workers
a POWER pamphlet

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The socialist alternative to New Labour

An action programme for revolution in Britain

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This pamphlet is dedicated to our comrade, Kuldip Bajwa, sentenced to 21 months in prison for the "crime" of defending the 1999 June 18 demonstration against capitalism from the vicious onslaught of heavily armed riot police.

Prison has not broken his spirit of resistance. He remains committed to the revolutionary programme outlined in this pamphlet and to building the revolutionary party so urgently needed to carry it into life.

We salute our comrade and look forward to his speedy release.

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PHONE: 020 8981 0602 FAX: 020 8981 0475
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Blair's Britain

When thousands of Rover car workers were told they were to lose their jobs at the Birmingham Longbridge plant, the Labour government sat back and said there was nothing it could do. But workers across Britain thought otherwise. They poured into Birmingham, to join with the Rover workers on the biggest demonstration the city has seen in years. Their message to Labour was simple – act to save jobs.

This display of working class anger at Labour's miserable failure to protect the jobs and livelihoods of its supporters is part of a growing realisation that the hopes so many placed in Tony Blair's Labour government have been betrayed by the New Labour leaders. The record of this government shows why this anger is justified and is set to grow and turn into action.

At the same time – in Britain and across the world – countless numbers of youth, who feel alienated from traditional politics, are willing to rally and fight under the banner of anti-capitalism. These youth rightly have contempt for Blair's creeping-Jesus sermons on Britain's "beacon" role as centre for world capitalism. Instead they march on the institutions of capitalism to vent their anger at the pillage of the globe these institutions oversee, from the City of London's finance houses to the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle.

We now have had three years of New Labour. And what have we got to show for it? The rich list got longer; the number of millionaires in Britain grew by 10 per cent. The UK now has 26 billionaires. The combined wealth of the richest 1,000 people at the beginning of the new millennium was £146 billion, a massive 27 per cent increase over 1999.

We are not talking lottery winners here; everyone on the rich list is worth more than £100 million. Tax breaks by Labour have helped this list to grow. In Blair's Britain – where unemployed youth have their benefits taken from them if they refuse to accept lousy paid jobs – more than one quarter of the wealthiest 1,000 are idlers who inherited their fortunes. Scores more landowners and aristocrats are rising up the list as they cash in on the housing boom by selling off land to the property speculators.

The league table of Britain's richest is not the only list that got longer since Labour's landslide win in May 1997. If you're waiting for NHS treatment for chronic complaints then your queue just got bigger – by 10,000 in January this year. And yet cutting them this was one of the top five pledges made by Blair!

The tales of two lists sums up the New Labour government's record. Fabulous riches for the few – job insecurity , low pay and increasing poverty for the many. Britain now has more children living in poverty than anywhere else in European Union (EU); we have the longest working hours, the most expensive and inefficient transport system, and the least spent on health of the major EU countries.

We are now three years into a government that gives handouts to fat cats while raising taxes on working people. Three years of a government that prefers to use its "war chest" to pay big bucks to bankers for loans taken out by the Tories while saying no to desperately needed funding for public transport, health and education. This is what Chancellor Brown means by "prudence".

Three years of a government that spouts "education, education, education" as its priority while blocking tens of thousands of young people from going into higher education by imposing expensive tuition fees and abolishing grants.

But it is not just this government's attitude to tax and spending that stinks.

This is a government of breathtaking hypocrisy. In opposition, "read my lips, no selection in our schools"; in office, grammar schools allowed to stay while cabinet members send their kids to private school. David Blunkett now claims his 1995 promise to end selection "was a joke". In opposition, no arms to dictatorships to use against their people – an "ethical" foreign policy; in office, the DTI send helicopter gun-ships to Indonesia to kill people in East Timor.

In opposition John Prescott lambasted the Tories and private rail companies for the profit before safety ethos that saw people killed in the Southall train crash. In office they sat on their hands. Then, after another 31 passenger deaths at Paddington, caused by the greed of the private rail bosses, Prescott acts decisively – to leave rail safety in the hands of corporate killers Railtrack!

Jack Straw, one of the most racist and authoritarian Home Secretaries ever, scapegoats desperate and poverty stricken asylum seekers, treating them like criminals, while real criminals such as the butcher of the Chilean people General Pinochet are allowed to escape justice. And Blair refuses to meet representatives of the Chechen people being butchered by Russia's army while he falls over himself to embrace the architect of this massacre, Russia's new President Putin, declaring him to be "a fine man".

There have been a few reforms to keep the trade union leaders smiling – the minimum wage, more trade union rights – but getting them has been like pulling teeth. And the minimum wage was set at such a low level so as to be acceptable to big business that even the Tories have admitted it's harmless. The trade union recognition proposals were scrutinised line by line by the CBI and red-inked so much that they were barely recognisable as the measures demanded by Labour when in opposition or asked for by the trade unions.

Three years into office the government is looking frayed at the edges. Blair's ratings remain high because memories of the eighteen years of Tory government are still fresh. Under Hague the Tories are still a bunch of no-hopers, so desperate that they fast-tracked Michael Portillo to the new office of prime minister-in-waiting in the hope of better things after the next election.

But the alliance that brought Blair to power is beginning to fracture. You can see it in the resignation from the government of the Blairite witchfinder general for Liverpool, Peter Kilfoyle. He has gone to spend more time with his working class constituents who are deeply alienated by Labour's failure to deliver.

You can see it in the constant cry from backbenchers that the "Labour heartlands" are fed up with the pro-business agenda of New Labour. Above all you can see it in the mass vote for Ken Livingstone – and against Blair's hapless stooge Frank Dobson – within the London Labour Party and trade union membership.

Gordon Brown's budget was the opening shot in the campaign for the next general election, probably no more than 18 months away. It was the first attempt to woo back some of the core working class vote for Labour by giving the NHS an injection of cash (though the money Labour is spending on the NHS remains less, in real terms, than the amount spent by the Tories between 1989 and 1992).

But it only served to highlight how miserly (aka "prudent") the rest of the budget was; pensioners were given a poke in the eye; those campaigning for massive investment in public transport were rebuffed; the cost of cigarettes and medicines still go up, hitting poorer people most; and the number one priority – education – got peanuts.

Worse, the rich did better than anyone. The capital tax break on "employee" shares in the budget was welcomed by the *Financial Times* as a "colossal giveaway" to around 100,000 top UK directors and senior managers.

Brown only used around a third of his £12 billion "war chest". His budget did not go anywhere near matching the resources needed to end child poverty or turn around the decaying health, education and transport services.

The task over the next 18 months is to drive a wedge between the Labour heartlands and the Labour government. There is frustration and anger among Rover workers, in the rank and file of unions like the FBU in the fire service, the RMT on the rail and Unison in the public sector, inside the Labour Party local organisations, among teachers. The hostility of thousands of youth who have taken to the streets and battled fiercely against the symbols of global capitalism's vicious exploitation of the world shows that the will to fight exists among those who will inherit the future. All of this needs to be channelled into active and co-ordinated resistance. Initiatives like that taken by the London Socialist Alliance to stand a socialist slate for the London Assembly are a start in this direction.

If we can draw hundreds of thousands, and eventually millions, into struggle around the demands and actions that are set out in this programme, then a revolutionary, internationalist and socialist alternative to New Labour can be built.

It can sweep New Labour from office and destroy the entire rotten capitalist system that Blair props up. That way we can make sure that the rich list stops growing – and instead is torn into shreds. ★

Defend our jobs, wages and services

BMW announces in March 2000 it will sell – off Rover with thousands of job losses and the German multinational's share price soars. Barclays Bank said that because £2.5 billion profits in 1999 were not enough – a 30 per cent increase! – they will sack 7,500 workers and close down 250 high street banks.

The new factories in areas such as the North East, which had been held up as hi-tech examples of Britain's manufacturing future, have been shut, wrecking the lives of workers, their families and the communities they live in. In the middle of an economic upturn the jobs massacre goes in Blair's Britain, making a mockery of Labour's "back to work schemes".

Labour talks of massive job creation since it came to power and points to the unemployment figures of 6 per cent and falling to prove it Everyone knows that the official unemployment figures – benefit claimants – are a joke. Over a million above the age of 50 have been kicked off the register and one million below the age of 50 are deterred from claiming though they would dearly love to work. The real figure of those out of work and wanting a job is nearer four million today.

Capitalism produces for profit not need. It doesn't matter how modern your plant, how hard you work, how competitive your work is or how much need there is for what you produce, if there is no profit to be made from what you make the capitalists won't produce it: your factory will close and your job will go. Rover workers have done all they where asked by their new bosses and trade union leaders to boost productivity and embrace multi-skilling and yet they get kicked in the teeth.

Steven Byers sheds crocodile tears over the massacre of Longbridge after his £150 million sweetener to BMW fails to prevent mass sackings. Brown and Blair say there is nothing they can do about private industry sacking its workforce – you can't buck the market! We can, but it means openly counterposing our needs – our right to a job and a decent livelihood – to the profit logic of the bosses.

No more job losses. All firms that "downsize", declare bankruptcy or try to move to lower wage locations or away from the "high pound" should be nationalised without compensation and be put under the democratic control of the workforce – not the discredited former managers or asset strippers.

Such companies' account books, computers and investment decision-making structures must be open to workers' inspection. This way we can get at the truth of their mismanagement, their hidden assets or find out if they really are bankrupt – and if they are make sure it is them who pay, not us.

All workplaces threatened with mass redundancies or closures should be occupied by the workers. To defend our jobs we must hold the bosses' plant and machinery to ransom. Appeals must be made to other workers for active solidarity, turning occupations into centres of resistance to the scourge of unemployment.

At the same time as they sack us by the thousands, the bosses try to get those of us still in work to put in ever longer hours. Britain has the highest working week in Europe, with an average of over 44 hours. British bosses are trying to get out of complying even with the European Union's law which bans working over 48 hours a week.

Some are forcing workers to sign away their rights without any additional benefits in return. There is a simple answer to this, one that would help us reduce unemployment at a stroke: cut the hours worked, not the jobs; share the available work amongst the workforce and organise a sliding scale of hours.

Labour should immediately impose a legally binding maximum 35 hour working week without loss of pay, intensification of work or increase of overtime. In addition all workers must be guaranteed a minimum one month's fully paid annual leave, in addition to all existing statutory holidays.

New technology must be used to shorten the working week, not to throw workers onto the dole or condemn the young to a lifetime on the streets. At the same time older workers should not be condemned to poverty through redundancy and then exclusion from the workforce.

Workers who are sick should not be cast into the benefit pit that Labour is digging for those on incapacity or disability benefit. We must demand the right to retire at 55 and full pay for all periods of illness, no matter how long the illness lasts.

All of these measures eat into the profits of the rich and challenge their absolute right to do what they like their private property – our workplaces. And that is just what Labour is refusing to do. New Labour accepts the sanctity of private property over the means of production, puts bankers and shareholders before workers. We don't. We demand the right to work. For full employment and useful work for all!

Is there enough work to go round? There are two answers to this question. If we mean work which will guarantee ever growing profits for the bosses then no. Especially in times of recession they have to slash the jobs to cut their losses. Even during booms they aggressively prune the workforce to enhance "shareholder value". A mass of unemployed – a kind of reserve army of workers – are used to threaten those in jobs to keep their wage demands "realistic", i.e. low.

However, if we mean is there vital work that needs doing, and which could put all the unemployed back to work tomorrow, then of course there is. Hospitals are closed, wards locked up, beds stacked and surgeons remain idle while waiting lists rocket.

Schools are crumbling; the railways need to be repaired and made safe; homes need to be built to house the homeless and slash council waiting lists; millions of children living below the poverty line in the Third World need to be fed, clothed, educated and housed; new, safe energy sources need to be developed. The list is, literally, endless.

We demand that we make a start on this list now. Impossible? Not if there was a massive programme of useful projects funded by the state: better public transport services, more hospitals, schools, colleges, libraries, fire services, homes and cleaning-up the blighted inner cities and the environment.

The workforce and the consumers should identify the most pressing needs and democratically decide the targets for such a programme at local, regional and national level. The workers on these projects must have full trade union rights, pay and conditions and must have control over their operation.

But New Labour will only speak of spending money on vital projects if private capital is brought in to make a profit out of every area of our lives. The transport network, the NHS, the colleges and schools, the fire stations, sport and entertainment, and even the prisons are to be hived-off to the mega-corporations and greedy private investors in "PFI" or "partnership" schemes.

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott told worried delegates at the Labour Party conference in 1998 that these projects would stay in public hands, and that private money is just a useful way of creating jobs and improving services. He likened the private investment schemes to a mortgage on your house.

Exactly! Working class people know very well that the house may be registered in their name, but they pay at least three times what they borrowed because of interest and if they lose their job and can't pay the mortgage, the building society can move in, repossess it and sell it off at a knock down price. That is what the capitalists have in store for Britain's public services.

It must not be allowed to happen. Scrap PFI and private – public partnering and drive the market out of our services, with no compensation to the "privateers". Increase the taxes on wealth and profits to pay for these projects.

Work or full pay

The Labour government caused public outrage by cutting benefits to single mothers. It aims to subject the disabled to humiliating tests before they get their incapacity benefits. As for the young unemployed, they are being herded en masse onto the mis-named "New Deal": a cheap "work-for-dole" scheme with no guaranteed employment at the end.

The jobless, the disabled, the youth and single mothers have become scapegoats to distract attention from the real causes of mass unemployment and urban decay.

It is not a "dependency culture" among work-shy claimants that causes unemployment – it is the capitalists who devastate whole swathes of the country with mass redundancies and leave a whole generation with a pitiful lack of opportunity.

We say: scrap the Job Seekers' Allowance, "Welfare to Work" and the "New Deal". Replace them with a non means-tested benefit equal to the last wage or to the minimum wage, whichever is higher. The rule against claimants "co-habiting" must be abolished. To really help the unemployed back to work training programmes, paid at the full union rate, and controlled by those working on them and participating on them so that they can be designed to fit individual abilities to the skills needed to rebuild Britain, must be set up by the state. Each such programme must provide guaranteed jobs at the end.

The tax system benefits the rich. This set up must be reversed by raising the level of corporation tax, capital gains tax, inheritance tax and stamp duty on share and property deals. The licensed fiddling that goes on must be stopped by opening the books, accounts, contracts and financial arrangements of businesses to workers' inspection

Against all attempt to divide the employed against the unemployed we need to forge an unbreakable alliance between them. This means the unions must open membership to the jobless with reduced membership rates and full rights.

We must build democratic, independent claimants' unions and unemployment centres – funded by the state and the unions but with no conditions, or restrictions on how to spend money and no bans on politics. From such local bodies we must strive to forge a National Unemployed Workers Movement to hound the job-killers, occupy empty homes, expose and harass the luxurious high life of the rich, and take action in support of other workers' struggles.

Make the rich pay!

The most familiar refrain from New Labour is that the country can only afford to spend a strictly limited amount on jobs and welfare. "Iron Chancellor" Brown preaches "prudence" to avoid getting into debt; the budget must be balanced. All this sounds like common sense – but it is based on a huge lie. Namely, that there is not enough wealth in Britain for us to be able to put everybody to work and provide decent services. The fact is that Britain is immensely wealthy. The problem is that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority, the rich.

And Labour, by promising not to raise taxes, to lower corporate taxes and to encourage these people to "get filthy rich", is dedicated to preserving the rule and the opulence of the super rich capitalists. Yet their wealth comes from exploiting our work. So when New Labour parrots the Tories old refrain that "we" cannot afford to "tax and spend" we must reply – tax the rich, make the millionaires and the billionaires pay! Bring in a wealth tax: a punitive tax on unearned wealth and on profits.

Since 1979 taxes have been cut for the rich and increased for the poorest members of society. Margaret Thatcher won cheers from the yuppies in the City when she slashed the top bracket of income tax to just 40 per cent – but New Labour has refused to raise it again. These cuts in income tax have cost £32 billion. Half of it has gone to richest 10 per cent, and 30 per cent has gone to the super – rich in the top 1 per cent.

Blair's spin doctors have finally admitted that the "tax burden" has risen under New Labour, and this mainly due to indirect tax increases on petrol, cigarettes etc which inevitably impact on working class people more since their income is less than the rich yet everyone shells out the same.

The only just way of overcoming such an unjust taxation system is to make income tax hit the rich not the poor through a steeply progressive income tax. Such a measure would be welcomed by millions, but to make the taxation system truly just we must demand Labour goes further.

All of us pay council tax. While this is banded according to property it takes virtually no account of income. The tax hits the working class hard and lets the big property owners off lightly. Above all VAT – an "equal" tax on goods and services – is a massive tax on the working class. All such "indirect" taxes must be abolished.

If the money lost by Tory and Labour tax cuts were recovered it alone would enable a Labour government to raise Income Support by half as much again, to build hospitals and schools, or for any number of other useful projects.

Meanwhile, £2,000 billion is held in "offshore" accounts around the world by the likes of disgraced former New Labour minister Geoffrey Robinson – over half of them in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man. At the same time the mighty Murdoch empire proudly boasts that it has managed to avoid paying corporate taxes in the UK while not breaking the law.

The tax system benefits the rich. This set up must be reversed by raising the level of corporation tax, capital gains tax, inheritance tax and stamp duty on share and property deals. The licensed fiddling that goes on must be stopped by opening the books, accounts, contracts and financial arrangements of businesses to workers' inspection.

This way we can find out who the thieves are and lock up the tax evaders who spend hundred of thousands on accountants to help them avoid millions in taxes. Hold them to ransom till they cough up. To stop these abuses inland revenue workers, together with trade union appointed accountants, must devise a system that closes all the tax loopholes. Shut down the tax havens and expropriate the offshore accounts!

When they try to send their funds abroad we must confiscate their property and freeze the bank accounts of anyone who tries to flee the country to escape fair taxes.

These measures will squeeze the rich, but they will also release millions need to fund job creation programmes and services for the vast majority of the population.

Low pay? No way!

Chief executives and company directors award themselves massive pay rises. Sir Bob Ayrling resigns after four disastrous years as head of British Airways and is rewarded with a multi-million pay out. Sir Peter Middleton, chairman and jobs butcher at Barclays Bank, quadrupled his salary last year to £1.76 million.

But at the same time they say workers' wages must be held down to help control inflation and give their firms an edge over competitors. Labour says exactly the same when it comes to paying the public sector workforce.

But inflation, high or low, is part of the capitalist system. It is not caused by high wages. During the mid-1970s, when it was high, workers' wages were being slashed by the then Labour government. Workers need to protect their incomes from the regular attempts by the bosses to erode them.

New Labour has been boasting about the low rate of inflation. But even when the official rate is low, for working class people the cost of living keeps rising. Rents and mortgages are excluded from the government's calculations. The supermarkets' monopoly control over food distribution means that workers are not benefiting from low production costs. They are paying massively over the odds.

To really protect our wages consumers and unions should work together to calculate real rises in the cost of living, the media be compelled to publicise this index, and the law should guarantee a 1 per cent pay rise for every 1 per cent increase in real living costs.

New Labour said it would govern "for the many, not the few". But it refuses to tackle the real problem of poverty pay and widening inequality. When it came to the minimum wage Labour caved in to the bosses demands to keep it low – £3.60 an hour, £3 for 18-21 year olds and nothing for those under 18. This turned a much heralded reform into a sick joke. Poverty pay, which is what £3.60 an hour amounts to, has been legalised.

Since then the bosses have pushed at an open door at Downing St and demanded of Blair that the minimum wage should not be annually updated. Naturally, he agreed.

Against this we must fight for a national minimum wage of £7 (12 euros) an hour for all with no exemptions. This is the European Union's "decency threshold" and no-one should be expected to work for anything less.

Labour set its minimum wage on the basis of a report from the Low Pay Commission. This has representatives from some of the worst-paying employers. It should be abolished. Instead the trade unions should decide the level of the minimum wage.

Delegate conferences should be called by trade unions to determine pay claims in a democratic way, launch action and agree to any settlement. Workers whose real wage levels have fallen below previously achieved levels – most of the public sector – should fight for full catch-up claims.

Stop the Pensions Scam

The Tories slashed the pensions of retired and older people and abolished the link between pensions and earnings. They defrauded thousands of workers by allowing the finance corporations to "advise" workers to take out private pensions – with them. This "miss-selling" scandal has now been exposed, but millions have lost out as a result and have not been compensated.

Now New Labour is refusing to restore the dignity and rights of older people. Instead they should restore the earnings link to pensions and raise the state pension to a guaranteed minimum of £200 a week. Labour must also end the cruel system whereby old people who require care are forced to sell off their goods or raid their savings to pay for private nursing home places. Long-term care for the elderly should be free and funded by the state.

The government knows that the state pension scheme is underfunded. But the average age of the British population is rising fast. Labour came to office encouraging a massive expansion of private pension schemes in the hope of covering the gap that will hit the next generations when they are at their most vulnerable. But the vast majority refuse to be conned.

This is a new "miss-selling" scandal in the making and the government must change course. The answer to it is to nationalise all private pension funds – without compensation to the corporate owners – and merge them into a single state fund.

Robert Maxwell's looting of the Daily Mirror workers' pension funds showed that bosses can steal the workers' pension funds because at law the funds belong to the employer. This is a scandal. The hidden crime of privatisation has been the theft of pension funds for use as capital for the new private bosses, resulting in the loss of millions of pounds for the workers of the former state industries. These funds must be returned to the pension holders with full accrued interest. All pension funds should be under the control of the trade unions and should be financially underwritten by the state.

Public Services Not Private Profits

The Tory policy of privatisation saw the sell – off of state owned services and industries to the rich. Telecom, gas, coal, rail, buses, the electricity and water systems were broken up and sold at knock-down rates.

The public were bribed with share issues which were supposed to bring these services "back to the people". In reality only a tiny handful of investors made a real profit – the rich institutions and individuals who that could afford to buy big chunks of shares. The directors of these companies made a killing.

Regulators have faced a rising tide of complaints from consumers about these private profiteers. The break-up of once-public bodies has yet another advantage for the rich.

It divides workers into a myriad of smaller competing companies, undermining negotiating rights, and weakening trade union organisation.

In addition privatisation has seen an increase in the number of accidents at work. When Labour won in 1997 the memory of the Southall train disaster was fresh. The lessons were obvious; Railtrack put profit before safety since the automatic train protection system was deemed too expensive and would erode shareholder dividends. Then on Labour's watch it happened again in Paddington; more deaths, more excuses and still Labour refused to take all responsibility for rail safety out of the hands of the criminal capitalists in Railtrack!

For all these reasons it is vital that we end the policy of privatisation now and nationalise all industries and services privatised by the Tories with no compensation to the private owners. To provide a truly public sector – in which people's need come before profit we must also nationalise the private schools, hospitals, pharmaceutical corporations and health insurance companies, which drain public services of vital resources.

Socialists support public ownership. We want the major corporations to be nationalised. But we do not want a return to the defects and inadequacies of the former nationalised industries or to maintain the bureaucratic management of the social services.

One of the reasons the Tories got away with privatisation was that millions of working class peoples experience of nationalised industries like British Rail, the National Coal Board and so on was one of high-handedness, bureaucracy, inefficiency and arrogance. They were supposed to be owned by the public, but ordinary people had no control over them.

What is more, they were chronically under-funded, although their original private owners were handsomely compensated for the loss of their "property". Nationalised industries, utilities and services must be provided with adequate finances and subsidies from the state and be placed directly under the control of workers and working class consumers.

In the twenty-first century there will be no reason to repeat the sorry tale of bureaucratic state ownership. Using modern information technology and a massive extension of democratic rights, state owned services could be placed under the control and management of the working class people that use them, rely on them and work in them.

By 1997 the whole Tory policy of privatisation was deeply discredited, hated by workers and consumers alike. But New Labour has continued the policy and given it renewed respectability. Labour is expanding schemes for partial privatisation, like the Private Finance Initiative, and "Private/Public Partnering" (PFI/PPP).

Some workers and users of services accept these PFI schemes because they seem to be

WORKERS' CONTROL

Everything in this society was produced by the labour of working class people. But a minority of financiers and industrialists – the capitalist class – exercise complete control over our lives.

We can't change this without taking control over our own working conditions. That is why we fight for workers' control of production.

By this we mean something quite different from the works' councils popular in Europe today, where workers' representatives sit round a table with management and decide where best to make cuts or shed jobs. Instead of collaborating with the bosses, the fight for workers' control is in reality a permanent declaration of war on management's right to manage our work in the first place.

Workers' control means a workers' veto over all management decisions. The bosses should not be allowed to cut wages, hours or jobs, to introduce new technology or working arrangements, to cut production or shift it to a new site without the workforce's permission. Workers' control over hiring and firing is the best means to stop employers victimising militants, discriminating against black people, youth, women, lesbians and gays, the disabled or trade unionists.

And workers' control means asserting the collective needs of the workforce over the divide and rule tactics of bosses who try to set one worker against another. To stop them doing this we need collective organisation – the imposition on management of 100 per cent union membership in every workplace.

Whenever workers refuse to accept job losses, pay cuts or worsening conditions, the employers will reply that competition and business necessities force their hand and that they will go bust unless they get their way. Don't believe them. They demand the right to know everything about us, our health records, our past jobs, even what we do when we are not working, while they are obliged to tell us . . . nothing.

That is why we demand the abolition of business secrecy and the right of workers – and specialists appointed by the workers – to examine their undoctored accounts, financial arrangements, contracts and business plans.

But some firms do go under. If any firm cannot afford to keep going without sacking staff, paying below the minimum wage or forcing workers to work more than 35 hours a week, then they should be nationalised without compensation, under workers' control. Available work should be shared out without loss of pay for any worker. The government should pick up the tab.

the only way to get a big injection of funds for vital services. But these projects allow profiteers to get a foot in the door of running core services like schools and hospitals. Public sector staff become employees of these companies, facing lower pay and even worse conditions.

Workers must fight against all PFI/PPP and Best value schemes. Labour must end the policy of privatisation by the backdoor. Confiscate the profits of PFI companies.

Restore the jobs, wages and conditions of the workers in those sectors. Abolish the Education Action Zones, NHS Trusts, Further Education corporations and all other schemes which give capitalist firms control over our services.

Our local services

The Tories fixed tight spending limits on local councils, forcing them to cut budgets for schools and fire services, close libraries and reduce facilities for local people. Councils put up taxes on local working people to try to cover spending.

Now Labour is still capping local taxes, even though in some areas such as Milton Keynes local people voted in a referendum for higher spending, even if it meant higher taxes.

At the same time the Tories forced councils to put services out to tender and to employ private firms who submitted the lowest bid. Council workers were sacked – those taken over by private companies saw their pay, conditions and bargaining strength get radically worse.

Labour promised to get rid of this "compulsory competitive tendering" (CCT) – and it has announced that it will be abolished. In its place it is bringing in "best value". Out goes the idea that the lowest bid must win the contract. But all this means is that even more council services will be privatised – even if using a private company is more expensive than before.

The way to really improve local services and protect jobs and wages is to scrap CCT and best value. To deal with local government corruption and mismanagement – which is rife – is to open the books of the local authorities and privatised services to public inspection.

Local authority spending limits must be abolished and the right of councils to set the business rate restored. But to get the sort of money we need to resolve the crisis of local services we must fight for a wealth tax and a steeply incremental income tax.

All councils should be elected. The Tories eroded democratic control of local government. With its London mayor, and plans for other cities to have the same, Labour is attacking local democracy with more subtle methods. Mayors may be elected every so often, but they are like elected dictators once in office and the "assemblies" below them count for little.

Abolish the undemocratic Corporation of the City of London in which business votes count more than residents' votes! Give London a democratic assembly with real powers over taxation and spending, not just a talking shop. Abolish the new position of Mayor and stop it being introduced in the other big cities.

Mass meetings on the estates and in the workplaces should draw up inventories of local needs and elect committees to set budgets and plan integrated services. Labour councils should set budgets based on these local needs, accountable to these bodies , and defy central government if it tries to surcharge councillors or overrule councils.

Take over the banks!

The banks, building societies, investment banks and insurance companies have vast power. They are the nerve centres of the entire economy. Through their own investments, whether by lending money or by taking shares in other businesses, they control what is produced, by whom and where, and who receives the products.

They shut down businesses ruining workers' live. They can impoverish whole regions by demanding debt repayments and interest from Third World countries.

They can influence what happens in the so-called "free" market. Home owners and small businesses can be thrown onto the streets in their thousands.

Yet, the banks are totally unaccountable. Even the Bank of England is now able to set interest rates independently of the government. Only by taking control of the major banks can the currency speculators, asset strippers and massive tax fraudsters be identified and their ill-gotten gains seized.

All the banks, building societies and insurance companies should be nationalised and merged into a single state-owned bank, under workers' control, so that society's wealth can be directed to meet the people's needs. ★

The trade unions and the fight for socialism

During the final twenty years of the century the trade unions were under constant attack. Margaret Thatcher, and the Tory governments she led from 1979 onwards, set out to break the power of the then strongest sections of the labour movement: the steel workers, miners, printers and dockers.

These workers fought long and heroic battles against her, but she succeeded because the union leaderships refused to unite these sectors in action and sabotaged all attempts from below to do so.

They had neither the will, nor did they know the way, to fight the Tories because in the end they have no fundamental quarrel with capitalism and they do not suffer the effects of surrender or defeat felt by the mass of ordinary union members.

Only a general strike could have smashed Thatcher's offensive and saved millions from the misery of mass unemployment, collapsing public services, low wages and job insecurity. But during every struggle the bureaucrats worked overtime to block such a strike developing.

After each major defeat Thatcher cemented her victory with another wave of anti-union laws. The defeats between 1981-87 constituted a strategic defeat for the British working class from which, as we enter the new millennium, the union movement has not recovered.

Britain has the most draconian anti-trade union legislation in the European Union. By the beginning of 2000 membership of the trade unions was only just over half of what it had been in 1979 – down from 12.2 million to 6.74 million (figures for TUC affiliated unions).

The severity of this defeat – unparalleled in Europe – led to the adoption of a cowardly ideology of appeasement to the bosses and the Tories, so-called "New realism". The union bureaucracy disavowed strikes and other forms of industrial action in favour of service provision – insurance, credit, legal advice and a concentration on "individual rights" at work.

Workers in newly developing industries and the service sector have not organised to boost the movement's strength. Across the private sector, bosses tore up collective agreements and derecognised unions, with density in this sector – once the bastion of British trade unionism – plummeting to 19 per cent by 1998.

Tony Blair – elected thanks to the millions of pounds and votes of trade unionists –made it clear, despite a greater willingness to talk to union leaders, that his government will not treat the unions preferentially. His refrain has been "fairness not favours", but even then fairness will only come provided the unions do not return to what Blair calls "the bad old days" of strikes, mass pickets and demonstrations.

His reforms, such as the Fairness at Work proposals (see box), concentrate more on individual rights and are very wary of imposing union recognition on the employers. On the other hand he has left intact all of the essential elements of the Tories anti-union legislation.

The trade union leaders have complained about the odd measure. But like Blair they do not want a return to the "bad old days" of the 1970s when an active rank and file, well-organised in shop stewards' committees and industry wide combine committees industry, forced the official leadership to sanction all-out industrial action. Instead they have joined with Blair to praise "partnership" between the unions and the bosses in the quest for productivity.

The TUC has put more money and effort into developing its website in the last three years than fighting for jobs and wages. Visitors to the site are urged to make a tour of the "virtual building" to see what is on offer; the answer judging from the TUC's actions over the last decade is "virtual trade unionism".

The reason that the trade union leaders refuse to fight is not because they are congenitally "bad" men or women. It arises from their social position in capitalist society. The union leadership is a distinct caste, a bureaucracy with material interests separate from the mass of their members.

The leader of Unison, Rodney Bickerstaffe, receives over £70,000 per year plus expenses and a car, while Doug McAvoy of the NUT takes home a cool £85,000. The average wage of a Unison official is around £30,000 plus expenses and car. Yet many Unison members are among the lowest paid workers in the country.

Union bureaucrats' high salaries and privileged lifestyles rest on their members' subs. At the same time they are immersed in a culture of negotiating with the employers. Such an existence, far removed from the day-to-day reality for almost all trade unionists, keeps these officials firmly tied to a capitalist system that a few still claim to oppose, but only with the occasional rhetorical joust.

Overcoming the obstruction of the trade union bureaucracy is crucial. The best way to do this is to build a rank and file movement, a movement of militants from all political groups and from none, united by their commitment to a programme of root and branch transformation of the unions into democratic, fighting working class organisations.

Three times in the twentieth century revolutionaries took the initiative in building powerful rank and file movements. Before and during the First World War Syndicalists and Marxists build the first shop stewards movement.

In the twenties the young Communist Party built the Minority Movement. In the fifties, sixties and seventies an array of different left-wing groups built a series of rank and file movements and organised lefts that reached the pinnacle of their power in the early 1970s. Each of these movements resulted in major advances for the unions and for the working class generally. But in the end all were defeated, the gains reversed, the unions thrown back onto the defensive.

The reason for these failures lay not in the idea of the rank and file movement itself, but in the failure of those movements to transcend the limits of trade union politics – the politics of the workplace, based on negotiations, compromise and co-existence with capitalism.

Militancy alone is insufficient to overcome these limits. And because the Communist Party degenerated into a reformist party after the 1920s the rank and file movements it led themselves became transformed into mere election machines, "broad lefts", designed to capture the union apparatus rather than radically overhaul it.

All attempts to recreate these broad lefts – rather than build real rank and file movements won, through democratic debate, to a revolutionary programme for the trade unions – are doomed to failure. They will turn today's left wingers into tomorrow's bureaucrats.

A rank and file movement is thus incomplete if it does not have – as the leading force within it – a new revolutionary workers' party with a programme for working class power. To this end it is vital that communists in the unions organise and build revolutionary fractions, publish regular workplace and union revolutionary bulletins and win more and more trade unionists to the revolutionary programme.

Without the growth and development of such a network of revolutionaries across the trade union movement the building of a rank and file movement will remain a vain hope rather than a practical option.

Such a rank and file movement would organise workers within and across the unions to fight with the officials where possible, but against them where necessary. Its main task would be to break the stranglehold of the entire bureaucratic caste, winning full democracy for the union membership and committing the unions to militant politics of class struggle.

As militant class struggle becomes more widespread as a result of New Labour's attacks and betrayals, the campaign for a rank and file movement will take on renewed relevance. It will be seen as the most effective way to mobilise the unions against the bosses and expose and oust their agents in the labour movement, replacing them with militant class fighters accountable to the members who elect them.

The rank and file movement must rebuild the battered and weakened the unions. It must fight for a mass unionisation drive aimed at young workers, new industries, call centres, retail and leisure outlets, software, IT and media staff, part-time, unorganised, women and immigrant workers.

The workplace organisations in particular were hard hit during the Tory years. We need a new, vigorous shop stewards' movement with stewards elected and accountable to section meetings and workplace newsletters open to contributions from all members.

Mass meetings must decide all general questions of policy and take all decisions on beginning or ending action. The establishment of workplace branches and branch meetings in works time with provision for child care must be the norm. Industry wide combine committees must be rebuilt.

The rank and file movement must champion real union democracy by demanding the annual election of all officials, subject to immediate recall by their electorate.

Against the obscene system of privilege and perks that helps turn union officials into defenders of capitalism we demand that all officials are paid no more than average wage of those they represent.

End excessive expenses. Second class travel only. No luxury hotels. No remission. For the rank and file monitoring of officials' expenses through regular publication of transparent accounts.

Only militant action will force the bosses to meet our demands. Partnership with capitalism is a cruel illusion that will be shattered with every redundancy announcement, pay cut and attack on conditions. We are for strikes and occupations against attacks and to win decent pay, conditions and recognition.

Strike committees, elected from mass meetings, should run all the actions and have a veto over all deals struck between the bosses and the union negotiators.

All deals to be published in full and all negotiations to be relayed to the entire workforce by audio-visual link ups paid for by the bosses. For the rank and file to control all strike pay.

The minute a rank and file movement leads a strike sanctioned by a mass meeting it will find itself deemed illegal by the courts because of the anti-union laws. That is why central to rebuilding the unions is the fight to smash the anti-union laws. They must be openly defied wherever necessary.

Unions must grant automatic recognition and strike pay for all unofficial strikes. All-out action must be launched to defend any striker prosecuted under the provisions of the anti-union laws provisions and defiance of any fine or sanction.

There must be a massive political campaign to force Labour to repeal the anti-union laws. We should cut off union funding to Labour if it refuses to repeal these laws.

Unions must represent us all. For the right of all victims of discrimination – black, women, youth, lesbian & gay and disabled workers – to caucus within the unions. Opposition to any discrimination at work or in the union. The rank and file movement will declare itself an enemy of all forms of social oppression and will challenge racism, sexism and homophobia wherever it exists.

In the 1980s and 1990s the bureaucracy has tried to preserve its own social status by merging unions into bigger and more general organisations. While our immediate goal is to democratise such general unions we recognise that the working class will be better served by unions which represent all workers, regardless of grade, skill etc., who work in one industry.

We are for industrial unions. To this end we are for joint stewards committees and workplace organisations that draw together different workplaces and industries. Industrial wings in general unions must be given full control over decisions concerning their industry. No "sweetheart" no-strike deals in return for union recognition.

Labour's talk of partnership is reflected in attempts to introduce (albeit in a weaker form than in the 1970s) institutions of class collaboration between the unions and the bosses.

Against this the rank and file movement must say no to class collaboration – for the independence of the unions from the state. Withdraw union collaboration from all joint management schemes. No faith in "independent" committees or boards. For free collective bargaining.

Rebuild local councils of union delegates to co-ordinate solidarity and campaigning. The trades councils have fallen into disuse or have been strangled by the local and national union bureaucracy. We need workers' councils in every town, borough or district of the larger cities. They must have delegates elected from the entire unionised workforce and recallable by them.

Today the keyword on the lips of the capitalists is "globalisation". They roam the world in search of profits. Too often the unions respond to this with protectionism and nationalism to defend "our jobs". This is a dead-end. Capitalism is global. But the working class is international. They share a common interest in fighting a common foe irrespective of national boundaries.

The sell-off of Rover by BMW has led to a filthy chorus of anti-German garbage from the likes of Ken Jackson, who leads the AEEU. For Jackson this is his alternative to organising meaningful action to stop the jobs massacre.

But for the Rover workers it is suicidal as they need the good will, not of BMW bosses, but of their brothers and sisters in BMW plants in Germany. It will be a lot harder to get the necessary solidarity action when union leaders spout this nonsense.

The euro is a reality and points the way to closer and closer European integration. Workers too must attempt to cement a new level of co-operation between Europe's working class organisations by forging international links across the borders of nation states and across the factories and offices of companies and industries.

In the face of increasingly synchronised attacks on social welfare provision that seek to reduce standards to the lowest common denominator, public sector workers in the various EU states need to be learning lessons and drawing inspiration from each other. In place of the impotent bureaucrats' talking shop of the ETUC we need accountable international shop stewards' committees, designed to co -ordinate action across combines and sectors. ★

RIGHTS AT WORK MUST MEAN RIGHTS FOR WORKERS

Anyone who claims there are no classes in society anymore should step inside today's factories, offices, hospitals or depots. Nowhere is the dictatorship of the bosses more obvious and unconcealed.

Here we are made to work faster, harder, longer, with no democratic say in how our workplaces are run. Any rights we have were fought for and won by generations of workers taking collective action.

The Tories stripped away our rights at work. New Labour has brought in new rules for "fairness at work", which barely scratch the surface of the problem.

Real fairness at work means:

- **Employment rights from day one. Scrap the qualifying period of one year before workers can claim compensation for redundancy or unfair dismissal.**
- **Permanent contracts for all workers with guaranteed hours or full pay in lieu.**
- **Ban temporary and zero-hour contracts and annualised hours.**
- **Home-working must be voluntary with full rights to return to the workplace immediately.**
- **Guarantee paid time off for union representatives.**
- **24-hour crèche facilities and care centres funded by employers with fully qualified staff to enable all women and carers to participate fully in the workforce.**
- **The right to recognition for all trade unions and collective bargaining rights wherever two or more trade unionists work for an employer.**
- **Equal pay for work of equal value.**
- **The right to whistle-blow on unsafe and unfair practices. Stricter penalties for breaches of health and safety legislation – criminalise all the bosses who threaten our safety.**
- **Abolish all the Tory anti-union laws.**
- **For a legal right to strike, including the right to take solidarity action, to picket and to strike for political aims.**

The fight for a workers' Europe

In the 21st century the arenas of revolutions will be continents and not the petty national states such as Britain. The British revolution may well begin in Europe and a revolution which began in Britain would have to spread to Europe at once or collapse.

As Europe's bosses try to compete with North America and Asia, the unemployed, the socially excluded, the racially and nationally oppressed all face attempts to worsen their already intolerable conditions. The increase in the size and strength of the multinational corporations leads to attacks on workers' wage levels, health and social welfare provision, on the education of young people and the democratic rights of immigrants and those seeking asylum in Europe. For the former "Communist" countries of Eastern Europe and the countries of the "third world" it will mean intensified exploitation.

The launch of the euro was a major step towards the creation of a federation of European states. Its rulers will be the giant multinational corporations and banks, exploiting Europe's workers and plundering the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In short the European Union (EU) is capitalist and imperialist. Monetary union has unleashed a tidal wave of mergers and rationalisation in finance, commerce and industry. It will speed up the creation of rival economic blocs in North America and East Asia.

Does this mean that the answer for British workers is to force "their own" bosses to quit the EU? No! The sight of Tory loser William Hague on his "battle bus" touring the country to "save the pound" sums up all the backward-looking and reactionary sentiments that the bosses use to try to tie the fate of British workers to that of the bosses on this tiny island.

Going back to an "independent" imperialist Britain is no solution. The bosses and their state would have to adopt even more savage austerity policies than the EU, even more ruthless downsizing and rationalisation, to compete on the world market with economic superpowers like the USA and the EU. In fact behind the nationalist rhetoric of campaigns such as "Business for Sterling" lies another agenda: to tie the fate of the pound not to the euro but to the US dollar – so much for "independence".

The only realistic alternative facing the workers, youth and immigrant communities is to seize control of the vast resources and productive forces of the continent that their labour has created. The answer is to go forward not back. To do this we have transcend our nationally divided and bureaucratic labour movements.

A sharp "either/or" faces us in the coming years. Either an intensification of exploitation and oppression, or forging unity in a militant continent-wide class struggle. Defeat is inevitable if we cling to the old strategy of the left-wing of Labour Party and its Stalinist advisers in the Communist Party.

This strategy sought an alliance with supposedly "patriotic bosses" against the EU. Today Scargill's Socialist Labour Party still peddles this little England nonsense in the labour movement. Any strategy which seeks to sever links with our European brothers and sisters, will disarm us both politically and organisationally.

But neither can we adopt the "pro-EU" imperialist stance of Blair and the TUC. Workers must not sacrifice their lives to the dictates either of the European Central Bank, or the Bank of England. We must not side with a new European policy designed to gain a bigger slice of the economies of the "developing countries". We must not support a European "defence force" which will bomb and terrorise states like Iraq and Serbia.

We, the workers of Europe, must overtake and outstrip our bosses' unification drive. We must build a new Europe wide workers' movement – workplace, trade union and political – independent of all fractions of the capitalist class. If the globalisation of capital is a threat then the globalisation of labour is the answer to it. The national union federations must be combined into a European trade union movement that is controlled by the rank and file.

The European TUC that exists is a useless lobbying machine and a ticket for regular junkets for the unions' top brass. The millions of unorganised workers must be recruited to a new European wide labour movement. Every workplace must elect its council of elected and recallable delegates. Youth, women, lesbians and gays and immigrants must likewise organise democratic working class mass movements to fight for their rights.

Only by concerted action across Europe can the new mega-corporations be prevented from slashing wages and working conditions, weakening or abolishing trade union rights and workplace organisation. Only Europe-wide action can defeat the EU leaders' plans to erode social welfare provision. Only common action between the workers of Western and Eastern Europe can stop the bosses from undercutting wages and social gains in the West and restoring a brutal low wage, dependent capitalism in the East.

Practical aid to the workers in countries such as South Korea, Indonesia and China can help them establish powerful unions, workplace organisations and political parties. This would undercut the plans of our common enemy, the multinationals, to repeatedly close and move factories to the locations of highest exploitation and lowest trade union and democratic rights.

But our goal must be more than survive an endless treadmill of defensive struggles. It must be bring about a total alternative to capitalism. On the European continent there exists the accumulated productive forces, the scientific and technological innovations, the human skills that can lay the basis of a planned economy in which working people can end exploitation and the chaos of the market: a Socialist United States of Europe.

We must fight for measures which expose and challenge the logic of the market system, counterposing to it workers' control over the economy and workers' political power.

- A maximum 35 hour week now, across Europe, without loss of pay, speed-ups and further flexibilisation. All companies who sack workers or shut plants must be nationalised under workers' control and with no compensation.
- A guaranteed European minimum wage of 10 euros an hour and a minimum income for the unemployed and pensioners set at two-thirds of the average wage. Equal pay for all workers, irrespective of gender, nationality and age. Full pay for trainees and apprentices from the first day of work.
- For a European-wide plan under workers' control to develop public transport, social services, health services, education, cultural facilities and to restore the environment.
- Open the borders – repeal all immigration controls. For the unrestricted the right of political asylum. No restrictions on the right of all immigrants to stay or to work! For full citizenship rights including the right to vote. Full access to social benefits, no restrictions on political activity. No to the racist Shengen and Trevi immigration agreements..
- No to the Common Agricultural Policy! No subsidies for the big commercial farmers and agro-businesses. Cheap credits for small peasants and support small farmers co-operatives, for investment into machinery. Average industrial wages and social and trade union rights for agricultural workers.
- No to NATO and the European Defence Union! Not a penny not a person for the defence of the EU. NATO and KFOR out of Kosova and the Balkans. Hands off Serbia and Iraq. No to sanctions against Iraq and Serbia.
- For militant solidarity action in support of workers and the unemployed throughout Europe and the world. Establish and use the right to take political and general strike action in all the states of the EU and across it.
- For Europe-wide co-ordinated collective wage bargaining as a step to create Europe-wide industrial unions and to raise wages and social rights to the highest level across Europe and reduce working hours. No to all restrictions on works council representatives to observe business secrecy. Build links between the rank and file of multi-national companies. For cross-plant and international committees of workers in multi-national companies.
- For the expropriation of the large banks, industries, communications systems and the media, large farms and retail outlets. For their

operation according to a system of integrated plans at a European, national, regional and local level. All to be democratically decided on by workers and consumers and with workers' management of production and distribution.

■ Solidarity with the countries exploited by the European banks, the World Bank , the IMF and the multinationals. Down with the Lomé Conventions that condemn "third world" countries to economic slavery. No to military intervention, whether by NATO or the CSCE, to prop up the military alliances or exploitation by the European mining and oil companies and agro-businesses. For the complete and unconditional cancellation of these countries' debts to the European banks and states.

■ Down with the unelected European Commission, European Central Bank, European Court of Justice. Down with the monarchies of the EU, the executive presidencies, the Senates, Houses of Lords and federal councils which thwart the democratic will.

■ For the election of a sovereign European Constituent Assembly by all those permanently resident in the EU over the age of 16 and from those countries who wish to join it. Down with the rampant corruption and nepotism in the EU bodies – for workers' inquiry into the corruption and for the guilty to be brought to justice.

■ Down with the treaties from Rome to Maastricht that enshrine the rule of capital. If such an Assembly – under the pressure of the masses – takes measures against big capital the working class must be ready to break resistance from big capital and its state forces.

■ No parliament can take the effective measures to expropriate the exploiters or destroy the machinery of oppression which defends them – the armies, police and secret security forces. Only a revolution can create the rule of the European working class – through organisations based on delegates directly elected from the workplaces and the communities and defended by an armed population. The state form of working class power in Europe must be:

■ The Socialist United States of Europe – fighting for the world revolution ★

Fight all forms of oppression

For women's liberation

When Labour came to power in 1997 it raised the hopes of millions of women workers. The first "Minister for Women", Joan Ruddock, promised:

"For the first time in nearly two decades, we have a government which does not want to evade or ignore women's concerns."

The promise appeared to be firm – backed up by the election of a record 121 women MPs (101 of whom are Labour MPs). It was as hollow as just about everything else in Blair's New Britain. Women's liberation is simply not on the agenda. Of course there have been surface improvements. There are more women in top jobs than twenty years ago.

Sexist language is now "officially" frowned upon. Lip service is regularly paid to the specific needs of women in everything from daytime chat shows to government policy papers. But the material conditions of the mass of working class women have barely altered.

At work women still suffer systematic discrimination. As a snapshot, average earnings in the late 1990s for all men were £434 a week. For women the average was £314, around 70 per cent of male earnings. Women working full time earn 80 per cent of average full time male workers.

Labour have insisted that there will be no legislation to deal with this and defend the "voluntary" code leaving it up to bosses to introduce equal pay. As the majority of the (growing) part-time workforce, women are denied many basic employment rights, are paid less on an hourly basis than full time workers and are excluded from benefits, such as sick pay schemes. Working women continue to face major problems as far as maternity leave and childcare are concerned.

Childcare is underfunded in the public sector and expensive in the private sector. Maternity and other forms of parental leave have been improved under Labour – but without ensuring full pay these improvements are meaningless since you are reduced to poverty when you take leave.

If Labour were remotely serious about facilitating real economic independence for women they would introduce equal pay for work of equal value now and equal employment rights for part-time workers. Workers' control would ensure that women were not passed over in terms of promotion and would prevent sexist practices in the workplace that continue to oppress women. Even Cherie Booth, married to Tony Blair, blew the gaff in a speech to the Employment Society three years in to her husband's terms of office and confirmed the extent of harassment and discrimination faced by women.

To get working parents out of the poverty trap they face we demand automatic entitlement to twelve months maternity/paternity leave on full pay – even for Tony Blair. Likewise women and male carers should be granted paid time off to deal with family responsibilities/illnesses etc.

Welfare cuts – especially to the NHS and the schools – increase the burden on women, who remain the carers in most families. The slashing of benefits for single mothers was the most appalling example of how far Labour is prepared to go to starve young women into low paid jobs.

Under new legislation lone parents will be forced to turn up for "job advice" shortly after the birth of their first child. If they don't turn up their benefits will be stopped. We are for the scrapping of the new law (Welfare and Pensions Act) and the introduction of universal benefits set at the level of the minimum wage.

Women's oppression does not only manifest itself in discrimination in the workplace. Capitalism's oppression of women means they can be subject to the most horrifying violence of assault in the streets and subjected to the ordeal of domestic violence at the hands of men. Latest figures suggest that the numbers of rapes are as much as ten times the reported rate.

One reason for this underreporting is the culture in the police force and the judicial system which presents female victims of crime with tremendous obstacles. The gravity of crimes of domestic violence is routinely belittled by police officers.

Scores of women remain imprisoned for acts of resistance to persistent domestic violence, rape and torture. We demand that such women are freed immediately. Self defence is no offence, on the homes or on the streets. At the same time the state must fund safe houses and refuges for victims of domestic violence. Divorce must be available immediately at the request of a single partner.

In the courts, statistics show a massive increase in the women prison population in the 1990s. Once there, little provision is made for women's healthcare or privacy with the regular humiliation of strip-searching. The barbaric practice continues of forcing women prisoners to wear shackles while giving birth.

Labour's "family-friendly" policies do nothing to challenge any of this oppression. On the contrary, they are designed to force single mothers into low-paid jobs and to increase "flexible" working – i.e. temporary, part-time contracts. Part of this involves continuing to deny women full control over their own bodies and their fertility.

Abortion is still not available on demand. Research into fertility treatments remains hidebound by backward, religious-inspired prejudice. Teenage mothers are stigmatised yet sex education at schools is pathetic or non-existent. This is why we need free abortion on demand. Pregnant women themselves – not their doctors – should decide whether a pregnancy is terminated. Instead of moral lectures we want free and easily available contraceptives and sex education in schools and colleges.

The roots of women's oppression lie in the role of the family in society. The full liberation of women will only come when crucial social functions like cooking, cleaning and child-rearing are organised by society as a whole rather than left for women to do in the isolation of the home and the family.

That is why revolutionary socialists fight for the socialisation of domestic labour beginning with the establishment of free 24-hour crèches in the localities and in the workplaces; a fully-funded network of state-run restaurants and cafes on subsidised prices, together with state run laundries and cleaning services. And, to solve the childcare crisis Labour should immediately introduce free nursery education for under-fives.

To fight for all of these demands and to make sure that the workers' organisations themselves, especially the unions, take them up, we are for the building of a working class women's movement. Under revolutionary socialist leadership such a movement can unite working class women to fight for their own interests and unite them with working class men to fight the system that exploits all workers – capitalism.

Fight For Black Liberation

In the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry it is clearer than ever before to millions that black people face systematic racism in Britain. This is not only the "institutional" racism of the police. It permeates every institution of British society.

Black people continue to suffer from systematic oppression. Meanwhile, a number of other minority groups, most recently East European refugees, face deep-seated prejudice and discrimination.

Many black children get a second-rate education. Racism leads directly to the exclusion of a large number of black children in our schools. Schools in inner-city areas are often overcrowded and under-resourced. Combined with poverty and deprivation, their life chances are further reduced by discrimination in housing, access to services and future employment.

Employment is another area of startling discrimination. Black women in particular find themselves directed towards some of the dirtiest and worst paid, least protected jobs. The idea that black women prefer these jobs which suit their temperament or "nimble fingers" is rubbished by the courageous strikes at Burnsall's, Hillingdon Hospital and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, unemployment rates – especially for black youth – remain one and a half to twice the national average even in times of growth. In recessions, black unemployment is the first to rocket.

But racial oppression is sharpest on the streets and in the prisons and police cells. Black people are up to ten times more likely to be "stopped and searched" by the police – then more likely to be arrested, charged and sent down. So ingrained is the racism of the police, the CPS and the courts that even when black people are the victims, they are treated like the criminals – a worrying fact given that racist crimes have increased by 40 per cent since 1992.

We demand justice for the murders of Joy Gardner, Shiji Lapite, Stephen Lawrence, Michael Menson and Ricky Reel. The racist

police and immigration officers responsible for these murders must be brought to justice.

We demand the Labour government abolishes all anti-immigration laws, which are racist to the core as they operate against non-white people and the poor exclusively. Britain is rich enough to provide work and a decent life to all who wish to come here. In particular, we demand of Labour: scrap the current Asylum and Immigration Act, along with those passed by the Tories in 1993 and 1996; restore benefit rights to asylum seekers.

Every immigrant should be granted full citizenship rights immediately not hounded and locked up as if they were criminals. Close down Campsfield Detention Centre and all the immigration centres and the special hostels; jobs and housing for all newcomers.

We fight against all racist employment practices – such as Ford's exclusion of black workers from its truck drivers' section – with all-out strike action.

Unions should organise autonomous sections for black members to discuss all issues affecting them and force the union as a whole to take them up. We fight for the right of black trade unionists to caucus.

Labour must recognise the right to self defence. We are in favour of self-defence squads, answerable to the black community, against racist attacks. The workers' movement must support such squads and help build workers' militia to drive the racists off the streets.

Fight For Lesbian And Gay Liberation

Labour's willingness to capitulate in the face of establishment reaction and bigotry has been especially obvious on the question of lesbian and gay rights. Despite overwhelming government support for the equalisation of the age of consent Tony Blair backed down in the face of opposition from the Barons and Bishops in the House of Lords.

He did nothing to challenge the military hierarchy's policy of denying lesbians and gay men the right to serve in the forces. Labour have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into contemplating reform by decisions of the European Court of Justice. The government even fought a case as far as the European Court to defend an employer's right to discriminate against a lesbian employee. You could almost hear Jack Straw's grinding teeth as he could find no legal pretext to prevent a gay couple settling here as legal guardians of a surrogate child that one of them had fathered in the USA.

Labour opposed an amendment to the Employment Relations Bill that would have given employment protection to lesbians and gay men – as with equal pay for women it preferred to leave the formulation of a voluntary code on the issue of sexuality to the bosses.

This failure to carry through even the most minimal reforms reinforces a culture that treats homosexuality as deviant behaviour. Lesbians and gay men are offered no legal protection against discrimination in the work place. Homosexual relationships are not recognised in law, same sex couples are treated as though they pose a threat to children in their care, and they have no right of access to fertility treatment on the NHS.

Labour recently refused to give same sex couples equal partnership rights on the grounds that it would "undermine the family". This gives the game away. The family is essential to capitalism and even though Blair may tolerate a gay man in his cabinet he will not do anything to threaten the capitalist system.

Section 28 – introduced by the Tories to prevent teachers from even discussing homosexuality in schools and to prevent local councils from setting up special units to address the needs of lesbians and gay men in their communities – remained law three years after Labour won an election promising to repeal it.

Labour were hounded in the March 2000 Ayr by-election by reactionaries committed to retaining Section 28 and refused to vigorously defend their plan to repeal it. They bowed and scraped to the House of Lords as they defended it. In order to appease these ermined relics David Blunkett draws up "guidelines" for teachers insisting they teach the superiority of marriage between heterosexual monogamous couples.

Not only must Section 28 be repealed but it must be replaced with comprehensive sex education free from all religious and homophobic prejudices.

All laws that discriminate against lesbians and gay men must be abolished immediately. The law should treat all relationships as equally valid with lesbian and gay partners having the same rights as heterosexual partners.

Lesbians and gays should have equal parenting rights, whether in the field of fostering and adoption or following marital breakdown and there should be full and equal access to fertility treatment. No discrimination against lesbian mothers.

Britain still has archaic laws on its statute books that criminalise gay sex and new legislation means that some gay men now have to register as high risk sex offenders for consensual acts between adults. The government verbally encourages safer sexual practices yet good condoms are sold for profit rather than made freely available.

All laws against consensual sex should be abolished, police entrapment of gay men cottaging should result in their police officers involved being prosecuted and condoms should be free and accessible. The age of consent should be immediately equalised – overrule the Lords.

This should be a step towards the abolition of the age of consent. This measure does nothing whatsoever to protect children from abuse – most of which takes place in the home at the hands of family members – but does enable the state to interfere in the bedroom to criminalise consenting sexual partners.

Legal discrimination, fuelled by the bigotry of the Church of England gives moral backing to every "queer basher" in Britain. When gays were murdered in a Soho pub by a right-wing racist bomber the wretched tabloid press spoke of "innocent" heterosexuals killed or injured, but lesbians and gays are referred to as "frequenters of gay haunts".

Bigotry leads to brutality. We fight both. To build the fight back we call for organised defence groups and for the labour movement to support the right of lesbians and gay men to defend themselves against physical attack.

The fight against lesbian and gay oppression is too often left to individuals or single issue groups to take a stand. Yet the systematic persecution of lesbians and gays in every sphere of social life, including in the workplaces, is a working class issue.

Lesbians and gay men are persecuted because their sexuality challenges the "family norm" that capitalism has decreed essential for the production and reproduction of the working class. This is why working class organisations, including trade unions, must put the issue of lesbian and gay liberation – as an integral part of the fight for socialism – to the fore.

Too often the unions have cloaked their own prejudice in the argument that the needs of the "whole class" must take priority. The TUC has issued a statement of principles declaring opposition to discrimination on grounds of sexuality. This statement must be turned into a fight against oppression through collective militant action.

To draw in lesbians and gay men into the trade union struggle and to put organised pressure on the leadership we fight for the right to caucus and form autonomous groups

SMASH FASCISM

The fascist threat in Britain has receded in recent years, but the seeds of its recovery lie in every New Labour betrayal. A glance at Europe, where fascist and far-right racist and populist parties are growing must be a warning to British workers: if we don't resolve the coming crisis, the fascists are preparing to step in, should the capitalists need them. The fact is that Jorg Haider's Freedom Party is now in government in Austria partly as a result of workers being fed up with the social democrats record in office and the least politically aware wrongly thinking that Haider would be better.

Haider is no fascist but he has apologised for them, almost certainly harbours them in his party and his policies give comfort to them. Fascist "solutions" include smashing every democratic right we have, breaking up working class organisations including the unions, sending all "non-Britons" (i.e. non-whites) to slave camps, killing gays and the disabled.

That is why we should crush them now, before they gain support for their programme of fascist dictatorship. No platform for fascists! Break up their marches and their rallies, kick them out of the labour movement and off the streets. As the Stephen Lawrence case shows, the police and the state will not do this job for us; build a mass anti-fascist workers' united front committed to confronting fascist ideology and smashing the fascists physically. Build militant defence organisations to make no platform mean no platform.

within labour movement organisations. And we demand that Labour introduce full employment protection for lesbians and gay men. It should be an offence to discriminate on grounds of sexuality, whether in employment, housing, life insurance or any other sphere.

Youth are the future

In every major progressive struggle, youth have joined the front ranks of the working class and the oppressed. Young workers and radicals have little time for the bureaucratic and reformist organisations of the official movement, however. They want action.

Youth also face their own oppression: higher unemployment, lower wages, student poverty – and increasingly in debt, now that Labour have introduced tuition fees and abolished the grant. They are subject to constant police harassment, using the anti-drugs and anti-rave laws. Youth alienation and despair are most graphically illustrated in high levels of youth homelessness, drug dependency and suicide.

School, college and university students are hide-bound by petty rules and excluded from any say in their education or how they live. They are not given any income and are forced to pay for a university education. Each graduate can expect to run up a £12,000 tab at the end of their time at college.

We demand free access to all education for all and for all students over 16 to receive a grant, set at the minimum wage. Students should have control over their working environment including living quarters and, along with teachers, lecturers and parents of schoolchildren, have control over the curriculum and how it is delivered – including anti-racist, sex and drug awareness courses. Above all, we need fighting, democratic and autonomous school and college unions.

Legislation is used to deny children and young people a voice and control over their own lives. The age of consent law, which pretends to provide protection, only adds denial of control by young people over their own lives: it should be abolished. Instead we must demand a charter of rights for youth. Only by recognising such rights will they be able to protect themselves from abusive relationships.

The family home – so beloved of the reactionaries – is the principal scene of abuse and exploitation. Children and young people who live in violent and abusive families should have open and swift access to good quality alternative care.

The children's homes run by local authorities and the churches have been found time and again to be sites of systematic and prolonged abuse; they must be taken out of the hands of unaccountable governors.

They must have a democratic regime including the youth, caring staff and representatives of the working class community. They must be open to regular inspection by delegates drawn from the trade unions and working class communities, who will have the authority to oust abusers and demand improved conditions and regimes.

Labour must equalise the minimum wage for all workers, regardless of age or training status and outlaw discrimination against young workers. The unions must be forced to launch recruitment drives in catering and service industries – wherever young workers are concentrated. Young trade unionists, not dead-head bureaucrats, must control these unionisation drives. For national strike action to win equal pay and conditions and union recognition.

Labour must release state funds for a mass housing programme under youth control, so that young people can design the kind of housing and environment which suits their needs and lifestyles – not be given the bleak "choice" of family home or cardboard box. We demand Labour provide free and accessible leisure facilities (youth clubs, sports facilities, cinemas, cafes, etc.) which allow youth to socialise with their friends in a safe, collective environment.

New Labour's "war on drugs" has completely failed in the two years since the drugs tsar was appointed. Heavier policing just creates more criminals out of young people. Labour must legalise all drugs and operate a state monopoly of the recreational drug supply to prevent adulteration and smash the gangsters' drug rackets.

Even the Police Foundation report commissioned by the Home Office says that cannabis use should not be a major offence. Only when the hypocrisy of the current laws are removed will it be possible to conduct effective education about the real dangers of hard drug, alcohol, substance and tobacco misuse. But the real roots of dependency on physically and psychologically addictive drugs (including the legal ones, tobacco and alcohol) lie in poverty, alienation and the loss of all hope and purpose in life.

Only a fight against the exploitation, unemployment, discrimination and petty restrictions imposed on young people under capitalism will prevent further generations sinking into the despair of addiction.

The active idealism of young people can be used to prevent the despair that many come to feel if they can be won to the revolutionary struggle for socialism. They must build an organisationally independent socialist youth movement which organises a ceaseless fight against the thieving multinationals police repression and racism, against poverty pay and the rampant discrimination and exploitation in the provision of and access to education, entertainment, sport, and youth culture.

The independent socialist youth movement, REVOLUTION, organises against the employers, the repressive state apparatus and racist and fascist gangs. It educates young class fighters in the spirit of revolutionary action. It brings the ideas of Marxism to tomorrow's leaders. Join it, build it, help it in the fight against oppression and exploitation.★

The environment under threat

Sellafield, BSE and GM crop trials. The food we eat and the energy we consume to heat and light our homes or power our appliances – these are not "side-issues", marginal to the class struggle or the lives of working class people.

The question of how energy is produced and with what cost to the general environment, or of how food is grown and processed before it reaches our table and whether it is safe to eat, these are literally life and death questions in Britain today. Cancer clusters around nuclear power plants and human deaths from "mad cow disease" is a reality, made all the more alarming by general ignorance as to what the scale of future deaths are likely to be from these and other man-made environmental disaster.

Of course, these problems and others like them do not just effect Britain. No other issue today so immediately has na international cause and demands and international answer. No corner has been untouched by capitalism's blind greed for profit. From the uppermost layers of the atmosphere to the deepest oceans the conditions for the self-renewal of life on our planet are under threat. The desserts are expanding whilst the forests – the very lungs of our planet – are shrinking.

The land, the rivers and the seas are increasingly contaminated and the air we breath polluted. The climate is changing at a pace never seen before and "natural" disasters are increasing in number and frequency.

The giant industrial corporations are unwilling to take effective measures to control pollution or conserve resources unless these processes can themselves be made profitable. Massive agribusinesses dictate what shall be eaten by everyone, what shall be grown by the farmers.

The conditions and heat of livestock and the repercussions for human health are horrific, as the BSE scandal showed. We can trust neither the farmers, nor the food industry dominated by great multinational corporations nor the bourgeois state which is their servant.

Of course, the Blair government is not alone responsible for many of the problems we face in this area; many are international in origin and can only be adequately addressed or solved at an international level. But their tolerance of lax regulation over agribusinesses and failure to set down and adequately resource enforcement of health and safety, and environmental standards is the fault of this government.

Global warming and climate change

Few scientists or governments still deny that the Earth's climate is changing through the so called Greenhouse Effect – caused by emissions of gases such as CO2, methane and CFCs, which prevent infra-red radiation escaping the Earth's atmosphere. The main sources of these gases are from burning fossil fuels, from the agribusisnesses and deforestation a certain point in such remorseless destruction quantity turns into quality; global weather patterns will change and reverse, leading to floods, droughts and colder winters in countries and sections of continents now mild and humid. In Britain, sea levels are expected to rise, as the ice caps melt.

In large parts of the world agriculture could be devastated. The less developed countries totally dependent on it can ill-afford the adaptations necessary. Famine and epidemics could result. Yet all the imperialist countries like the US will do is to cynically buy exemptions from the already feeble limits from third world countries who do not have enough industry to pollute up to their quota.

In order to prevent the rapid degradation of the biosphere, immediate action is necessary: not a stabilisation of emissions as advocated by Britain and the EU, but a 60 per cent cut in them. We need a planned turn from power stations and motor vehicles burning of fossil fuels to combat atmospheric pollution and Acid Rain.

To plan local, national and international programmes to organise and enforce these we need to fight for workers inspection and control of the polluting industries. We need massive diversion of resources to help the underdeveloped countries develop on the basis of the most modern environmentally clean production. We need a planned restoration of the rainforests and the devastated zones.

We demand that Labour draws up a short term emergency plan to reduce to environmentally manageable levels, the greenhouse emissions from power generation, industrial production and road transport in the UK.

This means both effective filtering of polluting power sources and the speedy replacement of fossil fuel power generation by more climate-benign and renewable sources of energy: wind and tidal power, solar energy, fuel cells, hydroelectric etc.

These sources of energy must be massively expanded during such a plan by state funded public works, and the use of grants and subsidies to householders.

At the same time the polluting industries must be made to pay the true costs of counteracting the damage they cause to the environment. Heavy taxation on such industries and massive fines for breaching new environmental protection laws should be the norm. If they cannot pay then their industries should be nationalised without compensation and placed under the control of the workers.

The hopes decades ago that nuclear power would provide a cheap and safe alternative to fossil fuels have been dashed. Today the nuclear industry is in decline.

This is because the costs of running a safe and properly controlled and inspected nuclear industry is extremely high, as is organising the disposal of waste. These costs, forced on a reluctant industry through mass pressure on governments following serious accidents - Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, have led to a retreat from developing nuclear power as a source of cheap energy in the USA, Europe and other countries.

Recent events in Sellafield underline once more how dangerous the nuclear power industry is. Safety standards are constantly compromised by inadequate levels of staff or monitoring regimes. Now Aldermaston threaten to sack thousands of its workers in order to trim costs with the effect that this too will jeapordise safety. We demand:

- workers' control over health and safety;
- for workers and community inquiries into any aspect of the plant or industry suspected of being unsafe;
- for the immediate closure of unsafe plants and nuclear facilities – ie fast breeder reactors developed primarily for military activity and the unsafe reprocessing facilities that go with them eg Sellafield. The workers must be maintained on full rates of pay until they are re-deployed to other jobs;
- for a workers inquiry into the continued use of nuclear power, proposed methods for decommissioning, and disposal of waste.

Food poisoning

The scandal of BSE is well-known, one of the Tories murderous legacies to us, a result of commercial cost-cutting on animal feed and "tearing down red tape" ensnaring business like health and safety inspectorates.

What is less well-known is how big the epidemic from this and other food scandals will be over the next years.

Labour is not putting enough into systems of inspection of the food industry and must be forced to do so.

Labour is also a friend of the GM firms, such as Monsanto, who wish to use GM crops to gain a monopoly of seed so that they can force farmers everywhere to buy their products at monopoly prices.

The possibility of dangerous and unforeseen dangers to the fauna and flora of the planet – the further destruction of biodiversity – cannot be guarded against whilst business secrecy and competition forces scientists and workers in these industries into silence until it is too late.

In Britain new trials of GM crops are about to start and anti-GM acitivists are about to try to destroy them as they have before. Instead of blanket opposition we should demand independent scientific trials, paid for by the state, but under the democratic control of workers' and consumers' organisations, with full public access to all necessary scientific expertise. The locations of the trials must be public and the results of these trials should be publicly available .

Field trials must be under conditions which ensure no escape of genetically engineered material into the wider environment, by the use of greenhouse trials or the removal of any flowers and plants. All commercial cultivation of genetically modified crops should cease until such time that it has been proven safe to be used commercially.

We demand that large agrochemical companies like Monsanto are nationalised without compensation and placed under workers' control. We demand the labelling of any product containing or potentially containing GM products. We believe that people have the right to choose whether or not to consume GM products. ★

British democracy is sham democracy

The rulers of Britain repeatedly tell us that we live in a democratic society. This, they say, means workers and youth have no excuse for taking direct action on the streets or in the workplace.

But every single democratic right in Britain today had to be fought for by direct action. The judges and the parliamentarians – in the Commons and the Lords – along with the big capitalists fought every extension of democracy to the working class and the oppressed.

First the muskets and sabres of the guard, then the truncheons of the police and when necessary the machine guns and gun boats of the armed forces have all been used against the workers' movement whenever it has pushed for democratic change in Britain.

The right to vote, the right to free speech, the right to combine in trade unions, the right to equal pay and an end to discrimination for women, black people, gays and lesbians – all these basic democratic freedoms were reluctantly, and often only partially, conceded by the ruling class in the face of mass movements like the Chartists the Suffragettes, and the countless campaigns and movements since the 1960s.

This struggle for democratic rights is far from over. The capitalists and their state have conceded as little as possible to the working class. Every right we have secured is strictly limited. No sooner is the pressure of mass mobilisation and protest relaxed than the forces of reaction – the employers' organisations, the churches, governments – both Labour and Tory – attempt to claw back and narrow the liberties of the people.

The employers fear the extension of the democratic rights of the majority of the population. It knows that it is a minority and can maintain its power and privilege only by force and fraud. It resorts to force when fraud fails. The system of fraud and disinformation means strictly controlling the information available to the people from the state, business and the media.

Democracy and the capitalist state

The state machinery – the civil service, the secret police, the government and police news managers, closely linked to the millionaire press and television channels and the "independent but responsible" BBC – every one of them constitute a standing conspiracy against the interest of the majority of the population.

All attempts to open this machinery up to public scrutiny have hitherto sunk without trace. Thus New Labour promised of a Freedom of Information Act but once elected to office launched legal injunctions against journalists who leaked government plans. The proposed Act itself is a disgrace – actually adding new restrictions on freedom of information instead of abolishing all such restrictions.

Those – such as David Shaylor – who have attempted to lift the veil on how the security services such as MI5 operate outside the control of parliament, plan illegal and unsanctioned operations against foreign statesman are not praised by New Labour. They are hounded, forced to live abroad. Even then they will not give up, seeking to silence him though civil actions.

The stable and near perfect democracy, dreamed of by the middle class human rights activists is impossible whilst the millionaires exist and pull all the strings in the parliamentary puppet show. Nevertheless a struggle for democratic rights, to put the electronic and print media into the hands of the people, to expose the hidden machinery of class rule to the full glare of publicity – is an essential part of the class struggle.

That is why we demand that Labour implement a Freedom of Information Act without delay. Open the files and computers of the civil service, government departments and security services to inspection by the people. The Official Secrets Act should be abolished.

Labour dithered hopelessly over its plans to "reform" the Lords. These unelected custodians of inequality block each and every piece of legislation that they suspect might benefit the majority at the expense of the ruling minority – as the Lords did 28 times in the first year of the Labour government, blocking progressive measures like the equalisation of the age of consent for gay men.

The promised root and branch reform Labour promised was watered down to one measure: the abolition of the right of hereditary peers to vote in the Lords. And even then Labour allowed some 90 of these fossils to stay on as "working peers" and vote.

To only get rid of something in the third millennium that belonged firmly in the first is bad enough. But New Labour want to replace heriditary peers with "Tony's cronies" – appointed life peers accountable to no one, like ex–BP boss David Simon. BP funded death squads in Colombia to kill anyone who stood in the way of either BP or the Colombian government making a fortune out of the country's oil reserves.

People like this, appointed by Blair and before him by Major and Thatcher, are being given sole control of the Lords by New Labour – or rather joint control with the unelected Law Lords (top judges) and Lords Spiritual (Anglican Bishops, and possibly in the future leaders of other churches). This is not democratic.

The House of Lords should be abolished without any replacement. Not just hereditary peers, but all appointed parliamentary positions should be scrapped. We do not need any "second chamber" to act as a "check" or "balance" against democratic decisions. The vast landed wealth of the aristocracy should be taken from them with no compensation.

Along with the Lords Labour should abolish the monarchy instead of "modernising" it and glamourising it as they have done (during the Diana death saga and the pathetic Dianna wannabe the Duchess of Wessex). The monarchy is not just an expensive and embarrassing relic. The Queen has the power to veto laws, dissolve parliament and declare war.

The army swears allegiance to her not to the democratically elected representatives of the people. The very existence of a hereditary head of state is an affront to democracy and a direct challenge to the principle of authority deriving from the majority of the people. We stand for a republic.

Labour has introduced limited proportional representation for the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies and the Euro elections. A party list system has been combined with first past the post to ensure "stability". Despite their limitations these elections have shown that proportional representation is a much more democratic way of conducting elections than Britain's system – which enables a party with a minority of votes to have an absolute majority in parliament.

Proportional representation must be introduced at once for all elections. A system of proportional seats allocated according to the national vote for open party lists would better reflect the intentions of the electorate and would allow a revolutionary working class party the possibility of winning seats in proportion to its support.

Any election system under capitalism, however, still leaves MPs unaccountable to those who elected them for years on end. We demand full accountability of all MPs, councillors, assembly members and Euro MPs. They should be paid no more than the average wage of a skilled worker and should be banned from having other jobs. They should be subject to instant recall if they break their promises, switch parties or take undeclared payments.

Whose justice?

New Labour has left all the Tories' anti-democratic laws on the statute book, and is even busily introducing new "fast-track" legal procedures and fewer jury trials. Jack Straw has issued a consultation paper which incredibly proposes to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism Act with something even more far-reaching and draconian.

We demand the abolition of all repressive laws: the total repeal of the Criminal Justice Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act as well as the anti-trade union and immigration laws. We demand the unconditional release of all those class war prisoners– such as J18

activists, Irish republicans in British jails and environmental activists who have been locked up for fighting injustice.

As well as the laws themselves we need to fight for democracy in the legal system itself. The unelected judges are chosen from the ranks of the ruling class to dispense "justice" on its behalf. That is why they come, in their overwhelming majority, from the public schools. It is why they are linked by a thousand threads to the propertied classes – family, social and economic.

They are the most bigoted of their entire class in their reverence for riches and contempt for the working class and the poor. Because they are unelected they can only be removed from in the most extreme of circumstances and then only at the discretion of the unelected Lord Chancellor.

But it is not just the social composition of the judiciary that creates in – built bias in the legal system. Access to the law is one of the most unequal aspects of capitalist society. The ordinary worker who goes to court to defend her or his rights will face near certain ruin thanks to legal bills. Meanwhile big business gets the best advice money can buy from monstrously overpaid commercial lawyers.

Everyone should have the right to representation in court. But New Labour has cut legal aid. Blair's legal boss Lord Irvine has even floated the idea of axing it altogether in civil cases. The new Community Legal Service will mean less money than before to help working class people pay legal bills.

We demand: the election of all judges; legal representation free and available to all; a national free legal advice service funded by the state. And we must defend the one democratic principle in the legal system that Labour is busy trying to snatch from us – for the automatic right of all defendants to elect to have a trial by a jury.

Disarm the Police

In every mass struggle, in every major strike or campaign, the police have been used to protect the capitalists and their property. From their repression of pickets by miners and printers in the 1980s through to their unprovoked attacks on marches in support of the sacked Liverpool Dockers in 1997, and on the anti-capitalist carnival in the City in June 1999, the role of the police has not changed.

It is impossible to change the police force into mere fellow citizens in uniform protecting the weak and unfortunate but we have to endure their bullying, thuggery, racism and corruption. We must organise defence against police attacks throughout the working class and support the right of black communities at the sharp end of police harassment to self-defence against police or racist attacks.

We must fight for punishment of individual guilty officers or forces and their commanders, for the immediate disarmament and indeed disbandment of the specialised forces and squads aimed at the working class and the racially oppressed.

The shameful role of the police in turning a blind eye to the murder of Stephen Lawrence has brought its systematic racism to public attention as never before. Indeed in the nineties a whole string of miscarriages of justice has come to light. Nor does this discrimination and harassment affect black people alone, though they face the worst of it.

Irish people, working class people, especially young people come in for systematic mistreatment. Not one police officer has ever punished for these crimes. To address this scandalous situation we call for public inquiries into police actions, convened under the control of working class communities not bourgeois judges.

Our job is not reform the police, but we can weaken their ability to repress us by fighting for reforms. We can fight for a purge of all racist officers, starting with those involved in the growing number of deaths – mainly of black people – in custody. We can demand the immediate disarmament of the police – depriving them of their CS gas sprays, their guns, their night sticks and plastic bullets.

The police overwhelmingly use spying to frame militants. We must stop police surveillance, phone-taps and CCTV. And to stop the frame ups carrying on in court we support a an end to convictions on the basis of confession evidence alone.

Surveillance forms part of the vast secret state – with its files, its bugging and its harassment of the left and other anti-establishment activists. There is no place for such a secret state in a society that claims to be democratic. We say abolish MI5, MI6, the Special Branch and all secret intelligence agencies.

Equally, the national police force that we have today, is a tool against workers, not against anti – social elements. The miners strike of the 1980s – when this national force co-ordinated actions against pickets – proved this beyond doubt. That is why we are for the disbandment of the Association of Chief Constables and all the other aspects of a national police force.

A great cry of left reformism in decades gone by was for "police accountability". As a strategy to deal with the repressive arm of the capitalist state this call was utopian. After all, the police are accountable, to their capitalist paymasters. That is why they get pay rises when the rest of us see our wage packets and jobs cut.

Nevertheless, any measures of local control, via democratically elected councils, which weaken the control of the police chiefs and the total freedom of action of the police forces should be supported. Such measures, tied to organised self defence, can help break up the chain of command of the police force, put its officers greater public scrutiny, end a situation where – farcically – the police force itself investigates and pronounces judgement on any complaints against it.

To this end we are in favour of subordinating local and regional forces to inspection and control by elected authorities while at the same time opposing the spending of one penny of local authority money to finance the police force.

The police force is not only institutionally racist, its is institutionally pro-capitalist. Its fundamental purpose is to intimidate and coerce the majority of the population into accepting the capitalist class's eternal right to exploit and to rule.

The police force needs to be disbanded and replaced by an armed militia of the people. Such a militia can and must arise in conflict with the police in defence of every serious ongoing struggle by sections of workers and the oppressed. The picket lines in the miners' and printers' strikes in the 1980s, the communities under attack by bailiffs in the rebellion against the Poll Tax in the nineties, demonstrations against fascist marches or racist murders, all show the need for organised self – defence.

From such workers' defence squads – organised by the unions, by workers' parties, by communities facing racist harassment – can grow the armed power the working class. This force will counter the armed power of the capitalist state and impose its own rule on society through a workers' militia, based on and accountable to democratic workers' councils.

Ireland

The on-off Irish "peace process" reached its highest point in late 1999. Five years after the Downing St declaration and eighteen months after the Good Friday Agreement the power-sharing executive took on its devolved powers in Northern Ireland. Blair basked in the glory. Eight weeks later it was in ruins, the British state once more ruling directly from London.

The Stormont Assembly collapsed because the Unionists could not get the IRA to sur-

WORKERS MUST BENEFIT FROM THE INFORMATION REVOLUTION

In the modern age information is one of the most valuable commodities in the world. Like every other product, it is workers that bring it into being, in the call centres, the IT industries, computer and telecommunications factories, publishing and the media, the schools, universities and research centres.

Whenever spending needs have to be calculated, whenever rates of pay, benefits, pensions, the cost of living or any other data needs to be calculated, working class people cannot trust the bosses to tell the truth.

When new technologies like genetic modification of food are developed, we cannot trust the profiteers or their governments to conduct really objective inquiries. Whenever the establishment is riven by scandals we cannot allow their own hand-picked representatives to decide who if anyone is guilty.

That is why socialists call for the establishment of information centres, paid for by the labour movement at a local, national, and an international level, conducting their research openly and under the independent scrutiny and control of the working class.

Linked together by the internet, such research centres could become a vital tool in exposing the truth about the system, supporting workers' struggles and asserting an independent agenda for our class all around the world.

We fight for free access to the internet in every, workplace, school and college. We oppose all state censorship, on any grounds, of material published via the internet.

render their arms by a date of their choosing. The Unionists, based on the protestant majority of the six counties, first demanded that Sinn Fein abandon all realistic hope of gaining a united Ireland. This was granted them; all Sinn Fein got was consultative North-South bodies which lack any real power.

Then they demanded that Sinn Fein renounce revolutionary violence in pursuit of their aims. This too was forthcoming, despite the fact the RUC did not renounce its continued use of counter-revolutionary violence against republicans.

Sinn Fein even signed up to a power-sharing formulae for the devolved government which guaranteed the Unionists a veto of any changes they do not like. Finally, they had seen the IRA ceasefire hold despite provocations from loyalist thugs and RUC alike. But none of it has been enough – not for the 100,000 or so who routinely vote for the demagogue Paisley which has refused from the beginning to endorse the "peace process"; not enough for at least a substantial part of the UUP which has been dragged screaming into it but is fearful of surrendering its privileges that has marked it out from the Catholics it has lorded over for decades.

Northern Ireland remains riven. The RUC remains a bastion of protestant privilege and loyalist reaction. In this state, based on protestant ascendancy, education and housing is still segregated and Catholic unemployment continues to run at twice the rate of the Protestant community. Northern Ireland remains a sectarian state based on Protestant supremacy, under the protection of occupying British troops.

Britain has dominated Ireland for centuries. In 1920-21 Britain sliced Ireland in two, deliberately drawing the border in order to make nationalists a minority in the "Northern Ireland" state in the north-east. This was done against the wishes of the majority of the Irish people for a united Ireland.

For twenty five years after 1969 the Provisional IRA followed the strategy of armed struggle against the British forces of occupation. The British labour movement should have supported their struggle while remaining critical of their overall strategy and some of their methods.

The nationalist politics and guerrilla strategy of the IRA and Sinn Fein have failed secure their stated aim – a reunited Ireland. Today they favour a "pan-nationalist" alliance with the Southern bourgeoisie, the northern Catholic middle class and the Irish American lobby to gently persuade the Unionists to change their ways.

The Unionists demands for IRA decommissioning in advance of the slightest political concession, show this strategy to be useless. The Unionists are a reactionary bloc. Unionism can be broken up – with protestant workers being won away from them – by a revolutionary socialist struggle to smash the Orange state. The best elements of republicanism must be won from nationalism to socialism to help build this struggle.

British workers must now extend our support to the revolutionary youth and working class people in Northern Ireland who have fought so courageously against British rule, the British army, the loyalist police (RUC) and the loyalist terror gangs and pogroms. Hand in hand with them we must build revolutionary socialist parties in Ireland and Britain to pursue a common strategy of mass action to kick out the British Army, smash the still sectarian statelet of "Northern Ireland" and overthrow the capitalist system both it and the twenty Six Counties are built on. We demand:

- End all discrimination against Catholics in jobs, housing and services.
- Disband the RUC and the Royal Irish Regiment.
- Mass mobilisation to block to sectarian Orange marches.
- For armed self-defence of the nationalist communities against sectarian murders and communities under siege
- No decommissioning – the IRA should place its weapons and expertise at the service of defence organisations in the communities which are accountable to the democratic organs of struggle of those communities such as workers' councils, tenants associations etc.
- British troops out of Ireland now.
- Free all Irish republican prisoners of war.
- Scrap non-jury courts.
- Abolish the "Prevention of Terrorism Act" and harassment of Irish people in Britain.
- For the right of the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future in all-Ireland elections for a sovereign constituent assembly
- For a socialist united Ireland.

To win lasting democratic rights and freedom, the Irish working class will have to come to the head of the struggle against British rule, aiming to divide the Protestant workers from their Loyalist bosses and to link up with the workers of the South, to take the fight for national liberation forward to the overthrow of the capitalist class in Ireland altogether.

Scotland and Wales: is devolution enough?

The last Labour government and the Tories denied the Scottish people their democratic rights by refusing to allow a Scottish parliament, which won the backing of a majority in a referendum. Now New Labour has honoured new referendum results in favour of Scottish and Welsh parliaments.

But Blair's reforms will not devolve real power to the people. Westminster will continue to have the right of veto over the Scottish parliament and the Welsh assembly. The Scottish parliament can raise tax only by 3 pence in the pound. The Welsh cannot do it at all. We stand for the right of the Scottish parliament and Welsh assemblies to raise tax, to nationalise businesses and redistribute wealth. We support the abolition of all spending limits.

But socialists oppose the separation of Scotland and Wales. We favour large nation states which benefit the development of production and the integration of powerful working class movements. But such union must be absolutely voluntary and freedom to separate is a primary democratic right.

That is why we support this right for the Scottish and Welsh peoples. If they should decide on a separate state the English workers must help them overcome any attempt by the British ruling class to thwart their will by force or fraud.

We are for the right of Scotland and Wales to self-determination and for parliaments with full tax raising powers and freedom from any Westminster veto in Scotland and Wales. The people of those countries should determine the extent of their parliaments' powers, not Westminster.

But against the absolute dead end of Scottish and Welsh nationalism – whose respective parties attack the working class at worst or seek to tie it to an alliance with their own bosses at best – we fight for workers' unity, for a common fight against a common foe – for a Socialist Republic of Britain.

Down with imperialist war – stop dealing in death

In the name of democracy Tony Blair helped launch a brutal war against Serbia – but did not even allow his own parliament a single vote on the issue. Likewise, those he claimed to be defending – the Kosovar Albanians – were explicitly denied self-determination in the NATO colony that was established as a result of this murderous war.

Britain is an imperialist power, with vast economic, political and military interests all over the world. Like the other imperialist powers it wages wars not for democracy but for its own naked self-interests: to divide and re-divide the markets and resources of the world.

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What it cannot secure by economic muscle alone it will secure by military force, be it against Serbia, Iraq or any of the other countries British imperialism or its partners in crime deem to be a threat to their interests.

The vast defence budgets, the alliances such as NATO and the armed forces all exist to defend British imperialism, not the British people.

Labour is the loyal servant of this powerful beast. It has always and will always prostrate itself before imperialism – no matter what pious pacifist phrases leading members may spout while in opposition. Under the guise of the "third way" New Labour attempts to deceive us about its military objectives.

But this is just a "modernised" version of the "war for democracy" slogan that Britain fought two world wars under in order to preserve its empire and maintain its subordination of entire countries to Britain.

It is imperative that socialists strip away the lies and reveal the truth behind the democratic prattle that Bomber Blair excels in.

We say clearly: down with imperialist war; British troops, planes and warships out of the Balkans, the Gulf and all overseas bases. We demand that Labour immediately withdraws from NATO. And we say, every time Labour requests money for the armed forces – not a penny, not a person for the defence of British imperialism.

Imperialism keeps the "third world" in debt bondage. When the people of these countries fight back they are branded as terrorists. This is rich hypocrisy coming from people whose "smart bombs" create a level of terror that no guerrilla organisation has ever matched.

Socialists are against imperialism and solidarise with those fighting it. We are for their victory every time imperialist troops, or their lackeys, wage war against them.

And to really begin to free the people of the semi-colonies we are for the immediate cancellation of all the debts of those countries to the imperialist banks and to the IMF, we make clear to those peoples that we will support them when they expropriate the imperialist factories, mines and holdings in their country. The Labour Party came to power promising that Britain would pursue an ethical foreign policy. For years the Tories, under Major and Thatcher before him, armed dictatorships and repressive regimes in the Third World.

They sold the blood-thirsty Indonesian tyrant Suharto Hawk fighter jets and other weapons which he used in his campaign of genocide against the people of East Timor.

They remained on the best of terms with the apartheid regime in South Africa, with Pinochet – the former dictator of Chile who seized power in a bloody coup in 1973, and with the military regime in Nigeria, which crushed democratic movements to defend the superprofits of British-based oil multinationals like Shell.

Did Labour change this? In words only. In his first week in office Tony Blair secretly signed seven arms deals with Indonesia. When Pinochet was arrested in New Labour left it to the High Court judges – appointed by the Tories – to free him to a house of luxury before Jack Straw eventually took pity on the studied frailty of an old man and let him go back to Chile.

New Labour was up to its neck in organising the military coup in Sierra Leone. It alone was willing to back the US in its continued air war against Iraq. British capitalists continue to make a fortune from misery and war. By 1996 Britain had 25 per cent of the global market in arms exports.

Key buyers include; Turkey (missiles, land rovers, guns and RAF reconnaissance systems), Pakistan (engaged in an arms race with India) Saudi Arabia (an monarchical dictatorship rich in oil). Britain's military spending and subsidies to arms dealers (export credit guarantee) over the last six years totals £47 billion. And they say it is old age pensions and health care that "we cannot afford"!

This bloody trade must stop. We must demand the cancellation of all arms deals with repressive regimes and the publication of all secret treaties and contracts. To stop the trade in death we are for the nationalisation of the arms manufacturers under workers' control without compensation.

The profits of the arms dealers must be confiscated and used to finance a conversion of military production to socially useful objectives, under the control of the workforce. ★

The road to working class power

The fight for the demands in the programme outlined in previous chapters leads inexorably to one conclusion – the working class itself must seize political power, real power not just a collection of ministers trying to reform capitalism out of existence on behalf of the working class.

Could this change be carried out through parliament? Absolutely not. If a socialist party tried to make serious inroads into the capitalists' profits, let alone confiscate the key industries and banks they own, all history shows that the ruling class would refuse to take it lying down.

Real power in this society does not rest in the debating chambers of parliament, but on the unelected boards of major corporations which decide where to invest, which factories to close down, what is produced and by whom. Ask Steven Byers and BMW!

It lies with the unelected army officers, police chiefs and judges. It lies with the faceless senior civil servants who stay in place no matter who is elected, who make the real decisions and tell ministers what they can and can't do. It lies with the security services who phone tap, spy and defame activists and elected representatives alike who call for radical change.

That is the reality of the capitalist state – the "power behind the Speaker's Chair". Any government that tried to take away the capitalists wealth would soon find itself face to face with that state. Just like in Chile in 1973, the full force of the repressive apparatus would be unleashed against any such government.

The capitalists will not allow their power and property to be eroded, let alone taken away from them, without resorting to every weapon in their considerable arsenal. They will use the media to confuse and divide us, they will use the New labour – and if need be – the Old Labour leaders to persuade us that there is no alternative to submission to the laws of the market.

When workers break from the passivity imposed by years of defeat and by the cowardly union leaders they will resort to the repressive forces of the state – the security services, MI5, the police as they did in the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-5.

When we really take the offensive, calling into question and their ownership of the factories and banks, the shops and the offices, when we challenge their control of state power then the armed forces will be called in to "restore order".

This is why the only realistic strategy for socialist change is revolution: the forcible overthrow of the capitalist state by the action of millions of working class people. Only this way can the capitalist state be broken up and replaced by working class power and a democratically planned economy.

There is another source of power in society. It is composed of millions of people rather than a few thousand exploiters. Without these millions nothing would function, from the factories to the supermarkets, from the railways to the schools.

There are long and deeply entrenched traditions among these people of collective organisation against oppression and exploitation, of working together, of solidarity and human decency. These people constitute a force capable of running the whole of society, because they are already central to making that society run.

This force is the working class. To rule it must be organised as a class, to recognise its own true interests, and to set about achieving them. Every major battle poses the need to win and organise solidarity from other workers, across the divisions of industry, locality, nationality and race.

The existing trade unions which accept all these divisions are insufficient. Not only do the unions need to be transformed but a new type of organisation needs to be built. In every locality, city or town councils of action need to be built.

They need to be made up of delegates drawn from all those fighting for working class people's needs and rights. Their bedrock will be rank and file workers elected in every workplace but they must also include delegates from the housing estates and communities.

Unlike MPs or trade union officials, and more like shop stewards, they will be elected in mass meetings of their constituents. They can easily consult with those who elect them and if they go against their electors' wishes

THE REVOLUTION MUST B

A revolutionary Britain, in which the power of the capitalists had been overthrown, would be surrounded by bitter enemies.

The capitalists of the world would rightly recognise a Workers' Britain as the greatest threat to their survival. The hatred, contempt and fear with which they regard our class today would be magnified a thousand times once we take state power into our hands.

When the Russian workers took power in October 1917, the major capitalist nations assembled a coalition which waged a bloody war of intervention against the world' s first workers' state.

In the 1980s Britain's ally, the USA, trained and funded thousands of right-wing thugs to undermine and destroy mass popular regimes in Central America.

A Workers' Britain would meet with a similar response from the "peace-loving democracies" of the USA, Western Europe and Japan. They would seek to impose an economic and military blockade around Britain, or even to wage war to re-introduce capitalism.

The arming of the entire working class would be essential to defend the revolution from its external and internal enemies.

But Britain would also be surrounded by many millions of allies and potential allies: the working class and poor peasantry of the world, who are themselves forced to endure the horrors of capitalism, many on a scale that British workers find difficult to imagine.

A workers' revolution in Britain would be a beacon to the oppressed and exploited of the world. Our victory would signal to them that working class power is a tangible possibility: and, like the Russian Revolution, it would unleash a wave of sympathy and revolutionary struggle around the world.

It would be a revolutionary detonator in Europe. The EU would be thrown into chaos by the overthrow of capitalism in one of its key economies and the removal of one of its two major military powers. And a revolutionary situation in Britain is unlikely to occur without political and economic crisis sweeping the entire European continent.

A vibrant revolutionary workers' democracy in Britain would demonstrate to millions throughout Russia, China, Cuba and Eastern Europe that there is an alternative both to the squalid prison house of Stalinism and to the poverty and chaos of capitalism.

To the masses of the Third World languishing under the control of the multinationals and imperialist monopolies, a workers' government would address the most direct of appeals: "Take over the British banks, companies and investments that have robbed you and exploited you for so long!"

To the vast working classes of the other advanced countries, the message would be clear: if it can be done in Britain, with its long

they can be immediately replaced.

Such councils should be the natural place to which every group of workers, every group suffering oppression and discrimination, turns for help in their struggle and they will be able to give it in the most immediate and active way possible.

Such organisations have many precedents in the history of the working class movement. They a have been created spontaneously wherever the working class enters the struggle for power.

In Russia in 1917 the workers' councils or soviets, took power and began to rule society. In Britain in the 1920s they arose in opposition to the deployment of British troops against the Russian Revolution, and they emerged in towns and cities up and down the country during the nine days of the General Strike in 1926.

The absence of such councils, in the miners' strike of 1984/85 and in the 1989- contributed to the failure to spread the struggle and win.

Councils of action begin as a means of coordinating our fight across the existing divisions of section and union. But they can rapidly develop into an alternative source of organised power in society, a challenge to the capitalists' own organisations of political rule.

Alongside such organisations the working class would need to build a means of protecting them – a workers' militia.

We will fight to make these organs of struggle an alternative centre of power in society. Based on such organisations a workers' government could be established, under complete democratic control by working people.

The possibility of establishing a workers' government could only arise under conditions in which the class struggle had reached fever pitch. Councils of action and workers' defence squads would exist alongside the capitalists' government, its army and police force.

The capitalists would immediately recognise the threat that such a situation of dual power represented to their rule. The situation could not last for long: one or the other power would have to triumph.

That is why workers who genuinely stand for socialism must take the revolutionary road. Even if a workers' government arose out of an election in a turbulent period of class struggle it would have to base itself on the mass organisation and armed power of the working class to survive the bosses' counter-attack. Such a workers' government would have to move to disarm the capitalist class.

This means winning the rank and file soldiers to the workers' side, helping them to organise rank and file soldiers' committees, to secure the democratic election of their officers, getting arms from them for the workers.

It would mean being ready to defeat the crack army regiments, the SAS, the police and the secret services in open battle, smashing the capitalists' army. In short, it would mean insurrection and smashing the capitalist state, the armed and repressive machine that defends the bosses' property.

Only then could the fight to establish socialism begin in earnest.

For many people the goals of working class revolution and socialism seem unrealistic. Yet the practical possibility of socialism, the urgent need for it, stare at us through the windows of decaying capitalism itself.

Millions have no work whilst all around us there is need. The full resources of society could be applied to give everyone a job and to meet all our basic needs and more. The jobless millions could be put back to work building the houses, schools, leisure centres, roads and railways we need.

How could this be achieved? Through planning the economy. Planning has become a dirty word. The collapse of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe and the failure of the old nationalised industries in Britain show us why.

To millions it conjures up the image of inefficiency, wastefulness, of drab, poor quality goods and a faceless, uncaring bureaucracy. The chaos of Russia today, as it attempts to complete its return to capitalism, however, demonstrates that neither capitalism nor bureaucratic planning are the solution for the working class.

Socialist planning in a revolutionary Britain could be made to work. It would work because it would be carried out not by a handful of bureaucrats in a British version of the Kremlin or on old-style paternalistic governing boards – but by the workers and consumers themselves.

There are those who reject the idea of planning, who say that the world today is too complex and populations too large for us to meet our needs in a planned way. They are wrong.

For all its defects, the present system points the way to the future. Even under capitalism there is a strong element of planning: it can be found no further away than your local supermarket. They deliver foods from all over the world, fresh, to millions of people.

They have to do it at exactly the right time to minimise both waste and shortages. Using modern technology like bar codes on every item they can plan the needs of different local shoppers on a day by day basis.

The capitalists plan, but they do it only to make a private profit and only for their own products. They have no idea of the scale and structure of demand; Despite their market researchers they can only guess and even then they are left with untold unsold goods in their warehouses.

Under capitalism planning is driven by market forces. Tesco or McAlpine plan to beat their competition. But the same market forces mean that millions of ordinary people can't afford more than the bare essentials at the supermarket, or can only afford to live in damp and dismal homes.

The same market forces sooner or later leave the shiny offices empty, the builders

COME INTERNATIONAL OR DIE

traditions of capitalist "democracy", it can be done in France, Germany and the USA. To the workers of the entire world the call would go out to mobilise the greatest possible opposition to imperialist intervention, to defend the fledgling workers' state.

Drawing on the vast resources of the entire nation and freed from the dictates and fetters of the profit system, a revolutionary Britain would send aid to workers around the world fighting against imperialism and the rule of the capitalists.

It would offer defence to semi-colonial countries facing imperialist aggression. But it would also give full support to the workers and peasants of all poor countries exploited and ripped off by western finance, seeking to guide them along the path of workers' revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy based on the rule of workers' councils.

The spreading of the revolution internationally would be a life or death task for the survival of working class power. Without it the economy could be isolated, the gains of the revolution undermined. The history of the degeneration and final collapse of the Russian revolution demonstrates this danger only too well.

The capitalist economy is international as the constant references to the "global village" and to "globalisation" by politicians and bosses remind us: production takes place across national boundaries, and without an international division of labour further progress is ruled out.

But on the basis of the spreading of the revolution, especially to other advanced countries, an international federation of workers' states could be established, setting in motion an international workers' plan of production, and finally putting the vast resources of the planet to a rationally determined and sustainable use.

The victory of revolution in one country, taken up and extended by the workers of the world, could thus herald the final eclipse of capitalism. Over years and decades of planning , the spectres of starvation, ignorance and disease could at last be overcome.

Mechanisation and computerisation, freed from the abuses of capitalism, could reduce the working week, gradually dissolving the distinction between work and leisure.

Humanity, freed from the toil of an unending struggle for survival, released from the terrible moral and psychological alienation of the individual in class society, could at last set its tremendous advances in science and technology to work on itself, inaugurating a revolution in health care, education, art and culture.

The dawn of communism, a truly classless society, would bring the darkness of human pre-history to a close. ★

bankrupt and thousands of skilled bricklayers, electricians and steel erectors idle.

Real socialist planning could apply all of the advantages of modern planning techniques, but it could do so in the interests of human need, not profit. Unlike the state industries in post-war Britain a planned economy would not be hampered by the dictates of the profiteers and constant government cutbacks.

Unlike the economy in the former USSR it would not be inefficient and lacking in quality, because the planning would be done not by self-seeking bureaucrats but by the workers themselves organised through democratic workers' councils.

Workers' control in each industry would cut down waste, not increase it. Most workers will never knowingly waste time or materials if they know they are working for themselves, not for some exploiter. Workers know better than any boss how the job they are doing should be done, and how it could be done quicker, better and cheaper.

Across industry all the separate elements of workers' planning could be integrated in a central democratic plan.

The tremendous advances made in by the internet would enable workers in individual workplaces, and on elected regional and national planning committees, to have at their fingertips all the information they needed to know what to produce and how to do it efficiently.

Achievement and progress could be checked literally hour by hour to see what changes should be made. Problems and failures would not be hushed up by careerist officials or company directors afraid of bad sales figures, but would be out in the open, in order that they could be quickly corrected.

Abolishing business secrets would get rid of the insane situation where scientists are forbidden to share their knowledge for fear of helping their firms' business rivals, and could therefore provide a tremendous boost to scientific development.

The working day could be slashed further with the introduction of every new labour saving device, giving workers more and more of the free time necessary to study, train, and plan, co-ordinate and run society themselves. ★

For a new Revolutionary Workers Party and a new Revolutionary Communist International

All of the issues this action pro gramme addresses will, in the opening years of the new millennium, be the cause for mass struggles. Capitalism drives people to resistance and revolt.

Until capitalism is hurled into the rubbish bin of history, like feudalism or slave society before it, revolutionary crises burst out repeatedly and spontaneously .

But all too often such heroic acts of resistance run their course in isolation from one another and end up in defeat before other identical struggles erupt to divide the attention and the forces of reaction.

But deep economic , social and political crises do create national and international waves of revolution. The nineteenth, and even more so the twentieth centuries several such waves.

In the twenty first century they will return in force to the "advanced", i.e. imperialist countries of Europe, North America and Asia – because the foundations of the greater stability of the post -second world war expansion and the division of the world was destroyed in the last decade of the millennium. This heralds a new period of wars, revolutions, and – if we do no prepare ourselves now – counterrrevolutions.

The crises of the twenty first century will have a greater much greater scope than in its predecessor because of the intermeshing of local, national and even continental economies into a global economy – with global crises which spread with terrifying velocity.

Far from witnessing the disappearance of the working class and its movement as the apostles of the Third way and Blairism think the world workers movement can and will be reborn. It will rise up out of the ashes of Stalinism and Social Democracy.

Why? Because the global means of communication, the reduction of all labour to waged labour, the higher levels of education and skills of the working class all mean that repeated crises demand the destruction of its root cause. At the same time the subjective, human means to do this can and will be recreated – the revolutionary, international workers' movement.

British workers need a section of such an international as a real alternative to the market policies of Blair and the pro – capitalist Labour leaders. To offer a real alternative, it must be a party that openly and fearlessly campaigns for a revolution end to the profit system and an economy based on a democratic allocation of humanity's resources. But it will have to be able to show the road to goal in and through each sectional, partial and immediate struggle.

But – workers will say – surely there is such a party, indeed several. The Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Party the Socialist Labour Party, the Scottish Socialist Party. Are they not all offering to build a new revolutionary party in Britain?

Why not join one of them or why not unite them all together?

Despite their claim to be parties we do not believe that any of them are more than socialist propaganda societies. their members are involved in various struggles true but none of them unites the advanced guard of the working class in a serious challenge to the reformist leaders. Most of them have been trying to do so for decades. Why have they failed?

Because their strategy and tactics have failed – because they have been unable to develop a programme which unites the daily struggle of workers to the struggle for workers' power. Most of them offer only a radical programme of immediate demands when faced with any ongoing struggle.

"Socialism", "Communism", Revolution" are for weekend schools or public meetings. They are unable or unwilling to point the road for workers struggles to escalate their goals and engage with the very centres of the bosses power and property.

Thus when the struggle ends the great mass of workers who listened to them, who struggled alongside them have not changed their views about the ultimate goals of the workers movement.

A few "join the party" but most remain reformist, even if they are militant reformists. Thus these "parties" oscillate between a militant reformist practice and an abstract revolutionary theory. They are, in Marxist terms, centrist parties.

The most burning task facing the working class today is to recreate a new international political party – a new revolutionary communist international.

Only such party with sections in every country can prevent the workers being dragged along in the wake of their own bourgeois's national policies – which sets them at the throats of the workers of other countries or national and racial minorities in their own countries. If the workers of the world are not to be drawn into a Third and infinitely more destructive world war, into national wars and genocides then a new international has to be built in the years ahead.

To spearhead the fight for revolution, indeed to begin to win victories against the bosses in the here and now, the working class urgently needs a political party that really represents its class interests. The working class in Britain today has no such party. It is faced with a crisis of leadership.

Resolving this crisis means building a new leadership for the working class movement. It must challenge the hold of the Labourites and the trade union bureaucrats over the working class. There is only one way that this can be done: by building a new revolutionary party. This is not just one worthy cause among many that socialist espouse. It is the most important task facing us in the new millennium.

So what type of party do we need?

It has to be made up of workers. It can't fight for a revolution unless it bases itself on the daily struggles of the working class.

It has to be a combat party, not an electoral machine or a talking shop. A revolutionary party would take the opportunity of standing candidates in elections, but without spreading the illusion that socialism can come through parliament.

The aim would be to use elections to spread the ideas of revolutionary socialism. Revolutionary MPs would use their position in parliament as a platform from which to denounce capitalism and the sham democracy of parliament itself.

One of the party's central tasks would be to root itself in and transform the unions. Alongside this it would aim to mobilise the most exploited and oppressed – the youth, the unemployed, unorganised workers on the estates and in the communities, black people, women, and lesbians and gays, in militant, working class oriented struggles.

Committing itself to supporting the creation and constant expansion of an independent revolutionary youth organisation would also be one of its most essential tasks.

It would be a fighting party, committed to revolution. It would have to have a centralised leadership and know that in battle all its members were fighting for the same goal. Its leaders would not be permitted to follow

whatever mood happened to take them or to speak out against party policy: they would be under the control of the party as a whole.

Party officials would be the servants of the workers, not the other way round. At the same time once a democratic decision on policy or tactics was taken, the revolutionary party would have to implement it with maximum unity in action.

This centralism is something many middle class people, and workers influenced by middle class ideas, can't stand. It smacks of authoritarianism, dictatorship, while socialism aims to free the individual, they cry.

But the workers' own experience tells them that they need common discipline for every serious task – at work or in the class struggle. Solidarity does not just mean back-slapping cameraderie in the working class. It means knowing you can trust your workmates, knowing they will pull their weight.

The principle of democratic centralism is only a political expression of that need for solidarity. In a war you need leaders, a battle plan and combat discipline. The revolutionary party is an instrument for fighting a class war.

But the class struggle also has to be conducted with full workers' democracy. Full internal discussion within the ranks of the revolutionary party would be the norm.

Without this there would be no development of the party's politics, no real education and training of its militants, no possibility of correcting any errors the party might make.

That is the meaning of democratic centralism, a phrase that the experience of Stalinism – and the lack of genuine democracy in the SP and the SWP – has led many workers to associate with the bureaucratic command of a clique. But that is the opposite of genuine democratic centralism. In reality it is the most democratic and the most effective means of organisation yet developed by the working class.

The revolutionary party would have to be an internationalist party. Just as the bosses organise across international borders, so too must the working class. Socialism is international or it is nothing: it cannot be built in one country alone.

A revolutionary party in Britain would have to be part of an international revolutionary party. The same discipline, the same democracy and centralism that exists within the party in Britain would have to exist across the international party.

The decisions and democracy of the international party would have to bind national sections in the same way that the decisions of the British party would bind each of its branches.

Without international democracy there is no way of learning from and fully assimilating the lessons of the working class struggle in other countries.

Without international discipline there is no way of preventing national parties from adapting to the prevailing views and prejudices common on their own national terrain.

Without a democratic centralist international party and an international programme, the very idea of internationalism loses its meaning.

Workers Power exists to build a revolutionary party. We are the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. We already have sections in nine countries and sympathisers in several more covering three continents.

Wherever we have members or supporters we fight in every struggle of the working class, conducting agitation for the forms of action we need to avoid sell-out and defeats, and seeking to win new members in the fight for socialist revolution.

We aim to rally the forces of the left around a genuinely revolutionary programme, so that from the discrediting of social democracy and Stalinism and the inadequacies of centrism, a strong, united and revolutionary party can be built, a party which can stand at the head of the working class in its fight for freedom.

We in Workers Power believe we have developed here a programme which can be the basis of a revolutionary party. Of course we recognise that it is incomplete, that it will be enriched and made concrete in struggles, in the lessons taught us by workers in these struggles.

We recognise that to build such party will indeed require unity with all the forces really fighting for revolution. But such unity cannot be on the basis of a lowest common denominator. Such a workers' party must thrash out in a democratic fashion a common programme. this is our contribution to that debate and the class struggles which lie ahead.

We urge all who agree with this strategy and this programme of action to join Workers Power and the LRCI in the struggle to create a revolutionary party and to hasten the day of the proletarian revolution in Britain, in Europe, in the world! ★