

# east against west... or class against class?

The recent Russian-Georgian war and the ensuing crisis in the Kremlin's relations with the European Union and USA have little to do with the fate of South Ossetia. The territory and the 70,000 people who live there - a third of the population of Hackney - are merely an insignificant pawn in the current bout of great power rivalry. Although we have not yet seen an attack on Iran, conflict zones and fronts of tension are expanding at a canter.

NATO is expanding eastwards at a rapid pace, and the EU similarly has a project of integrating almost all of non-Russian Europe; the Putin-Medvedev government in Russia has in recent months and years repeatedly interfered with gas and oil supplies to neighbouring Ukraine and halted internet access in Estonia; Putin has led Russia into closer alliance with China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which will soon welcome Iran into the fold; and much as the Bush administration has pumped military aid to Georgian President Saakashvili, so too has the Russian military become the leading supplier for the Iranian Air Force.

It is far from the case, however, that the world has been drawn up into clearly defined and conflicting "camps" of regional and world dominance, less still into "imperialist" and "anti-imperialist" camps. Much as the United States government talks of spreading "democracy", they support Islamist death squads in Iraq in an effort to impose stability by force; conversely, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, who speechifies at length about "imperialism" is in fact a supporter of the wars against - and occupation of - Iraq and Afghanistan, and has imposed IMF neo-liberal reforms. For his part, the "anti-imperialist" Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez is an outspoken supporter of Russia and its ally Serbia, and while waxing lyrical about the sovereignty of South Ossetia he has no qualms about excusing the oppression of Kosova and Chechnya.

The only force which can consistently oppose militarism and national chauvinism is the international workers' movement. We call for the maximum unity in organisation

and in action of the working class, across borders and regardless of nation-states, to fight all of our rulers. No-where in the world are working people in power; no country in the world is "in transition to socialism".

Indeed, most of those who speak at today's meeting would call themselves "socialists" or "Marxists" - yet how many of them pose, in the here and now and in the context of the war, the development of a movement of the working class capable not only of stopping the war, but having the potential to go further and making actual revolutionary change? This would be considered insane—revolution is something for the history books and speeches to the faithful few. The idea of a communist revolution from below was long ago separated from the day-to-day, "real" politics of the traditional left. They will prefer a "my enemy's enemy is my friend" standpoint... and thus collapse into one variant or another of support for the governments of Iran, Russia or whoever else is in dispute with the United States and Britain. Those who would "refuse to condemn" an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations merely have a mirror-image of this position, with no serious regard for what impact such an attack would have in retarding the workers' movement in struggle against the Islamist regime. Let us be quite clear: any form of support or excuse-mongering for one or another government necessarily entails a let-up in the class struggle.

But maybe the class struggle is not really that central for the left. Certainly there has been far too little talk in the movement of the strike which took place four months ago demanding the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq. On May 1st dockers in the United States organised in the ILWU union staged a strike shutting down all 29 West Coast ports for a whole day and - in an amazing display of international working-class action - Iraqi dockers at the ports of Khor Alzubair and Umm Qasr staged a strike in solidarity with their US counterparts.

>>> continues...

the  
commune

Is such an action unimaginable in Britain today? Is the class struggle really so heightened in the USA that we could not hope to emulate it? Although there is no iron law stopping the British workers' movement taking action against the occupation of Iraq, it is marked by a deep pessimism. Equally, advocating such action appears not to be on the agenda of the leaders of the Stop the War Coalition, namely the Socialist Workers' Party and their allies in the Communist Party of Britain, and has barely been discussed. Trade union resolutions to give money to StWC are not effective working-class action against the war.

Do we actually want effective action to "stop the war", or just to go onto the streets and say the fighting is "not in my name" in a liberal-pacifist act of self-justification? The endless series of protest marches, ever dwindling in numbers, show that the movement's leaders have no imagination as well as a lack of class politics. In this regard our movement is far behind not only the many activists involved in projects like Climate Camp but also the anti-war movement in other countries. The May 1st strike staged by dockers in the USA and Iraq was reminiscent of the action of Motherwell train drivers and Italian dockers who refused to transport arms at the time of the invasion of Iraq. But that was five years ago. We need a strategy for here and now.

The school students' walk-out at the time of the Iraq war and teachers' strikes at a few schools were excellent, and the bigger demos were inspiring. But reminiscing about the 15th February 2003 march and these actions serves no purpose, and giving the increased threats of war in the Middle East and the Caucasus, there is no place for self-congratulation... But what did the Stop the War Coalition produce in February? A book called *Five years on: why we are still marching*. Perhaps a better subject for enquiry would have been "Five years on: so why are we still marching?". At each demonstration the SWP grandees tell us that "we will keep on marching until the troops come home"... never mind the fact that the ever-smaller marches put hardly any pressure on the government and rarely make the news. This is not just censorship: of course the BBC (and most ordinary people) don't care if 10,000 lefties turn out for a demo. That is what lefties do. It is no more noteworthy than 10,000 people going to watch Millwall play.

There needs to be a radical rethink. The left and the anti-war movement should build solidarity with Iranian workers' struggles against the regime; they should support trade unions and our comrades in Iraq, Georgia and everywhere else; and serve as a hub of international working-class solidarity against all governments. Working-class politics is not just collecting money for foreign trade unions though: we must also begin an investigation into what tactics we use and what the workers' movement can do to take action to end the occupation and prevent further wars, including but not limited to strikes, walkouts and occupations.

## uncaptive minds

our communist discussion forum **uncaptive minds** begins with a series of discussions on class struggle in the 1970s, a decade which saw a wave of working-class militancy in Britain and the rest of Europe.

we will be debating the ideas developed by the workers' movement of the era, its methods of organising, why it failed and the lessons for today. our guest speakers include participants in the battles of the time, car workers, leading trade union activists, revolutionaries and marxist intellectuals, and scholars who are studying the period.

the first meeting in the series, an overview of the 1968-74 upsurge in class struggle, saw lively debate of the key questions facing the workers' movement both back then and today. come and take part in the discussion:

**15th september: women in struggle.** discussion of the 20,000-strong Leeds clothing workers' strike of 1970, reinventing the flying picket before miners and building workers picked up the idea. with Liz Leicester, and a film on the strike, *Leeds United*.

**29th september: the debates on workers' control.** with David Broder and Ian MacDonald.

**13th october: insurrection at work: the industrial struggle in England and Italy.**

**27th october: new methods of organising.** a critical comparison of the unions with Anton Moctonian.

**10th november: the 'alternative economic strategy' and its alternatives.**

**24th november: the great Grunwick strike.** film and discussion with Pete Firmin from Brent Trades Council

**8th december: where did it all go?** with Joe Marino, general secretary of the bakers' union and Steve Hedley, LUL regional secretary of the RMT.

**all dates are Mondays, all meetings start at 6:30pm. the venue is in central London. email [uncaptiveminds@googlemail.com](mailto:uncaptiveminds@googlemail.com) to register your interest and get more information**

# thecommmune.co.uk