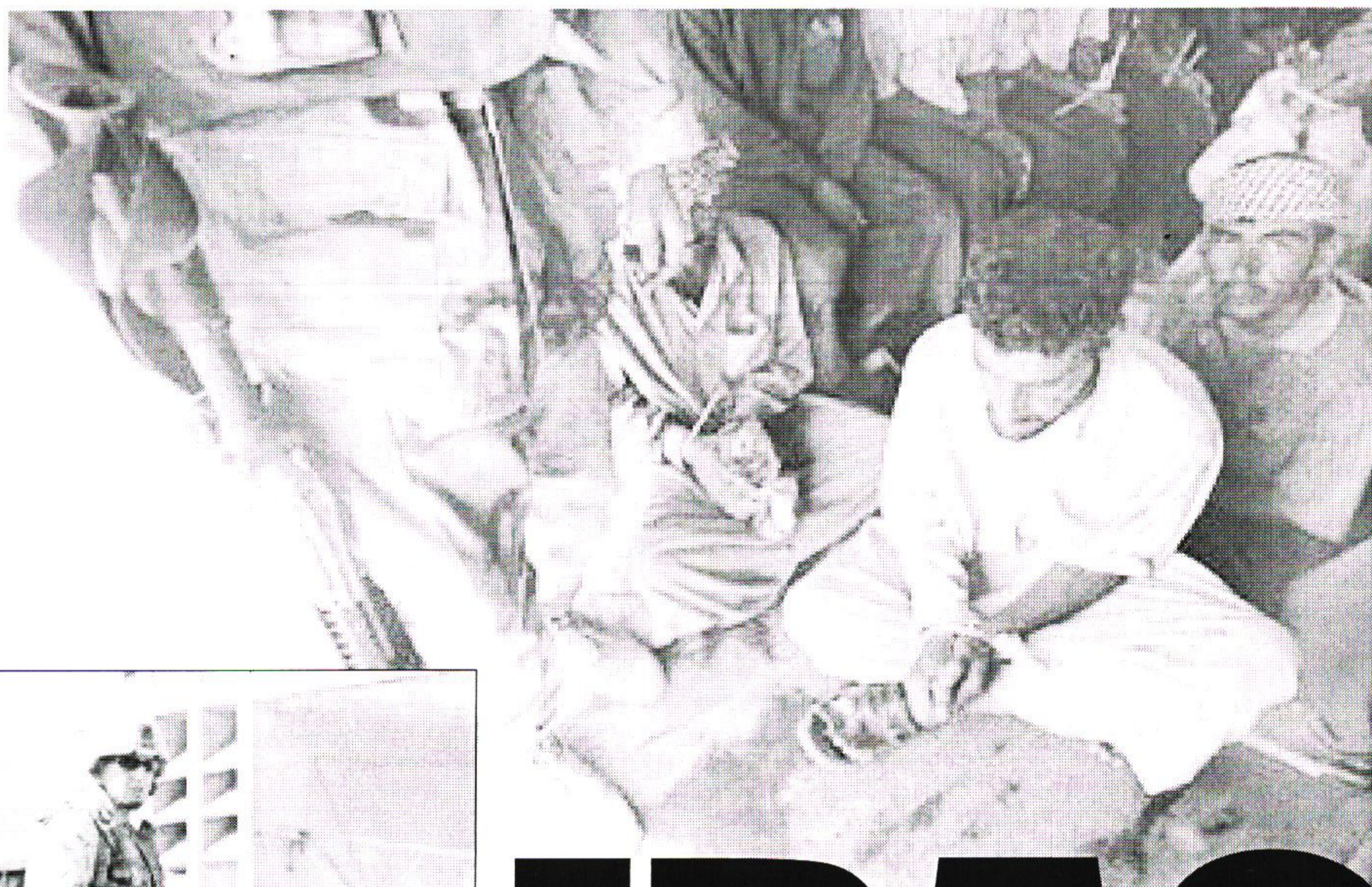


The Marxist voice of the labour movement

# Socialist Appeal

July/August 2003 issue 114

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



# IRAQ

## Imperialism's new Vietnam?

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**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**

# index

## this month

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Editorial:  
 Economic fears of deflation and the last laugh.....3

Reclaim the Party! -  
 UNISON throws down the gauntlet.....4  
 Renationalise entire rail network.....5  
 A right royal Charlie.....8  
 We need time to breathe.....8  
 All the Prime Minister's men.....9  
 The Great Pensions Robbery.....10

Immigration control - a tool of the bosses.....12

Anti-EU protests on streets of Thessaloniki .....20  
 Third general strike rocks Nigeria in three years.....21  
 Alan Woods speaks in the Trotsky Museum.....22

Student protests reveal  
 weakness of the Iranian regime.....24

Interview with Ted Grant .....28

Fighting Fund.....30

**Amicus - page 6**

Amicus points the way forward

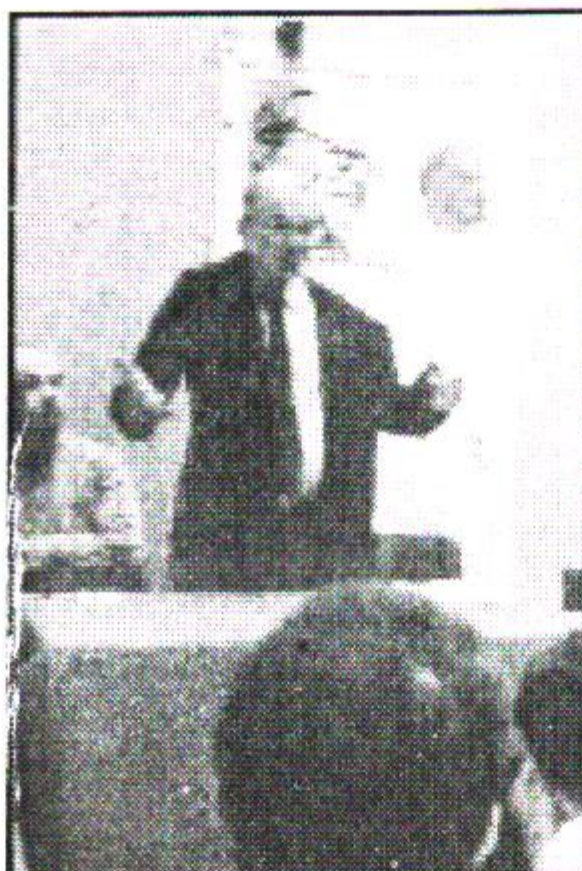
**UNISON - page 4**

UNISON throws down the gauntlet

**After the fall of Saddam - a new Vietnam for "coalition" forces? - page16**



**Back cover:  
 Time to Reclaim  
 Labour!**



**Celebrate Ted Grant's  
 90th birthday!**

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**The deadline for articles for issue 115 is August 15th**



# Economic fears of deflation and the last laugh

**M**arx explained long ago that capitalism operates through a series of booms and slumps. In the boom of the Nineties, his ideas were laughed at. Now, the situation is turning out differently as the world capitalist economy splutters. No wonder a recent article in the FT stated, "Marx seems to be getting the last laugh yet."

As the world economy continues to slow down, giving rise to fears of a deflationary spiral, the US Federal Reserve has been forced once again to cut its interest rates. Greenspan has slashed rates, down from 6.5 per cent at the end of 2000, to just one per cent today, the lowest for more than four decades. This is the thirteenth cut in three years,

"Nothing could better show the depressed state of the post-bubble US economy", states the Financial Times. "The appetite for still more aggressive policy action reflects the widespread fear of deflation. This is not an unreasonable worry. The world and the US economies are well into their third year of a 'growth recession' - a time when the economy grows well below trend and inflation is already very low, wise people should worry that the US will follow Japan into deflation." (FT, 28/29 June)

With the British economy also in the doldrums, there is increased speculation that the Bank of England will follow suit and cut interest rates in July and August. Gordon Brown's strategy, based on growth of 2-2.5 per cent, is coming apart at the seams. After all, annual growth over the last two years averaged 1.8 per cent, and the prospects are bleak. Recent

figures show that Britain's economy is in its worst state since the early 1990s recession. Growth figures have almost ground to a halt in the first three months of this year - a mere 0.1 per cent. The news was "an unambiguous warning that the economic outlook is darkening."

Consumer spending growth slipped to a quarterly growth rate of 0.2 per cent - the weakest for more than five years - as households prune back spending. "It is not a question of being close to the precipice. We are already over it and are desperately trying to claw our way back", stated a leading retailer. The slowdown in the housing market has added to the gloom. The building society Bradford and Bingley saw a 20 per cent drop in its housing transactions, which is certain to dent its first-half profits. Record household debt now stands at 125 per cent of household incomes.

## Investment

Business investment, which is the only real basis of a sustained recovery in the economy, is at rock bottom. It is 6.1 per cent lower than in the same quarter a year ago. Without the spending on new plant, machines and fixed capital, there is no basis on which the economy can grow. However, with excess capacity, there is little incentive for the capitalists to spend money on increasing it, even if the cost of borrowing is lowered still further. Lower interest rates might not lead to investment but could they prop up consumer spending?

Consumer spending, which has taken up the slack and sustained growth over

the last few years, cannot last indefinitely. Six per cent of last year's consumer spending came from equity raised from re-mortgaging homes.

"Growth was achieved by encouraging unsustainable rises in consumer expenditure", reports the Financial Times. In fact, it is rapidly slowing down already. And government expenditure, which increased by 2.5 per cent over the previous quarter, failed to offset the effects of the consumer retrenchment.

## Boom and bust

Gordon Brown, our master financial wizard, has repeatedly claimed that he has done away with the cycle of 'boom and bust'. But as with all those who suffer from illusions in the capitalist system, they can never see further than the booms of capitalism. They have never understood that the boom and slump cycle is an integral part of the capitalist system, just as inhaling and exhaling is part and parcel of our lives. The long period of boom during the 1990s is turning to bust. The only reason why the boom has lasted so long is that it has been artificially extended by the enormous amounts of credit being pumped into the system. But like all excess bingeing, there will be an almighty hangover.

However, whatever the short-term changes to the British economy, the economic climate looks bleak. Not only is America slowing down but so is Europe. The German economy, the most powerful in Europe, is stagnant and there are predictions of five million unemployed by the winter. The

Japanese economy, the second in the world, has been in the grip of a deflationary spiral for the last decade. It is this example that terrifies the serious American economists.

The world economy is hanging by a thread. If the US economy fails, then the world economy will collapse with it. Tinkering with interest rates will not solve the problem of over-production, or excess capacity, that has become endemic. "Working for deflation are the rising excess capacity, the high levels of consumption in GDP, the ongoing financial deficits of the household sector, the high debt burdens of the private sector and the weak demand abroad", states the FT.

Despite this scenario, the Blair government is still full of praise for the market economy. It hopes it can run capitalism better than the Tories. But it will come unstuck, as the economy is dragged down by the world contraction.

Tinkering with capitalism will solve nothing. Crises and the problems workers face are endemic to the system. That was the reason for the labour movement adopting the aim of socialism.

In the words of RH Tawney - and fondly quoted by Neil Kinnock in the distant past -

"It is improbable that a third Labour government would be guilty of the same follies as ruined its two predecessors... It must be prepared to live dangerously - it must on no account remain in power merely on sufferance... Either it means a decisive break with the whole policy of capitalist governments, or it means nothing at all." □



## Reclaim the Party! - UNISON throws down the gauntlet

by Mark Turner,  
Cardiff County  
Labour Link Officer  
(Personal Capacity)

This year UNISON celebrates its tenth anniversary, and, of course, to listen to the leadership, you would think the public service union had changed the world.

Well, the world has certainly changed in ten years; the Tories were thrown from office and the New Tories who have taken over Labour, have carried on where they left off, meaning more of our members are now working on worse pay and conditions, in the same 'services' but within the private sector. In local government, the national agreement has been cut to the bare minimum, and the parts to be agreed locally have, by and large, just been removed. The gulf of pay difference between men and women in local government, which was supposed to be eradicated under the 1996 Single Status agreement, shows no sign of being addressed. The health service continues to lurch from one crisis to another, with many ancillary services being picked off and operated to make profits from patient's suffering. Foundation hospitals represent a major threat to the union and the service, PFI has carried on unchecked, and low pay is endemic throughout the public services in which UNISON organises. Some achievement!

It is no wonder that the frustrations of the rank and file members, through the activists, have been voiced in recent conferences by calls to review the link with the Labour

Party. Originally, the aim of some delegates was to call for the breaking of the link altogether, and as a step towards that they called for a 'review' of whether the link was value for money. Many delegates expressed their frustrations by voting for this review, as a shot across the bows of New Labour. The review has taken place over 2 years, and in that time, those intending to break the link, have retreated, in stages, as they realise that the union is not ready to destroy it, and strengthen the arm of reaction within the Party. First, they argued, 'oh no! we don't want to break the link, just 'democratise' it so that local branches can back any candidate, from any party who backs 'union policies'.

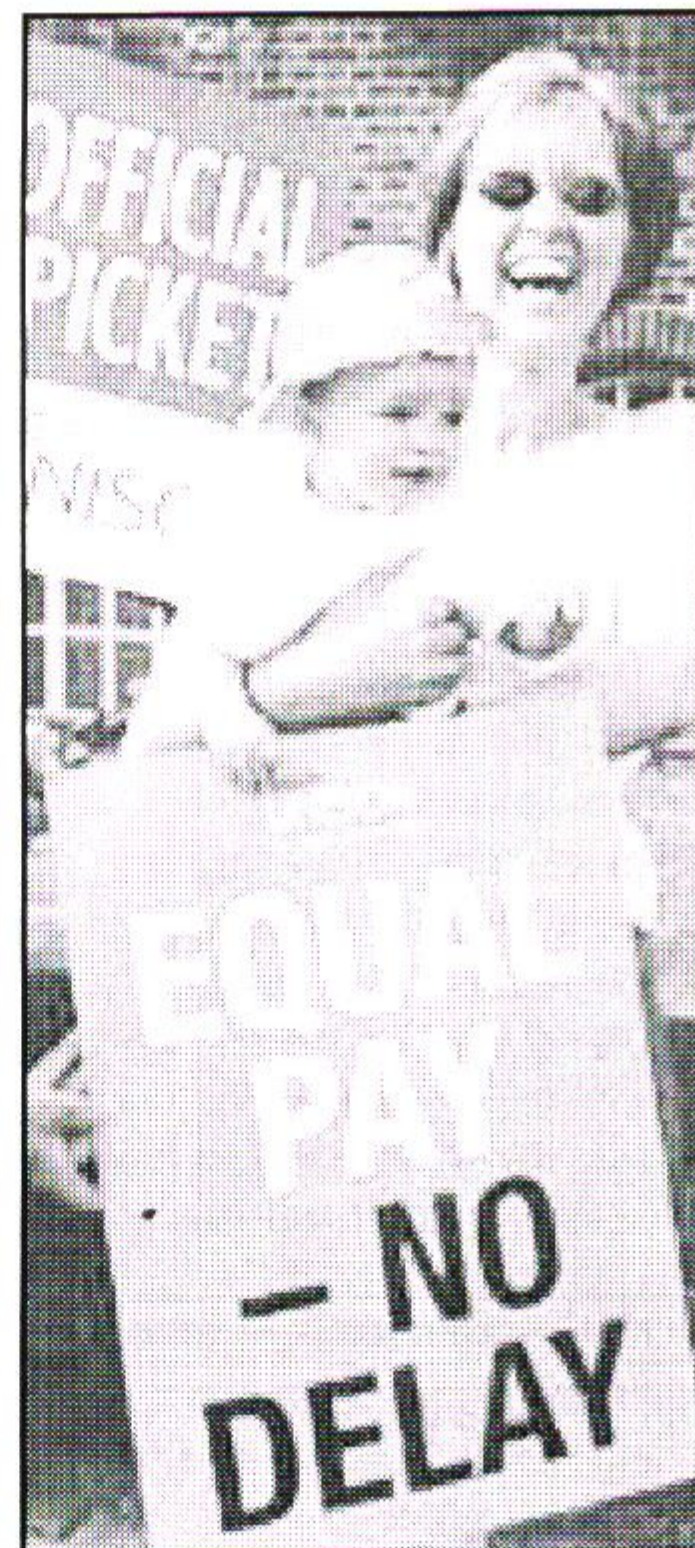
### Dishonest

It would be charitable to say this is naïve, since the union would lose any authority it currently has in the Labour Party. But, actually it is dishonest, since the more likely outcome would be that it would lead to the Labour Party excluding the union, because it could not possibly tolerate an affiliated body which simultaneously wishes to play a part in policy formation and at the same time campaign and financially support opposing parties. But this was the show-down which everyone was anticipating at this year's conference.

The problem is that the leadership of the Affiliated Political Fund have not acted as representatives of the union within the Party, but have acted as New Labour agents within the union. The leadership of the union has acted as apologists for New Labour, even as they engage in more

vicious attacks on public sector workers. There was a genuine fear amongst mainstream delegates, that the ultra left could win the day, and the obstructions and obfuscations of the leadership have not helped lend them credibility. As the big debate loomed on the Wednesday morning, it was strange that one of the main motions and amendments was withdrawn, leaving the option only to support the status quo, or the cutting of financial support for Labour. The ultra left now rallied around another amendment which called for the establishment of a third political fund, so that other parties could be supported. The General Secretary, Dave Prentis, defended the link in the only way which could succeed. He led the charge against the New Labour cuckoos in the party nest, and pledged that UNISON would be in the forefront of a campaign to Reclaim the Party. 'Some say we should break the link and set up a new workers' party, but we already have a workers' party- it's called The Labour Party!' He pledged to work with the other left trade union leaders on the TUC General Council, and the Campaign Group of MPs to plan the removal of the New Labour Tories who are wrecking our Party. He acknowledged the failings of the APF and pledged to make it work for the members. In the end, Prentis's leap to the left won the day, as the motions supporting the NEC were overwhelmingly carried.

The mood of the rest of the conference was subdued, as most delegates have moved further left, and there was little disagreement on the fights and campaigns which have to be waged. There was



a genuine sense of pride in the local government pay strike of last year, but motions critical of the leadership's early acceptance of an ACAS proposal and the suspension of the second strike, were also passed. In the end, the new NEC was welcomed, with the largest left contingent ever. The United Left made huge gains, but failed to acknowledge the success of the left slate in Wales, which overthrew the previous three delegates. The difference is that they are left, but Labour, and the United Left NEC members could have allies in the Welsh members, but will have to adopt a less sectarian approach to prevent them joining the right wing bloc.

UNISON activists must not be content with Prentis' fine words- they have to be translated into action. UNISON members must be recruited into the Party to fight for UNISON policies, and those purporting to represent UNISON at all levels, but in particular, on the Labour Party NEC, must be made democratically accountable, so that they can no longer support Blair whilst hiding in the shadows. □



# Renationalise entire rail network

by Phil Mitchinson

Connex, the private rail company that brought us 'leaves on the line', a 'one-inch snowdrift' and a 'flea infestation' amongst their many excuses for running one in five trains late, has finally been booted off the rails.

The French owned company has become the first private train operator to be stripped of its franchise by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). The SRA said Connex services, which are centred on busy commuter lines into London, were plagued by poor service performance and an overdependence on subsidies funded by the taxpayer.

Connex South Eastern is among the busiest rail networks in Britain. It carries 132 million passengers a year, running 1,800 services a day. But three to four hundred of those run late, and carriages are typically 103% full during the morning peak period.

In December last year the SRA gave the company £58m to 'stabilise its position', at the same time demanding that it draw up plans to improve radically its financial performance. Instead, Connex recently requested another £200m in subsidy. Indeed, all the private rail companies have taken the begging bowl to the SRA. They all want a public subsidy for their private profit. Virgin Trains another disastrous failure is getting £282m of aid to recompense it for maintenance problems on the west coast mainline. These people are not interested in running trains just making money.

Yet the SRA insist that Connex was a one-off. Out of all the train operators demanding greater subsidies, they said Connex was the only one with serious deficiencies in the way it managed its money. This tells us all we need to know about privatisation - apparently Connex were not dumped because of their inability to run a train service



but because of their inability to keep proper accounts.

According to the Strategic Rail Authority's latest figures, Connex was merely the third most unreliable operator in the south-east, beating Thameslink and South West Trains. These companies should be booted out too.

## Fat controllers

Rather than squander another penny of our money subsidising fat cat bonuses and share dividends all the Train Operating Companies should be taken back into public ownership at once. The various fat controllers have already made a pretty penny out of wrecking the rail network and should not get a penny more. Nor should these same incompetent profiteers be allowed to sit on the boards of newly nationalised rail companies. Instead these should be made up of representatives of the government and the rail unions. Railworkers are the only people who can really be trusted with running our rail network. In poll after poll the vast majority demand the renationalisation of the railways. For all the government's talk of regulation, this authority and that committee, the plain fact is you cannot control what you don't own.

Yet the SRA say they will be offering the London rail fran-

chise back to private companies in a year from now. Mick Rix, general secretary of the drivers' union Aslef, criticised the SRA, saying: "What's the point in handing £58m to Connex and then snatching the franchise away a few months later, only to hand it to another group of fat cats?"

The privatisation of the railways saw the network smashed into fragments with different private companies responsible for running trains, and for track maintenance. All of them have been a disaster. Just over a year ago the infamous Railtrack was declared bankrupt. Yet now its replacement, the supposedly not-for-profit Network Rail, has announced big bonuses for its top bosses and thousands of job losses.

Network Rail (NR) claim that at least an additional £1bn a year is needed for the next decade to repair and modernise the rail network. This is on top of the £10bn subsidy it has already said it needs to cover budget deficits until 2006. Anyone who has travelled on Britain's railways would not dispute that this is the scale of investment needed. However, if this money is handed over to private company it will be paid out in dividends and bonuses not invested in repairing our decrepit railways.

In addition to the demand-

ed subsidy NR are looking to make 'efficiency savings' of £1.3bn a year by axing 2,000 jobs from the 14,000-strong workforce over three years. It is hard to see how sacking one in seven of the workforce will succeed in making the railways more efficient. NR now admit that they see little chance of getting the trains running properly before 2009! Like everything else on the rail network their targets are running late.

Rail services have been cut back, fares hiked at rates higher than inflation, and yet it has now been revealed that this 'not-for-profit' company's top directors could earn bonuses of up to 60 per cent of their salaries. Directors received bonus payments totalling £1.8 million last year even though trains were still running late.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, described the job losses as "obscene". He added: "It is huge bonuses for the directors and P45s for the rest. We will resist any compulsory redundancies, with industrial action if necessary."

Richard Rosser, general secretary of rail union TSSA, said "NR was created as a not-for-profit organisation so every pound went into building a better railway. Last week we hear of loyalty bonuses for directors and now thousands of jobs will go - this simply does not add up."

Private companies exist to make a profit not to provide services. Not just the train operating companies, but the infrastructure and the entire rail network needs to be taken back into public ownership before the profiteers do still more damage.

As Bob Crow correctly argues "On the infrastructure side and the train operating side there's a crisis. What we need is root-and-branch reform. From our point of view that means renationalisation."

□



## Amicus points the way forward

by Kris Lawrie, Amicus member

The conferences for MSF and AEEU, the two unions merging to form Amicus, Britain's biggest engineering union, ran concurrently separated by a joint rules conference that debated and formally voted on the rulebook for the new union.

Big changes are taking place in Amicus and this was reflected in the mood of the conference. Almost every delegate commented that the AEEU conference was a refreshing change over the conferences that have taken place in previous years. It was much more open than the stage managed events in Jackson's day, with far fewer suited fulltime officials prowling about.

The election of Derek Simpson caused turmoil in the old rightwing of both unions, and has thrown them into confusion. The right has always based itself on the apathy among a large section of the members to keep them in power. But a decisive section of the membership are changing their ideas and beginning to look for a change in the discredited policies of the past 10 years.

### The New Rulebook

The one-day rules conference included delegates from both unions to debate and formally ratify the new rulebook. This was the last important step in the formal merger of the two unions in to Amicus.

The broad left of the new union, Amicus Unity Gazette, met weeks before the conference, as reported in an earlier issue of Socialist Appeal, to

decide what position to take on the question of the rulebook in the rules conference. The decision was taken to support the rulebook despite the fact that it was far from perfect. If the rulebook had been voted down by the rules conference it would have put off the EC elections and left the rightwing in control of the joint union. It was decided that the main priority is to win the EC elections and create a left executive. A left EC could immediately begin work on changing the rules to allow greater control and participation by lay activists, and give the power back to conference rather than the EC. Therefore the left supported the rulebook tactically as a starting point.

### The Crisis in British Manufacturing

The main issues of the conference were pensions, corporate

killing, employment and trade union rights, and the crisis in British manufacturing. Derek Simpson said 155,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last year alone, 13,000 a month. He criticised the lack of investment in industry, and the lack of support from the Labour government:

*"We are literally staring into the abyss. If we compare manufacturing bases with other leading countries, within five Parliamentary terms we face having a prime minister not fit to share a table with his or her G8 counterparts. No other country is sacrificing their industrial base in this way because our competitors realise how vital manufacturing is, not only to the people that work in the sector and in related jobs but for the whole UK economy.*

*"Further job cuts undermine the UK's capability to sustain our existing manufacturing base, yet if the government introduced the same employment protection here as is enjoyed on the continent, UK*

workers wouldn't be the easy target for redundancy they are now."

Simpson also announced plans to organise a co-ordinated demonstration of manufacturing unions at this year's Labour Party conference over the destruction of manufacturing, and the anti union laws which hamper our ability to fight back.

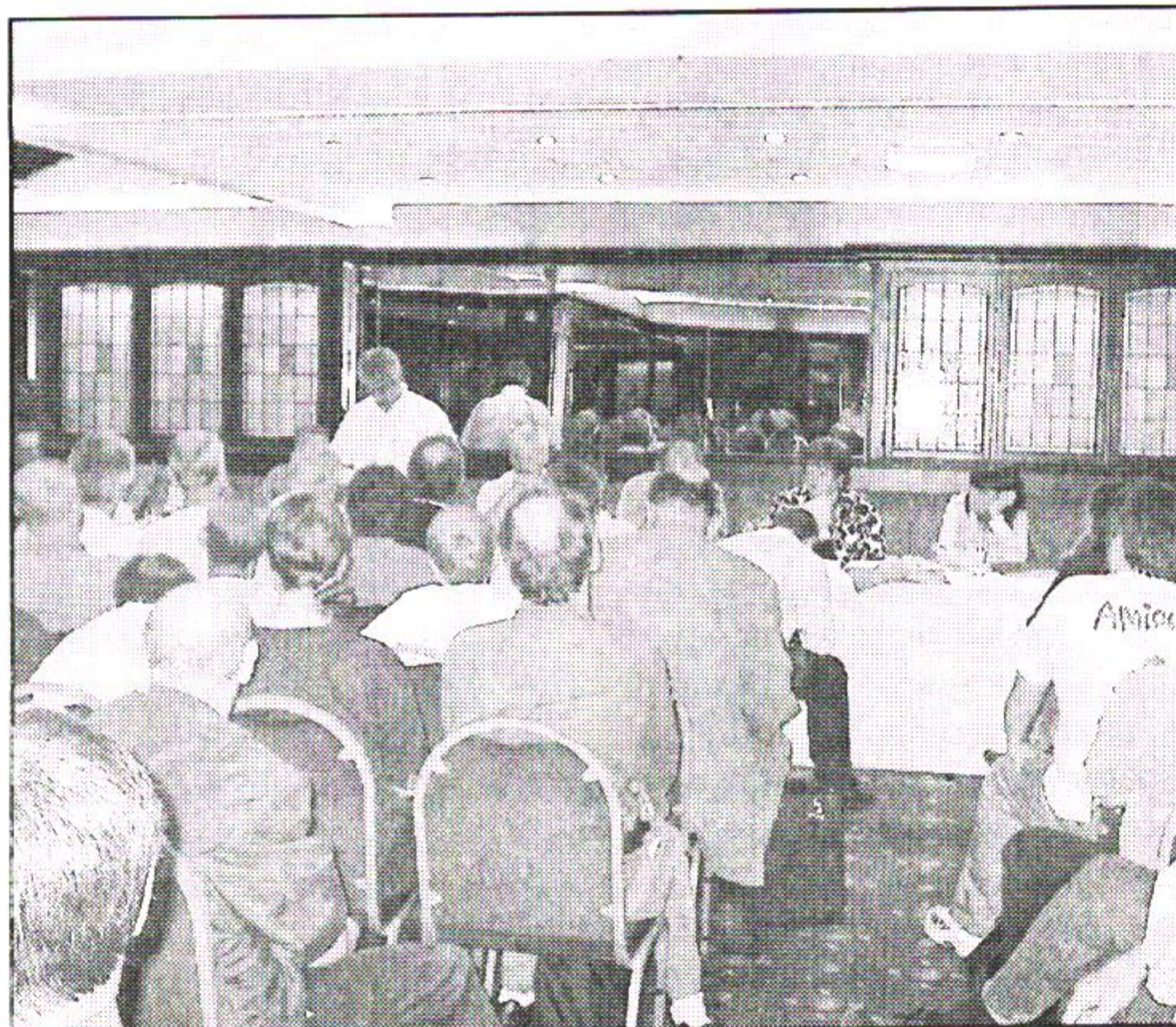
### Fight for Socialist Policies

Socialist Appeal supporters in Amicus intervened in the conference with a special pamphlet, *A Socialist Programme for Amicus*, and organised two fringe meetings on the need for the unions to reclaim the Labour Party. We sold over 150 of these pamphlets, which were very well received - great potential exists for socialist ideas in the unions at the current time.

The union membership is disillusioned with the policies of their former rightwing leaders, who have consistently sold-out the members interests with their policies of 'sweetheart deals' and partnership with the bosses. Workers have been forced to get by in whatever way they can even during a period of economic boom, so they have had their heads down.

The election of a Labour government in 1997 was the first step in workers trying to change their situation. Blair and his clique have squandered the huge Labour majority carrying through the same policies as clique around Jackson in the AEEU - they are more concerned with their cronies in the city than their supporters in the union movement.

The election of Derek





Simpson was a huge victory for the left. The members of AEEU threw out Jackson and his ideas, and that has been the trend across the labour movement. This trend will continue because workers are sick of their own leaders selling them out in collusion with their boss.

For the progress that has been made in Amicus AEEU to continue we need a left EC, which will put forward policies in the interests of the members. But if we want a victory for the left we will have to work for it. This is the only way to get a union fighting tooth and nail against closures, against job losses, for a decent wage and decent pension for all.

This fight must be taken into the Labour Party. The new union will have a powerful voice in the Labour Party, we sponsor 120 MPs through donations to constituency parties. We must use that influence to reclaim and transform the Labour Party. The Labour Party was built by the unions to represent the interests of workers in parliament. Only a Labour government with socialist policies can begin to solve the problems that face us.



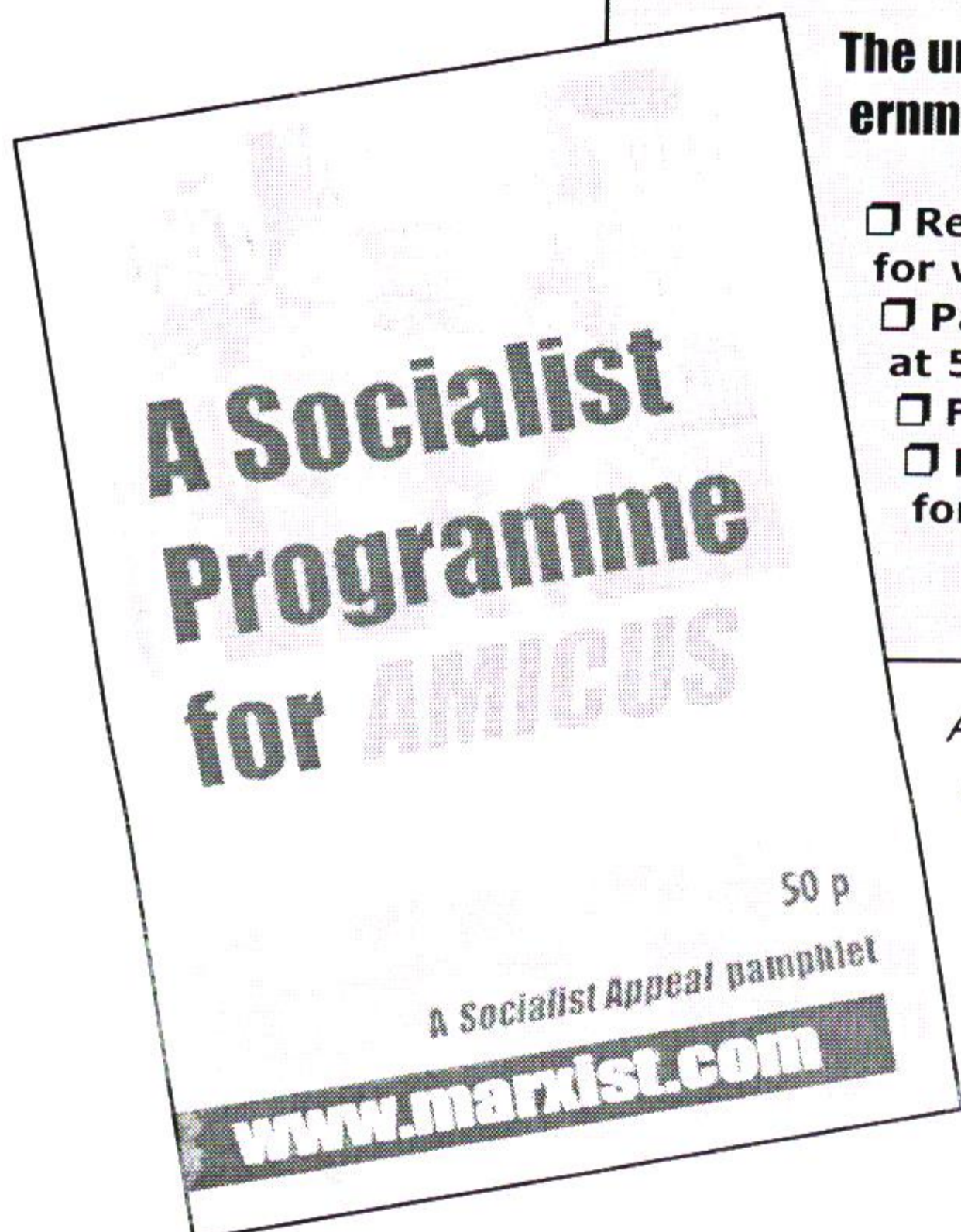
## We need a left EC for:

- An end to sweetheart 'no strike' deals.
- The union must fight tooth and nail against job losses and threatened factory closures
- A democratic union, give power back to lay-member led branches, and restore district committees to break the centralised control.
- Election of all officials

## The unions must reclaim the Labour Party and fight for a Labour government with socialist policies.

- Repeal all anti union legislation - for full rights and protection for workers from day one.
- Pay us what we are worth - A fair wage for all, and retirement at 50 with a full pension
- For a socialist plan of production
- Failing companies must be nationalised and run by the workforce.

*A Socialist Programme for Amicus*, A Socialist Appeal pamphlet. In this new publication Phil Mitchinson analyses the history of the unions which are merging to form Amicus and the part the union has to play in the current shift to the left in the labour movement. Order your copies at 70p each (including postage) from Socialist Appeal, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ.





# A right royal Charlie

by Steve Jones

From time to time members of our great royal family like to stop stuffing their faces at banquets and watching people bow and scrape at them, in order to offer us all some great pearls of wisdom, no doubt gleaned from their inbred understanding of the world. Despite the fact that none of these people have ever shown any particular academic leanings, to say the least, they seem to believe that they alone can grasp the problems of the world and point the way forward for all us lesser mortals. Chief amongst these is Prince Charles who, armed with the great inner wisdom gained at the feet of mystic nutter Laurens Van Der Post, has spent the last few decades pontificating about such things as

architecture, modern art (of course) and the need to talk to plants. Now he is weighing in on the question of teaching. Last year he started the Prince Charles Summer School, organised by cronies from the private education sector, so that he could lecture the assembled poor sods, drawn from various parts of the education world, on the need to abandon 'trendy' teaching and 'go back to basics.' This year, at time of writing, he is set to repeat the exercise in Norwich. Here he will warn the nation about the need to return to studying such vital aspects of history as the lives of the kings and queens and great statesmen of England.

Apart from the fact that it seems rather odd that we should spend all our school-

days looking at his family tree (useful I suppose to see what a double crossing, murderous, conniving bunch of morons the kings and queens of England have been down the ages) there is a serious intention behind all this. Whilst the royals are particularly keen that we should understand and accept the great part they play in the national fabric, so they laughingly believe, there is a greater desire amongst sections of the ruling class to ensure that education equals indoctrination in favour of their class. They hark back to the good old days when schooling, particularly for the working classes, was all about learning just the bare necessities to be able to work for the bosses. Such education would be linked up with hours of twaddle about the great achievements of your Lords and Masters, the glory of the British Empire and the need to show due respect to anyone

from a 'better' class than you. Such 'trendy' ideas as learning about the history of your class, the struggles of trade unionists, the oppression of capitalism and the brutality of imperialism are not to be welcomed lest they encourage people to question and think for themselves. There has been an ongoing campaign to push education in the direction of just teaching a pro-Western, eurocentric, pro-capitalist position, rather than something which could raise awareness and broaden horizons. Unfortunately, through such devices as the national curriculum, New Labour has gone along with this tendency. This rightward push in education needs to be resisted now before it gains a foothold and undermines much of what those who work in education are trying, despite cuts, low pay and overwork, to achieve. □

## We need time to breathe

Back in the 1970s television programmes like *Tomorrow's World* promised us a future of leisure as new technology would reduce the time spent at work, and eradicate the drudgery of labour. You did not need to be a cynic to doubt them. Given the nature of the capitalist system it was inevitable that any device that could be used to increase productivity, would be used not as a tool to provide us with more time to breathe but as a vice to squeeze more profit out of us.

From our own experience in work in the last two decades most of will know this to be true. For those who like official confirmation however, it comes in the form of the *Observer/ICM* "Precious Time" poll, which found that 42 per cent of us regularly work more than 48 hours a week - the national average and the longest time in the European Union.

For over a hundred years the trade union and labour movement in Britain

struggled to reduce intolerable working hours. These battles constitute some of the most important in the history of the British workers' movement. However, for the last two decades we have endured a counter revolution on the shopfloor. This has been driven by the need of the capitalists to squeeze more and more profit out of us. At the same time however the trade union leaders pursuing the policy of social partnership have done nothing to stem the tide of attacks on the wages and conditions of workers. The lengthening of the working day is one of the most visible consequences of their inaction.

In one year the average employee in London can expect to work 1,833 hours, compared with 1,587 in Paris and 1,666 in Berlin. The *ICM* survey found 51 per cent of those questioned say they are working longer hours than five years ago. Almost two-thirds say they rarely manage a full hour's lunch break, while nearly a third say they don't take their full

holiday entitlement each year.

Throughout much of the twentieth century the hours worked fell. Decades of trade union struggle saw weekly working hours fall from 54 at the start of the century to 44 in the 1950s - where it remained for the next 30 years.

In the 1980s this went into reverse. With no fighting lead from the tops of the unions some workers sought a short term solution to their problems through overtime and putting their noses to the grindstone. This cannot continue indefinitely. The *ICM* survey revealed that today *three-quarters would rather work a four-day week on present pay than continue with a five-day week and a 20 per cent pay rise.* The trade unions must launch a campaign to allow us time to breathe. The demand for four day working with no loss of pay is one that should be taken up in every union and every workplace. □



# All the Prime Minister's men

by Sarah Jackson

**The unseemly row between Alistair Campbell (Tony Blair's spin doctor supreme and one of those at the centre of the running of the Iraq war on a daily basis) and the BBC over a news report that Campbell 'sexed up' a key intelligence dossier on Iraq, has rather obscured the more damning questions that are now starting to be asked about the war on Iraq and the 'evidence' to support it.**

With over two months having passed since the official ending of hostilities the question must be asked - how much longer can the UK and US governments maintain the line on the existence of Weapons Of Mass Destruction (WMDs) in Iraq? The hysteria being shown by Campbell and his chums in government suggests the pressure is starting to get to them. For months before the war began the government line, pushed by Campbell and the rest, was that Iraq was packed solid with all sorts of fearful weapons which could be deployed within 45 minutes and which, more importantly, if left unattended to would be used against us, sooner rather than later. The message was clear- act and act now or we would all face disaster. MPs were summoned to see terrifying evidence of what Saddam had at his fingertips and on that basis many felt they had enough excuses to hand to vote for war.

Now with the war over what has been uncovered? Well, so far nothing - certainly nothing that could be used within 45 years let alone 45 minutes. Despite all the data seemingly to hand and with all the technology available to the occupying powers, no evidence at all has yet been found. Even more tellingly, no

one has come forward to make himself rich by presenting proof of where these WMDs could be found or even where they had once existed. No one has yet admitted to ever having even worked on them. The suspicion, which is now starting to take form, is that these WMDs never really existed in the first place. Many are now saying that the so-called intelligence evidence was just so much fantasising drawn up so that Bush and Blair could hear what they wanted to hear.

If it turns out that the basis on which Britain and the US went to war is flawed then the consequences could be quite serious. In passing it should be noted that whereas going to war to prevent a clear and present danger to oneself (i.e. through WMDs in the hands of a regime intending to use them) is apparently quite permissible and legally civilised, going to war to assert ones power and change a non-compliant regime, however horrible that regime might be, still falls under the heading of a war crime. The excuse that there might possibly be some WMDs hanging around ready to be used, even though no one had actually seen any concrete proof, does not legally wash. Of course Bush and Blair need not worry about actually ending up in front of any court since, as we well



know, international rule of law is just a tame tool for use by the imperialists - no reservations in the crossbar motel for them. The fact that thousands of people are now being held without trial or legal representation all over the world, as a result of the so-called war against terror, is just an indication of this. It is quite acceptable for the US having bombed and invaded Afghanistan to invent a new category of prisoner called unlawful combatant, so as to bypass the Geneva convention, and then stick them in an American controlled hellhole outside of the USA in order to avoid US law itself. This is the new world order - the law of the gun.

*Socialist Appeal*, in its pages and on our website, has constantly argued that Bush and Blair went to war to implement regime change, impose a puppet government (collecting control of the worlds longest lasting oil reserves as a nice bonus) and send out a clear message to the rest of the world - cross us at your peril. Welcome to Pax Americana. They used the issue of WMDs as a cover and hoped that some would be found anyway - a hope which is now receding and with it the tacit support which many people gave to the war once it had started and 'our boys' were in action.

Ironically despite all the crowing on about the war having been won so easily, the peace has been proving more difficult to win. The killing of US and now UK troops has continued unabated as resist-

ance to the occupation grows. This has been fuelled by the large number of Iraqis who have been made unemployed by command of the US administration - including hundreds of thousands of soldiers - together with those who have been unable to resume normal employment thanks to the chaotic situation that has been allowed to continue throughout the country. Whilst the US rushed to take charge of the all important oil, the rest of Iraq has been left in a mess, again in clear contravention of the Geneva Convention. The same thing happened in Afghanistan with a stooge regime set up in Kabul but the rest of the country left in ruins and in the hands of the warlords and the returning Taliban.

Campbell's arguments that no one disputes the facts of the government's dossiers, dodgy or otherwise, must be challenged. Ministers are already seeking to pass the blame elsewhere, mostly onto the unelected Campbell's shoulders who in turn is seeking to deflect that criticism. In this we can see clear parallels with the conflicts between the various White House staff as Watergate started to unravel under Nixon in 1972-3. The real question is how much public concern about the failures of the New Labour government fuels - and in turn is fuelled by -growing anger over the real human costs of war and the consequences of Bush and Blair's military adventure? □



# The Great Pensions Robbery

by Sheila Clark

**Why are pensions being cut or not paying out money that was promised? *Socialist Appeal* looks at the real reasons behind the pensions crisis.**

"When the stock market was booming, employers took contributions holidays worth more than £18 billion. Now the boom is over, holes are appearing in pension funds" according to the TUC. And companies don't seem keen to put the money back in.

A recent TUC report has blown the gaff on what employers are trying to do. It's not a great surprise. They want the workers to pay for the cost of the current crisis and prop up profits by cutting back on their pensions.

In their factsheet, *Pensions in Crisis*, the TUC points out that many employers are closing good final salary related pension schemes and that "It's the first serious attempt to cut pay and conditions since the Second World War."

Where workers have fought through trade unions for decent pay and conditions over many years and won decent pension contracts, these are now under severe threat.

Recent accounting regulations meant that employers had to show whether pension schemes contained enough money to pay out what was due for pensions. With recent stock market falls, many schemes were in a bad state and even most of the top FTSE-100 companies could not meet pension liabilities. [see Table]

This could upset shareholders, by causing share prices to fall - so the obvious solution was to close the pension schemes - first to new employees and sometimes to everyone. Nissan has closed its scheme, which was £121m short - or an average of £22,000 per worker.

When employers close the

'final salary' schemes, which link pensions to pay and the number of years worked with the firm, they offer new schemes that limit the amount bosses have to pay in. They have already saved about £4 billion in contributions. They're also, the TUC says: "transferring all the risk of stock market ups and downs onto employees."

New government plans to insure schemes and limit pension increases are not the answer - and could make

more schemes close.

As pensions expert Ros Altmann has explained: "Even fully solvent employers can just decide to wind up their pension schemes."

## Leaking Pension Pots

Perhaps Robert Maxwell's greatest gift to the Labour movement was to instil a healthy cynicism about employers looking after pension schemes.

The Tories passed the 1995 Pensions Act, which did nothing to really address the problem and set up the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, which never seems to have used its extensive powers.

It did nothing for people like workers from Allied Steel

and Wire (ASW) in Sheerness, Kent which went bust last July. With insolvent companies, retired workers pensions are protected, but those still working are just another creditor for the company and can see their entire pensions disappear.

More than 500 workers from ASW marched to Downing Street in June to protest. BBC News featured John Hayter, aged 59, who lost 90% of his pension, only three years from retirement. He had saved in the company scheme for 28 years but said: "We will have to sell up and move to a cheaper area, away from our family, friends and grandchildren . . . to raise capital which we will have to survive on somehow."

In other cases, already highly-paid executives walk away with the lion's share of the pot - leaving little for most of the workers.

Another problem is that less people work for companies that provide any kind of pension contribution from employers. The TUC says that there are two million less workers in final salary schemes today than in 1995, and in the private sector, four out of five workers do not belong to a final salary scheme.

## Stakeholder Pensions

One bright idea was to start stakeholder pensions, which were meant to be cheap and simple for the lower-paid to understand. Even small employers had to set them up - but they did not have to contribute. At least 10,000 firms have defied the law and not set up schemes - although none has yet been fined the £50,000 penalty.

The vast majority of firms do not contribute, so there is little encouragement for workers to save. Most simply can't afford to.

Even where employers do



Protest over planned pensions reforms, on a national day of public sector strikes in Paris.



contribute, their generosity is pitiful. The average employer contribution to a stakeholder pension is only about £25 a month - 1.25% of the average UK full-time salary.

**What a state!**

The good news is that people are living longer. The bad news is that means we need more money to provide for that longer life.

So "people need a bigger pensions pot to provide a decent pension. Men need around £180,000 savings at 60 to get a £10,000 a year pension, while women need £210,000. These figures have gone up by 40% since 1994."

Experts say you have to save 15% of your pay from your 20s to guarantee a decent pension. That means £1 in every £6 you earn. But with student debt, sky-high property prices and other costs, few can manage it. But if you don't start until you are 40 then you need to save £1 in every £4.

Apart from the sheer difficulty of finding the money, many people don't trust pensions after all the mis-selling scandals - and recent losses don't give workers any confidence in the stock market.

Both major political parties want to reduce the proportion of pension income provided by government from an average of 60p in the pound to 40p.

The state retirement pension is now linked to price rises. It used to be linked to rises in earnings. As earnings go up faster, it means that by 2020 the state pension will be worth only 10% of average earnings. That would make today's pension only £56. (Before the Conservatives scrapped the link it was worth 20% of earnings.)

**European Links**

The European Union has looked at the facts - especially as many countries like France, Germany, Italy and Spain have much more generous pensions than the UK state pension.

The European Commission

Company	Pension Deficit
Royal Mail	£4bn
BT	£8bn
National Grid Transco	£2.3bn
BA	£1bn
ICI	£670m

Source: Guardian 22 May 2003

Social Agenda journal of April 2003 explains that the ratio of people over 65 to those of working age is set to double by 2050. "Public spending on pensions is expected to rise by a third from 10% of EU production [GDP] to 13.6% in 2040."

The solution to the problem of the 'demographic time bomb', where a greater proportion of the population will be retired compared to the numbers employed, was obvious to them: extend working lives by five years - right across Europe. Then they realised they could save even more by cutting pension benefits.

"Keeping more people in employment for longer is a must. . . people will be able to decide for themselves whether they want to work a few years longer in order to achieve the same pension level as today, or retire at the same age as today, but in exchange for a reduced monthly pension." (Social Agenda, April 2003) What a choice!

The report ends encouragingly - with some remarks that our Government has taken to heart and published in the British press, too: "Large numbers of people in the 60s and even 70s will, on the whole, be physically fit, healthy and capable of living very active lives - at all levels, including professionally."

The World Bank has now turned its attention to Europe. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions says that the Bank has just published a report on "Pension Reform in Europe", which "asserts that countries of western Europe have no choice but to carry out massive

reforms involving increased retirement ages, reduced benefits, and partial privatisation." (And our Government has ominously just appointed Nicholas Stern, the World Bank's Chief Economist to a senior job at the Treasury.)

Workers in Europe have already been taking action to protect their hard-won benefits. There have been massive strikes in country after country.

Labour Research (June 2003) details some of the campaigns: Austria 500,000 went on strike and 200,000 marched in Vienna. The Government planned to reduce the pension basis from the best 15 years' earnings, to the average over 40 years, with a full pension after 45 years - instead of 40 as at present.

The OGB trade union fed-

eration estimated that the cuts would be 13% in the short term and up to 40% long-term. Union protests have put introducing the cuts in doubt.

In Germany the unions are campaigning against the Government's 'Agenda 2010' programme, which plans to increase retirement age from 65 to 67.

In Italy a general strike is threatened over pensions where the Government is lowering employer contributions. They also want to cut pensions for those retiring before 65 with incentives to work longer. In 1994, a general strike and mass demonstrations over pensions led to the fall of the first Berlusconi government.

In France: 1.2million protested against the governments planed pension cuts and concessions have been agreed. By 2008, those with a full contribution record will retire on at least 85% of the National Minimum Wage.

Even young workers, who in the past weren't interested in pensions, care about them now. They are coming to realise why the trade union movement has always regarded pensions as deferred wages. Just as when a wage cut is threatened - we won't give up without a fight! ☐

- ☐ **The TUC should co-ordinate action by unions in this country, in concert with those across the European Union, against planned cuts in workers' pensions**
- ☐ **The Government should guarantee a decent standard of living for all retired people - without means testing.**
- ☐ **Employers contributions should be made compulsory and workers' savings for retirement protected against company bankruptcy and fraud.**
- ☐ **The Government should nationalise the financial institutions and use the funds to invest in decent rail and road transport and public services and to revitalise industry**

**Further Reading**  
 TUC Pensions in Crisis factsheet  
 The TUC's full report, *Pensions in Peril, the decline of the final salary pensions scheme*, is available at: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)  
[http://www.rosaltmann.com/pdf/DB\\_Schemes\\_are\\_not\\_Safe.pdf](http://www.rosaltmann.com/pdf/DB_Schemes_are_not_Safe.pdf) - article about final salary schemes



## Immigration control - a tool of the bosses

by Mick Brooks

The free movement of labour is a basic freedom to be defended by all workers against those who seek to divide us.

The French Revolution of 1789 was the first to be fought under the banner of human rights. For the French revolutionaries the freedom to go where you wanted was as basic as the freedom to say what you thought. They were right. They were fighting against a regime that wouldn't let common people move from one part of France to another. The motive then, as now, was to control the movement of labour. In particular the King didn't want peasants running away from their overlords to work in the towns. So he controlled the movement of people so as to help the aristocracy keep commoners where they could screw them.

Two hundred years ago Alfred Lord Byron wasn't asked for his passport when he was swanning round the Mediterranean countries. The rich did the 'grand tour', moving easily across borders. Of course, they had money. More importantly, between 1815 and 1930 over fifty million people left Europe to find a better future. They went to the 'empty lands' of the Americas and Australasia. These countries were empty partly because of the massacres of the original inhabitants. Nobody tried to stop them leaving, or entering. Less than fifty years ago (white) British people were paid to migrate to Australia. Migration was believed to be good for the receiving countries and good for the sending nations. Certainly it was

*Say this city has ten million souls,  
Some are living in mansions, some are living  
in holes:*

*Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet  
there's no place for us*

*Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,  
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:*

*But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but  
they weren't German Jews*

From Refugee Blues by WH Auden

good for the migrants. They went of their own accord. They went in search of a better life.

At the time the great migration began, Britain was generally reckoned to be overcrowded. Its population at the battle of Waterloo was about 10 million. Then as now, 'overcrowding' is measured by the ability of the productive forces to keep the population adequately fed, watered and housed. As Marx puts it, "every method of production that arises in the course of history has its own peculiar, historically valid, law of population."

Of course there were frictions between new arrivals and established workers. The recent film, 'The Gangs of New York',

depicts the battles between 'native Americans' and Irish immigrants. After the US Civil War it became fashionable to sneer at Swedish migrants instead. Twenty years later Swedish Americans were regarded as fellow North Europeans to be appealed to in the battle against South Europeans, such as Italians, and Jews. In passing, one of the most depressing aspects of researching this background is to find out how utterly unoriginal all this racist rubbish is. The same abuse is passed down from generation to generation, and just hurled at the latest lot of incomers, whoever they happen to be.

It is worth noting that immigration controls have existed in this country for

less than a century! It was in fact only at the turn of the twentieth century that all over the world, we started hearing the clanking sound of drawbridges being pulled up. The era of unrestricted migration was coming to an end. In Britain, the Aliens Act of 1905 was the first general law restricting immigration into Britain. Immigration control is a monstrosity in a land formed by wave after wave of people looking for a better future for themselves and their families since at least the time of the beaker folk, thousands of years before Christ.

The passing of the Aliens Act was accompanied by violent anti-semitic agitation against Jews fleeing from the pogroms in Russia. Here's a (British) rant from the time. "Jewish power baffled the Pharaohs, foiled Nebuchadnezzar, thwarted Rome, defeated feudalism, circumvented the Romanovs, balked the Kaiser and undermined the Third French Republic". There's not a word there that Hitler couldn't agree with. What cut across this attempt to divide workers was the militant action of Jewish immigrants, particularly a series of strikes by the Jewish Tailors Union which the Manchester Trades Council saw as setting a good example for the 'locals'! And the bosses knew it. Here's the *London Evening News* from 1891, "The advance of Socialistic and anarchical opinion in London is commensurate with the increased volume of foreign immigration." The more, the merrier!

The years between the Wars were crisis years in Europe. Mass unemployment was an almost per-





manent stain. They didn't need immigrant labour to threaten the existing work force with - the dole queues were quite enough. Migration was strictly controlled. More to the point, it didn't happen. Workers had nowhere with jobs to move to.

The years after the Second World War, by contrast, were golden for capitalism. Steady growth and relatively full employment in all the advanced capitalist countries was a feature of the era. The problem the bosses confronted was labour shortage. They solved it by lifting the controls and actively encouraging immigration. In my own area of West London at the end of the War, Wolfe's rubber company started to lodge adverts in the Punjab for vacancies. This was the beginning of the mass movement of Sikhs and others into Southall. People of Asian origins now make up 90% of the population in central Southall.

Capitalism is an endlessly flexible system. Unfortunately, this flexibility is provided by the suffering of the working class. During the 1930s, while traditional industrial areas such as South Wales were gripped by despair, new industries were opening their gates in areas such as West London, including Southall, and Slough, particularly when rearmament began in preparation for the Second World War. What we saw was a transfer of workers between the regions. So far from getting on their bikes, like Norman Tebbit's dad, families actually walked all the way from Wales to London in search of work, sometimes pushing all their worldly goods in a pram.

Not everybody welcomed the Welsh, or the Punjabis. Famously the same walls in Southall that had held anti-Welsh slogans in the 1930s were adorned with similar greet-



ings to the new arrivals in the 1960s. But were the men who came to Wolfe's after 1945 really 'taking our jobs'? Well, if they were, 'we' were pleased to give them up at the time. Working with rubber is hot, nasty work and the 'locals' were pleased to move on to lighter and better-paid employment. After the War workers from the Caribbean staffed the health service and the transport system, invariably starting at the bottom with work that nobody else was prepared to do. Asian workers likewise went to northern cities in decline, took up work in industries such as textile production that were already low paid and where the locals were already leaving in despair for the future.

These immigrants were invariably of working age. They came and put in long hours and, in the process, put in a great deal more money to the Treasury kitty than they got out. It also remains the case that more people leave the country than come in. And those that enter, come here to work. By contrast Britain exports the economically inactive. Hundreds of thousand of pensioners head out for countries such as Spain for the winter, (to cut down on their central heating bills).

'It's a small country,' we're told, as if the entire 1½ billion or so population of the Indian subcontinent were all going to turn up at Heathrow and Dover on the day we tore up immigration controls. Well - if that happened, we socialists would have a problem. But is it likely? Some Welsh people came to West London in the 1930s. The majority stayed in Wales, even though the economic situation was desperate. Why? Because people are not economic calculating machines. Maybe they have folk to drop round on and look after. Perhaps the kids have settled down in school and made a good group of friends. People have got roots that they are unwilling to just abandon. Why did they have to pay people to go to Australia? After all the living standards are higher than here - and the sun shines more - and they have a more successful cricket team than us.

Why should people from 'abroad' be any different from us? Not everyone left Europe in the nineteenth century. Most countries (except Ireland) saw their populations rise continually despite the emigration, and millions were migrating from the villages to the cities to become workers throughout the period. In Britain, the popu-

lation continues to rise to this day, and it's not because of immigrants. Mass migration into this country ceased with a series of laws starting with the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962.

For under capitalism the good times don't last forever. During the 1960s it was clear that the golden age of the post-War economic boom was coming to an end. The 1970s was a decade of crisis all over the world. In one country after another the pattern of the inter-War years was repeated - fortress Britain and fortress Europe. And inevitably this meant harrying the hapless folk who just wanted to move here so as to work hard and do the best for themselves and their families. And, related to the economic crisis, the world showed signs of cracking up. For the first time since the Second World War we have seen armed conflict on the European continent. The inevitable result is waves of refugees streaming to what they see as safe havens. As for Africa, it has been riven by permanent economic crisis for the past thirty years. This has produced grisly wars and civil wars all over the continent.

This repeated pattern proves the lie of the racists, when they say that immigration causes unemployment. There was mass unemployment in the 1930s and no immigration. Why should anybody want to come to a country when they can't get a job? The bosses eased immigration controls when they wanted cheap labour. Immigration is associated with a tight labour market.

Actually some migrants did try to get to Britain in the 1930s - German Jews fleeing Hitler. But the Tories didn't let them in - effectively conniving at the holocaust.

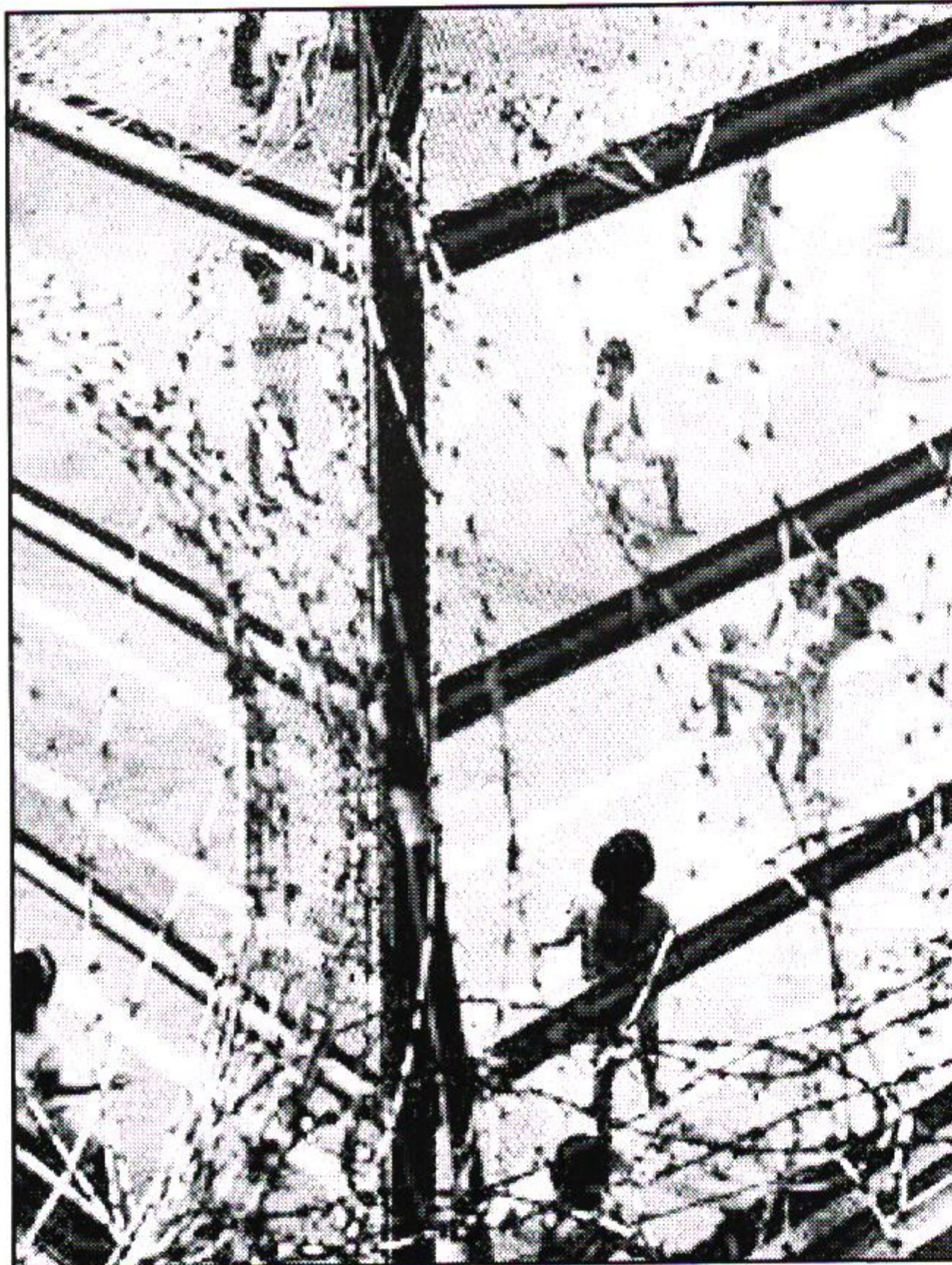
Why can't we have non-



racist controls? Many people in the labour movement who have swallowed the "we're a small island" argument are nevertheless horrified at the brutality of immigration control. But the one produces the other. Immigration controls are necessarily racist. The movement of labour occurs because different countries have different standards of living. When the Aliens Act was promoted, the phrase "undesirable immigrants" was used in the legislation. But the word 'Jews' was used on the streets. Under the present controls there is a 'primary purpose' rule. It queries whether the primary purpose of somebody getting married is to enter the country. In fact it is coded racism against Asians, who are most likely to contract arranged marriages. This is surely a cheek in a country ruled by a royal family with a severely shrunken gene pool as a result of hundreds of years of arranged marriages! Immigration controls are always racist.

What about capital movement? Capital goes to wherever it makes the highest profit.

Here's the economist Ricardo, regarded as one of the most hard-nosed representatives of the capitalist class in his time. "Experience shows that the fancied or real insecurity of capital... together with the natural disinclination which every man has to quit the country of his birth and connections... checks the emigration of capital. These feelings, which I should be sorry to see weakened, induce most men of property to be satisfied with a low rate of profits in their own country rather than to seek a more advantageous employment for their wealth in foreign nations." (*Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 1817)



The reader can see at once that Ricardo's sentimental nationalism has been replaced in the bosom of present day capitalists with a resolute, implacable and heartless internationalism. They will go anywhere if there's more profit in it for them.

Capital can move whenever and wherever it likes. Capital controls in this country were literally put on a bonfire in 1979 by Thatcher. She knew whose interest she was serving! So capital always goes where the wages are cheapest? Not necessarily. Other things being equal, capital will always vote for cheap labour. But other things are seldom equal. The City of London is still a bigger destination for capital out to make money than the whole of Africa. Capital is free to go where it likes, for it is owned by the boss class. The movement of labour is controlled in order to subordinate it to the bosses.

In the revolutionary year 1848, Marx made a speech

in Brussels on what attitude the workers should take in the debate on free trade and protection. He asked, "what is free trade under the present condition of society?" and answered, "it is freedom of capital". He went on, "the most favourable condition for the worker is the growth of capital." And he concluded, "the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade."

Free trade presupposes the free movement of labour and capital. This is all part of the free market system hymned by the apologists of capitalism. But the capitalist state lets capital move freely, yet controls the movement of labour.

Capitalists (unlike their ideologues) are actually suspicious of markets. Markets mean that the bosses are not always in

control. Since the dawn of their system the boss class has worked to negate the fact that markets can sometimes tilt in favour of the workers. Marx called the instrument they use the industrial reserve army.

We don't need to look in detail as to how Marx applied this concept to nineteenth century conditions in 'Capital'. How widows, orphans, the disabled and other unfortunates made up a disadvantaged section of the working class who found it very difficult to hold down a steady job. They in turn were used against the claims of the active workers.

This is what the industrial reserve army does for capital. "During the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, the industrial reserve army presses upon the army of active workers; and during the periods of overproduction and boom, the former holds the claims of the latter in check. Thus relative overproduction is the background in front of which the law of supply and demand works. Relative surplus population restricts the activities of this law within the limits which are convenient to capitalist exploitation and capitalist domination." So, "the condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness of the other portion, and the converse, become means for enriching the individual capitalist."

In effect the capitalists are able to tap a reservoir of labour in times of need. They are in a position to control the supply of labour. The starkest instance of this was apartheid South Africa. Blacks were supposed to live in Bantustans, homelands where in reality nobody could make a living. They were drawn out to the mines and industrial towns as needed and thrown back on these



scrapheaps when judged surplus to requirements. The beauty of the Bantustan, from a capitalist point of view, was that it didn't cost them a penny. The workers were left to their own devices to survive.

In Switzerland some economists have discovered a wonderfully flexible labour force. There is a core of native-born Swiss workers, who don't have to be very flexible. Most have a job for life. Then there are the *gastarbeiters*, foreign workers drawn in when needed. Most are adult males living in compounds and sending most of their earnings hundreds of miles back home. They have no rights. When recession bites, they are unceremoniously sent packing. Lovely!

The Labour government has announced a 'liberalisation' in the rules allowing some categories of asylum seekers to work. Guess what? They are workers with skills we are short of, and workers who will do seasonal work of harvesting for rates of pay no 'native' worker would put up with. This scheme is really a step towards controlling the movement of labour - in the interests of the bosses.

On the industrial reserve army, Marx concludes, "but if a surplus working class population is a necessary product of accumulation... on the other hand this overpopulation becomes a lever promoting capitalist accumulation, and is indeed a necessary condition of the capitalist method of production." Capitalism is using migration to reproduce an industrial reserve army in the receiving countries. The solution, Marx goes on, is for the workers to "discover that the intensity of competition among themselves is entirely dependent upon the pressure of the relative surplus population" and to "endeavour by trade unionism and in other ways, to organise a purposive co-operation between the employed and the unemployed, in order that they may avert or diminish the ruinous consequences that arise for their class."

But if it is a fantasy that several billion impoverished

people will up sticks and head for Britain the moment immigration controls are lifted, it is true that some people will make the move whether it's illegal or not, and despite all the hardships and dangers. If the movement of labour is criminalised, then snakehead gangs will profit from it anyway. Unfortunates up to their necks in debt are dropped off the back of a lorry in the middle of the night - often not even knowing which country they're in.

So the question is: what attitude does the labour movement take towards the working class victims of the immigration control regime when they're here? Asylum seekers are criminalised: if they try to get a job they can be deported. So they go underground and get sucked into the grey or black economy, working long hours for what we see as starvation wages and without any of the basic protection we take for granted. Is that what we want? If workers can be threatened

with deportation when they kick up a fuss, the bosses have got a pliant labour force. This is the hidden reality portrayed in the film *Dirty Pretty Things*.

The immigration regime is an obstacle to workers in Britain to protecting immigrant workers - and ultimately themselves.

The labour movement was built on the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all'. Now, more than ever, that must be our watchword. □

## What's all the song and dance about asylum seekers?

**Mick Brooks answers some of the myths and distortions about asylum seekers and "illegal immigrants".**

### How many asylum seekers are there?

Last year about 110,000 people applied for asylum in Britain - less than 2% of the world's refugees last year.

**Where are they from?** The top three countries most people have fled from are Iraq, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. Over the last couple of years Britain has helped in military actions to destabilise Afghanistan and Iraq, causing thousands of civilian deaths. Part of the justification for taking action against Saddam in Iraq was the plight of the Iraqi Kurds. How can we then turn round and argue that Kurds are not entitled to asylum? The *Daily Mail* is full with hate-filled accusations against so-called 'bogus' asylum seekers from countries such as Zimbabwe. At the same time they publicise the misfortunes of the white farmers there and point to Mugabe as a crazed dictator who is wilfully starving his own people. The *Daily Mail* is consistent only in supporting policies that help the rich.

**Are they scroungers?** Immigrants put more in to the country than they take out. In the financial year 1999-2000 they contributed £31.2 billion in taxes and took £28.8 billion in benefits. They should be thanked for that extra £2.5 billion.

**Have they got their hands in our pockets?** Keeping the refugee system going costs each taxpayer 10p per week. We spend six times as much as that on the monarchy. Asylum seekers only get 70% of the usual income support - itself carefully designed to be a minimum subsistence. A single person

would have to make do on about £37 per week.

**Are we a soft touch?** Most asylum seekers don't come here. Nearly three quarters are taken in by poor countries. For instance Iran and Pakistan both took millions of those fleeing from Afghanistan. Even in the European Union we are twelfth lowest (out of fifteen) in taking refugees in proportion to our population.

**They're really economic migrants, not genuine asylum seekers, aren't they?** The reader is irresistibly reminded of the line from Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, "He's not the Son of God, he's a very naughty boy." So does that mean it's OK to crucify him, then? Asylum seekers want to work, but most are not allowed to. And it is the case that, as civil strife winds down in countries such as Angola and former Yugoslavia, the arrival of asylum seekers from those parts disappears.

**Our duties.** Britain has signed up to the 1951 Refugee Convention. We have a responsibility to give shelter to those 'with a well founded fear of persecution'. End of story.

**Government policy.** Blair is pushing for what are in fact concentration camps to be set up on the borders of the European Union to receive asylum seekers - well away from Britain. Even some other EU countries find this illiberal and distasteful.

**The political background.** The children of asylum seekers are to be educated separately from everybody else. David Blunkett explains this is so they won't 'swamp' the schools. Blunkett is deliberately pressing the same button Thatcher pushed when she publicly worried about 'us' being swamped by alien cultures. It is racist code. *Thanks, David.*



# After the fall of Saddam - a new Vietnam for "coalition" forces?

By Roberto Sarti and Fred Weston

Two months have passed since the fall of Saddam Hussein yet there is no peace in Iraq. When President Bush stated on May 1, that combat operations had ended in Iraq, there was little discussion in the US of what that really meant. For most of the American people it seemed the war was over. It is not! Forty-seven US soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the beginning of May and many more have been injured.

In one week alone there were 12 deaths and on June 12, a U.S. Air Force F-16CG fighter crashed southwest of Baghdad, while on the same day a U.S. Army Apache helicopter was shot down by hostile fire in western Iraq. US military officials refused to say how many attacks their troops have been facing on a daily basis in which soldiers are neither injured nor killed, but some sources suggest that there have been an average of more than a dozen such strikes a day in the past week.

This was becoming too much for the US armed forces. So they launched their massive operation, called "Peninsula strike", a clampdown on "regime loyalists and other hardcore anti-coalition activities trying hard to disrupt our progress", as General David McKiernan, the commander of ground forces in Iraq, explained. According to him, about 400 people have been arrested, but the International Red Cross claims that over 1000 have been held under detention.

This operation was not directed solely against the

die-hard Saddam supporters, but also against the Communists and other left-wing activists that have been trying to re-organize their forces in the main Iraqi cities. This shows the real intentions of the US occupying forces. They have overthrown the supposed "threat" to US security, Saddam Hussein, but they have no intention of allowing the Iraqi people to genuinely govern themselves. The reason for that is quite obvious. If they allow the ordinary working people of Iraq to decide their own fate the first thing they would do would be to tell the American army to get out of Iraq. The next thing they would do would be to start taking control of their own lives and destinies.

Just two examples are sufficient to demonstrate how true this is. One is that of a Baghdad medical college (Medical College of Mustanseriyah University) where student demonstrations and protests managed to overturn the rigged elections of the dean. The dean was a diehard Ba'athist, and he was forced to resign on May 19. He had been extremely unpopular long before the Americans had arrived. At one point he had closed the college club for a period of two weeks

**The oil workers have been demanding the right to elect their managers. Again, they want to remove Ba'athists from the privileged positions they held under Saddam Hussein But the British army commanders have a different opinion.**



because the students had refused to let Saddam's photographs be hung up in the college. He had also lied about his belonging to the Ba'ath party. Another example comes from the South Refineries Company in Basra. The oil workers have been demanding the right to elect their managers. Again, they want to remove Ba'athists from the privileged positions they held under Saddam Hussein. But the British army commanders have a different opinion. All they are interested in is getting the oil pumping again.

## Brutality of US operations

It is within this background of a growing willingness of the Iraqi workers and youth to assert their rights that attacks on the US army have been taking place. The US top brass can feel that control is slipping out of their hands and the only answer

they can give is brutal repression. What is in fact striking about this latest "Peninsula strike", is the brutal and ruthless way in which the occupiers entered villages and towns.

In Balad, at least 27 Iraqis have been killed, while 82 fighters were killed earlier this week in a massive US army raid on a "desert training camp" near the town of Rawah, close to the Syrian border. In reality, as many witnesses explained to western journalists, the U.S. forces deliberately opened fire from tanks and helicopter at the houses of Iraqi civilians in Rawah, killing dozens of people while they rushed out of their homes.

This brutal repression is having the opposite effect to that desired by the US military. It is hardening the resolve of ordinary Iraqis to get rid of the US troops. "If I get a chance, I would shoot an American, because they are now my enemies," said Marwan Alrawi, a member of a family that owns farmland throughout the area. "Before this, one out of the 10,000 Rawah citizens would fight the Americans. Now, more than half would... This town was safe



before the Americans come here and spilled a lot of blood," said Ibrahim. "Is this the democracy they were talking about?" (*Jordan Times*, June 15, 2003).

In Mosul, hailed as a model of security by senior US officers until recently, clashes broke out on Saturday. US soldiers came under repeated hand grenade and sniper fire on the streets of the city centre. The attacks were the work of former soldiers taking revenge following the coalition's decision to dissolve all of Saddam's armed forces with just a single, but as yet unpaid, resignation payment. Around 100,000 Iraqis are in the same situation. During the same three-day operation 2,000 occupying troops stormed Falluja, the cradle of the "anti-coalition" resistance.

The behaviour of the US forces is looking increasingly like that in Vietnam. Villages and towns are raided, where every one is considered an enemy and a potential target for besieged troops in a foreign and hostile country. It is noticeable how the US has no support at all in any sector of the population. They have acted so arrogantly that it could not be otherwise.

### Low morale of US troops

However, the situation unfolding in Iraq is not only affecting the people, it is also having serious damaging effects on the morale of US troops. Recently the *New York Times* published an article under the headline of "Anxious and weary U.S. soldiers face new mission in Iraq". They had promised the ordinary US soldiers that the people of Iraq would welcome them with open arms as "liberators". The fact is that the US administration lied to its own soldiers. This was an attempt to get their morale high and ready them for

battle. Now they have been there for two months a completely different picture is emerging.

US soldiers in Iraq live in constant fear of being attacked. They don't know where the next sniper is going to come from, where the next grenade attack is going to hit. They are extremely nervous. This in part explains their policy of "shoot first, ask questions later". They are terrified. The *New York Times* article explains how one US soldier is even terrified of Iraqi children when they approach him. They see everyone as a possible threat.

As the article explains, "It was not supposed to end this way for the brigade's [1st Brigade of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division] 5000 soldiers and officers... Six months after arriving in Kuwait and almost three months after entering Iraq, they were ready to go home..." The article quotes Private First Class Matthew O'Dell, an infantryman, "You call Donald Rumsfeld and tell him our sorry asses are ready to go home... Tell him to come spend a night in our building." This must express the feelings of thousands of US soldiers now.

The article went on to explain that, "Some said they were haunted by the deaths they caused - and suffered - and have sought counselling. All seemed tired and hot and increasingly bitter. Morale seems to have plummeted as sharply as the temperature has risen." If this situation continues the top military commanders will find it increasingly difficult to carry out the job Bush has given them. The whole thing could start to unravel. And, most importantly, the morale of the US troops is going to filter back home, and the truth about what is really happening in Iraq is going to dawn on the millions of ordinary Americans

who have been duped by Bush and co.

This truth has, of course, already become abundantly clear for the people in Iraq. The US and UK promised democracy and freedom. Now they talk about years before Iraq has a democratic government. "I think we should be talking in terms of several years at a minimum," Richard Haass, director of policy planning at the State Department, told AFP. "There will be a gradual transition or evolution to a more open Iraq."

### Intolerable situation for the Iraqi masses

Paul Bremer, the new US governor, foresees two years of "interim" government by US-UK-led forces. For the time being they have postponed sine die the convocation of the National Assembly. They have even dismissed the Iraqi National Congress. This has led Chalabi (leader of the Iraqi National Congress), the man that they had initially brought in to rule the country just two months ago, to openly criticise the Americans. He warned America that it is making a mistake by refusing to give Iraqis (he meant himself) more control over the occupied country. But

even this mild criticism, these "words of wisdom", are not acceptable to Washington.

They promised "oil to the Iraqi people". Instead they are planning to privatise the oil company, as well as all the other state owned firms, and sell them off to the "best bidder", i.e. to US companies.

They promised a "better condition of life". In most of towns and villages the Iraqis have no water or electricity. Wages, at least in some sectors, have been paid, but no one is actually going to work, because the US doesn't want to open state owned companies anymore. "Nobody has asked us to do anything in weeks," said Mahmoud Hameed, a geologist at the national irrigation company who had turned up solely to pick up his wages. "We are all just waiting to see when the real work begins." (*Dar al Hayat*, June 16, 2003)

There are no job statistics in the confusion of post-war Iraq, but Iraqi and foreign experts alike estimate that at least one third of the work force is either unemployed or underemployed. Even professional footballers have been protesting, because one US battalion has been stationed right inside the national stadium.





They cannot play official games anymore!

In Britain the media has been hinting that the troubles have been provoked by the heavy-handed attitude of the US officers. But this does not explain the big demonstration that took place last Sunday in Basra where 12,000 marched demanding the right to rule themselves in their own country.

## A long term guerrilla war

A totally new scenario is now opening up inside Iraq. *The Times* recently stated that "British troops could be stuck in Iraq for up to four years if pro-Saddam Hussein militias continue to undermine coalition efforts to bring security to the country."

We do not have to add anything else apart from reminding our readers of what we wrote six weeks before this:

"The Americans and British do not have a real base of support in Iraq. Any support they might have had in the beginning is evaporating like water on the desert sand. Military superiority is of little assistance here. A long term guerrilla war waged with low-tech methods like sniping, ambushes and suicide bombings can have a devastating effect over a long period if it has the backing of the people - and it will.

American imperialism is the most powerful nation in the whole of history, but its power is not absolute. It was defeated in Vietnam by a barefoot army. To be more correct, it was defeated on the home front by a mass movement against the war.

So far the majority of Americans have backed the



war, but that was because it was short and relatively painless for America. But if it turns out that American soldiers are stuck in Iraq for a long time, subject to the attacks of a hostile population, the attitude of the American people will change. In the Lebanon a single car bomb was enough to force the US army to withdraw. Similar events in Iraq are inevitable. The final result will be the same, sooner or later." (The world after the war in Iraq, May 6, 2003)

At the beginning of May, Bush removed Garner, the former general, who had been criticized for moving too slowly in restoring services and for allowing widespread looting. Then Paul "Jerry" Bremer was appointed as top civilian administrator in Baghdad. He will report directly to Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary.

The appointment of Bremer was seen as the end of the long dispute between the State Department and the Pentagon over the

administration of Iraq. Secretary of State Colin Powell had wanted greater civilian control, while Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld emphasized the military angle. The latter has clearly won out.

Bremer has a hard-line view and is close to leading neo-conservatives in the Pentagon. In an article in the *Washington Times* on January 13, 2003 he argued that the war on terror cannot "be won on the defensive, we must go on the offensive. To be blunt, we have to kill the terrorists before they kill us."

That is precisely what he is applying in Iraq today. The US administration and top officers have become over confident as a result of the outcome of the Iraq war. They feel extremely powerful. And on military terms, they certainly are. But they are playing with fire. For the last three decades, the US ruling class seemed to have learned some lessons from the Vietnam war. They were very careful to avoid the occupation of foreign countries. The change of the international relationship of forces after the collapse of the Soviet Union played a role in determining the new US attitude, as well as the extreme shortsightedness of Bush and co. But the decisive reason is that the US bourgeoisie needs an

aggressive policy to preserve its dominant role in the world, both economically and politically.

In the last analysis, the men that are at the head of the US establishment are the ones that the big multinationals need. It is simply the case that the US bourgeoisie has no other choice.

The situation in Iraq is becoming so unstable that even the last defender of the US policy in Iraq, Adnan Pachachi declared that "Iraq has three weeks to avoid falling into chaos". He is described by *The Independent* as a "highly regarded former Iraqi foreign minister who is expected to play a big role in a transitional Iraqi administration". In other words, he is just another US puppet, but extremely worried that a social explosion could take place in the coming period.

There is no way in which the occupying forces can stop the guerrilla warfare in Iraq. Their aggressive policy is provoking more and more anger and resentment amongst the entire population.

The deadline of an amnesty for Iraqis to hand in heavy weapons without punishment has now passed. The coalition issued this law hoping to restore law and order.

The United States has stated that Iraqis have handed in 123 pistols, 76 semi-automatic rifles, 435 automatic rifles, 46 machine-guns, 11 anti-aircraft weapons and 381 grenades and bombs. Probably they just got rid of their broken or old weapons, for the number of arms in Iraq is far far bigger than these paltry figures.

## Need to build a mass movement

We support the right to self defence of the Iraqi people against the invaders. It is a struggle of national liberation against an occupying imperialist power. At the

**The US administration and top officers have become over confident as a result of the outcome of the Iraq war. They feel extremely powerful. And on military terms, they certainly are. But they are playing with fire.**



same time we would warn the guerrilla movement that they must not isolate themselves from the masses. A purely guerrilla type movement risks falling into the methods of individual terror. Armed resistance can only be successful if it is an auxiliary to the mass movement itself. If the struggle remains merely on the level of sporadic armed conflicts, then the US military has enormous firepower and can retaliate as they have been doing, killing hundreds and possibly even thousands of Iraqis.

The task is to build up a mass movement, involving the workers, the students, the city and rural poor, to such a level that no military force could stop. This mass movement is already there in the making. Mass demonstrations are taking place in every town in Iraq. From Kirkuk to Basra there are reports of thousands of people taking to the streets, demanding their basic rights. These are very brave acts of defiance, if we consider that the occupiers do not hesitate to shoot at unarmed people.

### Role of the Communist movement

The task of the genuine revolutionaries is to link up with the masses, raising the demands for committees of workers to take control over and run all the essential services and factories. If the Americans don't want to open the power stations, let's open them ourselves. If there is no water or basic foods, let's open the factories so our children will not starve or die of cholera! Let us defend our hospitals and basic public services!

Because of a lack of a seriously organised labour movement under genuine socialist leadership, undoubtedly the Shiite fundamentalists are gaining some ground in Iraq. But they are still very far from having control of the resist-



ance at national level, or even in the main cities. It is worth mentioning an article published this week in *The Economist* (June 14) with the title *Communists v clerics in Iraq*. This bourgeois weekly usually pokes fun at the communists, but this time it had to admit that, "Iraq's few Communists are among the brave to stand up to the ayatollahs".

The article gives a different picture from the usual propaganda we are fed about "Islamic fundamentalism". The author of the article asks the question, "Can the Communists' clarion call again strike a chord?" What follows on from the question is interesting. "Young people are fed up with being told which films they can and cannot watch. Women demand equal inheritance rights and the abolition of laws that sanction 'honour' crimes and forbid them from leaving Iraq without a male guardian. In the Baghdad cafés frequented by artists and authors, there is talk of a backlash." The article quotes one artist as saying that "we don't want to replace one totalitarian sys-

tem with another." If even *The Economist* has picked up on this mood, it means that there must be an inevitable stirring among the masses, a yearning for genuine democracy and control over their own lives, as the two examples of the students and workers quoted above clearly indicate.

Of course, *The Economist* tries to belittle the role of the Communists, portraying them as a tiny group, with very little influence. But then what is the purpose of wasting two columns, if communists have no support at all? The truth is that the Iraqi Communists have a long tradition in Iraq, that we have written about elsewhere. We can see that in the last weeks this tradition has not been lost. It is re-emerging. A new historical

opportunity is being given to the Iraqi communist movement.

We have to remember that, once a mass movement of the workers breaks out, it is very unlikely that the religious fundamentalists can take the lead (at least not in the initial stages). In Iran the Khomeini supporters played no role in the overthrow of the Shah or in the February 1979 revolution. That was a workers' revolution where committees, the shuras (or soviets) were set up in the initial stages. The workers were attempting to take control of their own destinies. It was only later, with the fundamental support of the Iranian Communist Party, the Tudeh, (that described the Ayatollah as "progressive" and "anti-imperialist") and of all the other main left-wing organisations, that Khomeini was able to take power, on the backs of a betrayed and defeated working class. The rise of fundamentalism is always the result of a defeat of the working class or of the mistaken policies of its leadership.

We support every effort of the workers in Iraq to set up their own organisations. In order to do so, it is absolutely necessary to learn the lessons of the past. There is no progressive wing of the Iraqi or western bourgeoisie, there is no intermediate stage. The successful struggle for national liberation can only be carried out as part of the struggle for the socialist transformation of society, both in Iraq and in the whole of the Middle East. □

More on the  
situation in Iraq @  
[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)





**The recent EU summit in Thessaloniki was besieged by tens of thousands of Greek workers and youth showing their opposition to the international club of capitalist gangsters. *Socialist Appeal* reports.**

**W**hile European leaders were discussing the new EU Constitution and the problems of "illegal" immigration in the comfort of their luxurious venue outside there were people with a different opinion. The "anti-globalisation" movement was present, protesting at the plans of the European capitalists. Most of the parties and small groups of the Greek Left had placed this summit at the centre of their activities and had been preparing for it for more than a year. This time the behaviour of the PASOK government was different from the past. The government not only avoided provoking the demonstrators, but on the contrary it provided camping areas and tents, and also halls for the organizing of events and discussions.

The police authorities had other plans. The atmosphere of fear that the officials and the police had spread through the media had in fact led many of the people of Thessaloniki to leave town during this three day event. Shop-owners closed their shops and tried to protect their property with

# Anti-EU protests on streets of Thessaloniki

By Angelos Irakleidis in Athens

metal bars.

The main demonstration was organised for Saturday 21. The problem was that there were three separate demonstrations, which unfortunately has become a feature of the Greek labour and left movement over the past few years, with different forces competing to see who can get the biggest attendance, rather than coming together in one united movement.

The biggest demo was organized by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) together with its trade union wing (PAME) and also with other KKE front organisations. This demonstration was attended by 30,000-40,000 people.

The second demo one was organized by the Forum. The trade unions, the Greek TUC (GSEE) and the Civil Service union, as well as left forces such as the Synaspismos (the fourth biggest party in Greece) attended this demo which attracted 10,000-15,000 people. The third demo was organized by a smaller left grouping called the NAR, with 3,000-5,000 people.

The main difference between this "anti-capitalist" demo and other anti-EU summit gatherings that have taken place over the last few years is that there was a much smaller participation from other countries. There were only a few hundred people from other European countries and some from Turkey.

The event was marred by uncalled for violent actions. Some hundreds of so-called anarchists - in fact they were merely hooligans - smashed up shops

and set fire to buildings and cars on the roads. The police replied with a storm of tear gas that led to the breaking up of the demonstrations. The hooligan elements once again played into the hands of the police. The police did not isolate these small groups. Instead they pushed them back towards the main body of the demonstration, towards all the people who were trying to escape from the tear gas, and thus used a tiny minority as an excuse to attack the bulk of the demonstrations and break them up.

## Conclusions

What we can say is that although there was a sizeable turnout, the demonstrations in Thessaloniki did not attract the numbers that the organizers had been expecting. This is even more marked if we also take into account that there had been a huge preparation beforehand.

There are several reasons that explain this relatively small turnout. Firstly it was only a couple of months ago that we saw the enormous demonstrations against the war. Huge numbers of workers and youth took part in those demonstrations. People had been mobilized repeatedly in many demonstrations over a period and they felt that they had already done enough. There was also the feeling of disappointment about the way the war ended. The masses in Greece mobilized not just once but many times in large numbers hoping this would have

**○ The atmosphere of fear that the officials and the police had spread through the media had in fact led many of the people of Thessalonica to go out of town during this three day event.**



an effect on the warmongering plans of the imperialists. But as we have explained many times, demonstrations are not enough. The movement must be built up against the very system that spawns war, the capitalist system.

Another major reason was that the way the demonstrations were organized. The fact that there were three separate demos did not help at all. It gave a feeling of a divided movement, which inevitably has the effect of keeping a large layer of people away. Lastly the police and the local authorities had built up an atmosphere of fear for some time before the summit. All these factors

played their role. This explains why the events of Thessalonica 2003 did not become the continuation of Genoa, or even of the recent Evian Conference, but just their echo.

However no one should interpret this in any way as a lack of willingness to struggle on the part of Greek workers and youth. Greece has seen very large strikes and demonstrations over the past two years, with general strikes and mass demonstrations. What we need is one united movement with a clear programme and objectives. Presented with this the masses would respond massively.



## Third general strike rocks Nigeria in three years

**N**igeria has been hit by its third general strike in just three years after another massive hike in fuel prices. There has been a massive wave of strikes across the country. In June 2000 there was a general strike against the government's attempts to increase the price of fuel. Again in January 2002 the workers came out, but the strike was called off very quickly by the NLC leaders who had not wanted it from the very beginning. Every time the NLC leaders, in particular its president Adams Oshiomole, did everything to call off the strikes and reach some kind of compromise with the government.

The problem for these "leaders" is that this achieved nothing for the workers. It merely postponed the problems. Under pressure from the working class the government made concessions. But these concessions always involved reducing the amount by which fuel prices were increased. It still came down to an increase, albeit a limited one. It was inevitable that the government would come back for more.

Nigeria has a huge foreign debt of over \$30 billion. It needs debt relief and resched-

by our correspondent in Nigeria

uling. For this to happen it needs to re-establish relations with the IMF, which were broken off last year. This in itself showed that even the capitalists of Nigeria and their government were finding it difficult to apply IMF policies to Nigeria. To do so meant coming into conflict with the workers. It also meant trampling on the interests of a part of the Nigerian elite itself - that section that has made money from the state control of the oil industry in particular - especially among the enriched army generals.

However, the logic of the world market is relentless. Imperialism wants its pound of flesh and Obasanjo, the newly elected President, is under enormous pressure to abide by the rules of international finance.

These pressures also explain his recent announcement to increase the price of petrol by 54%. The increase in fuel prices does not only affect petrol but also such products as kerosene, widely used for cooking in Nigeria. This would severely affect the poorer layers of society. The NLC was forced to call a general strike against

the government's measures after last minute negotiations failed. Thousands of bus drivers and taxi drivers took part in the strike and this led to paralysis in all the major cities. Government buildings were picketed by angry workers holding NLC banners. Lagos was brought to a standstill.

Obasanjo declared the strike illegal. He claimed the NLC did not give the government the 15 days warning required by law. But how can the workers wait fifteen days? By then the increase would have been consolidated.

There is however a logic in Obasanjo's declaration. Last time there was a general strike, a few days into it he declared it illegal and the NLC "leaders" obliged by calling the general strike off! This time they say that nothing can stop the strike action. But can these leaders be trusted?

The clash between Obasanjo and the working class was inevitable. He is under more and more pressure from the imperialists to come up with the goods. They are demanding he privatise and cuts subsidies. This means war

with the workers.

The problem of problems remains the leadership of the working class. Leaders like Adams cannot be trusted. Past experience is sufficient testimony to this. The workers of Nigeria need a leadership that is capable of the same fighting spirit as the rank and file. They need a leadership that does not cosy up to the likes of Obasanjo, but is ready to take him on. That means a struggle at all levels of the union movement to elect leaders that genuinely represent the workers. Together with this, the workers also need their own political voice. The recent elections showed clearly that none of the major contenders could be trusted. They are all part of the same gang of capitalists and their hangers-on.

The unions must build their own party, a party of labour. Such a party, once built, would have to campaign on a programme of nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, under democratic workers' control and management. This combined with a repudiation of the foreign debt would provide the workers with all the resources they need to solve all their pressing problems. □



## Alan Woods speaks in the Trotsky Museum

Alan Woods, editor of marxist.com was given the opportunity to speak to a group of workers, intellectuals and activists in the auditorium of the Trotsky Museum in Coyoacan, Mexico City on the present world situation during his recent tour. The meeting was packed, with over 150 people in a hall that seats only 80. In order to get everyone in, people sat in the passages and staff of the museum had to open the side doors, where people stood outside, trying to listen.

The audience consisted of workers, trade unionists, students, intellectuals and PRD activists. It was organized by the Mexican Marxist tendency, Militante, which has experienced a serious growth in the last period and is now the biggest and most active group on the Mexican Left.

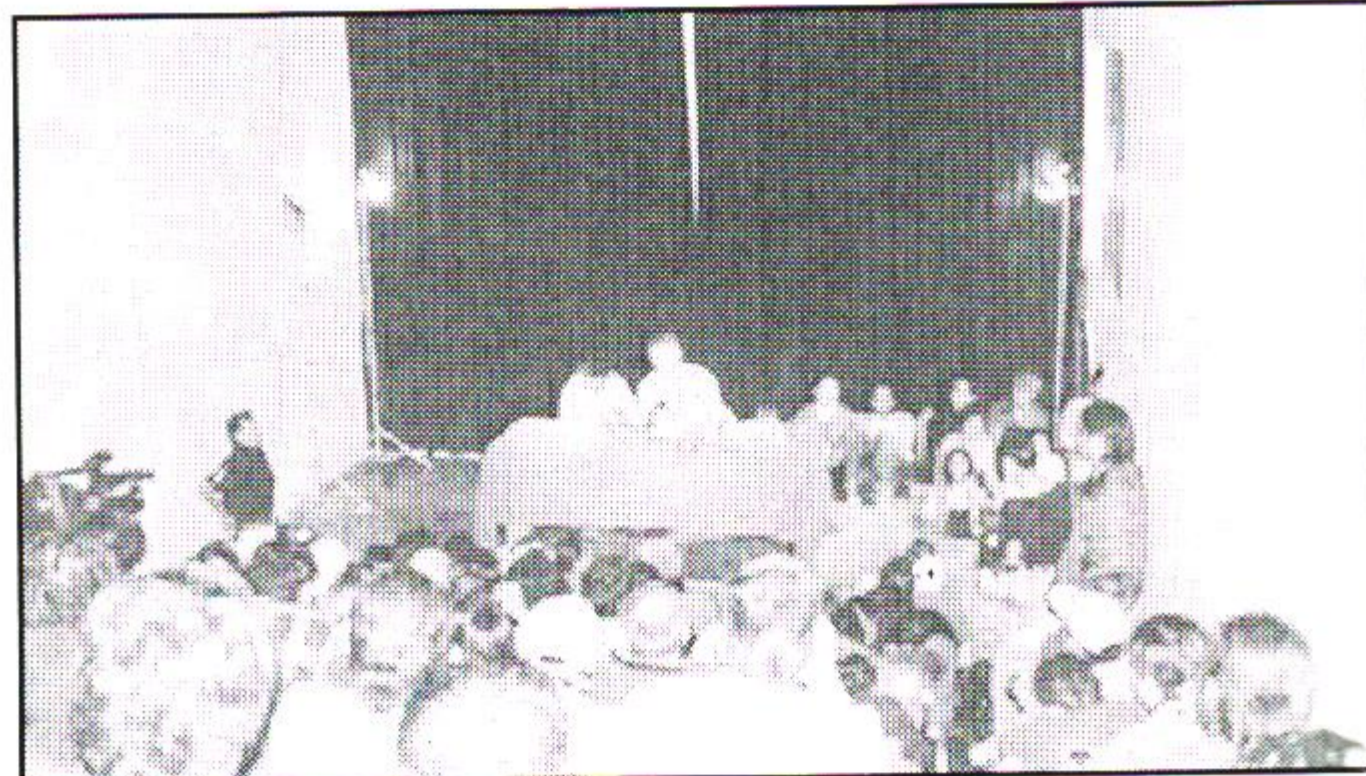
Alan spoke for one hour in Spanish, giving a broad view of the world situation since the war in Iraq. He dealt with world relations and the economic crisis, and then went on to deal in some detail with the particular crisis in Latin America: "There is not one single stable bourgeois regime from Tierra del Fuego to the Rio Grande", he affirmed.

Referring to the revolutionary events over the last two and a half years in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela and Argentina, he concluded that the only thing that prevented the workers from taking power was the lack of a revolutionary party and leadership.

There followed a lively discussion, in which many people participated, including trade unionists and veterans of the Mexican workers' movement. There was a lot of discussion on the attitude of Marxists to the trade unions and the PRD.

In his summing up Alan replied to these arguments point by point. He explained that one does not construct a revolutionary party simply by proclaiming it. "If that were the case, then every petty sectarian would be as great as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky put together". Turning to Esteban Volkov, who was in the audience, Alan said: "Well, Esteban, I don't know why your grandfather and Lenin wrote so much, since it appears that nobody ever reads what they wrote, or if they do, they do not understand a single line!"

Alan quoted Lenin on the unions and also Trotsky, who said that the task of building the party fell into two parts: firstly, the formation of cadres and the elaboration of theory, programme, methods, ideas and traditions. But the second part was more difficult: how do



we take these ideas to the mass of the working class?

The fact that the right wing leaders of the "charro" unions were bad and corrupt was no argument against working in these unions, which contain more than five million workers. Lenin explained this a thousand times, and the Communist International, when it was still a genuine Bolshevik International instructed all its members to work in the unions, no matter how right wing and bureaucratic they were.

As for the PRD, Alan said: "I understand that the leaders of the PRD are very bad. You understand it also. But there is just one little problem: millions of Mexican workers and peasants do not understand it yet and will vote for the PRD in the next elections. This is a very concrete question. The leftward moving workers have understood that they must kick out the PRI and the PAN. For them there is no alternative to the PRD." The Marxists must find a road to these workers, and not shut themselves off in little sects.

Finally, Alan spoke about

the tremendous potential of a socialist Mexico and a socialist Latin America: "This country of yours has everything necessary for creating a prosperous and cultured society. It can be a beautiful garden, and yet under capitalism it has been condemned to an existence of poverty and humiliation. The Mexican bourgeoisie has had nearly one hundred years to show what it can do, and it has failed miserably."

Only socialism can solve the problems of the people in Mexico, Latin America and the whole world.

Both the speech and the reply were received by those present with tremendous enthusiasm, and the meeting ended with the singing of the *Internationale*.

### New documentary on Trotsky

Esteban Volkov, the grandson of Leon Trotsky, was present at the meeting. Although he has never formally joined any Trotskyist group and retains his organisational independence, Esteban has fought all his life to defend the political heritage of Leon Trotsky and has played, and still plays a key role in maintaining the Trotsky Museum. Alan Woods was invited to Mexico by Esteban Volkov in order to participate in the making of a new documentary film about the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky.

The documentary, which is being made by the Argentinean-Mexican direc-





tor, Adolfo Videla, on behalf of TV-UNAM, will include contributions by Pierre Broue and veteran Mexican Trotskyists, one of whom organised Trotsky's asylum in Mexico. Alan has made an extensive contribution, explaining Trotsky's ideas and role in revolutionary history both in Russia and internationally.

The documentary should be ready in the Autumn, when it will be shown on Mexican television, but the makers hope that it will find a far wider audience in Mexico and internationally.



Esteban Volkov is the first on the left

## STOP PRESS

**C**onfirming the volcanic shift taking place in the British trade unions, the left have won a stunning victory in the elections for the leadership of the civil service union PCS. This is an amazing result. What a turn around!

The joint Left Unity/PCS Democrats list for the NEC overwhelmingly defeated the rightwing 'Moderate/Independent' slate. The political balance on the new NEC is Left Unity 25, PCS Democrats 9, Inland Revenue Members First 5, and Moderates 4. The previous balance on the NEC was: Moderates 24, Left Unity 13, IR Membership First 7, and others 2. This clearly shows the tremendous shift to the left following the victory of Mark Sewotka as general secretary.

Left Unity member Janice Godrich was re-elected as President in the first ever-straight fight for that position, with a decisive 23,000 to 15,000 majority over her rightwing opponent. Three Left Unity members and a PCS Democrat won all the deputy presi-

dent/vice president positions. The so-called Moderates were reduced to a rump in the 'General' constituency, coming bottom of the poll. They took only the four places left vacant by the fact that Democracy candidates standing for the presidential, deputy and vice presidential posts had also stood for constituency places. In the 'Taxation Constituency', Left Unity members also topped the poll, and the joint Democrats list won 5 seats. The IR Membership First faction disguised themselves as 'Independents' and managed to scrape 5 seats.

The election took place after a number of changes introduced by the former rightwing, which reduced the numbers on the NEC and gave it a different structure. They hoped this would benefit the right, but no manoeuvre could block the mood for change.

This result represents a tremendous advance for the left of the union. Left Unity has managed to win an absolute majority, even without the support of the 'centrist' PCS

Democrats. It should therefore carry out its own left programme and not be side tracked by 'moderates' in whatever form. This victory represents also a major challenge for the left, which now has to show in practise the benefits of a left leadership within the union. We have to use this important opportunity to take the union forward and address the problems of our members.

The days of Reamsbottom and the rightwing are at an end. The result reflects the mood of bitterness within the union against the continuing attacks of the government. This is a generalised mood across the trade unions. As we have argued, this mood will inevitably reflect itself in the Labour Party, and is a confirmation that even right-dominated unions and workers' organisations can be changed. It is a red letter day for PCS members!

Rachael Heemskerk,  
PCS president, DWP Essex,  
(personal capacity)

# PCS Left sweeps to victory!



## Student protests reveal weakness of the Iranian regime

by Fred Weston

Student protests across Iran have revealed how little support is left for the Islamic regime among not only the students and the workers, but also large layers of the middle classes. In spite of the harsh clampdown of the regime, it is clear that it is dying. It is no longer a question of "if", but rather of "when" it will fall.

What sparked off the latest movement was the regime's plans to privatise the university halls of residence as well as some other university services and their decision to increase fees. This would affect wide layers of the students, many of whose families would find it difficult to keep their sons and daughters at university if these measures were introduced.

So far the movement has not been as big as it was in 1999 in terms of actual numbers, but what is most significant is that it has come at a time when other layers of society, in particular the workers, have also been protesting. There has been widespread sympathy shown by the wider population for the students.

### Brutal reaction

Also striking has been the brutal reaction of the regime, which shows that it has nothing else to offer. In 1999 it could offer the illusion that the "reformers" would gradually introduce genuine democratic reforms and improvements in living conditions. The masses have now seen through this as empty promises.

So this time they have unleashed the Ansaar Hezbollah and the Basij militia, (as well as the police). These people are fanatical elements loyal to the regime, in particu-

lar to the conservative wing. They are more akin to fascists, who play an auxiliary role in backing up the regime. But even these elements have been proving insufficient in holding down the protests.

Once the conditions have matured and a genuine mass movement gets under way repressive measures can have the opposite effect to the one that is desired. These measures can simply push the movement on to fight back. In the process the workers and youth involved start to draw conclusions.

We can see this simply by quoting some of the accounts the students themselves have been posting on the Internet. One of them describes what happened on the night of June 14. The students were chanting slogans against the regime. Then they decided to take their protest outside the university dormitories and were met by 100 riot police. After several hours, early in the morning 600-700 of the Ansaar brutally attacked the students, aided

and abetted by the police who provided shields and other necessary equipment.

(Information taken from an article with the title, *The Blood of Iranians - Fighting our way to regime change*, by Koorosh Afshar)

### Down with all of them!

In reaction to these brutal measures, and as a result of the experience since the 1999 movement, the demands of the students and the wider public have gone further than simply calling for "reform". In the introduction to the above text on one site we find the comment of a student which says, "No more Khatami, not Khamenei, Not Rafsanjani... Total separation of religion [from] state... towards a secular democracy..." In fact the crowds have been shouting slogans such as "Death to Khamenei" and calling for end to Islamic rule. The masses have had enough. Their loyalties to any religious belief are not perma-

nent. This regime represents the wealthy Islamic elite and it has done nothing for the masses. On the contrary things have got worse under the mullahs and now the people are reacting against it.

The regime has become increasingly isolated from the masses, and more than looking at the actual numbers involved, we have to look at the overall process. Iran has been rocked by a steady increase in the number of such protests affecting not only the students but also the wider public, especially the workers and urban poor. Since 1999 there have been other protest movements and it is merely a matter of time before the movement boils over and becomes unstoppable. Even if for now the movement seems to have receded this can only be temporary. Already they are worried at what might happen on July 9, which is the anniversary of the 1999 movement.

The events of these last two weeks have been reported extensively, especially on the Internet and therefore do not need to be repeated here.

### Social and economic decline

It is necessary to put all these events into the social and economic context of what Iran has become today for the mass of people who live there.

If we limited our analysis to simply looking at GDP growth, then one would wonder what all the trouble was about. Over the past two years GDP growth has averaged over 5% per annum. GDP per person in 2002 was 20% up on ten years ago. But a closer look reveals a completely different situation. In the 1970s GDP was actually 30% higher than now! That





reveals the long-term decline which is really the explanation for the present revolt.

An even closer look at the economic and social situation reveals an actual nightmare for large layers of the population. Inflation stands at 17%. Official unemployment stands at 18%, but many admit that the real figure could be around 22-23%. The total number of unemployed today stands at 3.2 million, and is expected to rise to 7 or 8 million over the next few years. The population of Iran is a very young one, and 1.8 million people turn 18 each year. Each year around one million young Iranians enter the labour market, but there is barely room for half of them.

According to *The Economist*, 15% of the population subsists below the poverty line. But according to the CIA this figure could actually be much higher, as high as 56%! Whichever is the case, it is obvious that a large part of the population is living on the breadline.

Some other horrifying facts may add to the picture. Even the "Islamic" authorities admit that over two million people in Iran are taking drugs. Every month around a dozen policemen are killed in drugs related crime fighting. More than 60% of crimes are in fact related to drugs.

The plight of Iran's children is also terrible. There are 200,000 "streetchildren", i.e. children that have been forced by one circumstance or another onto the streets to survive, and this is according to the official figures of the regime.

The position of women is no better, especially among the poorer layers of society. In fact under the rule of these pious mullahs the scourge of prostitution is alive and well. According to some calculations there are at least 300,000 prostitutes. This can be explained by the fact that there are 1.7 million homeless women, with two-



thirds of them getting no kind of state support whatsoever. The mullahs on this question reveal an infinite ability to be flexible. There is the phenomenon of temporary marriage, or the *sigh*. This is a marriage with a defined time limit, which can even be of a few minutes! As long as it is a registered temporary marriage, then it is not regarded as prostitution!

All this has been compounded by the rapid urbanisation of Iran over the last thirty years. Tens of thousands of villages have been abandoned as the population has been driven into the cities to seek some form of employment. Of its 70 million inhabitants, 67% now live in the cities. Tehran is now a city of over ten million people. Thirty years ago it only had two million. This rapid urbanisation has not been catered for with improvements in housing and infrastructure.

The situation facing the young people of Iran is a desperate one. The population of Iran is extremely young, with two-thirds of the total being under the age of 30, and half under the age of 20. Young women are also playing more of a role, in spite of the attempts to confine them to the home. Last year 63% of fresh students were women. Although still low compared to more advanced industrial countries

12% of the active workforce is now made up of women, and in some sectors they represent the majority.

#### New generation fighting back

It is this new, fresh generation that is now spearheading the protest movement. The numbers are so high that the regime simply cannot hold back the inevitable for much longer. Already back in 1999 the first signs of discontent were evident. These marked an important turning point in the situation, and although they did not lead to any major change in the regime, they indicated that the beginning of the end was here for the mullahs.

At that time there were some illusions in the "reforming wing" of the regime. These were seen as "liberal reformers". It was in fact the promise of press freedom and other democratic reforms that persuaded the students and other people tired of the rule of the mullahs to back Mohammad Khatami in 1997. This is what helped to get him elected president that year.

It was inevitable that after such a long time (two

decades) of oppressive rule there should be some illusions in the possibility of gradually reforming the system through such figures as Khatami. But, as the saying goes, nothing is wasted in history. These past few years since 1997, including the important events of 1999, have left their mark.

#### Support for mullahs has plummeted

In 1998 Khatami's popularity still stood at over 75% according to opinion polls. As recently as 2001, when Khatami was re-elected, 69% of the electorate turned out. But by August of last year Khatami's support had already fallen to 43%. Now it has plummeted even further. On February 28 of this year local elections were held in Iran. The turnout was a miserable 25% on average. In Tehran the fall was even more dramatic with only 12% of the capital's voters bothering to turn out. On this low turnout the "conservative wing" was able to win and oust the so-called "reformers" from many local councils.

The fact is that the overwhelming majority of the population has lost all confidence in the regime, and in particular the "reformers" have lost the support they had. In Tehran the "conservatives" may have won, but the councillor who emerged as the most popular figure was only elected with the support of 4% of the voters!

The problem with the "reformers" is that they wanted to reform the system without changing it fundamentally. Their preoccupation was not to really to defend the interests of the youth, the unemployed, the poor, the workers. No, what they wanted was to channel the dis-



**It is this new, fresh generation that is now spearheading the protest movement. The numbers are so high that the regime simply cannot hold back the inevitable for much longer.**



content and give some minor concessions in order to avoid an even bigger movement that would inevitably topple the whole regime. To do this they would have had to mobilise the masses. This is the last thing they wanted to do.

## The programme of the "reformers"

What is worse with the "reformers" is that their economic programme is even more severe than that of the so-called "conservatives". It is based on widespread privatisation and severe cuts in subsidies. This is in line with the demands of western imperialism, which wants the whole state structure dismantled and placed in private hands, and also wants big cuts in social spending. In fact Khatami's 2000-2005 "five-year plan" envisages privatisation and deregulation of the economy. If we consider that 60% of the Iranian economy is still state controlled and another 10-20% is in the hands of parastatal companies, then these proposals would affect large layers of the population. Khatami plans to sell off 538 state-run companies. Such food items as wheat, rice, cooking oil and sugar are also heavily subsidised.

To implement fully this programme would mean provoking a massive uprising of the whole of the population. Khatami is very aware of this fact and may explain why, in spite of his avowed "market" principles his government has been doling out \$1.1 billion in the form of loans to employers who take on extra workers. This is much to the annoyance of western commentators who see this as merely keeping defunct companies alive. The problem is that the advice of the west is difficult to implement.

It was in fact the proposal to privatise the universities and introduce fees that provoked the recent student movement. What we have listed above also explains why the movement of the students has had such a wide echo among the population as a whole.

As we said, the movement



that started on June 9, has so far not proved to be as large as that of 1999. But what it does indicate is that the protest movements are occurring more often and they are infecting other layers. On June 13, for instance thousands of motorists blocked a main highway in Tehran publicly swearing against the "Islamic Republic", a clear act of defiance. More significant was the fact that people in the surrounding neighbourhood came out of their houses to cheer the motorists.

## Plight of Iranian workers

This mood of defiance reflects the desperate situation that many workers in Iran are facing. There have been many strikes and protests over the past period, in particular concerning the question of unpaid wages. One example is what happened recently in Esfahan at the Tedjarat Company, Rahim Zadeh, Kohe Faht and Pars Fastony factories. The workers in these factories are owed between 6 and 8 months wages. About one thousand of them organised a march on March 17, which ended up at the General Governor's office. The authorities replied by calling in the police who brutally attacked the workers arresting 12 of them. There is a long list of such cases, with workers being forced to protest either because of the long backlog of unpaid wages or because their jobs are at risk.

One of the most famous

cases is that of the Behshahr textile workers. The workers there have organised a hunger strike because of the huge amount of unpaid wages owed to them. The number of workers facing a similar situation is constantly growing, so much so that now there are over 100,000 workers who have gone without pay for anything from three to 36 months!

Just as the students' movement has spilled over beyond the campuses themselves, the same thing happened recently with the Behshahr textile workers. On June 15, after ending their hunger strike these workers marched into the city of Behshahr. This turned into a mass demonstration against the regime attracting thousands of people. Again the security forces went in heavily against the demonstrating workers.

Another example comes from Esfahan, where according to some eyewitnesses anything between twenty and forty thousand people marched through the town calling for the overthrow of the Islamic regime. Similar events were reported in other cities such as Mashad, Khorram Abad and Shiraz.

In working class areas of Tehran there have been reports of the local population protesting about the big increases in the price of staple goods. Inflation in fact is growing very fast and ordinary working people just cannot make ends meet. Again these protests were met with the brutal intervention of the security forces.

This is bound to increase as

the economic situation further deteriorates. Iran is heavily dependent on oil exports. Oil revenue still represents about 80% of export earnings and around 40-50% of the government budget. Thus next years current account is expected to move into deficit as the price of oil comes down, adding to the pressures that the regime is under, and providing further fuel to the mass movement that will inevitably develop.

## Mullahs are terrified

What has been significant with this latest movement of the students is the brutal reaction of the regime. In spite of every commentator underlining that this movement is much smaller than that of 1999 ("piffling" according to the latest edition of *The Economist*!) the regime's reaction is indicative of the fact that they believe it could spread far wider than the university campuses, to the workers' districts, which have already been in turmoil, as we can see from the situation described above. There is so much combustible material that it could be like a match being thrown onto petrol.

Thus no longer able to hold back the movement with the illusions of "reform", they have turned to ruthless repression. But a mass movement cannot be held back through pure repression alone. Some commentators have pointed out that the regime can count on an unofficial militia force of around 400,000. But they forget that under the Shah, before his overthrow in 1978 by the mass movement, his dreaded security force, the SAVAK was also considered the most powerful in the region. It did not hesitate to open fire on the crowds from helicopters. But this did not save it from the wrath of the masses once these began to move in a determined manner. The same fate awaits today's security forces and unofficial pro-regime militias.

The weakness of the present regime can be seen in the splits that have emerged at the top of the regime itself.



Recently more than 250 lecturers signed a letter calling on Khamenei to "abandon the principle of God's representative on earth" and to accept that he is accountable to the people. Among the signatories were two aides of Khatami. In May 127 legislators called on Khamenei to accept reform before "the whole establishment and the country's independence and integrity are jeopardised".

What this means is that a wing of the regime is clearly worried that the movement could get out of control and lead to the toppling of all of them, conservatives and reformers. But these pious gentlemen are not really worried about the conditions of the masses. Their aim is to loosen the reins so as to avoid an explosion that will sweep the lot of them away. The problem is that in the conditions of Iran once the reins are loosened the masses will begin to move more freely and will not stop at some minor concessions. Their problems are too big and too urgent for them to be able to wait for better times when the reformers manage to find it in them to do something.

Up until recently there was the illusion that some kind of democracy was close at hand. Now that illusion has gone. This can be seen from the demands being raised. They no longer appeal to Khatami, they call for his downfall and with him the whole rotten regime. It is significant that the demand for separation of Mosque and State is being raised.

### The next stage

This shows that the movement is progressing to the next stage. The problem is that so far this movement has been disorganised with no clear point of reference or mass party emerging that is capable of uniting together all the forces, workers, students, small shopkeepers, etc. That is clearly missing.

It is not enough to call for an end to the regime, for the

separation of the Mosque from the state. These are demands that Marxists support of course, but it is necessary to go further and also to warn the workers and youth of Iran. It is clear that so-called "liberal" bourgeois politicians are preparing to intervene in Iran. The old supporters of the Shah are also trying to get a look in through their satellite TVs.

The Bush administration in the US is clearly looking to these. What they want is "regime change" that would lead to a US-friendly regime. They want to exploit the mass movement that is developing to topple the regime and replace it with their own stooges. That also explains the pressures on the question of nuclear weapons. In this the European Union is also adding its weight demanding the inspection of Iran's military and nuclear hardware. They are trying to send a message to some of the leading figures in the regime which basically says; "either play the game according to our rules or you could end up like Iraq!"

The youth of Iran can see straight through this and have distanced themselves from Bush when he came out expressing his "support". The fact is that Bush really supports the economic programme of the "reformers". This means he is actually at the opposite end of the spectrum when it comes to the demands of the students. They are opposed to privatisation and cuts. Bush supports these measures.

No the solution to the problems of the Iranian workers and youth are not be found in any liberal bourgeois politician and certainly not in the capitalist west. What is needed in Iran is to coordinate the various struggles and bring them together under one banner. This means that the workers must build action committees in their workplaces. The same must be done on the campuses and in the neighbourhoods. These should elect delegates to wider co-ordinating committees. On this basis the workers and youth can hammer out a programme

and decide on the next step in the Iranian revolution.

The bourgeois are raising the demand for privatisation. These committees should write clearly on their banner 'No to privatisation'. Sixty per cent of the economy is already in state hands, but it is run in the interests of the clique around the mullahs. Instead, what the action committees would call for is workers' control and management of these industries. Iran is potentially a very rich country with an educated and skilled working class. If the resources of the country were under the control of the workers they could use them to eliminate the scourge of unemployment. They could provide housing and jobs for all. Education could be free for all.

All this would be possible if the workers were in power. A first step towards achieving that would be a general strike of the workers, students and small shopkeepers. If all the forces of the workers and youth were brought out together the regime would be powerless to stop it. So long as the protests are sporadic and isolated to one town or another, to one factory or another, to one campus or another, then the regime can pick off each of these and attempt to terrorise the workers and youth. But if the movement were co-ordinated and generalised then the regime would come tumbling down. That is what happened to the Shah. It can happen again.

### The role of the Iranian communists

But the lessons of the past must also be learnt. If the movement remains uncoordinated and leaderless then it can be hijacked by other forces. This is what the mullahs did last time. This was facilitated by such organisations as the Tudeh, the Iranian Communist Party, the leaders of which at that time presented Khomeini as a "progressive" element. Thus they supported the mullahs. They paid a terrible price for this support. They

provided the Islamic fundamentalists with a left cover, which they used to hoodwink the masses. After that the Communists were discarded and suffered terrible repression losing many of its members in the torture chambers of the Islamic regime.

There is no such thing as a "progressive wing" of the Iranian bourgeoisie. Those bourgeois and royalist elements in exile have nothing progressive about them. They merely want to exploit the situation to promote their own interests and trample on the Iranian masses once more.

There is a long history of class struggle in Iran, and also a long Communist tradition. Among the new generation of workers and youth now coming onto the scene of history there will be many who will seek this past tradition. They will be looking for genuine Marxist ideas. Already the Tudeh and other Communist groups, in particular the Worker Communist Party of Iran, have cells working on the ground and also many members in exile. Genuine Marxists would welcome the growth and development of such Communist Parties in Iran. But it is also time for a reappraisal of the past among the Iranian left. It is necessary to draw a balance sheet and develop the correct programme, strategy and tactics. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past in seeking the so-called "progressive elements". The working class, pulling behind it all the oppressed layers of society, would be an unstoppable force. The Communist movement must base itself on this central point and warn the workers not to trust any of the "reformers" or liberal politicians who are trying to regain their lost influence. Trust none of them. Count only on your own forces.

Now the workers and youth of Iran have been given another opportunity by history. Let us not waste it. □





## Interview with Ted Grant

### A lifetime dedicated to the cause of socialism

**On July 9, Ted Grant celebrated his 90th birthday. Ted has been an active Trotskyist all his life, since the early 1930s in South Africa and then in Britain from 1934 onwards. We interviewed him about his life's struggle and how he sees things today.**

**Is there a period in all your years of activity that you find particularly significant?**

I have been through many ups and downs. We started with a small group in 1938 of around a dozen or so. In the course of the Second World War we managed to build it up into a sizeable organisation of several hundred (the RCP) with a strong trade union base. But even this was not sufficient to avoid the defeats of the working class that took place after the war. But because of the antics of the so-called leaders of the Fourth International the work we had done was almost destroyed. There was then a long period of "crossing the desert". The 1950s were difficult years, but we held our small forces together and recruited a new layer. We were always confident that the situation would turn once more in our favour, and eventually it did in the 1960s and 1970s and we were once again able to build up a very powerful

force around the Militant paper inside the Labour Party. But again, partially the objective situation, but mainly the mistakes of most of the leading comrades led the bulk of the forces in Britain to abandon the fundamental ideas of Marxism. Once you do that you are lost.

I wouldn't say that any of these periods was particularly more significant than the others. At all times, whether good or bad, Marxists can develop the ideas, learn and build up the forces in preparation for the great tasks that history has prepared for us.

**You have made a major and key contribution in building several organisations in your lifetime. Again, was there one that stands out for you?**

I would say that the most significant is what we are building today! The past is behind us. We have to look forward to the future. It is a question of picking up the threads and pulling them

together and going forward. That is the task of the Socialist Appeal and the In Defence of Marxism web site.

**You have made a major contribution in developing the ideas of Marxism. What in your view would you say are the key questions?**

At the end of the Second World War all the other so-called Trotskyists were thrown by the events then taking place. They did not fully understand the nature of the period. They thought revolution was round the corner. Some had the crazy idea that the war wasn't even over, or that a Third World War was imminent. We in Britain were really the only ones to understand the nature of the boom that was then beginning. It turned out to be the longest and most powerful boom in the history of capitalism. This was bound to have an effect.

In the same period we had the phenomenon of proletarian bonapartism

(Stalinism) spreading to Eastern Europe. We had the Chinese Revolution of 1949. By sticking firmly to the method of Marxism, the method developed by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, we were able to build on that tradition. We came to the conclusion that the regimes in Eastern Europe, China (and later Cuba, Vietnam, and several others) were merely a photocopy of the Russian model, but not that of 1917 but of the terrible caricature of socialism that emerged under Stalin. We were the only ones to understand the real nature of these regimes. The others zig-zagged all over the place. First China and Eastern Europe were capitalist (in spite of the nationalised planned economy!) then suddenly, in some cases (China, Cuba, Yugoslavia) they became "relatively healthy workers' states". With this method you are lost.

**You are known in the movement for your consis-**



## tent approach to the mass organisations. How do you see this question today?

The attitude of Marxists to the mass organisations is the key. Unless we understand this we will never build anything viable in a million years. Our approach to this question is based on the traditions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. It was not something we invented. Read Lenin's *Left Wing Communism*, or Trotsky letters and articles on the situation inside the mass organisations in the 1930s. But we also built on this and developed it further. We were compelled to do so in a certain sense in the 1950s and 1960s because of the alienation of the working class from genuine Marxism at that time. We understood that when the mass of the working class moves in a decisive manner it does so through the trade unions and the mass workers' parties. All history teaches this. Comrades must get a feel of history, and understand how the class moves. What we have done is to apply the method of Marxism to the conditions of today. Trotsky had a genuine feel for the mass movement. He understood how the workers move and he always stressed the need for the Marxists to link up to the class. All the other groups who claim the mantle of Trotsky have never really grasped his method. It is not enough to mouth off a few quotes learnt by memory. The method is the key thing.

## What would you say was Trotsky's major contribution to the movement?

He said it himself. It was his analysis of Stalinism. With Lenin dead he was the only one who could deal with the question of the degeneration of the first workers' state in history. Without this the movement would have been lost. His last ten years were spent in re-arming the movement, in preserving and developing the ideas. We stand proudly on the shoulders of this giant. Without the "Old Man" we could not have achieved what we did. And we could not build what we are building today.

## What about the future prospects of the movement?

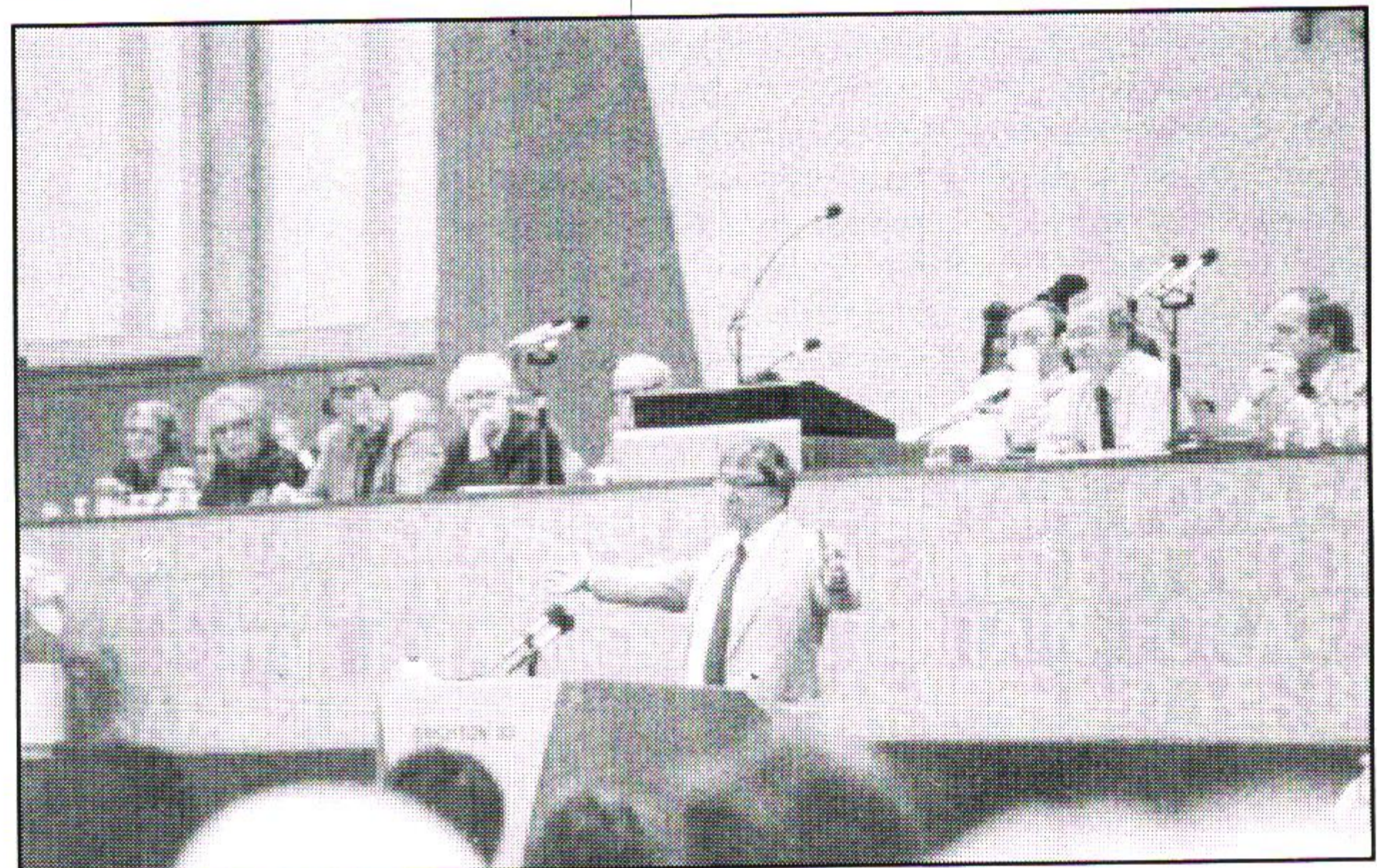
There are bound to be big move-

ments of the working class in Britain, in Europe and throughout the world. We already see the first signs of this with the massive general strikes in Italy, Spain, Greece... even countries like Austria and Sweden are being affected. The whole of Latin America is in turmoil. All this is bound to have an effect on the Marxist movement as well. We can only benefit from all this. The youth are once again on the move. They are the key. He who has the youth has the future. These youth will come to us. No other tendency has kept its bearings like we have. The others have abandoned the fundamentals of Marxism and so their organisations have turned to dust. Once you abandon the fundamental principles of Marxism you are lost.

We have preserved and developed the ideas for the future generations. For a period we were sidelined by history. Now the tide is turning once more. Our period is coming and I am confident that we will build a massive force both in Britain and internationally. Once the ideas of genuine Marxism become the ideas of the masses no force on earth will be able to stop them.

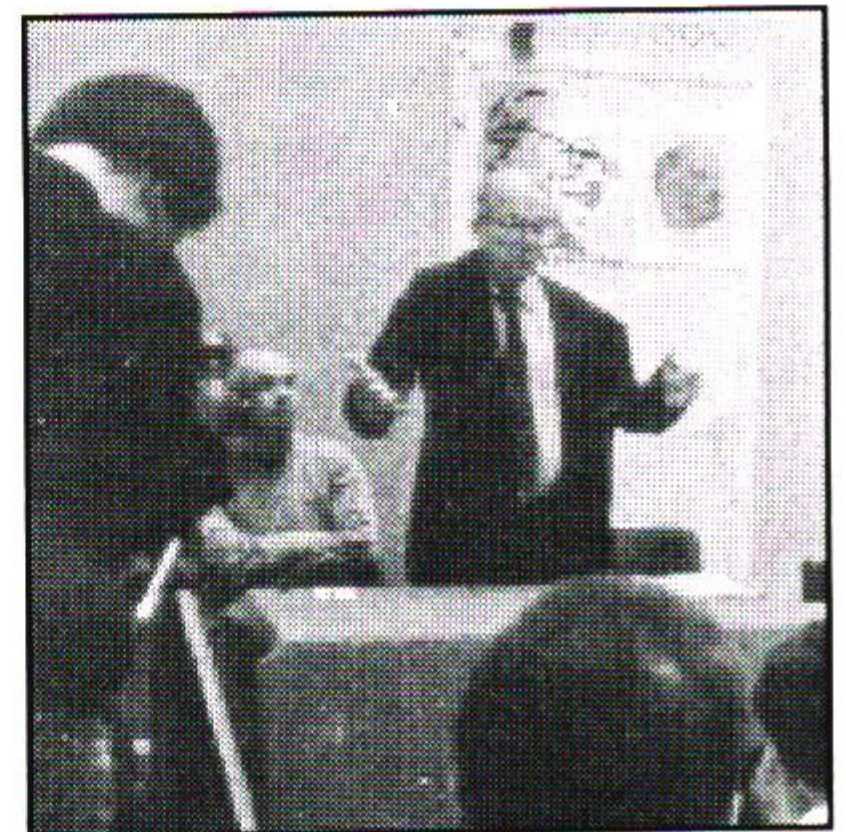
July 2, 2003

**Ted Grant appealing against expulsion at the Labour Party's closed session at 1983 Conference**  
Photography was banned.  
Thanks to Phil Lloyd for this remarkable picture.



**Ted Grant speaking at Hyde Park  
Mid - 1942**

**Ted Grant  
being filmed  
speaking  
at a youth  
meeting,  
London 2001**





# fighting fund

## Summer appeal

**A**s we all now head off on our summer holidays (assuming you can afford one that is), crammed in cars, coaches or cheapo planes, we can at least be pleased that one person is able to travel in style and comfort. Yes, good old John Prescott has got another Jag! Looks like stabbing the firefighters in the back has its plus side.

However looking instead now at genuine trade unionism, July is the month when we once more note the sacrifice of our Jag-less brothers and sisters who struggled to establish and defend the Labour and trade union movement, most notably of course the Tollpuddle Martyrs. Each year people assemble in Dorset to mark the sacrifice not only of the men from Tollpuddle but, in a sense, all those who have paid a price for building this movement of ours. The forthcoming book to be published by wellred on the history of the British trade unions will go through all this and it is important that we do not forget our history and our achievements. Over three hundred years ago Gerrard Winstanley, one of the founders of the Diggers during the English civil war, wrote: "Property ... divides the whole world into parties, and is the cause of all wars and bloodshed and contention everywhere... When the earth becomes a common treasury again, as

it must,...then this enmity in all lands will cease."

These words remain unfulfilled still and it remains our aim to realise Winstanley's vision and achieve a better society, a socialist world. But to continue with this mighty task we need your support. Donations are vital if we are to keep going and expand our operations over the next period. This month, to date, we have received over £800 with several iou's outstanding on top. Donations include £109 Mersey readers, £30 Leicester readers, £200 Robin Jamieson, £70 Lucy Sewell together with many other donations including cash from delegates and visitors at the various union conferences including Amicus, Unison and CWU. We thank you all but this needs to be kept up. Please send what you can to us at PO Box 2626, London, N1 7SQ. We also thank those who attended the meeting in London on Venezuela, which raised over £165 in profit which launched our special summer international appeal. Last year we raised over £2000 towards the struggle of workers internationally and the spread of Marxist ideas around the world. Anyone who would like to support this appeal this year should send donations to us, made payable to International Solidarity, to the same address as above.

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# In the Cause of Labour

## A History of the British Trade Unions

**W**e are pleased to announce the publication in September of a new book by Wellred on the history of British trade unionism. The original idea for this book arose from the series of monthly articles Rob Sewell wrote for *Socialist Appeal* in the early nineties. Although the material contained in this book is based on those articles, they have been considerably expanded, polished and revised. The conclusions are, nevertheless, the same as Rob Sewell wrote a decade ago. The only difference is that these conclusions have been confirmed by the events that have occurred since that time.

The book spans the two-hundred year history of the workers' movement, dealing with the birth of illegal trade unions, the Chartist movement, model unionism, New Unionism, the rise of the Labour Party, the war years and their after-

math, the General Strike and the period covering up until the present day. The book is a Marxist history, which draws on the writings of Marxism to illuminate the lessons from the struggles of the working class in Britain. It is particularly relevant today with the shift to the left of the trade unions and the emergence of a new generation of trade union activists.

A foreword for the book has been written by Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the NUJ and newly elected member of the General Council of the TUC.

All readers of *Socialist Appeal* are being given a chance to take up an introductory offer of receiving an advance copy of the book post-free. To reserve your copy as soon as it comes off the press and to take advantage of our special offer please send a cheque for £9.99 to Wellred Publications

# notice board

## July/August 2003

Advance Notice:

New book from **Wellred!**  
**In the Cause of Labour**  
**A History of the British Trade Unions**  
**By Rob Sewell**

Approx 250 pages

Price: £9.99

Publication: September 2003

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

## 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.** £8.00 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.





# Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

## Time to Reclaim Labour!



**T**he debate over the union-Labour link has surfaced repeatedly during the trade union conference season. This is not surprising given the attacks from the Blair government.

Some small unions have even threatened to disaffiliate. Bectu is balloting its members. The RMT took the decision to support various parties opposed to Labour. There are also rumours that the FBU will cut its links.

*Socialist Appeal* has consistently opposed this line of argument. Whilst understanding the frustration with the Labour government, to respond by breaking the link would be a big mistake. The point is not simply to get angry, but to get even! The only way to defeat Blairism is for the unions to take back the party. This has become the overwhelming view of the bigger unions such as the CWU, UNISON, GMB, Amicus and the TGWU.

At the conference of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Tony Woodley, the new general secretary, gave notice that New Labour's time was now up. "The days of New Labour are now numbered," he told the conference. He told delegates it was "time to reclaim our party" and put an end to privatisation, anti-union laws, pandering to big business and wars of aggression.

"Working people want something different. I say it is time to reclaim our party, not walk away from it as a few on the fringes would argue, but reclaim it for the values of working-class men and women, the values of socialism."

This call to arms is the latest onslaught in the long running battle over the future political direction of the government and the Labour party. Woodley, a leading member of the so-called awkward squad of new union leaders, is planning a summit of union leaders later this year to put the Labour "back in our party".

*Socialist Appeal* has urged that words be translated into deeds with the establishment of a '300 Club'. If the unions simply recruited 300 trade unionists to every local Labour Party, even on the present rules of One Member One Vote, they could decide who should represent the party at the next election. After all trade unionists can join the party for £12 per year. The unions could even help members financially to join by returning some of their political levy. It is as easy as that!

Such a plan would put the unions back in control. The Labour Party could be reclaimed for the working class and socialist policies. Don't contract out! Contract in!

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