

Iraq □ economy □ youth □ BA □ NUJ

Socialist Appeal

September 2004 issue 125

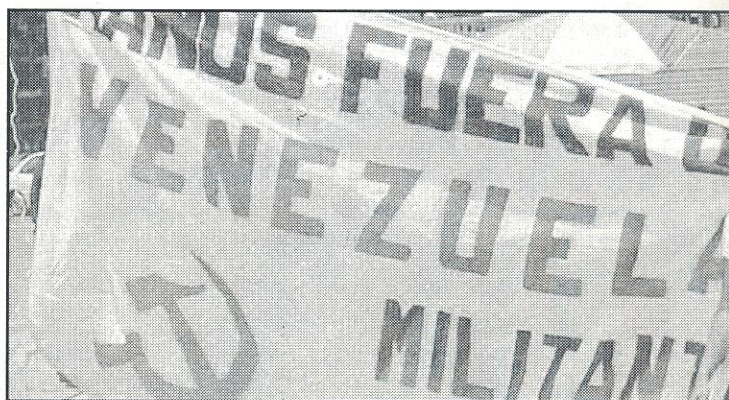
Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



**Interview with
sacked
Wembley
workers**

**Labour
conference
2004**

**Defend
Venezuelan
and
Cuban
revolutions**



www.marxist.com

editor: Alan Woods
PO Box 50525
London, E14 6WG
tel 020 7515 7675
appeal@socialist.net
www.socialist.net
www.marxist.com
www.newyouth.com

index

this month

www.marxist.com

Editorial:

- Fight imperialism!
Defend the Venezuelan and Cuban Revolutions!.....3

News:

- No compromise in Swansea council strike.....4
Privatisation and war mean higher fuel bills.....4
New Period Opens in Scottish Politics.....5
Support sacked Wembley workers.....6
Sacked workers gave us their views.....7
National Dock Strike.....7
Stress and overwork at British Airways.....7
Our Village must not be a dumping ground.....8
NUJ makes another step forward against low pay.....8

LP Conference:

- LABOUR: Demand Socialist Policies Now.....9
No to selection in schools!.....10
The fight against School closures is still on.....12
Defend State Schools.....13

Economy:

- The state of two nations.....14
Introduction to *My Life* by Ešteban Volkov.....24
New from Wellred books!.....27

Iraq:

- After the compromise at Najaf -
What future for the Iraqi resistance movement?.....28
Fighting Fund: Help us fund the revolution.....30
Notice board.....31

Back cover:

Reinstate Sacked Wembley Workers!

Please note our new address:
Socialist Appeal, PO Box 50525
London, E14 6WG

Venezuela



THE REVOLUTION HAS WON A MOST IMPORTANT VICTORY:

Now we must develop the strength of the workers, carry the revolution to the end and move towards Socialism (page 16)

The recall referendum in Venezuela

A crushing blow to the counter-revolution (page 18)

Venezuela Week of Solidarity (9th-15th August 2004) report (page 22)

Fight imperialism!

Defend the Venezuelan and Cuban Revolutions!

THE FOLLOWING statement on the Venezuelan and Cuban revolutions was endorsed by a meeting of almost 300 Marxists from 24 countries, which was held in Spain in the first week of August:

This international meeting of revolutionary Marxists expresses its firm commitment to defend the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions against imperialist and capitalist counter-revolution.

The fall of the Soviet Union has transformed the international balance of forces concentrating colossal and unprecedented power into the hands of US imperialism. With colossal power comes colossal arrogance. Washington is trying to impose its will onto the whole world. The barbarous invasion and occupation of Iraq is a monstrous manifestation of this.

However, the capitalist crisis on a world scale manifests itself as a revolutionary crisis everywhere. This is clearly evident in Latin America where there is not a single stable bourgeois regime from the Tierra del Fuego to the Rio Grande. The aggressive campaigns of US imperialism directed against Cuba and Venezuela are a reflection of this fact. The Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions are beacons for the oppressed workers and peasants of Latin America. That is why Washington is striving by all means to defeat and destroy them.

The Cuban revolution, which provided hope for millions of people, is threatened by external and inter-

nal enemies. The forces of capitalist restoration inside Cuba constitute the greatest threat to the revolution. They are backed by world imperialism, in particular by the USA and the European Union. It is necessary to fight against capitalist restoration in Cuba and defend the elements of the nationalized planned economy. However in the last analysis the only hope for the Cuban revolution is the victory of the socialist revolution in Latin America and on a world scale.

The fate of the Cuban revolution above all depends on the fate of the Venezuelan revolution. The two things are inextricably linked. The Bolivarian revolution has begun as a national democratic revolution but it is meeting with the ferocious opposition of the Venezuelan oligarchy and US imperialism.

The latest attempt to defeat the Venezuelan revolution is the referendum campaign. All the forces of

counter-revolution are united to defeat and depose the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The victory of the bourgeois opposition in the referendum would represent a deadly blow not only to the Venezuelan revolution but to revolution throughout Latin America.

We call upon all workers and youth and popular forces in Venezuela and internationally to unite to defeat the counter-revolution in the referendum on August 15. Our first task is to defeat the counter-revolution on August 15, but this will only be the beginning of a new and decisive chapter of the Venezuelan revolution.

The gains of the revolution will never be safe as long as the key levers of economic power remain in the hands of the oligarchy. It is necessary to consolidate the gains of the Bolivarian revolution through the nationalisation of the banks, the land and the big industries under the democratic

control and administration of the working class.

We stand for the full implementation of the programme of Simon Bolivar, that is to say the revolutionary unification of Latin America and the Caribbean. However under modern conditions this goal can never be achieved by the bourgeoisie. Only the victory of the proletarian revolution can guarantee the gains of national democratic revolution and the unification of Latin America.

The Latin American revolution can only be carried out by the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasants and the other exploited layers under the banner of socialism. It is the duty of the revolutionary Marxists to support with all of our energy and enthusiasm the anti-imperialist struggles of the people of Latin America, to arm it with the ideology, programme and policies of Marxism-Leninism and to transform it into an all-Latin American proletarian revolution.

The Latin American revolution will triumph as a proletarian revolution or it will not triumph at all. Our banner is the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky - the real continuation of the revolutionary inheritance of Bolivar Martin.

Our slogan is permanent revolution; our goal is the emancipation of the working class and of all humanity.

More details about this important meeting will be published on Marxist.com later on this month. □



No compromise in Swansea council strike

by our industrial correspondent

WORKERS AT Swansea City and County Council Information and Communications Technology Department went on indefinite strike at the end of last month following an overwhelming vote, with ninety seven percent of votes cast in favour of industrial action.

One hundred workers are involved in the dispute which centres around the council's plans to contract out its IT operations as part of a massive cost saving overhaul of its communications department. They plan to centralise the whole thing in line with the latest corporate fad - they have said that this will allow them to "generate annual efficiency savings of £3 million by reducing duplication and increasing efficiency" - in modern business newspeak "reducing duplication" means sacking workers, and "increasing efficiency" is a polite way of saying work those that remain harder.

The main concern facing staff is the uncertainty of being transferred from employment under the local council to employment under a private firm. A council spokesperson recently said "[we have] not taken any decision over whether IT staff would transfer to our chosen partner or remain in-house" - which hardly helps to resolve the uncertainty. However, the council doesn't seem to be so uncertain about its plans as it has already placed an advert in the press inviting bids, and the annual £3 million saving will no doubt help them to subsidise their chosen partner's profits.

UNISON asked other council workers not to cross the picket line, so on the first day of the action much of the council's operations were paralysed. The staunchest support came from the bin men and the council's transport fleet, although there was a good response across the sectors.

Contracting out of services has hit workers hard in every council across the land, and it doesn't matter what sector you are in. This is the reason for the good response. At the moment workers who are contracted out are protected under law, under TUPE regulations, and guaranteed terms and conditions of a 'similar level' for a given period after privatisation. The problem is that it is down to the employer to decide what a 'similar level' is, and in any case protection only exists for a limited time. Once the bargaining unit has been broken up negotiations take place separately and then the workforce can be divided and driven down.

The council and the union leadership must draw lessons from the show of solidarity that has taken place in Swansea. A very large number of workers has already been contracted out and those who remain can see why it is being done and what the effects will be. The council should back down and if it will not the public sector unions must force it to. No compromise can be accepted on this issue especially when it will lead to the workforce being divided. The union leaderships must grasp the nettle and give workers a clear lead against privatisation. □

Privatisation and war mean higher fuel bills

by Kris Lawrie

BRITAIN IS an energy rich country with reserves of oil, natural gas, and coal. However in spite of all this, as Socialist Appeal has been arguing for a long time, experts are predicting an energy shortage over the coming 25 years. We have faced high VAT on gas for years which has hit the poor and particularly pensioners. The latest attack on workers by the industry is British Gas' announcement that our gas bills will rise by an average of over 12%. They have blamed a 28% rise in wholesale oil and gas prices which is a result of the massive instability the imperialists have created in the middle east.

The rise will hit 18.4 million domestic customers that include people on low incomes, the unemployed, and pensioners, many of these people are already having to make the choice between eating and heating and they will be affected worst.

And prices are set to rise across the energy industry - petrol prices have risen fairly quickly over the past few months, and many electricity companies are predicting rises of about 3-4% in the next period. Again this hits the poorest the most because they do not have the extra money to spend on fuel bills. Many of them will be faced with the choice, either turn off the heater, or stick the bill on the credit cards when it comes through and try to clear it later. This is a scandal in a modern energy rich country like Britain.

In the past the energy industry - electricity network, oil companies, British Gas, and coal mines were nationalised industries - and Britain was a massive exporter especially of coal. Now we will be forced to import energy increasingly over the coming period. Left in the private sector power cuts and shortages will go hand in hand with price hikes to maintain profit levels.

The Labour government should renationalise the energy industry under workers control, and use the profits to begin a massive programme of investment in our energy infrastructure. Blair and co. don't seem fond of nationalisation, they are firmly wedded to the market. However, they will not be around forever (or even as long as North Sea Oil) so the unions in the energy sector should start fighting for a socialist energy programme inside Labour now. □

New Period Opens in Scottish Politics

by Kenny McGuigan and Gordon Martin

THE RESIGNATION of John Swinney as leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) reflects a deep crisis in Scottish nationalism and heralds the opening of a new period in Scottish politics.

In the last ten years, the vote for the SNP has dropped from 33% in the 1994 European Elections to only 19% today. SNP membership has also haemorrhaged by over 50%, falling from more than 20,000 to just over 8,000. It is possible that the high-point for the SNP has finally peaked, having climbed steadily since the 1970s.

Swinney's resignation came after several years of party in-fighting, much of it in public, and a sustained campaign by the ultra-nationalist wing, who felt that the issue of Scottish independence was being largely ignored.

Needless to say, the present front-runners for the leadership of the SNP have all made a big splash about independence being at the centre of their ideas for the party. Former leader Alex Salmond, who initially ruled himself out of the race, and had been previously criticised for his underachievement, threw his hat into the ring and announced his candidacy. Salmond was SNP leader between 1990 and 2000, when Swinney took over with his blessing. The fact that Salmond was forced to stand again for the leadership shows the depth of crisis currently within the ranks of the SNP.

As always in politics, this development has knock-on consequences for the working class and for socialists in Scotland. The crisis of Scottish nationalism has been accompanied by a collapse in support for Scottish independence, to around the 25% level. This is also bound up partly with enormous disappointment in the Scottish Parliament. Not only is every single matter of importance dealt with at Westminster, but the media scrutiny of MSPs has shown them to be largely ineffective, mediocre at best.

The widespread and tangible disappointment in New Labour has led to sections of Scottish workers looking to the SNP to solve their problems. But nationalism can never solve these problems, which arise from capitalism, and are the same as those faced by workers in England and

Wales. Where nationalist parties have come to power, whether in Eastern Europe or elsewhere, they have miserably failed the working class, with horrific consequences.

In Scotland, the SNP wear different hats according to their perceived role. In the conservative north-east, they are Tartan Tories, pandering to the landowners and big business, and are busy carrying out measures against the working class. In the west and central Scotland, they seek working class support using left-wing rhetoric. They are a party based upon the worst kind of opportunism.

In the leadership contest, Salmond is the clear favourite to outpoll his rivals Roseanna Cunningham and Mike Russel. Whoever wins will come under increasing pressure to place independence at the centre of the SNP's strategy. However, such a policy will offer nothing to the working class of Scotland.

Capitulation to Scottish Nationalism

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) is also dramatically shifting its line in support for Scottish independence. In fact, its leaders are proposing a block with the SNP and others to promote independence. This is nothing more than a capitulation to Scottish nationalism by people who once held to a Marxist viewpoint. This accommodation to the SNP is creating confusion within its ranks and even beginning to affect its electoral support.

The SSP, which has six MSPs on the basis of proportional representation, failed to win a single seat in the recent European elections, taking only 5.2% of the vote. This was well short of its expectations. In a recent council by-election in Falkirk, the SSP trailed in last with only 39 votes, when its branch membership is supposed to be 40!

There is a growing malaise within the party. The party's newspaper appears sporadically, overwhelmingly filled with articles by personalities and columnists. Articles do not draw conclusions, never mind socialist conclusions. It has increasingly adopted a more nationalist tone, hoping to build links with the SNP.

Surprisingly, the SSP is in dire financial

trouble, despite apparently receiving some £150,000 from the salary of their MSPs. The reported 2,800 members entitles the party to an additional £18,000 plus per year in state funding. Reports in the national press recently revealed that the party had been "loaned" £84,245 by "members" in the last year. It also receives substantial affiliation fees from the RMT.

On closer examination, it is clear that the leadership of the party has substituted stunts and photo opportunities in place of debate or principles. Overall, the SSP displays no class politics, theory or perspectives and, in reality, is looking to nationalism as a saviour. In so doing, it has lost faith in the working class, preferring "realism" instead. Its leaders have become a political coterie, who are hyper-sensitive to any criticism. At the same time, branch education is systematically and deliberately stifled, lest it serves to raise serious debate within the organisation. Principles have been replaced by misty-eyed hero worship, a most unhealthy sign and one that will lead the party to oblivion.

Such shenanigans are not lost on the ranks of the SSP, who are increasingly at odds with party officials and the nationalist leadership. Tommy Sheridan, the parliamentary leader, now openly talks of "doing business" with Tesco and of "Scotland's oil". Others look with delight at a political alliance with the SNP. At the same time, SNP leaders are looking towards a nationalist re-groupment themselves. In the Scottish Herald (9th July), leadership hopeful Rosanna Cunningham is quoted as saying that she wanted to "work across party boundaries" and "to put the SNP at the head of a pro-independence block in the Scottish Parliament".

Scottish independence offers no way forward. It would be a disaster for working people. It would serve to create divisions within the workers' movement on national lines. While we must fight for genuine autonomy for Scotland, only on the basis of class unity and a struggle for a socialist Britain and socialist Europe will the problems of working people be solved. We must combat the poison of nationalism with internationalism and class struggle. That is the banner under which we must fight. □

"We've been doing our work, we've done a good job up till now, and we would like to continue to do so"

Support sacked Wembley workers

On August 23, 240 workers who were sacked by the company contracted to do the steel works in the Wembley Stadium projects began a protest in front of the two main gates of the Wembley Stadium works. As we go to press this group of workers has not yet achieved the status of "official picket".

Socialist Appeal went along to offer solidarity to the picket line and took the opportunity to interview Tony Connor. Tony Connor is one of the 240 dismissed steel erectors and an AMICUS member. One of Tony's main concerns is that the coverage of the "serious" press is relying more on the Multiplex lies rather than on the facts explained by the workers. From the pages of our publication we appeal to all workers to offer support to the Wembley steel erectors dispute.

Socialist Appeal: How did the industrial dispute start?

Tony Connor: The problem started about a month ago when Cleveland Bridge was put off the site, Multiplex revoked our contract. Since that happened we've been campaigning through the union, through our fulltime officials, that we would like to be transferred, through TUPE, the protection of employment act. After some time in negotiations we did transfer over. When we were transferred we were told that we would transfer over to Fastrack under the same terms and conditions as we have had up till now. However, once we did transfer over to Fastrack they brought in their own in-house rules that they wanted us to comply with. We rejected these rules because we work under the NAECI agreement, which is a national agreement, and this job being a category 1 job, this should apply.

One of the things they asked us to do was to work 66 hours a week, which we say is way too much. They said they wanted us to work 66 hours compulsory, and wanted us to work 3 weekends out of the month with only one off. We negotiated through the union, we said this was way too much. On Thursday of last week we seemed to have things resolved, but the next day when we came into work they sacked all 240 of us.

SA: Do you think this struggle should be spread to other sites?

TC: We are waiting on some representation coming from the union to make the strike official. All we are looking for is the

national agreement to be implemented. It's a category one job so if we don't get anywhere through further negotiations then we would like to see the strike escalated and this dispute taken to other sites round the country for support.

SA: What do you demand from the Company and from your Trade Unions?

TC: We want the union to advocate and implement the blue book, NAECI, agreement. The procedure is there to solve disputes, and do it fairly.

SA: How can people help you?

TC: We just really have to spread the word about what is happening here, we're getting treated unfairly, were not out here wanting extra money or unrealistic demands or anything like that. We've been doing our work, we've done a good job up till now, and we would like to continue to do so. They're trying to undermine the trade union movement in this country and they're trying to bring in foreign workers because they are not in the union and they can bully them into submission.

SA: So the picket isn't yet official

TC: Not yet, we're hoping to make it official when we get some of the fulltime officers down, but they've been very slow in coming down this morning (Monday August 23).

SA: Do you think that the coverage in the press has been balanced? Has it helped your dispute?

TC: All coverage is always going to help the cause but loads of times the lads have been misquoted and they (the media) have published more of what Multiplex has to say and what Multiplex is actually saying is contradictory to the truth. It's nonsense. We are not asking for any demands. We are only asking to be transferred across under TUPE and keep our conditions, nothing more, nothing less.

SA: This is a flagship project, you have the Olympic bid coming up and half of the steel works unfinished, do you think you are in a strong position?

TC: Yes, we think we are in a very strong position because they want this stadium completed for the 2006 Cup Final and they are going to have to accelerate the timetable in order to get this dispute resolved and let us get back to work. The lads here take pride in their work, they want to get back to work, they want to finish the job but we are not being given the opportunity at the moment. It is bad relations from Hollandia, Fastrack and Multiplex that are causing all these problems, nothing to do with the workforce whatsoever. It is true that there has been mess in the works but it is due to mismanagement (Multiplex changing designs) and other reasons that this is taking place. We think this is a smokescreen. They try to get us out the gate and then they try to blame any delays they have got on industrial action. We have not had any industrial action. As far as we know we have been sacked. □

Other Sacked workers gave us their views

Tony Ryan
(Amicus member)

"WHAT WE'RE afraid of here is, obviously we've been working under this agreement and we've struggled for years to achieve the stature of the agreement on the sites. Really what we're afraid of is with this being a major project, if they are allowed to get away with doing away with this agreement that it will happen in other sites around the country. Being a major project the agreement should be protected on this project, and the new company should be made to honour it. We're not asking for any more money, we're just asking for the same terms and conditions that we were on before. When we signed over to this new company that was what we were promised, that we'd have the same as before, nothing would change, we'd have the same terms and conditions but they've caused this conflict not us, we've been forced into a corner. They've been trying to force us out the gate for the last 4 weeks." □

Barry Beech
(Amicus member)

"IT'S JUST a smokescreen, what they're saying is that we've breached our contract - we haven't breached any contract yet, all we did was fetch in the trade union officials to negotiate different aspects of the contract. The employer said they were starting us on TUPE and we would have the same terms and agreements - they weren't the same terms and agreements so we fetched the national officials in to renegotiate it. Since then we've been told that we're all unemployed. For my money it's a situation manufactured by Multiplex to get us out the door because they've got the job in such a state, the cranes are unsafe, there have been major problems." □

Stress and overwork at British Airways

A DEAL was concluded at British Airways last month which narrowly averted strike action by check-in staff on the busiest weekend of the year. This followed on from the wildcat action by the same staff at around this time last year over the implementation of a new electronic clock-in card.

However BA was in the headlines again less than a week later when thousands of travellers travelling out of Europe's busiest airport on the "world's favourite airline" were stranded for whole days at a time as flights were cancelled willy-nilly at the last minute. Thirty international flights were cancelled in the first day of the chaos alone.

Both of these latest developments are linked to the same events taking place in the airline industry. Before the corporate crocodile tears following 9/11 had time to dry virtually all the players in the world airline industry were cheerfully announcing massive cuts in staff. As Socialist Appeal reported at the time, BA - which is in a deep financial black-hole - announced

that it was cutting a quarter of its staff. The management could see a storm on the horizon and decided that the workforce would have to bear the brunt of it.

They had been operating for years on the existing level of staff, but suddenly found a declining market and began knee-jerk lay offs in order to try to preserve profits. Now that the market has picked up a little they have found that they are understaffed because of the earlier cuts. BA admitted that they have a shortage of 150 ground staff at Heathrow alone, which has over-stretched the remaining staff.

When the market was contracting it was the staff who were worst hit by job cuts - now that the market has picked up a bit they are hit by understaffing. This has led to a rise in stress and sickness. BA insiders admit that check rosters are put together assuming that 1 in 10 staff will be ill on any given day. This has also led to an increased rate of turnover as people leave and try to find new jobs, so lack of training and experience is putting yet more

National Dock Strike

THE TRANSPORT and General Workers Union is balloting its members at Associated British Ports (ABP), the largest port operating company in Britain. If a strike goes ahead it will be the first national dockworkers strike since the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme 14 years ago.

Dockers, drivers and port workers are being balloted after rejecting a pay offer of 2.9%, by three to one. The T&G believes that non-union members have had an imposed pay increase of 3.5%. Profits at ABP have risen in the last year by 4% to £74.5m.

The union is demanding a minimum wage of £7.50 an hour and a 5% increase to all rates currently above £7.50; a 1 hour reduction in the working week to 38 hours with no loss of pay; a £10 hour minimum wage and a 48 hour week for lorry drivers; plus a number of other improvements in sick pay, holidays, and parental leave

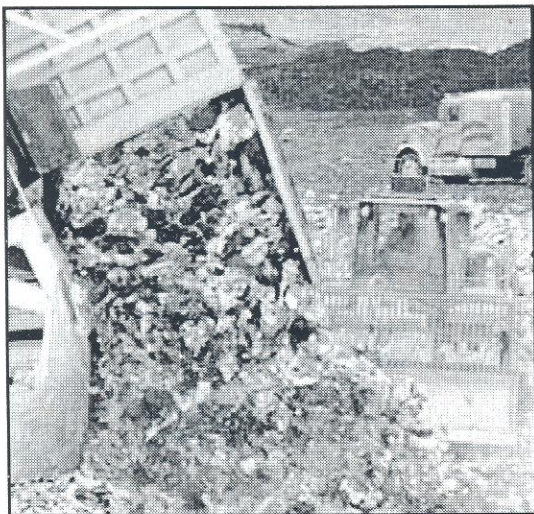
Graham Stevenson, T&G National Officer said: "This result sends a clear message to ABP that our members are serious about fighting back this year to win realistic and meaningful improvements to wages and conditions... We are looking to raise not just the standard of living of our members but to bring employment conditions into the 21st century. If it takes a full national strike ballot to make progress so be it." □

pressure on those in the job.

It is this which explains the rise in activity in a sector not previously noted for its militancy. The latest deal, which was reached at the eleventh hour, includes bonuses for staff who take fewer than the average 17 days of sick leave each year.

This is a typical gimmick used by modern managers who offer cash bonuses (or even the chance to win a car) in order to try to raise moral and stem 'absenteeism'. In fact it seems they will try any cheap stunt - anything rather than provide the resources to do the job properly.

The most recent dispute seems to have been settled for now - but the problems will continue to re-emerge until they are solved. Staff are overworked, stressed, and having to face angry customers on a regular basis and the latest episode can't have done much to help matters. □



Our Village must not be a dumping ground

by Gordon Martin, Salsburgh Council Tenant.

THE PEOPLE from the small North Lanarkshire village of Salsburgh, packed out a public meeting called by the community council (19.08.04) to protest the proposals being put forward by various companies, to exploit the former green belt land that surrounds the village.

A generation ago, Salsburgh had coal mines a few miles to the east, and steel works a couple of miles to the south, and west of it. Now like countless other communities in Britain it is an industrial waste land with the many and varied social problems created by the Thatcher government's de-industrialisation policies.

The capitalists now intend to turn the village into an industrial dumping area, a wind farm, or a major exclusive house building project.

The proposed wind farm seems to be the most contentious issue at the moment, with at least a dozen, 750 foot high turbines being built only 610 metres from houses. The chair of the community council asked for a show of hands, who was against this proposal, every hand in the hall was raised, except for the Blairite councillor who does not live in the ward, he is in favour of not only the proposed wind farm, he also strongly supports the plan to dump industrial waste in quarries very close to the village. This is despite the very real fears of villagers whose children attend the local primary school, of the increase in the number of lorries thundering past the school gates.

Of all the proposals, the least contentious was the "exclusive" house building project at the east end of the village. The very term "exclusive" sends the message to the people of Salsburgh (which has a higher than average percentage of its people living in council housing) these houses are not for the likes of you.

The councillor when asked what North Lanarkshire councils position was with regards to these proposals, said "the council does not have any position at the moment". He left the meeting with a clear message from the people of Salsburgh, that a generation on from people being thrown on the scrap heap when the pits and steel works closed, we will fight tooth and nail to prevent our village being turned into a dumping ground. ■

NUJ makes another step forward against low pay

by Ramon Samblas (NUJ member)

THE NATIONAL Union of Journalists has called for a 'Pay in the Media Summit'. This national meeting aims to match the experiences and successes of the different campaigns of the last year and work towards planning a national strategy around pay. The event will take place in London on November 6, 2004. This Summit has a special meaning due to the industrial disputes that have taken place in the last period against low pay. In spite of the profits being made by the media corporations low pay continues to proliferate among the professionals of this sector.

In June the scandal of the Independent Newspapers freelance rates erupted. The Independent pays £200 per 1,000 words. Sources in the NUJ revealed that in the last 12 years these rates have only increased by 4 percent. It was no accident that 200 staff and freelance contributors signed a petition asking this media group to recognise freelancers' right to be represented by the NUJ and an increase in rates, among other demands.

In the last period our brothers and sisters in different newspapers and magazines have continued to raise their voices against the constant attacks of the bosses against our wages and working conditions. For instance, Belfast Telegraph workers went on strike last May. This paper is part of the Independent News and Media group and is the biggest selling daily in the six counties. The workers held a two-day stoppage against low pay and working conditions disparity between the Belfast staff and the London and Dublin staff. In spite of the anti trade union laws that forced the workers to give 7 days notice, the industrial action was a success. They achieved a 3% pay rise, improvements in conditions for badly paid staff, and extra holiday entitlements based on length of service. This settlement proved that the only language the bosses understand is the language of industrial action.

In June, Blackpool Gazette workers followed suit. They had plenty of reasons to follow the example of their Irish brothers and sisters. The Blackpool Gazette was last year awarded the title 'best regional paper in UK', while Johnston Press (the owner of this newspaper) made £100 million and a profit margin of 20%. However, this has not been reflected in staff wages. Senior journalists are earning around £17,600 and this figure goes rapidly downhill if we talk about journalists in the Blackpool weeklies.

These examples of industrial action show how angry workers in this sector are becoming with current working conditions. It also shows how parasitic and idle are the media bosses who do not hesitate to pay puny salaries (£11,000 for a trainee journalist) while they get huge profit rates.

As we go to press the NUJ is still negotiating new pay agreements across Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the bosses have already expressed their usual unwillingness to compromise on pay rises. If they want a fight so be it. This is why on November 6 all chapels must be represented in the Pay in the Media Summit. We must take a united stand against low pay and fight back against the greed of the bosses. ■

LABOUR: Demand Socialist Policies Now

by Steve Jones

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party conference taking place in Brighton has the potential to be the stormiest conference of the party for nearly 20 years. This will be in sharp contrast to the quiet sedate affairs of even just a few years ago. There we saw a succession of conferences so staged managed it's a wonder no-one offered to transfer them to the West End. Debates, such as they were, took place with hordes of Blair loyalists being called up to the rostrum as if by magic to declare full support for the line and undying love for the Great Helmsman Tony Blair. Hardly anything was voted on and every speech of the leadership was cheered and cheered. Of course, the occasional upset would take place where the government would be challenged, for example, over pensions but, by and large, opposition was suppressed with minimum fuss.

Naturally this led to an increasingly large number of delegates creeping outside the conference to attend the more interesting fringe events or even just to do a bit of shopping and take in the sea air. Increasingly also a sense of dissatisfaction started to set in as delegates started to wonder: was this what we struggled to get a Labour government elected for?

The mood shift started with the trade union delegates, the first to feel the pressure from the rank and file on the shopfloor, but increasingly even the formerly bamboozled constituency delegates started to raise questions and not vote as the regional officers advised. Two years ago a resolution opposing the coming war was defeated narrowly on the back of a debate where pro-war speakers were called on a six-to-one ratio and a lot of promises from the top table about the UN and the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

By the following year's conference in Bournemouth it was clear to most people that they had been misled on the war. And that was not all. On every aspect of party policy the delegates were angry. Debates were avoided, stitch up deals concocted but one fact was unavoidable. By and large the union delegations had taken control of the conference and had the power to decide

what was agreed even if they did not always exercise their power to do so.

The glory days of Blairism seem a million years ago. Scandals, election defeats, sliding poll ratings both for Labour and Blair himself... things have started to look rather grim for the once cocky men in dark suits. At this year's conference the unions will be taking advantage of the increased options for debate and resolutions agreed last year. But we will also have to see how the 'accommodation' worked out between the union leaderships and the Blairites at the policy forum conferences pans out in practice. Under the agreed deal the unions agreed not to make waves (i.e. fight for their own organisations' policies) in return for certain assurances from the government (i.e. crumbs off the table) - all cemented with the threat of the coming general election and the rallying call 'heads down for a third term!'

Labour Needs to Change Course

Now no one wants to see Labour fail to win a third term and the Tories under the reactionary Michael Howard walking into No. 10, but at present that is where New Labour and Blair is taking us. But it is not just about personalities, things would be the same if Brown or someone else was PM, it is about policies and programme. Socialist Appeal has consistently argued that Labour needs to change course and adopt a fighting socialist programme which will tackle poverty, low pay, declining public services and provide a better future for ourselves and our children. This is what people expected from Labour when they came to power and they have been sorely disappointed.

Now is the time for the Left in the party and in the affiliated trade unions to make a stand. The launch of the Labour Representation Committee at a conference held at the start of July was a good step forward. The demands raised from the platform at that event would represent a considerable advance over what is on offer from New Labour but they clearly do not go far enough. Many of the demands were limited and did not seek to tackle the root cause of society's



problems - that of capitalism itself but rather put faith in such measures as new taxes and other panaceas. The conference was also rather dominated by a whole series of platform speakers, all putting different positions, at the expense of a clear discussion from the floor. However when discussion did take place the message from those assembled was clear - the time has come to fight Blair and bring a change of direction to the Labour government. The task now is to organise.

The mood of opposition to the Iraq war, reflected in the tremendous demonstrations of last year, shows that things have moved on from the post-election period when Blairism ruled unchallenged. Those demonstrations would not have been possible had they not been reflecting a deeper sense of concern about the direction and actions of the government than just that of being against a war. The danger is that we could now be heading towards an election defeat somewhere down the line and we know that a Tory government would not hesitate to take revenge on the working class for the humiliations of 1997 and 2001. Pressure must be put to ensure that fighting resolutions are taken at conference and, after a proper non-rigged debate, passed. What is also clear is that the fight for a socialist programme for Labour must be linked to a fight to change the leadership and elect one committed to the interests of ordinary people not the City of London and George W Bush. It is to be hoped that the LRC will use this conference to get the ball rolling, using its resources and the mood that is building up in the party rank and file, and start the real fight-back against Blairism and all that it represents. □

No to selection in schools!

by Mick Brooks

THE GOVERNMENT claims its new proposals will introduce more choice into education. Children, or rather their parents, will be able to choose which school they can go to.

Actually parents can already indicate their first choice of school for their kids. The school round the corner from me gets six times as many applicants as it can fit in. Since that is so for a lot of schools, we have to ask – who is choosing? Is the parent choosing the school? Or isn't the school in a position to choose what pupils they take?

The Past - Selection

The correct term for this is not parental choice. It is selection. We've been there before. Workers who hear Labour representatives talk airily about 'bog standard comprehensives' and the 'post-comprehensive era' should beware. Up till the 1960s we had a severely selective system – called a two tier educational system based on systematic class distinction. There was actually a third tier. The ruling class sent their kids to private, fee-paying schools. They still do.

Until forty years ago each eleven year old faced an exam that decided their future – the eleven plus. If you passed, you went to a grammar school. They were called grammar schools because they taught Latin grammar which, together with skill in confronting spin bowling, was regarded as the finest training possible for an imperial administrator. If you didn't pass – as about four in five didn't – you went to a different school with a different uniform. This was called a secondary modern school. Most children who went there were never entered for any exams. It was accepted that for the rest of their life they would be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. You were a failure in life at the ripe old age of eleven!

The function of this two tier system of selection was undisguised. It was to perpetuate class division by preparing a new generation of industrial workers in secondary moderns and separating them from those 'with a chance to get on' in the grammar schools. The assumption of the educational establishment that most



working class people were too 'thick' to do anything else was clear.

Not surprisingly, the four out of five that the system discriminated against and cast as failures hated selection deeply. When the Labour Party declared that if you voted for them on the local council they would introduce comprehensive education, people came out in droves to support them. A comprehensive school gathered children of different abilities together with one uniform and under one roof. It did not rule out streaming or specializing in subjects at a later stage. But it did confront the basic libel and insult that the principle of selection screams out to the world: that there are two sorts of people in the world – stupid people and clever people.

The Proposals

New Labour is working to reintroduce selection by the back door. Their proposal is first to create a layer of what are called super foundation schools. These would have greater independence from local

authority control. They would be able to borrow and to negotiate individually with teachers. So national wage bargaining will go out of the window there. The similarity with foundation hospitals, which are already in the process of being set up, is clear. Secondly they are proposing to give 2,000 specialist schools more powers and independence. And finally they propose to set up 200 city academies which, as we shall see, are in effect private or rather privatized schools.

A Pseudo-Market

In both education and health New Labour has first set up standards by which the service can be judged. This naturally leads to the compilation of national league tables. The conclusion is inescapable – some hospitals and schools are better than others. Then people are able to choose the winners and avoid the losers. This process is seen as identical to that where people see from adverts that Tesco's spaghetti is cheaper than Sainsbury's so they switch to shopping at Tesco.

So New Labour's solution to the issue of raising standards in health and education is to introduce a market, or rather a pseudo-market, into schools and hospitals.

One of Tony Benn's favourite one-liners is, 'The National Health Service is the most socialist thing we (Labour) have ever done – and the most popular.' Of course he repeats the line because it always strikes a chord with people.

In the first place the health service provides most care free. It gives according to need – a principle of pure communism. Secondly it is not an accident that universal school provision and comprehensive health care were not and could not be provided by capitalist firms over centuries of capitalist development in this country, or in any other country. It had to be introduced as an initiative of the state, under pressure to reform from the working class.

If you suffer a stroke, you don't want 'choice'. You want them to save your life. In other words you want a good service wherever you live. The ambulance crew won't run a list of how many performance

stars the different A & Es have across you. You will, after all, be unconscious. They'll take you to the nearest Accident and Emergency ward. What we want is not 'choice'. We want the local A & E to be as good as any other in the country. Is this so difficult for Blairite ministers to understand? If you're getting on and have to go in for an operation, you don't want to be carted half way round the country in search of hospitals with more stars. You want to go to the local hospital. That means you want it to be as excellent as every other. After all, having friends and relations in to visit is part of getting better.

It's the same principle in education. It's only in cities that even the possibility of choice can be posed. In rural areas there's only ever going to be one school near enough for you to go to, and that's likely to be a struggle to get to. So forget about choice – let's make sure every school is a decent one. But if there are six applicants for every place in a school, five out of six are not going to get the choice they want. Choice doesn't actually mean anything unless there's spare capacity. Are we really going to pay in future to keep empty places in hospitals and schools just to maintain the phantom of choice?

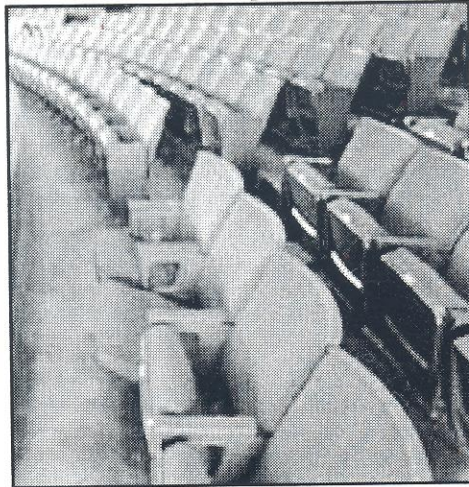
Super Foundation Schools

Despite the rhetoric of choice, New Labour is systematically undermining the one lever where we can influence education policy. We can vote. In the 1960s and 1970s you could vote Labour, committed to comprehensive education, on to the council. Or you could vote Tory to keep the grammar schools. That was real choice.

But local authorities now have less and less say over education policy. Successive white papers on education under Labour since 1997 have boasted how more and more cash is delivered straight from the Ministry to the headteachers.

And another instrument of local democracy is being subverted. Super foundation schools will have the power to 'choose' more of the pupils applying. So it is not obvious what constituency the board of governors (representing the parents and other interested parties) will actually represent. In any case the policy of giving all the money to the head means any scrutiny or control by the governors is meaningless.

And the relationship between an individual head and the Ministry is not an equal one. The Ministry pays the piper; it calls the tune. While we're soothed with the rhetoric of choice, ever increasing cen-



tralization and bureaucratic diktat is the reality. So democratic channels are being bypassed – all in the name of 'choice'.

Specialist Schools

There are now 2,000 schools which have decided they offer 'double specialisms'. This is not surprising since the Ministry will give you more money as a result. In addition to this they are given the power to select 10% 'by aptitude'. Weasel words! It is just possible that the 'aptitude' of a pupil at playing the cello can be objectively assessed. But 'aptitude' is a euphemism for class discrimination. At least the old eleven plus was formally blind to social class. Though really the well-to-do have always been better at playing the system, and were more successful at getting their kids to grammar school. But interview is even more biased in favour of the children of the wealthy than exams are.

But the worst proposal is to set up 200 city academies. This is in effect a plan to privatize state schools! They can set their own admissions policy – 100% selection is possible. Business firms can become sponsors at a knock down price. Stumping up 20% of capital costs makes them a sponsor – in effect an owner. Get this. New Labour is going to sell schools we've paid for at an 80% discount. This is not even privatization – it is looting the state's resources. Then business won't have to pay any of the running costs. The Ministry stumps up as usual. In other words we feed the cuckoo in the state education nest. CASE, the Case for State Education, is understandably outraged. City Academies, they say, "are accountable neither to locally elected officials nor parents". They go on, "CASE is not aware of any evidence that local education authorities are less able than sponsors to provide excellent standards, particularly if they are

resourced comparably." But of course they won't get as much money.

Choice

Informed choice depends on these being valid performance measures available in the public domain. In the case of schools these are supposed to be provided by the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) reports and the school's position in league tables of exam results. These measure outcomes which are important to parents for the future of their children. They don't really give a full indication of what the school has actually achieved for the pupil. This is called value added in the jargon (typical of the addiction to market analogies). Value added would give an idea of where the child started from and how much of their improvement in learning is down to the school's effort. Exam results in middle class areas may be enhanced by the intensive coaching wealthy parents' kids get to supplement the formal teaching at school.

And everyone knows that in well to do areas parents are prepared to pay tens of thousands of pounds over the odds to buy houses that will get them into the catchment area of a 'good' school. Freedom of choice for those with the money to buy it! The drift to more selection will widen the class divide, allowing well-resourced middle class areas to buy themselves a more privileged position – at the expense of the rest.

In any case exam results are important, but they are not the only important thing. Teachers in deprived areas may find their appointed task of jumping the children through exam hoops made more difficult by noticing that some come to school without having eaten breakfast. This disadvantage is not going to show up in an Ofsted report.

Speaking generally, the idea that 'standards' can be objectively laid down for health and education in the same way as quality control can determine that a car leaving an assembly line either has faults or has no faults is a prime example of 'market mania' - the tendency to reduce service provision to a crass economic mechanism just like churning out goods for profit. The delivery of a successful operation and recovery or a good schooling is more complicated than that.

Foundation Hospitals Farce

This can be seen in the recent fiasco regarding foundation hospitals. Like super foundation schools, these hospitals are

being given financial freedom to borrow and the power to negotiate individually with staff. It is envisaged that these 'success stories' will be able to pay more to hire well-regarded staff at the expense of the rest of the health service. They are to compete for 'customers' (as patients are called nowadays) and keep any surplus they make. Private practice is being reintroduced by the back door!

The same assumptions apply as with schools: that there are objective measures of success and failure, that they can be measured, and that the government should then reward success and punish failure. The equivalent of Ofsted reports for national health trusts is the star system. Desirable targets in health provision are identified and stars are awarded according to how many targets are achieved. The thirty-one most successful hospitals got three stars. The government decided that these were the ones that should be rewarded with foundation status.

One year later and another round of assessment has produced this result: ten of these pace-setters have lost their three star status! Four of twenty of the first wave of existing foundation hospitals also failed the test. That raises the question – weren't the wrong NHS trusts nominated for foundation?

The ten losing hospital administrators argue that the star system is not up to measuring the performance of a complex

unit like a hospital. They denounce the system as a 'lottery'. Obviously they would say that. But they have a point. Luton and Dunstable met 9 out of 10 performance targets but lost its three star status. These results show New Labour's drive to marketise health provision has been fatally holed below the waterline.

As the *Guardian* headline (21st July) puts it, 'Foundation hospitals plan left in chaos'.

The Future – Choice?

Grammar schools have swollen their rolls since Labour came to power in 1997. For private schools it is business as usual – without even their tax-exempt charitable status put to serious challenge. Yet the instinct to give everyone a fair chance in life, which means doing away with selection, is deeply ingrained in the labour movement. Even the right wing Labour MPs who dominate the Select Committee on Education have issued a challenge. "A government that permits the continuing expansion of selection by ability or by aptitude can only be understood to approve of both the practice of selection and its outcomes." One 'outcome' is, of course, a widening gulf of inequality in this country, between leafy suburbs and education ghettos.

New Labour prides itself on its pragmatism, its aversion to ideology – especial-

ly that of socialism. They boast, "What this government does is what works," What they're doing in education is what doesn't work for working people. And the reason it doesn't work for us is because it is driven by a neo-Thatcherite ideology and a pathetic abasement to the business interest.

The Blairites will argue that the Tories want to subsidise public (private) schools with our money. They are responding by offering choice within the public sector. This is like saying the best way to protect yourself from a gang of local thugs is to beat yourself up. Comprehensive education is a gain that needs to be defended and selection an enemy to be fought.

The proposals on health and education have another thing in common. They have not been developed in the labour movement as a result of any felt need or even discussed in the labour movement. They were unveiled as the results of a think-tank at Number 10 and imposed on the labour movement. An unelected nonentity called Andrew Adonis has more influence on education policy than Labour Party Conference. If we want policies that reflect the interests of the working class we have to take back the democratic decision-making process within the Labour Party. □

The fight against School closures is still on

by Heather Scott Labour Party member, Personal Capacity Edinburgh

PARENTS ACROSS Edinburgh are still fighting to save local primary schools from closure.

Last week, a few days before the start of the Autumn Term, parents of pupils at Lismore School were shocked to receive a leaked copy of a letter informing them that the school would be closed next year. This letter was leaked several days in advance of a Council meeting where deputations from schools were to be heard and where the matter was to be discussed. The fact that the letter had already been prepared confirmed the Lismore parents' fears that the whole "consultation" process had been a sham, and the deal to close the school and sell off the land had been cut-and-dried from the beginning.

The parents responded by staging a sit-in in the school playground on the first morning of the new term to show their continued opposition to the closure. Later that week three of the parents came to a local Labour Party branch meeting

where they received strong support.

Yesterday a deputation from the school attended the Council Education Committee meeting. Eloquent and well reasoned statements opposing the closure of Lismore were made by parents, pupils, the local Tory Councillor Ian Berry, MSP Colin Fox (SSP), and local Labour MP Gavin Strang.

Recommendations against the closure had also been received from the cross-party Children and Young Persons Scrutiny Panel, teachers' unions, local clergy and the Police (on road safety grounds).

The Committee, however, was unmoved, and voted for closure of the school, on the grounds that falling school rolls and small classes meant a worse education. (How unlike the claims of Eton and Harrow and other private schools).

A final decision is to be voted on by the full Council in September, and the parents are determined to fight on. □

Defend State Schools

by Reuben Bard Rosenberg, London School Student

JUST OVER a month ago both the Tories and new Labour unveiled their plans for changing education. While one cannot overlook the substantial differences between Labour and Conservative proposals they both have something in common: They both have the potential to expand selective education and therefore both represent an attack on the comprehensive system.

It is of course something of a misnomer to talk about Britain having a system of comprehensive education. In the 1970s the tripartite system - constituting of grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns - was partially dismantled. This system had determined students opportunities at 11 and had generally served to crudely channel children into opportunity structures corresponding to their social background. The Labour government of the day promised to replace the tripartite system with one of comprehensive education which would enable students from all backgrounds and ability ranges to be educated equally within a single institution. Yet, as has always been the case with Labour government policy, education was reformed in a way that bypassed the more difficult decisions. While the existing secondary moderns now became 'Comprehensives' which in theory would provide a broad education for all students, many of the existing grammar schools were allowed to continue to select students. The consequences of this were obvious: Since grammar schools were (and still are) allowed to continue to pick and choose the

most able students, comprehensive schools have never had a wholly comprehensive intake and unsurprisingly a huge gulf remains between the life chances of those in grammar schools and those in the comprehensive system. The Labour government of the day therefore failed in its bizarre (yet not untypical) attempt to promote equality without confronting privilege.

Yet the limited stride forward that was made during the 1970s is now under attack not only from Michael Howard but also from the Labour government. For their part, the Conservatives propose that schools should be allowed to set their own selection criteria. While it is unclear how such a scheme could work, what is clear is that the transition between primary and secondary school would be turned into a massive market place as 11 year olds are forced to compete with one another to secure places at the most sought after institutions.

Yet the Conservatives have always opposed all aspects of equality in comprehensive education. Perhaps of greater concern is the strategy being proposed by Labour. Under Charles Clarke's plans, all existing comprehensives will eventually aim to convert to 'specialist' schools, with a particular focus on specific subject areas. Meanwhile successful schools will become known as foundation schools, enjoying additional freedoms. Finally up to 200 City Academies will be established.

What is particularly significant is that specialist schools will have the right to select up to ten per cent of pupils. Thus

selective education is once again set to expand. While the government has stressed that only a minority of specialist schools have taken up the opportunity to institute selection one only has to look at the dynamics in the British education system for it to be clear how quickly selection will catch on once Labour's reforms are firmly in place. In a system in which schools are forced to consistently improve on exam results and to compete with one another for places at the top of 'league tables', few schools will want to be left behind, and few in the long run are likely not to take advantage of the 'right' to select.

Teachers under attack

Another dangerous aspect of Clarke's 5-year plan for education, is the implications it has for teachers' rights. Most significantly Foundation schools and city academies will be able to set their own pay and conditions. The effect of this will be to pull the rug from under the feet of the teachers' unions. Collective bargaining and the ability of unions to reach national pay agreements are clearly going to be undermined.

Yet this is part of a wider move to break the unity of those involved in education in particular teachers. The education system, as noted earlier, is already characterised by a constant push for schools to compete with one another, to receive the best Ofsted report or to jostle for positions in the 'league tables'. However the government's plans will add a new dynamic to the existing competitive atmosphere. The idea is

that, those schools that prove themselves to be 'the best' will be rewarded with additional opportunities for funding and greater autonomy. At the other end of the scale those judged to be failing would be threatened with closure. It is hard to assess what the consequences will be of this topsy-turvy policy, which looks to threaten and punish rather than genuinely help those institutions that are failing. What is clear is that the disparity between 'sinking' and 'swimming' schools will expand, as will the disparity between the working lives of teachers in the elite foundation and the lives of teachers outside of that environment.

The government I am sure hopes to be able to break the spirit of solidarity that exists amongst all those involved in education. It is therefore vital that teaching unions take a stand in relation to both Labour and Conservative proposals. By the same token young people must articulate their demands for a well-funded education system based on the principles of equality. At the same time, we as socialists must be realistic in terms of understanding that the education system does not exist in a vacuum. We should of course make specific demands over education, yet in a nation of such great material inequality and where huge numbers of children still grow up below the poverty line, we should not be so naive as to believe that a sound education system can bring genuine equality of educational opportunity. That of course would rely on the wholesale transformation of society! □

The state of two nations

by Michael Roberts

WORLD CAPITALIST leaders are pondering their economic futures. The big debate now is whether the US economy will continue to grow sufficiently fast to restore jobs to those who lost them in the first three years of the Bush administration without renewing inflation. Connected to this is the worry that there is little sign of any strong economic recovery in stagnant continental Europe or Japan. And now there is the danger that record high oil prices could stop in its tracks the short Asian economic boom, pushing China and Japan into recession.

What comforts the economic leaders of American and British capitalism is the thought that at least it's a lot better for them than it is for the French, Germans or Japanese. The economies of Bush and Blair are currently growing at 3-4% a year while Europe's big capitalist economies and Japan are hardly managing 2%. Unemployment (on dubious official figures, it's true) is only 5% in the US and the UK, while it is double that in France, Germany, Italy and Spain and now at a record high in Japan.

So it seems the Thatcherite 'free market' model of capitalism that both Bush and Blair espouse is working over the 'social market' models presided over by Chirac, Schroeder and Koizumi. Doing away with decent pensions, health benefits, privatising transport, housing and education and ending any regulation of employers and businesses, while imposing draconian labour laws on workers, seems to work best for capitalism. What a surprise!

But what is not a surprise is the human cost of the free market model in the two largest capitalist nations of the world that have adopted it. Two very revealing reports have just been released that expose the poverty, inequality and social injustice of capitalism in Britain and America.

Raving Marxists or 'bleeding heart' liberals (as right-wing capitalist commentators might call them) have not written these reports. The first report on Britain has been published by the

Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), a 'think-tank' that is supposedly close to the Blairite government. The second report on the US is published by the administration's own Bureau of Census. And they both draw on official data from their respective Inland Revenue and Employment departments to show the shocking state of millions of people in these two nations.

After seven years of a New Labour government, the IPPR reports that poverty is still with us in a big way in Britain. Indeed, in many areas, the level of poverty is worse under Labour than it was under Thatcherite Britain. In 2003, 22% of the population were living on incomes of less than 60% of average income and 23% of all British children were in poor households. The great plans of Gordon Brown to cut child poverty have made little progress. In 1998, the UK had the greatest share of poverty-stricken children in the EU of 15 countries. In 2003, Britain is still 11th, just ahead of Greece, Portugal and other much poorer EU nations. Britain's 23% of poor children compares to just 5% in Denmark, 10% in Sweden and 14% in Germany.

It's no better for old people in Britain: excluding housing costs, 21% of pensioners were in poverty in 1994. It's

no different ten years later. And the number of working people without children who are in poverty has risen 20% over the same period. Most worrying is that more people in Britain who are poor, stay poor. In Britain, 11% of citizens were persistently poor (three out of four years), compared to an EU average of 9% and just 5-6% in Holland or Germany. And 25% were in and out of poverty. Once you are poor in Britain, you are likely to stay poor.

What is even more galling for most of us who just scrape by with a living and even for some of us who do slightly better than average is the huge inequality of income and wealth in Britain (and as we shall see in the US as well).

Under the New Labour government of Blair, those earning more than £107,000 a year (the top 1% of income earners) have increased their share of national income. And the top 10% maintained the 29% of all income that it held in 1997. In the past decade, average earnings for workers have risen 45%, but for the chief executives of the top 100 UK businesses (already fat cats) it rose 288%, or six times as fast! In the failing capitalist economies of continental Europe, the share of income for the top 1% has fallen.

Inequality of income has increased in Britain under Blair - it's official. But the inequalities in wealth are even starker than they are in incomes 'earned'. Wealth is twice as unequally distributed under capitalism in Britain and the US than income is. The richest continue to get richer. The top 10% of wealth holders have increased their share of Britain's wealth in property, shares, bonds and cash from 47% in 1990 to 55% now. The top 1% now own 23% compared to 18% in 1990. At the other end of the wealth ladder, the percentage of Britons that own nothing rose from 5% to 10%. Of those aged 16-24 years old, 56% have no assets at all.

There's always a lot of talk in Britain and the US about 'equality of opportunity' being



more important than equality of income or wealth. If we create a society, Bush, Blair and Brown say, that allows everybody a chance of making a million or having a better life, then there's no need to worry about why some have much more than others. But of course, this is so much humbug. The reality is that under capitalism, if you are poor or even just average that's the way you are going to stay 99 times out of a 100. And if you are rich, you can bet you are going to stay that way.

Sons born to the richest 10% of fathers on average earn about 20% more than those born to the bottom 20%. Around three-quarters of children from the richest families get 5 or more passes in those GCSEs just taken, or more than twice the rate of those born in the lowest social classes. Currently just 11% of all university students (even after the expansion of college education under Blair) come from the poorest families.

So 'successful' British capitalism means a reality of the most extreme social injustice: more poor people, more children and old people in poverty, huge gaps in income and wealth between the richest and the poorest and between men and women, and little chance of going from rags to riches. And the poor suffer the most from crime (5% of people earning under £5000 a year were burgled compared to 2.5% for those earning more than £30,000). Finally, after life there is death. Life expectancy for the poorest Britons is an average four years less than for the richest Britons. It used to be a difference of only two years.

America is no better. In the latest report by the US government's Bureau of Census, it is revealed that, under George Bush, the number of Americans living in poverty has risen by nearly 1.5m in 2003, the third straight year of increase. Now

nearly 36m Americans live in poverty (as defined very narrowly by the Bureau, meaning that you have to be virtually destitute to qualify as poor, earning just \$6,000 each in a year!). That's 12.5% of the population. Child poverty is even worse. There are 13m American kids in poverty, or 17.6% of all children, up from 16.7%. These poverty rates, even as defined by the Bureau, are no better than they were in the late 1960s!

Incomes too have not improved. After taking account of inflation, average incomes have been flat under the Bush administration, while the rich continued to benefit from huge rises in earnings and tax cuts. Just as bad is the evidence that nearly 45m Americans have no health insurance in a 'free market' economy without a National Health Service and where hospital, doctor and drugs costs are astronomical. Don't get ill in the US.

Capitalist inequality

When these facts are put before the ideologists of capitalism, they present two arguments to defend inequality. The first is that capitalism cannot work properly under a regime of equality of income and wealth. That would destroy the willingness of people to invest their capital and take risks to build businesses if all their gains were to be taxed away and all their wealth were to be redistributed to help those who had nothing or did not take any risks, namely working people. And second, it is pie in the sky to argue for equality.

The first argument is right. Capitalism does not work properly if the capitalists must finance a welfare state with decent pensions, housing, health service, schools, transport and living wages and proper labour laws. Those capitalist countries that continue to have

at least some of these basic necessities, like France, Sweden or Germany are doing poorly in capitalist terms. Those that have hardly any of these things are doing better. But all are doing poorly compared to the needs of the majority.

The second argument is wrong. Capitalism may not work well without inequality and poverty accompanying it. But it is not pie in the sky to argue for equality because it is not a fanciful dream (as the capitalists imagine and many believe) that there is a better way of organising society.

Planned production, where investment and growth do not depend on rewarding a small clique of rich with profits for their 'risk-taking', is feasible. Indeed, it would be more productive as resources would go to those who contributed the most, and not to the unproductive layers of capitalist society that clog up productive potential (the bankers, advertisers, marketing, accountants, lawyers and 'entrepreneurs').

But that's another debate. Meanwhile the poor are still with us - and so are the rich. □



One in three children in poverty while one in 20 London households worth over £1m

While as many as 13 million people in Britain are living below the poverty line, and three million households are in debt to door-to-door leeches, the number of millionaires in the UK has nearly doubled since 2001. The Centre for Economics and Business Research reports that soaring house prices had led to a surge in the number of people with assets worth more than £1m in the past decade. Inland Revenue figures estimated there were about 230,000 millionaires in the UK in 2001. But CEBR says today's figure is likely to be nearly double that at 425,000 following a 64% jump in house prices since 2001. Unsurprisingly, given the impact of property prices on household wealth, the highest concentration of people with assets worth seven figures is in London. The group estimates that 175,000 or 41% of the country's millionaires live in the capital, where they account for 5.5% of all households. □

THE REVOLUTION HAS WON A MOST IMPORTANT VICTORY:

CMR declaration

Now we must develop the strength of the workers, carry the revolution to the end and move towards Socialism

We have just received the following declaration of the comrades of the Venezuelan Revolutionary Marxist Current (CMR), which we are pleased to republish in English for our readers' information. It is, in effect, a transitional programme that, taking its starting point from the concrete conditions of the Venezuelan revolution, explains what steps are necessary to build upon the victory in the referendum, carry the revolution forward and pose the question of workers' power and socialism.

THE REVOLUTION has just won a major triumph. The referendum victory is indisputable proof of the people's will not to accept any retreat in the revolutionary process, to defend the conquests in the field of health, education and in the level of organization and consciousness, and its will to carry the struggle forward.

This victory was won by the working class together with the popular-democratic revolutionary forces. It provides us with an enormously advantageous situation, since it has plunged the pro-imperialist sectors of the Coordinadora and the Bloque Democrático, and all the enemies of the revolution, into the deepest demoralization.

This victory must not be thrown away by false appeals for the unity of the nation, which includes those who organized the coup d'état of April 11 2002, and the criminal bosses' lockout of December 2, the provocative guarimbas, the infiltration of paramilitary forces, who have murdered more than a hundred workers' and peasants' leaders.

We are already hearing and seeing it: the Coordinadora Democrática and the Bloque Democrático do not want to recognise the victory of the NO vote and their bosses in the government of Washington, although they say they

do, act as if they do not.

In the hour of victory, we cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by those sections of the bourgeoisie who now come forward waving the white flag of surrender. This merely reflects their weakness and our strength. They are only doing this to gain time and prepare new ambushes like the one they prepared in the past for revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata in México, or Augusto César Sandino in Nicaragua, or in our own country in 2002, when Chávez pardoned them after the coup of 11 April.

Nor must this victory be used as a smokescreen to cover up the responsibility of those elements in the government (ministers, institutions, governors, mayors etc.) who have been behaving in a bureaucratic manner. These people have been carrying out anti-working class and anti-popular policies that are similar to those of the enemies of the revolution, such as the sackings of thousands of workers, the violation of collective agreements and of the rights of the people.

Carry Revolution forward

This victory was prepared by the people, the workers by hand or brain of both town and countryside, through sacrifice and bitter struggles against those who derive their privileges solely as a result of holding leading positions and who have sought to prevent the development of popular participation in decision-making and the democratic election of the genuine leaders of the movement.

We must make use of this victory, which further weakens the counter-revolutionary forces, to carry the revolution forward by taking concrete political, economic and social measures that will cut the ground from under the feet of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the national lackeys that serve it; and to put an end to the looting and exploitation and prevent



the preparation of new destructive and painful conspiracies.

We must advance towards our own victory. This means that the patrols and UBEs must be transformed into genuine organizations of revolutionary political struggle. They must become the embryos of power that will replace the existing governmental institutions that are standing in the way of a genuine democracy in which the masses will play the role of active protagonists.

The patrols and UBEs must discuss the organization of mass meetings of all those who support the revolution in every sector, neighbourhood, local area etc. These meetings must have the right to elect the candidates to the next elections. At the same time, these assemblies of all the active elements, patrulleros, members of Bolivarian circles, misiones, etc. must elect the commandos, and the latter must be subject to recall.

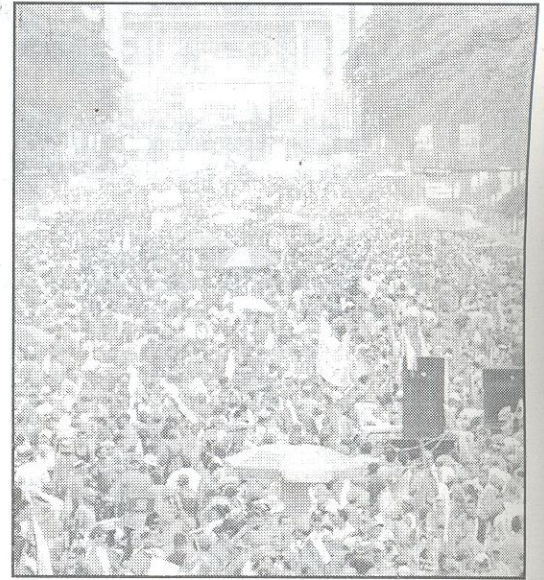
These embryonic organs of

workers power must also take up the demands of the local neighbourhoods, to decide how to distribute the municipal, state and national budgets. The revolutionary rank and file that makes up the patrullas and other revolutionary combat organizations must also elect delegates, subject to recall, to a great national revolutionary assembly, which must elect the leading bodies of the revolution. The latter must be answerable at all times to the revolutionary assemblies and be subject to the right of recall by them.

This system of workers power, based on the democratic decisions of the workers and other oppressed layers, must be reproduced at every level. The students must democratise the centres of learning, electing all

the educational authorities; every student, teacher, worker and employee must have a vote in the elaboration of the syllabus and there must be free education for all.

The patrols (patrullas) and UBEs, as the embryos of a new power leading to a genuine workers' government (as stated in the founding document of the UNT) must fight for the extension of a free and good quality health service to all the people; to fight to open up the workplaces closed by the bosses, to take over those that threaten to close or sack workers and to institute workers control in the workplaces, and in this way to put an end to the violations of workers' rights and solve the problem of unemployment. □



WE MUST CARRY THE REVOLUTION TO THE END AND MOVE TO SOCIALISM

We must speed up the revolution and carry it to the end in order to solve the problems that the masses are suffering. History teaches us that a revolution that stops halfway will be defeated (as happened in Chile, Portugal and Nicaragua). In a capitalist world in crisis, where unemployment and exploitation are increasing even in the most advanced countries, the only way to solve the problems of the workers and the popular masses is by adopting the following measures, basing ourselves on the embryos of workers' power, like the patrols and UBEs:

- Nationalization of the banking system under workers' control.
- Non-payment of the foreign debt: let these resources be used instead for productive purposes: to put the economy, which is now at the mercy of the price of oil, on a solid base.
- The nationalization of the basic industries under workers' control.
- Nationalization of internal and external trade.
- The setting up of self-defence brigades in every neighbourhood, workplace, town and village to maintain order and protect the people.
- For the establishment of a workers' and people's militia to defend the revolution from any internal or external aggression.
- Nationalization under workers' control of the big food and transport companies.
- Workers' control and management of PDVSA that will guarantee a majority of workers on all the decisive organs of management.
- Workers' control of the mass media to put an end to the constant counterrevolutionary agitation in the media, a campaign that is still continuing despite the clear victory on August 15.
- Military instruction for the masses: "every fisherman, every student, every member of the people must learn how to use a rifle, because that is the conception of the people in arms." (Hugo Chávez, Aló Presidente, April 2004).

All this can only be carried out through the establishment of a genuine workers' government, based on workers' and peoples' assemblies.

Last but not least, it is necessary to overcome the dispersal of the revolutionary vanguard, which must be united on the basis of the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. These ideas are the concentrated expression of more than 150 years of internationalist struggles. They are the only ideas that can guarantee the victory of the revolution: that is to say, the taking of power by the working class itself.

In order to attain this end it is necessary to group together the most advanced sections of the worker and people's activists and the youth in a Marxist cadre organization that can give to the revolution a clear socialist content.

If you agree with these ideas, then join us! We are fighting to create a strong Revolutionary Marxist Current as an integral part of the mass movement, which, while supporting the social revolutionary process in Venezuela, is fighting to deepen it and impart to it a socialist character.

Set up a group of the CMR in your neighbourhood, village, workplace, school or collage, or wherever you can. Come and join us! Together we will fight for total victory! □

Caracas, Wednesday, August 18, 2004.

The recall referendum in Venezuela

A crushing blow to the counterrevolution

by Alan Woods

AT 4:03 this morning Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) announced the result of the recall referendum on the government of the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías. A tally count of 94.49 percent of ballots from automatic voting machines revealed that the opposition had failed to obtain more votes than those who wanted Chávez to stay. There were 4,991,483 "no votes", representing 58.95 percent of those voting, against 3,576,517 "yes" votes, representing 41.74 percent.

Immediately the opposition "categorically refused" to recognise the result. Nevertheless, it is clear that the "no" vote has won by an overwhelming majority. Early reports suggested an even bigger majority - 63 percent to 36 percent. This may be closer to the truth. Manual count of votes from rural districts and poor urban areas where Chávez has widespread support, and where automatic machines were not used, will probably increase the President's margin of victory.

Masses roused

The referendum has roused the masses. There was unprecedented voter participation because everyone knew what was at stake. As a result Venezuelans were queuing for up to 10 hours

to vote. Our correspondent in Caracas wrote last night, giving a taste of the mood on the streets during the voting:

"The euphoria on the faces of the people and the street celebrations in poor areas of Caracas contrasts with the angry mood in the areas of the *escúridos*. In all areas there have been big queues to vote, but whereas in the poorer districts they are still waiting to vote, in the upper class and middle class areas the queues have already vanished. In some areas people have been waiting six or seven hours to vote."

The participation was around 90 percent. This historic voter turnout stands in stark contrast to the par-

ticipation in elections in Britain or the United States. This is what happens when the people feel that they have something to vote for - and against. It is what happens when people feel that politics really matter and that voting can make a difference. What a contrast to the situation in the "western democracies" where in most cases people do not even bother to vote because they feel that, whoever is elected, it will make no real difference to their lives. Yet Bush and Blair think they have the right to lecture the people of Venezuela on democracy!

This outstanding victory in Sunday's referendum is the eighth electoral victory

of Chávez and the Bolivarians in the last six years. Yet the opposition still persists in describing him as a "dictator". This flies in the face of the facts. Whatever you think about Hugo Chávez he is not a dictator. After almost six years in government, President Chávez has not only maintained his popular support but increased it. He won 56 percent in the 1998 elections and 59 percent in the 2000 re-election. Now his support is near 60 percent.

Opposition Defeated

Defeated in every election, the opposition has tried to remove Chávez from power through a coup d'état in 2002, followed by a management-led shutdown of the state oil company PDVSA. When these attempts failed the opposition put all their weight behind the recall referendum to oust the democratically elected President before the end of his term.

This is ironic. The constitutional right to a recall referendum only exists thanks to the new Constitution drafted by an elected Constituent Assembly during Hugo Chávez's first year in office, and approved by popular referendum. The recall of elected officials was an idea proposed by Chávez to the Assembly, and it was supported by the majority



and rejected by the opposition, which then hypocritically used that right to attempt to oust the President. By the way, if these "democrats" had won, the first thing they would have done is to abolish the right of recall referendum!

These gentlemen call themselves democrats but in practice show that "democracy" is only acceptable to them as long as their side wins. Right up to the last minute the opposition continued its manoeuvres. Before the official announcement was made by the CNE, a separate announcement was made by CNE board members Sobella Mejias and Ezequiel Zamora, questioning the result. It is an open secret that both Mejia and Zamora are aligned with the opposition. By such dirty tricks the opposition seeks to discredit the referendum and thus prepare the way for future acts of sabotage.

Once again the working class and poor people of Venezuela displayed an unerring class instinct. It was reported that in the working-class neighbourhood of Petare, people were queuing from 4 am. When it became clear that the opposition had been defeated, the mood of the masses erupted. The streets around the Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas were full of pro-Chávez demonstrators celebrating this new victory for the Bolivarian revolution. Venezuelanalysis.com reports: "Chavistas have taken to the streets of working class neighbourhoods blowing horns and playing music. Fireworks and firecrackers can also be heard in working class sections of Caracas, resembling a New Year's celebration."



Blow to the counterrevolution

There is no doubt that this result represents a body blow to the counterrevolutionaries, a section of which was clearly reluctant to accept the result. Intense negotiations were reported to be taking place between the Carter Centre and the Organization of American States (OAS) and the opposition coalition Democratic Coordinator to convince them to accept Chávez's victory.

It is quite natural that the masses should celebrate. They had yet again delivered a heavy blow against the counterrevolution and blocked it on the electoral plane. But strangely enough, Chávez opponents were also reported to be on the streets, ordered out by their leaders to celebrate their own "victory". Rank and file chavista groups have denounced the call as a plan to cause public disruptions and possible roadblocks as was done earlier this year. An opposition leader's call for a "civil rebellion" to protest the delays in the voting process clearly confirm these fears.

The counterrevolution-

aries-were hoping to use the referendum to engineer new clashes and disorders. Their ever-present hope is to cause sufficient chaos to provoke a coup. This would have been the scenario especially if the result had been close.

Opposition leaders Humberto Calderon Berti and Cesar Perez Vivas from the COPEI party gave a press conference Sunday night to thank international observers present in this "historic election". The miserable expression on Berti's face told its own story. It was not supposed to be like this! The counterrevolutionaries hoped that their control of the mass media would give them a sufficient advantage to win the referendum. In addition they counted on the scarcely concealed support of Washington and most of the governments of Latin America, in the person of Jimmy Carter and the OAS.

The role of the foreign "observers"

We have still to hear the verdict of international observers, including former US President Jimmy Carter and the Organization of American States. More

than 400 international observers, including a mission from the Organization of American States, descended upon Venezuela to "observe" the recall, referendum process. This was really an unprecedented level of foreign interference in Venezuela's internal affairs. This recall referendum was the most closely monitored electoral process in the western hemisphere. There was certainly no such monitoring of the last US Presidential elections, which were rigged to allow George W. Bush to get possession of the White House. But such little contradictions do not bother Venezuela's foreign critics too much.

The best-known element in the "observer mission" is the Carter Centre, founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. This former peanut farmer made a mediocre President, but as a diplomatic manoeuvrer he has excellent qualifications. President Chávez told me how Jimmy Carter wept when he learned of the appalling conditions of the Venezuelan poor. His ability to weep at given intervals is part of his inheritance from the US's Southern Bible Belt. No doubt his ancestors also wept for the plight of the poor at the same time as they enriched themselves on the backs of their black slaves. This special brand of Christian hypocrisy is a most useful weapon in the armoury of international diplomacy, and one that Mr. Carter has mastered to the utmost perfection.

Hypocrisy is, in fact, very much in demand in Venezuela at the present time. The counterrevolution cannot afford to appear publicly in its real guise, but must disguise itself as

Venezuela

"true democracy", even though its real aim is to install a dictatorship in Venezuela. Numerous counterrevolutionary organizations have sprung up posing as "human rights" groups and so on. In order to deceive public opinion, things must be turned into their opposite: an election defeat must be presented as a victory, and a victory as a defeat, dictatorship must be presented as democracy and democracy as dictatorship, and so on.

One of those who specialise in this special brand of hypocrisy and deceit is Súmate, which is supposed to be an objective non-partisan civil association but in reality it is a pro-opposition group, financed by Washington. The co-director of Súmate, Maria Corina Machado, was a participant in the 2002 coup that briefly overthrew Chávez - she signed the decrees of would-be dictator Pedro Carmona. She is currently being investigated for treason, for having received funds from a foreign government (the U.S.) earmarked for ousting the Chávez government.

Súmate used its funds generously supplied by US donors to organize a large team of "volunteers" whose aim was to collect the largest possible number of "yes" votes in exit polls. These "objective results" could then be presented as "proof" that the opposition had won, and used as propaganda for organizing disturbances when a Chávez victory was announced.

Despite its public image of an "impartial body", the Carter Centre is a tool of Washington. The Carter Centre relies on U.S. government funding. And as the English proverb goes: he who pays the piper calls the tune. It is well known



that the entire U.S. political establishment opposes Chávez and supports the opposition.

In testimony before a U.S. subcommittee hearing on March 15, 2000, the Carter Centre's lead observer, University of Georgia political science professor Jennifer McCoy, clearly placed the Venezuelan government in the category of "new, subtler forms of authoritarianism through the electoral option..." In her declared quest to "deter new hybrid democracies," McCoy called for continued U.S. government support of the Carter Centre, claiming that such funding represented a "neutral and professional means to improve the electoral process."

Dr. McCoy has called for U.S. pressure on the Chávez government, though there had never

been any significant allegations of electoral fraud in either Chávez's 1998 election or in the plebiscites that his government sponsored in following years. She also portrayed the Chávez government in the same light as the Peruvian ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori!

Carter urges caution

The fact that the sympathies of Carter and the OAS were all on the side of the opposition is not seriously in doubt. However, the plans of the opposition to make use of the foreign "observers" were dashed by the mass response to the referendum campaign. The campaign itself was conducted in a scrupulously fair and democratic manner. None of the hoped-for irregularities were found.

Early on Sunday, after

visiting several voting centres, Carter was forced to admit that the voting queues in Venezuela were "unprecedentedly long and orderly". Carter, who heads the Carter Center mission to observe Venezuela's historic recall referendum, added that "from the first hours of the day we have visited several voting centres of Caracas and there are thousands of people waiting with plenty of patience and in peace." OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria stated on Sunday that the referendum results would be "trustworthy".

What else could these ladies and gentlemen say? The original intention of the OAS and the Carter Centre was to put pressure on the Caracas government to reach a "compromise" with the opposition, or, if possible, to rig the referendum in favour of the latter. If the result had been a close one, they might have tried to announce an opposition victory before the official result had been announced. This was probably the reason why the announcement of the result was delayed.

A section of the hardliners must have been demanding that the OAS and Carter should collaborate with such a manoeuvre. Some sectors of the opposition had apparently announced their intention to release the results of their own exit polls five hours before the voting centres were scheduled to close. This seems to have been the position of the opposition leader Enrique Mendoza. This would have been a clear provocation. But both the Carter Centre and the Organization of American States have understood that it is pointless and counterproductive to try to deny the result of

the referendum.

At half past one in the morning, officials from the Carter Centre and OAS emerged from a meeting with the National Electoral Council. They were desperately trying to convince the Democratic Coordinator opposition coalition to accept Chávez's victory. There must have been a heated exchange in the small hours of the morning. But Carter could not oblige the hard liners. He is undoubtedly an imperialist scoundrel, but he is not a complete fool. A blatant attempt to hand victory to the opposition through fraud would have immediately provoked an explosion that could not be controlled.

Carter, a relatively astute representative of US imperialism therefore had to put pressure on the opposition to calm down. The Venezuelan newspaper *Diario Vea* stated that Dr. McCoy, had indirectly criticized the opposition's decision to release early and unofficial results. Dr. McCoy reportedly declared that all political actors should wait for the announcement of results by the accredited governmental body, the National Electoral Council.

Both the Carter Centre and the Organization of American States understood that it was pointless and counterproductive to try to deny the result of the referendum. But that was only a tactical decision. They understood that a coup was out of the question at this moment in time, because the class balance of forces was not favourable. Thus, a Chávez victory will have to be grudgingly accepted by at least one sector of the opposition. The best that they can hope for is to cast some doubt on the process, exaggerating irregularities, shouting fraud etc. This they

are already doing. In fact, they were already doing it before the referendum even took place.

What now?

As we predicted in our last article (As August 15 approaches: Why Marxists are fighting for a "No" next Sunday), the imperialists understand that the time is not ripe for a new coup, which would lead to civil war - a civil war that they would certainly lose. Therefore, they have decided to adopt a different tactic. Having failed to take their objective by assault, they will resort to siege warfare. The struggle has not ended - merely passed onto a different plane. The counterrevolutionaries and their imperialist allies will wait until the correlation of class forces is more favourable. They will move again. But for now they must beat a tactical retreat and lick their wounds.

Does this mean that everything is solved and that the opposition has been decisively defeated? No, it means no such thing. What the referendum campaign has shown is that Venezuelan society is extremely polarized between right and left. This polarization will not disappear after the referendum, but steadily increase. In that sense, the referendum has solved nothing. The counterrevolutionaries will regroup their forces and prepare for a new offensive once the conditions are more favourable.

On the international plane they will not cease their noisy campaign against the Venezuelan revolution, or drop their claims that Chávez has authoritarian tendencies. With the aid of organizations like Súmate, they will publish fake exit polls that directly contradict the official results

to show that the result was based on fraud. They will continue to sabotage and obstruct the progress of the revolution, attempting to cause economic and social chaos. They will never be satisfied until Chávez has been overthrown and the gains of the Bolivarian revolution completely liquidated.

The latest victory of the Chávez government places the bourgeois opposition in a difficult position. This is the fourth time that a free election in Venezuela has given a decisive majority to Chávez. The Venezuelan bourgeoisie is getting increasingly desperate. The class war is intensifying all the time. The workers and peasants, encouraged by the result of the referendum, will demand more reforms and a deepening of the revolutionary process. The bourgeoisie and the imperialists will demand a halt and a reversal. The government will find itself ground between two millstones.

The massive voter participation on Sunday is a clear reflection of the extreme political polarization of Venezuelan society to the right and left. The immediate question was the permanence of President Hugo Chávez in office, but far deeper questions are involved, and these questions remain to be solved. It was necessary to win the referendum, but the referendum result will not solve these fundamental problems. It will only pose them in an even sharper way.

Those leaders of the Bolivarian movement who argued that, by holding the referendum, the enemies of the revolution would be silenced, have been shown to be wrong. The internal and external enemies of the Venezuelan revolution cannot be reconciled by elections, referendums and

negotiations. They will only be satisfied when the revolution is defeated. Not to recognise this is the height of irresponsibility.

On previous occasions when the masses defeated the counterrevolution there was a golden opportunity to carry through the revolution to the end and finish the power of the oligarchy once and for all. But on each occasion the opportunity was thrown away. The leaders allowed themselves to be seduced by the siren voices that argued for "moderation" and "negotiation". The inevitable result was a new offensive of the counterrevolution.

One cannot make half a revolution

It is time to learn the lessons! One cannot make half a revolution. As long as the oligarchy continues to maintain its hold on important sections of the economy, it will continue to act as a Trojan Horse of US imperialism, sabotaging and undermining the Bolivarian revolution. It is time to ask ourselves the key question: can we allow the interests of a handful of rich parasites to decide the destinies of millions of people? Or will we put an end to this situation once and for all, expropriating the property of the counterrevolutionaries and taking the road of socialist democracy?

The 15th of August will enter the annals of revolutionary history as a great victory for the working people - on one condition: that we do not waste it, that we do not hand the initiative back to our enemies, but strike blows against them that will destroy the basis of their power. That is the only way we can build upon our victory, and turn it into a decisive revolutionary transformation of society. ■

HANDS OFF VENEZUELA

Venezuela Week of Solidarity (9th-15th August 2004) report

by Charlie Allen

THE VENEZUELA Week of Solidarity kicked off on Monday night with an exhibition of Latin American art at the rampART creative centre in Whitechapel. Highlights included the collection of skeletons which artist Victor Carlin explained was inspired by the Mexican 'Day of the Dead', Raul Piña's shamanic performance and the Teresa Teran works, the Venezuelan artist who curated the exhibition.

"Venezuela Bolivariana: People and Struggle of the Fourth World War" by Marcelo Andrade, which set the keynote for the week was screened. In that film the reality of class-conflict in Venezuela and how the government there is defending its people against corporate-colonial greed is quite well reflected.

Solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela

Tuesday was a day in solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela, highlighting the special relationship these countries have, both being 'liberated' from US imperialism. In the afternoon at the rampARTs we showed Oliver Stone's film "Comandante". Following that was a documentary about Cuban hip-hop artists, "Hip Hop Cubano", and we heard from Basi Amodu about the sizable hip-hop community there.

After a debate on the film, we launched a discussion of Cuba and Venezuela. JJ from Rock Around the Blockade spoke about the historical connections between the two countries and how the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people is complemented by a love of music, dancing and passionately celebrating life. Alan Woods from Hands Off Venezuela underlined this by pointing out that "revolution is the biggest fiesta there is", before explaining how capitalism effectively destroys this joyful spirit. He gave plenty of examples and a

scientific analysis of the destructive nature of capitalism, as well as an understanding of how grassroots activists and trade-unions could unite into an unstoppable force. Beat-poet Paradox awed the circle with some rapping on this very subject, and as the debate heated up delicious Venezuelan food appeared. The night ended in a Caribbean style party with drummers, sambistas and hip hop artists.

On Wednesday at 7pm, Rock Around the Blockade had arranged a meeting on "Creating a Caring Economy" at the London School of Economics. The discussion afterwards was very lively, with an agreement that it was vital to raise the level of awareness about what's happening right now in Haiti, and also in Colombia.

On Thursday we were back at the rampARTs with a round-table on the future of the Latin American solidarity movement here, with contributions from Colombia Solidarity Campaign, Bolivian Solidarity Campaign, Hands Off Venezuela and others. This began with a debriefing from David Rhys-Jones of the CSC on the flashpoint border region of Arauca, on the Venezuela/Colombia border. That night we were horrified to hear that in Arauca, just one week previously, three trade union leaders had been murdered by the Colombian Army. The Army claimed the three were guerrilla fighters.

Amanca Sonia from the BSC talked about how coca cultivation was vital to Bolivians (many of who live in the high mountains) and explained that coca and cocaine were as different from each other as sugar and alcohol, although they come from the same plant.

Jenny James from the Atlantis community shared with us some of her experiences living in the jungle there, both tragic and hopeful.

Her daughter Louisa performed some heart-breaking songs in English and Spanish on her guitar, and gorgeous food was served up by the rampARTs chefs.

Friday was our day on the media, and all afternoon we screened documentaries about Venezuela at the rampARTs, including "Another Way is Possible... in Venezuela" and Marcelo's brilliant "Venezuela Bolivariana..." (again). The evening was used to unofficially launch the new Venezuelan Indymedias, a Spanish-speaking one temporarily hosted in Puerto Rico and an English-language site here in the UK.

No to US intervention Hands off Venezuela

Saturday's workshops at the European Creative Forum, held at Project 142 in Clapton, went far beyond any of our expectations. We all got our hands messy painting T-shirts with FunkyGandhi, who brought some excellent-quality "ethical" shirts for us to experiment on (100% organic cotton, fairly-traded) which all the kids there especially enjoyed. The creative mood continued right up until the end of the night with us all taking turns painting a striking and colourful banner for Sunday's demo which read, "No to US Intervention, Yes to Bolivarian Liberation, Hands Off Venezuela!"

In the evening the Global Women's Strike premiered their new documentary, "Enter the Oil Workers", about how Venezuelan oil workers broke the lockout and sabotage of their industry by the bosses and corrupt union officials, and ended up running it themselves even better than before! This inspiring film sparked an in-depth and fascinating discussion afterwards.

Sunday was the day of the referendum. At 2pm, we started marching towards the US

www.handsoffvenezuela.org

embassy, samba booming out all the way. The four Metropolitan officers who met us outside were very polite and gave us hardly any interference. One was even spotted shaking her hips to the revolutionary tropical beat!

An open-mic was hooked up and we heard from around a dozen speakers, including activists from Hands Off Venezuela, Rock Around the Blockade, the Global Women's Strike and Payday network. Some Venezuelans who had just voted for Chávez joined us and even provided a CD of the classic "Uh! Ah! Chávez No Se Va!" song which we played, loudly, a few times before joining in with the English translation: "Hell No! Chávez - He Won't Go!"

Later on we regrouped at the rampARTs for the closing party of the art exhibition, full of excitement and anticipation of the referendum results from Venezuela.

Unfortunately because of the delayed poll closing in Venezuela we had to leave before the final result (eventually announced 9am Monday our time). However news was coming in all night, and we all left confident of a Chávez victory. When I heard the next morning that Chávez had won I knew that, barring any more desperate acts of sabotage, the Bolivarian Revolution was here to stay, and was personally very happy just to play a part in supporting it, from here in London. □

The Venezuelan Solidarity Campaign arrives in Glasgow

by our Scottish correspondent

On August 12 a 'video-forum' in solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution took place in Glasgow. During the meeting "The Revolution will not be televised" was screened. This documentary was made by two Irish journalists from RTE who were in Venezuela when the coup d'etat of April 11 2002 took place. Later on, the SSP film on Venezuela called "Tommy goes Caracas" was also screened. There was also an 'open mic' for those attending to put forward their thoughts on the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. A supporter of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign stressed the urgent necessity for the Venezuelan Revolution to abolish capitalism, to take the revolution to its logical conclusion, as well as the need to spread solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution all around the labour movement in Britain. Sixty people attended the event which culminated with some rousing tunes from a group of Venezuelan musicians. □

Rally opposite the US embassy in Mexico City

Report by the Hands off Venezuela campaign in Mexico City
1300 workers shouted Chávez no se va, ni tampoco la revolución (Chavez will not go, nor will the revolution).

THE RALLY organized in defence of the revolutionary bolivarian process and in support of the "NO" vote in the recall referendum took place opposite the Ángel de la Independencia (a well known monument and symbol of mobilizations in Mexico City) and next to the US embassy. The rally started at 11:30 am with the attendance of 1300 people from various left organizations which included workers, unemployed, students from the main universities, workers petitioning for housing, organizations from the states of Hidalgo and Puebla, intellectuals, musical groups, plus Venezuelans and Puerto Ricans living in Mexico who support the Bolivarian revolution.

Three lanes of the main avenue needed to be closed for the three and half hours that the event lasted. There was a clear atmosphere of combativeness and solidarity with the Venezuelan workers. From the beginning of the rally we relied on the internet to receive updates on the latest news of the referendum. This news was received with a lot of attention by the demonstrators, who despite carrying Venezuelan banners, maintained an internationalist spirit. The speeches of the workers from the Institute of Mexican Social Security (IMSS), and from students who have been rejected by the National Polytechnic Institute, led by the Comité de Lucha (Committee of Struggle) were very well received, especially because they themselves could feel the attacks of impe-

rialism. In their speeches they outlined the importance of the rally and the lessons of the Venezuelan revolution.

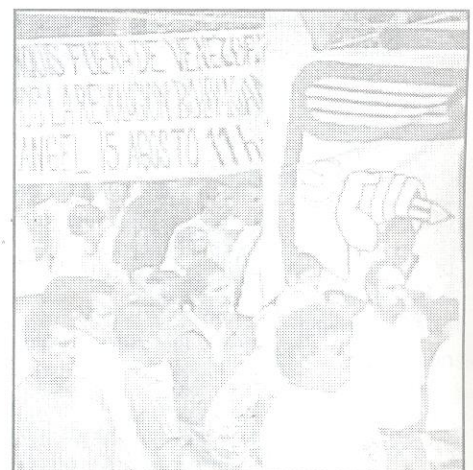
The interventions centred on the need to push forward the revolution along socialist lines as the only way to guarantee and deepen the current achievements of the current government in Venezuela, as well as the unification of the people of Latin America in a Socialist Federation – that is to say a Bolivarian union for a more just and dignified life for the workers of Latin America and the world.

There is no doubt that this has been the largest event in solidarity with Venezuela which has been organized in our country. The event was covered by the national media who interviewed the organizers.

The Hands off Venezuela campaign in Mexico collected 5000 signatures from trade unions, left organizations, university students, workers' districts etc, during the previous 2 months for a manifesto of solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution. These signatures were given to the Venezuelan and US embassies.

Some people who were very interested in organizing further activities affiliated to the Revolutionary Bolivarian Circles. These Bolivarian Circles have a principle task of organizing of further activities in defence the Bolivarian revolution, which is correctly considered as our revolution.

Four musical groups participated at the event, whose militant songs created a



good atmosphere when they rejected the US intervention in Venezuela. The list of speakers was endless as the demonstrators wanted to express their solidarity.

**Workers of the world unite!
Long Live the Bolivarian revolution!
Forward to Socialism!**

My Life

Introduction by Esteban Volkov

LEON TROTSKY once wrote: "The locomotive of history is truth, not lies." It is very important to re-establish the historical truth in the sea of confusion, falsifications and alterations within the framework of class struggle created by the oppressors and exploiters of the world in an attempt to maintain the status quo. The publication of a new edition of my grandfather's autobiography, *My Life*, is an important step in establishing the truth.

It is entirely untrue that Stalinism and Bolshevism are the same. Having usurped power, the privileged caste of officials dedicated themselves single-mindedly to the task of annihilating Lenin's Party. Stalin erected his dictatorship over the dead bodies of the leaders of the October Revolution. But one man remained to expose the crimes of Stalin and the bureaucracy.

For more than a decade, Stalin devoted unlimited economic and human resources to eliminate Trotsky. One by one, Trotsky's supporters and family fell victim to the GPU murder machine. Finally, on August 20, 1940, the great revolutionary fighter, theoretician, and martyr, Leon Trotsky, died of the wounds inflicted in a cowardly attack by a Stalinist agent.

The writer of these lines, Sieva Volkov is the last remaining survivor, the last remaining witness of the last chapter of Leon Trotsky's life in Mexico. I arrived in Mexico in August

1939 with the Rosmers who were close to Trotsky and Natalia, coming from Paris, where I had lived with Leon Sedov's widow. It was a big change. I was 13 at the time when I arrived at the house - Vienna 19 - in Coyoacan, Mexico. I remember it as a small community and a big family.

In this small vanguard of Socialism, there was a tremendous atmosphere of work, solidarity, and human worth. That is how I saw it at the time. But now I can see that it was so much more: it was the barracks of the political struggle. Natalia and Leon Trotsky were surrounded by

a group of young comrades from different nations, but mainly from the US. They were volunteers. And they participated in the house activities: guards, secretaries.

The house there was always a bustling hive of activity. They had not long moved from Frida's house. The new house was half ruined and there was a lot of refurbishment needed. One of the qualities that must be brought out about Lev Davidovich was his great admiration for human labour. He did not admit privileges or distinctions of any kind. I remember a problem that happened in the house once

with a septic well; Trotsky himself took up a pick and started the work of cleaning the sewage.

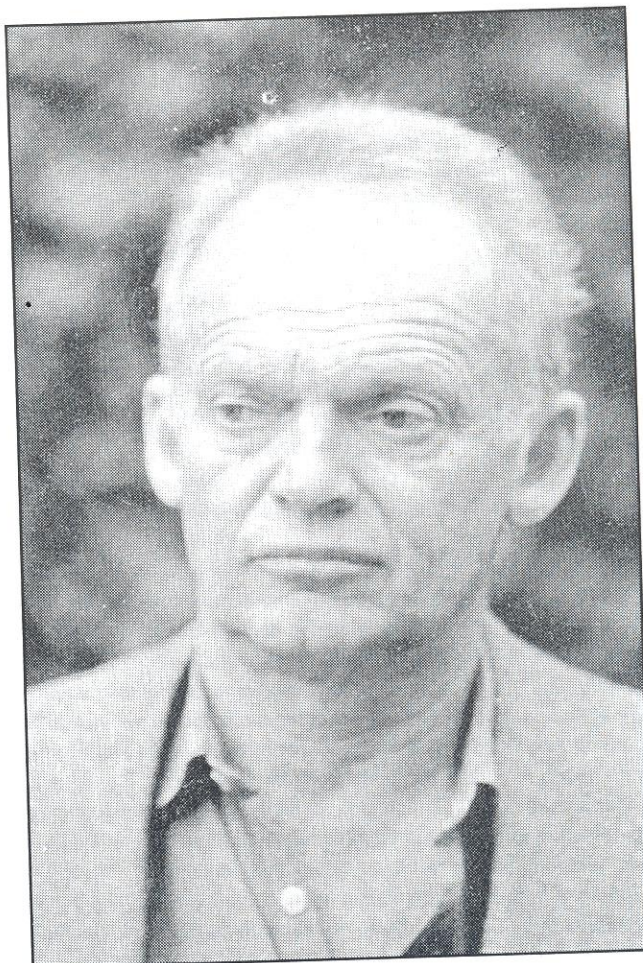
Everyone participated in the work. A Mexican comrade, Melquiades, built the chicken cages and the rabbit hutches. Alex Buckman, who was a professional photographer and an expert in electricity, installed the security system. The best photographic archive, and the last ones, were taken by Alex Buckman who died recently.

In the descriptions of the house that have been made elsewhere there have been many mistakes and falsifications. The house is frequently referred to as a fortress. In fact, it was not a fortress at all. We only had walls of a certain height and on the inside some wires were installed, which, if they were broken set the alarm off. Unfortunately, there were a lot of pigeons who did not know this, and those pigeons certainly gave us a lot of headaches.

Political education

Trotsky was very active and lively. He knew very well that his days were numbered, and he wanted to carry out as much work as possible in the little time left. He never forgot the political education of the comrades. And frequently there were meetings in the afternoon or evening in his office, where there were polemics and discussions.

One of the outstanding features of Lev Davidovich



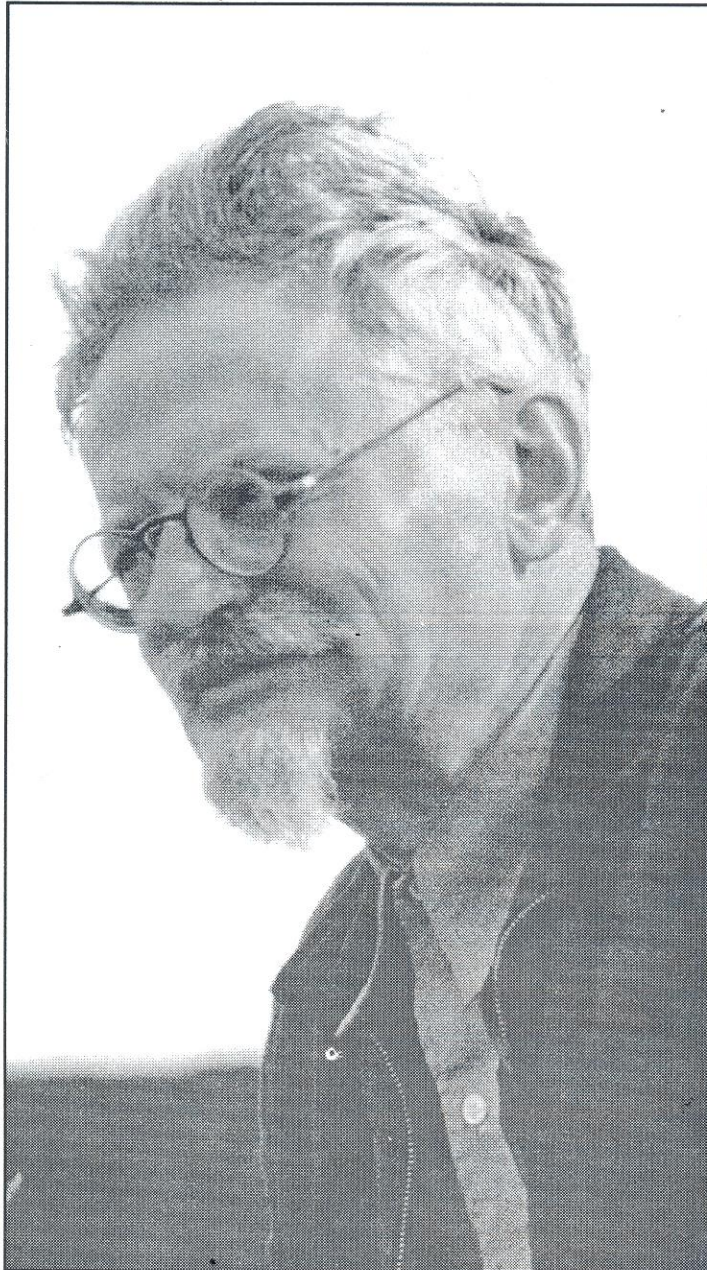
was his marvellous sense of humour, the interest he took in comrades, his human warmth; but at the same he was also very strict with norms and order. On one occasion a young American guard, Sheldon Hart, left the door open. Trotsky with a premonitory sense said that this mistake cannot be forgiven and that Hart himself might be the first victim. This warning proved to be only too true.

The Stalinist press in Mexico was always attacking and slandering Trotsky. Thousands of roubles were brought from Moscow and were distributed in a generous fashion to corrupt journalists. At the beginning of 1940 we saw an increase in the number of the slanders and attacks. Trotsky's comment was: "It seems that these journalists are about to exchange their pens for the machine gun." This laconic observation was soon proven to be correct.

On May 24 a gang of GPU assassins headed by the painter Alvaro Siqueiros entered the house. They took control of the house. One group took up a position behind a tree in front of the guardhouses. They established such a level of fire that the guards were unable to move. Another group went after LD and Natalia and they fired from three different angles with a Thompson into the darkness.

One of the assailants entered the room where I was sleeping and opened fire. Trotsky was sleepy as a result of the sleeping pills he had taken. His first impression was that this was some Mexican religious celebration with fireworks. But the smell of gunpowder and the closeness of the attack convinced him otherwise. It was a real miracle that Trotsky survived. This was partly because of the swift reaction of Natalia who pushed him under a table and protected him with her own body.

I remember when the



attackers left we immediately heard Trotsky's voice, and he managed to fire with his gun against the shadow moving through the canal near the house. Shortly afterwards all the members of the family met together with everyone else in the house. Trotsky was really euphoric at having escaped - this assault on his life. I remember that shortly afterwards the telephone rang and Trotsky picked it up and started to swear. He obviously thought that these were his attackers trying to get some information. But there was one detail which made the mood more sober and that was the

fact that Sheldon had been kidnapped by the attackers.

After the attack modifications were made to the house thanks to the help of the American Trotskyist party: iron doors, new windows, towers for the guards were installed...Trotsky was a little bit sceptical about the usefulness of all this work. He was convinced that the next attack would not be of the same kind. And he was right. No one could have imagined that Jackson, who was the partner of Sylvia Ageloff, without any political interests - a generous businessman, friendly to the guards, etc - was a GPU

agent. Finally he managed to carry out the wishes of Stalin.

On the 20th of August I was coming back from school, walking along Vienna Street, which is quite a long walk. When I was three blocks away from the house I noticed that something was happening. I rushed to the house, full of anxiety. There were several police officers by the door, which was open. There was a car wrongly parked. I entered and I saw Harold Robbins, one of the guards, who was carrying a gun and was very agitated. I asked him: "What's happening?" And he replied: "Jackson, Jackson..."

At first I did not understand and I continued walking. But when I entered the house I realised the awful truth. Natalia and the guards were attending to my grandfather. When Trotsky realised I was there, he told the guards to take me away. Even in those moments, he did not want his grandson to have to see what had happened. That shows the humanity of the man.

Later, I saw a man with two police officers with blood on his face. At first, I did not even realise it was Jackson. In their fury, the guards had beaten Jackson and Hansen actually broke his hand beating him up. Despite his terrible injuries, the Old Man still had the presence of mind to indicate that Jackson should not be killed. He was more useful alive. He must talk.

When I saw Jackson-Mercader he was in a very bad state, shouting and screaming hysterically. He caused a pitiful impression, more like a human dishrag than a man. When I think of the cowardly conduct of these great Stalinist "heroes", I always mentally compare their behaviour with that of the Trotskyists in Stalin's camps, who fought and died under the bullets of the GPU shouting "Long Live Lenin and Trotsky!" and singing the Internationale. This is the difference between conscious proletarian revolu-

tionaries and the hired gangsters of the Stalinist counterrevolution.

Defend the heritage of Bolshevism

To the very end the building of the revolutionary party, and a new International that would defend the priceless heritage of Marxism, Bolshevism and the October revolution, was uppermost in Trotsky's mind. Some sentences that Trotsky made to the American comrades on the occasion of the foundation of the Fourth International come to mind:

"There was never a greater task on earth, our party requires from us that we give ourselves fully and as a whole. But in exchange it gives us the highest fulfilment. The consciousness that one participates in the building of a better future. And carries on one's shoulders a particle of the hopes of humankind. And that our life will not have been lived in vain."

The entire life of the revolutionist Leon Trotsky confirms these words. A life dedicated fully to revolution, and was finally sacrificed to the cause of the revolution. One big question comes to our mind. Was it worth carrying out the great revolution of October 1917? The October revolution ended up destroyed by Stalinism which in turn saw the death of tens of millions, as well as the annihilation of the great majority of revolutionary movements, helping the survival of capitalism in its most destructive and parasitical phase.

The answer is clear; there is no doubt about it. In order to take humanity out of the hell of capitalism and bureaucratic totalitarianism. In order to arrive at



a new civilization, where mankind will no longer be used as value and occupy its rightful place. To achieve this no sacrifice will be too high or wasted.

I am not an expert in religion, but I think they contain a great truth. The existence of hell. The only little mistake is about its location. It is not underground but here on the surface, under the domination of the empire of private production and capital. In this hell lives three-quarters of humanity or maybe more. All the technological and scientific advances made are used to exploit the workers and the natural resources more efficiently. The big choice is between death by hunger, and death by smart bombs.

What failed in Russia was not socialism but only a monstrous totalitarian-bureaucratic caricature of socialism. Trotsky more than anyone else understood the role of bureaucracy as a brake on the revolution. In the last part

of his life, which he considered the most important, he set about the task of building a new revolutionary vanguard, as well as continuing the fight against, and to unmask, the bureaucratic regime of Stalin. His struggle made the tyrant in the Kremlin tremble because of his courage, his unswerving determination to defend the authentic traditions and ideals of October. This made the assassination of Lev Davidovich the main task of Stalin.

Stalin and his executors have long since gone to the place where they belong - the chamber of horrors of the Nero's and Caligula's. The monstrous attempt of the Stalinists to extinguish the flame of world revolution, by assassinating its greatest defender, failed. Their ideas have been dumped in the refuse bin of history. But the ideas of Trotsky and of genuine Bolshevism live on and are more relevant today than ever.

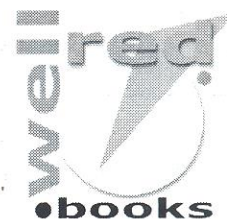
I recall a comment that my grandfather made to André Malraux when the famous French writer asked him his feelings about death. Maybe Malraux intended to unsettle my grandfather with such a question, and that he would be lost for an answer, but if so he did not succeed. Trotsky, in a calm fashion, said that death is not a problem at all when a man has fulfilled his purpose in life. In this short answer we see the essence of Trotsky's outlook.

Trotsky's Testament

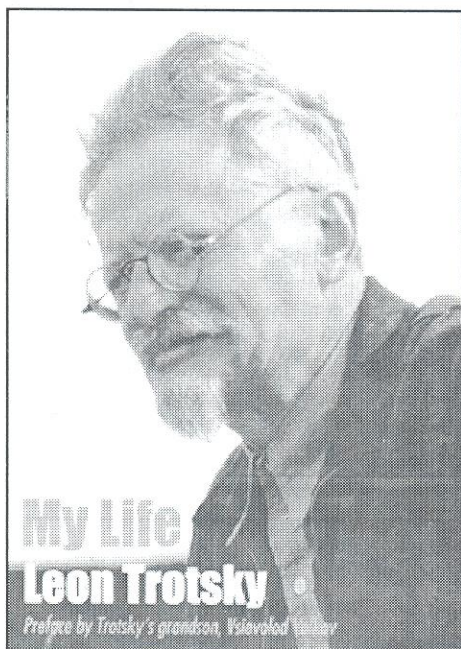
It would, I think, be fitting to end this brief preface to My Life with the last sentences of Trotsky's testament.

"For forty-three years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for forty-two of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I had to begin all over again I would of course try and avoid this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectical materialist, and, consequently, an irreconcilable atheist. My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent; indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth.

"Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence and enjoy it to the full." □



New from Wellred books!



My Life by Leon Trotsky

Since Leon Trotsky's *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, who 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 in the "universities" of Tsarist prisons, Siberia and then foreign exile - to his involvement in the European revolutionary movement, his central role in the tempestuous 1905 Revolution, the Bolshevik victory in October 1917 and the Civil War which followed. Trotsky's work concludes with the heroic struggle against Stalinism and his eventual exile and deportation from the Soviet Union.

"The publication of a new edition of my grandfather's autobiography, *My Life*, is an important step in establishing the truth", writes Esteban (Sieve) Volkov in a new preface to this book, the last remaining survivor, the last remaining witness, of the last chapter of Leon Trotsky's life in Mexico.

Pub. Date: 2004
Format: Paperback
No. Pages: 512
List Price £14.99

Our Price £9.99

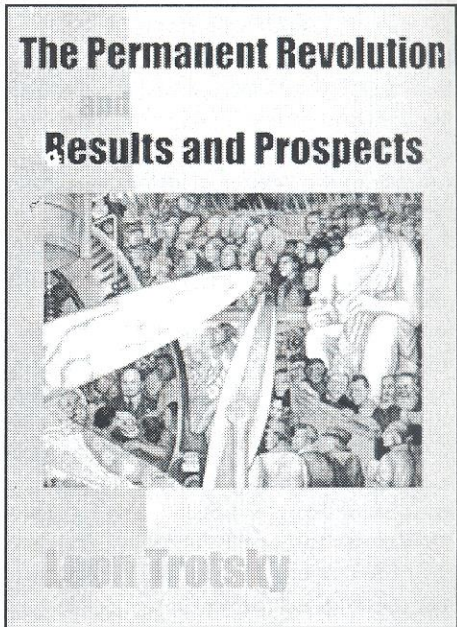
The Permanent Revolution by Leon Trotsky

Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution is one of the most important additions to the arsenal of Marxism. It was first developed by Trotsky in 1904, on the eve of the first Russian Revolution. At that time, all the tendencies of the Russian Social Democracy had the perspective of a bourgeois democratic revolution. Trotsky alone in 1905 put forward the idea that the Russian working class could come to power before the workers of Western Europe. The correctness of Trotsky's theory was brilliantly demonstrated in 1917, when the Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky led the Russian proletariat to power in the first workers' state in the world.

However, after the death of Lenin in 1924, the theory of the permanent revolution was subject to a vitriolic onslaught by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which had in effect renounced world revolution in favour of "socialism in one country". The attack on the theory came to epitomise the struggle against "Trotskyism". Today, however, with the collapse of Stalinism (and with it "socialism in one country"), Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution has become more relevant than ever.

Pub. Date: 2004
Format: Paperback
No. Pages: 278
List Price £9.99

Our Price £7.99



Wellred Books on line at wellred.marxist.com

- I would like to purchase a copy/..... copies of *My Life*
- I would like to purchase a copy/..... copies of *The Permanent Revolution*

Please add 20% for p&p
Make cheques payable to Wellred

Name.....

Total enclosed £.....

Address.....

.....

.....

email.....

**Send your orders to PO Box 50525
London E14 6WG**

After the compromise at Najaf - What future for the Iraqi resistance movement?

by Fred Weston

AS WE go to press the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has managed to broker a deal which may put an end to the conflict that has been going on in Najaf for over three weeks. Al-Sistani suddenly rushed back to Iraq on Wednesday after having spent the last three weeks in London for medical treatment and had remained there throughout the present crisis, remaining silent throughout. As a result his popularity was beginning to decline and Muqtada al-Sadr leading the fighting in Najaf was growing more popular.

Already, before his return, al-Sistani was clearly collaborating with the interim government and their imperialist backers. His staying away from Iraq for so long, while the fighting in Najaf and other towns was going on, was seen as a way of giving the Allawi government and the US a free hand in dealing with the insurgents in the Imam Ali mosque. But brute force alone could not solve the crisis. Al-Sistani had to come back in person.

Al-Sistani, in spite of his collaboration with imperialism, has for some time been Iraq's most popular figure. He is at the top of the hierarchy of Ayatollahs in Iraq, the highest religious authority, and therefore still has a big influence over the Shia population. He is also considered a moderate, and with his large influence over the Shias is seen as a key element in the process of pacification of the country. This means that in spite of any rhetoric, he is de facto collaborating with the government and therefore with the Americans. This

explains why the more radical sounding al-Sadr has started to grow in popularity.

What we are witnessing is a struggle within the Shia clergy for control. This conflict is a real one that involves mass forces. On August 26, al-Sistani led hundreds of thousands of his followers to the holy city of Najaf and to the Imam Ali mosque. It was a show of strength intended as a means of getting al-Sadr to call off his militia. Al-Sistani has now managed to patch together this compromise. This seems to have put an end to the present fighting in Najaf, although fighting in other towns, such as Kufa still seems to be continuing.

One of the key conditions the government was demanding, that the Mahdi Army disarms, has also been accepted by al-Sadr. Al-Sadr has agreed to evacuate the mosque and in exchange for this will be given some political role. But the militia, the Mahdi Army, is refusing to disband. Thus although the present crisis in Najaf may have been defused for now, the underlying problem will not go away.

Let us recall that the fighting was not isolated to Najaf. During the month of August there has been intense fighting in the district of Sadr City in Baghdad, as well as in Basra in the south, Nassiriya, and Samarra to the north of Baghdad, and other towns. The fighting has involved both Sunni and Shia communities. Thus it was not in any way a conflict between Iraqis; it was and remains a struggle against the imperialist aggressor.

A whole people, once mobilised cannot be held down by brute force alone. That is why they have had to retreat from an open armed conflict to take the mosque and instead have had to use the services of the moderate wing of the Islamic clergy. This is not a good position to be in. So long as this wing has sway over the majority then an unstable equilibrium can be maintained. But the masses will support al-Sistani only so long as they believe he has the best solutions to the present crisis. But by collaborating with the government and imperialism there will be no long lasting solution to the problems the Iraqi people are facing, and therefore the situation will not hold for ever. The masses will move again.

The nature of Muqtada al-Sadr

Whatever the outcome today in Najaf, the fact remains that the people of Iraq desire self-rule. They want the imperialists out. The tragedy of the situation is that the Iraqi labour movement - due to the limitations mainly of the leadership of the two largest Communist Parties, the Communist Party of Iraq and the Communist Workers' Party of Iraq - is not leading the resistance movement. But the Iraqi people, the poorest layers of society especially, cannot wait for the leaders of the left to assume their rightful role and therefore they turn to the only other seriously organised force, the Islamic clergy.

However, herein lies a contradiction between the

aspirations of the poor masses and the reactionary nature of the Islamic clergy, even its more radical wing. Muqtada al-Sadr is one of the more radical of such leaders. His base of support comes from the poorest layers of society, the "have-nots" as some bourgeois commentators like to call them. In Iraq these "have-nots" are counted in their millions. The Baghdad slum of Sadr City is an example of the kind of power base Sadr has. So too is the town of Kufa, near Najaf.

Al-Sadr on more than one occasion - even before the intervention of al-Sistani - has shown himself willing to transform his Mahdi Army into a political movement, a political party, and take part in the attempt to stabilise the country.

Here too we see the dilemma of the present Allawi government. It could do with support from leaders such as al-Sadr. He has a base within some of the most downtrodden layers of society, something that the government definitely lacks. But he has this base so long as he is seen to be opposing the occupation of Iraq. If he were to openly go over to the government he would begin to lose that support. The circle cannot be squared!

The problem for the Americans was that the movement in Najaf was not - and is not - controlled solely by one man. Al-Sadr both leads and is led at the same time. The existence of the Mahdi Army is not the creation of one man. It is an objective necessity of the poor masses that make it up. Their daily living conditions

are unbearable. The Mahdi Army instead of being weakened by the US onslaught was being strengthened. There is in fact no lack of volunteers for the Mahdi Army. The huge numbers of unemployed workers and youth of Iraq provide the new recruits for the resistance.

Shias and Sunnis coming together

Another effect of the stand off in Najaf was to bring together the Shia and the Sunni resistance groups. The heavy handedness of the US military, instead of weakening the resistance, has been strengthening it by the day. It has also been bringing together the disparate resistance groups. The contradictions between the desires and wishes of the Iraqi masses and the plans of US imperialism are too big to allow for any serious long lasting compromise. The masses want self-rule as a means of getting jobs, decent wages, housing, clean water and so on. The US imperialists - and their local lackeys - want control of the oil industry, big profits for their own companies operating in Iraq, and military bases as a means of defending their overall interests throughout the region.

We have several examples of the coming together of the Sunni and Shia resistance movements. As one former Iraqi security officer, a Sunni, involved in the defence of Sadr City in Baghdad, pointed out, "There is no difference between Sunni or Shia. We don't defend just Sadr City, we defend all Iraq."

This is all very paradoxical for the Americans. In the early days of the occupation the picture they were trying to present to us was one of a Shia population glad to be rid of Saddam Hussein and prepared to collaborate with the occupying forces. The

Shias were an oppressed section of the population that had suffered under Saddam Hussein, and being 60% of the overall population, it would seem that this would be a good base for the Americans to lean on. Instead, we have seen some of the most severe resistance coming precisely from this section of the population.

It is not difficult to see why this is so. The Iraqi Shias need jobs, housing, clean water, electricity, food. Without any of this all talk of "freedom" means very little. Their situation is one of being forced to live in poverty, in even worse conditions than before the fall of Saddam Hussein, while at the same time a foreign army of occupation is de facto running their country and guaranteeing the continuation of these conditions. Therefore Iraqis, Shias and Sunnis, are uniting in a common struggle, a struggle of national liberation.

The weakness of the Allawi government

Against this growing resistance and coming together of the different armed groups we have in stark contrast the position of the Allawi government. This so-called Iraqi government has no power. Without the US troops it would fall tomorrow morning.

The government has in reality given up any serious attempt to control the local areas directly. Real power is not in the hands of the government. There are two powers. One is made up of the armies of occupation; the other is made up of the local militias, mainly under the control of either Sunni or Shia clergy. In many areas the newly formed "Iraqi police" can only operate if they collaborate with the militias. The truth is - and this has been demonstrated

many times - the police actually sympathise with the resistance fighters.

This dilemma explains why in the end they called on the services of al-Sistani! But as we said, they can achieve temporary, unstable compromises, but they cannot resolve the basic underlying contradictions. Conflicts such as those we have witnessed in Najaf this month, and in Fallujah earlier this year, are bound to erupt again.

The masses that are still prepared to listen to al-Sistani will be expecting some concrete results from the compromise. But these will not come.

At the moment, due to the lack of any other credible alternative, the genuine grievances of the masses are being voiced by the Islamic clergy. But as we have seen, this clergy cannot be counted on to lead a genuine liberation movement. While they make radical sounding speeches they also negotiate with the government and their imperialist backers.

With such a leadership, the resistance movement has no clear guidance or strategy. It erupts here and there under the pressure of the masses.

The national liberation of Iraq could be achieved so much more quickly if it were under the leadership of the working class. If the leaders of the Iraqi labour movement were revolutionary Marxists they would be behaving differently. They would work towards calling a general strike of all the workers of Iraq, appealing also to the small shopkeepers and traders to support them. They would be actively participating in the resistance movement, giving it a class content. An all out general strike combined with an armed uprising throughout the whole of Iraq would mark the end of the foreign occupation.

This would be combined with an appeal to the workers of the surrounding countries. In Iran, already there is the beginning of a movement of the workers and youth against the rotten Islamic regime. Similar developments are beginning to emerge elsewhere in the region. An uprising and general strike, led by the workers of Iraq, would have an immediate appeal to all the workers of the Middle East and beyond. It would also have an impact on the soldiers who have been sent to Iraq to do the dirty work of imperialism.

Resistance needs socialist perspective

The task therefore is to open up a discussion within the ranks of the Iraqi trade unions, and within the left parties, in particular the Communist Party of Iraq and the Communist Workers' Party of Iraq, around these questions. It is unfortunate that the leaders of these parties limit their perspective to that of achieving some kind of bourgeois democracy in Iraq. They see this as the next stage. They have no real perspective of the struggle for socialism. This means that they are prepared to collaborate with the interim government, and therefore also with imperialism. The ranks of these parties must demand of their leaders a change of course.

By giving the resistance a socialist and working class perspective, the Iraqi Communists could play a crucial role in accelerating the whole process. From the barbarism created by the imperialist war against Iraq could come a focal point of class struggle for the workers of the whole region and of the world. □

fighting fund

Help us fund the revolution

AS THE fallout from the Thatcher coup scandal continues to spread out in all directions, one newspaper has already revealed, as I write these words, the existence of a so-called 'wonga' list of toffs who, it is alleged, chipped in to help fund the planned coup in Equatorial Guinea. Funny how these people are always able to find the dosh to fund an odd coup here or there but act as if they haven't a penny in the bank when it comes to pay negotiations with their workers. For them money is something to be accumulated and used in their own self interests - however much they already have it isn't enough, they want more and more..

Compare this to the attitude of those workers and youth who have helped support the work of Socialist Appeal over the last decade and beyond. The regular and special donations made through the years by people for whom these payments often represent a real sacrifice shows how ideas can inspire you. Because we are fighting for a socialist future people are motivated to make this investment to help end poverty, greed and exploitation.

This is an on-going task. We operate on very slim resources and need the income generated from our fighting fund appeal to, as the name implies, keep fighting. Over the last few months we have raised just over £3500. This included a single very large splendid donation from an anonymous supporter which has enabled us to invest in a new Duplo copyprinter. This machine will be used to produce high

quality leaflets, documents and our new theoretical magazine (see details elsewhere). Over the summer months it has already been put to work producing material on Venezuela, Pakistan and in support of workers on strike.

Also during the summer period a number of readers contributed what has amounted to several thousand pounds towards an annually held special appeal to support the struggle of Marxists worldwide. With events unfolding, as they have been, in Iraq and Venezuela this cash was essential and we salute all those who contributed towards this fund in the spirit of true workers internationalism.

Now as the nights draw in we look to the future. Next month we launch our winter appeal leading up to Xmas. So lets finish off this rather wet summer by getting as much cash in as we can this month. If every reader and seller chipped something in, however small, then the total amount raised would be something indeed. With this we could produce more material and help spread the ideas of socialism. We have no big backers - we rely on people like you! So please send what you can to us at PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG. Cheques/PO's should be made payable to Socialist Appeal.

Thanks in advance.

Steve Jones

Subscribe to Socialist Appeal



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

I want more information about Socialist Appeal's activities

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

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

Name.....

Address.....

.....

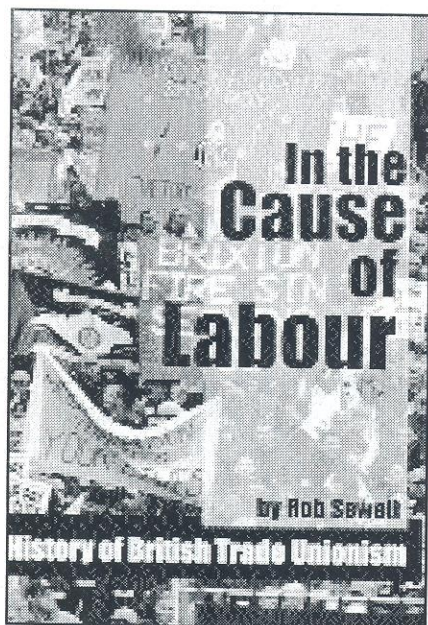
Tel.....

E-mail.....

Return to: Socialist Appeal,
PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG

In the Cause of Labour History of British Trade Unionism

By Rob Sewell



Price: £14.99

Approx. 400 pages

ISBN: 1 9000 07 14 2

SPECIAL FOR SOCIALIST

APPEAL READERS: £9.99!

Send a cheque for £9.99 + £2.50
p&p to Wellred Books, PO Box
50525, London E14 6WG

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

.....

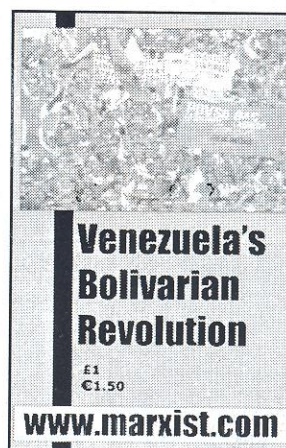
Phone:.....

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution

Price: 1 pound plus p&p

noticeboard

September 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 and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
- ✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining.
- ✚ **Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall.** No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.
- ✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.
- ✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.
- ✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay

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

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

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

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

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

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

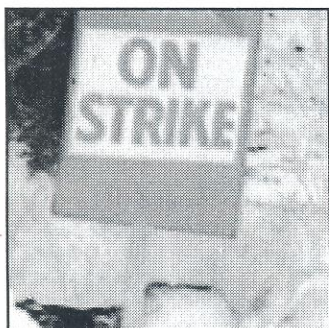
✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

Reinstate Sacked Wembley Workers!



Reinstate the sacked workforce!

Union action to defend the NAECI agreement!

Full NAECI conditions and rates for all workers on site!

TWO HUNDRED and forty steel workers on the Wembley stadium construction site were sacked last month after refusing to bow to attacks on their contracts. The new employer Hollandia/Fast Track was attempting to blackmail the workforce into accepting new conditions which would have undermined the NAECI agreement, or Blue Book, to which most of the major firms are signed up.

Cleveland Bridge who had been awarded the contract for the steel work pulled out last month after conflicts with industry cowboys Multiplex who are the main contractor. Cleveland laid-off the entire workforce but they were later taken on by the new contractor Fast Track who promised them the same terms and conditions.

Fast Track immediately went back on their word when a few weeks later they tried to force the men to work a standard 66-hour week including weekend working 3 weeks out of 4, they also tried to change the redundancy rules. Cleveland had always used last-in first-out which the workers were happy with, but Fast Track have introduced a points system - you will

get points against your name if you don't work overtime, or if you refuse to work in bad weather, or even if you are late for work.

This is blackmail because when the time comes for lay-offs they will attack the union activists first - and all the other 'troublemakers' who are concerned with little things like health and safety, fair pay, and having a few days off work in a month to spend with your family.

They are also trying to attack the workers by sowing division amongst them. Bringing in agency staff, often foreign and ununionised, and exploiting them to undermine the conditions of the other workers on site. This is a dirty trick of the employers to try to create resentment among the workforce - the union must launch an immediate campaign to recruit these workers and ensure that all workers on British sites get the NAECI rate.

The employers have been posturing for a long time in the construction industry to break the national agreements - these agreements were a victory which was only achieved by the struggle and determination of the workers themselves (shamefully

sometimes in a struggle against their own union leaders). They will be defended tooth and nail and the union officers and leadership must give their full backing to this.

Workers will not be surprised by what's gone on here - the employers have been doing this kind of thing for hundreds of years. What has surprised and shocked workers especially over the last few decades is the response of some of their leaders to the bosses attacks - all too often they've colluded with them.

Over the last period workers patience has begun to grow thin and big changes are taking place in the movement - the election of left wing leaders in most of the big unions has been an important victory. We must not let the opportunity slip, the bosses have had us on the back foot for too long - now is the time to take the struggle back to them - to let them know that we wont give any more ground.

Both Amicus and GMB must mobilise all their resources to help the sacked workers on the Wembley site - an injury to one is an injury to all.

www.marxist.com