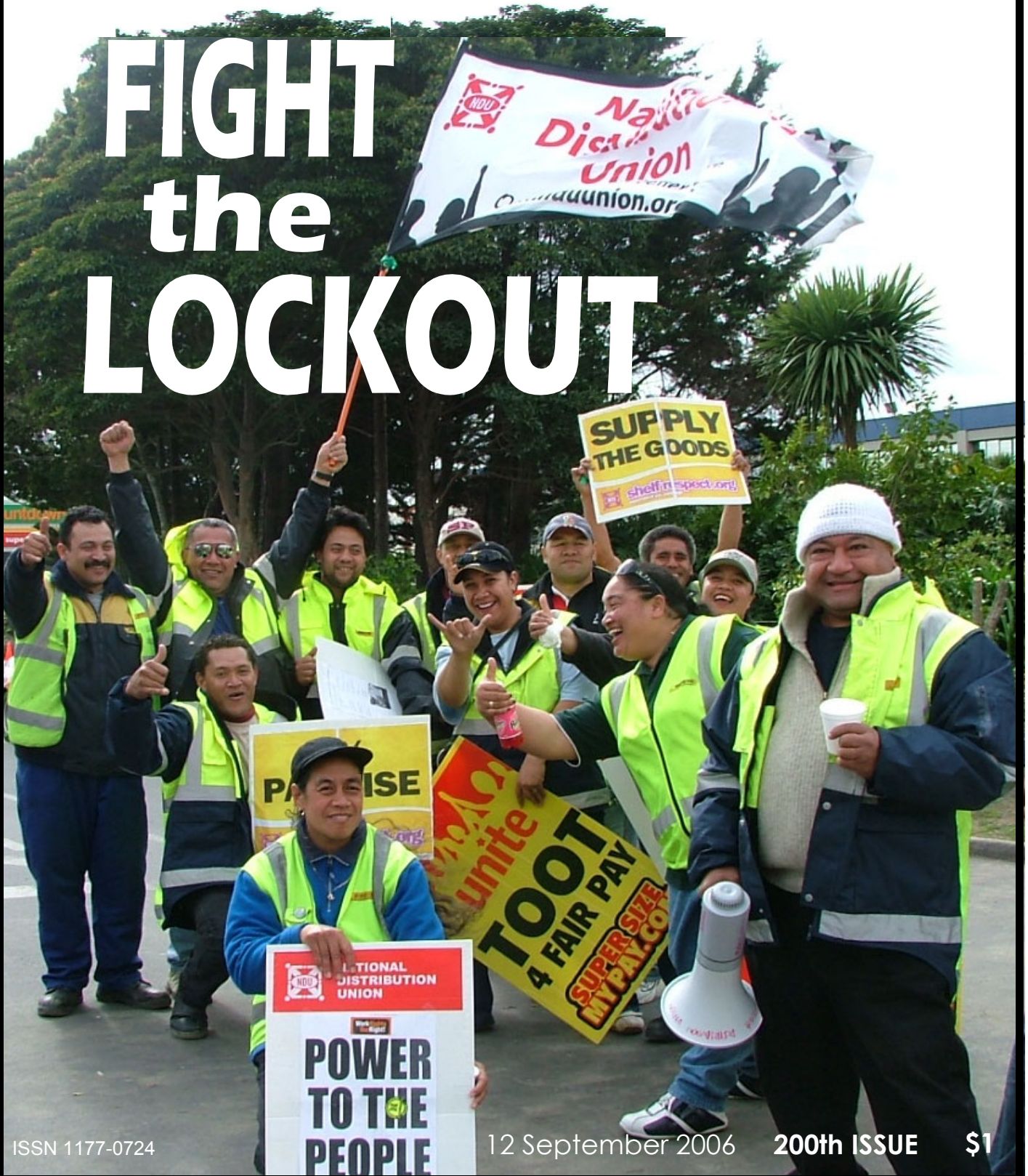


WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE! WORKERS AND ALL OPPRESSED PEOPLES, UNITE TO OPPOSE IMPERIALISM!

The SPARK

FIGHT the LOCKOUT



ISSN 1177-0724

12 September 2006

200th ISSUE

\$1

CONTENTS

Progressive distribution workers—
 daring to struggle, daring to win 3

The lockout: what are we doing about it? 5

Supermarket workers fightback 6

Labour—no friend of the workers 7

The 1951 lockout 7

About the Workers Party 8

UN fails to bring peace and justice to the
 people of Lebanon 10

Imperialist rivalry threatens Iran 12

5000 workers rally against the 90-day bill:
 positives and negatives 13

The parliamentary cookbook 16

THE WORKERS PARTY
www.workersparty.org.nz

REGIONAL WORKERS PARTY CONTACTS

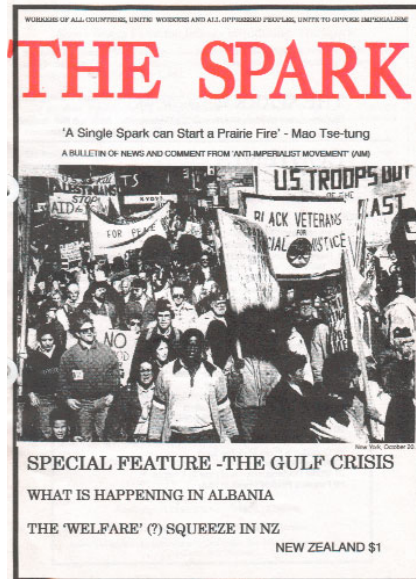
Auckland Daphna 0274949865
 Hastings Sam 0211250819
 Wellington Nick 027 563 6986
 Christchurch Byron 0211540612
 Dunedin Tim 4730509

CAMPUS CLUBS: Auckland, Wellington,
 Christchurch. Phone regional WP contact for
 details.

WHERE YOU CAN GET *THE SPARK*

On the streets, at fleamarkets, universities and
 stopwork meetings you will find *Spark* sellers.
 You may also wish to take out a subscription.
 The price is very reasonable.
 It is also available at **Scorpio Bookshop** corner
 of Hereford Street & Oxford Terrace
 Christchurch.

THE SPARK'S 200TH ISSUE



This is the 200th issue of *The Spark*. For 15 years this paper has been a consistent voice for the oppressed. The very first issue appeared January 1991 just as the US was raining bombs on Iraq. This *Spark* has been the harshest critic of imperialism from issue 1 to 200.

Through the nineties, as the establishment announced socialism was dead, we carried the little heard news of the revolutionary revival in Nepal, India, the Philippines. Likewise the new movements in Latin America.

Because the working class is global every issue of this paper has carried both local and international stories.

Spark writers set out to understand the world in order to change it. We are all activists, engaged in trade unions, protest movements, and the universities.

We work freely on the paper, that's why it is still the same amazingly low price after all these years.

BUY—SELL—CIRCULATE THE SPARK

The Spark editorial board:

Daphna Whitmore, Philip Ferguson,
 Jared Phillips, Don Franks, Sam Kingi,
 Tim Bowron

Progressive distribution workers - ***daring to struggle, daring to win***

Jared Phillips

“We are determined to stay out ’til we win. Christmas is coming up soon, and it might take until then for us to win, so we might get a Christmas holiday for a change” said defiant NDU delegate George Sesolai, at a September 9 rally of locked out Progressive Enterprises distribution workers, and supporters, in Mangere. As this issue of *The Spark* goes to press, the workers are in their 18th day of struggle.

‘Locked out but won’t shut up’

Workers at Progressive Enterprises Distribution Centers in Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch are struggling for a multi-site agreement and for pay parity across the sites, with Auckland workers going for an 8 percent pay increase.

On Friday August 25, at 4am, the workers, belonging to the National Distribution Union (NDU), began strike action against Progressive Enterprises Limited. This corporation consists of Foodtown, Countdown, Woolworths and other smaller retail/supermarket chains. The locked out workers normally run the distribution centers used to deliver goods to these stores. On the following Sunday, after the employer made clear that it would not negotiate, the workers voted to extend strike action. Originally the strike had been planned to last for two days. On Monday, the company then announced a lockout as part of its attempt to pressure workers into accepting company demands. These demands included claw-backs on the conditions that workers had prior to the strike. The locked out workers are digging-in deep to win their demands and to defeat the employer’s attacks on their conditions.

Pickers fighting back against lockout

The workers, as well as friends, family, and supporters, have kept up continuous around-the-clock pickets at the distribution centres. The pickets are lively, and are receiving a lot of support from the public and passing drivers. These pickets are preventing trucks from entering, loading up, and distributing goods. So the strengthening and defence of these pickets is key to the struggle. This blockade of the distribution centres has led Progressive Enterprises to use the warehouses at its Countdown, Foodtown, and Woolworths stores as temporary distribution points.

It is costing the company to use supermarket warehouses as distribution points. According to one NDU employee, the company is paying at least three



Stand Up, Fight Back painted on the picket line in Auckland by award winning artists Disruptive

times more than what it would usually pay for distribution from its normal distribution centres. So even when some shelves at Progressive Enterprises supermarkets look to be full, the company is losing profits every time it fills the shelves. One truck driver, who is supportive of the union and the locked out workers, said that drivers at the firm he works at are having to do 20 times the haulage they would usually need to do for the delivery of one load.

The use of makeshift distribution points is cutting into the company’s profits. To create even more pressure against the company, workers have gone out on flying pickets. They have targeted the temporary distribution points and distribution firms where people are handling goods that would normally be handled at the distribution centres. Dozens of trucks have been turned away at these pickets. Many truck drivers and forklift operators are secret or open union members, are employed by anti-union firms, and have expressed their solidarity by voluntarily ceasing work or stopping deliveries. The people who have attempted to do the work that would normally be done by Progressive Enterprises workers, and the people who have attempted to cross the picket line, while knowing that



they are undermining the workers, are scabs. The workers are standing strong on these picket lines, and have turned scabs away by their dozens.

A number of workers, unionists, and supporters, have also been leafleting the public, asking them not to shop at Countdown, Foodtown, or Woolworths. The NDU has not endorsed a boycott of these stores, however, many working people, and others who have a social conscience or trade union consciousness, have turned away from these stores because they are disgusted with the company's lockout.

Industrial support coming in

Along with picketing the supply lines, another essential objective is to keep gaining industrial support from other workers and their unions, especially from those in the same industry. At one supermarket store that was being used as distribution point, a forklift operator stopped his forklift when a picket team arrived. They asked him to stop loading and he jumped off his forklift, saying "Yeah, I haven't had a pay rise in years". This forces the companies to muster their managerial staff together to perform scab labour.

Maritime Union New Zealand (MUNZ) secretary Trevor Hansen has indicated that port workers may become more involved in the dispute. This involvement relates to the movement of containers destined for Progressive Enterprises Limited. It is possible that some of the cargo has not made it to Progressive Enterprises supply lines. MUNZ has also drawn support from the Maritime Union of Australia. It is also possible that unionised meat workers, who supply to Progressive Enterprises stores in Auckland, will go on strike in the near future, within the duration of the distribution lockout.

Importance of solidarity strikes

The current industrial framework, the Employment Relations Act (ERA), passed by a Labour Party-led coalition, outlaws solidarity strikes. Under this repressive law, workers cannot support each other by engaging in solidarity strikes. Workers can only take legal strike action over claims that relate to their own

collective agreements. This means that workers in industries relating to the current dispute cannot take legal strike action to support the locked out distribution workers.

In 1951 (see page 7) the locked out waterfront workers were assisted greatly by strike actions that were taken by other sections of the working class, including freezing workers and rail workers across the country. It is week three of this dispute and there has not been a solidarity strike action by any other section of the union movement. This situation is a direct outcome of the Employment Relations Act. Without the right to engage in solidarity and political strikes, workers' hands are tied.

In the past two elections the Labour Party received more campaign money from the bosses than did the National Party. Under both National and Labour, solidarity strikes have been banned. The legalisation of solidarity strikes would strengthen the industrial power of the working class. In order to maintain their support from the bosses, no Labour government will give us the right to take solidarity strike action.

What this means is that workers have get behind wider political campaigns for the right to strike. Any political organisation that does not call for the right to strike is not worth a grain of support from working people. The Workers Party, which produces *The Spark* magazine, demands the right of workers to strike in solidarity with other workers. The third point of the Workers Party platform is "For the unrestricted right of workers to organise and take industrial action and no limits on freedom of speech and activity". A separate political project, one that the Workers Party is not involved in, called Workers Charter, also argues for "The right to strike in defence of our interests".

If workers had the right to take solidarity action, MUNZ and other union workers would have been able to openly strike in defence of locked out Progressive Enterprises workers. Without solidarity strikes taking place, Progressive Enterprises workers can still win, but Labour's Employment Relations Act will not contribute to our victory. The Employment Relations Act and its strike provisions impede workers' ability to struggle.

Material support flowing in

Money from unions and the public has flowed in for the workers. For example MUNZ has so far donated \$17,000, the AUS has donated \$2000 and is encouraging members to donate more, and, through the Council of Trade Unions, other unions have donated tens of thousands of dollars. Other unions, including Unite Union and the Engineers Union (EPMU) have made their employees available to help on picket lines and to draw support for the locked out workers.

A musician belonging to Brass Razoo Solidarity Band said that over \$750 came in from the public within the first half hour of their band's performance on a busy pedestrian street in Wellington. He reported that people were rushing off to Eftpos machines so that they could donate \$20 notes.

Labour MP Steve Maharey donated \$200 to the fund for the locked out workers. His electorate is Palmerston North, where workers are locked out. MPs like Maharey have become accustomed to believing that they can buy workers off with affordable public relations exercises, while at the same time stabbing them in the back with repressive anti-strike laws, cuts to welfare (like the withdrawal of the Special Benefit), and statements and regulations in favour of wage restraint.

Create two, three, many Favona Roads!

In 1966, revolutionary leader Che Guevara wrote, 'Create two, three, many Vietnams'. He was referring to the struggle of the Vietnamese workers and peasants against their oppressors, chiefly the US ruling class. He was declaring that the world needed more resistance against the oppressor class.

The company has locked the workers out, and at picket lines the police have arrested a number of people for defending workers' rights. At Favona Road, where the Progressive Enterprises Distribution Centre is located, workers on the picket line know that this struggle has developed into an industrial war between the company and the workers. And more than this, they know that this is a battle to strengthen the union and a battle to establish future conditions in the distribution and supermarket industries in New Zealand.

In order to win we all have to continue the struggles to block the supply lines, we have to win more workers to our cause, and we need to keep money coming in from the unions and the public. Let's all get on board with building fighting unions and building political organisations that really support workers. □



The lockout:

WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

Workers Party members have supported the locked out workers in a number of ways. In Auckland, Mark Muller, an organiser for the NDU, has played a leading role in the coordination of flying pickets and the running of the continuous picket at Favona Road. During one flying picket, outside Toll Logistics, Mark was arrested and is defending four charges in court.

In Dunedin, Tim Bowron, a delegate at a Countdown store, helped to organise a picket when the store he works at was turned into a temporary distribution center. He was interviewed on the local TV station representing the NDU and putting the case for the locked out workers.

At SCA in Auckland (producers of nappies and tissue), Rebecca Broad, who works as a dispatch store person, had her workmates called back to their site after the bosses got them to go to SCA's supply centre to help shift goods that would otherwise be handled by Progressive Enterprises workers. In Wellington, Don Franks, a musician in the Brass Razoo Solidarity Band, helped to raise a donation for the locked out workers. Within half an hour the band raised over \$750.

Workers Party members in Christchurch have organised for a solidarity meeting to take place at the University of Canterbury, and they have organised support amongst Association of University Staff members. The WP produced two leaflets in the first fortnight of the dispute, Support the Locked Out Workers, and Organising to Win.

Workers Party secretary Daphna Whitmore, with other WP members in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin, have helped by supporting and strengthening picket lines.

WE CALL ON ALL READERS OF *THE SPARK*

To make a \$20 donation (or more), to help the locked out workers. Donations can be made to the National Distribution Union at the BNZ account: 02-0200-0217968-00 with the reference "Lock Out" or by phoning 0900 LOCKED OUT

Join the picket lines

Help out with the flying pickets

AREA CONTACTS: AUCKLAND Mark 021674035 or Jared0212452036 **WELLINGTON** Nick 0275636086 **CHRISTCHURCH** Phil 021443948 or Byron 0211540612 **DUNEDIN** Tim 4730509

Supermarket workers fightback against Progressive's union busting

by an NDU delegate and supermarket worker

At the same time that workers at Progressive Enterprises' distribution centres around New Zealand have been locked out by their employer in response to their demand for a national collective agreement, workers employed by the same company in Countdown, Woolworths and Foodtown supermarkets have also been engaged in a bitter pay dispute.

With a starting rate of between \$11.11 and \$12.38 an hour and with no allowances or penal rates, these supermarket workers earn on average 30-40% less than supermarket workers doing exactly the same jobs who are employed by Progressive's Australian parent company across the Tasman - even though after factoring in exchange rates grocery prices in Woolworths' Australian supermarkets are actually cheaper than here in New Zealand.

In July this year members of the National Distribution Union who work at Progressive supermarkets put up claims for a 7% increase on base rates, a collective agreement allowance and the abolition of youth rates. These claims were in the context of 4% inflation for the 2005-2006 year and a decline in real wages throughout the 1990s. Progressive came back with an insulting offer of 2.6% and refused to even consider any of the workers' other claims, saying that it could not afford such "unreasonable demands". This despite the fact that in the last financial year Progressive's parent company recorded a whopping \$1.2 billion profit, with its CEO Roger Corbett also taking home an \$8.2 million pay packet!

With the breakdown in bargaining talks, supermarket workers began taking their campaign to the streets with a series of informational pickets at Woolworths, Countdown and Foodtown stores around the country, handing out leaflets and collecting signatures from customers in support of their campaign.

Since the lockout at Progressive's distribution centres on 28 August these pickets have also sought to disrupt the operation of temporary scab distribution centres set up at some of the larger supermarkets by the company in a bid to bypass the lockout.

Meanwhile management have sought to intimidate



A worker from Countdown Dunedin picketing at the store

workers from attending the pickets by telling them that they will be suspended for taking part (even though this is illegal under the ERA). They have also offered a 3.8% pay rise to all non-union members in a bid to split the union, and said that even partial stoppages by union members will result in them all being locked out. Already in some stores they have begun training people to be used as scabs to work in checkouts and other departments against just such a contingency.

However this has not prevented supermarket workers from continuing to stage pickets. Around the country they have received tremendous support from members of the public as well as other unions such as Unite, AUS and the Maritime Union. In Auckland and Christchurch they have also been joined on the picket lines by their locked out colleagues from the distribution centres.

In Dunedin a cross-site committee of some 15 delegates from Countdown and Woolworths as well as Foodstuffs, Fresh Choice and Pak'n'Save organised a day of action on 6 September which saw some 50-60 people protest outside both Countdown and Pak'n'Save supermarkets (where the employer is also attempting to undermine the union). Around 10 uniformed police officers were also in attendance. The cops took a tough line with protestors who attempted to block trucks but did not seem overly concerned with the illegal actions of a company forklift driver who accelerated through a picket line, knocking down one man and narrowly missing a woman and her 12 month old baby.

Many supermarket workers are becoming angry at having to listen to PA announcements denouncing the locked out workers while they themselves are at work, and having anti-union propaganda displayed all around

the entrances to their stores. Because of the low union density (only around 25% across Progressive stores) strike action is unlikely but other tactics such as a call for a customer boycott may yet prove equally effective.

In the meantime supermarket workers will also be doing their best to support the locked out distribution workers through continued picketing of the temporary distribution centres and collecting donations on their behalf. In order to make these pickets really effective however we need members of other unions and the local community to physically join us so that we can



blockade scab vehicles without exposing individuals to the risk of being arrested. We also need to see

a serious union movement challenge to the strike-breaking provisions of Labour's Employment Relations Act, which renders illegal any attempt by other unions to take action in support of Progressive workers. Organised mass defiance of these laws (particularly by workers who have a much higher union density and therefore much more leverage) is the only sure guarantee of victory against the bosses!□

LABOUR - NO FRIEND OF THE WORKERS

We all know that the National Party screws over workers. But is Labour really any better? Let's look at their record.

In WW2, they passed emergency legislation which increased the powers of employers over workers. After WW2, they imposed peacetime conscription and deregistered the Carpenters Union, paving the way for the incoming National Party government's smashing of the Waterside Workers Union.

The second Labour government (1957-60) introduced the 'Black Budget' which raised the taxes on the few "luxuries" enjoyed by workers.

The third Labour government (1972-75) began a new wave of attacks on the union movement, allowing employers to take out injunctions to stop strikes and jail union leaders. In 1975, union leader Bill Andersen (later the president of the National Distribution Union) was jailed by Labour when his union defied an injunction.

The fourth Labour government brought in the Labour Relations Act in 1987, making injunctions an

even more powerful weapon in the bosses' hands and allowing employers to bring huge damages claims, just like in Thatcher's Britain, thereby curbing workers' ability to withdraw our labour. That Labour government also sold off a mass of state assets, drove down wages and working conditions and imposed mass unemployment.

Now we have the fifth Labour government. Their Employment Relations Act does give the unions right-of-entry to workplace, but it has also made it harder for workers to strike. We can't take industrial action in support of other workers, we can't do political strikes and we can only strike in support of our own contract bargaining after 40 days. We have a new leg-iron, which hampers our ability to fight for our own interests.

The record of Labour in restricting the rights of workers shows that we need a new political movement - one of, for and by workers. A new political movement that puts workers first. That's what the Workers Party seeks to build.□



The 1951 Lockout

In 1951 when waterside workers called an overtime ban in support of their claims for a wage rise they were locked out by their employer and the government imposed Emergency Regulations. For 151 days the workers stood firm. Seamen, cooks and stewards, rail workers, freezing workers, miners and many others went on strike in support of the watersiders.

Waterside Union leader Jock Barnes summed it up: "The workers' fight is never lost; the only time they lose is when they bow their heads".

ABOUT THE WORKERS PARTY

We aim to build a workers' organisation that represents the class interests of the international working class and fights for those interests on the ground in New Zealand.

Any political organisation that does not stand unreservedly for working class interests is bound to protect capitalism and preserve the austerity measures that the capitalist class continues to impose on the working class. This has been the experience of the working class under the New Zealand Labour Party and other capitalist parties.

The capitalist class consumes the labour-power of the working class. Your work produces their wealth. As long as the capitalist class exists it will prevent the working class majority from obtaining wealth or essential items. It will maintain discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, national origins, and sexuality. It will prevent society from becoming completely democratic. It will also prevent the majority of people from living up to their full potential as individuals. These are the structural barriers that capitalism presents to humanity, and we would like to see these barriers smashed.

Only the working class majority can put an end to capitalism by taking power and establishing a new society. We aim to help this process and we aim to play a leading role in it.

We treat Marxist theory as the analytical tool that underlies our assessment of culture, society, and economy. This helps us to determine the direction and activity of our organisation. This is what we do:

- Our members produce theoretically informed, experience-based, and up-to-date analysis of local and international issues. Our analysis is regularly presented in our newspaper *The Spark* and our magazine *revolution*. Our analysis corresponds to the concrete situation of the class struggle in New Zealand.

- As workers, unpaid organisers, and paid organisers, our members take up responsibilities in unions. Our union work includes organising, agitating for the best possible economic demands, fighting for union democracy, and advancing revolutionary and internationalist politics.

GET WITH THE



For in-depth analysis of contemporary political, economic, social and cultural trends in New Zealand and globally, make sure you get a subscription to revolution. Subs within New Zealand are only \$22 for six issues; if you're in Australia you can subscribe for \$NZ37, and everywhere else in the world is \$NZ40



**Send cheques to:Radical Media Collective
PO Box 513ChristchurchNew Zealand**

- Our members participate in anti-war/anti-imperialist groups and help build the anti-war movement. In this work we are concerned with providing a focus against New Zealand imperialism, winning local workers to the cause of Third World workers and peasants, and encouraging other individuals and groups in the anti-war movement to support the right of workers in the oppressed countries to fight invading/occupying forces.

- The Workers Party participates in local and general elections. This means we have a clear position and trajectory in national politics. We do not give electoral support to any capitalist parties. We use elections to spread our ideas to the public and to militant sections of the working class.

- The point is to change the world. In order to change it we need to understand it. We study Marxist theory, engage in contemporary debates, follow new research, and promote an atmosphere of lively and tolerant debate.

- We aim to maintain a presence on the main campuses. We aim to recruit and work alongside students who are serious about fighting capitalism and defending working class interests.

Check out our website at www.workersparty.org.nz and get involved with

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SPARK

Keep up to date with what's happening in New Zealand and around the world.

Why are the rich growing richer under a Labour government? Why are there anti-strike laws? Is the United Nations a force for good? What hope is there for peace in the Middle East? These sorts of questions get tackled in the *Spark*.

This is where you'll get hard-hitting analysis and news stories you won't find in the mainstream press.

Subs are \$15 for 10 issues or \$30 for 20 issues within NZ; Australia \$A20 for 10 issues or \$A40 for 20 issues airmail.

our organisation. Or join us by filling out the yellow membership form and sending it in. □

JOIN THE WORKERS PARTY

OUR PLATFORM:

1. Opposition to all New Zealand and Western intervention in the Third World and all Western military alliances.
2. Jobs for all with a living wage and shorter working week.
3. For the unrestricted right of workers to organise and take industrial action and no limits on workers' freedom of speech and activity.
4. For working class unity and solidarity – equality for women, Maori and other ethnic minorities and gay men and women; open borders and full rights for migrant workers.
5. For a working people's republic.

(Contact details on page 2)

UN fails to bring peace and justice to the people of Lebanon

Tim Bowron

On August 14 Israel and its US backers were forced to agree to a ceasefire in southern Lebanon, after a month of aerial and ground assaults which left over 1000 Lebanese civilians dead and nearly one million without homes. Despite this devastation the Israeli offensive completely failed in its stated objective of destroying the popular resistance movement Hizbullah, which lost only a tiny percentage of its guerrilla fighters killed in the fighting while at the same time accounting for 116 soldiers of the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) and gaining enormously in terms of both popularity and prestige among the people of Lebanon.

The conflict was initiated by Israel, ostensibly in response to the capturing on July 12 of two of its soldiers by Hizbullah who hoped to exchange them for some of their own fighters already being held in Israeli jails. The swiftness and scale of Israel's response however indicated months of planning and preparation, as the Ehud Olmert government (in concert with the Bush administration) plotted to eradicate one of the few forces capable of frustrating their plans for "regime change" in neighbouring Syria as well as Iran.

A further pretext, that it was necessary to establish a "buffer zone" in southern Lebanon in order to prevent civilians in northern Israel from being killed by

Hizbullah rockets fails to account for the fact that prior to the latest Israeli onslaught there were no civilian deaths attributable to rockets fired from the Lebanese side of the border.

Even when Hizbullah hit back after the beginning of the Israeli air raids on July 13 their antiquated Soviet Katyusha rockets were directed mainly at military and police installations and only 43 Israeli civilians were killed as a result of missiles hitting the wrong targets (compare this with the indiscriminate dropping of cluster bombs on southern Lebanese towns and villages by the IDF).

UN intervenes to protect interests of the USA and Israel

Having failed to secure the destruction of Hizbullah themselves, Israel and the US had no alternative but to turn to the United Nations to carry out their dirty work by alternative means, through the deployment of a "peacekeeping" (foreign occupation) force in southern Lebanon and the mandatory disarmament of Hizbullah, as provided for in UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

Of course when passing the resolution, the UN Security Council did not bother to consult with the (predominantly Muslim Shi'a) inhabitants of southern Lebanon, who had only 6 years ago finally achieved liberation after nearly two decades of Israeli occupation! Nor did it ever occur to them to call also for the disarming of Israel, which throughout the recent conflict was continuously being fed shipments of missiles, guns and cluster bombs from the Western NATO powers.

In the meantime while the 15 000-strong UN force is being prepared to deploy in Lebanon, Israel has continued to carry out sporadic attacks against supposed Hizbullah



targets in the country (in clear violation of the ceasefire) as well as maintaining (until as recently as 7 September) an aerial and naval blockade, preventing desperately needed supplies from being brought in (postscript: despite earlier Israeli promises, the naval blockade had still not been lifted at the time we went to press).

Furthermore, Israel insists on the right to determine the makeup of the UN occupation force in southern Lebanon, refusing to countenance the deployment of troops from Muslim nations such as Indonesia and Bangladesh who might be vaguely sympathetic to the Lebanese people and their legitimate grievances. Instead Israel prefers countries such as the former colonial power France or NATO client-states of the US such as Italy and Turkey to take the lead (Turkey despite being also a Muslim country has since the 1980s pursued a policy of military alliance with Israel against their common foe Syria).

It was hardly surprising then that when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan attempted to visit the devastated suburbs of southern Beirut with the Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on 29 August that he was besieged by thousands of local residents shouting "Kofi Annan is an agent of the Americans" and forced to evacuate with his entourage after only 10 minutes (source: Al Jazeera.com).

Continuing a legacy of imperialism

The people who inhabit the majority-Shi'a areas of Beirut and southern Lebanon have no reason to trust the Western imperialist powers. In the 1920s the French colonialists who then ruled Syria under a League of Nations mandate forcibly incorporated them into a new Maronite Christian dominated "State of Greater Lebanon" in order to ensure the survival of a reliable proxy for French economic and military interests when independence eventually arrived. Deprived of the right to determine their own political future, the local Shi'a population were then further betrayed by the outrageous gerrymander of Lebanon's post-independence electoral system, which today guarantees the various Christian groups half the seats in the national parliament despite their comprising only about 40% of the total population.

In the 1980s and 1990s when Israeli troops (allied with local right wing Christian militia groups) occupied southern Lebanon as part of their efforts to destroy the PLO, the local population was forced to create its own self-defence organisations in response of which the largest and most successful was Hizbullah. Hizbullah (the name literally means "party of god") owed its success in large part to the colonial legacy of entrenched communal divisions, which tended to promote the growth of religious-based movements and

place considerable obstacles in the way of secular leftist organisations such as the Lebanese Communist Party (which despite having a mainly Christian membership also fought on the Muslim-dominated side in the liberation struggle).



While in terms of its actual politics Hizbullah is plainly neither particularly left-wing nor socialist, it continues to enjoy the overwhelming support of the oppressed Shi'a community in southern Lebanon. Today Hizbullah's weapons are all that stand between these people and complete annihilation at the hands of the IDF and Western Imperialism. For this reason we must oppose any attempt by outside forces to disarm them and insist on the removal of all Israeli and UN troops from southern Lebanon. □

Correction

In the last issue of *The Spark* (17 August) we ran an edited version of a talk by WP member John Edmondson on the Lebanon crisis which concluded with the following sentence:

"Therefore we demand that the New Zealand government oppose the presence of all foreign troops in South Lebanon – including UN "peacekeepers" – and respect the right to self-determination of the Lebanese people."

As staunch opponents of imperialism both at home and abroad we in the Workers Party do not of course believe that the New Zealand government either can or should be called upon to intervene (benevolently or otherwise) in the affairs of other nations. As such, that sentence (which along with the rest of the final paragraph was added by in by the subeditor and did not form part of the original talk) should have read instead:

"Therefore we oppose the presence of all foreign troops in South Lebanon – including UN "peacekeepers" – and respect the right to self-determination of the Lebanese people, and in particular we oppose any moves by the New Zealand government to station troops in Lebanon". □

- Spark Editorial Board

Imperialist rivalry threatens Iran

Don Franks

Under heavy pressure from Washington, a UN Security Council resolution passed on July 31 set August 31 as the deadline for Tehran to stop its uranium enrichment facilities.

US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, labelled Iran's failure to stop enrichment a "a red flag" issue, demanding that the Security Council impose "a very tough sanctions resolution"

Bolton also raised the prospect of military action against Iran. Interviewed by CNN, he said: "We're exercising a lot of diplomatic activity to try and resolve this peacefully. That's our objective but no President charged with defending the American people takes the military option off the table."

Addressing an American Legion convention US President Bush produced more smarmy political language: "It is time for Iran to make a choice.... We will continue to work closely with our allies to find a diplomatic solution there must be consequences for Iran's defiance, and we must not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon."

Historical facts show that US talk of "diplomacy" is just bullshit. The Bush administration has refused to negotiate with or even meet with Iranian authorities. The White House rejected Iran's offer on August 22 to hold "serious negotiations" over proposals made in June by the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus



Germany to end the nuclear standoff.

American officials have repeatedly declared in relation to Iran that "the military option is on the table". The Bush administration has also this year increased funding for Iranian opposition groups and other activities aimed at "regime change" in Iran.

Washington's campaigning about "diplomacy" is intended to push its European and Asian rivals into backing US pressure against Iran.

A negotiated settlement to the dispute over Iranian nuclear capability is actually the last thing American authorities want. Relaxation of diplomatic tensions and the economic opening up of Iran would be to the advantage of EU powers, Russia, China and Japan. All of those imperialist powers have significant economic interests in Iran. Those interests are a major source of US belligerence. The only sure way for the US to stamp their dominance in Iran is an aggressive policy of "regime change" in Tehran.

George Bush thunders: "we must not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon."

He speaks as the leader of the only country to have ever dropped nuclear bombs and as the leader of the army currently occupying Iraq, which uses nuclear armaments in the form of depleted uranium tipped munitions.

When the US government and the UN Security Council talk big about negotiated diplomacy against Iran they are pimping for US business interests. Imperialist threats to Iran foreshadow yet another unjust war and should be the concern of every civilised person on the planet. □

5000 WORKERS RALLY AGAINST THE 90-DAY BILL: POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

Jared Phillips and Rebecca Broad

On August 23, around 5000 workers rallied in Aotea square, as part of a union effort to bring pressure against the 90-Day probationary employment bill, which was proposed by the National Party's Wayne Mapp. Predominantly, the workers belonged to the EPMU, NDU, SFWU, and Unite unions.

In previous *Spark* articles we have highlighted some of the problems with the approach that top union leaderships have taken towards the bill. We pointed out that the current union leadership is sending out an incorrect message, a message suggesting that the current legislation, contained in the Employment Relations Act, is fine, and that the capitalist system can work for everybody under Labour. We also clearly demonstrated that under the Labour-led government the bosses have the right to hire and fire. Increasingly, the bosses are winning ground in their attacks on job security. They are doing this through creating two-tier workplaces (of secure and insecure workers) and through increasing the use of precarious labour that is hired through temping agencies. This is the reality for today's workers.

We argued that 'Mapp's Bill' was a piece of legislation that needed to be opposed, and that it needed to be opposed along with all the other anti-worker laws and practices that prevail under Labour. In this article, we review the mass workers rally against the bill. The campaign itself was full of contradictions. At its core, this was a fight against labour market flexibilisation. But the top union leadership wants to highlight only the flexibilisation that is carried out by National, and it wants to ignore the flexibilisation carried out by Labour. Because of contradictions like this, we must say that the positives and negatives of the current union movement were reflected at the rally. From the perspective of two of the Workers Party members who attended the rally, these were the positive and negative aspects of the day.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

(+) A mass rally of unionised workers

Participants in the rally numbered about 5000. These were mainly blue collar industrial workers, as well as service sector workers. So this was obviously the largest union mobilisation in some time. The size of the mobilisation puts to rest - in a public way - any



claims that the union movement is dead, or that the class struggle is over.

(+) SEA Unite members walked out

Despite intimidation and threats from the employer, members of Sky City Employees Association Unite walked off the job. The crowd received them with applause during one part of the rally, and this added a more militant class struggle element to the rally.

(+) Rank and file workers spoke from the stage

Some rank and file speakers were organised to speak at the rally. Of all the speakers, the best were rank-and-file NDU and SFWU speakers.

(+) Workers Party engaged in building for the march

One WP member mobilised the overwhelming majority of NDU members, who were excited about the demonstration. According to another NDU employee, he mobilised a very large proportion of the total NDU members who were present. Another WP member, as a rank-and-file NDU member, led a large worksite with a banner saying '5% / 4 Weeks + service / Union Democracy / Fight Casualisation'. These were concrete demands for that workplace and for the labour



movement. Other WP members worked with an EPMU employee to mobilise students by heavily leafleting Auckland University. They handed out the official union leaflet, and this work conformed with the WP's objective of winning students to workers' struggles.

(+) A receptive audience for politically advanced ideas

WP members talked with about 150 workers at the rally. About 95 percent responded positively to ideas like "So we say let's not allow the top trade union leadership, with the EPMU/SFWU affiliated to Labour, to turn this campaign into an anti-National Party rally", and "Let's not allow them to turn our collective power into an early election campaign for Labour, because casualisation is rife under Labour". Some workers responded that they would put our leaflet, which contained these types of ideas, on notice boards at their workplaces. The few who didn't respond positively to us seemed bemused, or a bit unaware, but not hostile to our politics.

NEGATIVES

More so than 'the positives', the way in which most of the negative aspects impacted is quite hard to measure because of the destandardisation of the working class. For example, where union democracy is strong, the usage of stop-work time is not a barrier to organising on the job; but where union democracy is weak, the use of stop-work time is a real problem. So while these comments will not apply consistently, the inconsistency does not negate the validity of the claims.

(-) Union democracy and the rally

In some cases workers need their stop-work time to debate claims and other issues. In some workplaces moderate or tame delegates and organisers prevent workers from debating claims. There are even cases where such people say that workers 'Aren't allowed to

know the claims'. So the using-up of two of the four annual stop-work hours would have been a god-send to organisers and delegates who, because of being under-committed or under-resourced, seek to prevent democracy, debate, and rank-and-file input to the union movement.

Of course, democratic organisers and delegates can fight to ratify extra meeting time, and strong rank-and-file workplaces can call snap meetings. But in most workplaces such arrangements and activities don't exist.

(-) Tightly controlled event

Closely related to the above, is this point: Objectively, in sum total, the union officialdom, and the ideas of the union officialdom, gained more of a platform amongst workers. There was an extremely tight control on the reigns, no open microphone, even for organisations that helped to organise the mobilisation.

(-) One hour event or strike?

It could be argued that there was no open-microphone as a result of lack of time. However, this begs the question as to whether workers' rallies should be confined to one hour. After allowing for travel time, most workers would have been at the event for close to one hour. We believe that the 'one hour event' concept lowers workers' expectations, and that to combat this we should raise workers expectations by arguing for strike action. Firstly, we should argue for political strikes against aggressive anti-worker legislation. Secondly, we should argue *for the right* to take political strikes and solidarity strikes, both of which are banned by Labour.

(-) The politics of the event

The overall politics of the event were anti-National. In many ways we still have an effectively two-party system, so this anti-National approach, whether intended or not, converts into a pro-Labour approach. The EPMU and SFWU top-leaders *do* intend for this pro-Labour approach to become dominant.

More disappointing, was Unite organiser Mike Treen's introduction of Pita Sharples to the stage. Sharples apologised for his party's early support for the Bill (except in the case of Hone Harawira). Maori Party support for the bill was given in the same month in which Tariana Turia was making overtures to the ACT party. She claimed that ACT and The Maori Party had common ground on unemployment issues.

This meant that far from being receiving clarity with regard to which political organisations stand for the working class, workers were encouraged to take up vague impressions that the Maori Party represents

workers interests. The Maori Party did not 'all-out' attack workers, but it nearly did.

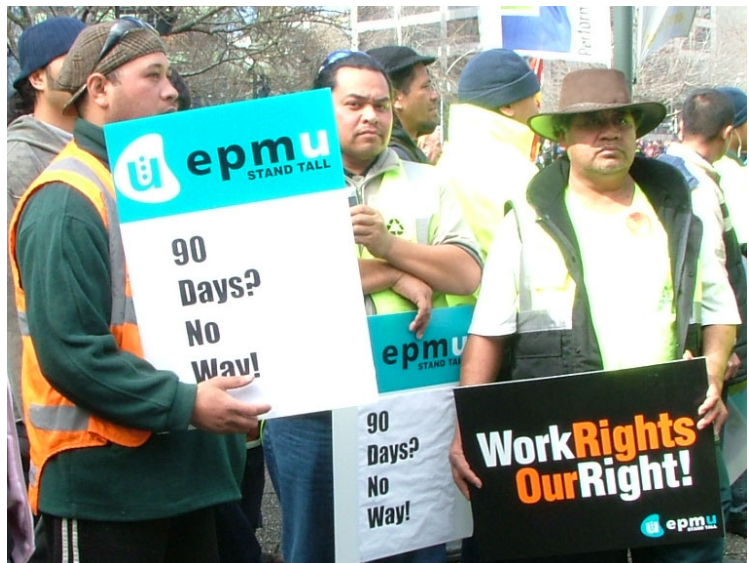
(-) Symbolism of workers struggle

The top-leadership simulated an atmosphere in which workers were out to 'Kill the Bill'. For example, in order to prolong the suspense, and make the single issue protest seem more relevant, union leaders pretended that the Maori Party had not already fully come around to its position of opposing the bill. This allowed the union leaderships present to act as if it was still relevant for workers to be marching under the single anti-National 'Kill the Bill' demand.

More honestly, event organisers could have conveyed the message, "The Maori Party has finally come around to opposing the bill, so let's celebrate that the bill won't go through. We've had an upsurge of union activity with the 5% percent campaigns, with Unite, and with a campaign against youth rates, so let's strengthen all that." Instead, organisers are now taking posters to worksites saying 'We Won'. The fact is that the bill didn't have sufficient support in parliament, and it was defeated in parliament. This all means that workers have been given less clarity, not more clarity, on the way forward for the union movement.

(-) No workers' internationalism

With the exception of a rank-and-file SFWU member who talked about John Howard and Liberal Party attacks on Australian workers, there was very little internationalism on display at the rally. This could have easily been different. For example, only three weeks before the anti-Mapp rally, the NDU condemned the bombing and killing of Lebanese workers. Laila Harre should have condemned the bombing at the anti-Mapp rally. Unite Union, with a wider-reaching left leadership, should have used some of its influence to get a speaker who could have advertised the upcoming march against Israel's attacks on Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. As it stands, we still have a union movement that wants to wear its internationalist hat on weekends. □



Those a bit suspicious of Labour Minister David Benson Pope's new book of recipes telling the poor what they should eat might prefer....

THE PARLIAMENTARY COOKBOOK

"HELEN'S VIETNAMESE LEFTOVERS"



Take whatever old scrapings of Vietnam war opposition that may be to hand, (they may take a while to find). Wrap these up tightly and discard. Serve with agent orange and Afghans in blood sauce.

" KEITH'S K RATIONS "

A tasty treat to rejuvenate "our police" and "our troops" as they rest from subjugating Pacific peoples. Take ten back copies of Socialist Action, shred and stew for several years, until all anti-capitalist content has evaporated. Reshape and top with Green icing. (Make sure that each step of this process is done legally).

"PETER'S FUTURE FAMILY FAVOURITE"

Anything suitably greasy.



"DON'S DOG'S DINNER"



Take any number of treasonous foreigners (ie someone with a funny name who has written a letter) and some equal amounts of privilege.

Run the lot through a speech writer, picking out and discarding any chunks of logic that might appear. Set aside the privilege for your own supper. Serve the remainder; if diners complain that there's actually nothing there, remind them that's their individual choice.

"RODNEY'S RAW HIDE"

Assemble any ingredients you like, just as long as they look nasty and smell. Warm over slightly and serve, saying that someone else made it, then complain about how awful it is.

"JIM'S PROGRESSIVE REHEATED CUSTARD"

Search in the depths of the larder for any rancid concoction you once pronounced unfit to eat. Serve up now as though nothing has happened.



"MAORI PARTY SURPRISE"

Tell everyone there's nothing for tea but a ninety day old map. Then at the very last minute, jump up and say the map is inedible. People will think you did all the cooking.

"WINSTON FIRST DESERT"

Take several ripe plums of office. □

