numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge. Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood, which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts."

What does this mean in the day-to-day struggles of workers? It means rejecting all slogans or demands that would divide us long national lines. It means striving for international solidarity. Indeed, Marx and the First International gave real, pow-

erful assistance to workers in struggle by persuading workers, imported as strike-breakers from one country to another, not to play the bosses' game.

But only rejection of all resorts to nationalist rhetoric and all calls for national privileges could do this. Instead, the principle that communists must fight for is to spread and unite the struggles of workers of different countries around anti-capitalist demands.

For this very reason, communists resist this nationalism (or localism, or élitism) whenever and wherever it shows its head: for example, in defence of the interests of a particular trade or craft, in support of a particular locality, or in promoting the rights of the workers of "one's own" country.

Trade unionism (combining of workers in a particular trade to sell their labour power for the best price under the best conditions) is not class consciousness: that is, not yet class conscious, only embryonically so.

Because trade unionism always, by its very nature, combines only a section of the class, not the whole class, it can end up defending the privileges of that section: white workers against black workers; men against women; native born against foreign. Wherever trade unionism sets off in this bourgeois direction, it has to be combated by class conscious, i.e. socialist workers.

If the bosses bring in "foreign" strike-breakers or try to undercut nationally won wages and conditions, of course it is right to fight this. But at every stage the attempt must be made to link up with the workers involved, with the labor movement in their home country, to show that it is the working class interest we are defending, theirs as well as ours and not narrow, national or local identities.

So the oil and construction workers in Lindsey and beyond should attempt to abandon calls for British jobs for British workers and instead recruit the Italian, Portuguese and other contract workers to the unions. They should fight for decent contracts, pay and conditions for all workers, regardless of nationality, and should link up with other European trade unions and workers' parties to fight for the abolition of all anti-union laws and anti-worker EU directives.

Our aim must be to counterpose to exclusion of foreign workers an active international solidarity. In the end such an attitude will strengthen the workers' movement worldwide.