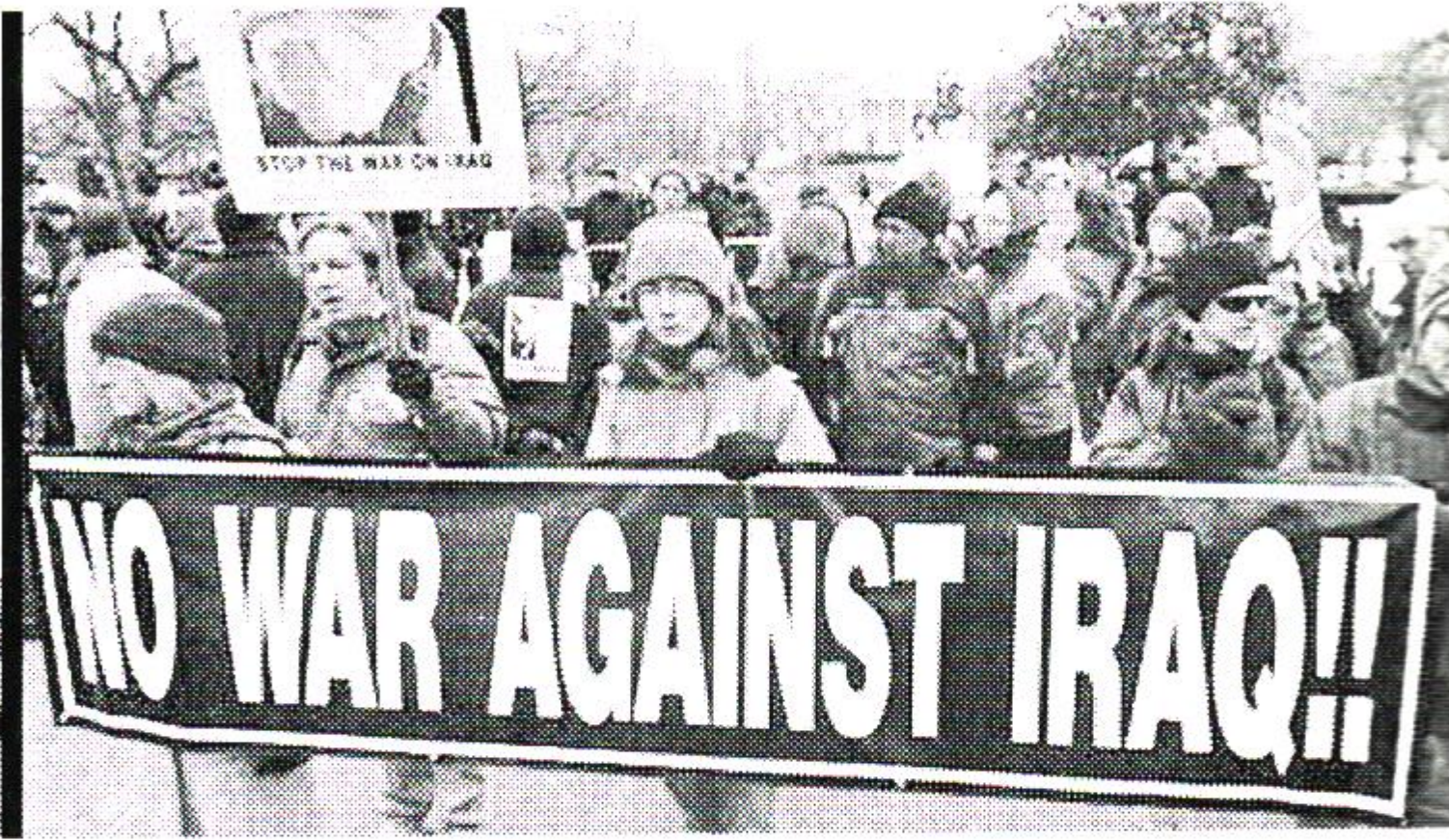
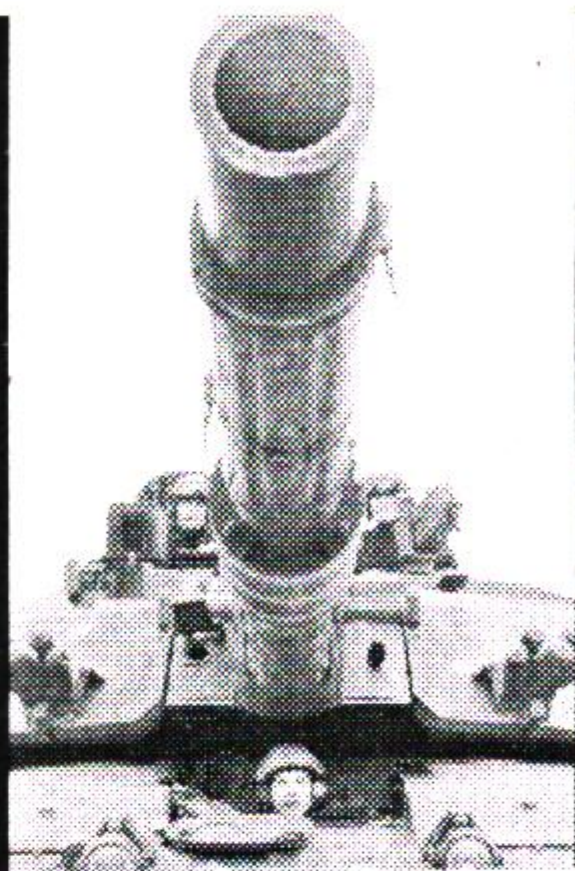


inside: Venezuela ● economy ● Marx ● top-up fees

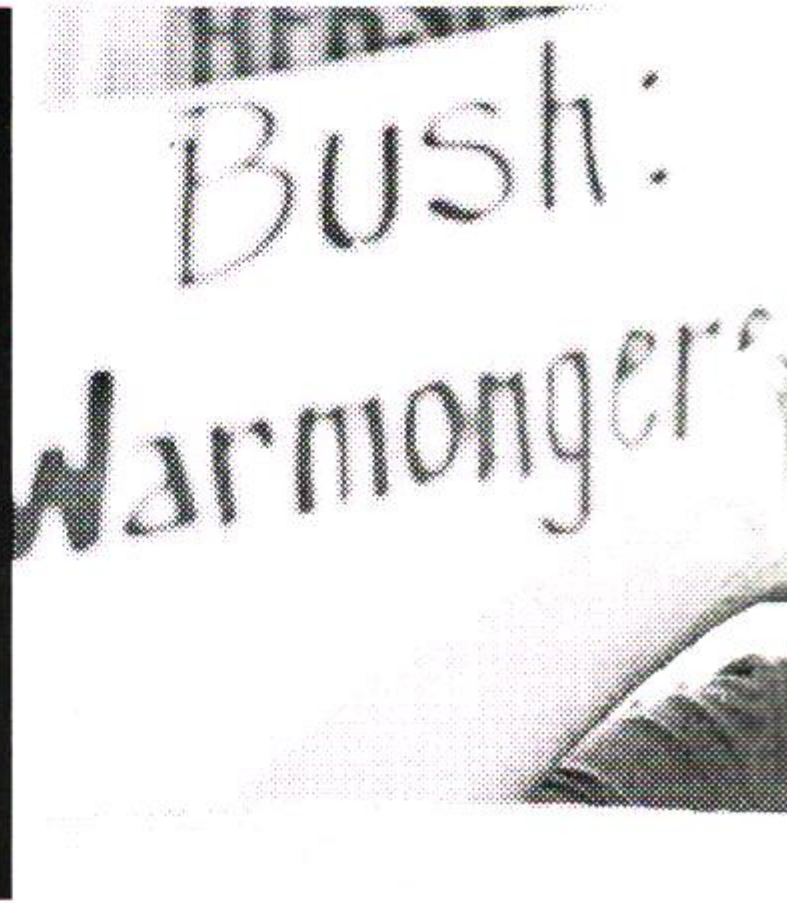
# Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

February 2003 issue 108 Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



# Oppose Bush's war



[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)



# Prescott's Law : A threat to the whole labour movement

**A**s we go to press the Blair government has launched a new offensive against the firefighters. Despite the repeated efforts of the firefighters to negotiate a settlement to their dispute, time and again the government has intervened with blatant acts of provocation. Now, Deputy Prime Minister Prescott has announced his intention to change the law to take direct control of the fire service and impose a settlement on the firefighters. This would mean the imposition of the Bain proposals, the derisory pay offer of 4% and thousands of job cuts, resulting in the closure of fire stations and the undermining of the fire service. This must not be allowed. Furthermore, this latest provocation is a warning of what other public sector workers can expect from Blair and co. Such measures are a threat to the entire labour movement, and must be answered by the movement as a whole.

Prescott says that the government has lost patience with the firefighters. Yet the latest opinion poll results show 63% of the population entirely in support of the firefighters (MORI 21/01/02). This reflects not only the genuine support of the majority for the just demands of the firefighters, but also that increasingly disillusionment with Blair is turning to anger and open opposition. In reality it is Prescott, Blair and co who are out of touch. No-one supports their war in Iraq, and no-one supports their attacks on public sector workers. We have run out of patience with this government and their Tory policies. This far and no further!

For all their talk of "modernisation" they intend to use the powers of the 1947 Fire Services Act - which was repealed in 1959 - to impose their savage cuts on our fire service. What they mean by modernisation is cost cutting and hang the consequences for public safety. This same policy of modernisation will be applied to all public services, if they are allowed to get away with it.

This new threat requires an immediate response. If Blair and co want a fight then they will get one. If they think the firefighters will back down in the face of these bully boy tactics then they have got another thing coming. The FBU, who have demonstrated their willingness to negotiate at every turn, must now meet fire with fire. FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said Prescott's announcement came as "no surprise" because the fire service minister had already told chief fire officers last week that there would not be a negotiated set-

tlement. "Imposing a settlement by legislation simply highlights their unwillingness to negotiate" the FBU leader concluded. Just to confirm the intransigent position of the government Prescott concluded his statement claiming that the FBU had walked away from talks by saying "For the avoidance of doubt, the government's position will not change." The government has no intention of negotiating a settlement. Their intention all along has been to break the firefighters, and then move on to an all out assault on public services.

However, Prescott's proposed legislation will not break the resolve of the firefighters who are now fully aware that they are fighting not only for decent wages, but also to save the fire service from the suicidal cuts proposed by the government. Faced with such an unprecedented attack the FBU must now take all-out action, this is the only language Blair and co understand. They are not willing to listen to reason, they are not willing to negotiate, they are not willing to listen to public opinion, very well then they will have to face action. With the overwhelming backing of public opinion and the support of the trade union movement an all-out strike by firefighters can force Blair and co to back down.

So far this dispute has cost the government £70 million, and is now running at a cost of approximately £1 million per day. However that is of little concern to a government preparing to spend millions on an adventure in Iraq. Indeed they will see this as money well spent if they are able to push through the rest of their modernising proposals for public services as a result. No doubt it is the preparations for war which has encouraged them to speed up their attacks on the fire service. While thousands of British troops are being shipped off to the gulf, 19,000 are kept behind to provide emergency cover during the firefighters' walkouts. Prescott's legal moves are also undoubtedly designed to gain access to the 'red' fire engines during disputes. However, so far the government has not been able to find anyone, including the army and the police, willing to take these engines out of striking fire stations.

All trade unionists should move resolutions of support for the firefighters, and call on their own unions to organise solidarity action in the face of these outrageous attacks. The firefighters action must be spread, to show Blair and co that the entire labour movement stands behind the firefighters. Labour Party members should

likewise move resolutions condemning these threats and demanding their local Labour MPs vote against any such proposal in Parliament. Furthermore Party members should back calls by the Campaign Group to organise a recall Labour Party Conference. The Labour leaders have picked a fight with the unions. Then the unions must fight back, not just industrially but politically, inside the Labour Party, to reclaim it from the Tory clique who have hijacked it. Hand in hand with the struggle of all trade unionists to support the firefighters must go a struggle to reclaim the Labour Party. The fight for socialist policies in the Labour Party, and the fight to defend public services and win fair pay for firefighters are two sides of the same coin.

It is clear that Prescott and co wish to impose a settlement on the firefighters. This represents a threat to the entire labour movement. If they are allowed to get away with this then who will they attack next? Will teachers find their pay imposed on them? Will nurses be forced by legislation to accept cuts in the NHS? No, this must be stopped now!

This assault on public services and public sector workers must be stopped in its tracks. The TUC must convene an emergency meeting of the General Council. From the beginning the TUC have voiced their support for the firefighters. Now those words need to be turned into action. The firefighters must not stand alone. Their fight is our fight. Any attempt to impose a settlement to this dispute must be met with the determined opposition of the entire labour movement. That means the TUC calling a 24 hour general strike if there is any attempt to impose a settlement on the firefighters.

For their own sake and for the sake of the entire movement the firefighters must win.

Enough is enough! Blair and co have gone too far. The entire movement must now stand shoulder to shoulder with the firefighters.

- ☆ Victory to the firefighters!  
For All Out Action Against Prescott's Law
- ☆ No to Bain. For 30k with no strings
- ☆ No more attacks on public services.
- ☆ TUC prepare to call a 24 hour General Strike
- ☆ Trade unions reclaim the Labour Party.



# No to Imperialist Aggression in Iraq!

**T**he warmongers Bush and Blair are making final preparations for an all-out assault against the peoples of Iraq.

Washington has made it clear that it is prepared to attack Iraq without waiting for UN weapons inspectors to find evidence of illicit weapons programmes. Nothing will prevent the imperialist powers from unleashing their horrendous terror on the Iraqi people in the next few weeks. If Blix cannot come up with a pretext, then one will be invented. If Saddam wishes to avoid war his "friends" have urged him to go into exile-with the full backing of US imperialism.

Tony Blair, our Christian Prime Minister, in his bleak New Year's message talked in effect of blood, toil, tears and sweat. Of course, Blair has no intention of shedding any of his own blood, sweat, toil and tears. As with the cowboy king George W. Bush, the plan is to fight to the last drop of other people's blood, most notably the innocent men, women and children of Iraq.

As the imperialists prepare their holocaust, they twist the screws on Iraq with a New Year UN resolution, passed on 30th December, to tighten the sanctions against the country, including the supply of ... antibiotics and medicines. With a decade of sanctions having already reduced most Iraqis to penury, these additional burdens are an attempt to pile on the agony. Already up to 16 million people-more than two-thirds of the population-are dependent upon food rations set up by international agencies. Malnutrition, especially among women and children, is widespread. The bombing of roads, ports and railways, would plunge the country into mass hunger. With the water and sanitation system on the verge of collapse and dependent on electrical power, any disruption would certainly lead to the spread of disease.

As we have explained repeatedly the role of the United Nations is a fig-leaf, if one is needed, for the actions of American imperialism. The UN is not a neutral arbiter, but only a forum of capitalist powers that can sometimes reach a deal over secondary matters, but on fundamental questions cannot alter anything. The contrast between the supine inactivity of the UN in relation to Palestine and its open defence of US aggression against Iraq is glaringly obvious. Where the UN has intervened, as in Korea and the Congo, it has

played an openly counterrevolutionary role.

The Americans were able to bully and bribe the other members of the Security Council to fall into line, despite all their hot air opposition. The Texan bullhorn was calling all the shots, backed up by his poodle in Downing Street. Despite the UN resolution, the hands of the United States government will not be tied on this vital question. As G.W. Bush declared recently: "I'm the guy who makes the final decision." So the decision has been made and the UN can go and whistle Dixie.

But despite these difficulties, the American imperialists are determined to get their hands on Iraq's oil. The Middle East accounts for 65 per cent of the world's oil resources. The United States is dependent upon this vital supply, at this stage, from Saudi Arabia. However, with the political instability intensifying within the region, Saudi Arabia is not the stable haven that it was in the past. In order to secure its future oil needs, the US has targeted the Iraqi oilfields. The cover of a "war against terrorism" is to be used to achieve its aims. Once, these oilfields have been "liberated", the US puppet regime that replaces Saddam will flood the world market with oil-forcing down its price.

While American leaflets dropped over Iraq urge the soldiers down below to "think of their families", that is precisely what they will be doing, but not in the way the American imperialists think. Whatever they may think of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator, they will regard the American/British troops as the aggressors.

Rather than defend the country through desert defence fortifications, the Iraqis have concentrated their defence within the towns and cities. This will result in the bombing of civilians and will certainly complicate the plans of the imperialists for a quick war. The Iraqis will fight street by street, house by house, if need be. This will be the worst scenario for the

Americans, and lead to massive casualties. Unlike in 1991, this is no retreat from Kuwait. This will be a war against a foreign invader which will turn the war into a defensive one as far as the bulk of the population are concerned. While the Allied troops will have far superior fire-power, there is no mass support for the war back home in America or Britain or in Europe.

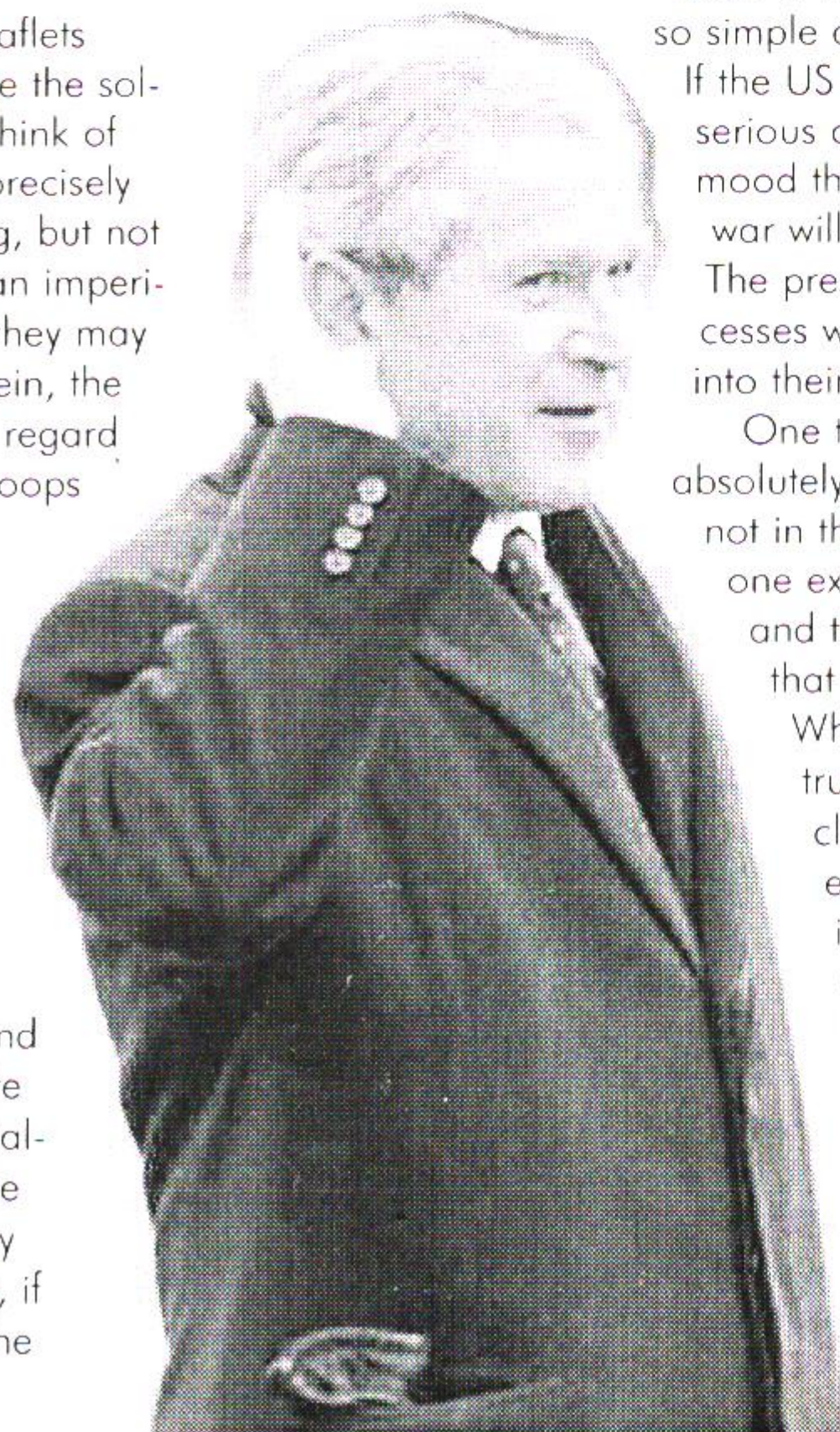
The bloody equation of war is full of imponderables, and nobody can predict the outcome with certainty.

It is impossible to judge beforehand the morale of the Iraqi army and the masses. However, the Iraqis will be fighting a defensive war, not in Kuwait but in their own country. Nor will it be a simple matter to occupy a country like Iraq.

There is no great enthusiasm in the USA for this war, with 81% opposed to unilateral action. Here in Britain there is very little support for it. In most European countries there is open hostility that can grow into a serious anti-war movement in the coming months. The potential for such a movement was clearly shown in Italy, where around one million gathered in Florence to protest against the war and in the United States where 250,000 demonstrated in Washington and 400,000 demonstrated in California.

Even in the USA it will not be so simple as Bush now thinks. If the US army begins to take serious casualties, what mood there is in favour of war will swiftly evaporate. The present electoral successes would then soon turn into their opposite.

One thing, however, is absolutely certain: this war is not in the interests of anyone except the imperialists and the big oil interests that stand behind the White House. Every true socialist, every class conscious worker and trade unionist, every young person who wants to fight for a better world, must join in the most active and militant struggle against this unjust imperialist war. □





# Firefighters Stand Firm! Their fight is our fight!

As firefighters grit their teeth for another round of strikes, the Blair government has buried its head in the sand. All the FBU are being offered is a 4% wage rise, and anything above this the following year is still based on job cuts, which are unjustified and dangerous and will result in the closure of many fire stations.

John Prescott told the House of Commons that "strikes cannot and will not achieve anything", and asked the firefighters and emergency fire control staff to "get back to the talks at Acas". The Deputy Prime Minister even had the audacity to charge the firefighters with "putting the public at unnecessary risk".

The deputy prime minister however rejected Tory calls for the government to seek an injunction banning the strike under a 1992 Tory anti-trade union law on the grounds that life was being intentionally endangered. He also came out against fire authorities attempting to lock strikers out of fire stations.

Nevertheless, the Blair government is acting like a Tory government in its dealings with the FBU, and public sector workers generally. Blair's aim is to defeat the firefighters and force through a package of so-called modernisation. But this has nothing to do with modernisation and everything to do with cuts in manning levels and cuts in costs. If Blair succeeds, this will be used to force through changes in other services and sectors in the name of "reform".

"We are appalled that a Government, elected by working people, has forgotten those who elected it and is encouraging such an anti-union stand by the fire authority employers rather than encouraging a negotiated solution", states Paul Mackney, NATFHE's General Secretary. "They speak of modernisation, the slogan under which col-

leges were semi-privatised in 1993." Such "modernisation", says Mackney, "has brought many of them to a state of collapse with relentless restructuring and redundancies and the destruction of national conditions of service."

The FBU strike took place for one overwhelming reason: that outrageous pre-conditions were being placed on talks, which rule out any normal negotiations. Scandalously, the pre-conditions demanded are that any future talks must include the union's full commitment to the Bain recommendations. These include proposals for 2 per cent year on year job cuts over the next 4 years, changes to the pension scheme and fewer firefighters at night, when the risk of death and injury to the public is highest. Even fire authority documents show that 4,500 jobs would be cut, new shifts created to reduce cover at night, and lower pensions would be introduced for recruits.

A Mori poll published on 21st January shows almost two-thirds - 63% - of the public supports the FBU strike for a Fair and Professional Wage. "We are not surprised by the outcome of polls, which show we have massive public support. Our members are all part of their local communities and have known all

along that the public is supporting us," stated Andy Gilchrist.

While this is undoubtedly true, the Blair government has turned a blind-eye to these polls and appears hell-bent on defeating the firefighters, much in the same way as Thatcher defeated the miners. This is no exaggeration. The very moderate John Monks overheard Blairites at Millbank during the General Election openly talking of the need to take on a public sector union and defeat it as an example to the rest. Under these circumstances, this fight is not simply about firefighters' pay, but has widespread implications for the trade unions and ordinary workers. The firefighters' struggle is a struggle of all trade unionists and workers.

It is essential that the FBU is not isolated. The TUC, which has pledged its support, must organise solidarity action to put pressure on the government. The full weight of the British trade union movement must be put behind the firefighters. They should take up the call of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs for a recalled Labour Party conference over this issue. The Blair government must be forced to back down.

But the trade unions should go much further! They should take the struggle into the Labour Party against the Blairites. The Labour Party was created to represent the working class in parliament, not as a vehicle of middle class careerists. The left general secretaries should take the initiative. Many have made powerful statement of the need to change the Labour Party. It is time that words were translated into deeds. A campaign to cleanse the party must go hand in hand with the fight for real socialist policies and the restoration of Clause Four. No to the market economy! No to the butchery of the public services! Support the firefighters! Fight for socialist policies! □





## Prescott nicks the medals!

Last year a decision was taken to issue Queen's Golden Jubilee Medals to all those who worked in the armed services and emergency services and who had completed at least 5 years of service. Unfortunately for the government those covered by the 'emergency services' description included the firefighters, of course. Bearing in mind that the last thing they want to do at present is remind people that firefighters risk their lives to do their job, the decision has been taken, under an order from John Prescott's office, not to present the medals until after the FBU dispute has finished.

Firefighters have reacted with anger at what they see as yet another snub. According to an FBU representative from Hornchurch, Essex: 'It is not less than we expected from the Deputy Prime Minister's office. They don't want to be seen doing anything that would condone our actions regarding the pay dispute...' So much for the 'non-political' Queen's jubilee, another victim of the drive to demonise firefighters for taking action to preserve jobs and conditions and gain a living wage. Be on the look out for boxes of medals hidden in the boot of official looking Jags! ☐

## Save Live Music

Thanks to an act currently sneaking through parliament it could soon become illegal to perform live music in places such as pubs or church halls without an expensive entertainment license. The Licensing Bill could, if it becomes law, have a devastating effect on amateur and semi-professional live music around the country. For example, pubs at present can have live music so long as the number of musicians involved do not exceed 3. Under the proposals in the Bill all live music in pubs will require a licence however few people are involved. Churches, who yearly stage thousands of chamber and orchestral concerts, often involving local musicians, will also have to have a licence to cover admission-charging performances, which could cost some church organisations a prohibitive bill of thousands of pounds, money which they may well not be willing to spend. The danger here is that the scope for the performance of live music outside of the big venues and clubs could be massively reduced thanks to this new law. The Bill is intended to raise cash for bombing Iraq and giving tax refunds to big business rather than aid music or the arts. Arch-Blairite Parliamentary Under-Secretary Kim Howells, who is pushing the bill through parliament, has attacked the Musicians Union saying that they are 'talking nonsense' but the union has presented evidence which shows the degree to which live music will be detrimentally affected by the proposed law. This Bill should be opposed now - New Labour is well off-key on this issue. ☐



## Nissan strike looms

The first strike in the 19-year history of Nissan's car plant in Sunderland could be on the cards following the failure of management to present a satisfactory pay offer. The works council, designed to promote 'social partnership' has hit the buffers of reality and is presenting the company's 'final' offer, of just 3% per year over the next two years, to workers without any recommendation. The union involved, Amicus, expect that in the light of what they call a total breakdown on talks, the offer will be rejected and a ballot will then follow for the taking of industrial action by its members. The Sunderland factory currently produces around 300,000 Micra, Almera and Primera models a year.

Dismay has been expressed by union officials that the deal establishing the works council, signed between the union and management, is no longer working in the interests of either side. But the truth is that it was only ever designed to work in the interest of the bosses. Whilst the deal could be used to buy workers off and diffuse any action things were fine for management and union officials looking for a quiet life. But with Nissan feeling the cold wind of crisis in the car industry, their ability to present any sort of decent deal has been eroded as they seek to preserve their profit levels with the result that pressure has built up from below. Workers have seen the higher deals won at other plants and have wondered why they are not getting the same. With pay levels at Nissan now in danger of falling below that of the industry average, workers will not be slow to take action. ☐



# Justice in the media

**Another strike, another press slur. This has become an all too familiar event as workers such as the firefighters take industrial action. Papers such as *The Sun* in particular have long had a tradition of printing hostile stories aimed at undermining the morale of strikers and eroding public support.**

by Kris Lawrie, London Central, NUJ

**T**he fact that these stories tend to have no basis in reality doesn't worry them, by the time the truth comes out the damage has been done.

The firefighters in particular have been shocked by the tone and sheer nastiness of much of what has been written about them. However not all journalists are Murdoch hacks. The London Central branch of the journalists' union, the NUJ, has initiated a campaign to put the alternative case and expose the lies of the press barons. The branch, which covers Wapping, produced a leaflet for circulation at the firefighters demo in December and this has since been circulated to other sections of the movement and fire station picket lines around the country. The response from firefighters so far has been to welcome this initiative.

The leaflet makes the following points arising from the FBU action:

'Over the last few weeks, the government's "spin doctors" have flown into action, determined to dig up as much dirt as possible on the FBU and its members. Sections of the media have willingly cooperated in this attempted frame-up.

Leading the pack has been *The Sun* newspaper, ever ready to attack the cause of the trade union movement. "Fire Union Chiefs Are Saddam Stooges", screamed *The Sun's* front page on Thursday, 14th November. "How many more have to die?" was plastered over its front page the follow-

ing day, which demanded Andy Gilchrist "Call off Killer Strikes".

'This propaganda is typical of the anti-union News International Group, owned by the billionaire Rupert Murdoch, described by the BBC "as one of the most powerful men on the planet."

'Murdoch is no friend of the trade union movement or ordinary working people. At Wapping, where *The Sun*, *The Times*, and the *News of the World* are published, unions are excluded. Trade unionists discovered face the sack. This great "democrat", who preaches "freedom of the press", has no regard for democratic rights.

In 1981, Thatcher and the Tories allowed him to buy *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* without a review from the Monopolies Commission. He also bought a half-interest and control of Britain's only satellite television service, despite the fact that Thatcher's own home secretary found the deal "not technically legal."

'In 1985, in a bid to cut costs, Murdoch moved his print operations to Wapping and adopted new technology. His intention was to break the print unions. He provoked a bitter strike, where he brought in non-union labour and then sacked 6,000 printers, electricians and journalists who worked in Fleet Street.

'Prior to this Murdoch had been secretly moving non-union staff into Wapping for months and was discussing with his senior executives how they could sack the thou-

sands who had been given 'assurances' that their jobs were secure.

Recently, Murdoch, the Australian-born American citizen, was awarded the honour of being Britain's greatest living businessman by another aspiring magnate Richard Desmond, owner of Express newspapers.

'Desmond said: "I would not have the business I have today unless he [Murdoch] had done what he did to make Britain a fairer place."

'Tony Blair has certainly courted *The Sun*, Murdoch, and the rest of the media moguls. Murdoch calls in to Downing Street for regular chats. His daughter, and former BskyB boss, Elizabeth Murdoch is a close friend of Peter Mandelson. She is also a business partner of Lord Alli, a New Labour media player.

'The Government is expected to stick to its plan to drop all restrictions on who can own media companies, paving the way for the media giants to get their hands on commercial TV and radio.

'The chief executive of Disney, Michael Eisner, blurted out in an internal memo: "To make money is our only objective." And this money-grabbing philosophy applies equally to the rest of them.

'This drives their anti-union stance. They see unions, not as a democratic right of workers to organise, but as a threat to their "right to rule." That latter being their untrammelled power to manipulate public opinion.

'*The Sun* boasted that its stand in 1992 won John

Major the general election, proclaiming from its front page "It was *The Sun* wot won it." Ever since, Blair has sought to cultivate Murdoch and the paper.

'Now this relationship is bearing fruit with *The Sun* backing the Blair Government, especially when it attacks the trade unions.

'This one-sided propaganda offensive to discredit the firefighters' just case must be exposed for what it really is: an attempt to break the union. "Why let the facts get in the way of a good story", as the old saying goes.

'The National Union of Journalists fully backs the FBU in its current dispute. We condemn the scurrilous attacks on the union by the Government and the media. The London Central Branch of the NUJ are launching 'Justice in the Media' to highlight this scandal. In the name of FREE SPEECH and DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS we demand that the newspapers and media allow the FBU equal space to put its side of the case and answer any attack made against it.

'To this end, we call on all trade unionists and progressive organisations to give support and sponsor this campaign.'

*Socialist Appeal* welcomes and gives full support to this campaign. For further information, messages and resolutions of support, etc. contact London Central Branch NUJ at 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP or via the internet at [www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk) □



## Bradford NUJ on strike

**N**ational Union of Journalists members at Newsquest Bradford - a division of the giant US media firm Gannett - have named six dates for strike action over pay.

The journalists will walk out on January 30 and 31, and again on February 10, 11, 19 and 20. Feel free to join us on the picket lines outside the company's offices in Bradford, Shipley, Otley, Keighley, Skipton, and Ilkley in the north of England.

### Can pay wont pay

The journalists have asked for a pay rise of £2,000 per year each - which would still leave most of them well below the UK average wage of £24,000.

The company have offered 2 percent - less than inflation.

Newsquest Bradford makes £23,000 per day. That means they had made enough to pay this year's £2,000 per person claim in full by just after lunchtime on January 9.

The chapel - workplace NUJ branch - also asked for extra money for loyal and experienced journalists. Editor Perry Austin-Clarke responded by writing to the chapel: "I am certain that your members would not wish individuals to receive extra payments merely for coming to work, regardless of their performance levels and especially where poor performance reflects on the work levels of other members."

In 2001 - the last year for which figures have been published - the company made a pre-tax profit of £8.7 million - an increase of 17.6 percent on 2000.

During negotiations the company told the NUJ that their draft accounts for 2002 showed profits down year on year by three percent. That means profits of £8.4 million pounds.

During 2001 the dividend paid to shareholders - in other words Newsquest UK in Surrey and Gannett in the USA - was increased by 82 percent to £6.5 million.

### How you can help

As well as joining the picket line you could send a polite message to Newsquest UK chief executive Paul Davidson by visiting

[http://www.newsquest.co.uk/your\\_comments.html](http://www.newsquest.co.uk/your_comments.html) or faxing 020 8646 3997.

Please send a message of support to [bradfordnuj@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bradfordnuj@yahoo.co.uk) - it only takes a few seconds and makes a huge difference to morale.

The chapel needs money to sustain the dispute. Please ask your union branch or chapel to send a donation. Why not organise a workplace collection. You don't have to be a union rep to start it and you could be pleasantly surprised by how many people donate. Point out that if the Bradford journalists win it will mean that your management has to take workers more seriously - and just talking to people about workers who are standing up for themselves strengthens your organisation. Send cheques and postal orders to Newsquest Bradford NUJ chapel, at NUJ, 22, Swan Street, Manchester, M4 5JQ.

Ask for a speaker at your next union meeting. Email [bradfordnuj@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bradfordnuj@yahoo.co.uk) ☐

Miles Barter  
Northern regional organiser  
21 January 2003

## Train Drivers take action against war

**T**wo Motherwell train drivers refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition believed to be destined for British forces being deployed in the Gulf. This militant and courageous stand was reminiscent of the actions against General Pinochet, and of the Jolly George incident in 1920. Railway managers cancelled the Ministry of Defence service after the crewmen, described as "conscientious objectors" by a supporter, said they opposed Tony Blair's threat to attack Iraq.

The two Motherwell-based drivers declined to operate the train between the Glasgow area and the Glen Douglas base on Scotland's west coast, Europe's largest Nato weapons store.

English Welsh and Scottish Railway (EWS), which transports munitions for the MoD as well as commercial goods, attempted to persuade the drivers to move the disputed load. However Defence Chiefs cancelled the train, deciding instead to shift the munitions by road, saying they thought the train had some 'technical' problems!

Leaders of the Aslef rail union were pressed at a meeting with EWS executives to ask the drivers to relent and stop their unofficial action. But the officials of a union opposed to any attack on Iraq refused to comply.

The two drivers are the only pair at the Motherwell freight depot trained on the route of the West Highland Line. However, a total of fifteen drivers at the Motherwell depot stated they would also be prepared to take action on the issue if confronted.

"We don't discuss commercial issues," an EWS spokesman said. "The point about the two drivers is untrue and we don't discuss issues about meetings we have."

The MoD later said it had been informed by EWS that mechanical problems, caused by the cold winter weather, had resulted in the train's cancellation!

Dockers went on strike rather than load British-made arms on to ships destined for Chile after the assassination of leftwing leader Salvador Allende in 1973. In 1920 stevedores on London's East India Docks refused to move guns on to the Jolly George, a ship chartered to take weapons to anti-Bolsheviks after the Russian revolution.

Trade unions supporting workers who refuse to handle weapons could risk legal action and possible fines for contempt of court. Under the Tory anti-union legislation, political strikes are outlawed.

In the House of Commons, an early-day motion was tabled by John McDonnell on behalf of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, applauding "the courageous and principled action by the two Motherwell-based train drivers who have decided not to operate a freight train carrying ammunition destined for deployment in a war against Iraq..."

The Campaign Group are also calling for an emergency recall of the Labour Party Conference to discuss what it termed the government's "declaration of war" on the firefighters "at the same time as it is poised for a war on Iraq." ☐





## RMT Arriva off the rails

Those who yearn for the renationalisation of the railway forget the chronic lack of ambition shown by BR. In its day, the rail system was run like a giant train set in which passengers were an inconvenience. Faced with a Devon train service which had proved more popular than expected, BR solved the congestion problem by cutting the service. By contrast, private rail companies have gone looking for passengers.' Ross Clark, The Times 15th January 2003.

'Around 100 train services a day are to be cut in an effort to improve the reliability of trains by reducing overcrowding on busy lines... There will be no more direct trains between Oxford and Bristol, while services will be cut on lines between Derby and Birmingham, Southampton and Bournemouth and Manchester Airport and Crewe. Virgin Cross Country services will also be reduced...' BBC News 16th January 2003.

What a difference a day makes. No sooner are those who demand the renationalisation of the railways being soundly admonished in the Thunderer column of The Times, on the grounds that the old BR solution to congestion was just to cut services, then we see the new privatised solution being presented - cut services! According to Richard Bowker chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) the problem is 'We have got a network which is overfull and it is not working properly...' Commonsense would suggest that the

answer is to increase services, lengthen trains and, above all, improve the network infrastructure in order to eliminate overcrowding and delays but, no, this cannot be done - it would cost money. Cutting services will reduce line congestion but at a cost of pushing more people into fewer trains with more journey changes and delays, a move which costs the companies nothing but increases rail misery for us. 'We have already seen major upgrading projects delayed or cancelled, stations dropped from some long distance routes in order to massage travel time figures and - of course - the inevitable fare increases, year on year. But then we are no longer passengers to be served but customers to be ripped off in the pocket.

Unions have correctly noted that when services are cut as a result of industrial action they are called wreckers and so on, but when the other side does it to save money then the response from the bosses media and the government is... nothing. The fight must now be intensified for a publicly owned and fully integrated public transport system with those privatised elements being taken back without compensation into public hands without further delay. The case for this is becoming unanswerable and action, unlike the train services, can no longer be postponed. □

by Steve Jones

More than 30 people were injured when a Central line train carrying some 800 passengers jumped the tracks and hit a wall at Chancery Lane station. The train's driver had warned of a fault on the train before the derailment.

Mick Rix, general secretary of Aslef, claimed that LU management had been repeatedly warned about potential problems on Central line trains but had failed to act. "We have repeatedly drawn to their attention concerns about the motors on Central line trains but these warnings have been ignored."

Union leaders have called for a public inquiry into the derailment and said all safety work carried out under the controversial public private partnership (PPP) should be suspended.



A memorial concert for Joe Strummer, ex-guitarist with The Clash, has been organised in Southampton on 22nd February. The show will be headlined by Billy Bragg alongside other local musicians and speakers. Also present will be Andy Gilchrist from the FBU, attending in recognition of the fact that Strummer's last gig was a support event for the firefighters.

Billy Bragg will be performing an acoustic set of Clash songs, emphasizing the radical link between the two musicians and the fact that they shared a common heritage of using music to express political ideas. The concert takes place at the Maple Leaf Club, The Polygon, Southampton and admission will be £5 plus a donation of a vinyl record! □

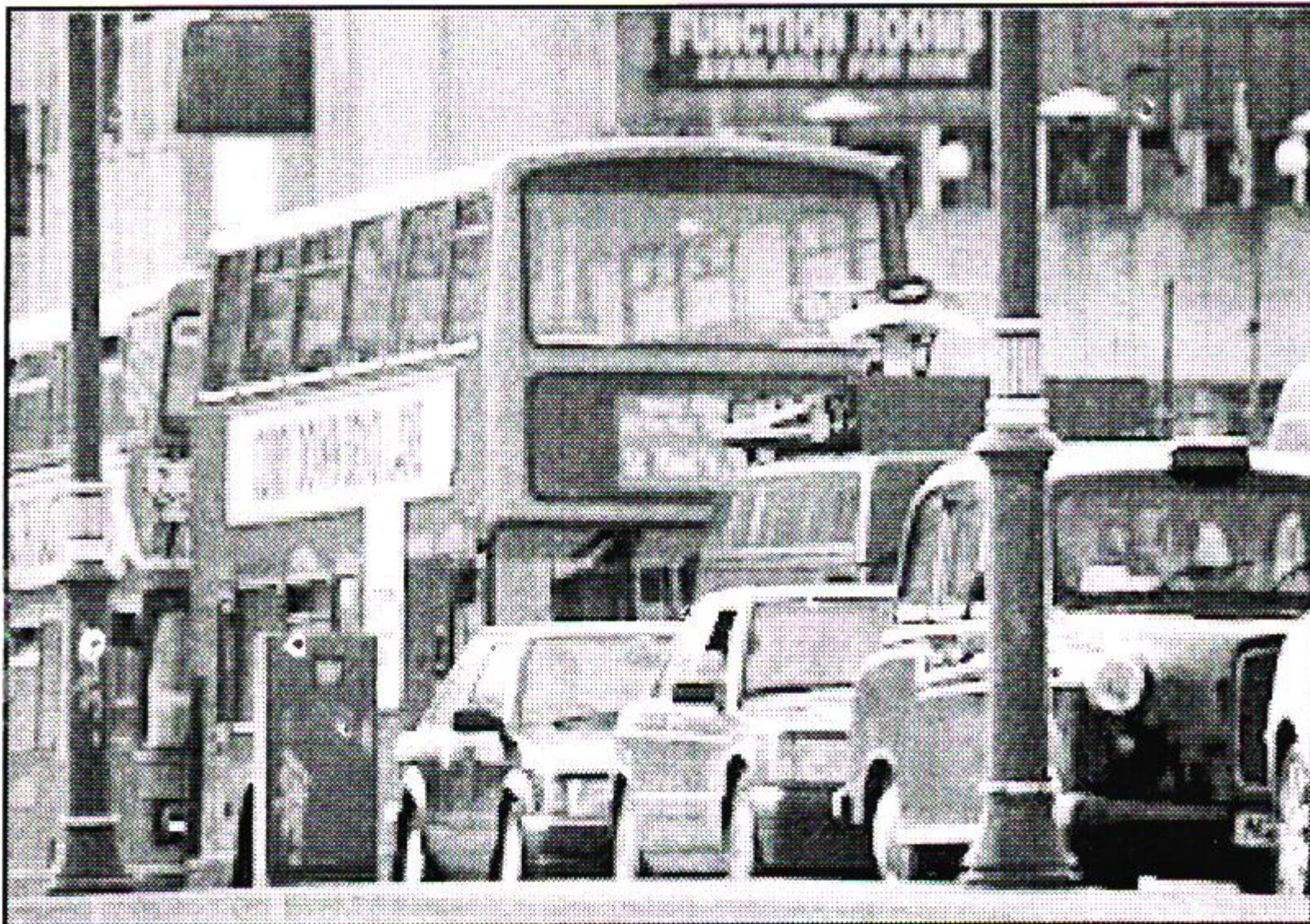
For further information contact the event organisers, Cllr Perry McMilan and Richard Chorley - phone 0747 871534.



# London's "congestion charge" won't cure gridlock

February 17th will see the introduction of the most dramatic change in London's transport arrangements for decades with the implementation by the London Mayor of a £5 per day congestion charge.

by Steve Jones



Using state of the art new technology anyone driving into the central area of London during the day on Monday to Friday will have to pay a charge or face a fine. The intention of this controversial new scheme - probably the largest such project ever implemented - is to tackle London's serious road congestion problem. Will it work and what are the alternatives - and what attitude should socialists adopt to the new charge?

London's road network has been getting worse and worse for decades now. The roads in central London are often in a state of near gridlock during the day with cars moving so slowly that it can sometimes be quicker to walk. The reason for this is two-fold: firstly the actual number of cars on the road has increased dramatically over the years. Secondly the state of the roads themselves has declined, with disruptive roadworks springing up everywhere in an attempt to stop the rot. The increase in car volume has undoubtedly impacted on road conditions but this has been matched by the effects of a policy of ongoing neglect thanks to cuts in local and national public spending.

In the early 1980s the opportunity existed to tackle this problem before it got out of hand. The introduction of the 'Fares Fair' scheme by the Labour GLC provided the basis for a start in reducing car usage by introducing cheap fares on London's public transport. Had

this been linked to a long term strategy of road repairs and upgrades, properly funded, then the nightmare we face today could have been avoided. But it never happened. The cheap fares policy was outlawed by the Tories, cuts were introduced on road projects - everything was left to the whims of market forces. Thatcher's short-sightedness was to have terrible consequences as we now see.

This problem has now reached the point where action has to be taken. But are congestion charges the way forward? All Londoners want to see traffic being freed up and reduced in volume not least because of the effect on the environment. In the short term the introduction of a charge may have such an effect but are the main problems being addressed? Most people driving through central London during the daytime weekday period covered by the charge are not lazy joy riders too dim to work out alternative routes - they are delivery drivers, couriers, taxis, buses and people who work inside the area who need their car to move equipment essential to their job. Mail vans, for example, are going to be charged but can hardly avoid delivering and collecting mail in central London. In Oxford Street, for example, where private cars have been banned for years now, these groups make up 100% of the traffic and still the road is often grid locked thanks to the volume of traffic. To this number should be added

shift workers for whom public transport is not a viable option.

These people will have to keep travelling into and through London and will therefore have to pay the charge - in effect turning it from a charge into a £25 a week tax. The rich will in any case just pay the charge and carry on driving into the City without a care but for those on low income who have to use their car to do their job it will be a heavy and unavoidable burden. Undoubtedly some people will dodge the charge by travelling around the central area. But this will simply clog up the smaller suburban roads which are ill-equipped to take such traffic, transferring the problem from one part of London to another. Others will give public transport a go - but here we hit the biggest problem of all.

Public transport in London is not only very expensive, certainly compared to other cities in Europe, it is also in an advanced state of disrepair. The Underground especially has suffered from years of under expenditure and penny-pinching and is now set to be cannibalised by the profiteers of the government's PPP scheme. At present it cannot handle any increased level of usage that might result from people transferring from car to bus or tube and this is likely to be the state of play for the foreseeable future.

It is therefore most likely that the congestion charge will have no long-term effect on the state

of the capital's roads, in the end traffic will return to pre-February levels and the charge will simply then be another overhead to be met. People frustrated by the lack of alternatives will end up using their car again despite the extra cost. Things will get worse not better.

So what is needed? The way to encourage people off the roads is to give them a proper alternative. This means a public transport system which is both cheap and meets the demands of the population, running when and where it is needed. New bus routes, more buses, new tube lines... all this is now necessary. Alongside this a proper citywide plan to repair and improve the state of London's roads needs to be implemented. The old cheapskate options of the past where homes were demolished and communities destroyed to build roads on the cheap - and to hell with the environment - should no longer be considered. Projects must be implemented which take people into account (by building tunnels and underpasses for example) before profits. Under capitalism this is not on offer but this is precisely what is needed. But it can only be achieved as part of a socialist programme which releases the finance to pay for all this rather than seeing this cash used to bolster the profits of the monopolies. Increasingly it seems that the struggle for socialism is the only alternative left to a future of chaos and exploitation. □



## Fiat Dispute: Militancy shifts up a gear

**The Fiat crisis is a clear example of the general crisis of Italian capitalism. In the world car industry there is an overcapacity of more than 20 million cars per year. This means a struggle to the death for world markets, where Fiat has clearly lost. After having made huge profits in the second half of the 1990s, the bosses, as usual, want to make the workers pay for the present crisis.**

**by Roberto Sarti,  
of the Editorial Board of *FalceMartello*  
[www.marxismo.net](http://www.marxismo.net)**

In fact, the plan of the Fiat management, put forward in October, amounted to an all-out attack on the workers. The plan involved more than eight thousand workers being laid off for a year, the closure of two plants, one near Milan (the old Alfa-Romeo factory) and the other in Termini Imerese (Sicily), and the possible closure of another two plants.

All this led to an immediate mobilisation by the Fiat workers. The most militant section of the Fiat workers were those in Sicily. Sicily is one of the less developed regions of Italy where jobs are scarce. That explains why in Sicily, this was not purely a strike to defend jobs. It was really about the future of the whole island. In a situation where unemployment has reached the figure of 30% of the working population, the loss of 2000 jobs means creating thousands of new potential

recruits for the Mafia, as this would be the only "expanding industry" in the area. Some of the Sicilian Fiat workers actually commented that if their plant were to close then what future would there be for them and their children.

### Sicily in revolt

Right from the beginning of the struggle the workers of the Termini Imerese plant revealed a great willingness to take up the struggle. They also aroused the support of the entire population of the area. The women (wives and daughters of the Fiat workers) were the most militant section and they set up a support committee that proved to be very useful on the picket lines and in all the actions that the workers organised all over the island.

The workers waged a two-month strike, during which, on several occasions, they paralysed Palermo airport, the motorway and the railway. On one occasion they brought the city of Messina to a standstill, blocking all the ferries to and from the Italian mainland for the whole day. They stopped 2000 cars that were ready to be sold out of the plant

throughout the whole period of the strike.

The most interesting thing was that the overwhelming majority of the population of Sicily completely supported the Fiat workers. We have to remember that in the 2001 parliamentary elections all the constituencies in Sicily were won by the right wing. That explains why the bosses had calculated that if they launched an attack in the region there would be no response. In fact, a lot of Fiat workers and families had voted for Berlusconi. But, as the government had come out in support of the Fiat bosses, the workers felt disillusioned and betrayed. They shouted slogans and made placards against Berlusconi and the right wing regional government. This is a clear demonstration of how consciousness can change very rapidly, once the working class begins to move. In all the other Fiat plants the workers fought with all their might. On November 27, 20,000 Fiat workers marched through the streets of Rome.

However, what they lacked was a trade union leadership that could match the militancy of the workers themselves. These "leaders" failed to organise a general strike (which was clearly possible) in support of the Fiat workers' struggle. The alternative of the trade union leaders was to pro-

pose "a change of the industrial plan". The CGIL (the biggest and the most left wing of the three trade union federations), together with Bertinotti, the leader of Rifondazione Comunista, called for the state to intervene. But this was a far cry from outright nationalisation. In reality what they were proposing was only a Keynesian measure of state funding, and did not put into question the real problem: the ownership and control of the firm. It was, and still is, a complete illusion to imagine that the Agnelli family (the owners of Fiat) could change their plans. Fiat's auto sector is no longer making profits for them. It is also an outrageous scandal that after decades of receiving state subsidies, and the Agnelli's never paying back a single lira, the State is again being called on to intervene to save their profits.

The only alternative still remains the nationalisation of Fiat under workers' control with no compensation to the fat cats. What should have been done was to set up a co-ordinating committee of newly elected shop stewards from all the Fiat plants, and this committee should have been the body to decide on all the actions that were needed.

This was the proposal that we, the supporters of Falce Martello, put forward throughout the Italian





labour movement and, most importantly, at the gates of the Fiat plants. In Milan, we stood side by side with the workers throughout the whole dispute. At the Milan State University (the Statale) on December 5, the students gathered around the "collettivo Pantera" (Panther Collective, a student committee launched under the initiative of the supporters of FalceMartello in the university), organised a meeting with more than 200 students and workers in support of the strike. Our programme was put forward by the main speakers on the platform and there was complete agreement on the part of the audience. This was followed by a demonstration on December 12 in Milan of around 10,000. The local press highlighted the fact that people had been mobilised to take part in this demonstration by the "Collettivo Pantera" in conjunction with the Alfa-Romeo shop stewards' committee.

### Government and bosses alliance

In early December, when the layoffs were planned to go ahead, an agreement was

reached between the government and the Fiat bosses, that in practice confirmed the original plan. The most significant thing about this was that, for the first time since the Second World War, the trade unions were excluded from the agreement!

In Termini Imerese a meeting with more than a thousand people present took place outside the gates of the factory the day after the "agreement" had been announced. The mood was very tense. The anger of those present became even greater after the first speeches of the trade union leaders had been made. They were speaking against the agreement but they were offering no way out for the struggle. As Rinaldini, the national secretary of the FIOM (the CGIL's metal workers union) was winding up his speech with an appeal for "Unity and struggle" (without saying how or when this was to be organised), some hundreds of workers and women forced their way through the factory gates.

The occupation of the plant, a demand that we had been proposing for weeks as the only way out,

would have been entirely possible at that moment. The ordinary rank and file workers were open to the idea and were ready to move if only their leaders had given the go ahead. But, apart from us, no trade union leader, no shop steward, no left organisation was raising it. Thus the workers remained leaderless. Thanks to this the trade union bureaucrats were able to persuade the workers to go back home.

On December 6, an opportunity was undoubtedly lost. The occupation of the Termini Imerese plant could have easily spread to other plants, thus bringing about a qualitative change in the class struggle in Italy. That one key step could have ignited the movement and a new "Hot Autumn" would have been possible. The huge demonstrations (3 million in Rome on March 23, one million in Florence in November) and two general strikes are a clear indication that this is the case.

Now the first phase of the Fiat dispute has been closed, but this is not the end of the story. Various sections of the working class have their collective bargain-

ing agreements up for renegotiation in the coming months (for example the metal workers and the public sector). New bitter struggles will ensue from this. Also, although the government has emerged weakened from the recent period, it is nevertheless considering attacking the pension system once again (the last time pensions came under attack was back in 1995). They are considering this not because they have all gone mad. It is the economic crisis that dictates these measures.

Therefore with the new mood of militancy and determination to struggle of the Italian working class, the year 2003 is going to be one of deeper and more bitter class struggles throughout the country. □

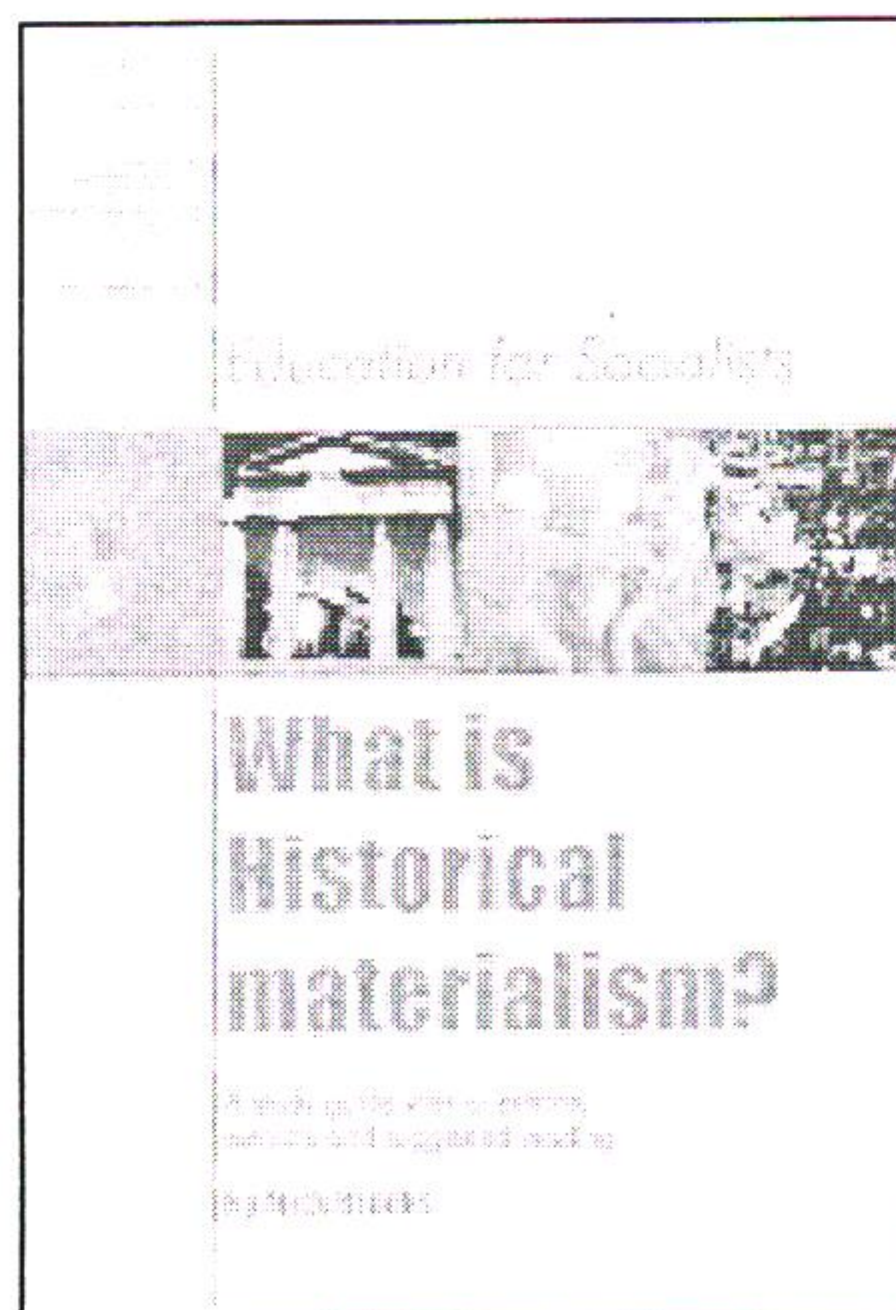
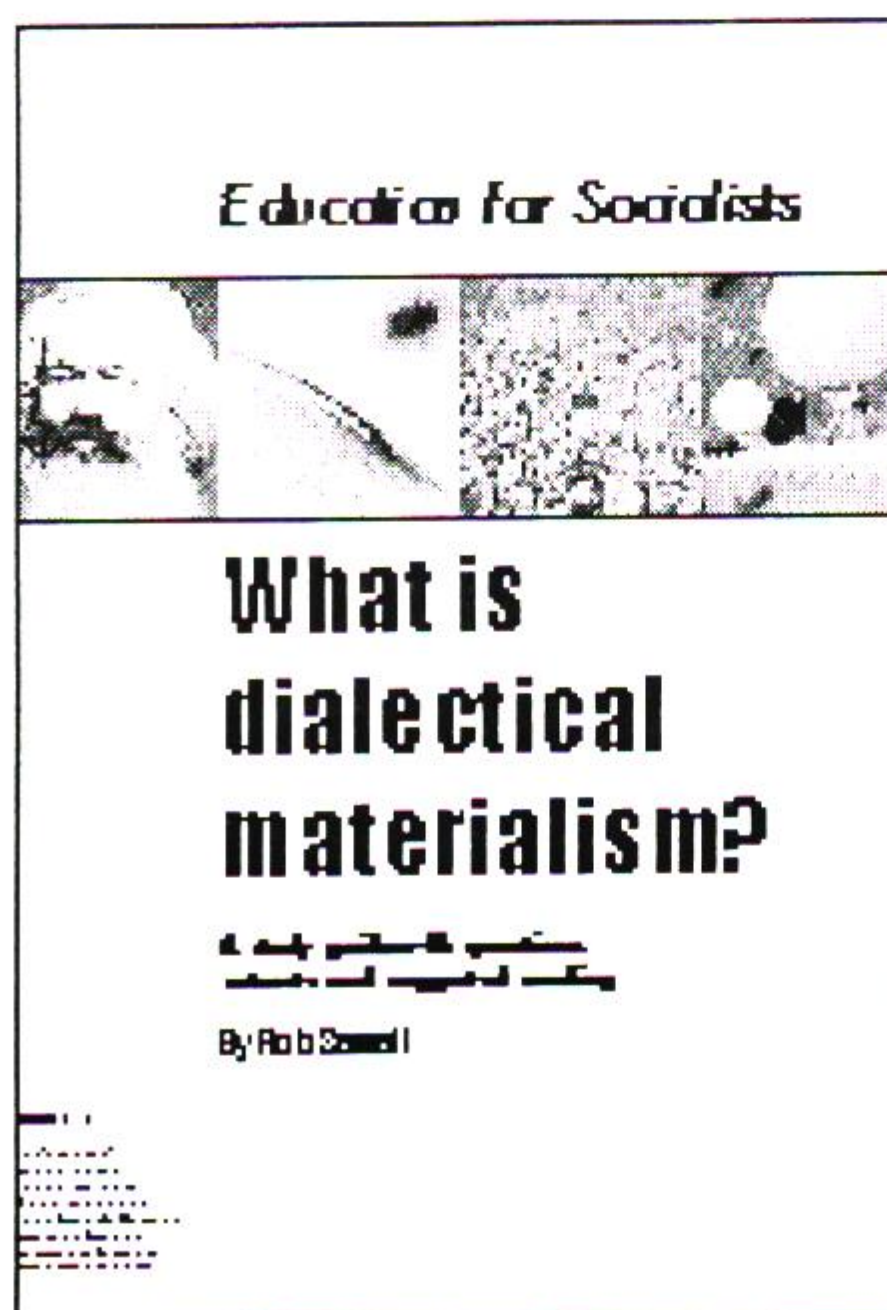
Get your study guides from *Socialist Appeal*

### "What is Marxism?"

- 1- Dialectical Materialism
- 2- Historical materialism

Coming soon

- 3- Marxist economics



# Education for Socialists



# No to top-up charges!

Despite all their lofty promises about the priority of "education, education, education," and their pledge that there would be no top up fees, Blair and co intend to pass the bill for higher education once again onto students and their parents, making it yet more difficult for students from poorer backgrounds to get to university.

by Pablo Sanchez

Labour pledged in its 2001 election manifesto not to increase top-up fees. Such promises are not worth the paper they are written on. They never pledged to introduce fees at all back in 1997. The new White Paper will propose changes that won't be implemented until 2006, after the next election so they won't break an electoral promise, which always looks good for the Millbank propaganda machine.

In return for extra investment, top universities will be required to show they can deliver on government targets - for instance on attracting working-class students (Guardian, December 5) The punishing option of charging students commercial interest rates on their student loans is now way down the list of preferred options, but student debts continue to rise and new higher rate fees will only increase that debt, whilst creating a two tier system, keeping poorer students out of select academies.

Two points arise from the already delayed White Paper: They claim that they want more working class students at University and they want the banks to make on the equation. The truth of the matter is that working class students do not go in enough numbers to university because they cannot afford it and their schools and colleges are under-funded.

Education officials stressed: "Nothing we will do would create a barrier to kids who do not have the money."

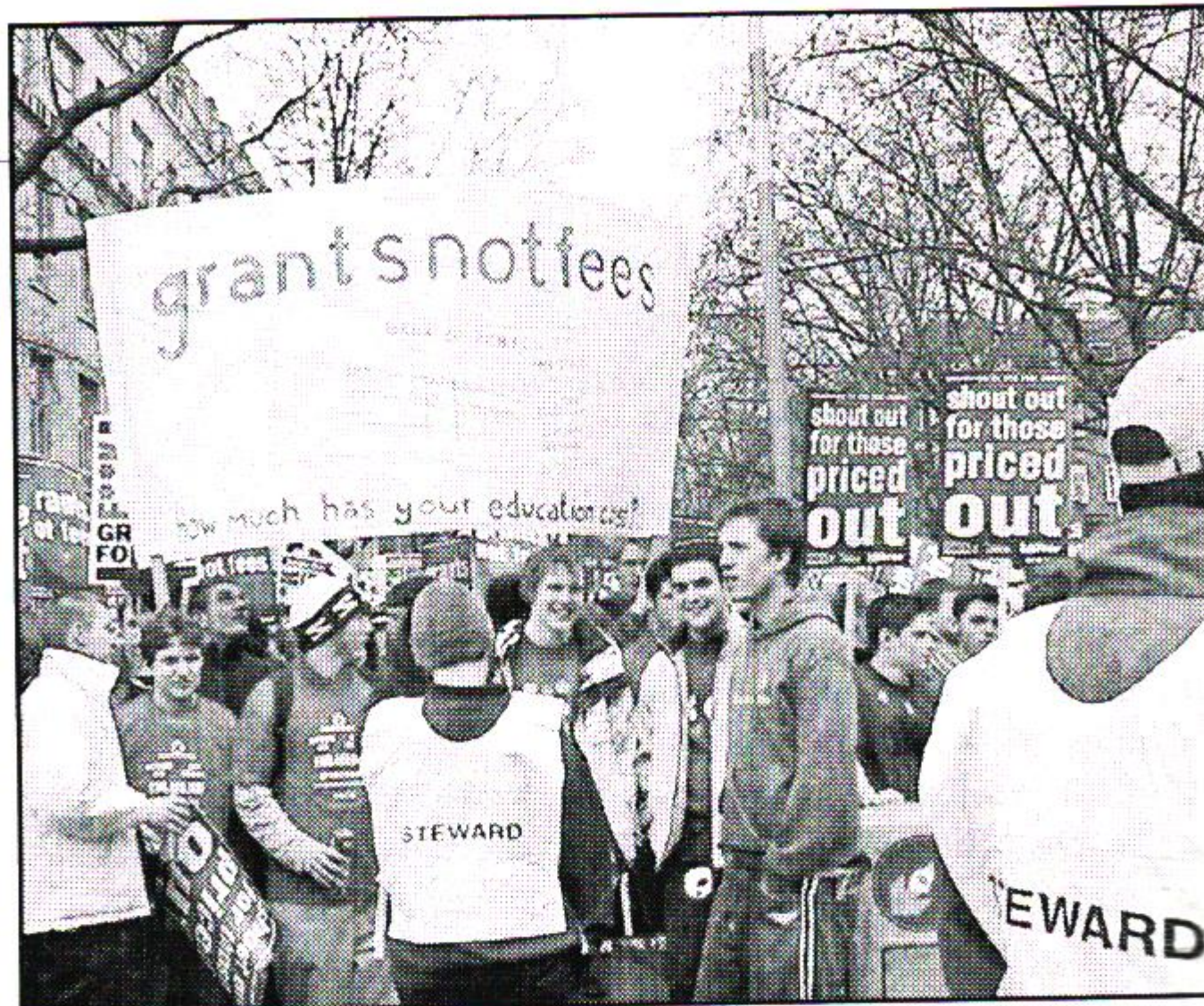
(Guardian, January 17). This is completely true because they are already out of the higher education system. They aren't creating the barrier, just propping it up. Only through a properly funded, democratically controlled education can those barriers be pulled down. That's what socialism is all about.

It is not an accident that the universities with the largest working class student population, and at the same time those with the the worst for graduate employment are Wolverhampton, Paisley, North East Wales, East London and Bolton Institute. Most of them in the deprived areas and with the highest dropout rates.

It would be a good start if those now in the Labour cabinet who benefitted from a free education themselves could at least read their own party constitution. The idea of socialism is in now way compatible with this policy of pricing working class and middle class people out of higher education.

Of course if this proposal goes ahead that will only widen the gap between the good universities and those caricatured as "mickey mouse" ones. If Oxford, Cambridge and Warwick would be allowed to have differential top-up fees to reflect their elite status in return for a package of scholarships and other schemes to help poorer candidates that would only help to strengthen the "privatising trend" in education.

The problem seems to be funding but there is no prob-



lem spending the money to wage a war against Iraq, Afghanistan or any of America's other foes. The point is that there is enough wealth in society to fund a free education system, restore living grants and give a Xmas present to all students. We only need to ask Lord Jenkins Chancellor of Oxford (It'll be a bit difficult to ask him now for obvious reasons) and the businessman Wafic Said, or the corporation that "de facto" rules Cambridge with the Shell Chair in Chemical Engineering, Unilever Chair in Molecular Science, etc. The root of the problem is how this wealth is shared in society, or more correctly how the ruling class gets its profits from the workers' sweat.

What we need is a real campaign organised by the NUS, all teachers unions (they are also under threat from privatisation) and the MPs who have been speaking against fees since 1997 to finish all this nonsense. The Cambridge MP Anne Campbell, said: "If you end up with a system where poor kids go to the ex-polytechnics and the rich kids go to Cambridge it will be a disaster." Newcastle under Lyme MP Paul Farrelly and Ian Gibson from Norwich believe differential fees could be the first step to privatisation. "Once the principle is established, they will be able to do what they like," Mr Gibson said. (Guardian, January 20)

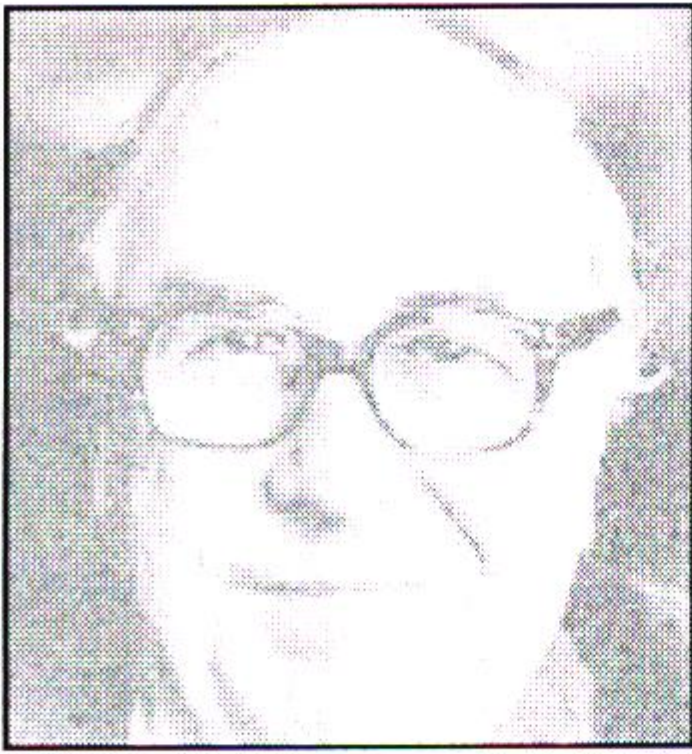
A REAL campaign, not just a demo here and there, once a year and a couple of

public statements, is what is required now. The mood is there. Cambridge students refused to pay in 1998, Goldsmiths' students did it in 1999, East London students occupied in 2000, Sussex students in 2001. There have been many demos. It is time now to mobilise students against the government's plans, not just complain about the low level of expenditure on alcohol by students and the state of NUS bank balance.

This is one of the issues that can split the Labour Party right down the middle. And not only the Labour Party, students face a major debt of up to \$21,000 at the end of their degree. This clearly will discourage many working class students from attending University. We need to oppose these new attacks and to offer a clear fighting alternative for all university students, school students, teachers, lecturers and education workers.

- No to top-up charges! Scrap Fees! Free Education For All!
- No student loans! Scrap the debt!
- For a decent living grant for all over 16.
- A guaranteed job, apprenticeship or place in further/higher education for all young people. ☐





# Roy "The Renegade"

Although he ended up as a Liberal Democrat Lord, Roy Jenkins was for a time at the heart of the leadership of the Labour Party during the Sixties and Seventies alongside Wilson and co., serving as Aviation minister, Home Secretary and then Chancellor of the Exchequer during the 1964-70 Labour government and again as Home Secretary from 1974-6. He was also deputy leader of the party during the Heath government.

Elected as a Labour MP in 1948 - but already known to the political establishment from his Oxford days - he quickly worked himself in with the rightwing clique which dominated the then leadership of the party. These people saw it as their sworn duty to keep the Labour Party safe as a sort of Second-Eleven for capitalism. But to achieve this they had to fight and manoeuvre against the movement from below, the party rank and file and the affiliated unions especially, who in turn reflected the pressure from the working class itself. Even during the boom years of the 1950s the ruling class understood that these two sides reflected mutually opposed and irreconcilable interests who would clash in the future and accordingly financed the right wing to a considerable degree.

A regular contributor to the Labour right-wing mouthpiece *Encounter* he was, according to his autobiography '... not particularly shocked when it... emerged that the magazine was partly CIA-financed.' In fact CIA involvement went far beyond this with various right wing setups in the movement

being covertly funded for decades.

Increasingly isolated in the party during the Seventies, especially over Europe but also in hostility to the unions, he quit as an MP in 1976 to become president of the European Commission. After this (well paid) period in Europe he grandly decided that the time had come to re-enter the fray of British politics. With the defeat of the Labour government in 1979 and a growth in militancy both on the industrial front and inside the party, he felt that the time was ripe to launch a new party aimed at replacing a Labour Party he now deemed unsuitable for service to capital. Like many before and after, he would be proved very wrong.

'I had long been well disposed towards most Liberals,' he later wrote, 'however he saw a direct move into the Liberal party as not 'a satisfactory strategy for changing the pattern of British politics... a substantial social democratic breakaway from the Labour Party, on the other hand, might be a much more repercussive matter.' In other words split the party from within.

The new party was first 'floated' on the occasion of a BBC lecture in November 1979. The original draft of his speech was deemed "too right wing" by the Tory Ian Gilmour but remained largely unchanged even in its final televised version. Not unsurprisingly much of it sounds like an anticipation of the sort of stuff which would later be spewed out by theoreticians of Blairism and the so-called 'third way'.

Initially, Jenkins and his co-

conspirators continued openly as if nothing was afoot whilst plotting to form a new party from behind the scenes, but they could not hold back forever.

With much publicity the new party - called the SDP - was launched in January 1981 (following a special Labour Party conference which had voted in new democratic reforms much to the distaste of the right wing) at David Owen's posh Limehouse residence by Jenkins, Owen, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers.

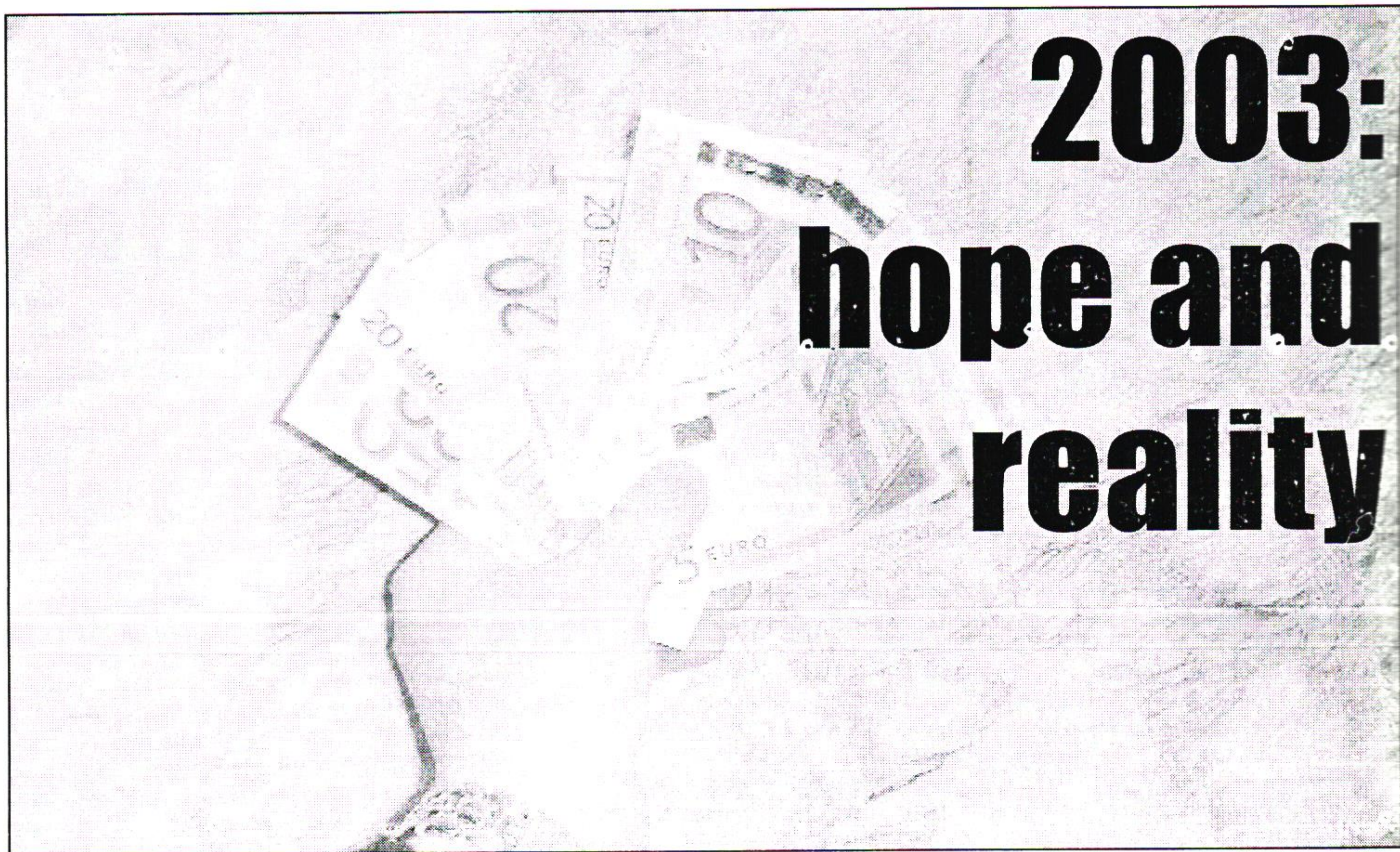
The SDP were initially touted by the media as being dead certs to replace Labour in the polls and byelection successes such as Crosby and Hillhead (where Jenkins was returned to parliament) seemed to support that theory, so they thought. But the general election of 1983 was not to provide that breakthrough - in league with the Liberals they got just 25.5% of the vote, two points behind Labour. Their vote was not enough to pick up a large numbers of seats but was enough to cost Labour seats through vote splitting. Although Thatcher would probably have still won the election without the aid of the SDP traitors, many would come to blame the Gang of Four for giving the Tories such a strong hand with their massive parliamentary majority.

From then on it was clear that the ruling class no longer had any faith in the SDP/Liberal Alliance ever crossing the proverbial Rubicon and that their sole remaining purpose would be a temporary one of holding back Labour's vote. In the 1987

election, the SDP decline was more pronounced: half a million votes and 5 seats lost including that of Hillhead. There only remained the task of administering the last rights to the SDP through a formal merger with the Liberals to form the Lib-Dems. Unfortunately for Jenkins, fate was to play a cruel joke. David Owen who replaced Jenkins as leader after 1983 had not only moved much to the right but had also developed even more delusions of grandeur than was normally the case for these people. He launched a campaign against merger which resulted in a long and bitter conflict involving the sort of splits, plots and defeats which they had so despised in the Labour Party.

With the SDP now a distant memory all that remained was for Jenkins to depart from politics, taking up a nice retirement 'job' as Chancellor of Oxford and writing books. In his final years he became an icon to the Blairite clique (who include many former SDPers), giving out advice to them from behind the scenes in the hope that they might succeed where he failed. Jenkins' treacherous role serves as a warning to the whole movement of the double agenda being carried out by the right wing, effectively seeking to serve two masters but in the final analysis serving only one, that of capital. The struggle for a working class leadership, armed with a socialist programme, remains an ongoing one even though Jenkins has finally departed the fray. □





**This time last year, all the talk among the capitalist economic experts was about the V-shaped economic recovery that world capitalism would make from the recession of 2001.**

**by Michael Roberts**

Indeed, the view was that the world would grow at about 5%, with the top seven capitalist economies shooting along at 3%. Unemployment would stay low and even fall. All stock market experts expected a significant rally in share prices. There was no way that the world's stock markets could fall for the third year running. After all, that had not happened since 1939-41, during a world war!

The main risk was a return to higher inflation. Everybody expected that the main central banks of world capitalism, the Federal Reserve in the US, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England, would have to raise interest rates in order to curb price rises.

Well, nearly everybody expected that. There were a

few dissenters. This column was one of them. This column argued that: the optimism of capitalist politicians, economists and investors is so much wishful thinking and hogwash...Downturns in capitalism have usually been brief. But the underlying economic forces increasingly suggest that the recession of 2001 is developing into the depression of 2002. ...The whole world is levered on what happens in the US, even more than it was in the 1930s. ...The danger in 2002 is competitive devaluation and deflation, driving the world capitalist economy further down.

Who has been closer to the reality of 2002? The world may not have slipped into a depression yet, but the V-shaped recovery has proved a mirage. The US

economy has grown by about 2.3% this year is slowing as we enter 2003. The Eurozone economies have managed less than 1% growth, while the UK is now growing at less than 2% a year. Japan actually contracted. Indeed, since the bursting of the hi-tech economic bubble in 2000, world capitalism has grown at its slowest rate since the first post-war worldwide capitalist economic recession of 1974-75.

#### Unemployment

Far from unemployment falling, the opposite has been the case in most capitalist economies. The US has lost over 2m jobs and the unemployment rate has risen to 6%. Germany and France continue to maintain an 8-9% jobless rate and unemployment is starting to rise again. Japan's unemployment rate is at a record post-war high of 6%. Only the UK enjoys a low rate (but partly because its statistical

measure is bogus). And far from prices in shops and for businesses rising, the forces of deflation have intensified. Inflation in the US, Europe and the UK slowed to around 2.5%, while companies are experiencing price falls. Japan and most of Asia remains deep in deflation.

As a result of falling prices, companies in the US, Europe and Japan have been unable to bring in more profits. Profits for US companies are still lower than in 1997. So business investment has dried up completely with no sign of revival. Productivity (output per worker) has grown only because companies have slashed jobs, reduced overtime and cut back on pension payments.

This column used to measure the benefits of capitalism for the average working class family by a rather crude but effective measure - the misery index. The misery index was the sum of the inflation and unemployment rate in any country. If the index figure started to rise,



## The US, with its monkey on a lead, the UK, is hell-bent on going to war in Iraq. There seems little doubt that American and British troops will be in Baghdad by March at the latest.

capitalism was not delivering. If it reached double digits, then workers were really suffering.

In the 1990s, in the US the misery index fell from 10.7 to 7.4, Eurozone from 13.7 to 10.9 and in the UK from 15.0 to 7.5. However, in the last two years, the index has risen, with every prospect it will rise again in 2003. It is not at crisis levels yet, except in Europe. Only countries like Argentina and Brazil have moved into that category. But it's getting there.

Indeed, in one way the misery index is out of date as a measure of capitalist failure. Lower inflation is good news for workers, as it means increases in pay do not get wasted in higher prices. But when low inflation turns into falling prices or deflation, then that is bad news for all. It means all the debt borrowed to buy cars, goods in the shops and above all houses becomes more and more expensive in real terms to pay back. What has kept things reasonably okay for those in a "good job" has been the sharp rise in property prices in the UK, US and other so-called Anglo-Saxon countries like Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia. Capitalism has been very unproductive in the last three years, but the better-off half of the population have gone on spending like there was no tomorrow (and there won't be!), confident of their property wealth.

This happened to Japan in the 1980s. Stock market prices and land values rocketed. Then the stock market bubble burst in 1989 and has never recovered. Last week, the Tokyo stock exchange hit a 20-year low. Two years after the stock mar-

ket crash, property prices started to fall in Japan. They have been falling ever since. The same thing happened in Hong Kong and Asia in 1997. On that history, the property bubble in the US and the UK has not much longer to run. And once property prices start to fall, then the huge debts (mortgages) run up will become a major burden. The average American and British household had debts worth 80% of household income in 1990. Now that debt level has reached 100-120%. Only low interest rates make it possible to pay the costs of that debt.

### The forecast

But optimism springs eternal among the spin-merchants of capitalism. The consensus view among the experts is that the world economy will recover and grow much faster in 2003. The prediction is for the US to grow at around 3%, the UK at around 2.5%, Europe at about 2%. Only Japan will remain in the doldrums. Once again the forecast is that deflation will give way to inflation, interest rates will rise later in the year, while unemployment falls. As for the stock market, there is no way that world share prices will fall for a fourth year in a row. That has not happened since 1929-32, the years of the Great Depression. Indeed, of 67 experts surveyed at the end of December 2002, 64 said that stock market would rise in 2003 by at least 10%. It's déjà vu. It's exactly the same wrong predictions made at the beginning of 2002.

These predictions again stand in the face of reality. The world economy continues to slow down. The US will be

growing at just 1% in the first quarter of 2003. The same applies to Europe and the UK. As measured by the surveys of the experts themselves, consumer confidence in Japan, the US, the UK and Europe has never been lower. Business investment is falling at a 10% rate. If the property bubble should be pricked, then spending in the shops will dry up. Already, the reports are that Xmas sales have been weakest for years. As it is consumers will only buy if there are huge discounts for cars or goods in the shops. In New York it is now common for people to 'make an offer' below the ticket price in most shops. Hagglng in the way of the Middle East bazaars has come to America. That means companies will be making little or no profits. They will have to lay off more workers and new investment in technology and plant or extra borrowing will not materialise.

And there are the gathering dark storm clouds of war in 2003. The US, with its monkey on a lead, the UK, is hell-bent on going to war in Iraq. There seems little doubt that American and British troops will be in Baghdad by March at the latest. Of course, the capitalist optimists are confident that this adventure by the greatest military power that the world has ever seen against a poor and small Arab country will be a huge success. Then oil prices, which have been rocketing up in the past few weeks, will drop sharply back. A new US-friendly regime in Iraq will pump up the oil and the other Arab dictatorships will play along. Israel will be able to force the Palestinians to accept a draconian peace deal enforcing

their rule in the region. World capitalism will rejoice and start to boom.

That's the theory. But again it is far from reality. Sure, US firepower may triumph in Iraq. But will Saddam be captured. Even if he is, will the clever, educated Iraqi people accept an American-imposed dictatorship? And will the Arab and Palestinian masses stand by while America and Israel impose a dictated peace? And won't Bush's victory deliver the exact opposite to what he claims the war is all about? Far from terrorism being defeated, the suicide bombers and attacks on American tourists and civilians will almost certainly increase. Indeed, it seems that the North Korean dictator, whose economy is on the brink of collapse and famine, as a result of US boycotts and corrupt totalitarian rule, is already using this as an opportunity to blackmail to world into providing aid by threatening nuclear war.

Uncertainty, worry and realisation that Bush has not 'saved the world' will be the product of Iraq at best. At worst, for capitalism, there could a messy war and worldwide opposition to the war, Vietnam-style. That will not be good news for the world capitalist economy.

If the Bush-Blair adventure goes badly wrong in any of these ways, then oil prices will not drop back but go even higher. That will squeeze incomes and profits in the oil importing economies of the West. The last two big oil crises of 1974 and 1986 drove the world economy into a deep recession. That is the prospect again. □



# The Living Ideas of Karl Marx

by Phil Mitchinson

**"Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways. The point is, however, to change it." - Karl Marx**

One hundred and twenty years ago - on March 14 1883 to be precise - Karl Marx, one of the greatest figures in human history, died. In an online poll conducted by the BBC a couple of years ago Marx was voted the greatest thinker of all time. Despite over a century of attacks, distortions and attempts to belittle Marx's contribution, no-one can doubt that he dramatically altered the course of human history. That would be reason enough to study Marx's ideas and his writings, whether one agrees or disagrees with them.

For those workers and youth who wish to struggle to change society however, there is an even more pressing reason to study Marxism. On reading Marx's writings on philosophy, history, economics, and sociology, one is struck not only by their remarkable breadth and depth, but above all by their relevance to the world today. These writings are an invaluable weapon in the hands of workers and youth everywhere fighting for the socialist transformation of society.

During the course of 2003 we intend to produce a series of articles on the writings of Marx. These are not meant to be a substitute for the real thing, but are intended to whet the readers' appetite to plunge more fully into a study of Marx's writings and ideas.

A word of warning here. Libraries and bookshops the world over are littered with learned tomes 'about Marxism'. In reality these are usually 'against Marxism', but few are honest enough to admit it. These works fall into two main categories. First the method of knocking down a straw man, that is, spurious arguments that have nothing to do with Marxism are presented as the ideas of Marx only to be easily countered and defeated. Secondly there are the 'interpretations', that is works that go to great lengths to tell us 'what Marx really meant', when in fact they proceed to distort Marx's ideas out of all recognition. To discover what Marx meant is in reality quite easy. All one has to do is read the books he wrote.

Some people will tell you that those books are very difficult to read. This is not really true. Marx wrote in such a way that the average person could understand him. He wrote essentially for the workers. Having said that Marx did not believe in what the BBC call 'dumbing down', that is talking to the workers as if they were little children. As every worker knows nothing worth having in this life is achieved without a struggle. To study Marx's writings with the necessary attention undoubtedly requires a certain amount of work. The rewards however merit such effort.

Marx wrote not just about politics and economics for which he is perhaps most widely known, but also about philosophy, art, history, science, and all questions relating to human society. Marx declared once that his favourite maxim was that of the Roman general and poet Terence "Nihil humani a me alienum putu." (Nothing human is alien to me).

The advanced worker must make it his or her duty to make a thorough study of Marx's writings, to master the method of Marx. This is not an academic exercise. Marx's ideas are above all a guide to action, they provide a method for understanding the world, the better to be able to change it.

## Hegel and Feuerbach

Marx was born 185 years ago, on May 5, 1818, in the city of Trier in Rhenish Prussia. His father was a lawyer and his family was comfortably well-off. They were not particularly revolutionary in their outlook. After leaving school in Trier, Marx went on to university first in Bonn and then later in Berlin, where he read law, majoring in history and philosophy. As a student Marx was a follower of the great German philosopher Hegel's ideas. In Berlin, he belonged to a group of "Left Hegelians" who sought to draw atheistic and revolutionary conclusions from Hegel's phi-

losophy.

After graduating from university, Marx moved to Bonn, hoping to become a professor. However, the reactionary policy of the government, which deprived Ludwig Feuerbach of his academic position in 1832 led Marx to abandon the idea of such a career. At this time Left Hegelian views were making rapid headway in Germany. Feuerbach, in particular, developed a criticism of theology and began to develop materialist ideas. The ideas of Feuerbach had a profound effect on Marx and the other Left Hegelians of the day. The year 1843 saw the appearance of his book *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. "We all became at once Feuerbachians", Engels wrote some years later. It was around this time that a radical group in the Rhineland, who were in touch with the Left Hegelians, founded an opposition newspaper called *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne. The first issue appeared on January 1, 1842, and in October 1842 Marx became its editor-in-chief and moved from Bonn to Cologne.

The paper had begun with a revolutionary-democratic outlook and this became more and more pronounced under Marx's direction. As a consequence the government imposed a series of censorship measures against the paper, and then on January 1 1843 decided to sup-



press it altogether. The *Rheinische Zeitung* suspended publication in March 1843.

This was the year in which Marx married. His wife came from a reactionary family of the Prussian nobility, her elder brother later became Prussia's Minister of the Interior during a most reactionary period between 1850 and 1858.

In the autumn of 1843, Marx moved to Paris in order to publish a radical journal abroad, together with Arnold Ruge. However only one issue of this journal, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, appeared. Publication was discontinued owing mainly to the difficulty of secretly distributing it in Germany, and disagreements with Ruge.

#### Marx's closest friend

In September 1844, Frederick Engels came to Paris for a few days, and from that time on became Marx's closest friend and political collaborator. The names Marx and Engels have since become inseparable, almost one person. Immediately the two men proceeded to take a most active part in the hectic life of the revolutionary groups in Paris. Proudhon's anarchist ideas were quite popular amongst some of these groups. Marx answered them thoroughly and meticulously in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, in 1847, using the method which one finds time and again in the writings of Marx, withering criticism backed up by facts, and substantial quotations from the writings of those he criticises. Unfortunately this rigorous and honest approach has not been shared by that countless number who have written spurious works in an attempt to rubbish Marx's ideas ever since.

Marx and Engels together waged an energetic struggle against the various doctrines of petty-bourgeois socialism, anarchism and so on, in an effort to place the ideas of socialism on a scientific footing. This was perhaps Marx and Engels' greatest achievement, to pull the idea of socialism down from the stratosphere to earth and the

real world of class society. Socialism was no longer to be just a lofty ideal, but the product of a material struggle between the classes, a product of historical development. The ideas of Marx and Engels are scientific socialism.

Marxism is a science. In order to understand the problems of the modern world, a scientific method is necessary. The bourgeoisie and its academic experts are at a loss to explain what is happening in the world. One would look in vain in the pages of the economic journals for a rational explanation of the world crisis of their system. As for sociology, philosophy, psychology etc. - they write a great deal and yet they say nothing. Whilst in its progressive phase the bourgeoisie produced great ideas, now in its senile decay, it produces only gibberish.

On the one hand it fell to Marx, and his great co-thinker and lifetime comrade, Frederick Engels, to place the ideas of socialism on a sound scientific basis linked to an understanding of the class nature of society. At the same time their task was to provide the working class with the ideological weapons it requires to change society. For without a scientific understanding of the world it is impossible to change it.

These revolutionary ideas inevitably drew the attention of the authorities, already shaken by the onward march of revolt across Europe. At the insistent request of the Prussian government, Marx was banished from Paris in 1845, as a dangerous revolutionary. He went to Brussels. In the spring of 1847 Marx and Engels joined a secret propaganda society called the Communist League. They took a prominent part in the League's Second Congress in London in November 1847. As a result they were charged with drawing up the document which became *The Communist Manifesto*.

*The Communist Manifesto*, written when Marx and Engels were still young men, is a truly remarkable document. Its publication represents a turning point in history. It is as fresh today as when it was first written in 1848,



if anything it is probably more relevant now than when it was then. In the pages of the *Manifesto* it is possible to see the superiority of Marx's method very easily. Take a look at any book written by the bourgeois 150 years ago. Today it will be just a curiosity. But if you read the *Manifesto*, you will find an accurate description of the world, not as it was in 1848, but as it is now. Phenomena such as globalisation, the concentration of capital, the exploitation of labour under the guise of modern technology - all these things were not only predicted by Marx but explained scientifically.

This is not the place to look at the *Manifesto* in detail, that will be the subject of a later article. We cannot pass it by completely, however. Not even the bourgeois do that, indeed, some of them have even been forced to admit, grudgingly, that at least in places, Marx was right:

"As a prophet of socialism Marx may be kaput; but as a

prophet of the 'universal interdependence of nations' as he called globalisation, he can still seem startlingly relevant... his description of globalisation remains as sharp today as it was 150 years ago" write John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge of *The Economist*, in their book *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalisation*

Indeed on reading the *Communist Manifesto* today one is amazed at how contemporary Marx's words appear. Not just the growth and interdependence of the world market is predicted here,

"In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." But also the domination of that market by a handful of monopolies and the centralisation and concentration of capital that this represents: "It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few



hands."

The reduction of the workforce to the role of slaves to the machine, "in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time, or by increased speed of machinery,"

More importantly we find the reason for these developments, the contradiction between the expansion of the forces of production and the narrow limits imposed by the twin straitjackets of capitalism - the private ownership of the means of production and the borders of nation states, "The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them."

Of course those bourgeois who concede that Marx was right here or there write to bury him not to praise him. Inevitably they conclude "obviously socialism failed." However such an off the cuff, unsubstantiated assertion will not fool the new generation of workers and youth who are discovering the ideas of Marxism in their search for a solution and a future. Whilst it remains true, and a crime of truly historic proportions, that Stalinism dragged the names of Marx and Lenin through the mud, the accomplishments of capital to date in Russia and Eastern Europe are hardly inspirational. The restoration of the free market has brought not prosperity but prostitution, profits for the few but misery for the many. This is not to defend or justify the crimes of Stalinism. On the contrary, the disaster in Russia today should clarify that it was not the absence of the market that was the problem but the lack of democracy. It was not the nationalised economy but the suffocating, dead weight of bureaucracy and corruption which strangled



the Soviet Union. The one element of the October revolution remaining, that is the one connection with the ideas of Marx, albeit in a barely recognisable, perverted form, namely a state owned economy, enabled Russia to develop from a backward country to the second power on the planet. However the monstrous bureaucracy and its totalitarian dictatorship which leached off the life blood of the planned economy doomed it. To excuse their bureaucratic excesses Stalin twisted Marx's aphorism "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" into "from each according to his ability, to each according to his work." Of course the "work" of the bureaucrats was so onerous that they required higher wages, perks etc. In the same way the pig Napoleon in Orwell's *Animal Farm* rewrote the teachings of Major.

Without democracy, control over all aspects of society by the working class,

socialism was never created in Russia. It speaks volumes that in addition to their many crimes the Soviet bureaucracy with the immense resources of a sixth of the planet at their disposal came up with not one single original thought. Compare that to the accomplishments of the poverty stricken Karl Marx.

The Soviet bureaucracy however were concerned only with their own survival and the survival of their privileges. They developed not one new idea, instead they attempt now to turn the clock back by restoring capitalism. What we saw in Russia was not socialism. Socialism could never be built within the confines of a single country, even one the size of Russia.

### Marx's method

Today's new generation discovering Marxism will see this easily enough. Even now in their newfound appreciation of some of Marx's conclusions these learned bour-

geois academics are unable to take the next logical step and ask why Marx came to correct conclusions. This is not a question the bourgeois are keen to answer. If on not one, or two, but many occasions a method leads to correct conclusions it would seem reasonable to assume that the theory used was correct. A 'lucky guess' is not likely to be repeated often. Yet the prediction of the development of the world market does not drive them to read more of Marx or to accept that not only his conclusions but also his method was and remains correct. Such keen insights were not simply a work of intuitive genius - though there is no doubt that Marx and Engels stood head and shoulders above our modern day intellectual giants. Marx's ideas represented everything that was best in the achievements of the bourgeoisie, bringing together the best of English political economy, French sociology and German philosophy. From this new height they were able to see far indeed.

Their method was their great accomplishment. Using it we can understand the world around us and offer a way out of crisis ridden capitalism. That is why the dreaded question 'Why was Marx right?' is one the bourgeois refuse to address. Fortunately Marx's ideas are not meant simply to convince the bourgeoisie to change their tune. That would be utopian. Marxism instead has the goal of arming the working class and the youth for the revolutionary struggle needed to change society.

In 1848, as Marx explained, the spectre of revolution was haunting Europe. The power of Marx's ideas led the ruling class to expel him from one country after another. On the outbreak of the Revolution of February 1848, Marx was banished from Belgium. He returned to Paris and then, after the March Revolution,



he went to Cologne, Germany, where *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was published from June 1 1848 to May 19 1849, with Marx as editor-in-chief. His ideas were being daily confirmed by the course of the revolutionary events of 1848-49. The victorious counter-revolution instigated court proceedings against Marx. He was acquitted on February 9 1849 but then banished from Germany on May 16 1849. From Germany Marx travelled on to Paris, was again banished after the demonstration of June 13, 1849, and then went to London, where he lived until his death.

His life as a political exile was a very hard one, as the correspondence between Marx and Engels clearly reveals. Poverty weighed heavily on Marx and his family; had it not been for Engels' constant and selfless financial aid, Marx would not only have been unable to work on *Capital* but would have inevitably have been crushed by want.

*Capital*, completed after Marx's death in the main due to the tireless efforts of his comrade Engels, is probably the best known of Marx's writings. In these three volumes, which represent capitalism's genome, there is more than enough argument to convince a thinking bourgeois of the inability of the capitalist system to solve its inherent problems.

Yet today's thinking bourgeois are not studying how society or economy works. They are thinking about how to defend their system and their privileged position. They think not of how new technology can be used to shorten working hours to allow us time to participate in decision making and implementation. Instead they research how to use new technology to squeeze an ounce more out of our muscles and brains in the name of profit.

They don't investigate the worldwide eradication of disease through the knowledge contained in the Human Genome, they calculate how to patent chromosomes and medicines to profit from our ill health.

A small layer of scientists, and intellectuals in different



fields can no doubt be won over to socialism, but society cannot be changed simply by changing the minds of the ruling class one by one. Marxism came into being as an attempt to place socialism on a scientific footing, to rescue it from the great but idealistic utopians of earlier generations who believed that socialism could be achieved simply by demonstrating its intellectual superiority.

#### Power of ideas

Nonetheless the intellectual struggle, the struggle over ideas, was for Marx of decisive importance. First and foremost he recognised the power of ideas "We are firmly convinced" he wrote "that the real danger lies not in practical attempts but in the theoretical elaboration of communist ideas, for practical attempts, even mass attempts, can be answered by cannon as soon as they become dangerous whereas ideas which have conquered our intellect and taken possession of our minds... are demons which human beings can only vanquish only by submitting to them."

The revival of the democratic movements in the late fifties and in the sixties recalled Marx to

practical activity. There is a myth that Marx was a writer and thinker, but not a practical revolutionary. This is nonsense. For Marx theory was a guide to action, above all the revolutionary action of the proletariat. Marx had played an active and leading role in the movement in Germany and France. Now in London in 1864, on September 28, the International Working Men's Association - the celebrated First International - was founded. Marx was the heart and soul of this organisation, the author of its first Address and of a host of resolutions, declaration and manifestoes.

Marx's health was undermined by his strenuous work in the International and his still more strenuous theoretical studies and writing. He continued to work tirelessly on the question of political economy and on the completion of *Capital*, for which he collected a mass of new material and studied a number of languages including Russian.

On December 2 1881 Marx's wife died, and then on March 14 1883 Marx himself passed away peacefully in his armchair. He lies buried next to his wife at Highgate Cemetery in London.

Marx died 120 years ago.

But his ideas live on to educate and inspire a new generation of class fighters all over the world. We dedicate our struggles to the memory of this great revolutionary figure. In recent years many a learned wiseacre has declared that struggle to be finished. Yet for all their scribblings the spectre of revolution is once again abroad. This time that spectre casts its shadow over not just Europe but the whole world. The struggle is far from finished, in fact it will continue until humanity finally triumphs over all obstacles and raises itself up to its true height. For thousands of years, knowledge and culture have been the monopoly of a tiny handful of wealthy exploiters, who have used and abused their position to keep millions of their fellow men and women in chains. Socialism will put an end to this odious monopoly once and for all, giving free access to the wonders of culture to every man, woman and child on the planet. It was Marx who declared, "workers of all lands unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains."

There is a world to win. A world freed from poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy and despair. A world where the true potential of humanity is released and can flourish. That is the greatest end to which anyone can aspire, the only cause worthy of giving one's life for. Karl Marx gave his whole life to this cause, sacrificing everything for the cause of the emancipation of the working class.

Whilst those who have written to bury Marxism over the last 150 years have vanished into obscurity the ideas of Marxism not only retain their relevance but are now gaining a new audience. In general in the hands of bourgeois academics the ideas of Marxism will be transformed and vulgarised into dead dogma. In the hands of the workers movement, inscribed on the banner of the youth, they will serve their true purpose. As Marx himself explained that purpose is to help not only to understand the world, but to change it. □



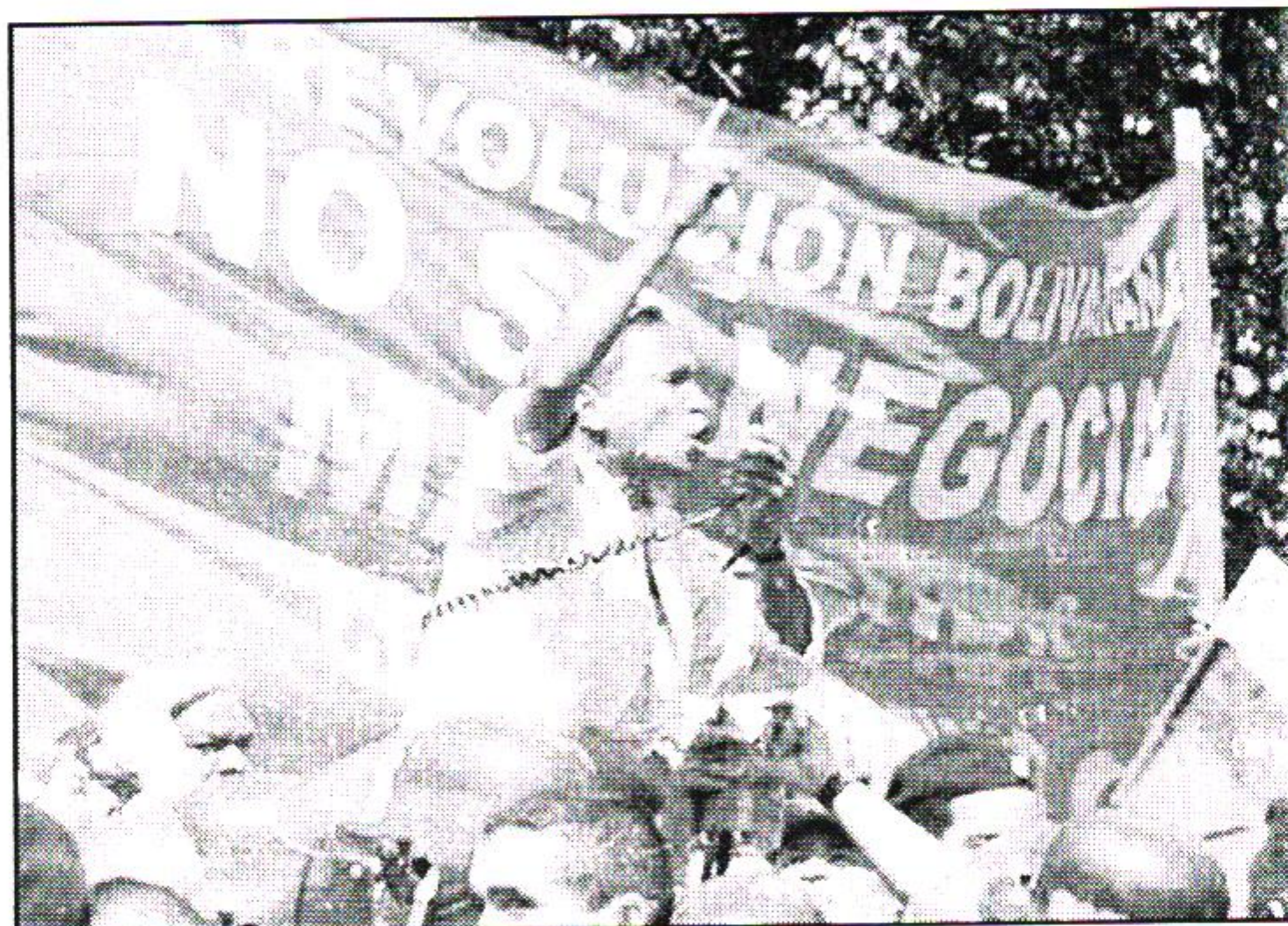
## Opposition "strike" or bosses lock out?

An eyewitness account

If we were to believe the information we get from the mass media internationally, we would get the impression that in Venezuela there has been a general strike for the last one and a half months and that president Chávez is an extremely unpopular and authoritarian ruler who is about to be overthrown in a mass popular revolt. Nothing could be further from the truth.

by Jorge Martín, Secretary, Hands Off Venezuela Campaign, [handsoffvenezuela@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:handsoffvenezuela@yahoo.co.uk)

In fact, the "national civic strike" called by the opposition on December 2nd demanding Chavez's resignation and early elections has been a complete failure since the beginning. When I arrived in Caracas on December 11th the airport was working normally, so was public transport (buses, coaches and the Caracas Metro), shopping centres, restaurants and bars. The basic industries (iron, steel, aluminium, etc), which are state-owned, were working at 100% capacity because of the decision of the workers and their unions to oppose the 'strike'. In the state of Carabobo, one of the most important centres of manufacturing industry, the Class Struggle and Democratic Trade Union Block, which organises workers in 52 different unions in the most important factories in the state (including Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, Pirelli, GoodYear, Firestone, MAVESA, and others) declared its opposition to the 'strike'. Some of these factories remained open but in others the workers went to work and found themselves locked-out by the bosses. They demanded to be paid their wages, since they had gone to work, and in most cases they were paid. The same was true in some sections of the food and beverages industry, which is controlled, almost in its entirety by Grupo Polar, which is owned by the powerful businessman and opposition leader Mendoza. This is not a strike at all, but a bosses' lock out. The fact that this protest has the support of



"The Bolivarian revolution won't be negotiated away, take a firm hand!"

the executive committee of the CTV, the main trade union centre in the country, should not fool anyone, since this EC was never elected, but self-appointed before the end of the ballot in the extremely irregular elections of November 2001, and is not recognised by most of the federations and local union branches.

The only part of the economy that was seriously hit by the opposition protest was the oil industry. Here, a small group of managers, directors, supervisors and technicians organised the sabotage of production and brought the industry almost to a halt. Oil production is highly computerised and a few managers withdrawing their keys and passwords can cause a lot of damage. They also made sure they fixed the administrative procedures so that they would still receive their (very high) salaries while they were on 'strike'. Also a

number of captains and crew of some of the oil tankers mutinied and prevented normal deliveries. It is important to note that the oil workers union leaders, who in April had supported the opposition-led attempted coup, did not even dare now make a public statement in favour of the 'national strike'. Slowly but surely, oil workers took over the refineries and oil fields and started to get the industry back to normal. By January 10th the state-owned oil company PDVSA was working at 50% of capacity.

The opposition protest has been accompanied by a campaign of lies, half-truths and the blatant manipulation of all the private media, particularly the TV stations, which are also controlled by the opposition. All TV stations suspended their normal programming to broadcast only 'news' about the success of the 'strike' and gave all their com-

mercial breaks over to opposition propaganda. To give just one example of the level of hysteria which the opposition and the media are trying to whip up against the government, when the government finally got a court order to take over the oil tankers that had mutinied, the opposition claimed that the new crews were Cuban, and that this was a further sign that the country was rapidly moving towards "Castro-Communism". This lie was repeated by the media, until a couple of days after, having been directly challenged by the Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, the opposition leaders were forced to retract their allegations and recognise there were no Cubans working in the oil tankers.

At the beginning of January, the opposition, faced with the failure of their actions to bring the country to a halt, decided to up the stakes by announcing the closure of the banks and that schools and universities would not re-open after the Christmas break. Again, both actions failed. Most banks remained open and those that did close only did so for 48 hours. In most schools around the country the alliance of parents, teachers and students guaranteed the opening of the education centres, in some cases against the will of the headmasters.

As for Chavez being an unpopular dictator, nothing could be further from the truth. The opposition has been regularly calling demonstrations against the government



For more information write to  
[handsoffvenezuela@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:handsoffvenezuela@yahoo.co.uk)

demanding his resignation, and they can manage to mobilise 100, 200 or even 300,000 people onto the streets, mainly from the rich and middle class areas of Caracas. What is not generally reported is that Bolivarians, as the supporters of the revolutionary process call themselves, can get far bigger crowds into the streets. On December 7, right at the beginning of the opposition protest, a massive demonstration of more than 2 million people took to the streets of Caracas against the 'strike' to defend the democratically elected government.

In fact, the result of the opposition 'strike' has been to further polarise society and to push many people who had not taken sides to openly declare themselves against the opposition, which they rightly see as responsible for the fuel and food shortages. There have been many instances in which people, queuing for hours to get petrol have expelled opposition supporters from the petrol station queues for having the audacity to try to blame the government for the shortages.

Chavez is most definitely not a dictator. It is in fact his supporters who are demanding that the government take stronger action against the opposition, which is hell bent on overthrowing a democratically-elected government. The only people who are currently in prison as a result of the opposition coup on April 11th are actually government supporters who were defending the presidential palace against the coup! Pedro Carmona, who appointed himself president for a few hours following the coup, was

put under house arrest for a few days and escaped to Colombia. The opposition newspapers (all of them with two or three exceptions) carry numerous articles and editorials openly calling for a military coup to remove Chavez and appealing to the armed forces to overthrow the government, and no measures are taken against them. There is a group of military officers who have declared themselves in rebellion against the government and instead of being arrested they have been allowed to set a permanent camp in Plaza Francia, a square in the centre of Caracas (mind you, these "courageous men" leave their "permanent" camp at night to go to sleep in luxury hotels!).

### Elections

Chavez and his government have in fact been through seven different elections since he was elected in 1998 and they have won every single one of them. Furthermore, the country's new Bolivarian Constitution allows for all elected public officials to be subject to a recall referendum half-way through their term of office. This includes the president who would be up for such a referendum in August 2003. The problem is that the opposition is convinced they would lose such a referendum and that is why they are demanding Chavez's resignation. What they did not achieve in April by means of a military coup, they want to achieve now by a combination of economic sabotage, chaos, appeals to the armed forces and international pressure.

The reason why the local oligarchy and US imperialism

are opposed to Chavez is that even his limited programme of bourgeois democratic reforms (land reform, maintenance of PDVSA as a state-owned company and extension of political democracy amongst others) and the process of mass mobilisation and organisation which they have generated, directly clash with the class interests of the capitalists. But the very actions of the reactionary forces are pushing the masses to take direct action and advance in their revolutionary cause. On January 10th, for instance, 400 workers at COVENCAUCHO (a tyre company in the state of Lara) decided to take over the factory and declared themselves on "strike against the strike", when they were told that the company had decided to join the opposition protest. The oil workers in one of the oil refineries had been running the installations under workers control throughout Christmas and New Year. When a new manager was appointed by the government to replace the old one who had joined the opposition protest, he was told by the workers that he was welcome to join them, but that the refinery was now under workers management. Also, on January 17th, the national guard with the support of workers and the local population took over a Panamco beverages warehouse in Carabobo belonging

to the powerful businessman and oppositionist Cisneros, and the general in charge justified his actions by saying that collective rights came before private rights. All this is an indication of the deepening of the process of the Venezuelan revolution.

The main discussions that are taking place in the trade union and popular movement at the present time are about popular control of the mass media, workers control and management of the state-owned companies, occupation of privately-owned factories, popular management of schools, nationalisation of the banks, etc. Through their own experience, workers, the poor peasants and students are drawing the conclusion that the revolutionary process, in order to be defended, must be strengthened and deepened.

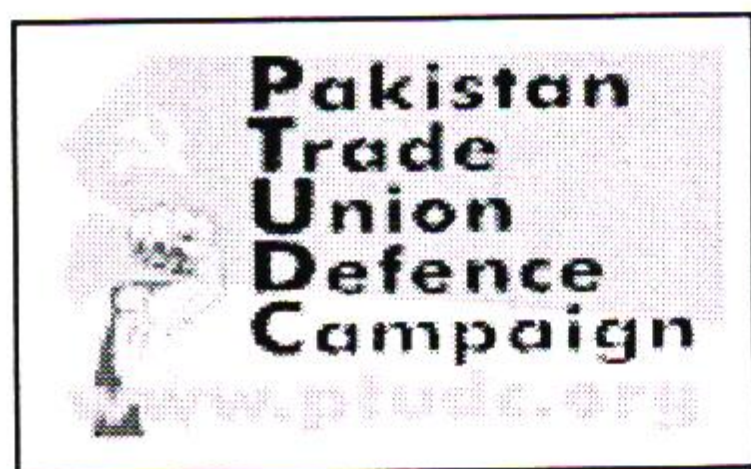
The most urgent task for revolutionaries in Venezuela is the building of a conscious Marxist leadership that can help the movement draw the necessary conclusions and that the revolutionary process must adopt a clear socialist international approach as the only way to guarantee its final victory. □



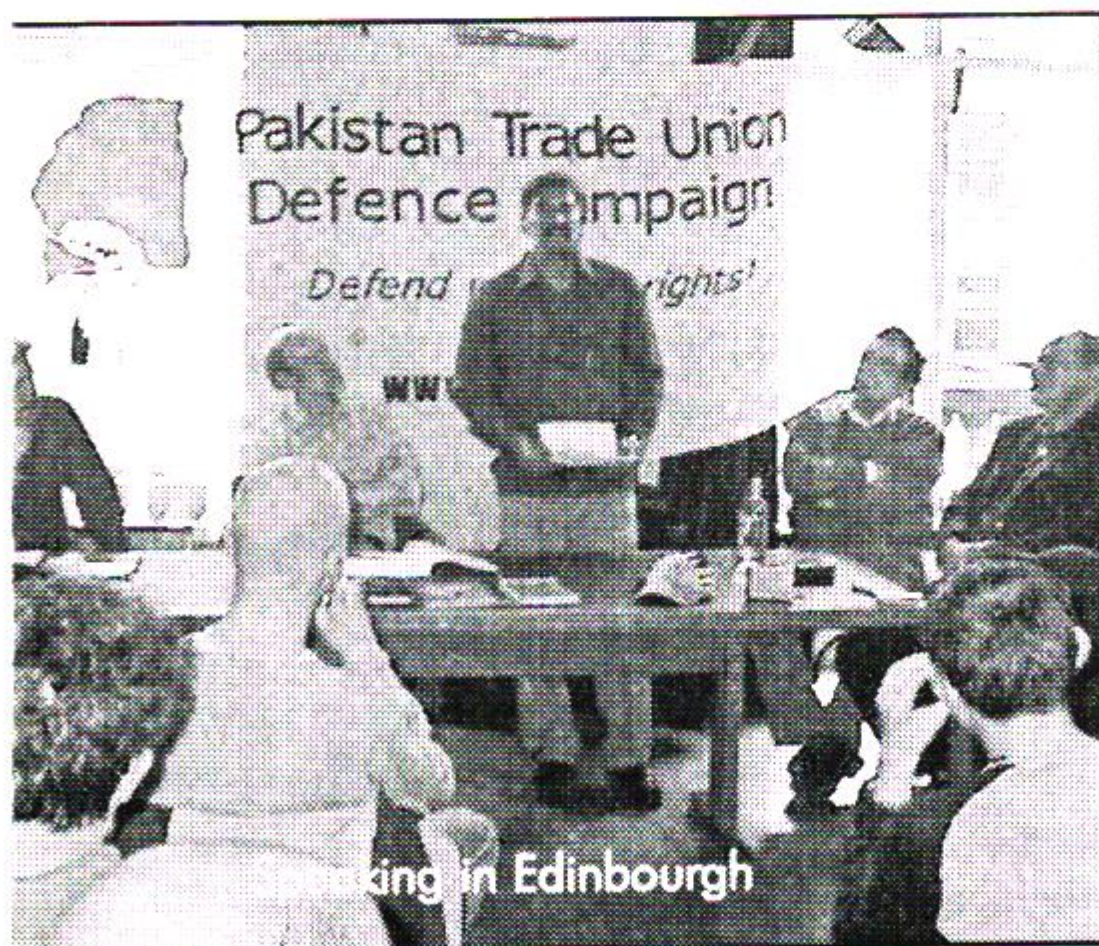
"Hey, ho, Chavez won't go" demonstrators in New York



# Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign



Manzoor speaking in London



Speaking in Edinburgh

Pakistan is in a critical condition at the current time, it is engulfed in a social, economic and international crisis. Military dictator, Gen. Musharaff is in power and can see that he and his government is in crisis as well. In an attempt to escape from this crisis, he held elections for parliament at the end of last year. However in spite of all the hopes of Musharaff the elections have not created any strong government.

There were three main parties that got substantial votes in the elections. The Pakistan Peoples Party, got 25% of the vote and could have won the elections, but they were rigged by the government so they only won 81 seats out of 342. The King's Party, so called because they are backed by Musharaff only got 22% of the vote. The other group was a coalition of all the fundamentalist parties, they got only 10% (65 seats) of the vote. This is an historical high for them, in the past they have never had more than 3% of the vote in any elections, but they have made some gains with the help of the Pakistani secret service, and because of America's 'war on terror'. The situation is that of a hung parliament, in other words unless two of these groups get together and form an alliance no parliamentary government can come to power.

Including the 10 PPP MPs, who they bribed into defecting, the King's Party has the greatest number of seats, but not an absolute majority. This makes the King's Party, which is in fact a coalition of parties, very

weak. This is the largest number of coalition parties in the history of Pakistan if any one withdraws its support then the government would crumble.

The democracy is a sham, even after the parliament has decided the law, Musharaff has reserved the right to amend the it, he even has the right to amend the constitution. One man can override the whole of the elected parliament.

Behind the political crisis lies the social and economic crisis that the country faces. The government finances are in permanent deficit. 65.5% of the GDP is spent on debt servicing, and another 40% on defence, which adds up to 105.5%. While only 1.2% of GDP is spent on education and 0.7% on health. There is extreme poverty in Pakistan, and this has been on the increase during the so-called boom years of the 1990s, 52% of the population in Pakistan live on \$1 a day, 85% of Pakistan's population lives on \$2 a day. This has been the result of the policies of the current government and previous governments, who have faithfully carried out the programmes of the IMF and World Bank.

Pakistan's economy is 56% dependent on agriculture, but agriculture is in severe crisis at the moment because of the high price of fertilisers, seeds, electricity, and fuels. All these prices have been going up but the prices of crops have remained low. Industry is also facing huge closures, in the last 5 years, 7200 factories have been closed. The official figure for unemployment is 10 million, and

in the past year alone 1.5 million lost their jobs. This is set to increase, the government wants to sack 1 million public servants next year, and who knows how many in the following years.

On the trade union front, we have suffered the biggest attacks in the history of Pakistan. The electricity sector is facing privatisation. The dictatorship sent the army in to run the sector, and in the last few years the new army directors have taken a tighter grip and implemented brutal measures. The right to organise has been revoked and the union was banned. They sacked more than 20,000 people, and there is no right to appeal or protest. Similar processes are going on the railways where the union was banned 5 years ago, and the postal and communications sectors, which are all suffering very severe attacks at the present time.

Privatisations are taking place in Pakistan, especially in health and education. But since privatisation, the prices of using them have shot up by as much as 60 times, and there are plans to privatise many more schools, hospitals and other services. It is impossible for the majority of people to pay to use these services. There have been big movements among the unions against this privatisation, but the government sacked all the leaders of that movement, all the teachers, doctors who led the movement.

The military state hangs the ever-present threat of war with India over the heads of the workers, to divide them along religious and national lines. This has

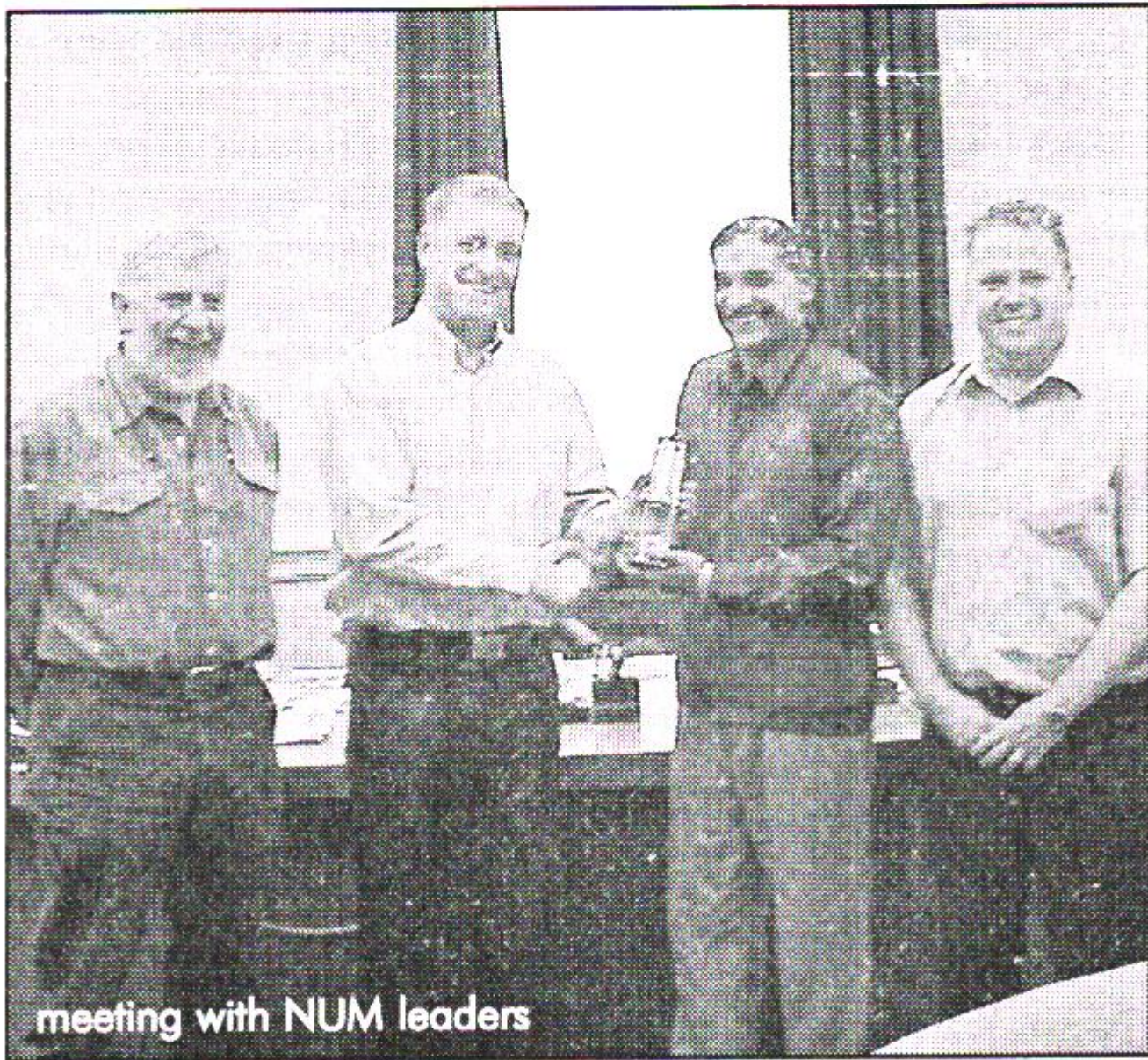


a totally pernicious effect and merely demonstrates that the ruling class is unable to solve any of the problems of Pakistan.

The PTUDC is fighting against the attacks of the ruling class and the state. We are fighting both a political struggle and an industrial struggle in the streets and in parliament. We oppose the government attacks on trade union autonomy and democracy. We are opposed to the cuts that the government is implementing at the behest of the ruling class and the imperialists. Workers face extreme poverty and, unemployment and uncertainty over the future of their jobs.

The PTUDC requires the support and solidarity of workers, and trade unionists around the world. We are trying to unite, organise and give support to the trade unionists in Pakistan. Many of our comrades have been imprisoned in the past for the struggles that they have waged, and when this has happened it was the strength of the campaign within Pakistan and the solidarity internationally which got them released.

We also need the help of the international working class in the form of financial assistance, the work we do is extremely important and we rely only on the ordinary people in Pakistan for that money. That is why we have organised a tour of Britain in order to meet MPs, trade union leaders, and ordinary workers to seek support, affiliation, and financial aid.



meeting with NUM leaders

## PTUDC on tour in Britain

The PTUDC in Britain has organised a speaking tour throughout January. The tour has been designed to build the profile of the campaign in this country, to establish points of support in the labour movement, and to collect financial donations for the campaign. The tour will involve meetings and discussions with leading figures and bodies of the labour movement, meetings with individual trade union branches, and regional public meetings to attract broader layers of workers and establish support in Britain's Asian communities.

Lal Khan, PTUDC International Secretary, travelled to Britain at the beginning of January for a short tour of some of Britain's leading unions, including the TGWU International office, and GMB General Secretary, John Edmonds. Both of these unions are keen to help with the campaign, they agreed to sponsor the PTUDC, requested further information on trade union struggles in Pakistan, and invited comrades along for further meetings in the next month.

Lal Khan told the union leaders about the terrible working and living conditions which exist on the Indian Sub Continent, the attacks by the bosses, the imperialists and the military state. One of the main problems that Pakistan, like many former colonial countries, faces is the uneven nature of development of the infrastructure. Which means that you have an anomalous situation where the most modern technology coexists side by side with technology that has not changed for thousands of years.

Lal Khan also met with the General Secretary and national officers of banking and financial services union UNIFI, who organise a large chunk of the British finance industry, including Pakistani banks with offices in England. General

Secretary Ed Sweeney was very enthusiastic and made a lot of useful suggestions of avenues the campaign could pursue in the future.

Among the most supportive of the trade unionists we have met has been Jeremy Dear, NUJ General Secretary, and long time supporter of the PTUDC, Lal Khan was able to meet with Jeremy for a discussion, and he spoke at various NUJ branch meetings which were very keen to give financial assistance and build links with the campaign, one of the branches actually put it on their agenda to discuss providing the money to sponsor a full time organiser for the PTUDC at their next meeting.

The campaign in Britain is now continuing with a tour by Manzoor Ahmed, the recently elected Marxist PPP MP.

Manzoor has already spoken at a number of very important public meetings, which were attended by some leading union activists. He spoke in a recent Edinburgh meeting of trade unionists and youth, on the everyday problems which trade unions face in Pakistan, and got an excellent response. Many of the comrades offered to raise the question of affiliation in their union branches. The general mood of all the meetings was that the struggles in Pakistan are the same struggles as we are facing over here although on a much more horrific level.

Manzoor has already met with the NUM General Secretary and national officers, and in the coming week he will be attending other important union events. This will involve meetings with leading trade unionists from the ASLEF NEC and meetings with the General Secretary, T&G (National Secretary agriculture & Ellesmere Port motor vehicles branch), NUT General Secretary (school teachers), NAHTFE Conference (university teachers).

For more information on the campaign and its activities in Britain please call Kris on 0799 062 8769.

### PTUDC

Name.....

Organisation.....

Address.....

We wish to affiliate to the campaign:

National organisation £500       Regional organisation £100

Local organisation £25

I/We want to make a donation of £.....

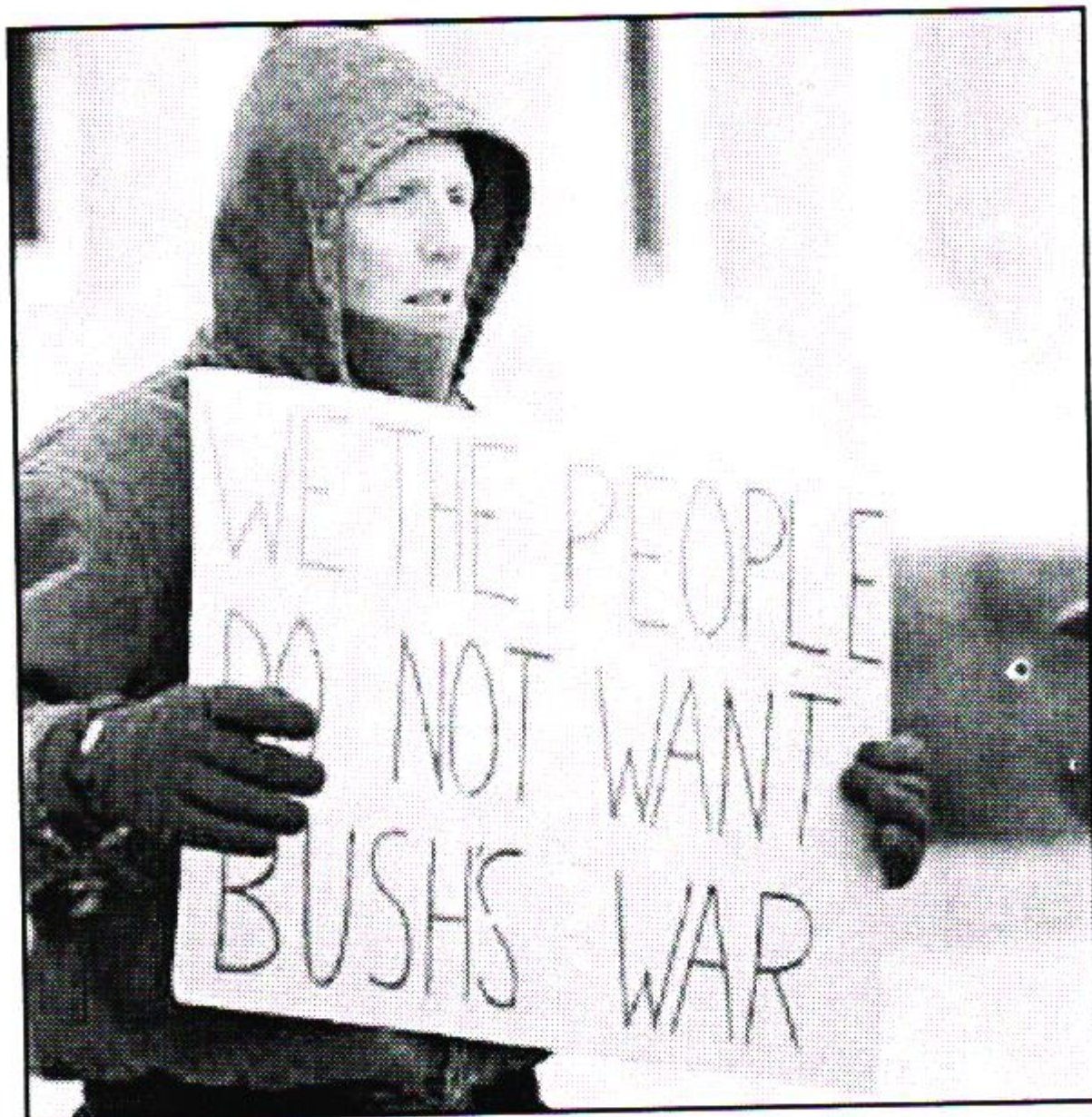
Total enclosed £.....

Your can also make your contribution online going to [www.ptudc.org](http://www.ptudc.org)

Return to Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, PO Box 6977, London N1 3JN

All cheques payable to *Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign*





**"Delenda est Carthago"**

## US imperialism hell bent on war with Iraq

by Alan Woods

The American imperialists have learnt a lot from their true ancestors - the Romans. After the Second Punic War, when Rome finally defeated Hannibal and established her superiority in the Mediterranean, she still lived in fear of a revival of Carthage. The war party at Rome was headed by Cato, who, when delivering a speech in the senate, no matter what the subject, always ended with the same phrase: "Delenda est Carthago" - Carthage must be destroyed.

This chilling advice was carried out to the letter. After a three-year siege in which many of its citizens starved to death (an early example of effective sanctions) the city was razed to the ground and the surviving inhabitants sold into slavery. To complete the job, the land on which Carthage stood was sown with salt. In this way the whole world got the message of the fate that awaited anyone who refused to acknowledge the superior values of Roman civilization.

Of course, the world has moved on since then. Slavery is out of fashion. Instead, whole peoples are economically enslaved through the mechanism of the world market. This is called "globalisation". Here the domination of the weak by the strong is achieved by indirect means: the terms of trade and foreign debts. This is so much more economical than the wars and slave hunts of the Romans! But occasionally situations arise where the old Roman methods of wars of conquest and occupation of foreign lands become appropriate. Such is the case of Iraq.

However, even here we note a clear advance over the old methods. The Americans intend to occupy Iraq.

There is not the slightest doubt about this. They have even made detailed plans of how the US-run colonial administration will operate, how the imperial governor will reconstruct the shattered infrastructure - beginning with the oilfields, of course. For the aim of American imperialism is not to sow the soil of Iraq with salt and make it barren for all time, but on the contrary to make the desert bloom, and the oil flow - for the greater glory of God and the profits of the US oilmen and the revenues of the US treasury.

### The farce of "inspection"

As the deadly game of hide-and-seek with the arms inspection people drags on, there is speculation in some quarters that perhaps matters will not reach the point of a shooting war. Rumsfeld generously offers Saddam Hussein the option of exile in some unnamed destination, hinting that he might thus escape prosecution. Such diplomatic minuets should fool nobody. The only thing that matters here is that the military build-up in the Gulf has practically reached the point of no return.

Saddam Hussein knows that the kind promises of Washington carry very little weight, but are only part of the general diplomatic cover necessary to hide the real intentions of the USA and lull the world, and Iraq, into a false sense of security prior to the commencement of hostilities. He therefore appeared on television on January 17 to warn that anyone who tries to invade his country would be defeated and "forced to commit suicide at the gates of Baghdad".

This fiery rhetoric marked the 12th anniversary of the Gulf war, when Iraq

was quickly defeated with the loss of more than 200,000 lives. The Americans are clearly banking on a repeat of the same scenario, but not everyone is so sure. The nervousness of the financial markets worldwide is sufficient proof of this.

### "Guilty until proved innocent"

Conscious of their weakness in the face of the world's only superpower, the Iraqis have gone to extraordinary lengths to show their willingness to help United Nations weapons inspectors search for evidence of weapons of mass destruction. To no avail! After more than 200 expeditions, Hans Blix reported at the end of December that they had found nothing, and that they had yet to discover the "smoking gun" that would convince the world of the threat Iraq allegedly poses. On December 31, Kofi Anan stated that he saw no basis for armed intervention against Iraq.

The response of the Americans was to state that, in so many words, the fact that you have found nothing proves that the Iraqis must be hiding something! This logic reminds one of the twisted reasoning that used to be applied in the trials of witches hundreds of years ago. A poor woman was accused of being a witch and subjected to torture to force her to confess. If she refused to confess, the devil was said to be giving her strength, if she fainted, the devil was said to be giving her sleep, and so on, until the unfortunate victim either confessed or died.

The discovery of 11 empty 122mm chemical warheads, all in good condition, served as a convenient pretext for



the tormentors of Iraq to renew their hue and cry. These, said a spokesman for the inspectors, were not included in the 12,000-page declaration that Iraq has made about its arms programme. A senior Iraqi official claimed that that is because the warheads were not linked to any banned weapons programme and had simply expired and been packed away in wooden boxes, where they had been forgotten about.

It is quite possible that the Iraqis are telling the truth, as also in the subsequent discovery of a large number of notes in the house of one of their scientists that were likewise not declared. The scientist has protested that these notes could not be connected with a military nuclear programme and included notes for lectures to his students. But that will not help Saddam. The Americans, like the Queen in Alice in Wonderland want to establish a guilty verdict first and hold the trial afterwards. They will accept nothing less!

The inspectors are preparing to present their first formal report on Iraq to the UN Security Council on January 27. Before delivering that report, the UN's chief inspector, Hans Blix, and the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El Baradei, will visit Baghdad. Iraq will be told that the situation is "very tense and very dangerous", Mr Blix has said. To avoid war, he added, Iraq must provide credible evidence that it has eliminated its suspected nuclear, chemical and biological programmes.

In a normal trial, it is the task of the prosecutor to prove that the accused is guilty. Here, however, the accused is presumed to be guilty and is required to furnish proof of his innocence! Not only that, he is expected to show the greatest enthusiasm in helping the prosecution to find the necessary proof - that he is, in fact,

guilty! Officials in Washington argue that the Iraqis do not have to be in "material breach" of resolutions: in other words, they are guilty until proven innocent.

### Why war?

The actions of US imperialism resemble those of a wild elephant, blundering into every obstacle in the belief that its sheer bulk will suffice to remove them. Unfortunately, this is not always the case! It is interesting to contrast America's tough line on Iraq with its policy towards North Korea, where Mr Bush is promoting diplomacy and has said he would consider food aid and energy shipments if the North Koreans scrap their nuclear-weapons programme. The North Korean regime makes no secret that it possesses nuclear weapons, so the sending of UN arms inspectors is unnecessary. Yet Bush does not threaten to invade North Korea! The reason is obvious. North Korea has a powerful army and nuclear weapons and could do considerable damage in the event of a war. And a bully will always pick on a victim who is smaller and weaker than himself.

The fact is that the ruling clique in Washington long ago (before September 11) made up its mind that Saddam Hussein must be overthrown and Iraq must be occupied. What are the reasons for this stubbornness? There are various: political, strategic, economic and even personal. George W. Bush, who incidentally "won" the last presidential election through a blatant fraud, wishes at all costs to remain in the White House. Since there is just over a year before the next presidential elections, he calculates that a victorious little war would do his chances no harm. After all, just look what the Falklands war did for Margaret Thatcher. The fact that many people will die in



such a war is surely a trivial consideration compared to the political future of George W.!

The personal destiny of Mr. Bush would, of course, in itself, be insufficient to justify plunging America into a bloody and (no matter what is said to the contrary) uncertain conflict. There are other, more powerful, reasons of a strategic and economic character.

Since the fall of the USSR, America has emerged as the world's only superpower. It accounts for 37 percent of the world's total arms expenditure and 40 percent of world arms production. No other power comes remotely close to this. The American imperialists have therefore abrogated to themselves the role of the policeman of world capitalism. They have decided to tear up all the old agreements that formed the basis of "international law". Their slogan is "might is right". And they will tolerate no regime that is not willing to accept their domination. That was the meaning of the war in Kosovo, and it is also the meaning of the war against Iraq.

Despite the terrible pounding it took in the last Gulf War, and ten years of barbaric sanctions that have reduced the Iraqi people to beggary and starvation, Iraq remains a formidable power in the region. The USA wants

at all costs to destroy this power and thus give a terrible lesson to the peoples of the Middle East and the world at large. See what happens to those who try to stand against us? That is the intended message.

Although it is an oversimplification to characterise the coming war as a "war for oil" (there are other elements in the equation), there cannot be the slightest doubt that oil plays a most important role. The US economy depends heavily on oil, and the biggest available reserves of oil are to be found in the Middle East. George W. Bush comes from a Texan family the wealth of which comes from oil. His Vice-President, Dick Cheney, also has close links to big US oil companies. The oilmen make up the single most powerful group in the US oligarchy and have a determining influence on US policy. Together with the notorious Military Industrial Complex, they have a powerful influence on Washington's foreign policy.

### Saudi Arabia

Up till recently the USA was tranquil in the belief that its Middle East oil supplies were guaranteed by a friendly power - Saudi Arabia. The parasitic and degenerate Saudi ruling clique keeps order in its own house with a rod of iron. It is, in fact, a



fundamentalist dictatorship that tortures its opponents, discriminates against women and cuts the hands off thieves. This naturally qualifies it for membership of America's coalition of democratic regimes.

While speaking in the name of Allah, the members of the royal house of Saud are notoriously corrupt. These defenders of the Faith and keepers of the Holy Places of Islam drink whisky, drive expensive cars and enjoy themselves with prostitutes. They have succeeded in clinging to power partly through the most savage repression and partly because the vast oil revenues permitted them to give concessions to the population. But this has all ended.

Falling oil revenues have meant falling living standards for most of the Saudi population. The standard of living is now only 20 percent of its level 20 years ago. Unemployment is high and rising, especially among Saudi youth. This means that discontent is increasing to dangerous levels, and it will not be possible to contain the situation by repression alone.

It came as a shock to the Americans that the biggest number of hijackers on the September 11 came neither from Afghanistan nor Iraq, but Saudi Arabia. But in fact this was entirely predictable. The degenerate Saudi ruling clique, conscious of its weakness and isolation from the population, arrived at a deal with the Moslem clerics of the strict Wahhabi sect, giving the latter a virtually free hand to operate in Saudi Arabia, on condition that it encouraged Jihad (Holy War) outside Saudi borders only.

Reactionary fundamentalist gangsters like Osama bin Laden (who had close



links with the Saudi royal family) were actively supported, financed and armed both by the CIA and the Saudi regime, to attack the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The infrastructure of al Qaida was built up at that time. It was not seen as a problem as long as it confined its activities to killing Russians. But in the end, after the fall of the USSR, al Qaida turned its attentions to America. As sometimes occurs, the mad dog bit the hand that fed it.

It is interesting to note that the CIA so trusted the Saudis that it did not even keep them under surveillance. A CIA defector recently pointed out that the agency did not even bother to keep a file on that country. This astonishing negligence may explain the reason why America's security services were caught off guard on September 11. But now all that has changed.

From blind faith in the Saudi regime, the Americans are becoming increasingly suspicious of it. They fear, with some reason, that the regime is unstable and may be overthrown sooner rather than later. The splits in the royal family lend credence to this interpretation. The loss of Saudi Arabia would be a body-blow to the USA, which is heavily dependent on Saudi oil supplies, which represent the biggest proven reserves in the world.

It is clear that the ruling circles in the USA are actively considering this scenario and preparing for it.

The presence of US troops on Saudi soil, allegedly to defend the kingdom against the threat of foreign invasion (from Iraq), is in reality an insurance policy. In the event of the regime being overthrown, the US army would immediately take steps to occupy - not the whole country, which would be a formidable task - but the oilfields, most of which are situated on a narrow coastal strip. This would then be sealed off from the rest of the country, and the Arabs would be left with the sand.

This is where Iraq comes into the picture. Iraq is sitting on the second biggest reserves of oil, after Saudi Arabia. Possession of these valuable reserves would be essential for America if, as is possible, Saudi Arabia became unstable. Moreover, any invasion of Saudi Arabia would have to be launched from Iraq. So the establishment of strong US bases in that country is a strategic necessity. For all of these reasons, the Americans are determined to push for an invasion - and the sooner the better!

### Blix's tricks

The discovery of a handful of empty warheads is unlikely to convince all the members of the Security Council that they should declare Saddam in "material breach" of his obligations, and thus trigger a war. Nor are the various gaps and omissions which the inspectors say exist in

Iraq's declaration. Mr Blix says he expects the Security Council to ask him to deliver a further report in February. By then, a trickle of revelations might well have built up into a body of evidence sufficient to show that Iraq is not telling the truth.

In their mad drive to war, however, the US comes up against serious obstacles. The neighbouring regimes are all terrified of the consequences of an American invasion of Iraq. Already a powerful anti-American current is flowing in the Middle East. Saddam has sent a special envoy to hold talks with several Arab leaders, including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Syria, which took part in the 1991 military action that drove Iraqi forces from Kuwait, has since rebuilt ties with Iraq and opposes a strike against its neighbour. But these regimes cannot help Iraq. They will be struggling to maintain themselves! The real danger to America comes not from Arab governments and armies but from what they now call "the Arab street" - that is, the masses.

A recent survey showed that in Egypt only six percent of the people are pro-American, while 69 percent were against. In Jordan, 25 percent were pro-American, but a staggering 75 percent were against. Both these regimes are hanging by a thread. A US invasion of Iraq will further destabilise them, provoking a wave of protests throughout the Middle East. Terrorist acts and attacks on Western targets will increase in an infernal cycle of violence. The recent murder of American civilians in the Yemen are a warning of what can happen. Far from being a "war against terrorism", the actions of US imperialism - that is to say,



state terrorism, will enormously exacerbate the problem, creating a mood of hatred and bitterness and winning numerous new recruits for terrorist organisations.

Washington's problems are, however, not confined to the Middle East. Europe is becoming restive, irritated by the insolent arrogance of their American "allies". The real reason why Blix and his UN colleagues continue their activities in Iraq is the pressure of several members of the Security Council who are unenthusiastic about the prospect of war - in the first place France. Jacques Chirac, the French president, said on January 17 that the inspectors should have more time and that unilateral action against Iraq would contravene international law. The French imperialists have their own interests in the Middle East and Iraq. They have been assiduously pursuing contracts with oil producers like Iraq and Libya, to the fury of the Americans. It stands to reason that if these lucrative contracts are signed by French companies, they cannot be signed by American ones.

But President George Bush's patience is wearing thin. "Time is running out" for Saddam, he said. "I am sick and tired of games and deception, and that is my view of timetables." This is a warning not only to Baghdad but also to Paris. There is a clear sub-text that reads as follows: "If you oppose us over Iraq, we will go in anyway, and we will make sure that all your contracts are torn up and you will get nothing. If, on the other hand, you support us, you will get some crumbs from the table after we have finished eating." The French, with many a tear and many a sigh, have agreed to support their American "friends", and even to send

troops.

As for Russia, Moscow has dispatched its deputy foreign minister to Iraq for "negotiations on disarmament" (read: Iraq's capitulation). This is an exact replica of Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomacy in the Gulf on the eve of the 1991 Iraq war, when Moscow left the Iraqis in the lurch. Now history is set to repeat itself. The Russians have important oil contracts with Iraq (where most of the installations and machinery came from the USSR), which also owes them a large amount of money. The Americans will have promised the Russians that they will get their money back. How much these promises are worth is another matter!

### Inexorable build-up

As the diplomatic comedy show continues, American and British forces are gathering in the Gulf. The really important thing is not the diplomatic games in the UN but the inexorable build-up of troops. For the first time the US has sent in a full division - 11,000 troops. They have set up a command centre in Qatar. For its part, Britain has called up over 20,000 reserves. The aim is to establish a force of 100,000 fighting

troops and maybe twice that number of backup forces. The mobilisation of such numbers is not done for the purpose of idle amusement. The troops are there to be used!

It is, of course, possible that the USA will in the end go back to the Security Council to secure a new resolution backing the use of force. They will by now have taken steps to buy off the French and Russians, who will back the resolution, or at any rate will not veto it. If, however, the Americans think they will not get a resolution through the Security Council, they will proceed anyway, arguing that the UN "has already decided" in the previous resolution.

How can Saddam Hussein prove that he does not have any weapons of mass destruction to the complete satisfaction of George W Bush. The answer is quite clear: he cannot. In the very best case the inspectors will return a verdict of "not proven", rather than "not guilty". And, as *The Economist* correctly pointed out "If America were to attack Iraq on that basis, it would, of course, cause consternation. But at the same time, the logic of war would take over. Even with-

out UN backing, Britain (probably) and France (possibly) would fall in behind America."

Despite all the humming and hawing in London and Washington, and despite all the protestations of Mr. Blix, we are in no doubt that America is hell-bent on war with Iraq, with or without a UN resolution. All the fussing about arms inspection and Security Council resolutions is really an irrelevant farce. If the Americans cannot find any evidence to justify their accusations they will simply invent it. We can expect some provocation or other in the near future. In fact, the Americans and British are bombing Iraqi positions in the so-called no-fly zones all the time. If they attempt to retaliate in self-defence, this will be used as an excuse to launch an all-out attack. This can happen at any time.

Those people who are under the delusion that the UN can halt war are mistaken. Appeals to the UN merely divert attention from what is really going on. War can break out at any time, and sooner than most people expect. The real task is to build a powerful anti-war movement from below. No time must be lost in doing so. □





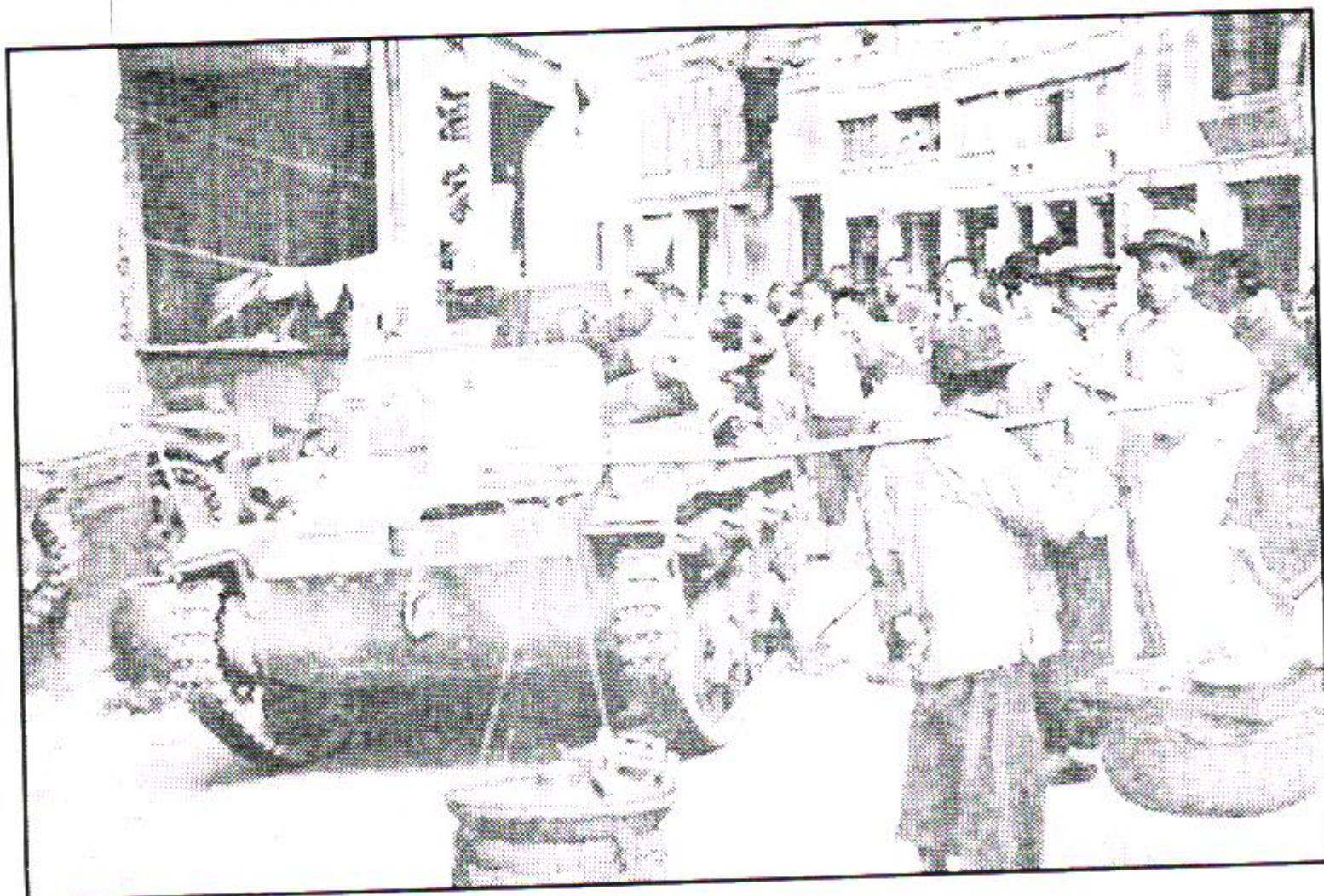
# obituary

## Wang Fanxi - Chinese Trotskyist, 1907 - 2003

In January, 95-year-old Wang Fanxi the veteran Chinese Trotskyist sadly passed away in Leeds. Wang, who described himself as "a mere foot-soldier in the Revolution", was one of the few links to the early Chinese Trotskyist movement left to us. His autobiography, *Chinese Revolutionary*, was translated by Gregor Benton and then released into numerous languages and was an inspiration to many in the movement.

Wang began his political activity in 1925 as a radical student nationalist and then joined the young Communist Party. After the defeat of the second Chinese revolution in 1927, he went to study at the Communist University for the Toilers of the East in Moscow, where he arrived just one month prior to the tenth anniversary of the October revolution.

At this time he was drawn into the factional struggle taking place within the Russian Communist Party. He and some hundreds of others began to question the official line and became sympathetic to Trotsky and the Left Opposition.



"News of the persecution of the Oppositionists filtered through to us with amazing speed", stated Wang. "This was odd, since the persecution was carried out in conditions of strictest secrecy. There was not a word about the Oppositionists in the press. Nevertheless, whenever anything important happened, we nearly always got to know of it more or less on the same day. For example, news of the suicide on 16 November 1927 of the Soviet diplomat Joffe, the man who had signed the joint declaration with Sun Yat-sen, spread like wildfire. We heard of Trotsky's deportation the very same morning that it took place. Students gathered in small groups in the refectory, the corridors, and the lecture rooms of the university to swap news of the event. There was scarcely a happy face among them. For three months we had taken part in a virtually non-stop 'discussion' of the struggle between the Stalinists and the Trotskyists..."

Wang read the opposition documents, such as Zinoviev's *Theses on the Chinese Revolution*, Trotsky's *The Chinese Revolution* and the *Theses of Comrade Stalin*, and after that the *Platform of the United Opposition of the CPSU*. "They had an enormous impact on me... From then on I became a 'Bolshevik-Leninist'."

Hundreds of Chinese students supported the opposition, but as with the Russian opposition they were violently suppressed. Wang returned to China where in Shanghai he worked in the

Communist Party's organisation department under Chou En-lai, but was forced to leave when his opposition views were discovered.

Wang then spent his time attempting to organise the Trotskyist movement, but for much of the 1930s he was imprisoned. This lasted up until the collapse of the authorities after the Japanese attack in 1937 when he was released. He then continued in his propagandist work, producing magazines and books.

By the late 1940s, Mao's guerrilla armies swept through Shanghai. Within three years many of the Trotskyists who had suffered under the Kuomintang were now to suffer at the hands of the Stalinists.

The Chinese Trotskyists were shipwrecked by the victory of Mao. They still clung to the old perspective that the victorious guerrilla armies would only be able to establish a bourgeois regime. However, as Ted Grant and the RCP leaders were able to foresee, the impasse of landlordism and capitalism in China and the existence of the Soviet Union as a model, pushed the Stalinists to expropriate Chinese capitalism and establish a regime in the image of Moscow. It was a distorted version of Trotsky's permanent revolution, where the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution could only be carried out by another class, in this case the peasantry used as a battering ram by the Stalinists.

Suffering repression after the Maoist takeover Wang was forced to leave China for Hong Kong in late November 1949. There he remained until 1975, when with help from friends he made his way to Europe. He finally found some respite in exile in Britain.

For the last few years he has been housebound and beset by physical difficulties. But he was still mentally alert and showed a keen interest in the current debates and literature of the movement. At the end of his life he remained aligned to the USFI, a grouping that never understood the developments unfolding in China. Wang was not a theoretician, and was confused on a number of issues, but he was a courageous man who defended the revolution until his death.

"Now that I am approaching the end of my life's journey, I cannot but feel happy to find that what appears before me is not the darkness after sunset, but the bright glimmering of day-break." □

by Rob Sewell

### ***Problems of the Chinese Revolution***

by Leon Trotsky

**354 pages, hard cover  
£5.95 plus £1.50 p&p**

**Available from wellred books at  
[wellred.marxist.com](http://wellred.marxist.com) or by post  
PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ**

**(make cheques payable to wellred)**



## Factories under workers' control: A lesson for the working class.

**Last December, in a meeting organized by the Argentina Solidarity Campaign, two workers from Argentina outlined the experiences in their factory (Zanon Ceramics), which was the first factory to come under workers' control during the current crisis. It was a very inspiring and informative account.**

by Pablo Sanchez

**D**ue to the economic crisis the unemployment figures have rocketed up. The number of beggars is now officially four million, more than nineteen million live under the poverty line. The Argentinean population is only thirty seven million.

During the late 90s, the working class had fought back against the De la Rúa Government and the vicious IMF plans with several strikes and demonstrations. This struggle reached its peak when during the revolutionary events of 19th and 20th December 2001 the masses took to the streets and overthrew the Government. The response of capitalism has been to plunge the country into still further economic chaos as they seek to try and save their remaining profits in the face of the oncoming disaster that they themselves created with their lust for loot.

But the response of the industrial working class to the crisis has not been as massive and organized as would be the case with other sections of the class. The fear of losing their jobs has held them back in the struggle. But some workers could no longer wait for the rest of their class to move and felt that they had to do something faced with the closure of their factory. This is the case with the workers of Ceramics Zanon (Zanon Ceramics). Despite the profitability of this company, set up with Italian capital (the owners also opened another factory in Buenos Aires), 100 redundancies were announced in 2000 together with a cut in the wages of all remaining employees. This caused an immediate 34-day long strike. After the strike the management then proposed the sacking of 300 of the 360 workers left in the plant. Faced with the effective shutting down of the plant the workforce decided to occupy the factory under worker's control.

Now the workers meet three times a week to decide production and coordinate their work. They have discussed the problems that the various factories under workers occupation face from the

attacks of the police, boycott of other supplier companies and so on. When they saw that none of the usual suppliers were going to provide clay for a factory under workers' control, they asked the indigenous people of the region of Neuquen (the Mapuche people) to provide them with cheap raw materials. The Mapuches who previously had refused to give clay to Zanon, agreed because they saw this struggle as being linked to their own.

The workers have transformed the union at a local level and joined in the struggle of the unemployed movement (piqueteros) to help provide them with jobs.

Another example of the level of organisation now in place is the establishment of their own workers' militia at the factory perimeter to defend themselves from the raids of the police and the bosses' thugs.

After the example of Zanon other factories have followed including Brukman, another ceramic factory with a long tradition of struggle. At the moment there are more than 150 factories being run by workers. There has been a National Assembly of occupied factories which passed a very politically advanced resolution. Among other things they have called for the following:

- A federation of the occupied factories, united with the unemployed in a plan of struggle.
- Occupation under workers' control



of all factories closing down and the opening of the books to see the true situation rather than that presented by the old bosses.

● The creating of a fighting fund for those on strike and their families.

● Nationalisation of the banks and the creation of a National Bank giving low credits to the factories under workers' control.

● Immediate recall of the workers representatives at any time.

Not only that they are also calling, because the capitalists are leaving the country with millions, for a workers Government.

The major handicap at the moment is the size of the companies involved. So far none of the occupied factories are from the major industrial sector in the country, but this is just a question of time. As soon as the crisis bites still further, capitalists are going to withdraw their money from Argentina leaving the big oil companies, the steel industry, transport and so on under threat. This will pose the question of who runs society as the first point on the agenda. The unions that have not fought yet, will have to do so. And this will open up a new stage in the Argentinean revolution that started on 19th and 20th December 2001. What is really needed is a joint struggle of the piqueteros, the popular assemblies, the federation of the occupied factories and all the unions, armed with a fighting leadership and a socialist programme.

Sometimes when we talk about a revolution people think about a far away country, poor and backward. This is NOT the case of Argentina, a rich and industrialized country. It is the fourth food exporter in the world, and an economic power in Latin America.

The effects of the current crisis are the results of the IMF plans to open up markets, the so-called neoliberalism or, in reality, capitalism at the end of the 20th Century. What is happening today could happen in any other country with similar characteristics (i.e. any economically developed country). We need to learn from the lesson of the present and organize to prevent such a development here in Britain. Only a system that can put an end to booms and slumps can avoid the Argentinean experience. The workers in Argentina and the workers in Britain need the same solution, a socialist transformation of society. □



## Build for Socialism

The new year brings with it important opportunities to raise the socialist banner.

As war comes closer and closer, the demo in London on February 15th takes on an ever greater importance. This will be the centrepiece of what will be a massive movement around the country against the war. There will be plenty of opportunities to sell *Socialist Appeal* (on the demo, at meetings, in the colleges and workplaces and elsewhere) and open up discussions with workers, students and youth over the fundamental questions of war and imperialism. Many in the movement approach the issue of war from an apolitical 'moral' point of view but it is important for socialists to look beyond this and understand the class nature of war, why capitalism is compelled to send thousands of men and women into violent conflict and what they wish to gain from it.

*Socialist Appeal* has consistently sought to provide such an explanation not just of this central issue but of all the major questions facing society today. Only the method of Marxism can provide an understanding not only of what and why but also what can be done.

But to do this we need your help, not only in buying and/or selling *Socialist Appeal*, but also important financial help. Papers such as *The Sun* and the rest attack workers on strike, like the firefighters for example, with the aid of well financed daily publications. Everyday they spew out lies against strikers, asylum seekers, single parents... anyone they

can hit on as an easy target. Their aim is to confuse workers and distract them from their real enemy - the bosses. We are having to combat them with considerably less funding available than they can count on. So we need your help. In November we launched a Xmas appeal for £5000 in donations to help us keep the flag flying. As at the start of this month we have raised nearly £2800 towards that target - so we have £2200 to go and only a few weeks, if that, to get it. But we can do it - it is down to you.

If you haven't placed a donation, now is the time to get the new year off to a flying start by sending it in straight away. Those who have promised donations should redeem those pledges without further delay. The fight is on and we need every penny sooner rather than later. Donations can be sent to us, made payable to Socialist Appeal, at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ.

Donations received over the last period, selected at random, include Kenny Cairns (£20), Julianna Grant (£100), Andy Viner (£30), Alison Mandrill (£10), Peterborough readers (£110), Pam Woods (£50), Denis McCluskey (£30), Linda Bell (£15), Ray McHale (£200), Mark Turner (£20), A London reader (£500!), £300 plus from a Edinburgh meeting, Roxio (£36), Peter Currall (£10), Miles Barter (£5) and many others who cannot be named this time because of lack of space. We thank you all - keep it up! ☐

by Steve Jones


## Subscribe to Socialist Appeal

●Safety ●Youth ●Ecuador ●Reviews ●Letters ●Wellred

# Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement February 2001 issue 87 Price: £1

**Vauxhall threaten closure: Workers ballot for action**



**Militant Action**

**the only way**

2001 YEAR

Tube workers ballot to fight privatisation danger  
Stop Blairite 'project'  
PCS: Right wing defeated  
Environment: Global warning  
Ireland: The truth about the Easter Rising

Berlin: Three months after the fall of the wall  
Russia: at the crossroads  
How the SPD betrayed the Transnistria movement

**www.marxist.com**

I want to subscribe to *Socialist Appeal* starting with issue number.....  
(Britain £15/Europe £18/ Rest of the World £20)

I want more information about *Socialist Appeal's* activities

I enclose a donation of £.....  
to *Socialist Appeal* Press Fund

Total enclosed: £.....  
(cheques/ PO to *Socialist Appeal*)

Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

E-mail.....

Return to: *Socialist Appeal*,  
PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ



Editorial: No to Imperialist Aggression in Iraq!.....3  
 Industrial Editorial:  
 Firefighters Stand Firm! Their fight is our fight!.....4  
 News.....5  
 Justice in the media.....6  
 News.....7  
 London's "congestion charge" won't cure gridlock.....9  
 Fiat Dispute: Militancy shifts up a gear.....10  
 RMT Arriva off the rails.....8  
 No to top-up charges!.....12  
 Roy "The Renegade".....13  
 2003: hope and reality.....14  
 The Living Ideas of Karl Marx.....16  
 Opposition "strike" or bosses lock out? An eyewitness account.....20  
 PTUDC on tour in Britain.....22  
 US imperialism hell bent on war with Iraq.....24  
 Wang Fanxi - Chinese Trotskyist, 1907 - 2003.....28  
 Factories under workers' control:  
 A lesson for the working class.....29  
 Build for Socialism.....30  
 Notice board.....31



**editor: Alan Woods**  
 PO Box 2626,  
 London N1 7SQ  
 tel 020 7515 7675  
 appeal@socialist.net  
 www.socialist.net  
 www.marxist.com

www.newyouth.com

## notice board

February 2003

### Don't attack Iraq

**Demonstrate  
 15 Feb 2003**

12 noon Enbaktment

**Rally to Hyde Park**

## Socialist Appeal Stands for:

- ✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.
- ✚ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £6.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.
- ✚ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.
- ✚ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
- ✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.
- ✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.
- ✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.
- ✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay

for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

- ✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

- ✚ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.

- ✚ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.

- ✚ **No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.

- ✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.

- ✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



*inside:* Venezuela ● economy ● Marx ● top-up fees

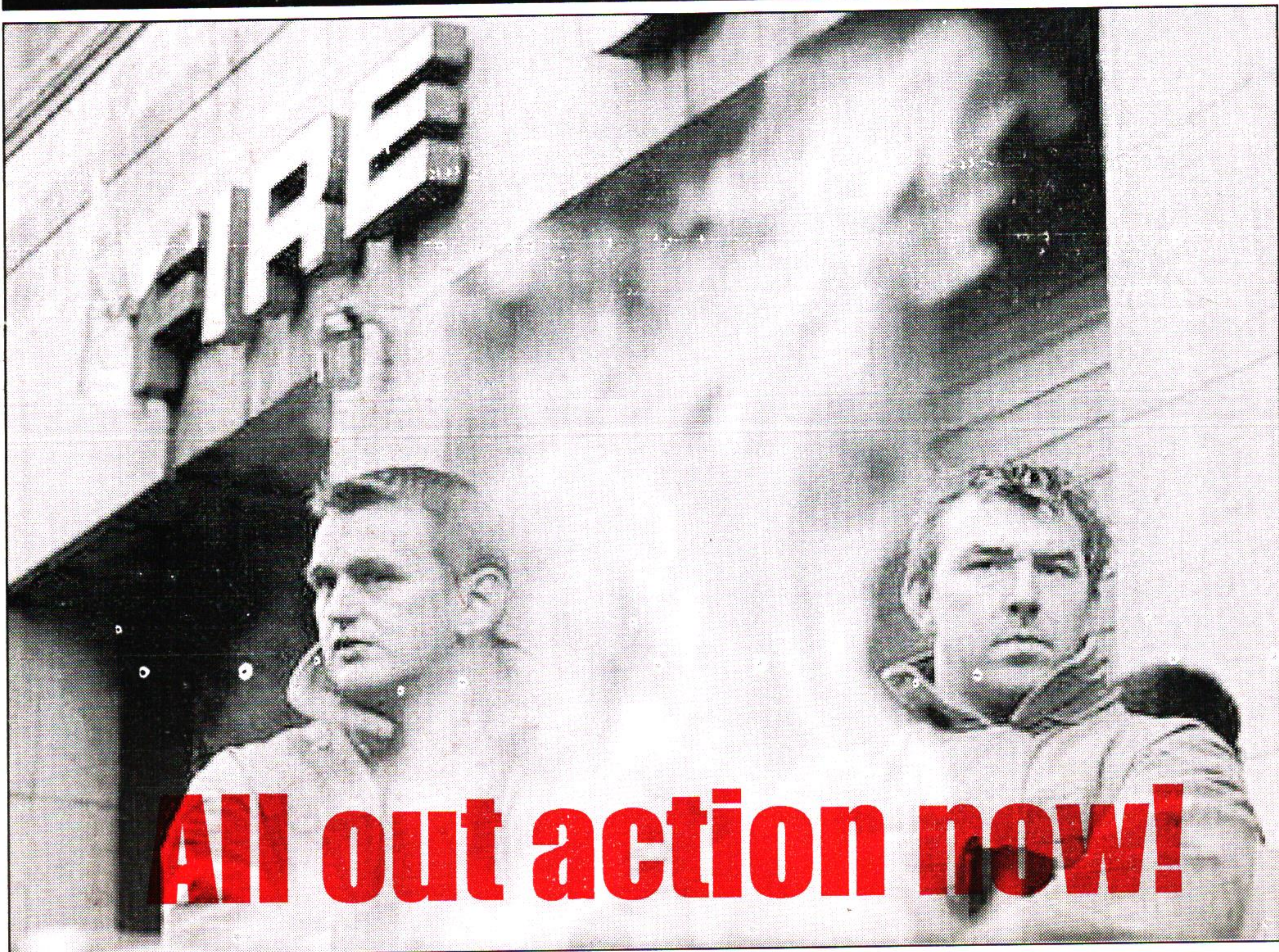
# Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

February 2003 issue 108 Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2

## Firefighters dispute:

# We must win!



## All out action now!

[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)