

RESPECT □ Haiti □ Venezuela □ Lenin

Socialist Appeal

March 2004 issue 120

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2

End occupation of Iraq now!



Feature - 20th anniversary
of the Miners Strike

www.marxist.com

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



www.marxist.com

Editorial:

Secrets, Spies and Cover-ups.....3

Trade Union news:

NUJ: Vote to Strengthen Our Voice!.....4

Lectures and students strike against reforms.....4

PCS: Record numbers on civil service strike.....5

RMT: Fight for our re-affiliation!.....5

UNISON Cymru/Wales

Regional Labour Link Forum 2004.....6

T&G GEC Elections - Important Gains for the left.....7

Drivers demand decent pay.....7

**Feature - 20th anniversary
 of the Miners Strike:**

Miners - A year of struggle.....8

Interview with miners' leader.....12

Women enter battle.....13

RESPECT - a "new" alternative to New Labour?.....14

LENIN - 80th Anniversary of his death

The relevance of his ideas today.....16

International:

Occupation Forces Out of Iraq!.....20

Economy: Something Wicked This Way Comes.....22

Haiti - There can be

no solution under capitalism.....24

Youth:

Spanish Students show the way.....27

Venezuelan opposition steps

up campaign against Chavez government.....28

£15,000 the target for 2004!.....30

An appeal to all Labour and trade union organisations.

It is our intention to once again carry May Day greetings from organisations and individuals from the movement in our May 2004 edition.

Our struggle is the struggle of the international working class. May Day is an important date in the calendar of the Labour and trade union movement and we are therefore asking all readers to consider sending us greetings and messages of solidarity for inclusion in this edition. Our rates are very reasonable and different sized designs are available. In addition, and at no extra cost, all greetings will be placed on our websites to be viewed by people in struggle from all around the world.

Sizes available are:

12cm/20cm - cost £60

8cm/14cm - cost £30

4cm/14cm - cost £15

2cm/14cm - cost £10

Send details and payments to us at Socialist Appeal, PO Box 2626, London, N1 7SQ. Cheques should be made payable to Socialist Appeal. For further information and technical requests (logo's etc) contact us on 020 7 515 7675

The deadline for articles for issue 121 is March 15th

Secrets, Spies and Cover-ups

IT SEEMS the truth will out. The intrigue, deceit and lies surrounding the build up to war in Iraq continue to leak out. No sooner had the Hutton whitewash absolved Blair - convincing no-one - and scapegoated the BBC, than once more Radio 4's Today programme delivers a devastating blow.

Former Cabinet Minister Clare Short, who resigned over the war, astounded presenter and listeners alike by candidly admitting that British Intelligence had spied on UN officials including Secretary General Kofi Annan, in the run-up to war. When asked to confirm that she was certain about this Short replied that she had known about it whilst in the government, "I know. I have seen transcripts of Kofi Annan's conversations" she said.

These new revelations follow hot on the heels of the remarkable case of Katherine Gun. A former translator at GCHQ, Ms. Gun was arrested some eight months ago, and later charged with a breach of the Official Secrets Act, for disclosing what she saw as highly unethical and possibly illegal British and American spying operations. At GCHQ she had seen an e-mail from the US National Security Agency asking British Intelligence for their assistance in bugging officials at the United Nations. In her own words she thought this was "outrageous", and despite the risk to herself leaked the information. This she does not at all deny. Yet when the case finally came before the Old Bailey the government's lawyers dropped the charges saying they had no evidence to submit, and refused to go into any more detail. Had they been so shaken by the impact of the persecution suf-

fered by Dr. David Kelly that they decided to let the matter drop?

The truth has more to do with self-preservation. Here we enter the realm of yet another cover-up. In their defence Ms. Gun's lawyers intended to demand the details of the advice given to the government by the Attorney General on the legality of attacking Iraq. Legal Advisors in the Foreign Office were apparently divided, many believing that a second UN resolution was required to legitimise an invasion.

Legal advice

In another related blow to the government a senior legal adviser at the Foreign Office, Elizabeth Wilmhurst, who resigned from the Foreign Office after 30 years service last year, has now confirmed that the reason for her departure was that she was unhappy with the legal advice given to the government by Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, that a war would be legal even without a second UN resolution.

Why did the Attorney General differ with his opposite numbers in the Foreign Office on this question? The answer brings us back to the original lie festering away at the heart of the build up to war in Iraq, and the deceit extending to the very tops of the government. Very few people ever believed the claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. In any case their mere existence was not enough for Blair and co. They had to go that one step further in claiming that Britain was in clear and present danger because those weapons could be used against us in 45 minutes. Everyone now knows this was

not true. But was this 'evidence' used to convince the Attorney General that war would be legal? In the opinion of Clare Short there was "something fishy about the way he said that the war was legal." This whole business stinks. Prime Ministers and governments have fallen for less. That the secret services spy on the UN comes as no surprise. The labour movement has plenty of experience of the illegal activities of these people. That these operations should be exposed by a former member of Blair's cabinet creates a scandal of the first order.

This lie and the cover-up operations shrouding it have already driven one man beyond the edge of reason to take his own life; they have persecuted a former GCHQ translator, cost several people their jobs, and launched an unprecedented assault on the BBC. No matter how hard Blair wishes, and his aides spin, this will not go away. The legality or otherwise of the war is in reality a purely formal question. The families of the thousands of dead in Iraq, those enduring the occupation of their home by foreign invaders, and the families of those troops who have died will not be so concerned with legal niceties. They, like millions of others, will however be appalled and outraged by the web of intrigue and deceit now surrounding this government.

All this covert activity, the cover-ups and whitewashes which helped drag Britain into a war opposed by the majority of the population, certainly required a great deal more planning than has been given to conditions of the troops. Following the death of Sergeant Steven Roberts, killed after being made to hand over his flak

jacket to another unit because there were not enough to go around, another soldier has exposed the frivolous manner in which these soldiers are being sent to die in a war they should not be fighting. The new revelations, from a soldier who served on the frontline in Iraq, explain how he and his men were given five bullets each for the duration of their duty. Many uniforms, vehicles, and even 'camouflage' nets were green instead of the required desert brown. Instead of radios they were issued with mobile phones and told to call if they came under attack!

Blair must go

As Clare Short rightly pointed out "the tragedy is Iraq is a disastrous mess. Ten thousand Iraqis have died, American troops are dying, some of our troops have died, the Middle East is more angry than ever...so it won't go away will it?" Whilst Blair and co are desperate for Iraq to go away, there are millions in Iraq who are desperate for them to go away.

These scandals are dragging the name of the Labour Party through the mud. By their actions at home and abroad, in secret and in public, the Blair leadership faces crisis. The Blairites and their pro-capitalist policies must go. The stench of corruption, intrigue and deceit leaking from every pore of the corridors of power needs to be cleared away. At home and abroad a socialist policy is required. Blair will soon receive a verdict not from Hutton, or some other inquiry, but a verdict he cannot control, from the labour movement. □

Vote to Strengthen Our Voice!

Sylvia Courtnage, NUJ member, Book Branch

NUJ members around the country are discussing why we should have a political fund and the ballot to decide on this has just opened. Some members are arguing against. They cite the law and say that we don't need a political fund. We should remember that the Labour Movement can never rely on the help or fairness of the law courts. The legal system has been used against us far too many times.

Campaigning Issues

There have many trade union campaigns recently - aimed at protecting their members - which would not have been possible without them having political funds. A number of examples are quoted on the Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee (TUCC) site:

- The recent USDAW Christmas Day campaign to keep large stores closed on Christmas Day;
- Unison's Positively Public campaign fighting for high quality, responsive, modern, publicly-funded public services;
- the GMB's Asbestos campaign;
- the Take Back the Track campaign run jointly by the rail unions to bring the railways back into public ownership;
- the CWU's fight to save rural post offices;
- the Musicians' Union campaign to Keep Music Live;
- the TGWU's campaign to retrieve the pensions of retired bus workers;
- ISTE's campaign to Protect Pensions; and
- Amicus' European campaign to limit the length of the working week.

Natascha Engel, Co-ordinator, TUCC, writes: "None of these campaigns could have been run without a political fund to finance them. More broadly, unions over the years have used their political funds to

argue, lobby and campaign for a National Minimum Wage, for better pensions, for the pro-trade union legislation introduced under the Employment Relations Act - and unions continue to push for more. None of these achievements would have been realised without political funds.

"Today, with the political shift towards a legal rights approach to industrial relations, not least through implementing EU social directives, the need for unions to lobby and influence politicians both in Westminster and in Brussels is now even more central to protecting union members at work than ever before."

Strength in Numbers

Moving closer to home, we have the example of our sister media union, BECTU (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union) which has recently balloted on whether to keep its political fund. The result was clear - they voted overwhelmingly (72.8%) to retain it. Civil Servants and professionals in Prospect (which combines the IPMS and Engineers and Managers Association) have also recently voted to set up their own political fund. They understand that politics is increasingly affecting union members and it's no use sitting on their hands and saying 'it doesn't concern us' Their vote was 71% in favour of having a fund. The latest report from the Government's trade union Certification Officer shows that out of 7.75m trade unionists, a substantial majority, nearly 4.5m (58%), contribute to political funds. Let's follow their lead! □

VOTE YES TO MAKE OUR UNION STRONGER!

Lectures and students strike against reforms

MEMBERS OF the university teaching union AUT took 24-hour strike action this month alongside NUS students in a joint action against top-up fees and low pay in the universities. Many universities across the country were practically shut-down by the protests.

The ballot of AUT was returned with 54.4% in favour of strike action, and around 80% in favour of action short of strike action against the employers' latest offer, which would mean a paycut for many members. This expresses the mood of academic staff at the low level of pay, job security, and research funding.

Sally Hunt, AUT General Secretary, said: "The way in which our members have crippled the UK higher education system is symptomatic of the extreme anger felt by staff over the issue of pay and conditions."

The action links together students and teaching staff against the governments proposed changes that will introduce market forces into the higher education system. Staff have been asked to take on a greater workload, and contend with increasing bureaucracy while at the same time having to work harder to secure grants in the cutthroat world of research which is more and more dominated by the multinationals.

At the same time legislation is going through parliament to allow universities to impose top-up fees of at least £3000 a year on students on top of the current fee of around a thousand pounds.

The government is trying to cut state funding of education and increase the role of business. It is up to students and staff to defend the education with the full support of the labour movement.

- Our universities are not for sale!
- Kick big business out of education
- For a programme of government investment in academic research.
- For an education system controlled by students and staff.
- Not to tuition fees; introduce a living grant for all.
- A decent wage and job security for all university staff.

Record numbers on civil service strike

Rachel Heemskerck, DWP Essex Branch President, personal capacity

THE 16TH and 17th February saw the largest strike in the Civil Service since 1987. 100,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) working in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) took industrial action due to a derisory pay offer of 2.6%. The strike disrupted services in Jobcentres, Benefit Offices and Pension Centres across the country. In addition members in the Driving Standards Agency at driving test centres across the country took action on the same Tuesday. Over 90% of staff supported the call from the union to take industrial action.

Workers in the civil service are amongst some of the lowest paid, many earning less than £13,000 per year. Over 20,000 are forced into claiming the benefits they themselves administer for the government.

On the first day of the strike the *Financial Times* reported on a leaked government document that detailed cost cutting exercises in the civil service which will lead to 80,000 job losses and cuts to already stretched public services. This was the final nail in the coffin for many who joined the picket lines, some for the

first time in careers that spanned 20 years of service.

Workers in the Immigration Service, Prison Service and Office of Constitutional Affairs also took strike action over pay on the 29th and 30th January. The DWP workers were due to take united action with the other departments on that day but the government succeeded in postponing the action by offering last minute talks, which eventually resulted in nothing. Civil servants have had enough of low pay and attacks on working conditions that do nothing but add stress to the work they do. The DWP has one of the highest levels of sickness at an average of 14 days per year and Management are now threatening the sack for anyone who is off sick for more than 8 days. All of this led to a record number of members taking action and fighting back for decent pay and conditions.

The government must now realise the civil service will not take the bullying tactics of a management who threaten disciplinary action on anyone who joined the strike. We must keep the pressure up with the overtime ban and removal of goodwill. Our strength has been shown and we can win. □

Fight for our re-affiliation!

By Rick Grogan

THE SPECIAL General Meeting of the RMT held in Glasgow on the 6th February upheld the decision of our 2003 AGM to allow union branches to affiliate to organisations other than the Labour Party. This decision meant that as of mid-day on the 7th February, the RMT was deemed expelled from the Labour Party.

This decision was not taken lightly. The original debate at last years AGM was very heated and lasted for hours. At that time, many delegates were of the opinion that the RMT should immediately disaffiliate from the party, such was their disgust at the anti-working class policies of the Blair government.

The decision of the SGM should be no surprise to the wider labour movement. The RMT have a proud tradition of standing by its principles and facing up to bullies. The threats and ultimatums from the Labour Party Executive, (where representatives of our sister unions sit and shake in fear at the thought of rocking the boat), only served to strengthen the resolve of the delegation to uphold their previous decision. Disgracefully, we were not even given the chance of a hearing to explain our actions. Bob Crow in his summing up said: "even Harold Shipman was given a hearing."

At the end of the day, the delegates at the SGM were reflecting the wishes of the membership that elected them. There is tremendous anger throughout the RMT, be it sailors watching the new Queen Mary sail with a foreign crew, bus workers in Devon fighting for a decent wage and safety standards, or rail workers fighting the selling off of their industry and the disasters that it is causing.

RMT sponsored Labour MPs have pledged their support to the union and will continue to fight our corner inside Parliament. The question to be asked is where do we go from here?

This situation should be used to open up the debate inside the party and the TUC over how such an abyss could open up between the party and one of its founding members. We should be exposing the real villain of the piece - Tory Blair and his anti-union policies. We must expose the gulf that Blair has created between the Labour Party and the labour force of this country.

Above all, we must launch a campaign inside the TUC and the party for our re-affiliation. We should encourage our members and the members of other unions to join the Labour Party and campaign in the constituencies for our re-affiliation.

We should use this to reclaim the party that we helped to set up over 100 years ago by exposing the group of spivs and liars that are running it today. □

UNISON Cymru/Wales Regional Labour Link Forum 2004

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

THE EVOLUTION of the Labour Link in Wales, over the 11 years since the creation of UNISON, has been gradual, almost incremental, but this year has seen a dramatic change. Not only is there an end to the tolerance of New Labour, but they are actually looking to transform the Party.

In the first 8 years, the Labour Link section of the Welsh Region was tightly controlled by the then Regional Secretary, Derek Gregory. Whilst he had a long standing reputation as a 'left', his tenure as Regional Secretary saw him as an old right wing trade union fixer, determined not to rock the Labour boat. In particular, the Political section of the union was shaken by his 'early retirement' following a harassment and bullying allegation. His departure meant the temporary lifting of the dead hand of bureaucracy from the Labour Link.

At first, delegates were

unsure what to do, having been told what to think for so long (speeches were written for delegates to conferences, to ensure they were singing the right tune). Last year they condemned the Labour leadership as warmongers in the build up to the invasion of Iraq; the first shots fired at New Labour in anger.

This year, the Regional Political Committee came up with a re-written Constitution, which delegates only received a matter of days before, and they expected it to be debated, amended from the floor, if necessary. They obviously didn't expect any independent thought from delegates, because the Annual Report, the new Constitution and the motions, were timetabled to last less than an hour! They were to be disappointed, because almost all of the afternoon was taken up with amendments to the Constitution. What was surprising was that the proposed

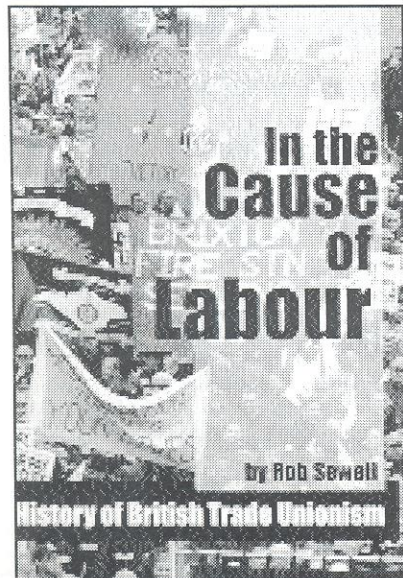
Constitution was more democratic than the old, but still not enough for delegates, who changed it accordingly.

The Forum then went on to unanimously pass a motion calling for the union to lead a campaign at local, Regional and National level, to Reclaim the Party, by voting against New Labour policies where they contradict our own, and to remove delegates, MPs, AMs or councillors who support New Labour policies. This is to be done by linking with other unions at national, regional and local levels to campaign on an agreed set of alternative policies for the Party.

In addition, they passed a motion to redress the unaccountability of the union's representation on Labour's NEC. For years the mechanism for choosing these reps have been shrouded in mystery and UNISON's policies, in particular for the first term of the Labour Government, were not

adequately pursued at that level. Indeed, the former General secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe rebuked the Labour Link leadership in one of his retirement speeches, by reminding them that the Link was there to represent the union within the Party, not the other way around. In reality, the Labour Link leadership has acted as apologists for New Labour. The Cymru/Wales Region will now campaign for these representatives on Labour's NEC to be elected by the general Labour Link membership.

If the changes to the constitution are allowed by the National Political Committee, and UNISON/Labour Link activists act on the motions they passed, the campaign to rid the Party of the New Labour parasites will receive a boost, both in Wales, and nationally. ■



In the Cause of Labour History of British Trade Unionism

By Rob Sewell

Price: £14.99

Approx. 400 pages

ISBN: 1 9000 07 14 2

SPECIAL FOR SOCIALIST APPEAL READERS: £9.99!

Send a cheque for £9.99 + £2.50 p&p to Wellred Books, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ

Name:.....

Address:.....

Phone:.....

T&G GEC Elections - Important Gains for the left

by Ramon Samblas, T&G member

THE POSTAL ballot of all 800,000 T&G members finished on the 6th February. The results brought gains for the left who have won at least 18 seats out of 36 seats up for election.

Provided they work together, the new left majority on the GEC can play an important role in developing and cementing policies in the members interests, and strengthen the growing self-confidence and willingness to fight within the T&G and the wider trade union movement.

The left gains in the GEC will buttress the General Secretary Tony Woodley and put pressure on him to carry through the programme on which he was elected of re-engaging with and developing policies in the interests of the members.

But in spite of having a left leadership at the top there are many bad elements of the old regime still in place who are without a sense of perspective, and imbued with a spirit of partnership. Many of these old rightwing bureaucrats, who have been riding the gravy train for years, want to frustrate any attempt to democratise and return our union to its rightful owners: workers in the shops and branches.

After Tony Woodley's election there was a self-confident mood amongst left activists, some of us fell into the trap of thinking it is possible to sit back while the membership vote left leaders into position and then watch the GEC and the officers lead us towards a fighting democratic union. It is never

like that, we always have to fight at Shop, Branch, Regional and National level. If we stop fighting we just let the right back in.

Any individual or small group of individuals, no matter how honest can shift and buckle as they come under the pressure of the hammer-blow of events.

The existing left trend in the T&G contains many good left activists but is to all intents and purposes closed and partially isolated from many of the members. The task before left T&G activists is to build up a strong broad left organisation to coordinate activities and make sure the right cannot sneak back in. We must reach out to, and draw in, new layers and begin to discuss and work out a basic set of policies to point the way forward for the union and inspire the membership.

This will take consistent work over a period of time but if we want to have a leadership that is in touch with and accountable to the membership then it has to be done.

With 800,000 members the T&G could be a formidable force in society. On condition that we build solid left structures at all levels of the union and lay the foundations for a leadership that is prepared to break with the Blairite ideology of partnership and compromise and begin to put forward socialist policies for the union. At the same time such a leadership could take these ideas back into the Labour Party and throw the Blairites and their ideas out of the labour movement for good.



Drivers demand decent pay

by Rachael Webb, Branch Secretary 1/888
Sussex RTC T&G Branch

IN THE LAST months Stagecoach Worthing Branch of the T&G has been locked in strike action over pay and conditions. The last strike was solid with 48 out of the 78 striking workers on the picket line.

Drivers are demanding an extra 32p an hour to bring their pay up to £7.50. But management has turned down this quite reasonable increase. There are no overtime enhancements so this will mean an increase of only £30 a week at most. The workers have held a series of one-day strikes, and have more planned for the future, these will continue till victory. Workers are in a confident mood and picket numbers are increasing.

Management are bussing in scabs from all around the country to cover strike days. The response of the union has been to come out for two separate days in a week, far enough apart to force management to pay hotel bills for the scabs but close enough together for the strikers to be able to earn a bit in wages. The scabs earn £200 a day, plus cost of hotel accommodation and meal allowances.

In the last strike-day one worker from Cambridge was

sent down by the company to scab on the strike, but local T&G activists and union officers liaised with 1/803 branch and as a result of discussions the worker was won over and decided not to cross the picket line, and has packed his bags and gone home.

Over the last few years there has been a steady rise in disputes between workers and Stagecoach management, these have taken place across the country. Not least last years victorious strike in Stagecoach Devon which caught the attention of Stagecoach workers across the country. This is reflected in messages of support being sent from all over the country.

As we go to press Worthing Stagecoach T&G are planning further 24-hour strikes on Friday 27th February, and Monday 1st March, and other dates during the month that have not yet been announced.

Messages of support please to
Branch Secretary 1/803 Paul
Cowell:
paulcowell@ntlworld.com

Miners - A year of struggle

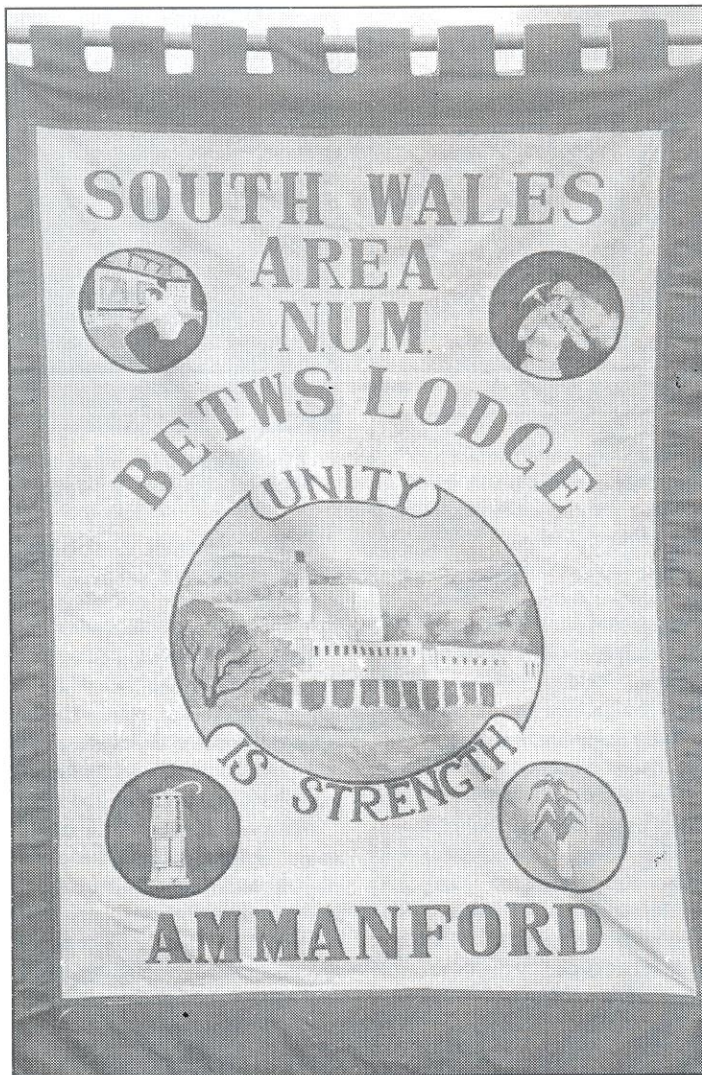
by Phil Mitchinson

TWENTY YEARS ago on March 5, 1984 the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) embarked upon the most important class struggle in Britain since the general strike of 1926. Over the following twelve months of ferocious battles billions of pounds were spent by the ruling class to crush the miners' militancy; over ten thousand miners were arrested; two were killed on the picket lines and countless others injured. Decades of so-called consensus were obliterated and the real and ugly face of British capital was exposed for all to see. The masks of Democracy and the Law behind which the ruling class try to conceal the rule of capital were shattered as the veil of so-called independence of the courts, the police and the media was lifted to show the real role of the state in capitalist society.

The courage and determination of the miners and their families, struggling to defend their communities from an unparalleled assault by the ruling class, should serve as an inspiration to new generations. The strike is rich in lessons, and we would be doing that heroic struggle no favours if we did not also try to understand the mistakes which played an important role in the dispute as well as drawing inspiration from the colossal resolve and sacrifice of the miners' struggle.

It is, however, impossible to deal with the titanic events of this prolonged fight in a few short pages, so here we will only really skim the surface, returning to some of the questions raised in more detail in future months.

When Thatcher's Tory Party came to office in 1979 they were still smarting from their humiliation at the hands of the miners' strikes of 1972 and



1974. Ted Heath's government was brought down by the militant action of the miners and the Tories were determined to prevent such a humiliation ever happening again. This fact coloured many aspects of the dispute. Revenge, however, was not the principle cause of this orchestrated attack on the miners and their communities. For the ruling class confronting and defeating the miners, widely seen as the vanguard of militant trade unionism, was the vital prerequisite for an all out assault on the working class as a whole. There was no longer any room

for consensus, compromise and concessions. Reforms aimed at placating the working class could no longer be afforded. The answer of the ruling class to the decline of British capital was to restore profitability at the expense of the working class, just as they had done in 1926.

This was never solely an economic question. For decades billions had been squandered on nuclear power and on oil demonstrating the anxiety felt by the ruling class at the dependence of the British economy on coal, and the power this bestowed upon

militant miners.

In 1926 the miners' struggle had led to the general strike and nine days that shook the very foundations of society. In the 1970s their action brought down a Tory government. The militancy of the miners represented a serious threat to the capitalist system.

Between 1926 and 1972 there was not one official national miners' strike. Where was the miners' renowned militancy during this period? It had taken from 1926 until the second world war to recover from the mortal blow of the 1926 lock-out. In the period roughly from the end of the war to 1970, following the nationalisation of the pits, all serious disputes were resolved through negotiation at national level. Against the background of the world upswing of capitalism, and the introduction of new technology, mechanisation etc, living standards generally improved. Hundreds of pits were closed but there were no compulsory job losses.

Throughout this period there was a consensus approach between the union and the National Coal Board (NCB). As a result the union at the top was in the grip of the right wing, although given the miners' traditions there was always a left presence, including one or two Communist Party members, in the leadership.

This consensus however was only the surface, in coal mining especially it is necessary to know what is going on underground. Whilst there were no national strikes, disputes in individual pits and areas between 1947 and 1957 constituted 70 percent of all the industrial action in the country. In these struggles a

new generation of militant leaders was born and schooled.

In 1969 and 1970 these disputes escalated into serious strikes over hours and wages. In 1956 miners had earned 122 percent of average manufacturing workers' wages, but by 1970 this had fallen to 89 percent. Thus falling living standards and the continuing closure programme combined with a new generation of militant activists to prepare the strikes of 1972 and 74.

The tactic of flying pickets and mass picketing played a decisive role in these disputes, most notably the mass picket at Saltley Gate. Pickets were not needed at the pitheads in 1972 because the strike was rock solid, so the mass pickets concentrated on the power stations. Solidarity action was spreading with other sections of workers taking sympathy action. The Tories, running scared, declared a state of emergency. A major confrontation was prepared at the coke depot of the Saltley gasworks in Birmingham. Engineering workers across the region went on strike to support the miners, and 10,000 of them marched on Saltley Gate to join the 2,000 miners already picketing. With only 1000 police officers in attendance, the authorities had no alternative but to close the gates. The miners, with widespread support, and a solid strike, using the militant tactic of flying pickets, scored a tremendous victory. Two years later the threat of a new strike, forced Heath and the Tories to call a general election - which they lost. The miners had secured an historic industrial and political victory. The ruling class were visibly shaken. Something would need to be done to prevent this ever happening again.

In 1978 future cabinet minister Nicholas Ridley prepared his now infamous report for a confrontation with the miners. Ridley's plans included building up coal stocks and increasing coal imports; recruiting non-union lorry

firms for coal transport; transforming power stations to enable them to burn oil; cutting the state benefits available to striking workers; and the creation of a national, almost paramilitary, police force.

In the early Thatcher years between 1979 and 82, there were important disputes at British Leyland, British Steel, in the health service, and on the railways. In fact the Tories almost provoked the miners prematurely in 1981 when they announced their intention to close 50 pits. The South Wales miners walked out and sent flying pickets to other coalfields. Within days the Energy Secretary David Howell was forced to withdraw the plan. They had done exactly the same thing in 1925, delaying, retreating to fight only when they were ready. As Howell explained "Neither the government nor I think society as a whole was in a position to get locked into a coal strike... The stocks weren't so high. I don't think the country was prepared, and the whole NUM and the trade union movement tended to be united all on one side."

An internal Coal Board report published in June 1983 claimed that 141 out of the 198 pits were 'uneconomical', 100,000 jobs would have to go in the space of five years. For years pit closures had proceeded through agreement with the union on the basis of

the exhaustion of mineable supplies. Now they wanted to close them for economic reasons. That is, to recognise that the mines existed not to extract coal but to make money. The miners' case was really unanswerable in relation to the needs of industry and the long term supply of energy. Logic and the facts, however, would not be allowed to interfere with the needs of the ruling class in securing their profits and defeating the trade union movement.

Shift to the left

Thatcher brought in Ian MacGregor - the butcher of the steel industry - as the new head of the NCB, and moved Peter Walker to the post of Energy Secretary, informing him on his appointment, "we are going to have a coal strike." This statement betrayed not just Thatcher's desire to provoke such a battle, but also a recognition of a process which was already underway.

In 1981 the shift to the left at the top of the NUM was confirmed by the election of Arthur Scargill, one of the militant leaders of the 1972 strike, as President of the NUM. At the end of 1982 The Coal Board announced the closure of Kineil colliery in Scotland. The miners occupied their pit over Christmas but no strike was called. At the beginning of 1983 the closure of Lewis Merthyr colliery in South Wales

was announced. The pit was occupied and the strike spread to other collieries with 3000 miners walking out. The South Wales Area of the union endorsed the strike, and the Yorkshire and Scotland areas both voted for strike action. At the union's National Executive Scargill argued for a Rule 41 strike, but lost. This rule of the union allowed the Areas (South Wales, Yorkshire etc.) to call their members out separately without calling a national ballot. The use of this tactic was soon to have profound consequences.

On this occasion a national ballot was held, with 61 percent voting against national strike action. A campaign was clearly needed throughout the coalfields explaining the threat to tens of thousands of jobs and the attacks that were being prepared on all sections of the working class.

MacGregor made provocative statements about the need to close 20 pits and destroy 20,000 jobs. The ruling class had been preparing and were now clearly ready for the confrontation. The miners' preparations began in earnest in November 1983 when a national overtime ban was organised to try to run down coal stocks.

The Coal Board announced another closure at Polmaise in Scotland. They proceeded to flood neighbouring Bogside colliery, claiming that the overtime ban was to blame, offering a glimpse of the unparalleled black propaganda campaign that was to follow.

On March 1, 1984, the final provocation came with the announcement of the closure of Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire. Flying pickets were dispatched around the country, immediately bringing Scotland and Wales out. This time however the ruling class had prepared its stocks of coal, its transportation systems, and had created a national police force - all the plans outlined in Ridley's 1978 report - to confront the pickets and place mining communities across the



country under a state of siege. The battle lines were drawn. This was to be class war.

Within days 171 pits were at a standstill. Yorkshire, Wales, Kent and Durham were solid and flying pickets were sent into Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and North Derbyshire to spread the dispute.

This time, however, there was to be no national ballot. This decision resulted in a storm of protest in the media, echoed by the right wing Labour and trade union leaders. These 'democrats' are only keen on democracy when it suits them. Back in 1977 a national ballot rejected a new incentives scheme by 55.75 percent. Right wing NUM leader Gormley declared the result of the ballot to be irrelevant, and, when the matter was taken to the high court, the judges agreed.

NUM vice-president Mick McGahey argued that the miners would not be 'constitutionalised out of their jobs' and this was quite right - in principle. The trade unions should decide upon how they conduct their affairs themselves without the interference of the state. However, this *principle far from exhausted* the question.

Scargill had already lost several national votes over pay, and over closures. This must have been a factor in the decision not to call a new ballot, betraying a certain lack of confidence in the rank and file. Once the vast majority of miners were on strike, and certainly by May when the national demonstration took place in Mansfield, there can be no doubt that a ballot would have been overwhelmingly endorsed.

Why should there have been a ballot? The unity of the strike was decisive. A ballot would have assisted



the strikers in Nottinghamshire to make their case amongst those miners still working. Could a ballot have created the necessary unity nationally, and isolated those determined to organise scabbing? We will never know for sure, but it would have helped, and above all it would have completely cut the ground from beneath the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party who consistently covered behind the question of the ballot to prevent solidarity action.

Tactics

In any strike or dispute tactics are vital. In a titanic struggle such as this, with the might of the state lined up against them, the tactics adopted by the miners' leadership were decisive. Not holding a ballot once the dispute was underway proved to be a serious mistake. Not because the Tories or the press said so, but because of the need to build unity and to break the stick that was being used to beat them.

To be clear, however, the responsibility for the eventual defeat of the miners' struggle rests squarely upon the shoulders of the leaders of the labour and trade union movement.

It is possible that the miners could have won even this colossal struggle without widespread solidarity action. The determination and sacrifice of the miners themselves was one impor-

tant factor available in abundance. What was also needed was the utmost unity, and correct tactics on the part of the leadership.

With solidarity action, spreading the strike to other sectors who would soon be facing the same attacks themselves, the miners could easily have won, more than that they could have brought down the Tories. There would have been no third Thatcher government.

At the very least the dispute needed to spread to the power stations, the steel plants, the railways and the docks. Despite the initiative of workers in each of these sectors to support the miners, the leaders of their unions struggled might and main to prevent solidarity strikes from taking place.

There was the serious possibility of a national docks strike - the dockers themselves were facing renewed attacks. This development would have been a fundamental turning point for the miners. However, the dockers' leaders failed to link up the disputes, and another important opportunity was lost.

As in 1972, the mass picket of a coking plant would play a decisive role in the 1984-85 dispute, but this time with a different outcome. The ruling class had clearly learned from their earlier defeat at Saltley Gate.

Between the end of May and the middle of June the events at the Orgreave cok-

ing plant near Rotherham led to the most violent confrontations witnessed by the British labour movement since the first world war.

NUM pickets assembled on the Sheffield side of the plant while the police gathered in their thousands at the front of the plant, with mounted brigades lined up in an adjacent field. Police with dogs and thousands in riot gear surrounded the pickets. As soon as the lorries had entered the plant, the riot police launched their offensive. The mounted divisions rode into the surrounded miners, followed by truncheon wielding foot police. This was a military operation. For all the beatings and arrests, the miners were not cowed. On June 18, 5000 strikers turned up to be met by an even greater number of police and an unprecedented orgy of violence. The forces of law and order ran riot, beating and bludgeoning the miners. From their experiences on the picket lines, and not just the obscenity of Orgreave - the taunts and insults, officers waving their overtime payments in miners' faces - many rank and file miners who before the strike had respect for the law and the police who upheld it, *learned a bitter lesson* from the end of a truncheon, that the law, the courts and the police are arms of the state for the defence of private property, that is, for the defence of the capitalist system.

The capitalist media portrayed Orgreave as the height of picket line violence... by the miners. Thatcher infamously denounced the strikers as "the enemy within". Kinnock and Willis - the Labour and TUC leaders - desperate to prove their respectability, condemned both sides 'even-handedly', reserving most of their venom for the pickets. Doctored film

footage was shown on the BBC - which years later conceded that a 'mistake' had been made - demonstrating that the miners attacked first.

There were no more mass pickets at Orgreave after this ferocious battle. Mass pickets were not having the desired effect. The scab operation to move coal by road was stepped up. For the miners to have won on their own would always have been an immense task. As months passed solidarity action from other unions became ever more decisive. Yet it was not forthcoming. Railworkers in Leicestershire blacked coal at great personal risk. The printers at the Sun newspaper - at the forefront of the propaganda war against the miners - refused to print a front page picture portraying an alleged Hitler salute by Scargill (actually a wave caught at an angle by a photographer) under the despicable heading 'Mine Fuhrer.' But these were only isolated incidents. There could be no doubt that the might of the labour movement brought out in support of the miners would not only have secured the future of their pits and their communities but could have brought down Thatcher and the Tory government.

Was such support available from the rank and file of other unions? There is an argument that the miners strike was taking place against a background of a decline in strikes after the period of 1979-82. Nonetheless in 1984 of the 26.5 million working days lost to strike action, 4.3 million were not the miners. The support of workers across the country was demonstrated by their tremendous donations week after week, support which was matched by workers overseas. But this tremendous solidarity was not matched by the union leaders who timidly covered behind the law to cover their bare backsides.

A whole separate article would be necessary to deal with the magnificent role

played by the miners' support groups and especially by the miners' wives. The collection of money, organising of soup kitchens and social events was only one side of the work of these groups. The wives played a most militant role, including on the picket lines, indeed, it would be hard to imagine how the miners could have endured so long without the immense sacrifice they contributed.

In August a new opportunity raised the miners' spirits. The Coal Board had foolishly torn up an agreement with the pit deputies represented by NACODS. In a ballot a remarkable 82.5 percent of their members voted for strike action. If these workers, responsible for safety, walked out then no pit in the country could work. Tragically, 24 hours before their strike was due to begin, the NACODS leaders called it off. The miners were on their own again.

TUC's support

In September the TUC passed a mealy mouthed resolution supporting the miners but offering no concrete action. One would search in vain in the archives of the TUC for leaflets supporting the miners' struggle. They did not even organise a national demonstration. TUC leader Willis addressed a mass rally in November at the Afan Lido in Aberavon, South Wales. Thousands were packed inside, and thousands more lined the streets outside. The mood was electric. But Willis chose this venue, for the sake of the watching press, to once again condemn violence by pickets. During his speech a noose was lowered in front of him carrying a placard reading 'where is Ramsay McKinnock'. This is just one example of the humour of the strike, illustrating the contempt in which these leaders of the working class were increasingly held by the miners they would not support.

When the NUM's funds



The consequences of the miners' defeat for the working class as a whole were profound. As attack after attack was launched, the mood of workers became "if the miners can't win no-one can."

were to be sequestered, the courts and the law again being used to try to crush the miners, the TUC had one last opportunity to organise solidarity action. A one-day general strike would have shaken the ground beneath the judges, the NCB and the Tories. But no such action was forthcoming. As in 1926, the leaders of the TUC had abandoned the miners to their fate.

As the likelihood of serious support diminished, so too did any realistic chance of victory. At the beginning of 1985 there was a drift back to work. The miners and their families had fought valiantly for a whole year against everything the state could throw at them, from the constant barrage of propaganda, to the siege of their communities and the violent confrontations on the picket lines. Their solidarity and sacrifice remains to this day an inspiration. They could have done no more.

At a special conference on March 3, 1985 delegates voted by 98 - 91 to return to work. On March 5, the day the strike ended there were still 27,000 miners out. Everywhere miners returned behind colliery bands and banners, heads held high, proud of the tremendous struggle they had been engaged in.

The struggle had cost the ruling class over £5 billion. From their point of view this was money well spent. New anti-union legislation was pushed through. The counter-revolution on the shopfloor to drive down workers' wages and conditions across industry went full speed ahead.

Was it worth all the sacrifice? Without a struggle the

pits would still have been closed and the bosses would have launched their attacks. Those attacks could not have been defeated by the TUC's 'new realism' - in reality class collaboration. Despite the immense cost to the miners and their communities to go down fighting the strike has left behind a proud and inspiring tradition. Lessons were learned that will never be forgotten. They are burned into the consciousness of a whole layer of workers.

The consequences of the miners' defeat for the working class as a whole were profound. As attack after attack was launched, the mood of workers became "if the miners can't win no-one can." The right wing consolidated its grip on the labour movement, leading eventually to the low point of 'social partnership' and the triumph of Blair inside Labour.

The right wing always rests upon defeat and inactivity. Their triumph however, was only temporary. Eventually the working class recovers from defeat, and is forced by the conditions imposed upon them by capitalism to return to struggle once more.

We have a duty to uphold the proud memory and tradition of the miners' strike, and not just for sentiment's sake. A new generation is now preparing to enter the road of struggle. In the titanic struggles of the working class to come in Britain, a thorough study and understanding of past battles is of decisive importance. Alongside the general strike of 1926 today's new generation must also study the great miners' strike of 1984-85. □

Miners strike: "A turning point in the history of the movement"

Interview with Nigel Pearce, NUM, NEC

**continued from
back page**

SA: What were the lessons of the strike?

NP: The strike is full of lessons. One of the main ones is the need for unity among the working class, that stands out above all else - unity is strength, and united the working class can achieve anything. Divided we are weak, and even small divisions can have a destructive effect. If you have such divisions it becomes a very risky game, and it leads to long, bitter, drawn-out strikes.

Above all we need a strong and united leadership in the movement that will support other groups of workers in struggle, and is prepared to take a courageous stand.

On the question of the national ballot. In hindsight most people accept that it was a mistake not to call a national ballot. But hindsight is a wonderful thing, and it is a lot more difficult to be right at the time.

From the beginning we could see we had problems with unity. Some areas were refusing to come out saying the union had not held a national ballot. In Yorkshire we were solid but we could see that there were problems around the country.

But at the time there was great confidence among the membership, after the victories in '72 and '74, and the strong traditions of an undefeated labour movement. The leadership thought they could achieve unity quite easily without a ballot. There was also a certain feeling of inevitability; we couldn't afford not to go on strike.

But at first the relations between the areas were friendly. I remember as a young miner going to Nottinghamshire to picket. At first the picketing was very peaceful and there was a very friendly relationship between us and the Notts. Miners.

At the beginning of the strike it would have been possible to win any ballot. That might not have created unity but it certainly would have given our detractors less ammunition. But confidence was run-

ning high in 1984 and many miners believed that the dispute could be won without the ballot. Clearly that was a mistake, and it is something to remember in future battles that it is very important to achieve as much unity as possible in the opening stages. This gives enemies in and outside the movement less ammunition.

SA: What do you think have been the consequences of the strike?

NP: There have been many consequences starting with the destruction of the mining industry. The whole labour movement was pushed back. Industrially and politically this had huge ramifications. Workers came under attack everywhere. In their own organisations the right was able to push unchecked to the forefront and 'new realism' was born which has led to the current right-wing labour government. The idea of "social partnership" and in many ways the triumph of Blair finds its roots in the period after the strike.

SA: What is the future of the coal industry in Britain?

NP: The future is now bleak for the mining industry, we are down to 13 deep pits and the closures are still going ahead. In the next period we are looking at the closure of the Selby pit which will lead to the loss of many more jobs including my own.

What was left of the mining industry was privatised in 1992, and the union still calls for total renationalisation. But the reviews are ongoing, and we have a total lack of government support. In 2 years time there will only be 5 or 6 pits left. And a recent government review predicted that there will be no pits left in 10 years time.

We need an energy policy that reflects the needs of the country. This will be a big question in the future - they are making a big mistake by allowing the last of our deep mines to close.

This is typical of the short-sighted capitalist class in Britain today who have developed a culture against manufacturing. A certain section of the establishment have convinced themselves that the

British economy doesn't need manufacturing, and that they can do fine without it. But this is pie in the sky and in time it will show what a terrible weak state the British economy is in.

SA: Was it worth it?

NP: Like the old saying goes 'I don't regret one minute'. I've got no regrets, but it's the loss that I don't like. Is it worth it? The mining industry has been destroyed; originally they said they said they wanted 70 closures, they've shut 200 pits. Was the union right about the threat to the mining industry? Yes. Was the union right about the threat to the labour movement? Yes.

The defeat of the miners gave them a clear run to carry out their programmes. They introduced the anti-union laws which was an attack on the entire movement, they've taken on and defeated union after union. British industry has been dealt a heavy blow, the nationalised industries were privatised and most of them have collapsed, like coal, like steel, car making, and shipbuilding.

And all this stems back to the time of the defeat. So yes we were right to fight, we had a duty to fight, and I'm proud to have fought, and I'm proud of all those I fought alongside. The miners' strike was a turning point in the history of the movement. □



Women enter battle

Bellow we are republishing, with the permission of the author, an article by Pat Reet, (an activist in Hoyland's women's support group during the strike) originally published in 1986

THE KEY role played by women in the miners' strike has been an inspiration to working class women everywhere. Many of the myths concerning women were smashed in the course of the strike. Far from being a drag on the trade union, the Women's Support Groups proved what an invaluable weapon women could be. They gained the respect and admiration of workers internationally not only for their achievements, but for the enormous sacrifices they were prepared to make in one of the longest and most bitter disputes ever waged.

Every attempt by the Tories to demoralize, intimidate and even starve the miners back to work only served to strengthen their determination which, in turn, brought forth new initiatives to counter the attacks and, in the process speeded up the radicalization that was occurring. The attempt to starve miners back to work by reducing and even abolishing benefit not only failed but led to the establishment of kitchens and food parcel centres. These not only helped to alleviate much of the hardship but, also, served to bring together many of the strikers and their families who would otherwise have been isolated and scattered, open to the lies and the distortions of the press and the media. Instead, returning pickets were able to report straight from the picket

lines on what was happening. Many more strikers were drawn into activity by this contact. The rallying together of the miners and their families helped in the revival of the community spirit, raising morale and passing on information to where help with problems could be obtained.

Kitchens were only a part of what women did during the strike and, when you look at what a full role they played, you have to wonder where they found, not only the time, but the energy. Fundraising was essential to keep the kitchens going and women travelled everywhere and anywhere, speaking at meetings, collecting outside factories and even on the streets and markets, to ensure these funds continued.

The invasion of their communities by the police and the use of paramilitary tactics didn't deter many women from picketing. Women were prepared to run the same risks as the men and many were arrested in supporting the strike.

Public speaking

Every community, every group has its own stories to tell, enough to fill a library, of how ordinary women achieved the near impossible again and again. Each achievement added to their growing confidence leading in turn to greater achievements. Some



of the best public speakers during the strike were women. Many surprising themselves at what they were capable of doing.

A young miners' wife in Barnsley found herself in constant demand as a speaker and, despite having had a baby at the start of the dispute, she spoke constantly throughout the strike, raising money for the kitchen in her own community. Her own mother, herself a miner's wife, worked 5 days a week in the kitchen where, at times, 400 meals a day were provided. Even the grandmother played a role by tipping rubbish onto the gardens of known scabs. Sadly, the young miner himself was rewarded with the sack. Despite this, when the young miner's wife was asked about the strike, she stated quite firmly that she would do it all again.

Even in the later stages of the strike, women's groups were emerging, many of whom had been opposed to the strike in the early days, but having seen the issues distorted in the press had changed their views.

Variations did however exist in many areas, some groups suffering difficulties whilst others thrived. Throughout the strike there was an overwhelming need for a National Delegate Conference to co-ordinate much of the work and help iron out many of the problems that existed. Though many welcomed the Conference called after the strike, one day

proved to be insufficient to put forward resolutions or have discussions and plan for future action.

After such intense activity and enormous effort by women during the strike, it's not surprising that many were disappointed at the NUM Conference decision to reject associate membership. Not only would it have given women the recognition they deserved for the role they played, but, it would also have forged links between the WSGs and the NUM.

"The future is ours"

Many other issues affecting women have yet to be fought. Cuts in education, housing, transport and health just to name a few. Miners' wives are not exempt from these attacks and in the fights yet to come the involvement of women with so much experience would strengthen the movement enormously.

The anger and bitterness many women feel at the attacks they and their families have been subjected to has to be harnessed into the labour movement. Women have proved what an invaluable force they can be. This needs to be built on. It was a miner's wife that perhaps best summed up the way forward when she said: "history we inherit -the future is ours". Women linked to the trade union and labour movement can ensure that in the coming period these words can at last become a reality. □

RESPECT - a "new" alternative to New Labour?

by Rob Sewell

WITH THE media frenzy over tuition fees and the Hutton report, you could be forgiven for not noticing the launch in the same week of a new political party, RESPECT.

This new party, if you can call it a party, has the backing of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), the Socialist Alliance, Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and members of Stop the War Coalition. It also has the support of Ken Loach, George Monbiot and expelled Labour MP George Galloway.

It hopes to be registered with the Electoral Commission prior to standing candidates for the European parliament and Greater London Authority (GLA) on 10 June. Apparently, George Galloway, MP for Glasgow Hillhead, is intending to become a prospective MEP for London.

"There's a big demographic and geographic spread", said George Galloway. "Our constituency is basically growing out of the anti-war movement. The people who marched in the great demonstrations came up against the limits of the politics of protest. No matter how many millions marched, MPs voted for the war nonetheless. I think among the millions there's a big feeling we need to somehow break this democratic dysfunction that exists in this country, where the people think one thing, want one thing and the politicians do another."

While George Galloway, who courageously opposed the Blair/Bush war in Iraq, wants to fight Blairism, he is misguided in imagining he can accomplish this by setting up a new "rainbow coalition" party. No doubt he is sincere, but the road to a very hot place is paved with sincerity.

Since his expulsion from the Labour Party, Galloway has bounced in a number of different directions, from the need to fight within the Labour Party to this new electoral adventure. Desperate to cobble something

together, he has jumped into bed with the sectarian SWP and its front organisations. The SWP leadership originally put their hopes in the Socialist Alliance as the way forward for revolutionary politics, even taking it over, but as we predicted, the SA failed to make any electoral advance whatsoever.

The SWP, so as not to offend its new allies, has been determined to keep the Stop the War Coalition within the confines of pacifism. Now it wants to inject this opportunism into the parliamentary field, eager to embrace anybody opposed to Blair!

Muslim fundamentalists

Both Galloway and the SWP are falling over themselves to cement strong relations with the religious Muslim community, in the form of MAB. Under the Stop the War banner, the SWP leaders provide platforms for Muslim fundamentalists, and set aside time during demonstrations for prayers, desperate to keep these religious bedfellows on board.

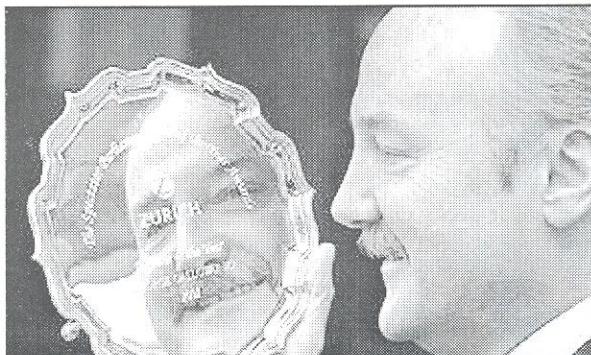
In Birmingham, the SWP were directly involved in the removal of local anti-war activists from their positions and their substitution by Muslim figures, such as Salma Yaqood, who became chair of the Birmingham Stop the War Coalition. They stopped at nothing to build closer ties with Muslim clerics, even shamefully giving into demands that the sexes should be kept separate in meetings. This was all part of their plan to bring MAB on board and

ensure their support for their new electoral adventure. Salma Yaqood is almost certain to stand for RESPECT as MEP candidate for the West Midlands seat, where she will be guaranteed support from MAB.

While the anti-war movement should welcome the participation of religious people, including Muslims, in its ranks, it should not pander to these beliefs. If people want to pray, that is their personal business and should be free to do so. But religious activities should not be part of official demonstrations or promoted from the platform of the Stop the War Coalition. However, adopting such a secular stance would offend the hierarchy of MAB, something the SWP leaders are not prepared to tolerate.

In the meantime, these pseudo-Marxists attempt to cover their backs by scandalously using the examples, completely ripped out of context, of the Communist International's dealings with the Muslim peoples of the east! This is part of the SWP's so-called anti-imperialist bloc: together with the Islamists against imperialism. "We must certainly learn from the early Comintern that you can be on the same side as a certain movement (or even state)", states Chris Harman, "in so far as it fights imperialism, while at the same time you strive to overthrow its leadership and disagree with its politics, its strategy and its tactics."

It was this type of pseudo-radicalism that led this group to back the Afghan counter-revolutionary "freedom fighters" (the Mujahadeen) during the 1980s in their CIA-backed fight with the progressive regime in Kabul. It is mixing up the banner of revolution with the banner of counter-revolution. Here the SWP identified the Russians as the "imperialists" and welcomed the victory of the Islamic fundamentalist counter-revolution. This led to a devastating civil war and the victory of the reac-



tionary Taliban.

"But the taking of Kabul by the Taliban", states Chris Harman in his pamphlet 'Prophet and the Proletariat', "was not the first, or even the worst, horror to beset the people of Afghanistan. For two decades a succession of rival political forces, secular and religious, pro-Russian and pro-US, modernist and traditionalist, have wreaked havoc on the country and its people."

This, however, did not prevent the SWP from supporting the "religious, pro-US, traditionalist" Islamic fundamentalist forces of counter-revolution against the Afghan regime. The SWP supported the Mujahadeen in what they falsely described as the Soviet Union's Vietnam.

The imperialists wholeheartedly backed the counter-revolutionary Mujahadeen. As Brzezinski, former US secretary of State explained: "What is more important from the point of view of history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet Empire? A few stirred up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?"

Opportunism

Harman attempts to justify the SWP's line: "many of the individuals attracted to radical versions of Islamism can be influenced by socialists - provided socialists combine complete political independence from all forms of Islamism with a willingness to seize opportunities to draw individual Islamists into genuinely radical forms of struggle alongside them."

"On some issues we will find ourselves on the same side as the Islamists against imperialism and the state. This was true, for instance, in many countries during the second Gulf War", states Harman.

John Rees, an SWP national organiser and leader of the Stop the War Coalition, says of RESPECT: "It's basically going to be an alliance of a very large number of anti-war activists, quite large sections of the Muslim community and the socialist left... coming together



The whole of history has shown that the working class, which has painfully built up its organisations over generations, will not abandon them lightly. When the mass of workers move in a political direction, they will move through their traditional organisations, the trade unions and the Labour Party.

to try and establish a political alternative to New Labour."

Rees' aim to keep the new initiative broad-based was successful as the programme adopted is extremely broad indeed. Socialist policies are deliberately rejected for fear of alienating the voters! These "revolutionaries", so full of verbal radicalism, are prepared to abandon their ideas and programme to accommodate their liberal friends. The word RESPECT apparently stands for Respecting Equality, Socialism, Peace, the Environment, Community and Trade Unionism. Apparently, it represents a programme broad enough to encompass the hierarchy of the Muslim Association of Britain, who are keen to maintain a certain "radical" image for now anyway.

Lindsey German, another leading SWP member, backs up her comrade: "To those who ask, why is it not more socialist, I say: because it is built on the anti-war movement, and because there are large Muslim communities, and we want to reach out to them as well as the traditional left."

This abject opportunism clearly reveals the SWP's abandonment of "unpopular" socialist policies. In reality, they have no confidence in their ideas or the working class. They have accepted the viewpoint of Labour's rightwing that "socialism loses votes" and "puts off the voters". They therefore rush to embrace demands that are acceptable to all - hoping that people will not be too put off to vote for them.

In so doing, these "revolutionaries" are busy promoting illusions that the problems of the working class can be solved within the framework of capitalism. This is fundamentally false. Only a socialist programme can answer the prob-

lems of the working class, which are rooted in the capitalist system.

RESPECT has decided not to stand any candidates in Scotland as the new broad alliance does not want to compete with the Scottish Socialist Party. SSP leader Tommy Sheridan, who was at the RESPECT launch meeting, supports the new initiative, saying it was "probably the most significant development on the left in England for a very long time." The only thing is that he said the same thing about the launch of the doomed Socialist Alliance only a few years ago. "I think they have looked at our model and decided they have to try and bring the left together in as broad and unsectarian a fashion as possible", said Sheridan. "There have been a lot of false starts up to now that have led to acrimony and infighting. This is the closest they have got to a coalition of the left..."

SSP

Tommy's party has become so "broad and unsectarian" that he has sought to broaden his appeal by embracing Scottish nationalism and has looked to Norway and Denmark as models to emulate. The attempt to broaden the appeal of the SSP has embroiled it in opportunist politics, which, sooner or later will end in tears.

All the attempts to build a new alternative to the Labour Party, as history has shown, will come to nothing. The different sectarian groups on the fringes of the labour movement have been attempting to build the revolutionary alternative to Labour for decades and achieved nothing. That is why they jump from ultra-leftism to opportunism and back again. Why should this venture be

any different? It will not.

Forces are already gathering within the trade unions to take back the Labour Party for the working class. In the coming period, the edifice of Blairism will come crashing down. The Labour Party will take a sharp turn to the left as in the 1970s (after decades of rightwing domination) as the unions press for working class policies. All the sects, including RESPECT, will be left with their mouths open.

They only see the surface of events. They are incapable of seeing the subterranean processes at work in the bowels of society. That is why they constantly look for short cuts to success, when none exists. They are never able to learn from history and simply repeat its mistakes.

The method of Marxism, dialectical materialism, is a closed book to these people. Marxism for them is at best a dogma and not a weapon to understand the processes at work. The whole of history has shown that the working class, which has painfully built up its organisations over generations, will not abandon them lightly. When the mass of workers move in a political direction, they will move through their traditional organisations, the trade unions and the Labour Party.

While initiatives like RESPECT can pick up disgruntled votes here and there, they will never attain a mass base or be able to break the hold of the Labour Party, or even Blairism, from the outside. Only by organising a struggle, with the rest of the trade union movement, within the mass organisations of the working class, can Blairism be defeated and the Tory carpetbaggers driven out. All other routes are doomed to fail. ■

LENIN



80th Anniversary of his death

The relevance of his ideas today

By Rob Sewell

Last issue, in the first part of this article published to mark the 80th anniversary of the death of Lenin, we looked at Lenin's early life, how he was won over to the ideas of Marxism and the role he played in the development of the Bolsheviks in Russia. This issue we consider his critical role in the dramatic events which started with the First World War and would lead to the mighty Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state.

BY 1912, the split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had reached an open breach with the establishment of two separate parties. At this time, the Bolsheviks launched a new daily paper called Pravda, and within two years, and after consistent work, had won over four-fifths of the organised workers to their side. In the rigged Duma elections they had managed to win six deputies, all of whom were arrested at the outbreak of war.

The world war of 1914-18 proved to be a turning point. It demonstrated that capitalism had exhausted itself and its contradictions had reached explosive levels. The development of the productive forces was being strangled within the straightjacket of private ownership and the nation state. The test of war, and there could be no greater test, found the leaders of the Second International wanting. In August 1914, they betrayed the working class and discredited international socialism by siding with their

own capitalists. As the Social Democratic leaders voted for the war credits of their own ruling class, they called upon the workers to slaughter one another in the name of "justice". Despite their original declared opposition to war, when the time came they capitulated. The workers were shocked. Even Lenin thought the declaration supporting the war published in the German Social Democratic paper was a forgery! In reality, the Second International had suffered an ignominious collapse. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg, it had become "a stinking corpse".

Only the Russian and Serbian parties stood by the line of socialist internationalism. The Bolshevik deputies in the Duma voted against the credits and were deported to Siberia. In December 1914, Karl Liebknecht voted against the war credits in Germany. It was left to the tiny handful of internationalists worldwide, persecuted and isolated, to become the leadership for rebuilding

the forces of international socialism.

From exile in Switzerland Lenin addressed the class-conscious workers disoriented by the great betrayal. He characterises the world war as a reactionary imperialist war, which was led by the main imperialist powers of finance-capital for world plunder, markets, spheres of influence and profits. In this explanation, he sharply distinguished between those progressive wars of social and national liberation waged by oppressed classes and nations, which had the support of socialists. This imperialist war was of a fundamentally different character, said Lenin, and called upon the working class to "transform the imperialist war into a civil war", into a war to overthrow capitalism and for the victory of socialism. The workers had no fatherland, to quote Marx. The test of a sincere struggle against imperialism was a fight against one's own imperialist government. Lenin linked this analysis with a courageous call for a new Third International to maintain the spotless banner of international socialism. The international gatherings at Zimmerwald (1915) and Kienthal (1916) provided a vital focal point for the left internationalists, which was finally to lead to the founding of the Third (Communist) International in March 1919.

During the war years, Lenin spent a great amount of time making a fresh study of Marxist theory. In par-

ticular, he gathered material on economic questions that were used to produce his classic pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). He also engaged in a thorough study of dialectical materialism and philosophy, a continuation of his studies of 1908-1909. Above all, he poured over Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in order to elaborate Marx's dialectical method. The mastering of dialectical materialism, the Marxist world outlook, was essential in understanding the complex unfolding of events. "The decisive thing in Marxism", declared Lenin, "is its revolutionary dialectic."

Lenin understood that the experience of war was inevitably preparing new revolutionary waves. The crisis eventually broke in Russia in February 1917, the "weakest link" in the chain of world capitalism. On international women's day, workers of Petrograd struck work and demonstrated on the streets under the slogans "Down with the war!", "Down with Tsarism!" and "Give us Bread!" These protests and strikes grew into a revolution, which brought down the 1,000-year edifice of tsarism. As in 1905, soviets were thrown up alongside a provisional government, constituting a regime of "dual power", but were initially dominated by reformist parties, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. The latter parties had no perspective of taking power from the bourgeoisie. The revolution had placed power into the hands of those who had carried out the revolution, the workers and soldiers, but they were not conscious of this power, which was handed over to the reformist leaders, who in turn handed it to the bourgeois government under Price Lvov. Such a situation of "dual power" could not last indefinitely: either the soviets would assume complete control, or there would be complete counter-revolution.

Within a matter of months after leaving his exile in Zurich, Lenin was to become "the most hated and most loved man on earth." It took a further eight months from the first revolution, with sharp turns and the rapid unfolding of the class struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, for the workers to finally become conscious of their strength



The crisis eventually broke in Russia in February 1917, the "weakest link" in the chain of world capitalism.

and take power and organise a Soviet Republic under the leadership of the Bolsheviks.

Of course this was no easy matter. When Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd on 3rd April, he greeted the mass crowds with the words: "Long live the world socialist revolution!" He had no trust in the Provisional government, which the editors of Pravda (Kamenev and Stalin) had duly granted. He chastised them and set about conquering his own party for the immediate perspective of socialist revolution. In his famous Letters from Afar, written at the time, he had already defined the key tasks:

"(1) To find the surest road leading to the next stage of the revolution or to the second revolution, which revolution (2) shall transfer the state power from the government of landowners and capitalists (the Guchkovs, Lvovs, Miliukovs, Kerenskys) to a government of the workers and poor peasants. (3) The latter government must be organised on the model of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies."

Patiently explain

Lenin had to wage a bitter struggle to overcome the initial resistance amongst the "Old Bolsheviks" and set the Bolshevik Party on a course to win over the masses and towards a sec-

ond revolution. While the Bolsheviks were a minority, their key task was to "patiently explain" their policies to the mass of workers. Finally, on the basis of events, they succeeded in winning a majority under the slogans, "Bread", "Land" and "Peace". Lenin's writings in this period constitute a profound body of knowledge for Marxists of leadership in the midst of a revolution and of the art of insurrection. In the midst of these historic events, he completed one of his most important theoretical works, *The State and Revolution*, clarifying the line on this vital question between reformism and revolution.

By the beginning of September the Bolsheviks had won a majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. On 25th October, the old regime was swept away and a Soviet government, composed of Bolsheviks and Left Social Revolutionaries, was established with Lenin as President and Trotsky as Foreign Minister, or Peoples' Commissars, to use the new terminology. The history of the world began to dramatically change.

Lenin's individual role in 1917 was crucial, and serves to highlight the vital role, under certain circumstances, of the individual in history. In the broad sweep of historical events, individuals generally play a secondary role. However, there are crucial times, especially when a situation is on a knife-edge, when individuals can play

a decisive role for better or worse. Lenin proved indispensable. He integrated himself into the course of events, grasping their underlying laws, and shaping the social forces that were to carry through the revolution. Trotsky summed up this experience in reviewing his own role in 1917: "For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place - on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no



Lenin

October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring - of this I have not the slightest doubt!" (Diary in Exile 1935).

This was undoubtedly true. The resistance of the party heads to the new course was very strong. Without Lenin it would have been infinitely stronger. Single-handedly, Trotsky believed he personally might have lacked the necessary authority to turn the situation around. Under these circumstances, the Bolshevik Party would have failed to adopt the necessary road to power in time. This could possibly have allowed the bourgeoisie to surrender Petrograd to the Germans, put down the leaderless proletarian uprising and install its authority under a military-Bonapartist regime. The entire course of history would have been different, with future historians ridiculing the utopian antics of the Bolsheviks!

Trotsky

Trotsky, who had remained outside both Bolshevik and Menshevik camps, had finally recognised his mistake in attempting to unify both factions. On his return to Russia in 1917 he joined the Bolsheviks and was elected to its leadership. Looking back two years after the success of the revolution, Lenin wrote: "At the moment when it seized the power and created the Soviet republic, Bolshevism drew to itself all the best elements in the currents of socialist thought that were nearest to it." Without doubt this referred to Trotsky, who, as head of the Petrograd Soviet and



Revolutionary Military Committee, commanded the technical/military preparations of the successful October Revolution. In fact in these years Lenin's reliance on Trotsky, the co-leader of the Revolution, was enormous. Throughout this time the names of Lenin and Trotsky were inseparable. "If we are killed," once asked Lenin of Trotsky, "do you think Bukharin and Sverdlov will manage?" This was no passing concern as the fate of the Revolution was frequently in the balance.

At the beginning of the civil war, the Social Revolutionaries went over to the counter-revolution and attempted to murder the Bolshevik leaders. On 30th August 1918, Lenin was shot and wounded by the bullet of a Left Social

Revolutionary. Although he managed to recover and resume work, this injury was in large measure responsible for his premature death some five years later. Bombs were also planted to blow up Trotsky's red train, but he managed to escape by chance.

The victory of the October Revolution transformed the world situation. For the first time in history, the working class had conquered power and established proletarian rule. The tasks facing Lenin and the Soviet regime were to achieve peace, consolidate the regime and extend the socialist revolution worldwide. The Soviet Republic however faced ever-greater dangers. The international bourgeoisie immediately set to work in destroying the Bolshevik regime by aiding internal counter-revolution and despatching twenty-one imperialist armies of intervention. Under the command of Trotsky, the mighty Red Army of five million was constructed to repel the foreign invasion and defeat the

internal White Armies.

During the momentous years of 1917-1923, Lenin concentrated his entire being on the burning questions of defence and world revolution. The work of Lenin during this time outstrips any summary biography. It ranges over the field of world politics, civil war, the new economic order, the building of the Communist International, and the struggle against bureaucracy. Alongside the host of speeches and reports he gave, he also found time to write such Marxist classics as *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, and *Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*.

By late 1920, with the routing of Wrangel's white army, the counter-revolutionary and interventionist forces were all but defeated. The Soviet state had won a reprieve at terrible cost. This respite gave way to a temporary "equilibrium" between the powers, which was used by the Bolsheviks to prepare the working class internationally for the new revolutionary wave. "A balance has been attained", stated Lenin, "a highly unstable one, but certainly a balance. Will it last long? I don't know; nor do I think anyone can tell. We must, therefore, show the greatest possible wariness."

Degeneration

Unfortunately, with the Russian economy shattered and the world revolution delayed, the Soviet state suffered from an internal degeneration characterised by the growth of a bureaucratic cancer within the state and party. With each demoralising defeat and setback for the exhausted Russian masses, the bureaucrats pushed aside the workers and placed themselves increasingly in control. Inevitably this bureaucratic reaction surfaced within the Bolshevik Party itself and was reflected in the figure of



The victory of the October Revolution transformed the world situation. For the first time in history, the working class had conquered power and established proletarian rule.

Stalin. After the death of Lenin, this parasitic growth on the back of the workers' state was to eventually lead to the political dispossession of the working class and the creation of the totalitarian regime under Stalin.

From the end of 1922 onwards, Lenin's last life and death struggle was against this bureaucratic degeneration. Unfortunately, Lenin's first stroke came in the spring of 1922, resulting in paralysis in his right arm and leg. After convalescing, he managed to recover and returned to work later in the year. In December, came a second stroke, this time more severe. From his death-bed Lenin was preparing a blow against Stalin and his allies, who were busy scheming against Trotsky. "Vladimir Ilyich is preparing a bomb for Stalin at the congress", relates his secretary Fotiyeva. As part of this he formed a secret bloc with Trotsky against Stalin over the Georgian Affair and other key questions. Finally, in Lenin's Testament written 24/25th December, with a postscript added on 4th January 1923, Lenin urges the removal of Stalin as General Secretary of the Party. Two months later, he breaks off all personal relations with Stalin, and publishes his famous article *Better Fewer, but Better*, containing a vitriolic attack against the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (Rabkrin), headed by Stalin. "We have bureaucratism not only in the Soviet institutions but also in the party", stated Lenin. Whilst waiting for a reply to a note from Stalin, Lenin suffered his third deadly stroke and lost the power of speech. Despite a late rally in his health, he finally died of a brain hemorrhage in January 1924.

Stalin suppressed Lenin's Testament. Behind the scenes, he had devel-

oped a tight grip over the party apparatus. Assisted by Lenin's death and the isolation of the revolution, Stalin worked to concentrate power into his hands. Part and parcel of this was the expulsion of Trotsky's Left Opposition. Under Stalin's rule, a political counter-revolution, based upon nationalised property rights, was carried through in the Soviet Union by the mid-1930s. The Purge Trials constituted a river of blood that separated the regimes of Lenin and Stalin.

Trotsky's real relationship with Lenin was best summed up in a letter sent by Krupskaya the week after Lenin died:

Dear Leon Davidovich, I write to tell you that about a month before his death Vladimir Ilyich, looking over your book, stopped at the place where you give a characterisation of Marx and Lenin, asked me to re-read it, listened very attentively, and then read it over again himself. And here is what I want to say besides: The relation which was formed between Vladimir Ilyich and you, when you came to us in London from Siberia, never changed with him to his very death. I wish you, Leon

Davidovich, strength and health, and I embrace you.
N. Krupskaya.

As early as 1926, Krupskaya stated in a circle of the Left Opposition: "If Ilyich were alive, he would probably already be in prison." Later, the Stalinist bureaucracy would conquer more than the Opposition. It would conquer the Bolshevik Party. It would defeat the programme of Lenin.

Defence of Marxism

Lenin, without doubt, was a political giant of a man. He was the most outstanding revolutionary of the twentieth century. Imbued with confidence in the final victory of the working class, he was a revolutionary and Marxist to his very being. However, Lenin was not born with these qualities, but made himself through a combination of learning and experience, of theory and practise. By the age of 23, all the fundamental features of Lenin's personality, his outlook on life, and his mode of action were already formed. He lived and breathed the revolution. Through this greatest of historical tasks and singleness of purpose, he fulfilled himself completely and absolutely. Through years of study in the fun-

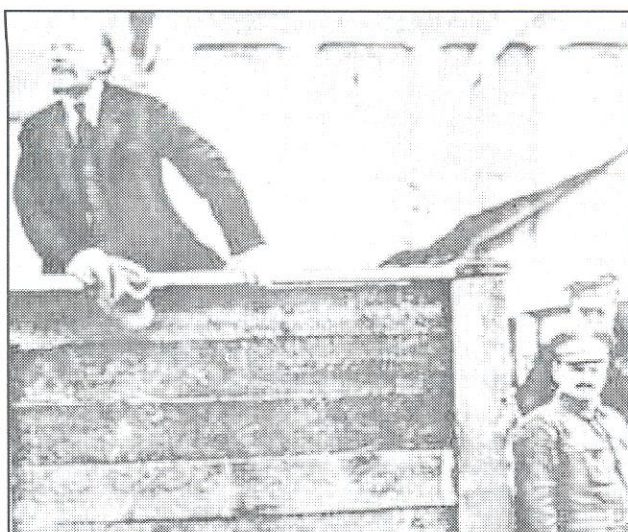
damental ideas of Marxism combined with hard practise, he became Lenin, the great man and teacher we know.

In the broad sense, after the death of Marx and Engels, the defence of genuine Marxism fell to Ilyich Lenin. Through his boundless work and confidence, he prepared the way for the first successful socialist revolution, and changed the course of world history.

"Only the proletarian socialist revolution can lead humanity out of the blind alley created by imperialism and imperialist wars", wrote Lenin. "Whatever difficulties, possible temporary reverses, and waves of counter-revolution the revolution may encounter, the final victory of the proletariat is certain."

Individuals of Lenin's standing are rare in the revolutionary movement. This article does not challenge each of us to become a Lenin or a Marx. We must be ourselves. However, it is nevertheless a challenge to change ourselves, to develop ourselves theoretically and politically for the role we will play in the future. We are proud to stand on the shoulders of the great Marxists that went before us. We, like them, must imbue ourselves with a sense of history and a faith in the classless future of mankind.

With Lenin's death, the defence and continuity of Marxism fell on the shoulders of Leon Trotsky who fought against the Stalinist epigones. Today, that continuity falls on the present generation of Marxists, in conditions of deepening world crisis and instability, to carry forward this fight for a new era of humanity, to the final victory, which it was Lenin's triumph to inaugurate, but which he could not live to complete. ■



Occupation Forces Out of Iraq!



By Samuel Roddey

THINGS ARE going from bad to worse for the occupying forces in Iraq. As the guerrilla insurgency intensified, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived in Baghdad to check things out "on the ground".

Shortly before Rumsfeld's arrival, two US soldiers and one Iraqi were killed and there was a fresh suicide attack in Kirkuk. These are the latest in a string of assaults that have made February the bloodiest month for Iraqis since the US president, George Bush, declared an end to hostilities in May. Already an estimated 250 Iraqis have died in guerrilla attacks since 1st February this year. In one attack alone in Iskandariyah involving a police station and an army recruiting office, more than 100 people were killed. The number of US soldiers killed since the start of the Iraq war has now risen to over 500.

After the war, the imperialists originally thought that their speedy victory would mean an easy occupation. However, the insurgency has turned Iraq into a nightmare for US and British forces, over 100,000 of whom are bogged down throughout the country.

Rumsfeld's arrival, his fourth visit since the fall of Baghdad, was a display of heightened security. He resembled a weak Roman consulate arriving in a troublesome outpost of the Empire. His visit was apparently organised to gauge security risks ahead of a planned handover of power to local Iraqis in June. The United States is struggling to stamp out insurgency and contain the situation in Iraq along with mounting ethnic tensions ahead of the scheduled handover of power. Clearly, such violent attacks are set to intensify as the deadline approaches.

Rumsfeld, the man who thought guerrilla warfare was ruled out in Iraq

due to the lack of a jungle, was greeted at Baghdad airport by US administrator Paul Bremer and senior US officers. He vowed democracy would take root in the unsettled country despite current "untidiness." The apparent smugness of this leader of US imperialism reveals how out of touch the American Administration is.

Of course, the British government echoed this view. The British lap dog is forced to sing from the same hymn sheet. Hilary Benn, Britain's international development secretary, told a London news conference: "Despite the security concerns - and they are real - reconstruction is progressing. Life is beginning to get better."

"Democracy"

These people have no idea. Despite their beliefs, daily life in Iraq is getting worse not better. With daily power cuts, lack of water and up to 70 percent unemployment, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis do not share the optimistic views of British ministers. Despite all the sugary promises, so-called democracy has brought nothing for the Iraqis. The brutal 'search and seek' actions of the occupying troops, trained in the methods of the Israelis on the West Bank, have only added to growing resentment against the imperialist armies of foreign occupation.

After his official briefings, Rumsfeld was presented with a poster from members of the Iraqi security force. It showed four happy Iraqis in uniform and was headed with the words: 'Iraqi Security Forces - A New Generation'. Despite the touching gesture, it could not hide the fact that guerrillas had killed more than 300 policemen deemed to be cooperating with American occupation forces. The recent carnage in the northern Iraqi

city of Kirkuk, where 10 people were killed and 42 wounded, graphically underlined the problems faced by the Americans. The attack was on a police station, the latest in a relentless campaign against Iraqis seen cooperating with US occupation troops.

Armed only with AK-47 assault rifles, Iraqi police often complain that American troops do not provide them with any protection against suicide bombers targeting their offices.

The situation is one of profound instability. This latest bloodshed erupted at a time when Iraq's Kurds are pressing for greater autonomy and competing for influence with other ethnic groups ahead of the US handover of power.

The 25-member Iraqi governing council, which is drafting an interim constitution, is trying to work out a federal system to decentralise government in the future Iraq, but differences have arisen over how much autonomy to give Kurdish areas.

Kirkuk is at the centre of this controversy. The city has witnessed rising ethnic tensions as Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans vie for control of the city, located in one of the world's richest oil-producing regions, 300km north of Baghdad. Kurds view the city and surrounding region as the heartland of their Kurdistan, but it also has Arab, Turkoman and other populations vying for control. The tensions have erupted into violence in recent months. The Turks also have a vested interest and will not tolerate the Kurds establishing their own state.

Having originally dismissed the United Nations, the Bush administration is keen for it to pick up the bill. It is now prepared for the UN to return and mediate in the situation, especially as the security situation continues to deteriorate. The UN had been reluc-

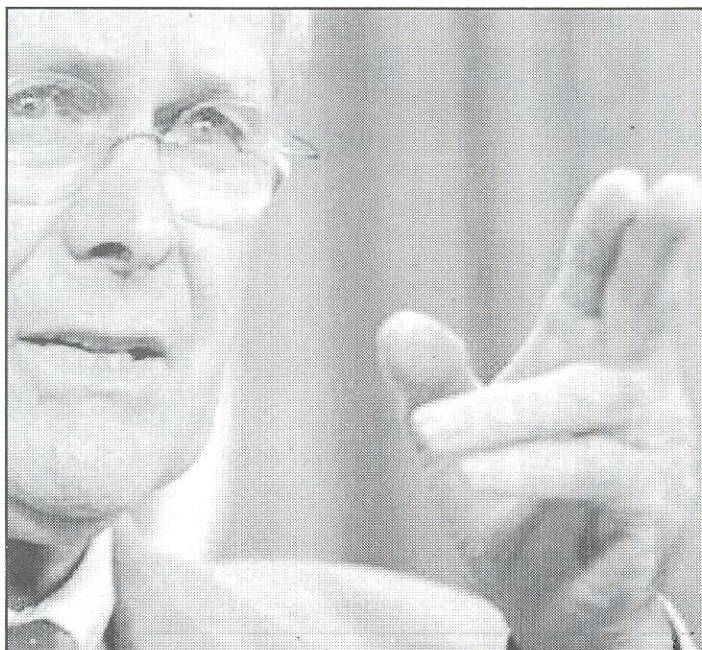
tant to intervene since it was forced to pull out of the country after the blast on August 19 that destroyed its office in Baghdad, killing 22. Under American pressure, the UN has now agreed to return to Iraq to help resolve the dispute between the US occupying force and the country's Shia majority over how to hand back power to Iraqis. Shia demands, backed by huge demonstrations, to hold direct elections by the end of June have been rejected as impractical by the United States and the UN. The United States' proposals, however, to hold 18 regional caucuses of the "great and good" to chose an interim legislature have also been rejected, forcing both sides to revise their plans.

The Bush administration, with an eye on the presidential elections in November, has said that it plans to hand over some power to the Iraqis on 1st July, but that it was flexible about how it did so and to what kind of body. The bottom line is that the United States needs a puppet government to do its bidding in Iraq. In the meantime, Associated Press reported that a senior US official said the administration was considering extending the US-appointed governing council so it could take temporary control of the country. The present US proposals do not envisage elections until late next year.

UN blessing

Of course, the United Nations have now given its blessing to America's timetable for the transfer of power in Iraq, saying that elections should wait until after the handover in June. Kofi Annan said he supported Washington's position:

"We shared with them our sense - and the emerging consensus or understanding - that elections cannot be held before the end of June, that the June 30 date for the handover of sovereignty must be respected, and that we need to find a mechanism to create a caretaker government and then prepare the elections...



some time later in the future," Annan said. So there we have it: the Iraqis can have "democracy" but without elections (the real meaning of "some time later in the future").

The UN intervention was the first effort to resolve the stand-off between Washington and the powerful Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, over the handover to an Iraqi government. The cleric had called for elections, arguing that any other method of selecting leaders would be illegitimate. Washington was adamant polls could not be organised before June 30 and would have to wait. Obviously "democracy" is inconvenient for the Americans in their pursuit of a pliable government.

Annan said the UN would explore mechanisms for creating a caretaker administration that would prepare for elections after the handover. The UN is expected to make recommendations on the formula for a transitional government at a future date. Those may prove not much to Washington's liking, which is keen to get it all its own way.

The White House had asked the UN to suggest a "framework" for Iraq's political future after its own plans for a complicated system of caucuses were rejected by Ayatollah Sistani.

In Washington circles, it is

taken for granted that no retreat on the handover deadline would be tolerated in the run up to the American elections next November. "It is holy writ," an administration official told the New York Times. "Changes are possible, but the date holds," Paul Bremer said in Baghdad.

In the meantime, the occupiers are busy sharing out the spoils, in the form of contracts overwhelmingly to American companies such as controversial Halliburton and Bechtel with close links to the White House. "To the victors go the spoils", and in this case this means the United States. Up until now the British, America's special ally, have been left out in the cold, as is everyone else. The juicy Iraqi contracts total some \$14 billion and cover areas such as electricity, water, transport, and telecommunications. The bidding process is firmly in the grasp of the Americans and is being run by Admiral David Nash, the senior procurement official at the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq.

Contracts

Concerned at being cold shouldered, the British government sent Brian Wilson, the PM's special envoy on reconstruction, cap in hand to Washington to plead with sen-

ior CPA figures and officials at the State Department and the US Army Corps of Engineers, which is funding most of the contracts.

Wilson went to Washington following disappointment with British involvement in reconstruction so far, particularly Amec's failure to win a \$1.2bn deal to overhaul Iraq's southern oil network. That work went to KBR, and so far UK companies have not won any major work arising from post-war reconstruction. US officials were keen to advise Wilson that Halliburton had not had special treatment, after negative publicity over its cost control record. Wilson said: "It is not part of my role or the British Government's position to complain about Halliburton or anyone else. Our role is to highlight the positive merits of British companies and the contribution they can make."

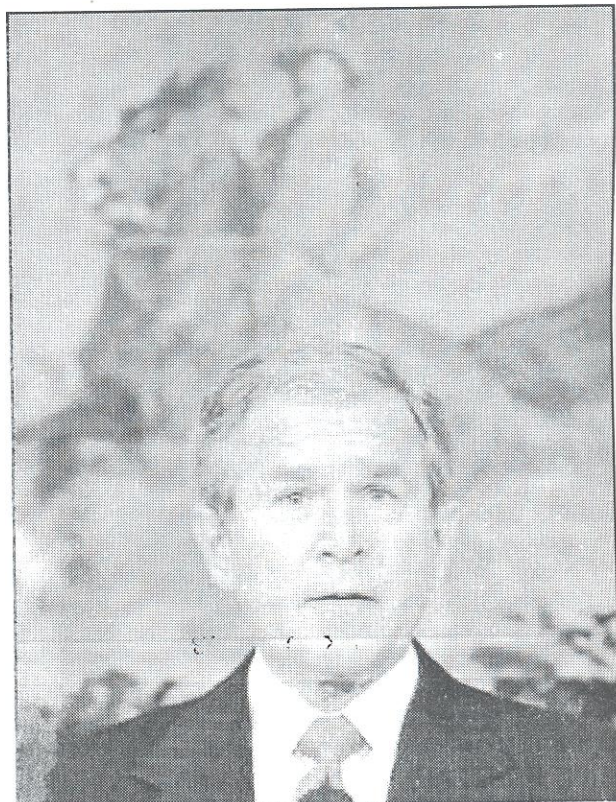
Blair's messenger boy, who was at pains to explain the process was being carried out fairly, will get nowhere. British companies are involved in bids for 15 of the 17 major Iraqi reconstruction contracts being examined by the US administration in the country.

It is clear that grabbing highly profitable contracts is more of a priority for some than granting genuine democracy to the Iraqi people. But all this does not go unnoticed among the Iraqi masses. The longer the US forces stay the greater the hatred for the Americans grows among the Iraqi people, especially the downtrodden and poor.

US imperialism has created a situation that it had not bargained for. The situation is more unstable than ever. Genuine democracy in Iraq will not be possible on a capitalist basis. Any Iraqi "democracy" that may be established at some point in the future will be a puppet regime and corrupt from head to toe. What is lacking in Iraq is a genuine voice of the workers and poor. Only when this is built can we expect a genuine solution to the crisis in Iraq, i.e. a socialist one. ■

Something Wicked This Way Comes

By Michael Roberts



THE US presidential election campaign is off and running. As I write Bush has officially launched his campaign for re-election. According to him, the choice before the electorate is between two 'visions' of America. His is that people get the choice for opportunity, enterprise and wealth, while the Democrats will just get the government to take all your money through taxes and choose for you.

It's the usual straw man set up by the neo-conservatives both in the US and the UK. The more right-wing capitalists argue that lower taxes will mean faster economic growth and prosperity even though public services are decimated as spending is cut back to balance the state budget.

The less right-wing argue that lower taxes may not be enough to kick-start an ailing capitalist economy and the government may have to spend too. And anyway without some public services, the whole thing will fall apart.

The irony is that Bush

has the barefaced cheek to argue that his campaign is built round smaller government, when his own administration has never spent so much. The days of the Reagan administration in the 1980s are remembered for driving up spending on defence, space etc and so creating loads of unproductive jobs and government deficits and debt that had to be painfully pulled back under George W's father, the elder Bush.

Being a war leader in Gulf War No 1 did not save him from defeat by the so-called 'big government' Clinton. Again, ironically, Clinton introduced a very tight government spending policy cutting back on all sorts of social programmes. Only some economic growth in the great hi-tech bubble years of the late 1990s got the government's accounts back in line.

Under Bush Jnr, taxes have been cut while spending on arms and Iraq has rocketed 35% in real terms! Most of the tax cuts have been in reducing taxes on stockholders dividend pay-

ments, in lower corporation tax and in tax rates for higher income earners. The rich have not had it so good since Reagan. Inequalities of wealth and income in the US have reached record extremes.

The result has been a sharp increase in the government deficit.

Record deficit

Whereas in the last year of Clinton, the government ran a small surplus of 1% of GDP, in four years Bush has turned that into a record deficit of 5% of GDP - and that does not count the spending of \$160bn in the military campaign and occupation of Iraq. None of this spending has been on useful social projects, but only on 'homeland security', new tanks, planes and missiles.

All this spending has stopped the US economy slipping into a major economic recession, up to now. Economic growth is around 3%. But that has not translated into jobs for the unemployed. Under Bush

2.5m jobs have disappeared - mainly manufacturing jobs but also some service jobs as US corporation switch services abroad to cheaper places like India. And wages for the average worker who does have a job have stopped rising as employers pressure employees into accepting wage freezes and cuts in health and social benefits with the threat of redundancy.

But here is the reality. It may be true that if the likely Democrat presidential candidate, Senator Kerry, had been in the White House, the US may have stopped short of invading Iraq. That adventure was clearly the product of the insane arrogance of the neo-conservatives in power.

But defence spending would have been raised (Clinton had already started to end the 'peace dividend' that followed the fall of the Soviet Union). Pax Americana made it inevitable that US armed forces would have to be everywhere (from Bosnia to Korea) to defend the New World Order.

It may also be true that Kerry and the Democrats would not have cut taxes quite so much. But they would have done nothing to stem the wholesale destruction of manufacturing jobs after 9/11. And all the same economic forces that have driven up the US trade deficit by 40% and the dollar down by 20% would have operated.

The US economy is living on borrowed time (literally). Household borrowing is up 42% since Bush came into office, corporate debt is up 20% and unemployment is up 45%. Even the stock market is still down 20%.

The Democrats would not have changed a jot to those statistics.

Spending cuts

And everybody knows that once the election is over, the government debt (now at \$7trn, or 70% of GDP, more than 20% points higher than in the Euro area) and deficits are going to be cut by draconian attacks on social spending programmes. The US runs a huge deficit on its social security fund - in other words it does not raise enough social insurance contributions to match its payout of benefits mainly to the old, the sick and the unemployed. And of course, there will be no cut-backs in defence and homeland security spending by either Bush or Kerry. Assuming that the Medicare plan just introduced by the Republicans is not touched, then everything else must go - transport, education, help for poor regions, environment etc. Given that the individual state governments like California also have dire finances, the cuts in social spending are set to be huge and the tax rises significant.

The future for Americans over the next four years is higher taxes and less public services, let alone what happens to jobs and wages. Very interestingly, it is exactly the same future for Britons. It is probably only 15 months to a

general election in Britain, so that by the summer of 2005, we could have the same two leaders that went to war in Iraq back in office or just possibly a completely new set.

Either way, taxes are set to rise and public spending to fall. The Blair government has just announced that it is going to double the spending of MI5 over the next parliament. So defence is clearly not going to be the fall guy in any spending cuts. And Gordon Brown will shortly announce in his March budget that he won't make cuts in any planned spending on the NHS or education before 2007. So that means everything else is under threat.

In its first two years of office, New Labour rigidly followed the budget plans of the Tories under Major and ruthlessly cut back on spending on the NHS, education, roads etc. Tony Blair told us that the days of 'tax and spend' under Labour were over. New Labour stood for low taxes and low spending, just like capitalist governments everywhere and just like the Democrat administration under Clinton.

Of course, what Tony had forgotten was that if you did not spend on health services, education and transport, then your country would become sicker, less skilful and unable to efficiently get around to sell things or services. How did he think we had a health service

or schools in the first place? It was by raising taxes and spending money.

Of course, you could adopt the myths and ideology of the neo-conservatives and argue that schooling, education, prisons, housing, roads, rail etc should all be run by private companies and people should buy their services from these companies direct. From Thatcher to Blair, from Reagan to Bush, that is where the ideology of capitalism would like to go.

Capitalism does not work

But the reality is that it does not work. Capitalism cannot deliver a decent education system, a proper health service or fast and effective transport for the mass of people. Eventually, even the blinkered New Labour government began to realise this.

As Britain's public services began to fall apart, they decided to reverse that policy in education and health. Spending on schools and hospitals is now rising at over 5% a year in real terms. And government spending as a share of GDP will hit 42% this year, back at the same level before Thatcher came to power in 1979. This has been paid for by a whole battery of tax measures introduced by Labour. Sure income tax rates particularly for the rich, have been held down, but social insurance has jumped sharply

and there are taxes on air travel, house buying, insurance etc.

But it is still not enough. The UK capitalist economy is not creating enough new value to justify any more increased spending. Government spending is up 8.4% this year but tax revenues are up only 5.5%. The government is now running a rising deficit on its budget.

The Tories' answer to this dilemma was announced by the new shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin along with his new Transylvanian leader: they will cut public spending and lower taxes. This is where we came in! Back to the policy of Bush.

But where does that leave Messrs Blair and Brown? Either taxes will have to be raised or spending on transport, social services, environment etc will have to be slashed. We shall probably get both once the general election is over, in say May 2005.

Either side of the transatlantic pond, over the next few years, the average working household is set to pay heavily for the tanks, planes and bombs used in Iraq and around the world to preserve 'our way of life'.

Of course, if you don't have a job, you may not pay taxes, you'll just pay in not having any sort of a 'way of life'. ■



Haiti

There can be no solution under capitalism

by Rob Lyon

FORMER DEATH squad and military leaders from the darkest periods of Haiti's past have been leading an armed struggle against the government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide for the past two weeks. Paramilitary groups have taken over a dozen cities in northern Haiti and control several key supply routes. Although the paramilitaries are few in number, they are well armed and are controlling the north through the use of terror. The 'mainstream' bourgeois opposition had previously been encouraging these groups, as they saw them as means to overthrow Aristide and take power. In response to the crisis, Aristide's government has asked for international assistance to prevent a coup.

The Opposition

Former military leaders from the disbanded Haitian army and former death squad leaders continued their armed campaign against the Aristide government by taking Cap-Haïtien, the country's second largest city. These armed groups, formerly called "the Cannibals" and now renamed the Gonaïves Resistance Front (GRF), had taken the city of Gonaïves and declared an independent country of 'l'Arbonite'. The new so-called government is headed by Buter Métayer, who was a former Aristide supporter. Guy Philippe, former police chief of Cap-Haïtien and Duvalier death squad leader in the 1980s, was named l'Arbonite's chief of armed forces. Philippe fled Haiti in 2002 to the Dominican Republic after it was discovered that he was plotting a coup. Jean Pierre Baptiste, who calls himself General Tatoune, lead the march into

the city. He was one of the leaders of the uprising that overthrew Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier in 1986. Under the military regime of the early 1990's, he joined the paramilitary outfit FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti) and was serving life in prison in Gonaïves for his role in a 1994 massacre. A close associate of Chamblain, Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant, who lead the coup against Aristide in 1991, has admitted CIA financing for the movement. It has also been claimed that these paramilitaries received "some form" of training while in the Dominican Republic.

The mainstream opposition, including groups such as the Group of 184 and the Convergence Democratique have distanced themselves from the (GRF) but were previously encouraging them as they felt they could come to power on the back of a coup against Aristide. There are also rumours that the GRF is in fact the armed wing of the US funded and backed Convergence Democratique. Tensions are high between the Creole-speaking black majority, most of whom live in absolute poverty and the minority French-speaking mulattos, one percent of whom own approximately 45% of the country's wealth. One Haitian claimed "the dominant class speaks French, but all Haitians speak Kreyol. When the dominant class doesn't want the people to know what it's doing, it speaks French." US congresswoman Maxine Waters, upon returning from a visit to Haiti exposed opposition leader Andre Apaid Jr. as a 'Duvalier supporter', and that he along with his Group of 184, is

"attempting to instigate a bloodbath in Haiti and the blame the government for the resulting disaster in the belief that the US will aid the so-called protestors against President Aristide".

Clearly reflecting the bourgeois, pro-imperialist and reactionary nature of these "democratic" opposition leaders, Apaid himself never renounced his US citizenship, and he is a major factory owner.

Aristide's government is in serious danger of being overthrown by a bloody coup. His government only has a police force of about 4,000, and there are reports that the police are demoralized and out-gunned. A successful coup would obviously be a nightmare for the Haitian people, as the old paramilitaries, who instated a murderous regime in the early 1990s would exact a terrible revenge upon Aristide, his supporters, and the Haitian workers and urban poor.

US Imperialism

Many in the US State Department see Aristide as a 'beardless Castro', and he is hated by Jesse Helms, and his clique of extreme right wing allies in the State Department.

After Aristide was overthrown, his re-instatement as President on the back of a US invasion of the island in 1994 was only made possible when he embraced the Haitian ruling class and the dictates of Washington and the IMF. In order to maintain US support and receive aid, Aristide needed to maintain the standard 'structural adjustment' package, with foreign funds going to debt repayment and the needs of the bourgeois, as well as maintaining and open foreign

investment policy.

This was a recipe for disaster for Haiti. Of course many state owned and subsidized industries were privatized and lead to a further concentration of wealth. By the end of the 1990s Haiti's local rice production had been reduced by half and rice imports from the US accounted for over half of local rice sales. The farming was devastated, and the price of rice rose drastically.

On the other hand, in order to appease the masses the Haitian government has invested heavily in agriculture, public transport and infrastructure. The minimum wage was doubled recently from 36 to 70 gourdes per day. Health care and education have also become major priorities. More schools were built in Haiti between 1994 and 2000 than between 1804 and 1994. The government subsidizes meals and public transport for school children and has maintained the controversial fuel subsidy.

These social policies, which were really minor concessions, were intolerable for US imperialism. This shows the current situation of crisis of capitalism where they cannot accept reforms of any kind, even minor ones. When Aristide won the election in February 2000, the US froze hundreds of millions of dollars in aid claiming that the elections had been flawed. Out of 7,500 positions filled nation wide, election observers recommended that seven senate seats go to a run off. Haiti's electoral commission disagreed. This was the only international concern surrounding the election. In the end, in order to avoid 'the wrath of the mighty', these senators resigned.

Although it seems clear that

the US has been involved in some way in the armed conflict, the Bush administration has been reluctant to get openly involved because as Condoleezza Rice said a few years ago the US administration will only intervene militarily when there is a clear and compelling interest for the US ruling class. The Bush administration also doesn't need any more foreign policy risks in an election year. There is also the issue of cost. The US defence budget has ballooned over the past few years with the 'War on Terror' and the invasion of Iraq.

The US has had to draw a distinction between the 'mainstream' bourgeois political opposition and the armed gangs that have taken over the north. In order to avoid a foreign policy disaster around the policy of 'regime change', much like the one brewing around Iraq, Colin Powell has claimed that the US political plan for Haiti does not include Aristide's stepping down, although he added that the US would not object if, as part of the negotiations with the opposition Aristide would agree to leave before the end of his term in 2006. And now along with the diplomatic initiative from the US, the administration is planning on sending a military inspection team to investigate the safety of the embassy. This is only an excuse to send a military team in to Haiti to check out conditions for a military intervention.

The US is concerned that Aristide cannot maintain control of the situation. Revolutionary events have opened all across the Caribbean and Latin America and the US is attempting to shut the floodgates. They would like to see Aristide gone and put someone more reliable in place. They would prefer the bourgeois opposition to come to power, but this doesn't seem very likely. Now that the paramilitaries appear to be winning the US is thinking twice. It seems obvious that the US doesn't want to see the armed gangs attain power in Haiti, as this would undoubtedly lead to a civil war and would not be



well received at home, and could cause problems in an election year. What the US would prefer is to broker a deal with the opposition and Aristide. The problem with this though is that the bourgeois opposition is digging in its heels, believing that they can come to power on the backs of a coup by the paramilitaries. The bourgeois opposition will find though, if these criminal gangsters are allowed to return to power, that they will be crushed just the same as everyone else; the paramilitaries are out of control and will not take orders from anyone.

It was not until the French expressed an interest in sending troops to Haiti that the US government responded. Naturally, the US does not want the French to begin military operations in its backyard. This is yet a further reflection of the deep crisis of the world economy and the contradictions between the imperialist powers.

In order to head off a collision between the two countries the US agreed to a diplomatic intervention including France, Canada, and CARICOM. Many are commenting that this is a way of healing the rifts caused by the invasion in Iraq and re-affirming the US's commitment to the UN. It is however a cynical self-interested

move to prevent unilateral French action. Canada has been invited because of its 'long record' of 'assistance' to Haiti, and because there is an attitude in the US government that Canada appears more neutral, and less imperialistic than the US. It is also an attempt at "outsourcing" the costs and risks of military intervention abroad to complying allies. This could prevent an anti-US backlash in Haiti, and make negotiations with Aristide easier. This gives the US the suitable diplomatic cover to move in, undercut its competitors and protect its own interests in Haiti.

The Dominican Republic and the threat of war

Tensions have also been running high on the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The Haitian government has been demanding that the Dominican government explain how their troops allowed armed Haitian gangs and criminals to cross in Haiti. It is obvious that they could not have crossed without the complicity of the Dominican army. The Dominican army said it had no information about how the exiles crossed over the 362 km border that is barely patrolled. In the meantime, the

Dominican army is still trying to find out who ambushed and killed two Dominican soldiers at a remote area of the border. The killing of the border guards is an obvious provocation, and could prove to be a pretext for war.

The Dominican government has also stepped up its complaints about illegal Haitian immigrants. It is estimated that more than 1 million Haitians, mainly workers, are living in the Dominican Republic.

Another serious point of contention is the fact that the exiled paramilitary leaders who just returned to Haiti from the Dominican Republic were armed with new M16s. Is it just a coincidence that, as is well known, the Dominican Republic had recently received a shipment of 20,000 US made M16s?

There is a danger that the US, if it fails to diplomatically secure its interests may rely on its Dominican colonial ally to enforce 'regime change' in Haiti. This would provide a smokescreen for the US's role and involvement in the affair, because once again it is an election year, and could also be seen by the Dominican Republic as a useful tool to quell its own growing social unrest. There was a two day general strike in the Dominican Republic at the end of January against privatization, low wages, rising fuel costs, and unemployment, which now stands at 17 percent. This came after another general strike on November 11 last year. Given the pretext of instability in Haiti and a flood of refugees, it could be the excuse the Dominican government needs to invade Haiti and use the army to crush the working class opposition and quell the developing revolutionary situation in its own country.

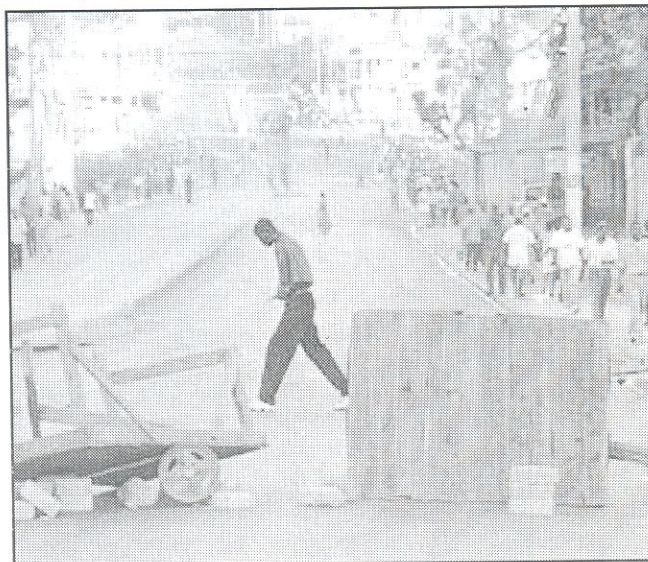
The so-called Peace Plan

Aristide agreed on Saturday to the peace plan proposed by the US, Canada, France and CARICOM nations. The rebels are to be disarmed and a new government will be formed with a new prime minister. The

peace plan requires that the government and the opposition agree to a tripartite commission, including an international representative by Tuesday to move ahead with forming a new government and electing parliament, which has not functioned since January. The real meaning of this peace plan is to keep Aristide at the top as a way of containing his supporters amongst the masses, but at the same time give real power to the representatives of the bourgeois opposition, and win time to disarm the armed thugs who are out of control. But if this "deal" went ahead it would mean political suicide for Aristide, who would have compromised with the hated imperialists and local elite for a second time.

Meanwhile the armed gangs have continued their offensive. Before Cap-Haïtien fell, police made it very clear that they were too afraid to patrol the streets, and seem unable and possibly unwilling to defend themselves. The one thing that Aristide has going for him is his popularity with the urban poor and the working class. Pierre Frandley, a carpenter, told the Associated Press 02/20/2004 that "we have machetes and guns, and we will resist. The police might have been scared, but the people got together and organized... We blocked the streets."

It was also noted in the Observer that "in the sprawling slums of Port-au-Prince, Aristide continues to be widely seen as a hero fighting against a powerful and tiny elite and its international backers". The bourgeois media has reported major demonstrations of the opposition against Aristide for some time, but continually neglect to mention that these protests are met with mass counter-demonstrations of workers who support Aristide. As the



rumours of the armed thugs and gangs approaching Port-au-Prince grow, workers from the slums and working-class neighbourhoods, the 'bastion' of Aristide's support in Port-au-Prince are arming themselves and throwing up barricades in order to support the government. It seems that the masses of the workers and the urban poor who had probably been disillusioned by Aristide, are now rallying to defend him faced with the threat of return of the cutthroat gangs of criminals who ruled the country under the Duvaliers. In this they are showing a very clear class instinct. As Marx commented, sometimes the revolution needs the whip of counter-revolution.

The crisis in the world economy has led to revolutionary developments across the Caribbean and Latin America. Revolutionary situations are developing in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil. The US is trying to stem the tide of the revolutionary awakening of the masses. In some cases, like in Venezuela the US has not intervened militarily to overthrow "uncooperative" regimes but has done so in an indirect way by whipping up a "popular" uprising, in reality a counter-revolution. In fact the situation in Haiti

reminds us very much of that which led to the April 2002 coup against Chavez in Venezuela, where a coalition between the ruling elite and US imperialism, used the masses of the middle class as cannon fodder, and tried to overthrow the government. In the case of Venezuela, the masses responded immediately and defeated the coup. Whether this will be the case in Haiti, where Aristide's image has already been tarnished in the eyes of the masses by his collaboration with the US after he was reinstated in 1994, remains to be seen.

Now, the US doesn't necessarily want to remove Aristide, but rather, use him to prevent the development of a revolutionary situation. They might sit back and watch the developments and the battles, and when the time is right they may rely on the Dominican army, under the pretext of 'stopping bloodshed' and an 'international humanitarian mission' in order to crush the movement of the masses. Given the fact that it is an election year, and given the loss of American life in Iraq, the US will be reluctant to send in their own troops and risks the lives of more US soldiers.

This crisis in the world economy and politics into

which the world has entered is such that there can be no solution to the problems in Haiti, or elsewhere such as in Venezuela or Argentina on a capitalist or reformist basis. That is precisely why Aristide and his government are in such a mess. The only solution would have been to expropriate the imperialist interests and the bourgeois in Haiti. It seems unlikely however, that a reformist politician like Aristide would carry out such a programme.

Contrary to the opinion of the US administration, Aristide is no communist or socialist, in fact he can hardly pass as a reformist and the working class will find him to be a barrier to genuine socialism and liberation from imperialism and poverty. The workers and urban poor, along with the poor peasants must organize themselves into defence committees, democratically organized and linked across the country, in order to defend themselves against the return of the hated macoutistes and take the future into their own hands. The arming of the workers and the people and the defeat of the coup would effectively put power in the hands of the workers. They must use this to push the socialist transformation of society. This however, will not be enough on its own. Haiti is a small, poor, and isolated country that could never survive on its own. A socialist revolution in Haiti could be the catalyst that sparks off a socialist revolution in the Dominican Republic, which is the only way out of the current crisis for the workers of both countries. The Haitian workers must appeal to and link up in struggle with the working class of the Dominican Republic, and appeal to all of the workers of the Caribbean and Latin America to join them in solidarity and struggle for socialism. □

Spanish Students show the way

By Ray Smith

ON MARCH 4th all university and high school students in Spain have been urged to strike against the reactionary and regressive laws passed by the right-wing government. Youth are extremely angry after seven years of cuts in social expenditure and attacks on democratic rights.

The Students' Union is the most important student organisation in the high schools and has a strong influence in universities throughout Spain. The union has called for a National Day of Action against the anti-working class laws of the PP government and for a decent future for youth. The Students' Union has made a public appeal to the trade union leaders (CCOO, UGT, STE's and CGT, the main unions in education) as well as the parents' association to support the mobilisation. This Day of Action has been organised by the Students' Union in an attempt to repeat last year's mass mobilisation of millions who took to the streets to protest against the government management of the "Prestige dis-

aster"(a tanker full of oil which sank in sight of the Atlantic Spanish coast).

The Marxist leadership of the Students' Union believes that after two years of struggle against the LOU (an act that will lead to the privatisation of university education) and the Quality Law (an act that segregates secondary education along class lines), the time has come to kick out the right-wing government.

During that period, more than fifteen students' strikes (many of them with the support of parents' organisations and teachers' unions) took place. This present national strike takes place very close to the Spanish general election, which is seen by a whole layer of workers and youth as an opportunity to kick out the right-wing government. However the Students' Union leadership has warned that it is not enough to expel the Popular Party from the government. A left-wing government with a truly socialist programme is needed to solve the problems of working people, including students. The

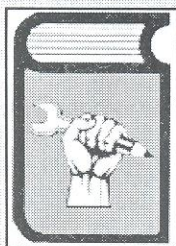
Students' Union is determined to struggle against any government that follows a policy in favour of the employers.

This clearly shows that cuts in education are not simply the prerogative of the British government. In Britain a few weeks ago we faced the vote on Top Up tuition fees. Despite the anger of the rank and file of the Labour Party, the Blairites won the vote by five votes. They are paying a high price for it. Blair had to face a rebellion among the Labour backbenchers and make concessions hand over fist.

Only a year ago, tens of thousands of youth flooded the streets from the schools and universities not only to protest against the imperialist war in Iraq, but also to express their anger towards the pro-business policies of the Blair government. In fact a mood of dissatisfaction exists among the youth, and especially amongst students. A proof of this was the national rally against top up fees last October, when students from around the country marched

through London. The lack of a decisively organised campaign to stop these plans gave the government enough breathing space to win the vote. The vote on Top Up fees would have been different if the leadership of the NUS had seriously planned marches on London and strikes in all university campuses.

Due to sluggish growth of the European economies, the representatives of the ruling class are dramatically cutting social expenditure. This is shown by Gerhard Schroder's words at the Berlin summit last month: "Health and pensions must be adapted to free up resources to invest in other fields." (*The Guardian*, 19th February). Only with the determined organisation of working people and youth will we be able to face these attacks and defeat them. The heroic struggle of the Spanish students is an inspiration for students and workers throughout Europe, and especially Britain. We must follow their lead. ■



Youth for International Socialism

Youth for International Socialism (YFIS) wants to build an international movement against the monstrosities spewed forth by capitalism, war, hunger, illiteracy, disease and poverty. We are not just against capitalism and all its crimes, however. We are also for something. We are for an alternative society, one based on meeting the needs of people, not the profits of the few. We stand for socialism, for a socialist society, a soci-

ety where all the resources of the planet are democratically and scientifically planned in the interests of all. We want to free ourselves from the straightjacket that this insane system imposes on our lives. We must change society - and we can. No force on earth could stop a united struggle of workers and youth.

Youth for International Socialism wants to help to develop the movement needed to overthrow capitalism. We are constantly told that things will improve and we, young people, have to wait and study and work hard. This will only make us cheap labour for the capitalist class. We have to organise and fight against capitalism internationally.

**The struggle starts here and now!
Join us in the struggle for Socialism!**

Venezuelan opposition steps up campaign against Chavez government

by Jorge Martín and Camilo López

HAVING BEEN defeated twice by the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses after their coup in April 2002 and during their sabotage of the oil industry in December 2002, the reactionary forces in Venezuela are now trying to reorganise their forces in a renewed attempt to overthrow democratically elected president Chavez.

In the last days of November they organised a four-day collection of signatures to try to force a recall referendum against Chavez. During those days there were already many allegations of fraud and foul play. Many workers in private industry reported threats of losing their jobs if they did not go to sign for the opposition. Despite the fact that signatures had to be collected in officially recognised places where the exercise could be monitored by Chavez supporters and international observers, the rules also allowed for itinerant signature collection sheets. This was also abused by the opposition, and many instances of signature sheets being taken into hospitals and psychiatric institutions were denounced. Despicably, patients were being asked to sign in order to receive medical treatment. There were also cases denounced in which people had been bussed from one electoral district to another so that they could sign twice.

Despite all this trickery

it was clear for all to see that the opposition had not been able to mobilise the middle class in decisive numbers. The masses of the petty bourgeoisie in Caracas which had provided the cannon fodder for previous opposition attempts at overthrowing Chavez, had had enough of the opposition leaders, and are now divided and bickering amongst themselves. There were only sizeable queues on the first day of the signature collection, after that signing places looked empty, deserted and many were closed after the second day.

Opposition "victory"

The opposition needed to collect at least 2.4 million signatures to force the recall of president Chavez.

At the end of the four-day period they announced that they had gathered 3.8 million, but this figure was quickly rebutted by one of the main opposition leaders, Carabobo state governor Salas-Rohmer who said they had collected 2.8 million. The significant fact was that there was no joy in the faces of opposition leaders as they announced their "victory". After that it took them nearly 20 days to hand over the boxes with signatures to the National Electoral Commission (CNE) for them to be counted and certified. The delay became so farcical that even Salas-Rohmer urged the other opposition leaders to hand them over immediately or risk losing any credibility they might have had left. This was after some of them announced they would not

hand them to the CNE, but rather to representatives of the Organisation of American States!

Finally, when signatures were handed to the CNE, there "were" only 3.4 million, that is nearly half a million had "disappeared" between the end of the collection period and the handing in. Along with this, opposition leaders recognised that there might be a 10% margin of error in their figures.

To make things worse the tape of a phone conversation between a prominent oppositionist and his father in Paris was made public. In it they admitted openly to only having collected 1.9 million signatures. They have now recognised the veracity of the tape, but are still taking a journalist to court for having divulged the details in his newspaper column and his TV programme. This would be funny if it weren't so scandalous. The opposition leader involved was seen during the coup on April 11, 2002, on live TV demanding opposition mobs to arrest Tachira state governor by force and has never been charged. Meanwhile, the journalist, Villegas, only repeated information which had been available for weeks on the revolutionary website Aporrea.org

Since December, increasing evidence of fraud and invalid signature sheets has emerged. Thousands of signatures

Supporters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez dance during a protest outside the National Electoral Council building, in Caracas, February 10, 2003. Banner reads "they won't come back".



seem to have been filled in with the same handwriting and these sheets have either been declared invalid or set aside for further investigation. Nearly half of all sheets have been contested for one reason or another.

Despite this farcical process, the opposition still insists they collected the signatures and is putting the CNE under pressure to recognise them. This campaign of international, diplomatic and media pressure reached its peak last weekend when the opposition called for a demonstration outside the CNE on February 14th. This was clearly a provocation, since the CNE building is located in Caracas Square, a traditional gathering point for Chavez supporters, and the building up to the demonstration was full of rumours of a coup attempt, a terrorist attempt on Chavez's life, and hard core opposition supporters went out and set up illegal road blocks in Caracas on Thursday, February 12.

Rumours of this kind are always spread in order to increase the climate of social tension and try to actually provoke an intervention of the Army tops against Chavez. However, in the short run a coup is unlikely since the forces of counter-revolution have been greatly weakened within the army, not because military officers who participated in the previous attempts have been tried and jailed, but rather because they declared themselves in rebellion and therefore put themselves outside of the army. However it is precisely in these conditions in which reactionary forces feel isolated and weak that they may attempt desperate measures and terrorist attacks.

Thousands of people from the revolutionary movement gathered in the centre of Caracas to counter the opposition demonstration. Finally, the opposition demonstration was a flop, only gathering a few thousand (20,000 according to international media) nowhere near the hundreds of thousands they could gather one year ago during the bosses



lock out and sabotage of the oil industry. Just a few weeks earlier the revolutionaries had gathered between half a million and one million people during the anniversaries of January 23 (the overthrow of the dictatorship in 1958), and February 2 (when Chavez was sworn in as president in 1999).

Balance of forces

This reflects the current balance of forces amongst the masses. The massive social plans undertaken by the government in the last year have strengthened the social basis of support for the Bolivarian revolutionary process amongst the masses. Nearly 1 million people have been lifted from illiteracy, hundreds of thousands have had access to primary health care for the first time, and 3 million hectares of land have been distributed to landless peasants organised in peasant co-ops.

However the economic situation is still extremely difficult.

The final balance for 2003 was a fall in GDP of 18%, largely because the opposition organised oil industry sabotage and the lock out of December 2002 and January 2003. It is true that the economy is forecast to grow again this year, mainly as a result of high oil prices.

Nevertheless the sabotage of the economy by the banks and private companies continues. There is a danger of a feeling of overconfidence on the part of the peoples' and workers' movement, of thinking that because reaction is weak and has been defeated by the masses on a number of occasions, all is solved. On the contrary, the capitalists and imperialism have shown once and again that they are committed to overthrowing Chavez's government and putting an end to the revolutionary movement unleashed around the Bolivarian movement.

The latest provocation from US imperialism came this week with the visit of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State

Peter DeShazo. After meeting with opposition leaders, he declared there were "too many technicalities" in the process of verification of signatures. He also declared that as important for the United States as the final decision of the National Electoral Council, was the opinion of the Organisation of American States and Carter Centre observers. This is yet a further attempt to pressurise the CNE to recognise the signatures which came after evidence has been uncovered that the opposition organisation which organised the signature collection effort, SUMATE, has received funding from the US National Endowment for Democracy, together with a whole host of other opposition organisations (details can be found on the website www.venezuelafoia.info/)

Socialist Revolution

Mass popular support for the revolutionary process and the weakness of the opposition should be used to further social transformation. If bankers and capitalists sabotage the economy and finance undemocratic attempts to overthrow the democratically elected government, they must be nationalised and put under workers control. Already in the struggle against the oil industry sabotage the oil workers showed the way forward by occupying and running under workers control PDVSA, the country's largest company. To defeat the reaction, it is necessary to place the key sections of the economy under the democratic control of the workers, replacing the permanent army with a popular militia, and replacing the administrative apparatus of the state (full of reactionaries sabotaging the democratic will of the people) by a genuine workers democracy. This is the only way to smash reaction once and for all. A successful socialist revolution in Venezuela would have a massive impact throughout the continent and beyond. □



There is a danger of a feeling of overconfidence on the part of the people's and workers' movement, of thinking that because reaction is weak and has been defeated by the masses on a number of occasions, all is solved.

argentina.elmilitante.org

fighting fund

£15,000 the target for 2004!

THE TABLOID press has been gripped over the last few weeks by one burning issue of national importance - who was going to win 'I'm a celebrity...?' This seemed an old title for a TV programme since most of the names of those involved were greeted by the viewing public with such comments as 'Who?' or 'What did he/she do?' But I suppose calling a programme 'I'm a has-been after publicity, get me out of here' would not have gone down well. Still it passes the time until the next series of Pop Idol/Fame Academy comes along to assist our 'never mind the quality, give us the twits' pop industry - and industry would be the right word here as we are all invited to vote for the next bland manufactured 'artist.' to be shunted off the TV production line.

Yes, anything to keep our minds off such petty issues as the crisis in education and health, exploitation, world poverty and war - including the ongoing war in Iraq. Far better, they argue, to stick to a modern version of Bread and Circuses. Maybe the tabloids will now have a jolly competition to decide which country should be bombed by America next? Expect Jordan to get a lot of votes here.

If nothing else, prolonged exposure to our wonderful national press drives home the burning need for a socialist alternative. With the likes of the Sun and the Mirror going on and on about one brainless celeb after another and the more upmarket Express and Mail weighing in with endless attacks on immigrants, the 'feckless' poor, trade unions etc, all in defence of the good old 'middle classes', you could soon end up feel-

ing very angry indeed. Of course they have millions to spend on peddling their lies and defending the position of the bosses. We on the other hand are depending on donations, small and not so small, from ordinary workers, students and youth to keep going.

Don't let the likes of the Sun and the Mail go unchallenged? Socialist Appeal is a Marxist journal charged with the task of both exposing the bosses lies and explaining the alternative to their system. But our resources are weak. We need your help. Our fighting fund is exactly that. A fund to fight for socialist ideas and a better society. We have set ourselves - and you - a target of £15,000 to be raised this year. To date this month we have got in £700 towards this. A good start but it needs to be kept up and improved on as we proceed through the year. You can contribute by donating in a number of ways. You can go into any Post Office or branch of Abbey National and simply pay over the counter. Contact us by phone, post or e-mail and we will provide you with the required details and forms if needed. You can also arrange to make regular automated payments by standing order from your bank account - again give us a call. Cheques and Postal Orders can as usual be sent direct to us at SA, PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ, make 'em payable to Socialist Appeal. Whichever way you choose and however little you give, it all helps in the fight to build Socialist Appeal. □

Thank you in advance

Steve Jones

Subscribe to Socialist Appeal

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

Socialist Appeal

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

Vauxhall threaten closure: Workers ballot for action

Militant Action
the only way

2001 Tube workers ballot to fight privatisation danger
Stop Blairite 'project'
PCS: Right wing defeated
Environment: Global warning
Ireland: The truth about the Easter Rising

www.marxist.com

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

I want more information about Socialist Appeal's activities

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

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

Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

E-mail.....

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

STOP THE WAR

**National demonstration - London
Saturday 20th March
Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square**

noticeboard

February 2004

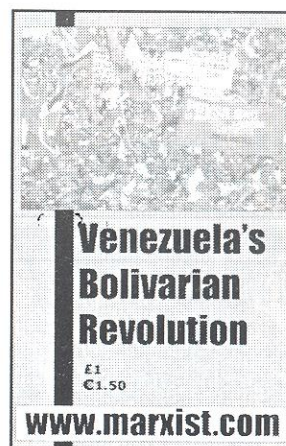
Memorial meeting for Al Richardson

Sat 13th March
2.30 pm Conway Hall
London WC1
(Organised by Revolutionary History)

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution

Price: 1 pound plus
40p p&p

Send cheques to
Wellred Books, 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



Miners strike:

“A turning point in the history of the movement”

Socialist Appeal: What were the main reasons for the strike?

Nigel Pearce: Nowadays most people accept the political nature of the strike, but at the time many people didn't see that. Many people said that it was a purely industrial dispute. But from the point of view of Thatcher, MacGregor and the ruling class it was very much viewed as a political question.

The labour movement emerged from the 1970s very confident and undefeated, the miners had come out victorious from disputes in '72, and '74 when we toppled the Heath government, and so we were regarded as the advance guard of the working class.

Following on from the historic victory in 1974 the Tories put together the Ridley Report, which was basically their programme for how to defeat the unions. The Thatcher government had its own political agenda of large-scale privatisations and cuts in public services. But to carry them out they first had to take on the trade union movement and its advance guard - the NUM. The Thatcherites knew that if they could defeat us they could walk over the labour movement

The first attempt to provoke us came in 1981 with Thatcher's plans to shut 50 pits. The union immediately balloted for action, and got a solid majority in favour. The government temporarily backed down. At the time it was presented in the press as a U-turn, but it was actually more of a side-step. They used classic delaying tactics because they were not prepared for a showdown at the time.

But following 1981 they instructed power stations to start stockpiling coal in prepara-

tion, and they began using tactics to sow divisions within the union in line with the conclusions of Ridley. MacGregor who served his apprenticeship as the hatchet-man in the British Steel strike was installed at the head of the NCB to lead the attack. So they were making serious preparations to take us on.

The government was very well prepared but in some ways the labour movement wasn't so well prepared. In Yorkshire we could see that a dispute was coming, the defeat of the steel workers, and the appointment of MacGregor made it inevitable.

The spark came when they announced the closure of 5 pits initially, and later extended this to 20. This was intended as an act of provocation because they knew fine what the response would be. The final spark came with announcement of the closure of Cortonwood in Yorkshire, with that the union immediately called out the workforce.

SA: What kind of support did you get from the wider labour movement?

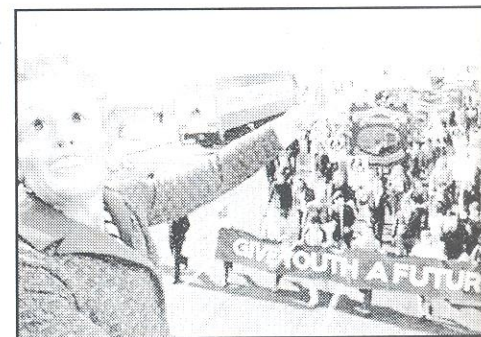
NP: Initially we received a lot of support from the movement, both nationally and on an area by area basis. And support among the local communities stayed solid during the dispute.

The working class has an instinctive capacity for organisation. When it became clear that it was going to be a long dispute we began to get a lot of support from mining communities, and non-mining communities alike. Initially many of these initiatives were organised by the union but later whole communities began to mobilise in support. Many community based initiatives played a key role

in the strike such as women's support groups, soup kitchens, and people in the local areas putting up picketing miners who had to travel away from home.

We had some problems with some of the national union leaders along with the Labour leadership. At first a lot of them did not see the dispute for what it was. It was seen by many as a normal industrial dispute and they didn't see the government's political motivations, and most of those that did tended to stand back.

And when the problems began to occur in Nottinghamshire it gave Kinnock and the Labour leadership, along with the right-wing union leaders an excuse not to support the strike. We could see it at quite an early stage. Within weeks certain sections of the Labour Party and trade union movement were wavering and didn't give support. I believe that if we had got the support we needed the strike would have won.



Continued on page 12

www.marxist.com