

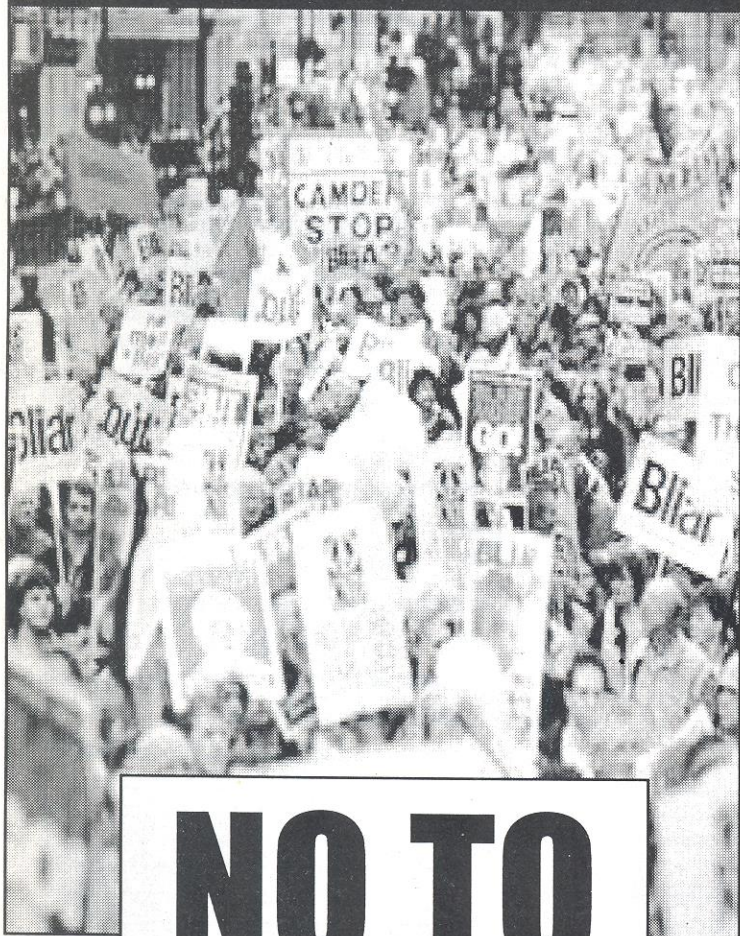
Socialist Appeal

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IRAQ



NO TO

Venezuela



imperialist intervention

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editor: Alan Woods
 PO Box 2626,
 London N1 7SQ
 tel 020 7 515 7675
 appea@socialist.net
 www.socialist.net
 www.marxist.com
 www.newyouth.com

www.marxist.com

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All Foreign Troops Out Of Iraq

"I also have this belief, strong belief that freedom is not this country's gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom."

George Bush

US imperialism is now beginning to reap what it has sown. Bush and Blair promised to bring stability, democracy and prosperity to Iraq. Instead they have brought death, misery, and universal poverty. More than half of the population is unemployed. The resentment of Iraqis to the occupation of their country is being transformed into a struggle for freedom from foreign invaders.

The past month has seen a fundamental change in the situation inside Iraq. US occupying forces are now faced with uprisings all over the country. In the first 27 days of April, as a result of the heaviest fighting since the end of the war, 115 US soldiers were killed, equalling the number who died during the two-month war itself a year ago. As many as 1,500 Iraqis have been killed in the same period. US imperialism is finding occupation considerably more difficult than invasion, and has, in truth, lost control in several areas. They cannot even get the oil out. The suicide boat-bombing of oil facilities has forced the closure of Iraq's largest oil terminal, costing one million barrels of oil per day.

The American and British soldiers were told that they were going to Iraq to liberate the people from a despised, tyrannical regime, and would be welcomed like heroes. Instead, everywhere they turn, the coalition forces meet

mounting hatred and suspicion. As the French revolutionary Robespierre once explained, people do not usually welcome missionaries who carry bayonets.

Following the departure of Spain's 1,400 soldiers - as a result, it must be stressed, of the mass movement in Spain - and, following them, troops from Honduras and the Dominican Republic, some of the most fierce battles have broken out in the areas they left. Bush will no doubt be putting pressure on Blair to provide more troops to replace the Spanish contingent. The labour movement here must oppose this with mass demonstrations, demanding the withdrawal of all troops from Iraq.

Crisis of occupation

The ferocious battles in the Shia city of Najaf, and the Sunni city of Falluja demonstrate the scale of the crisis now confronting the forces of occupation. They are stretched, and for all their talk of the danger of civil war between Sunnis and Shiites - which they have been provoking for their own ends - the recent uprisings against them have served to cut across those religious and national differences which they try to exploit.

US forces have bombarded Falluja from the air and attacked with ground troops. The civilian death toll mounts daily. With every such attack, the hatred of the occupying forces will grow and can serve to unite Iraqis against them. This must have an impact too on the morale of the troops.

The American general staff are keen to tell us that they are facing resistance only from small numbers of Saddam loyalists and terrorists. This is patently untrue. While the

numbers fighting may be a minority this is to miss the point. The strength of these fighters lies not in their numbers but in their support in the population, the vast majority of whom now oppose the occupation of their country. In effect, we have seen in recent weeks not just guerrilla attacks supported by the people, but mass uprisings of the whole people against the hated foreign invader. History clearly demonstrates that it is impossible to defeat an entire people, no matter how many troops, tanks and helicopters are used.

Such resentment at foreign occupation - a sentiment workers everywhere will be able to comprehend - cannot be removed by military force. On the contrary, every strike against civilian areas, every woman and child killed, increases the hatred of the occupation forces.

Nevertheless, the intensity of fighting seen in recent weeks cannot be maintained for long. The Americans have sufficient military might to achieve something resembling control. But they will not be able to establish anything like stability. None of the fundamental problems can be solved. Therefore, new upheavals and insurrections are inevitable.

Changing mood

Their problems will not be confined to Iraq, however. Inside America public opinion is beginning to change. The mood of the Americans is increasingly critical. The recent publication of hundreds of photographs of US soldiers' coffins - which the Pentagon attempted to ban, but then bungled it - has already had a serious effect.

As in Spain, the mood in

the USA can experience lightning changes that can cause serious upsets.

Bush's position is increasingly precarious. However, whether Kerry or Bush sits in the Oval Office does not make a fundamental difference. As their coalition falters, and for the sake of public opinion - not to mention the cost and the need for more troops - whoever is in the White House will have to try to use the UN as a cover for the occupation of Iraq.

For the moment the US imperialists, together with their valet, British imperialism, are trapped. They cannot pull out because they would lose everything. The idea of handing over power to the Iraqis is a farce. Their collaborators are isolated and hated by the population. In the end the question will be settled by both the struggle of the Iraqi people for self-determination and by the movement of the masses in the USA, Britain, Spain and the other countries involved.

In their struggle for liberation from foreign armies of occupation the Iraqi masses deserve our support. The war and all its consequences have damaged Blair, as well as Bush and Aznar. Unlike in Spain, however, there is no electoral alternative to Labour here. But there is an alternative to Blair. The struggle for socialist policies must not be confined to economic questions, but must extend to foreign policy - which is always an extension of home policy.

The Labour movement must inscribe upon its banner the struggle against imperialism, in the proudest traditions of workers' internationalism. That means opposing the involvement of foreign troops in Iraq, whether under the UN flag, the Union Jack, or the Stars and Stripes. □

LRC Conference: Reclaim Labour and Fight for Socialist Policies

by Rob Walsh, Ealing North CLP (personal capacity)

THE RECENTLY-FORMED Labour Representation Committee, which aims to reclaim the Labour Party from Blairism, is to hold a conference in July. The conference is intended to bring together rank-and-file Party members and trade union activists to draw up a policy Prospectus for the left and look at how to carry forward the fight to kick Thatcherite policies and their supporters out of our party.

Socialist Appeal wholeheartedly supports a real struggle by trade unionists and the party membership to reclaim Labour. We would therefore urge our readers and supporters to participate in this campaign, especially those in affiliated unions. At the same time, as Marxists we must raise the ideas of socialism inside this movement.

Therefore we must advance a socialist programme as the only means to begin to tackle the problems facing working class people.

The conference is supported by leading figures on the left, such as John McDonnell MP, chair of the Socialist Campaign Group, and is being sponsored by the CWU and the FBU. The RMT has also expressed an interest in supporting the conference. The railworkers union has been disaffiliated from the Party by Labour's Blairite national executive committee because some branches, using the provisions of a recent RMT rule-change, sponsored the SSP, which stands candidates against Labour in Scotland

By the time the LRC Conference takes place, the FBU will also have discussed disaffiliating, and its executive are recommending loosening the Union's links to the Labour Party in a proposal entitled "Restructuring the Political Work of the Union."

Given the mood of many rank and file firefighters it is quite likely that the FBU will follow the same route as the RMT. This is understandable in the light of the treatment meted out to firefighters during their recent national strikes. Nevertheless it would be a mistake. If the FBU executive's proposal is endorsed; "the Fire Brigades Union Political Fund will in future be used to support candidates and organisations whose policies are supportive of the policies and principles of this. This may include candidates and organisations who stand in opposition to New Labour so long as they uphold policies and principles in line with those of the Fire Brigades Union". This could give Labour's right wing the excuse to disaffiliate the FBU as they did the RMT, thus weakening the opposition inside the party. Blair will not be shedding any tears, after all it is the Blairites

who would like to break the links between the party and the unions. To disaffiliate will not punish the Blairites, instead it will help them.

These developments highlight the complex nature of the processes taking place at the present time within the labour movement in Britain, which stem from an important contradiction: that the traditional mass party of the working class has been hijacked by the agents of the bosses. New Labour's reactionary policies in government and the Blairites' attacks on party democracy had led to a collapse in party activity even before the invasion of Iraq prompted many members to tear up their party cards in disgust.

Declining membership

It was reported in April 2004 that Labour Party membership is at its lowest for 70 years; down to under 250,000 from 405,000 in 1997. With Labour in government carrying on where the Tories left off, there is hardly any reason to expect Labour membership to grow. However, what is really interesting about the decline in membership in recent years, is that broadly those who have left are those that joined in the run up to and immediately after the 1997 election. In other words, at least in general terms, it is mainly the Blairites who have left - along with some ordinary activists who feel betrayed by the actions of the party leaders in government. We have long explained that this would happen. The Blair project for transforming Labour into another version of the US Democrats has run into a brick wall. The fair-weather friends who have seen the swing to the left in the unions, and many

others disappointed by Labour in office, their illusions dashed, have left. The majority of the membership is now more long standing. They were around before Blair, and they will be around after he has gone. Most of them are not Marxists or supporters of this paper, but they will undoubtedly rally to a real fight to reclaim the party from the Blairites, especially one organised by the leaders of the affiliated unions.

This campaign can be a real focal point for opposition to the Blairites inside the labour movement. Within this process there will be many opportunities for Marxism to argue the case for a genuine socialist programme. In its present condition there is little reason for workers to be attracted to join the Labour Party, but once a serious fight was organised inside the party for a programme capable of tackling the problems facing British society, the decline in membership can be halted and reversed.

During a third Labour government, facing one crisis after another, an alternative socialist programme inside the labour movement can gain enormous support. In the next period, the main feature will not be breakaways or disaffiliations, but a process of radicalisation in society and inside the unions which will be reflected in a struggle inside Labour too. □

**Launch of the Labour
Representation Committee**
FOUNDING CONFERENCE
9.00 : 16.00, SAT 3RD JULY,
TUC CONGRESS HOUSE

Express Backs Tories

BLAIR'S TORY fairweather friends have begun to leave like rats - even before the ship is sunk - returning to the bosses' first eleven. Richard Desmond, owner of the Daily Express, has swung his paper behind Michael Howard and co. Some of you may be surprised to learn that the Express was a 'Labour paper.' Desmond donated £100,000 to the Labour Party in 2001. The Express devoted seven pages to explaining its change of heart. Desmond declared that Europe was becoming a super-state, and was worse than anything Hitler could have dreamed up! Desmond appears to be obsessed with both Europe

and the Nazis. According to The Guardian at a recent joint board meeting with fellow Tory supporters the Daily Telegraph, he launched a quite remarkable tirade against Germans, accusing them all of being Nazis as he goosestepped around a boardroom.

As Telegraph bosses walked out in disgust, Mr Desmond apparently told Express executives to sing Deutschland über Alles.

The extraordinary scenes were apparently prompted by a bid for the Telegraph by the German media group Axel Springer.

One can only wonder what Frankfurt-based Commerzbank, which bankrolled Mr Desmond's £125m acquisition of the Express group in 2000, make of all this.

Amicus - GPMU - UNIFI Merger

Britain's Biggest Union Needs Militant Lead

THERE HAVE been merger talks on the table between Amicus and a number of other unions over the past year. Discussions and negotiations have been taking place with the finance union UNIFI, and print union the GPMU. It is now almost certain that these mergers will go ahead, although in both cases it still has to be approved by a ballot of the members. These mergers will make Amicus the largest union in Britain with 1.38 million members.

A special meeting of UNIFI delegates took place in March and took the decision to accept the terms of the merger and recommended that members support it in the ballot. The ballot of UNIFI members is taking place as we go to press, and the result is due to be announced on May 15th. The merger with UNIFI will bring together 150,000 banking and insurance workers in UNIFI with the 50,000 insurance workers currently organised in Amicus. Under the terms of the merger UNIFI will keep its name and become an autonomous finance sector within the union, with Amicus finance members being transferred into the new sector.

In January the GPMU voted in a membership ballot to open formal merger negotiations with Amicus. The results, announced in February, showed that on a fairly high turnout (38% of members), 26,976 favoured a merger with Amicus while 9,803 favoured a merger with the T&G. The decision to go for Amicus was also supported by 25 of the GPMU's 27 branches. Negotiations are now taking place but the merger will require another full ballot of the membership when the details have been negotiated.

The exact details are still to be worked out. As with UNIFI, the GPMU will become an autonomous print sector within Amicus, with 20,000 existing print workers transferred into the new sector

Industrial logic

There is certainly an industrial logic to these mergers. Amicus has a significant level of organisation in both the finance and the print industries so uniting these workers will mean greater strength for the union in these fields.

The banking press has been full of talk about a 'financial super union', and in fact the new union will have enormous potential to begin to tackle the problems of

By Kris Lawrie

workers in the finance industry today. One of the main tasks of the union will to unite all those in the industry who aren't unionised, and there are 750,000 of them, while at the same time trying to build unity with the smaller banking unions and consolidating them into a powerful force in the industry.

This logic also applies to the GPMU merger which will unite the unions in the print industry which have been thrown back a long way since the defeats of the 1980s.

Under the terms of what is being proposed the smaller partners will become autonomous parts of a larger union, and this means that the workers in the industry will retain their autonomy on questions relating to their industry.

Over the last period most of the unions have been losing members. We have had the collapse of traditional industries that were the bastion of the movement and no real lead given by the union leaderships to prevent this. At the same time for the most part the unions haven't been saying or doing anything that would encourage most workers to join.

The merger between MSF and AEEU was seen by the rightwing bureaucrats as an easy way to hang on to power, maintain membership and finances, both of which had been rapidly declining in each union, while at the same time allowing them to continue milking the union dry.

It is important for the movement that new layers are won over and recruited into the union. The only way to do that is to offer them something. The unions must make a recruitment drive while at the same time developing a serious campaign to defend and improve wages, conditions, pensions, and defend jobs.

Both the UNIFI and the GPMU leaderships are dominated by the rightwing, and

this will doubtless cause some to argue against the merger on that basis. Let's not forget that this was also the case within both MSF and AEEU, and that until recently Amicus was almost totally under the control of the rightwing and the bulk of the union apparatus still is.

The recent historic gains for the left in the EC elections point the way forward, and are a sign of things to come, but it is not yet a majority. At the moment there are 22 Gazette (broad-left) EC members, as opposed to 25 independents/moderates. Under the terms of the mergers 8 hand-picked members of the UNIFI EC, and 6 from GPMU EC are due to be co-opted onto the Amicus EC when these mergers go through later this year. This will strengthen the moderate/centre ground on the EC and further reduce the power of the Gazette on that body. This new "moderate" centrist layer will be a bulwark against change in the union, and will hamper the struggle to defend wages, conditions, pensions and jobs.

Members' Interests

The outlook of the left in the union must be determined by the interests of the members and not just immediate electoral effects or numbers on committees. The Gazette have some way to go yet to secure a majority in the leadership of the union. We have made tremendous progress but now we have to knuckle down for a period of principled opposition on the EC and within the union, and begin preparing for the next elections. Above all we must put forward a militant alternative strategy for fighting to defend jobs and conditions.

It is vitally important that we maintain the forces of the Gazette and build them into a single, centralised, disciplined but democratic organisation. We must strive to integrate the broad-left organisations from UNIFI and the GPMU, and above all open up to new layers of members.

We welcome the mergers between UNIFI, GPMU and Amicus because they will strengthen the hand of workers in these industries. This is a step forward, but to reap the benefits it is important that the union has a leadership and a full time apparatus with socialist policies capable of waging a struggle in the workers' interests. □

Now It's Lord Jackson

Amicus members will be disgusted, but not surprised, that Sir Ken Jackson, the disgraced ex-general secretary of the union, who was forced out two years ago after a ballot rigging scandal, is about to don the ermine, according to The Guardian's "reliable political source", where Jackson was among more than 20 loyalists named in a delayed draft Downing Street document.

Local Government Pay - Militant Struggle Needed

By a UNISON activist

IN A history of the old National Association of Local Government Officers, written in the late seventies (which was as interesting a read as it sounds), the most memorable quote was the claim that, in the early decades of the twentieth century, 'trade unionism was anathema to most local government officers'. Indeed, even in the late eighties there was evidence of this 'staff association' mentality in some areas of NALGO. How far these local government workers have come on in the last thirty years is evidenced by the fact that they merged with the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), and affiliated to the Labour Party. However, it took nearly a decade before the resulting union, UNISON, began to realise its potential with the national local government strike over pay. The action was jointly taken by UNISON, the Transport and General Workers Union and the GMB.

The major claim of the unions was that local government pay had fallen behind the private sector, that many workers were paid poverty levels of pay, and that of those being paid these low wages, women were far and away the worst off, despite the commitment to a Job Evaluation scheme in the 1996 Single Status Agreement. That the biggest ever public sector strike took place at all was a shock to the government and the bourgeois pundits in the media, but we observed at the time that the leaderships of the unions concerned were even more surprised that it was such a success. So, after only one day's action they called off the strikes, buckling at the first suggestion of a deal put for-

ward by ACAS. The two year deal gave little to most members above the original offer, though it was sold as a 7% rise. The concession of a 'low pay commission' to look 'objectively' at the issue was sold as a win for the unions. Now two years on and we're still waiting for our 'winnings'!

This year - some may say as a cynical attempt not to upset the Labour government in the run up to the next election - our leaders did not seriously seek to address the low pay issue, but put in a preposterously low claim of 4%, with an increase

in leave of 5 days (which many employees already have after 5 years service). Some may have thought that this 'reasonable' claim would show our 'responsible' approach, but what it did was signal a weakness and unwillingness to fight which gave a green light for the employers' offensive.

Whilst the low pay commission noted that local government earnings have run behind whole economy levels for the whole of the period from 1988 to 2002, the employers have responded to our 'responsible' claim by demanding a 3 year deal of 7% with NO increase in the 3rd year, to pay for 'equal pay audits' - a cheaper and 'tar-

geted' alternative to a full and fair Job Evaluation. In addition, they wish to 'review' (read - cut!) car allowances, annual leave, sick pay, 'prescriptive premium rates' for shift, evening, overtime and weekend working. In other words, slashing the pay of the lowest paid workers. And of course, let's not forget 'a new agreement on modernisation and improvement'; two words which strike fear into all workers!

In a memo to all Chief Executives the national employers admit that it is 'a challenging agenda' with 'tacit support from central government', (our emphasis) and that although 'it is essential that it succeeds ... success should not come at the price of damage to staff morale! The way to win the dispute, they tell local employers, is 'to win the hearts and minds of your employees' and not leave 'the ground clear for the unions.' They give advice on media campaigns, email bar-rages and text messaging of staff, as well as establishing a 'budget to pay for design, printing, distribution and mailings etc.'

Clearly, this pay battle has now become one over the very basic conditions of service for local government workers, and not over the level of increase, but whether real take home pay is savagely slashed. The local government employers are once again, as with the fire-fighters last year, doing Blair's dirty work, in trying to make low paid workers pay for 'reforms' in services. The union leaders must not falter now, and must forget any thought of a softly, softly approach - 2002 was merely a warm up for the big fight, and, whether they want it or not, we have no choice but to step up the campaign for major industrial action in defence of our very livelihoods. □

Scottish nursery nurses:

Strike against low pay enters third month

THE MAGNIFICENT all-out strike of 4,500 nursery nurses across Scotland we reported on last month is still going strong after two months. The strikers, members of Unison, are fighting for a decent national pay deal from COSLA, the Labour-dominated local employers.

The employers have been giving these low paid workers the runaround since they first made their claim in 2001. At present nursery nurses starting salary is just £10,000. The average nursery nurse earns £13,361 a year. The union is demanding a £4000 a year rise. With the employers dodging the issue nursery nurses balloted for strike action, voting 87 percent in favour.

About 200 strikers protested last month outside the Scottish TUC which was being addressed by Labour First Minister Jack McConnell.

No doubt the employers had hoped that the combination of the empty monthly pay packet followed by the two-week Easter break would sap the determination of the strikers. In a particularly spiteful tactic, employers are refusing to pay nursery nurses who have been on long-term sickness unless they write a letter dissociating themselves from the dispute.

Despite the worst efforts of the employers these workers have enormous public support. There are worries that the union might suspend the action to pursue negotiations. The union must ballot before any new deal is signed. The nursery nurses have shown the determination to fight for their full claim, which is certainly no more than they deserve. Their struggle should inspire all low paid workers, particularly low paid women who continue to be discriminated against in the local government pay system. □

RMT Ballot for National Strike

Rail workers show bosses red signal

by an RMT member

WORKERS ON Britain's railways have had to endure years of attacks. Privatisation has led to disasters, waste, inefficiency and decay eating away at the rail network. Rail workers have fought back against each new attack launched on their jobs, wages, conditions and the provision of services. Now, signalling, maintenance, and station staff working for Network Rail - the company that runs the entire rail infrastructure network - are to ballot for strike action. A Yes vote will mean the first national rail stoppage for ten years. The 7,000 members of the RMT on Network Rail are being balloted for action over three issues - pay, pensions and travel facilities. So far management has offered a paltry rise of just 3 percent. This is the lowest pay offer in the rail industry.

None of the 40 percent of workers who joined Network Rail or its predecessor,

Railtrack, after 1 April 1996 gets any kind of discount on rail travel. The RMT is fighting for everyone to get the same discounts as the people who joined before that date.

The company also wants to close its final salary pension scheme to anyone joining the company after 1 April this year. The attack on pensions is of particular importance on Network Rail as thousands of workers are due to transfer to it from contractors such as Carillion and Jarvis any time now. The far from militant TSSA white collar rail union has also talked up the prospect of strikes on Network Rail. A united struggle of all rail unions would be the best way to guarantee victory in these struggles. Militant industrial struggle is vital to defend ourselves, but we also need to fight politically. RMT members, and the union as a whole, need to be inside the Labour Party fighting against Blairism, and for the renationalisation of the entire rail network, as part of a socialist integrated transport policy.

Underground Workers Will Fight New Attacks

by Rick Grogan

AT A meeting of RMT London Underground Representatives in Euston on Monday, April 19, the London Underground Management was sent a clear message that the workers have had enough.

The representatives were asked to give their opinion on the management's new improved attendance at work procedure. Though there were a few improvements, the new policy was still just as draconian as the last. The management do not want to recognise doctors' certificates as being a good enough excuse for being off work. Their own rules say that you must not sign on for work in an unfit state. How then, when a doctor confirms that you are sick and orders you to stay at home, can the management use that sickness to discipline you?

It is unthinkable in a 'modern company' that people should face disciplinary action for being ill. The meeting voted unanimously to oppose the new policy. Management will probably attempt to impose this over the heads of the union, but they will find the RMT ready, willing and able to fight back. The other rail unions, ASLEF and TSSA, have accepted the new deal without consulting their reps or their membership. Workers in both unions should reflect on this and act to change their leaderships.

The reps at the meeting were also informed that this year's pay deal has not even been discussed. The due date in April has passed and the next meeting is not even scheduled until May. Reps therefore called for a ballot for strike action before the end of May if the issues of pay, the shorter working week, and equalisation of travel facilities, were not dealt with satisfactorily at the next meeting with management. The shorter working week and travel issues have been outstanding for some years now. This year we intend to make management know that we will wait no longer.

100,000 Civil Servants Strike Over Pay

Now Action Needed to Defend Jobs

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

ON APRIL 13 strike action by civil servants fighting for fair pay saw picket lines outside Job Centres, benefit offices, prisons and three government departments. The action, like the previous strike in February was a tremendous success. The struggle has been supported by 90 percent of members, and these strikes are among the biggest ever seen in the civil service. This fact reflects the profound discontent at years of being underpaid and undervalued. The threat to 40,000 jobs announced by the chancellor in his budget has naturally angered civil servants around the country still further.

This second strike by workers in the Department for Works and Pensions was joined by a 48 hour strike by 4500 administration and support workers at prisons in England and Wales; and by a one day strike by 1700 workers at the Office for National Statistics in London, Newport, Southport and Titchfield. The ONS strike was especially significant because this was the first strike action taken in the history of the government's statistical service. A more militant mood is clearly developing across the entire

civil service facing the prospect of thousands of job cuts.

These recent strikes are tremendously important to build support and demonstrate to the government the serious opposition of workers to government plans, as well as fighting for decent levels of pay. It is becoming increasingly clear - especially after Gordon Brown's recent statement that he will not back down from his pledge to destroy thousands of jobs - that militant action is the only way to make this government sit up and take notice. To defeat their plans and save those thousands of jobs will require national action. A campaign is needed amongst the membership now to explain the need for militancy to defend jobs, and the need for all out strike action if we are to win.

The vital importance of militancy and a campaigning leadership brings into sharp focus the forthcoming Executive elections in the union. A big vote for the left is needed if we are to conduct the kind of campaign and action necessary to secure fair pay and to safeguard our jobs. □

The suspended students are back, but the fight is on

by a Cumbrian school student

Last month the Editorial Board of Socialist Appeal received a report from a school student in Cumbria. This report exposed a lack of democratical rights in schools. Following the unjustified suspension of a school student a group of students started a petition. This action led them to be both "awarded" with a suspension.

Things have been moving slowly since the suspension, I have spoken to the head of 6th form once, and he sought assurances that the matter would go no further. I replied that it wouldn't be correct for me to comment at this time.

The school have still to explain

what rules I have broken, if I haven't broken any rules then they have no grounds to suspend me. The only reason now is that we could have potentially damaged the schools good reputation, which I don't believe is a rule.

Both myself and the other student who started the petition, feel we have been wrong-done-by, by the school. There is a general feeling amongst the students that petitions and such should be treated with caution and avoided. Also there is a growing lack of interest, as the story becomes old news.

However, I have been speaking to members of the 6th form individually which, although very time consuming,

has been quite rewarding. I have explained to these students what actually happened, and what could come of that. This has given our case some support and a base of people, in the 6th form, who are willing to back us up. Despite the manoeuvres of the head to give this issue a low profile we must fight back. Now we are fighting to overturn the decision. The head must apologise publicly for these unfair suspensions and taken them off our records. □

Education Maintenance Allowance

For a Living Grant For All in Education

by a London School Student

THE EDUCATION maintenance allowance (ema) grants children from poorer families (families with a joint income of £30,000 or less) up to £30 a week if they stay on at school past 16. In this measure there is some, albeit limited, recognition of the fact that dropout rates amongst working class youth do not simply reflect a set of abstract cultural attitudes but instead reflect the economic circumstances behind deciding whether or not to stay on at school. £30 is clearly inadequate to make a decisive difference, are we expected to save this money up to pay towards our fees when we get to college? The ema can be little incentive to stay on at school while we still have to sit down the barrel of years of debt to further our education.

However Education Secretary Clarke's belief that such weekly payments - starting from the age of 16 onwards - is a means by which the 'opportunity gap' characterized by massive dropouts at 16 can be effectively tackled is indicative of how far he is out of touch with the nature of the education system.

The fact is that long before a student is old enough to qualify for the ema they experience an education system characterised by a multitude of 'opportunity gaps' the consequence of which is a clear correlation between class background and achievement at GCSE level. One key aspect of this is that - contrary to the way schools are named - in reality there is no comprehensive system. Under the current system the government professes to maintain a comprehensive system alongside a layer of state-funded grammar, independent, and private schools - something which by definition is impossible. This is quite simply because once those students presumed to be the most intelligent and desirable have been accepted by the many private and state-funded-grammar schools which exist, the intake which is left to the so-called comprehensives is anything but comprehensive (something unlikely to worry Blair considering his children's schooling). Meanwhile the view put about by grammar schools and their supporters that they select simply on ability is false. I remember my final year at a state-pri-

□ For a living grant for all over 16 in full time education

□ No to fees. Education is a right.

mary during which a significant proportion of the class suddenly acquired tutors in preparation both for the SATs and for school entrance exams. Moreover, within the comprehensives, in which the setting and streaming of students on the basis of their supposed ability is used extensively, equality of educational opportunity is by no means a reality.

Without fundamentally changing the education system so that these aspects of inequality can be addressed, the introduction of the Education Allowance - aside from the fact that it guarantees a small amount to a somewhat limited section of students - will be severely limited in its effect. Such changes would however be far harder to reconcile with the ideological framework of new labour and would certainly be unacceptable to Tony Blair's target constituency - the armies of middle class parents determined that their children should receive privileged secondary education at the expense of the state sector. □

Dublin postal workers on strike for 2 weeks

by Francis Archer in Dublin

On Friday March 18, the Executive Committee of the Communications Workers' Union (CWU), which represents 90 per cent of An Post workers, met to discuss whether or not to begin industrial action against the State company. They decided to hold off in order to allow time for further talks with the management. One week earlier the workers had voted by a six-to-one majority to take national strike action on that same Friday.

Events, however, spiralled out of the control of the union's executive. At the same time that the CWU executive committee was trying to avoid a strike with 'uncertain consequences', An Post decided to impose a new sorting system on the workers at the Dublin Mail Centre, which processes an average of 3 million items every day (about 60 per cent of the State's total).

The workers then decided not to carry out tasks that had been arbitrarily imposed and An Post suspended 262 workers at the centre that weekend. The number of suspensions rose to 420 on Monday and to 555 in the following days, plus 89 delivery workers on temporary contracts that were laid off according to the company.

The four new automated hubs to process the mail at the centre were part of a recovery plan that the company was trying to negotiate with the union to curb the economic loss of €46.4 million last year and the €30.6 losses expected this year. The plan contemplated laying off 1,350 jobs in letter post operations - about one third of the workers employed in these operations; the reduction of overtime; and tighter management control.

The CWU had broken off negotiations over the plan last December when An Post refused to implement a pay rise of 3 per cent already approved under the agreement "Transformation Through Partnership", which both parties signed in 2000. An Post, on its part, conditioned the pay increase on the endorsement of the new management plan by the union. The workers would not give in to this blackmail and had no other

option but to go on strike. In the end, however, An Post precipitated the workers' action when they decided to impose the recovery plan by sheer brute force.

From the beginning, the company tried to discredit the workers' action saying that they were refusing to carry out task that were part of their normal work. An Post's spokesman declared that "the [workers'] action is clearly designed to maximise disruption to mail services while attempting to minimise impact on their own membership and finances", by reducing industrial action to the Dublin Mail Centre rather than going on a national strike.

On Monday the 22nd, An Post began its advertising campaign in the media, telling costumers not to post to or from Dublin, and proceeded to the seal postboxes in Dublin. They were aware that postal disruption could be very unpopular, especially among business organisations, which warned they were going to be particularly affected by this strike.

Bosses' propaganda

An Post's campaign seemed to work and, although the committee of the postal union seemed to have little excuse not to call the national action the members had voted for, Mr Seán McDonagh, CWU national officer, said that postmen and postwomen would not be 'provoked into overreacting.'

Mr Tommy Broughan TD, the Labour Party spokesman on communications, urged the Minister for Communications, Mr Dermot Ahern, to intervene in the dispute since, for him, the State was ultimately responsible for An Post and its management was not fit to deal with the workers. But Mr Ahern proceeded to place the responsibility for any postal disruption on the workers' shoulders and demanded the implementation of the recovery plan on An Post terms.

"Neither the country nor the company can afford a dispute at this time. The company is facing continuing losses in recent years which will

amount to almost €100 million... Obviously these continuing losses are not sustainable" (Irish Times, 23/03/04). That night the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, backed the statement of his minister.

The war of propaganda escalated thanks to the full support of the Fianna Fáil Government. An Post's spokesman, Mr Larry Donald, said that 'the union's actions were designed to "harass" the company into the 3 per cent increase after having lost €46 million last year mainly, according to him, because of overtime and inefficient work practices.

Finally, the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) decided to mediate in the conflict on the 27th of March. The CWU accepted this mediation but demanded that first the suspended workers must be reinstated. The company agreed to do so but only after the LRC gave it no other option. An Post then tried to break the 1992 agreement between the company and the workers by hiring 200 temporary postal workers to sort out the mail backlog accumulated during the conflict. According to this agreement, temporary workers cannot be employed for less than seven months. The case has been referred to the Labour Court. If the company wins the case it will mean a further defeat for the workers since flexible temporary contracts will become an alternative to permanent jobs.

On Monday the 5th of April, services went back to normal and post boxes were unsealed. The LRC gave the deadline of mid-May for the talks on the future of the company to be settled; that is, for how the management, with the blessing of the State, is going to make the workers pay for An Post's crisis with a staff reduction of 1,350, tighter management control, and the introduction of more 'flexible' part-time contracts. Otherwise they will be referred to the Labour Court. Postal workers will not stand for these attacks and have made their intention to fight clear. □

HANDS OFF VENEZUELA!

The campaign moves forward

By Ramon Samblas

THE APPEAL launched by the Hands Off Venezuela! campaign is a success. After just 3 months our message is being spread all over the world. The International Day of Action, on March 23 shows this clearly. In the last issue of Socialist Appeal we proudly reported all the actions that took place all over the world, from Australia to Mexico, Austria and Italy.

During last month we have seen the campaign growing and gaining more supporters.

Three days after the International Day of Action, Alan Simpson MP and John McDonnell MP signed the appeal of the campaign, later publishing an article in the Morning Star paper.

On March 18, the Wolverhampton & Bilston Trades Council invited Hands Off Venezuela! to speak on Venezuela. At the end of the meeting they decided to make a donation of £50. The trade unionists present were very interested and commented on the need to raise the issue of the campaign in the British Labour movement. They agreed to use the material in their own unions.

On April 6, the NUJ (Central London branch) agreed to give a donation of around £250 and signed the appeal condemning US imperialist intervention in Venezuela and supporting the Bolivarian Revolution. The questions and contributions of the members of the branch expressed their concerns and interest in this issue.

A motion was also proposed at the NUJ Annual Delegate Meeting to support the new Venezuelan trade union confederation UNT. It was agreed to further discuss the issue but everyone reaffirmed the previous years decision to fully support the struggle of the Venezuelan working class.

Hands of Venezuela! Campaign was introduced in Manchester by YFIS (Youth for International Socialism). A meeting was held in the NUJ headquarters of the city on April 16. The collection raised £25 and all participants agreed that links between the Venezuelan trade union movement and the British Labour movement have to be built.

On April 22, the HOV campaign organised a very successful meeting at the Occupied Social Centre "Café Rebelde" in Tuffnell Park (London). More than 70 people turned up for a showing of the video "The Revolution will not be Televised", a lively discussion with Jorge Martín, secretary of the

Campaign and correspondent of "El Topo Obrero". A Venezuelan comrade had prepared traditional food (arepas, caraotas, arroz y cambures) which completed an internationalist evening in which comrades from many countries were present (Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, Canada, US, etc). The collection raised 60 dollars and 60 pounds.

On May 10 the campaign will hold a meeting in Birmingham to develop the campaign in the Midlands.

Peru

A flock of new signatures for the campaign has arrived from Peru, supporters over there have collected new signatures including that of the General Secretary of the CGTP (the main trade union federation). A public meeting was held in Lima on April 10, with two speakers, one was the Venezuelan Ambassador, and the other the local organiser of the campaign. The audience at the meeting expressed their concerns about a possible armed intervention by the US against Venezuela, but also expressed their support for their class brothers and sisters in Venezuela.

The traditional Easter Marches of the peace movement took place in Germany a few weeks ago. There were 12 speakers at the demonstration in Wiesbaden, one of which was Hans-Gerd Öffinger, vice regional Chairman of the trade union Ver.di (public sector union), editor of the Marxist journal Der Funke and a very well known supporter of the campaign in Germany. Hans-Gerd Öffinger spoke at the demonstration in Wiesbaden about US imperialism in Iraq and how the Bush administration is following the dictates of the oil industry. A lot of his speech was devoted to the situation in Venezuela, one of the world's major exporters of oil, and consequently an important country for the interests of US imperialism. US imperialism has interfered directly in Iraq and they have also been interfering in a more indirect manner in Venezuela. This explains the assertions from the Bush administration that President Hugo Chavez supports guerillas and terrorists in Colombia and explains the interference of US imperialism in the country as a possible excuse for further intervention.

Spain and Italy

In Spain, public meetings were held in the main cities of the country - Barcelona, Madrid and Seville amongst others - during



the second fortnight of April. The Marxist journal "El Militante" organised these meetings with the support of the Students' Union and some local branches of the Communist Party. These meetings were called to raise support for the Revolution in Venezuela. Luis Primo (one of the national organisers of UNT) spoke on the situation in Venezuela.

The former PP (right-wing party) Government was one of the backers of the Venezuelan reaction and supported the April 2002 coup openly. They are also responsible of the sale of 100 tanks to Colombia. The Colombian government is organising military provocations along the border with Venezuela under the direction of US imperialism.

Also, in Italy public meetings are taking place all over the country with the European correspondent of the Venezuelan Marxist journal "El topo obrero" (the workers' mole) and eyewitness of the process in Venezuela, Jorge Martín.

The campaign has got off to a flying start, but it's not enough. That's why we ask you to help us to spread the campaign.

Visit
**Youth
 For
 International
 Socialism**
 website
uk.newyouth.com

"Hands Off Venezuela" meeting in Manchester

by Semeno Arsakovich, YFIS-Manchester

ON FRIDAY, to celebrate the second anniversary of the defeat of the reactionary Coup in Venezuela, Socialist Appeal and YFIS (Youth For International Socialism) held a meeting on the coup, the current situation, and what the future holds for the people of Venezuela.

Using up to date information on Venezuela via our comrades working there, Pablo Sanchez (supporter of Socialist Appeal) and campaigner for Hands Off Venezuela was able to give an excellent and relevant talk on what the real current situation is.

The first topic in the talk was the historical events of 15 April 2002, and how with the backing of US imperialism (for whom Venezuela is extremely important in terms geopolitics and oil resources), there was the military coup.

Then the talk went into the current tensions and how Venezuela is now at a crossroads between deepening the revolutionary process or the defeat of the gains of the Venezuelan working people. This, for many attending, including myself, was very interesting, made more so due to the extreme lack of media coverage of such important events in Latin America in the British press.

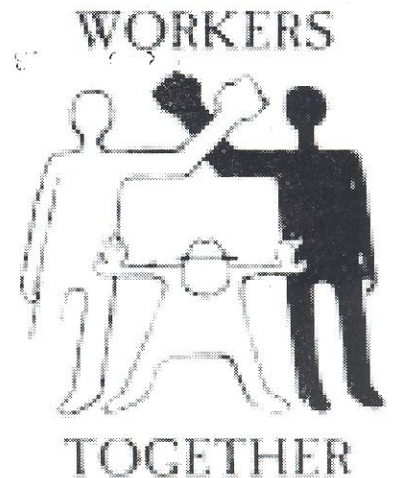
Many political and tactical questions arising from the situation in Venezuela were discussed. An important topic was what we can do in Britain and internationally.

The final issue discussed was concerning the position of the British government with Chavez and what their stance was during the Coup period.

Overall this was a good meeting to start the campaign off in

Manchester. We are gathering support. The important thing to remember is that we shouldn't allow the momentum to weaken and we must build on what we have already. More emphasis should be placed on building support amongst university students.

£30 was raised for the Campaign which will allow us to set up a website and publish further materials. More money is needed to subsidize transport costs for speakers and trips to Venezuela as well as finance for our comrades working in Venezuela at the moment. □



NUS Must 'Stand with Labour Movement, not with Labour Government'

by Brian Conlon

ON THE eve of the Tuition Fees Debate in the House of Commons students have decided at the NUS National Conference to endorse the left-wing candidate Kat Fletcher. The new President is opposed to Top-up fees and has vowed to campaign against the government's policies on education. She promised an NUS "that stands with the Labour Movement, not with the Labour Government". This is a major step forward for the student movement.

The narrow victory of the Left-wing candidate (by only two votes) indicates that there is still plenty of scope for improvement for the left within the NUS. But the defeat of the official "Blairite" candidate shows that the trend that we have seen in the trade union movement is now being repeated in the NUS.

Kat Fletcher won the presidency with the support of the Campaign for Free Education (CFE) which has been very active

in fighting against the Top-up fees bill, and pledged to implement the policy that the CFE has passed in the previous NUS conferences.

This is good news for the student movement and should encourage all activists to fight back after years of going backwards. In the recent period we have seen some student unions disaffiliating from the NUS or having worrying results about maintaining their links with the national organisation. With a fighting lead and a programme for defeating top-up fees and other attacks on education taken energetically to students, colleges and schools throughout the country, this trend can easily be reversed. Those who have left can be brought back. More importantly the NUS can be transformed into a real trade union for all students. That means going out and building in schools and colleges as well as in the universities. Such a fighting union for young people in education, alongside the labour movement, could be a powerful weapon to defend and fight for the rights of all young people. □

The Market Cannot Solve Housing Crisis

By Phil Mitchinson

THE RIGHT to a roof over our heads is surely not some idealistic utopia, but merely the bare bones of a civilised existence. Is it too much to demand that everyone has a home to live in, to bring up their children in, to retire and grow old in?

Claims of record, uninterrupted economic growth jar with the fact that 95,060 households are living in temporary accommodation provided by local authorities, because they are homeless. Newspaper headlines proclaim a housing boom (really a house price boom) and yet there are 380,000 single homeless people in Britain according to the charity Crisis. The fourth richest economy in the world forces one million of its children to live in unfit, overcrowded or emergency accommodation.

Housing has always been a major issue for the labour movement. After the first world war, Lloyd George promised returning troops "homes fit for heroes." What they got were slums and unemployment.

Following the second world war, the Labour government faced a severe housing crisis. The population had grown by a million during the war, whilst bombing had destroyed 200,000 houses and damaged another three and a half million.

Housing minister Nye Bevan insisted on building proper homes, with gardens, for working class people to live in, at affordable rents. Although Bevan had a somewhat utopian view of people from all classes, professions and backgrounds, living together in pleasant council housing developments, nevertheless the houses built were the best ever provided by the state.

In 1919-21 Lloyd George had built just 89,000 houses. Between 1946 and 1948 the post-war Labour government built 440,000. By September 1948, 750,000 new homes had been provided (367,000 new houses, 156,000 temporary houses, 135,000 repairs and 106,000 conversions). By

1951 one million houses had been completed, 82 percent of them built by local authorities. One might argue that after 1945 economic and technological advances made it easier to build these houses, as did the political will of a reforming Labour government. If we assume this argument to be true, then by the same logic such advances in the last six decades should make it all the easier to provide decent quality affordable accommodation for all today. That is surely true, but the political will of this Labour government is bent to the interests of the market. Capitalism cannot afford the reforms it was forced to grant in the past, the market will not provide housing (nor anything) to meet the needs of society, but only for profit.

Property owning democracy

The post war house building programme demonstrates, with just a glimpse, the immense superiority of centralised planning over the anarchy and profit motive of the market. From the beginning, Bevan had to contend with the ideological demands, even inside the Labour Party, for a bigger part to be played by private companies. Later, though the Tories continued to build council houses for the next decade when they were in office - smaller and meaner to meet targets more cheaply - they turned increasingly to private companies. Houses with gardens were replaced by flats and tower blocks. As years went by less and less social housing was built. Then came the Thatcher years, and the demagoguery of the 'property owning democracy'. Hidden behind this slogan was the privatisation of council services, the cutting of finances to local authorities, and the uninterrupted rule of private capital in the housing sector.

Council houses were sold off. Thanks to the cuts in local authority financing, and the ready availability of cheap credit, coupled with huge discounts, it was much cheaper to buy your house than to continue paying

rent. This meant less and less rented accommodation available for young workers and young families as the social housing stock available declined. More and more people were coaxed into the property market, those unable to afford a mortgage were left in the hands of profiteering landlords in the private sector.

Inevitably with easy credit on offer, and little opportunity to rent decent homes even if one wanted to, a property boom took off in the 1980s which has many parallels with today's unsustainable bubble. At its height property prices were more than five times average incomes. The inevitable crash in those prices, and soaring interest rates, left many in debt, negative equity and even repossession.

In recent years a new property boom, again stoked by cheap credit, with low interest rates, and bolstered by the illusion that boom and slump had been eliminated - a myth perpetuated by Blair and Brown - has led to an even bigger bubble being blown. Sooner or later this bubble will burst

Many of us have, at one time or another, attempted to build a pyramid structure with playing cards. The first 'floor' is quite easy. Each new level becomes more difficult, less stable. If you are lucky you may get four or five floors to stand with a point at the apex. With some skill and still more luck you could get six levels. But then you would run out of cards. All you could do then would be to try to protect the tentative structure from vibrations and draughts. How long your house of cards would remain standing is impossible to say. But if you started taking cards from the middle of the structure - playing Jenga with your house of cards - the whole thing would soon collapse. In the case of a child's game like this it does not really matter, but when the game is a none too subtle metaphor for the British economy - a property pyramid constructed of credit cards - then the consequences can be very serious indeed.

The British economy is no longer powered by coal and steel production, nor driven by the manufacture of cars

and ships. The chancellor boasts of the longest uninterrupted growth for 200 years but this is based on consumption not production, on speculation not investment, on unprecedented debt and an unsustainable property price bubble. When the bubble goes pop many will be left with appalling debts. Some may lose their homes.

Meanwhile, in Britain's other housing crisis, thousands of families do not have a home to lose. According to the Bank of England only 37 percent of households can afford to take out a mortgage. To be clear, we are not proposing here that those who want to buy a house should be forced instead to live in a council house. We are demanding that decent houses are built by local authorities, for working class people who cannot afford a mortgage or do not want to burden themselves with years of debt. If these same people later wish to buy a house, so be it, there are plenty on offer, but they should then leave their council house for another family to live in at an affordable rent.

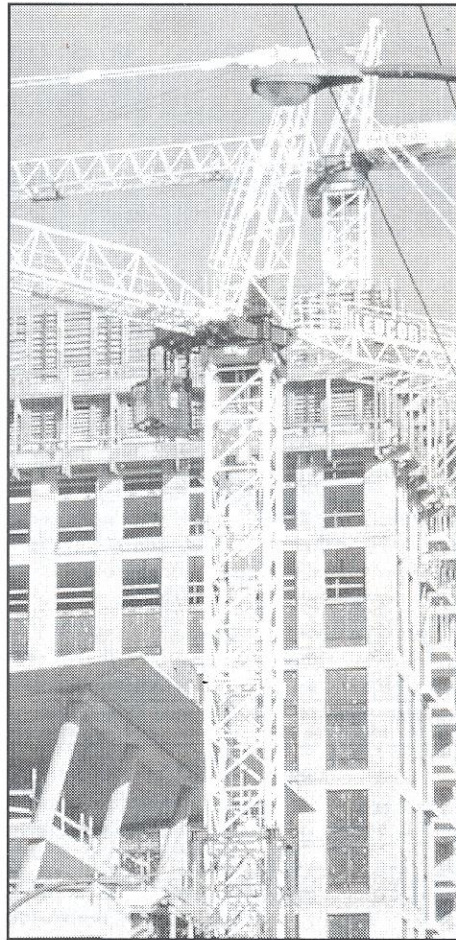
According to Kate Barker of the Bank of England between 70,000 and 120,000 new homes need to be built each year. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott has announced plans to build just 70,000 in the next three years - even Lloyd George managed 89,000 in the first couple of years after World War One. There are 95,000 households living in temporary accommodation right now.

Build a million homes

The market, private consortia, building companies and banks have no interest in building affordable homes for rent. They are in the business of amassing profits not building homes. Construction firms and banks are not going to build nice homes with gardens for working class people to live in out of the goodness of their hearts. The market cannot solve this crisis. Building homes, like health and education, is a job for the public sector. A massive injection of finance to local authorities is needed to build these homes. A plan to build one million new homes for rent - with gardens - could provide jobs for tens of thousands of building workers, plumbers, electricians and their apprentices. Clearing slums and building homes fit for the 21st century would not only solve the housing crisis, and provide jobs. The knock on effects not just economically, but socially, would be immense.

In a searing indictment of both the criminal justice system, and Britain's housing crisis, Nick Price in *The Guardian* quotes the example of Allan Seymour.

"For £400, Allan Seymour would stop breaking the law. He's been breaking it now for 34 years. He's been punished with fines,



punished in the community, punished in prison. Everybody is always telling him they're going to rehabilitate him - he's done all the courses. But here he is: 53 years old and up in court yet again. All for want of £400.

The secret of Allan Seymour's crime is so plain it is almost invisible. You might see him one night, asleep in a quiet doorway in Westminster or on a bench in Green Park, and you might think he was a boozier or a junkie or maybe another schizophrenic receiving his care in the community. He is none of those things. His problem is simpler. He is poor.

He is a qualified chef but he cannot get full-time work, because he has no fixed abode. He has no fixed abode because he cannot earn enough from part-time work to save up the deposit for a flat, which would be about £400.

On good days, he finds a bit of casual work in a kitchen somewhere and he earns £30 - that's £20 for bed and breakfast for the night, and £10 for his food, and nothing left for saving. On a bad day, he earns nothing, and so he sleeps rough and does not eat. If he has too many bad days on the trot, he has to go and steal something. And once in a while, he gets caught." (*The Guardian* 14/04/04)

Before the Orwellian "Education, education, education" - which led to cuts, pri-

vatation, loans and fees - there was the original Blair soundbite, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." This may sound reasonable enough but it depends on what one perceives to be the causes of crime. For the *Daily Mail*, no doubt, single parents and immigrants are the prime suspects. There is an easily discernible link between poverty and crime, petty crime in particular. Just as there is a link between wealth, greed, fraud and corruption. How many unemployed people do you know who have bought a contract through a dodgy deal with a bent MP to earn their company millions. None, of course. Similarly how many millionaires have been prosecuted for stealing a loaf of Bread from Asda to feed their hungry children? Not so many.

To be tough on the causes of crime would require being tough on the market economy, and the social decay caused by a system no longer prepared to provide health care, education or housing. To be tough on a system that leaves a man £400 short of a life.

Civilised existence

The state of Britain's housing has a profound impact on the lives of millions of people and on society in general. It is not only a matter of having a roof over our heads. The impact of the housing crisis on crime is clear; the million children living in unfit conditions are having their health damaged by increased risk of TB and asthma; their education is damaged by continually changing schools as they are forced to move between temporary accommodations.

In the market economy houses are not homes, they are investment opportunities. The problems of housing, the supply of affordable accommodation without a lifetime of debt, the clearance of slums and construction of houses fit for people to live in, cannot be solved within a system whose purpose is neither to build nor contribute but to exploit and profit.

We must demand a massive programme of investment in the construction of affordable housing for rent. No Labour government should brag of its economic prowess when its single greatest achievement is a record accumulation of life long debt by ordinary working people, and while there remain families without roofs over their heads.

To demand that affordable houses are built to rent, and that workers are employed building them is the very minimum. To provide everyone with a home fit for human life in the 21st century is part of the struggle for a civilised existence, that is the struggle for socialist change. □

Euro, London and Local Elections Will Be Blair's Referendum

By Steve Jones

THIS COMING June people up and down the country will be looking with great interest towards Europe... towards the European Championships in Portugal that is! The other, officially far more important event, the elections to the European parliament on June 10th will pass largely unnoticed. Admittedly some interest has been generated by Blair's U-turn on holding a referendum on the EU constitution; and by the danger of the BNP thugs gaining some ground in one or two parts of the country. Yet for most people the Euro elections will be seen as largely irrelevant. Most of us can easily name the England squad, but who can name their local MEPs? These people travel back and forward from Brussels, incurring huge expenses, earning huge salaries, doing who knows what. What power exists inside the institutions of the European Union lies outside of the European Parliament, firmly in the hands of the bureaucracy. Behind them, in the boardrooms and offices of the big multinationals lurk the real powerbrokers of Europe. This is

where the ruling class decides trade strategies, job and public spending cuts - all the key economic decisions that affect the lives of millions of people throughout Europe. So we can see that voter apathy won't need much encouragement this time. The turnout will be low, but this is not all disinterest, for many not voting will be an opportunity to protest against the Blair government, the war in Iraq etc. Raising a referendum on the EU constitution now is an attempt by Blair to cut across a revival in the Tory vote, as Howard and co raise the spectre of the 'European super-state' to try to get their voters out on polling day. The referendum 'pledge' (there has already been considerable backsliding) will do nothing to inspire Labour voters to go to the booths. To generate a revival in the turnout of the Labour vote would require a sharp change of direction by the government to start acting in the interests of working class people. In the absence of such changes these polls will be Blair's referendum - a display of massive dissatisfaction on the part of millions.

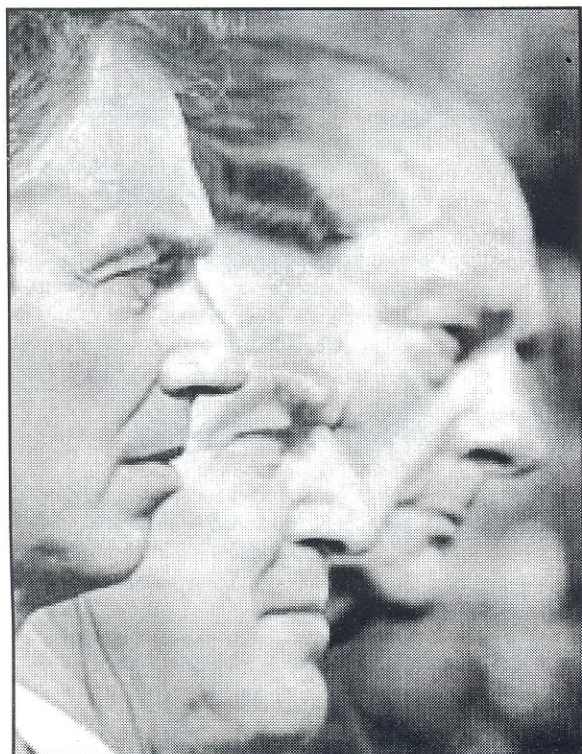
We also have the London Mayoral and assembly elections, alongside the usual run of local elections - moved from their traditional berth of early May. Again turnout will be poor as voters ask - what's the point? We can all argue the obvious difference between Labour and the Tories but people will need a hell of a lot of convincing this time to actually vote. During the early 1990s people used the local and European elections as a mighty stick with which to beat the hated Tory government. Labour councils were elected where none had ever existed before. Whole chunks of middle England were suddenly painted red. But from 1997 the trend has been reversed. Traditional Tory voters have sneaked back to the fold and Labour voters, depressed with the failings of the Blair government, have simply stayed at home and voted to watch The Bill instead. This combination of apathy and protest not-voting has been com-

pounded by the performance (or lack of it) by the local councils themselves.

In recent years most councils have been acting exactly the same way be they Tory, Labour or NOC (no overall control). They have been concentrating on keeping those services not now under private or national control going with less and less money. The increasingly harsh constraints on income, most of which comes from national government, has left most councils trying to avoid increasing council tax charges too much and, at the same time, cutting services year on year. Staff morale is low, with high rates of sickness as workers attempt to do ever more stressful jobs with little in return.

As usual government seems quite happy to throw billions of pounds, in the form of grants etc., at big business whilst turning a blind eye to the fact that they all seem to pay less tax than a low income family! Then they complain that the money 'simply is not there' to fund proper local services. Funnily enough they didn't have this attitude when it came to the Iraq war, or any war for that matter. Throughout the country care homes, schools and libraries are being shut or merged - the money for this seems to have been turned into bombs and missiles to be used against the Iraqi people - literally going up in smoke.

Some may argue that the government should now bite the bullet and increase taxes to pay for better local services, to give councils the money they need. But this will not solve the problem since the bulk of the burden will fall on those least able to afford it, even with the most progressive of tax systems. The holders of the real wealth in society will remain largely immune and unmolested - although that won't stop them from moaning on, from the comfort of their pent-houses and clubs, about 'tax and spend' Labour governments. As socialists we should be fighting for the nationalisation, with compensation only on the basis of real need, of the big companies and monopolies so that this huge reservoir of wealth





can be used for the benefit of all rather than being wasted in the pursuit of profit. After all it is our money gained at our expense.

Any Labour council worth its salt should be campaigning for this, linking up with local Labour organisations, tenants groups etc. as well as other Labour councils, refusing to increase local taxes and charges whilst at the same time making no cuts in services. This would put them in direct conflict with national government, as happened with Liverpool City council in the 1980s. But it would also act as a focus of mobilisation as workers demand that the council receives funding to cover the shortfall. Such a campaign would be a vote winner for Labour and would cut across the problems which have arisen as a result of voter apathy and low turnouts.

This would also cut across - and expose - the other recent benefactors of Labour's failures, the fascist BNP. The tendency has been for people to either a) ignore the BNP as not important or b) panic about the threat of 'fascism around the corner.' Both approaches would be wrong. Whilst the BNP should in no way be over-estimated they do represent a threat in certain areas. They have been concentrating on certain run-down parts of the country where they think they can get a result, tricking people into voting for them. They also hope to use the complex PR systems used for the Euro and London Assembly elections to pick up a seat or two. Labour's approach to the BNP is to suggest writing nice letters to people saying that Labour is very interested in local issues, such as broken pavement stones, and the BNP are not. This will not have any effect whatsoever.

We should be clear. There should be no platform for fascists - and that is what the BNP are. Their leaders may be trying to present themselves as 'respectable', but this

is just a smokescreen. Their ranks are packed with racists, Hitler-fantasists and thugs who have always represented the hard core base of fascist organisations. The movement must take a firm stand. There should be no platform, no dialogue, no debate with them in any form. Their councillors should be shunned and given no recognition at all. We must be alert to the fact that these groups could - and have - used these electoral campaigns and the results thereof, to intimidate and attack Labour and immigrant organisations and individuals in certain areas. This cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. A threat to one is a threat to all. They must be chased off the estates and streets where they show their ugly faces.

Groups like the BNP feed off the failure of Labour to provide a solution - at a national or local level - to the problems facing working class people. They rely on

people losing hope and becoming disorientated. The recent drive by the Tories and the bosses papers to whip up hysteria, firstly over asylum seekers and then over those from Europe who will be free to enter the country following the expansion of the EU, has also helped the fascists. These lies have been given additional credence by the disgraceful position of the Labour government in going along with this rubbish, talking about cutting back on the numbers 'flooding' into the country and so on.

We must work for the best Labour vote possible on June 10th to keep the Tories and their Lib-Dem clones out. But this must be linked to a struggle to clear the Blairites out of the party. A turn towards socialist policies would turn these elections around and, in passing, smash the BNP vote into the gutter, where they belong. If people see that Labour is fighting for them and not big business, that Labour representatives will make a stand in defence of those who elected them, then these elections together with the coming general election can - and will - be won.

With a socialist programme for housing, jobs and services, the filth of creatures like the BNP can be demolished and a real start can be made on tackling the daily problems facing working people. This is the way to win local elections. On the EU, a socialist stand against the bosses' and bankers' Europe, for the use of the colossal resources of a continent in the interests of society and not the pursuit of profit - the planning of those resources democratically by the majority in a Socialist United States of Europe - could lift the sights of millions.

Socialist policies are the only answer to constantly falling turnouts, they are the way to inspire and to win elections. More importantly they are the only way to tackle the real problems we face everyday. □

HOOVER WORKERS TAKE ACTION

300 workers at the Hoover factory in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, walked out last month on a 24 hour strike over pay. For the past two years the workforce have been pushed into accepting pay freezes due to what the company, owned by the Italian based firm Candy, called 'difficult market conditions' - but no more!

Hoover, who produce washing machines and fridges, had announced yet another pay freeze for this year with the option of increasing pay through a bonus scheme linked to productivity - that is, do more and just maybe we will give you more. As one worker on the picket line put it: 'It is impossible to earn extra money under this scheme... components don't come in on time... the bonus scheme is a very unreliable way of securing extra cash.' Workers have had enough and see the need to fight for a proper wage increase to stop the decline in their living standards. The company have used the old scare tactic of threatening to close the factory and shift the work abroad, as happened in Scotland where work was moved to China, but the workers aren't going to be bullied anymore.

They have the management in a spin and are determined to hang them out to dry. The 24 hour walkout is just the first step in this struggle. □

By Sion Corn

Lenin



80th Anniversary of his death

Lenin's Last Struggle

By Alan Woods, 1970

Continuing our series on the 80th anniversary of Lenin's death is the second part of Alan Woods' 1970 article on Lenin's Last Struggle.

THE DEFEAT of the European workers' revolution gave even more importance to the work of the Communist International for a revolution of the enslaved peoples of the East. The October Revolution gave a mighty impetus to the struggle of the colonies against their imperialist oppressors. In particular, the proud slogan of "The rights of nations to self-determination" emblazoned on the banner of Bolshevism gave heart to the downtrodden millions of Asia and Africa.

Almost the first act of the workers' government was to recognise the independence of Finland, although that inevitably meant granting independence to a hostile capitalist government. Naturally, Marxists stand firmly for the uniting of all peoples in a World Socialist Federation. But such unity cannot be brought about by force, but only by the free consent of the workers and peasants of the various countries. Above all, when the workers of a former imperialist nation take power, it is their bounden duty to respect the wishes of the peoples in the former colonies - even if they wish to secede. Unification can be brought about later, on the basis of example and persuasion.

In 1921, the Red Army was forced to intervene in Georgia, where the government had been consistently intriguing with Britain and other capitalist powers against the Soviet State. Lenin was extremely anxious that this military

action should not be seen as the annexation of Georgia by Russia, thus identifying the Soviet state with the Tsarist oppressors. He wrote letter after letter instructing Orzhonikidze, the representative of the Central Committee in Georgia, to pursue a "policy of concessions in relation to the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders," and advocating the setting up of a "coalition with Jordania or similar Georgian Mensheviks." On the tenth of March, he sent a telegram urging the need to "observe particular respect for the sovereign bodies of Georgia; to display particular attention and caution in regard to the Georgian population."

However, the activities of Orzhonikidze in Georgia were connected with the Stalin clique in the party. Stalin was working on proposals for the unification of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation with the other, non-Russian Soviet Republics. In August 1922, while Lenin was out of action, a commission in which Stalin was the leading figure, was set up to work out the terms of unification.

When Stalin's theses appeared, they were firmly rejected by the Central Committee of the Georgian party. On 22 September, the Georgian Bolshevik leaders passed the following motion:

"The union in the form of the autonomisation of the independent republics, proposed on the basis of Stalin's theses is premature.

A union of economic efforts and a common policy are necessary, but all attributes of independence should be preserved."

The protests of the Georgians went unheeded. Stalin was bent upon bulldozing through his proposals. The commission met on 23 and 24 September, under the chairmanship of Stalin's stooge Molotov. It rejected the Georgian resolution with one vote against (Mdivani the Georgian representative). On 25 September, the materials of the Commission were sent to Lenin, who was convalescing at Gorki. Without waiting for Lenin's views, and without even a discussion in the Politburo, the Secretariat (Stalin's centre in the party) sent the Commission's decision to all CC members in preparation for the October Plenum.

On 26 September, Lenin wrote to the Central Committee via Kamenev urging caution on this question and warning against Stalin's attempt to rush the business through. ("Stalin tends to be somewhat hasty.") Lenin had arranged to meet him the following day. He did not yet suspect the lengths to which Stalin had gone to force unification through. However, even this letter indicates his opposition to any affront to the national aspirations of a small people and thus strengthen the hold of nationalism.

"The important thing is not to provide material for the 'pro-independence' people, not to destroy their independence, but to create another new storey, a federation of equal republics."

May Day Greetings to

Socialist Appeal

Marxist ideas are very important today for rearming the Labour Movement and to recruit a new layer of activists into the movement.

Socialist Appeal plays a key role in that process.

Phil Willis, Amicus Shop steward, Heathrow Terminal 5, Construction

I would like to thank SA for the support they have offered us during the dispute.

I will be taking up the issue of workers' rights in our union and I welcome Socialist Appeal as a comrade in the struggle.

Eddie Grimes, WM Cooks strike Committee, Amicus EC member

Warm May Day Greetings to SA. We have come through a difficult time, a bleak period where workers were under attack. The tide has begun to change. The ideas of socialist internationalism represented by Socialist Appeal are the most important ideas.

Forward to Socialism!

Peter Currall, Amicus Convenor, Corus Tubes, Corby

Fraternal greetings on this May Day to all workers of Britain and the world. Wansbeck and Castle Morpeth Trades Council extends the warm hand of solidarity to all workers in struggle against capital. And to those in Venezuela fighting imperialism.....Forward to socialism!

Thanks, Steve Brown, Secretary.

**May Day Greetings from
Jeremy Dear
General Secretary
(personal capacity)**

NUJ

**Fight low pay
Repeal the anti-union laws**

**CWU London 7
May Day Greetings
Repeal all Tory anti-union laws!
Andy Blake, Branch Secretary**

Workers of the world unite!

Nigel Pearce
National Union of Mineworkers NEC
(personal capacity)

**Defeat Blairism!
No social partnership!
For a Socialist Labour Government**

**In Defence of Marxism
The Marxist Daily Online**

www.marxist.com

May Day Greetings to all our readers

“Without revolutionary theory, there can be
no revolutionary movement” (Lenin)

Harlow Trades Council
Sends May Day Greetings
For a Socialist, Peaceful,
Democratic World!

**May Day Greetings to Socialist Appeal!
From Phil Waker CWU NEC
(personal capacity)**

**Repeal all anti-trade union laws!
For a Socialist Labour Government!**

Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign

We send all our supporters May Day Greetings
“Our struggle is your struggle”

PTUDC, PO Box 6977, London N1 3JN

Peterborough Trades Council

- Repeal the anti trade union laws
- Full employment rights for all workers
- For a £6 per hour minimum wages with
no exceptions

**No more privatisation!
Renationalise the railways!**

For a Labour Government with a socialist programme

Forward to Socialism!

Matthew McLean,
Glenrothes CLP Youth Officer

Comrades of the Socialist Appeal,

With the favourable conditions developing in Britain, the Socialist Appeal is becoming a vital weapon in placing the socialist alternative before the workers and youth.

We in Mexico are confident that you will continue to fulfill this vital task in the struggle for a socialist society.

We want to send May Day, revolutionary and militant greetings from the Marxist paper "Militante". We wish you all the success for the future in the struggle for genuine Marxism.

Comradely,
Editorial Board of "Militante", Mexico

Revolutionary Greetings from Pakistan

**Manzoor Ahmed MP
Qamar uz Zaman Qaira MP
Zulfiqar Ali Gondal MP**

**Seize the future!
Forward to the world socialist revolution!**

Red May Day greetings from the US!

Your comrades in the USA send their best wishes and solidarity to Socialist Appeal for May Day 2003. On this day of international working class and trade union unity and action we are certain that our British comrades and their paper will make another wonderful intervention with the ideas of genuine Marxism. Have a militant May Day! Chase Blair out of the Labor Party and back to his church!

From the birthplace of May Day,

Workers International League,
Socialist Appeal (U.S.)

www.socialistappeal.org

Unison North West Anglia District Health Branch

Sends May Day Greetings to Socialist Appeal

- **No to PFI and Privatisation!**
- **Yes to a democratically controlled NHS free to all at the point of need!**
- **"The right to life is higher than the rights of private property."**

**Hands Off Venezuela Campaign
Sends May Day Greetings to workers everywhere
Support the Venezuelan Revolution
Secretary: Jorge Martin**



FALCE MARTELLO

Comrades!

The struggle against war and imperialism has intensified both here in Italy and throughout Europe. We salute the workers and youth of the world in their stand against capitalism and wish all those who are fighting for a better future the very best.

May Day greetings to all readers and sellers of the Socialist Appeal - forward to socialism!

Falce Martello Editorial Board

www.marxismo.net

Revolutionary May Day Greetings from "Der Funke", Marxist journal in the German labour movement.

Down with capitalism, imperialism and militarism. For a social regime change and socialist democracy all over the world. Long live working class internationalism

www.derfunke.de

MILITANTE

In Spain we have seen a magnificent stand from the workers and students of our country in bringing down the hated right wing government. The bosses regime has been punished for its anti-working class policies, its attack on students and, above all, its support for the imperialist war in Iraq.

Now we must concentrate on the fight for socialist ideas and make the methods of Marxism the property of the oppressed masses as a whole, both in Spain and beyond. The Marxist journal EL MILITANTE intends to be at the heart of this struggle. We call on the workers of the world this May Day to rally to the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Long live the international struggle! Long live May Day!

EL MILITANTE Editorial Board

www.elmilitante.org

May Day greetings to Socialist Appeal from the comrades of 'The Struggle' in Pakistan.

Forward to the socialist revolution!

Lal Khan.

Fraternal greetings from the Marxists of "El Militante" in Argentina to the workers in struggle all over Latin America and around the world.

**The future is ours!
Forward to the socialist federation of Latin America and the defeat of imperialism**

www.elmilitante-ar.org

Lenin's amendments were aimed to soften the tone of Stalin's original draft to make allowance for the "pro-independence" people, whom he considered, at this point, to be in the wrong. In answer to Lenin's mild comments, Stalin wrote to members of the Politburo on 27 September a number of abrupt and surly rejoinders, including the following:

"On the subject of paragraph four, in my opinion Comrade Lenin himself 'hurried' a little... There is hardly a doubt that his 'hurriedness' will supply fuel to the advocates of 'independence', to the detriment of the national liberalism of Lenin."

Stalin's rude reply was the expression of his unconcealed annoyance at Lenin's "interference" in what he considered his private domain, accentuated by fear at the outcome of Lenin's intervention.

Stalin's fears were well-grounded. Following his discussion with Mdivani, Lenin became convinced that the Georgian business was being mishandled by Stalin, and set to work accumulating evidence. On 6 October, Lenin wrote a memo to the Politburo, On Combatting Dominant National Chauvinism:

"I declare war to the death on dominant nation chauvinism. I shall eat it with all my healthy teeth as soon as I get rid of this accursed bad tooth."

The full significance of what had happened in Georgia had not yet come home to Lenin. He did not know that Stalin, in order to strengthen his hand had actually carried out a purge of the finest cadres of Georgian Bolshevism, replacing the old central committee with new and more "pliant" elements.

What he did know was sufficient to arouse Lenin's suspicions. In the following week he began quietly to collect information on the Georgian "affair", and got the Central Committee to send Rykov and Dzerzhinsky to Tiflis to investigate the complaints of the Georgian Bolsheviks.

On 23 and 24 December, Lenin began to dictate his famous letters to the Congress to his secretary. He stressed that this was to be secret. Lenin's work proceeded slowly, painfully, interrupted by bouts of illness. But through it all, the idea becomes increasingly clear that the central enemy lay within the bureaucratic "apparatus" of the state and party, and the man who stood at its head, Stalin.

In *The Real Situation in Russia*, Trotsky records his last conversation he had with Lenin shortly before his second stroke. In reply to Lenin's suggestion that Trotsky should participate in a new commission to fight against bureaucracy (see "How to Reorganise the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate"), Trotsky replied as follows:

"Vladimir Ilyich, according to my conviction, in

the present struggle with bureaucratism in the Soviet apparatus, we must not forget that there is going on, both in the provinces and in the centre, a special selection of officials and specialists, party, non-party, and half-party, around certain ruling party personalities and groups - in the provinces, in the districts, in the party locals and in the centre - that is, the Central Committee, etc.

Attacking the Soviet officials you run into the party leader. The specialist is a member of his suite. In such circumstances I could not undertake this work."

"Then Vladimir Ilyich reflected for a moment and - here I quote him practically verbatim - said: 'That is, I propose a struggle with Soviet bureaucratism, and you want to add to that the bureaucratism of the Organisation Bureau of the party.' I laughed at the unexpectedness of this, because no such finished formulation of the idea was in my head. I answered, 'I suppose that's it.'

"Then Vladimir Ilyich said: 'Well, all right, I propose a bloc.' and I said:

'I'm always ready to form a bloc with a good man.'"

This conversation is important for the light it sheds on the content of Lenin's last works, especially the famous "Testament", the letters on the national question and *Better Fewer, But Better*. The tone of his letters gets increasingly sharp, his targets more clearly defined, with every day. No matter what question he deals with, the central thought is the same, the need to combat the pressure



of alien class forces in state and party, the rooting out of bureaucracy, the fight against Great-Russian chauvinism, the fight against the Stalin clique in the party.

Despite Lenin's insistent requests that his notes be kept strictly secret, the first part of the "Testament" found its way into the hands of the Secretariat and Stalin, who immediately realised the danger of Lenin's intervention and took measures to prevent it from taking place. Severe pressure was put upon Lenin's secretaries to prevent Lenin from discovering any news which might "upset" him.

Nevertheless, Lenin found out from Dzerzhinsky that, among other outrages perpetrated by the Stalin faction, Orzhonikidze had gone so far as to hit one of the Georgian oppositionists. This may seem a small thing when compared to the later Stalinist terror, but it shocked Lenin profoundly. His secretary noted in her diary for 30 January, 1923 the words of Lenin: "Just before I got ill Dzerzhinsky told me about the work of the Commission and about the 'incident' and this had a very painful effect on me."

To understand the enormity of this crime, it is necessary to know about the relations between the Russian (more correctly Great-Russian) nation and the national minorities. The historic task of the Russian Revolution was to raise these despised minorities to the stature of full men, with their own rights and dignity. The idea of a representative of the Great-Russian nation abusing or striking a Georgian was a crime against proletarian internationalism, a Tsarist monstrosity which would have been punished in the most drastic matter - by expulsion from the party at the very least. That is why Lenin poured out his wrath against Stalin and Orzhonikidze, demanding "exemplary punishment for those responsible."

Stalin placed every obstacle in the way of Lenin's receiving information from Georgia. Numerous passages from the diaries of Lenin's secretaries give a clear picture of this bureaucratic harassment:

"On Thursday 25 January, he [Lenin] asked whether the materials [of the Georgian committee] had been received. I answered that Dzerzhinsky would not be arriving until Saturday. Therefore I had not been able to ask him.

"On Saturday I asked Dzerzhinsky, he said Stalin had the materials. I sent Stalin a letter, but he was out of town. Yesterday, 29 January, Stalin phoned, saying he could not give the materials without the Politburo. Asked whether I had not been telling Vladimir Ilyich things he was not to be told - how was it he was posted about current affairs? For instance, his article about the WPI (RABKRIN) showed that certain circumstances were known to him, I answered that I had not been telling anything and had no reason to

believe he was posted about affairs. Today Vladimir Ilyich sent for me to learn the answer and said that he would fight to get the materials."

These few lines starkly reveal the bullying, bureaucratic manner with which Stalin attempted to defend his position against Lenin, whom he mortally feared, even on his death-bed.

With difficulty, the sick Lenin managed to learn that the Politburo had accepted the conclusions of Dzerzhinsky's Commission. It was at this time (2-6 February) that Lenin dictated *Better Fewer, But Better*, the most outspoken attack on Stalin and the party bureaucracy yet. The Georgian events had convinced Lenin that the rotten chauvinism of the state was the most dangerous indication of pressure from alien classes:

"Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not yet been overcome..."

In his last public appearance at a political gathering, the Eleventh Congress of the RCP(B), Lenin had warned that the state machine was escaping from the control of the Communists: "The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it.

It was like a car that is not responding to the steering, but going in the direction someone else desired as if it were being driven by some mysterious, lawless hand - God knows whose, perhaps of a profiteer, or of a private capitalist, or of both. Be that as it may, the car is not going quite in the direction the man at the wheel imagines, and often it goes in an altogether different direction."

The poison of nationalism, the most characteristic feature of all forms of Stalinism, had its roots in the reaction of the petit-bourgeois, the Kulak, the Nepman and the Soviet official against the revolutionary internationalism of October.

Lenin proposed to fight against this reaction at the forthcoming Congress, in alliance with Trotsky - the only member of the Central Committee he could trust to uphold his point of view.

He proposed to deal personally with the question of RABKRIN and was "preparing a bombshell" for Stalin. His conviction that the Party "apparatus" was plotting to keep him out at all costs is illustrated by the remark of his secretary that "apparently, furthermore, Vladimir Ilyich has the impression that it was not

the doctors who gave instructions to the Central Committee, but the Central Committee that gave instructions to the doctors."

Lenin's suspicions were only too well grounded. One of the ideas seriously canvassed on the Central Committee at this time was the printing of a special, single number of *Pravda*, especially for Lenin's consumption, in order to deceive him about the Georgian affair!

The argument that this was all for the good of Lenin's health does not hold water. As he himself explained, nothing agitated and upset him so much as the disloyal actions of CC members and the tissue of lies with which they were camouflaged. The real attitude of Stalin towards the dying Lenin was revealed in a truly monstrous incident involving Krupskaya, Lenin's wife - attempting to defend her sick husband from the rude importunings of Stalin, she was rewarded by crude abuse from the "loyal disciple". Krupskaya describes the incident in a letter to Kamenev dated 23 December 1922:

"Lev Borisovich,

"Concerning the brief letter written by me at Vladimir Ilyich's dictation with the doctors' permission, Stalin phoned me yesterday and addressed himself to me in the crudest fashion. I have not been in the party for just a day. In the whole 30 years I have never heard a single rude word from one comrade. The interests of the Party and Ilyich are not less dear to me than to Stalin. Now I need the maximum self-control. I know better than any doctor what can or cannot be said to Ilyich, because I know what upsets him and what doesn't, in any case better than Stalin."

Krupskaya begged Kamenev, a personal friend, to protect her "from rude interference in my personal life, unworthy brawling and threats," adding that as far as Stalin's threat of bringing her before a control commission was concerned: "I have no strength and no time to waste on such stupid squabbles. I am also a human being and my nerves are stretched to breaking point." Lenin's threat to break off all comradely relations with Stalin and his accusations of "rudeness" in the "Testament" are often explained away by vague references to this incident. But in the first place, what Stalin did was not a "personal" matter but a grave political offence, punishable by expulsion from the Party. The offence is magnified by the fact that Stalin's position in the Party made it incumbent on him to root out such

behaviour, not to champion it.

However, this "little incident" must be seen in its proper context. It is only the most distasteful and obvious of the manifestations of Stalin's disloyalty.

Lenin's last active days were spent organising his fight against the Stalin faction at the Congress. He wrote a letter to Trotsky asking him to take up the defence of the Georgian comrades, and to the Georgian leaders warmly committing himself to their cause. It should be noted that such emphatic expressions as "with all my heart" and "with very best comradely greetings" are very rarely met in the letters of Lenin, who preferred a more restrained style of writing. It was a measure of his commitment to the struggle. It should also be pointed out that Lenin's bloc constituted a political faction - what was later known by the Stalinists as an "anti-party bloc". The Stalinists had already organised their faction which controlled the party machine.

Trotsky

Fotieva, Lenin's secretary, took down Lenin's last notes on the Georgian question, evidently preparation for a speech at the Congress:

"Vladimir Ilyich's instructions that a hint be given to Stoltz that he [Lenin] was on the side of the injured party. Someone or other of the injured party to be given to understand that he was on their side.

Three moments:

- 1) One should not fight.
- 2) Concessions should be made.
- 3) One cannot compare a large state with a small one. Did Stalin know? Why didn't he react? The name 'deviationist' for a deviation towards chauvinism and Menshevism proves the same deviation with the dominant nation chauvinists.

Collected printed matter for Vladimir Ilyich."

On 9 March, Lenin suffered his third stroke which left him paralysed and helpless. The struggle against bureaucratic degeneration passed to Trotsky and the Left Opposition. But Lenin laid the foundation of the programme of the Opposition, against bureaucracy, against the Kulak menace, for industrialisation and Socialist planning, for Socialist Internationalism and workers' democracy. □

Trotsky's My Life - Special Offer!

Wellred Publications, which has acquired the literary rights of Trotsky's works from the Estate of Leon Trotsky, is about to embark on a project to publish Trotsky's writings. The first title to be published this June is Trotsky's masterpiece, *My Life*, originally written in 1930 just after his exile from the Soviet Union by Stalin.

Since *My Life* was first published it has been regarded as a unique political, literary and human document. Written in the first year of Trotsky's exile in Turkey, it contains the earliest authoritative account of the rise of Stalinism and the expulsion of the Left Opposition, which heroically fought for the ideas and traditions of Lenin.

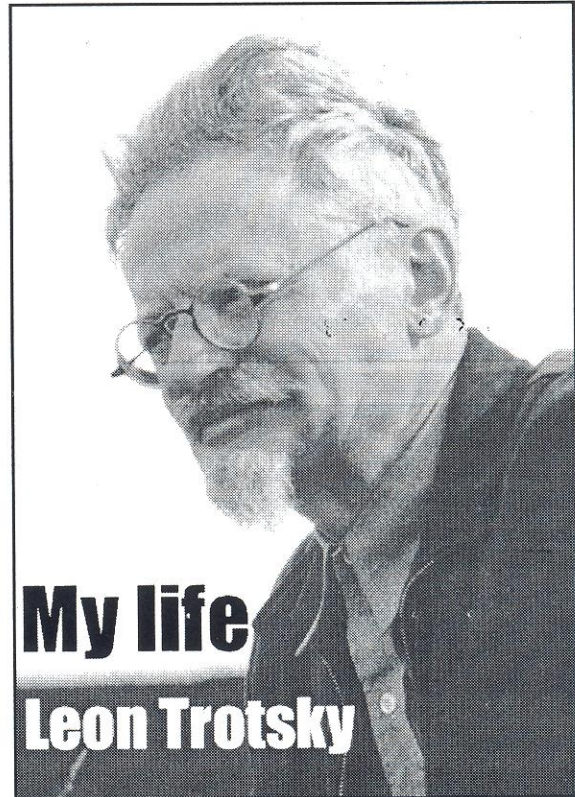
Trotsky's exile is the culmination of a narrative which moves from his childhood, his education at the "universities" of Tsarist prisons, Siberia and foreign exile to his involvement in the European revolutionary movement and his central role in the tempestuous 1905 revolution, the Bolshevik victory in October 1917 and the civil war which followed. The work concludes with his deportation and exile.

Trotsky's profound understanding and experience shines through every page. He comprehends history and its irregular features, its ups and downs, but at the same time understands its irresistible direction.

"I do not measure the historical process by the yardstick of one's personal fate", stated Trotsky. "On the contrary, I appraise my fate objectively and live subjectively, only as it is inextricably bound up with the course of social development... I know no personal tragedy."

The new edition contains an introduction by Alan Woods and prefaces by Esteban Volkov, Trotsky's grandson and Pierre Broué, the distinguished French Marxist historian.

The book remains an inspiration to all who read it. It is an essential work for those seeking to change the world.



SPECIAL OFFER! Socialist Appeal readers have the opportunity of purchasing copies of the book for the special pre-publication price of £10 plus £2.50 p&p (retail price: £15). Send for orders to: Socialist Appeal, PO BOX 2626, London N1 7SQ (cheques/PO to Socialist Appeal)



Our times again are rich in memoirs, perhaps richer than ever before. It is because there is much to tell. The more dramatic and rich in change the epoch, the more intense the interest in current history. The art of landscape painting could never have been born in the Sahara. The "crossing" of two epochs, as at present, gives rise to a desire to look back at yesterday, already far away, through the eyes of its active participants. That is the reason for the enormous growth in the literature of reminiscence since the days of the last war. Perhaps it will justify the present volume as well.

In a television programme watched by millions

Chavez praises Marxist.com and backs Hands off Venezuela campaign

Report from our correspondent in Caracas

READERS OF Marxist.com will be aware of the fact that a few weeks ago President Chavez of Venezuela dedicated 20 minutes of his "Alo Presidente" TV programme to our web site and our Hands off Venezuela campaign. Last Sunday evening we were once again on this programme, but this time there were five comrades of the international Marxist tendency on the show. This shows the growing role of the Marxist tendency in the process of the Venezuelan revolution and the international solidarity movement Hands off Venezuela.

Alan Woods, editor of Marxist.com, Manzoor Ahmed, the Marxist MP from Pakistan, Miriam Municio, the general secretary of the Spanish Students' Union, Jordi Rosich of the editorial board of El Militante, and Jorge Martin, the Latin America correspondent of Marxist.com were on the panel. There were more than a hundred people present, and Manzoor and Alan Woods were placed in the front row, in a prominent position immediately opposite the President.

In the course of the week, Alan had spoken at packed meetings of workers, trade unionists and activists of the Bolivarian Movement and was received enthusiastically. In addition, he was received by President Chavez for a private audience that lasted well over an hour - a most unusual occurrence.

The latest edition of "Alo Presidente" was broadcast in Caracas on Sunday April 18, 2004 in the Salon Ayacucho of the Palace of Miraflores. President Chavez began by recalling the revolutionary traditions of the Venezuelan people. Citing the heroic period of the struggle for Independence, he quoted a phrase well known to the readers of Marxist.com: "He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." He got the phrase from Alan Woods' book *Bolshevism - the Road to Revolution*, a fact that was confirmed when he turned to the editor of Marxist.com in front of the TV cameras and said: "Alan, I am reading your book."

He urged the people of Venezuela to derive strength and inspiration from their revolutionary past. "Let us work together," he said, "let us work hard, all together, to defeat the threats that come from all sides [...] to conquer what is our own, nationally and throughout Latin America [...] to construct a new economic system that goes beyond savage capitalism, an economic model that satisfies the needs of the majority, an economy at the service of man, and not man at the service of the economy, a social economy. [...] Let us continue working for a new society that includes everybody and excludes nobody: a society of equals, with liberty and equality, because we have always said that liberty without equality is meaningless, it is worthless."

Today the Venezuelan Revolution is threatened by internal and external enemies. The constant conspiracies of the Venezuelan oligarchy are backed, encouraged, financed and organised by Washington. Thus, the question of international solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution is a matter of life and death. Hugo Chavez emphasised this when he greeted the large numbers of international delegates present in the studio, who had participated in the Second World Rally in Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution.

During the programme Chavez talked a lot about capitalism, the working class and internationalism. He also said, "this revolution unless it is also about social and economic change cannot win." This is no accident. It reflects the growing polarization to the right and left and the fact that the most advanced elements are looking for a way out. They want to carry the revolution through to the end and finish the power of the oligarchy once and for all. And they are very open to the ideas of Marxism.

It is clear that the Venezuelan revolution is advancing and is approaching a critical point. Not long ago, Chavez made a speech in which he said: "Every fisherman, student, every member of the people, must learn

how to use a rifle." This idea was repeated in the course of the programme, when Chavez was asked for help by a group of agricultural workers who have occupied some abandoned land. He told them, "You have to take power there" and he added "we will help you get electricity and water and machinery" and "you must arm yourselves to defend the place... we will give you arms permits and we will send some soldiers to help defend you."

It is in this atmosphere that our ideas are getting a wide echo among the masses. Our ideas correspond to the needs of the masses at this precise moment in time. Thus our ideas are connecting with the revolutionary aspirations of the masses. In the programme, President Chavez introduced the editor of Marxist.com with these words:

"Also here is Alan Woods, a writer and intellectual from Great Britain, although he prefers us to say Wales. He has presented us with some books, and one of them I presented here a few weeks ago, called *Reason in Revolt* - and a very good book it is."

Just before the programme they showed an interview with Alan Woods and, half way through, the programme was interrupted to show a video about the solidarity meeting in which the editor of Marxist.com was again shown explaining that the main role in defeating the coup was the direct intervention of the masses. In the course of the programme, Hugo Chavez mentioned Alan at least three times. He said he is reading *Bolshevism - the Road to Revolution* and he again mentioned *Reason in Revolt*, which he warmly recommended. President Chavez has given his personal support to the publishing of the Venezuelan edition of *Reason in Revolt*.

Comrades Miriam and Manzoor spoke in the course of the programme, as the following extracts show:

President Chavez: "We also have with us Miriam Municio of the Spanish students union. Miriam, how are you?"

Are you from Madrid?"

Miriam Municio: "I am."

President Chavez: "How are things? What do you think of the change of government over there?"

Miriam Municio: "Very good, of course. This was the biggest mobilisation of the workers and youth against the reactionary government of Aznar, which wanted to reconquer Latin America - and it was this that led to the change of government. That shows that the movement is not only in Latin America and Venezuela. I would first like to send greetings from the revolutionary youth of Spain, represented by the Marxist tendency El Militante and the Spanish Students Union that I represent here. We send militant revolutionary greetings to this revolution. Know that the workers and youth of Spain need to know all that is going on here and we will do all in our power to answer the lies and distortions of the bourgeois mass media. [...] We will tell them how the workers have occupied the factories and are organising workers' control and that things are changing substantially.

"We are an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and revolutionary organization. We represent young workers and the children of workers, not the children of the rich. In Spain as in Venezuela there are rich and poor. And of course we have much more in common with the Venezuelan people than we have with vultures like Aznar, or businessmen like Botin and the others. [...]"

"I would like to tell you, President Chavez, that if we were able to mobilise hundreds of thousands, bringing the youth of Spain onto the streets against the reactionary government of Aznar, who wanted to end public education, public health, the rights of the workers, enormously increasing casual labour, and against the invasion of Iraq, we will also commit ourselves to mobilise the youth against the aggression of US imperialism against Venezuela."

Applause

Presidente Chávez: "Many thanks, Miriam. Miriam is a young revolutionary fighter from that Spain we love."

Later in the programme he enthusiastically greeted Zapatero's announcement of the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq, at which point the whole audience stood up and applauded loudly.

Turning to Manzoor Ahmed, who he introduced as the editor of *The Struggle*, a member of the Pakistan National Assembly and president of the Hands off Venezuela campaign in Pakistan. Manzoor mentioned the list of over 50 signatures of Pakistani members of parliament he had delivered to Chavez and the latter replied:

"I had the honour to receive that letter - I don't know whether the lads have got it to hand - but it is a very substantial group of leaders and parliamentarians who are supporting the people of Venezuela, and I thank

them very much."

Manzoor: "Yes, this campaign has passed beyond the borders of Pakistan and has now been spread to India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and in all the South East of Asia we will be holding demonstrations of solidarity [...] The question is why do the workers of such far-flung places send these messages? It is because the workers of the world have understood that this revolution does not belong solely to the people of Venezuela. It is a revolution that inspires revolutionaries all over the world. The people of Pakistan and all South Asia understand that this revolution is also their revolution."

Later on, the president made an explicit reference to the Hands off Venezuela campaign. "We need a lot of struggle and a lot of consciousness. That is why the kind of meeting we are having here in Caracas is so important for the future of America and the future of the whole world, and when I speak of America, I am also speaking of course of the people of the United States of North America, and the people of Canada, who are also people of the Americas, of the continent, and are our brothers. We send them all our best regards, our hope for a world of equality and justice."

Turning to the TV cameras Chavez held up the original signatures of the 52 Pakistani MPs on camera and everybody could see the heading Hands off Venezuela campaign. Then clearly and slowly he read out the address of the website:

"Well, we have also had some visitors from the United States, and they are here with us. I have here a document and I would like to show it to you: the Hands off Venezuela campaign. Here it is, signed by a whole group - these are the original signatures. They are not fakes! [a reference to the signatures of the opposition in the recent referendum campaign] Don't remind me of that business. I don't even want to hear about it! But these are not the signatures of dead people. They are originals not fakes. They are all members of parliament from Pakistan and mass leaders of hundreds of thousands of people.

"These are fighters - Marxists and non-Marxists - but all are revolutionaries. The campaign is co-ordinated and led by the web page: www.marxist.com. That is the website through which this Hands off Venezuela campaign is being advanced. Hands off Venezuela! Many thanks to all you fighters of the world who are backing this campaign for the freedom not only of Venezuela but of the whole world."

We can see from this incident alone that the work of the Marxist tendency in Venezuela is attracting a lot of attention. Comrade Alan Woods has been interviewed on several TV and radio stations, and we are getting coverage in all the main web sites in Venezuela. Two examples are the following.

The Aporrea web site: <http://www.aporrea.org/dameverbo.php?docid=15858> where there is a report in Spanish and photographs of Alan speaking. This is only one of a series of rank and file meetings that the editor of *Marxist.com* has addressed during the course of the last week.

<http://www.aporrea.org/dameverbo.php?docid=15833>

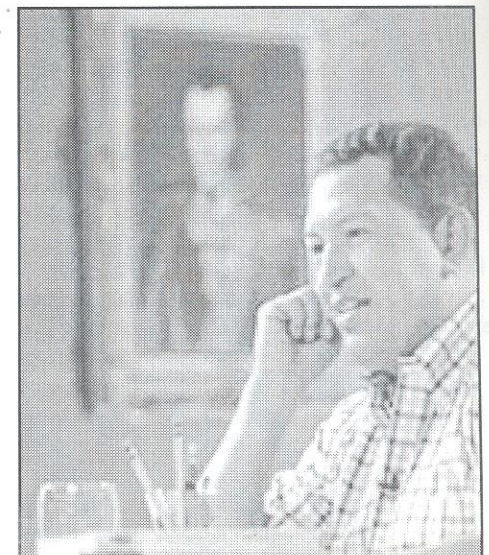
This is a small report of Alo Presidente on April 18th, where they only mention by name one of the guests and that is Alan Woods!

Another widely read English language Venezuelan news site (www.vheadline.com) has published the El Topo Obrero interview with Alan Woods, which you can see at: <http://www.vheadline.com/readnews.asp?id=17757>.

This means millions of people in Venezuela have now heard of our tendency and have heard our ideas. Immediately after this we put up a clear link in Spanish at the top of the In Defence of Marxism web site home page to the Hands off Venezuela campaign and the Revolutionary Marxist Current in Venezuela. There is no doubt that many people in Venezuela will be looking up our web site after this TV show and we have already received phone calls from people - including important trade union leaders of the oil workers, congratulating us on our intervention.

Everywhere the revolutionary message of Marxism is getting an enthusiastic response, and we will be publishing further details and photos on the web site. We appeal to our readers and friends to discuss the developments in Venezuela and raise this question in the workers' movement internationally. The recent comments in the Colombian senate indicate that the threat of foreign intervention is very real. The voice of the world working class movement must be heard loud and clear: Hands off Venezuela! Carry the Revolution out to the end! **□**

Caracas, April 19, 2004





For regularly updated analysis, reports, and more pictures visit the new Hands Off Venezuela website at

www.handsoffvenezuela.org

The Venezuelan Marxists, Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria can also be visited at

venezuela.elmilitante.org



Socialist Appeal editor, Alan Woods meets president Chavez. The Venezuelan president has been reading Alan's book *Reason in Revolt and Bolchevism, the road to revolution*:

He quoted a phrase well known to the readers of Marxist.com: "He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." He got the phrase from Alan Woods' book *Bolshevism - the Road to Revolution*, a fact that was confirmed when he turned to the editor of Marxist.com in front of the TV cameras and said: "Alan, I am reading your book."

President Chavez Greet
marxist MP Manzoor Ahmed
from pakistan. 50 MPs in
Pakistan have signed the
"Hands off Venezuela"
campaign



Chavez addresses international visitors to the solidarity meeting



Marxist MP speaks in Venezuela

This is the text of the speech of Comrade Manzoor Ahmed, Member of the National Assembly in Pakistan, and editor of the Marxist paper "The Struggle", to the II International Gathering in Solidarity with the Revolution in Caracas, on April 14th, 2004.

Dear Comrades and friends,
Red Salute!

I come from the other side of this planet to pay tribute to you, the workers, peasants and youth of Venezuela for you valiant struggle and defiance against imperialist manoeuvres and threats of aggression. I also bring with me the messages of support for your struggle from the workers, peasants, youth, trade unionists parliamentarians and left wing political activists of Pakistan.

Your defiance and resilience in this anti imperialist Struggle is a source of great inspiration and encouragement for the revolutionaries in Pakistan and around the world. I also want to congratulate President, Comrade Hugo Chavez, for his bold and courageous stand against capitalism and imperialist aggression.

The U.S. imperialism has gone berserk due to the deep and organic crisis of the capitalist system on a world scale. The imperialist aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq is the madness resulting from this desperation of the leaders. But the only thing they have brought to these lands is death and destruction. They have ravaged these societies and bombed them into Stone Age. But in spite of the huge unprecedented military might the imperialists have failed to win these wars. Rather the massive resistance of the Iraqi masses has shocked the imperialist invaders. They might have to face a fate worse than their humiliating defeat in Vietnam. This resistance has given a new courage and strength to the resolve of the oppressed around the world to fight and defeat these forces of

aggression and capitalist exploitation.

I belong to the Pakistan Peoples party whose foundations lie in anti imperialist struggle and the programme of a socialist revolution. This party became a political force as a result of a mass movement that erupted in Pakistan in 1968-69. In this movement the workers had seized the factories and peasants had taken over the landed estates. Power was hanging in midair and the ruling classes had lost control of state and society. The PPP gained a mass support due to its socialist programme. Its founding manifesto called for the expropriation of imperialist assets, landed estates and national capital. The founding Chairman of the party, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto became the most popular leader in the history of Pakistan. The ruling classes of Pakistan and India were so terrified of this revolutionary upsurge that they went to war to derail the revolution. After the war they had to give power to the PPP. The Z.A. Bhutto government carried out most radical reforms in the history of the country but it didn't overthrow capitalist system. This gave a new lease of life to the ruling classes and imperialist agents. As soon they recovered they overthrew the PPP government and assassinated Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto through the gallows in April 1979. This was the result of doing half a revolution and not abolishing capitalism and imperialist interests in total. There are important lessons in this tragic episode.

While in his death cell, Bhutto wrote a small book called "If I were assassinated" in which he drew the lessons from



Manzoor Ahmed, second from the right, addresses solidarity meeting in Caracas

the experience. He said: "I am suffering this ordeal partly because I sought an honourable and equitable middle way between conflicting interests, in order to harmonise the disjointed structure of our society. It seems that the lesson of this coup d'Etat is that a middle way, a modus vivendi, a compromise is a utopian dream. The coup demonstrates that the class struggle is irreconcilable and that it must result in the victory of one class over the other. Obviously, whatever the temporary set backs, the struggle can lead only to the victory of one class, the proletariat"

The imperialists and their toadies in our countries do not and shall not refrain from any heinous act to protect and preserve their interests and exploitation. Overthrowing their system of profit that breeds' exploitation, poverty, misery hunger and disease can only decisively defeat them.

Today Venezuela is at the crossroads. The outcome of the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution sponsored by Imperialism in Venezuela will have impacts far and Wide. The victory of the revolution in your country shall strengthen revolutionary forces across the planet. It will also have implications in Pakistan. You have here a historical opportunity. By completely eradicating capitalism not

only the salvation of the masses in Venezuela will come but also it would weaken imperialist aggression internationally. A socialist victory here would give a new impetus to the class struggle on a world scale and will bring the task of the emancipation of mankind more realizable. Hence your struggle is our struggle. Once again I pledge full support and solidarity from the people of Pakistan in your struggle to defeat imperialism and complete the revolution. We have launched the 'Hands Off Venezuela' Campaign in Pakistan under the guidance of El Militante and marxist.com. We have got the signatures of several trade union activists, political leaders and people from other important sections of the society. More than 50 members of the National Assembly of Pakistan have pledged support for the campaign. We are also expanding the campaign to India, Iran, Srilanka, Bangladesh and several other Asian countries.

- Go forward, Victory shall be yours.
- We have nothing to loose but our chains.
- We have a world to win.
- Long live; the socialist revolution in Venezuela!
- Long live; the world proletarian revolution!

Venezuela two years after the coup

"Deepen the revolution, advance towards socialism"

by Jorge Martín

TWO YEARS after the brief April 2002 coup, Venezuela is still living through an unfinished revolutionary process. The masses of the people and the workers have defeated the counterrevolutionary conspiracies of the local oligarchy and imperialism twice, but the revolution has not been completed and thus the danger of a new reactionary coup is still ever present.

In the last year the Chavez government has implemented a number of social plans which have widened the mass social base of support for the revolution. Three million acres of land have been distributed mainly to peasant co-operatives. The other important reforms have been mainly in the fields of education and health care. Mission Robinson, Mission Rivas and Mission Sucre, aimed at eradicating illiteracy, giving people primary and secondary education and access to university, have been a great success so far. More than 3 million people (out of a population of 27 million) have gone through one or another of these plans. More than 1 million people have been lifted out of illiteracy and the target by June is 1.5 million. The Plan Barrios Adentro (Into the Neighbourhood) has given access to primary health care to millions of people (more than 1 million in the Caracas council area alone), with the help of some 3,500 Cuban doctors who have gone into the poorest neighbourhoods in the capital and around the country, where no doctors

had ever been before.

These plans and "missions", paid by the national oil company PDVSA, are not without problems (bureaucracy, mismanagement, corruption in both opposition and Bolivarian controlled councils, open sabotage, lack of democracy in some instances of its implementation), but they have undoubtedly reached a wide layer of the masses who can see in them some very concrete benefits of the revolutionary process. Also, the fact that these programmes have been implemented in the popular neighbourhoods by the community organisations themselves has, to a certain extent, allowed the government and the revolutionary organisations to by-pass the structures of the state, full of saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries trying to prevent the implementation of any reforms.

The feeling that the old capitalist state inherited by the revolution cannot be used to serve the needs of the workers and the people, and should be replaced by something else, is widespread. This is even reflected, though in a confused way, in an article in the Caracas Libertador Council weekly Caracas Courier bulletin, distributed in all poor and working class areas of the capital. The article, under the title "The people is the vanguard" explains how: "The Party of the Revolution is at the same time ... opposition to the traditional adminis-

tration of the State. Everywhere we see deaf conflicts between the organisation of the people and the bureaucracy of the local bosses and subcontractors who behave like [supporters of the old regime] with red berets ... everywhere we see the old that refuses to die" (Correo de Caracas, April 5-11).

The structure of the old capitalist state machinery is largely intact and is acting to stop and frustrate the revolutionary initiative of the masses. One issue which is particularly enraging the masses who defeated the coup is the fact that those who organised and implemented it two years ago are either free or in a comfortable exile in Miami, Costa Rica or Colombia, directing from afar the threads of new reactionary conspiracies. More recently Baruta local police officers caught using firearms in the opposition riots in February ("La Guarimba" as it was known), were released without charges. Carlos Melo, a prominent opposition leader caught during the Guarimba with illegal rifles in the boot of his car, was also released, and so was Baruta mayor Carlos Radonsky, responsible for the assault on the Cuban embassy on April 12, 2002. This is further proof, if any was needed, that the justice system is still a bourgeois system, at the service of the interests of the oligarchy. The same Supreme Court of Justice which declared that there had never been a coup in April 2002, but rather a "vacu-

Puppet characters of the coup organisers





um of power", is now conspiring to declare valid the fraudulent signatures which the opposition claims it collected to force a presidential recall referendum.

Having been defeated twice, in April 2002 and in December 2002/January 2003, the opposition is weaker, divided and its social base demoralised. But it is far from having been defeated decisively. As one of the speakers said at the rally in Puente Llaguno, to commemorate those who died defending the revolution on April 11, 2002, "the only way to kill a snake is to cut its head off, we left the snake alive and now it is preparing to bite us again". Nineteenth century peasant uprising leader Ezequiel Zamora expressed the same idea in these words: "the only way to deal with a wasps' nest is with fire, if you disturb it but do not destroy it they will come back to sting you".

Through a combination of diplomatic, terrorist and economic means, they are trying to create a situation in which an international intervention could be justified, and one of the main planks of this strategy is to increase tensions along the border with Colombia.

The oil industry

In the economic field there has been a certain recovery, after a steep fall in 2003, caused mainly by the oil sabotage in January and the economic sabotage of the ruling class. However, unemployment remains high, and price and exchange controls are reaching their limits in the struggle against price rises and a flight of capital. The main engine of the economy has been the recovery of production in the oil industry, PDVSA, but even here the workers feel they are losing ground. It was ordinary rank and file oil workers who saved PDVSA faced with the sabotage of the industry on the part of its directors, managers and many engineers in December 2002. In many oil refineries, fields and plants, the workers recovered and maintained production on their own through workers' control, with the help of revolutionary engineers, the

local communities and sections of the National Guard. In some cases, the experience of workers' control lasted for a period of time even after the oil sabotage and bosses lock-out had been defeated.

Workers' control was particularly strong in the states of Anzoategui and Monagas.

After the defeat of the oil sabotage, the government appointed new directors, but the managerial structure of the company remained largely the same. Oil workers, after having learnt in practice that they could run the industry themselves were not at all happy with this situation. During 2003 a number of regional meetings of oil workers, the local communities in the oil rich areas and sections of the army took place to discuss the best way to restructure PDVSA, which was now said to "belong to the people". One of the main conclusions of these meetings was that the change of directors was not enough. Even if new directors and administrators were appointed who were loyal to the revolution, they would still be part of a bureaucratic structure which could not serve the interests of the workers and the people. The only way to guarantee that PDVSA belong to the people was through the democratic participation of the workers in its management.

In the meantime, as the workers movement retreated after the immediate danger of reaction receded, the old bureaucratic and reactionary managers started to slowly creep back into key positions in PDVSA. For months now the oil workers have been denouncing this situation and in some cases, like the Paraguana Refining Centre in Punto Fijo, they have forced the resignation of reactionary directors and managers. In order to deal with this situation, and also to avoid getting the workers caught up in the power struggle between different factions trying to get control of the company, a few months back the oil workers in different

parts of the country started to organise "Guiding Committees". These are meant to generate political discussion amongst the oil workers, raise their political level and come up with proposals for the process of restructuring PDVSA.

These committees have no real power within the industry but are playing quite an important role in generalising the experience and the political discussion amongst oil workers.

They took the initiative of calling for a demonstration outside the US embassy in Caracas after President Chavez made his anti-imperialist speech at the massive February 29th demonstration. There, Chavez warned, in his harshest speech to date against American imperialism, that if the US dared to intervene in or even blockade Venezuela, they would cut off the oil supply. This is quite a serious threat since Venezuela is the third largest supplier of oil to the US. A week later, some 2,000 oil workers from all over the country marched to the US Embassy in Caracas to protest against Washington's interference against the Venezuelan revolution and to warn that they would implement Chavez's threat.

Political consciousness of the workers' movement

Reflecting this rapid development of the political consciousness of the workers, a national meeting took place in Caracas on March 27 to discuss the "political unity of the workers in the struggle against imperialism". The meeting, called by the oil workers' Guiding Committees and some class struggle unions within the UNT, was relatively small, but was attended by some of the most advanced activists in the Venezuelan working class movement. The discussion paper had a good analysis of imperialism and proposed the unity of the working class around an anti-imperialist programme, but also had certain weaknesses. It laid the main stress of the struggle against US interference, but said nothing of the struggle against the local agents of imperialism, the capitalist Venezuelan oligarchy. An interven-

tion by Paraguana Refining Centre oil workers leader Francisco García, a member of the Revolutionary Marxist Current, explained how in order to struggle against imperialism one should also struggle against the new bureaucratic managers of the oil company and for workers' management, since the only guarantee to cut the oil supply to imperialism would be that the valves and installations be under the control of the workers. Other speakers also explained how all sections of the Venezuelan capitalists were on the side of the counter revolution and that therefore, in order to defeat imperialism, one also had to defeat capitalism. The need to deepen the revolution and implement workers' control were incorporated as part of the meeting's conclusions.

Finally the meeting agreed to convene a series of regional meetings of working class activists, to lay stress on anti-imperialist slogans at the May Day march, and to convene a National Workers' Assembly. The first of these regional meetings has already taken place on April 24th in the industrial city of Valencia, which has a long tradition of class struggle unionism. The draft document discussed at this event was already much more advanced than the one presented at the national preparatory meeting. It talks, amongst other things, of the need to repudiate the foreign debt; to expel from the country such pro-imperialist bodies as the Organisation of American States and the Carter Centre; to reject the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement; to confiscate national and multinational companies which have participated in economic sabotage or helped finance the coup; to nationalise the banks and financial sector; to renationalise all priva-



tised companies under workers' management; for the formation of Workers' and Peoples' Militias and for a genuine workers' and peoples' government. This is a very advanced programme, which is in line with what was already agreed at the founding congress of the new trade union confederation, the UNT, on August 1st 2003.

Another indication of the militant mood of the workers' movement was the massive meeting which took place in the Teresa Carreño Theatre on Saturday, April

17th, to commemorate the first anniversary of the proclamation of the UNT. The meeting had been scheduled to start at 10 am, but 45 minutes earlier the theatre was already full to capacity (more than 3,000 people) and at least 2,000 workers could not get in. Delegations had come from the main factories and oil refineries from all over the country with banners and slogans. The mood was electric as the different trade union speakers addressed the audience. There was an announcement that the

smaller, Communist Party dominated, CUTV confederation had decided to fuse with the UNT. The rally also announced the launching of a recruitment drive aimed at increasing trade union membership from around 15-20% to 80% of the workforce. But the main attraction of the meeting was Chavez's speech. Once again he made a strongly worded anti-imperialist speech, and repeated that capitalism, neo-liberalism and globalisation had shown they did not work. He declared that the revolution was entering a new stage in which the key would be socio-economic transformation. Finally he congratulated the trade unionists on their recruitment drive and encouraged them to form "revolutionary, Bolivarian, class struggle unions".

Radicalisation of Chavez's speeches

This was in line with a marked radicalisation of Chavez's political position in the last few months. After the mass demonstration against imperialism on February 29th, which smashed the attempts of the opposition to create chaos on the streets through the so-called Guarimba, Chavez has been much clearer in denouncing the role of US imperialism in the April 2002 coup and the role of Washington in further coup preparations against him. He has also expressed clearly his view that capitalism does not work. Thus, at the mass rally to celebrate the victory of the people over the coup on April 13, he said that his government was committed to "break with the capitalist schema which has been sown in our country, through which a wealthy minority had concentrated the resources, capital, and means of production, for a long time. We are democra-

tising the economy in order to transform the socio-economic model and thus raise the living standards of the whole of the people".

He has also spoken openly of the need for "every fisherman, student, worker and person of the people to learn how to use a rifle, since this is the concept of an armed people", as the only guarantee to defend the revolution against imperialism. Also, he has warned against those who say that the revolution is already irreversible and said that moderation would be fatal. In a number of recent speeches, he has added that moderate tendencies must be purged from the revolution and that he would rather risk another military coup than drive the revolution over a cliff because of moderation.

There is a clear struggle between the moderates and the revolutionaries at the head of the revolutionary process. The revolutionaries want the revolution to advance further since they see this as the only guarantee to defend what has been achieved so far, though they have not got a clear programme of how or where to go. In the same Caracas Council newsletter quoted earlier, we can read about the need of a Party of the Revolution (as opposed to the electoral parties which support the government): "the building of this revolutionary organisation, where the rank and file is key since it is not contaminated with the mediocrity of the past, and the general arming of the people, through the reserve forces and the Army, will guarantee that we will fulfil our historical mission and that the revolution will not be betrayed". (Correo de Caracas, April 5-11, emphasis in the original)

In this context it is not just a coincidence that the president addressed this important workers' meeting. Some of the moderate "advisors" to Chavez have also noticed, and resented, this turn. Thus, Heinz Dieterich, one of these Latin American intellectuals who argues that the way forward for Latin America is the creation of Latin American multinationals, banks and armies, complained in an interview to the daily Ultimas Noticias, of the "shift to an approach based on the workers, which is a regretful return to outdated language", since he thinks that the middle class is the "key to any modern revolution"!

At the same time the leaders of all the government parties (rallied in the so-called Ayacucho Command) are extremely discredited amongst

the revolutionary masses, who see most of them as careerists and bureaucrats, and have shown once and again their complete incapacity to lead anything (as recently when they completely bungled the attempt to force recall referendums against opposition MPs who were originally elected as part of pro-Chavez slates). The masses of the people have a strong feeling that the revolution is being betrayed by all sorts of saboteurs, fifth columnists, turncoats, bureaucrats and careerists.

The shift to the left in Chavez's speeches is also, to a certain extent, a reflection of these pressures from below and the tireless conspiracy of the oligarchy and imperialism against his government. However, this is far from being a clear-cut or unidirectional process. For instance, the day after Chavez made the February 29th speech, he signed an agreement with the oil multinationals to exploit the "Plataforma Deltana" gas deposits. More recently the government has hired a very expensive firm of consultants in the US to lobby Washington and improve the image of Venezuela amongst American politicians and businessmen, as if a revolution could ever get a good reception from imperialism. Open criticism of capitalism as a failed system in itself is quite significant, but a clear alternative programme (ie the democratic planning of the economy by the workers themselves) is still missing.

What is clear is that the process of radicalisation of the masses and of raising their consciousness is proceeding ahead. All over the country the people are occupying empty buildings if they have nowhere to live, occupying empty cinemas in order to hold weekly political discussions, setting up literacy centres, etc. This is the independent revolutionary activity of the masses which forms the backbone of the Bolivarian revolution. The working class, particularly its key section in Venezuela, the oil workers, has achieved a very advanced level of consciousness and awareness of their own strength and role in the whole process. A leaflet distributed at the April 17th UNT meeting by the Bolivarian Workers Force from the Miranda Heights, and signed by trade unions from 14 different factories and workplaces, dealt with the need for political education "to guarantee the victory of the working class", and ended by saying that "workers historically have done all the labour, but now it is a question of taking power. We are going to educate ourselves so that we can run the country".

What is needed now is, on the one hand, the national unification and coordination of all revolutionary organisations, assemblies, trade unions and Bolivarian circles, through a body of democratically elected and recallable representatives which could be the basis of an alternative power of the workers and the people. On the other hand, the most advanced activists must gather around a clear Marxist perspective which includes workers' management of the oil industry and other nationalised companies, the expropriation of the banks, the big monopolies and all imperialist and multinational interests under workers' control, and the general arming of the people with the formation of democratic workers' militias to fight against reaction and imperialist intervention.

The growing interest in the ideas of Marxism which was clearly shown at the recent II International Solidarity Gathering and the keen reception for the ideas put forward by Alan Woods, Manzoor Ahmed and Miriam Municio, all leading members of the international Marxist tendency, show that the ground is fertile. The comrades of the Venezuelan Revolutionary Marxist Current with the slogan "deepen the revolution, advance towards socialism" are actively participating in the revolutionary process putting forward a clear Marxist case. □



The Passion of the Christ

Directed by Mel Gibson

A Review by Rob Sewell

THE RELEASE of Mel Gibson's controversial film *The Passion of the Christ* has certainly taken the box offices by storm. In the opening weekend in the US it took in \$76.2 million alone. This Hollywood epic, a gruesome and vivid account of Jesus Christ's final hours of suffering and execution, exaggerates the Gospels, and in turn, lays all the blame for Christ's crucifixion at the feet of the Jews. This was clearly Gibson's intention, a man who prides himself on being a staunch orthodox Catholic and Christian Fundamentalist.

The scenes in the film of excruciating violence against Christ perpetrated by the Roman soldiers in particular are breathtaking. You wince with every blood-drenched lash. You cringe with every flesh-ripping flagellation. The violence reaches a crescendo in the horror of crucifixion, its preparation and execution. The use of Aramaic and Latin language throughout the film, although strictly unhistorical, serves to add dramatic authenticity to the vivid images.

However, despite the powerful imagery, you will learn nothing about early Christianity from this film. The social forces that lie behind this earth-shattering movement of millions are totally absent. The film is totally devoid of the hows and whys, and reduces everything to the suffering of one man. It is a simple carbon copy of the tale - largely false - as told by the evangelists of the betrayal

of Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection.

Christianity constituted one of the most powerful movements in human history. Supposedly based up the revolutionary teachings of one man, Jesus Christ, it has managed to survive, adapting itself to different class societies and interests, for more than 2,000 years.

Today, despite the deepening of our knowledge of this epoch, we are no nearer resolving the enigma of Christ as a person. While Christianity certainly existed at the time of the Roman Empire under the emperor Tiberius, there is precious little evidence of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Although he is supposed to have accomplished astonishing feats, incredibly none of his contemporaries mentions him. At the time of Jesus's death, according to Christian tradition, the earth was in darkness for three hours. And yet this occurrence, which supposedly took place at the time of the elder Pliny, who devoted a special chapter on eclipses in his *Natural History*, gets no mention.

In fact, the only contemporary non-Christian sources of Christ the man, Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, and Tacitus and Pliny, the Romans, are either recognised forgeries introduced by later Christian scholars, or are deadly silent about Christ's work or doctrine. Josephus relates so many trivialities, that the sensation around Jesus Christ would certainly have been reported.

Of the Christian

sources, there are many, but they cannot be trusted for historical accuracy. Karl Kautsky, in a brilliant book entitled *'Foundations of Christianity'*, written nearly 100 years ago, dissects the early Christian writings from a materialist perspective...

"It is certain that almost none of the early Christian writings are by the authors whose names they bear; that most of them were written in later times than the dates given them; and that their original text was often distorted in the crudest way by later revisions and additions", writes Kautsky. "Finally, it is certain that none of the Gospels or other early Christian writings comes from a contemporary of Jesus."

For example, the Gospel according to Mark is regarded as the oldest account, probably written 50 years after the death of Christ. "What we see is thus the product of half a century of legend-making."

Mark is followed by Luke, then Matthew, and lastly by John, some 100 years after Christ's recorded death. The later we get, the more exaggerated and fantastic the miracle stories become. The Gospels are full of inaccuracies and contradictions, where ideas are twisted to fit a particular version of the story. According to Luke for instance, Joseph and Mary have to leave Nazareth to go to Bethlehem on account of a Roman census. In fact there was no such census under Augustus. Also Judea became a Roman province

only after the date given for Christ's birth. A census was made in 7 AD, but was carried out in place where people lived. In other words, there was no reason to travel to Bethlehem.

Thus, while there are certain elements of truth contained in the Gospels, they have been written, re-written and edited at the hands of later Christian scholars, to the edification of the faithful. Each revision was made according to the social needs of the time, and the adaptation of the Christian church to class society. The process has parallels with the Stalinist School of Falsification of the twentieth century.

Christianity was formed in the four centuries from the beginning of the Imperial age of Augustus to the barbarian invasions and the fall of the Roman Empire. The conquest of the Mediterranean and the subjugation of Judea created great social turmoil. The Empire plundered the regions under its domination serving to sharpen all social and class antagonisms between patricians and plebeians, rich and poor. There was a growing hatred of foreign domination. The Aramaic-speaking Galileans, of whom Jesus was one, were also often in dispute with Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Given the social conditions, there was no shortage of Messiahs at this time, where leaders of revolutionary bands and prophets were continually springing up to challenge the existing order of things. This was part of a general

rise in Messianic movements and the search for miracles among the lower classes.

Christianity was only one of such sect, based originally on the most downtrodden and oppressed layers of society. Christ, the Greek word for "the anointed", is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah". The Christian sect in Jerusalem, like the rest of the Jews, expected the coming of the Messiah. Christianity was a movement of the



oppressed, and for that very reason, hated the rich, rejected private property, embraced primitive communism, and sought to establish such a "kingdom of God" on earth.

The Temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem, rebuilt by Herod, was the appointed place of worship for Jews. The Temple was not simply a church, but had huge warehouses, where vast amounts of goods, gold and silver were stored. It was here that the moneylenders went about their daily business. The Temple became a centre of struggle between the corrupt Temple hierarchy, the Sadducees, and the majority of the people led by the Pharisees. The Sadducees represented the priestly nobility, dominated the Temple and received all its taxes. As its wealth grew, the priesthood set itself above the mass of the people. However, the Pharisees were also divided on class lines, between rich and poor. The wealthier Pharisees constituted the moderate, more timid wing. Those on the extreme left were the Millenary sects, most notably the Zealots and Essenes, a communistic order, which based themselves on the propertyless of Jerusalem and Galilee.

In 1947, the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in a cave in Qumran, which cast light on the period of early Christianity. Initially,

the Catholic Church saw in them proof of Christ's existence, but they were sorely disappointed. Consequently, they remained under lock and key and only made available by the Vatican in 1991. Until this find, barely a scrap of papyrus existed from the two centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ. The scrolls are the documents of the Essenes sect, who lived near Qumran about 250 BC, based upon a revolutionary communist doctrine and an ascetic piety as they waited for the end of days. The Essenes were one of the forerunners or roots of early Christianity, some 250 years before the birth of Christ! The evidence of the Scrolls confirmed the analysis of Karl Kautsky, made some 50 years before their discovery.

"Their documents were copies of the Bible, by 500 years the earliest known Hebrew copies", explains Justin Cartwright, an authority on the Scrolls. "There are also pesharim, or Bible commentaries, rules of the community, laws for admission, orders of service and hymns, a (probably) allegorical guide to hidden treasures, and an account of the war between the sons of light and darkness. There are 50,000 fragments and many have phrases which resonate through the New Testament, which led to rumours that these were early Christian

documents and that the sect leader, the 'Teacher of Righteousness', was Jesus."

The fact is that the Essenes were not alone. There were a number of Jewish sects, including the Essenes. Christianity was originally no more than a Jewish sect, turning to the scriptures for justification, looking for a Messiah, hopeful of a new order on earth. The revolutionary standpoint of these early Christian sects appears as a thread running through the New Testament, but distorted and concealed by later revisions.

The original class hatred of the early Christians pours out for instance in Luke's early version of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blesses are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh... But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." But compare this to the later version of the revisionist Matthew where Jesus is made to say: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are they, which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

In Matthew it is the poor "in spirit" (covering all social

classes) that are blessed. The Church had become more respectable and accommodated itself to slavery, and wanted now to renounce its earlier class-war language. It wanted to break from its proletarian origins.

Mel Gibson's film of Christ's Passion peddles the stories of the Gospels at face value. Yet they are full of contradictions.

The original story that Jesus was crucified by the Romans as a Jewish Messiah, as king of the Jews, that

is a defender of Jewish independence and a traitor to Roman rule, presented some difficulty to later Christian scribes, eager to ingratiate themselves with the powers that be. Firstly, by this time Christianity had come into conflict with Judaism, and secondly, the Christian church wanted to be on good terms with Roman power. The 'difficulty' was resolved by shifting the blame for the crucifixion on to the Jews and hatred of Rome left out altogether. The Passion was therefore rewritten to satisfy the new orthodoxy.

The communism of the early Christians, as expressed in the Acts of the Apostles, has been all but buried. The idea of an egalitarian society now falls not to religion, but to the struggles of the modern proletariat. Only a socialist revolution can bring about such a society, where the fruits of our labour will be common property. The dreams of more than two millennia will be realised in the world socialist society of the twenty-first century, on the principle of from each according to his ability to each according to his need. Through common effort, we shall create such a Paradise on Earth for our children and grand-children for all eternity! □

**for full version of this article see
www.socialist.net**

fighting fund

MAY DAY THE WORKERS DAY

EACH YEAR socialists and trade unionists around the world mark the occasion of May Day. Meetings and demonstrations take place and adverts are placed in Labour movement publications to mark the event. Why? Well the answer lies in the deep rooted internationalism which is at the heart of our movement. May Day is, above all, an international workers day. It marks the common united struggle of workers and youth, both here and abroad, against the common enemy: capitalism and imperialism. Sometimes this day is used by certain Labour and trade union leaders to indulge in a bit of so-called 'holiday speechmaking.' They get carried away at rallies and start talking about a better society, the fight against the bosses and so on. The next day it is back to business as usual, in every sense, and all this fiery talk gets well and truly forgotten.

But for Marxists this struggle exists 365 days of the year, not just on May 1st. Because we recognise that their fight is our fight, internationalism becomes not just a nice idea but central to the realities of class struggle. So it is in that spirit that, on behalf of the editorial board of this journal, I wish to thank all those individuals and organisations who have placed adverts with us for inclusion in this May Day edition.

I also wish to thank all those supporters and readers who have contributed to our Spring fighting fund appeal. This month we have raised a splendid £1935 with a further £1300 received in pledges. It is impossible due to lack of space to thank all those who contributed, even those comrades who made particularly large donations including a few of £100 plus and one individual donation of £500 plus a pledge from another reader also of £500. We thank you all.

But this needs to be kept up. We are entering a very busy period indeed with the elections in June, the trade union conferences and the ongoing campaign against the imperialist occupation of Iraq. I have already mentioned the internationalist approach of Marxism and Socialist Appeal has put that into practice with extensive coverage of events and struggles abroad, be it Pakistan or Venezuela or the Middle East. This is important so that activists here are fully informed as to what is happening elsewhere and why. But all this costs money and the only source of help we have is from you, reader. So please help keep the momentum going and donate what you can to our fighting fund. With this we can keep going and expand our coverage and analysis of events as they unfold. We need to be looking ahead. We have the various websites to provide more immediate coverage but we also need to have a more regular publication. We can work toward this if you are able to help by sending something in, however small. Donations should be made payable to Socialist Appeal and sent to us at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ.

Thank you in advance. Keep the red flag flying!

Steve Jones

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**Hands off Venezuela
public meeting
Speaker: Alan Woods**

MAY DAY
Old Shades pub,
37 Whitehall SW1A 2BX
4pm (after the demo)
near Trafalgar Sq,
London

**Launch of the Labour
Representation Committee**

**FOUNDING
CONFERENCE**

**9.00 : 16.00, SAT
3RD JULY, TUC
CONGRESS HOUSE**

notice board

May 2004

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 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 lay the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment
- A funded and fully comprehensive education system under democratic local 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 child-care 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 all private healthcare. 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' MP's 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 companies, 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.

**Marxist voice of the
labour movement
and youth**

Socialist Appeal

Railworkers, teachers, civil servants, firefighters...

Blair Faces Summer of Strikes

MANY WORKERS feel that talks with employers and government have been a dialogue with the deaf. Therefore, there is now no alternative but to take industrial action to sort out grievances over jobs, training and pay.

Almost 100,000 civil servants have already been on strike last month, in the biggest civil service industrial action for more than a decade. Tens of thousands of workers in Jobcentres and benefit offices in England, Wales and Scotland walked out for 48 hours in an increasingly acrimonious dispute over pay.

They were joined by 4,500 workers from the prison service in England and Wales in a separate wage dispute and by 1,500 workers from the Office of National Statistics who staged a 24-hour strike - the first in the office's history. The scandalous announcement of 40,000 jobs cuts across four key government departments - the Department for Work and Pensions, Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue and the Department for Education and Skills - has simply embittered the situation.

Meanwhile, London Fire Brigades Union members are being balloted for industrial action over an attempt to force members to work as surrogate ambulance crews. The FBU is angry about plans to use fire crews to make an initial response to medical emergencies. Mick Shaw, a member of the London FBU executive, said: "We don't believe our members will be properly trained to deal with the sort of situations they are likely to encounter. What we need is a properly staffed ambulance service able to meet its response times."

In addition, teachers are threatening industrial

action if local councils press ahead with plans to tear up the annual school timetable and introduce a six-term year. The government's plans for classroom assistants, and continued attacks on education are creating a militant mood amongst teachers up and down the country.

A strike ballot of 7,000 RMT signalling, maintenance and station staff at Network Rail has been called over pensions, pay and travel facilities - raising the prospect of the first national rail stoppage for a decade. Now a big vote for strike action is needed to make management sit up and listen.

"The company has closed a decent pension scheme and imposed a glorified savings plan on our members, has refused to negotiate at all on travel facilities and has tabled the worst pay offer in the industry this year," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

It is clear that years of "partnership" have solved nothing. These strikes, ballots and threats to strike reflect a growing frustration amongst workers. Disappointment with the Labour government is turning into trade union action. As a result Blair can expect a hot summer on the industrial front. The unions must fight politically too, by taking these struggles into the Labour Party.

The continuing strike by Scotland's nursery nurses is an anticipation of a struggle over pay to come in local government. As with the teachers and rail workers, national strike action is now on the cards. Enough is enough! We need militant action to defend our jobs and living standards!

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