

Venezuela • Iraq • NHS • US elections • Middle East

SocialistAppeal

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Disaster in Iraq

**TROOPS
OUT
NOW!**



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It Won't "Be Over By Xmas" - Imperialist troops out of Iraq!

IRAQ SINKS deeper into chaos and misery. In a war Bush, Blair and co claimed was over more than a year ago, the death toll mounts daily. As many as 10,000 civilians and 1,000 foreign troops have been killed, so far. For what? On October 6, Charles Duelfer, chief US weapons inspector, finally presented his report confirming what we all knew already. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. They even dashed the idea that there had been such weapons, but they had been moved. There was, they concluded, no evidence to suggest it. Bush, Blair and co grasp at the straw that Iraq had "the *potential to build these weapons*", but then so does any even semi-industrialised country.

The invasion and continuing war was based on a lie. Blair assiduously refuses to apologise for his deceit. "I can apologise for the information that turned out to be wrong, but I can't, sincerely at least, apologise for removing Saddam". Realising the weakness of their deception Bush and Blair changed their justification. They had got rid of Saddam and he was a monstrous dictator.

The imperialist powers are no more interested in removing dictators than they were in illusory weapons of mass destruction. They are on good terms with many dictatorial regimes. Others, with whom they do not have good relations, like North Korea, have very real weapons of mass destruction, even nuclear missiles, explaining why they are

spared the righteous crusade of Bush and Blair. In reality, this is nothing more than hypocrisy from the imperialists. Their real reasons for invading Iraq are obvious for all to see. The imperialists wage war for markets, raw materials and spheres of influence. We are asked to believe they invaded Iraq to bring peace? There is no peace. To bring stability? They have brought chaos and mayhem. To bring democracy? They have installed a puppet regime. The people of Iraq have no say and are left with no alternative but to fight back against these foreign invaders.

We are asked to believe that this is a war on terrorism, yet *Al Qaeda had no base in Iraq before*. They do now. Can anyone honestly claim that there is less terrorism in Iraq today?

It is not just isolated terrorist groups who are attacking British and US troops, however, but the Iraqi people, whose country has been invaded and wrecked. A proud and ancient civilisation has been devastated. There is more to come. The US are clearing preparing a massive assault on Fallujah where they have failed to hold sway, aided and abetted by Blair, Hoon and co.

This is the real meaning of the deployment of 800 British soldiers from the Black Watch to Baghdad under US command. They are going to relieve US troops needed for the attack they are preparing. Their intention, to paraphrase Tacitus, is to create a wasteland and call it peace. Already Fallujah is being bombed daily by F-

16s and helicopter gunships. Hundreds of civilians have been killed. The US is now intent on completing what it failed to do in the spring: the military occupation of Fallujah. The aim, they say, is to 'root out' Sunni 'terrorists'. They will find this far harder than they imagine. Even if US troops manage to occupy the city - with hundreds and possibly thousands of victims - there will be massive resistance. Meanwhile, the British army, it seems, is now just another division of the US military. In parliament, Defence Secretary Hoon promised in one sentence that the decision to move the troops was purely a *military one to be taken by the army*, and had not been taken yet, while in the next sentence confirmed that the decision had already been taken by himself and Blair!

Blair assures us that these troops were going to do a specific job and would "be out by Christmas". The short time frame - if it turns out to be true - gives us a clue what the Americans are planning in Fallujah - an all-out assault, with thousands more dead. For what? To get rid of Saddam? To find weapons of mass destruction? To capture Osama Bin Laden (who they don't mention much anymore)? To bring peace and stability? According to Blair, "every time you deal these people a blow by showing how we stand up for the values of freedom and democracy and they don't, then we deal a blow to their recruitment, to their propaganda. This cannot be defeated by weapons

alone. It has to be defeated by showing that what we are actually trying to do is to bring greater stability, freedom, prosperity and democracy to these countries." What they really leave in their wake is death, misery, chaos and destruction. The resistance to the occupation grows with every new raid, every new attack.

Not just inside Iraq, but here too, opposition continues to grow. A poll in the Mail on Sunday (24/10/04) found that almost two-thirds opposed the plans to send the Black Watch to Baghdad. A YouGov poll in October showed that support for the war is at its lowest yet, with just 38% now believing it was justified, while 52% think it was wrong. This compares to 66% who supported the war and 29% who opposed it when US and British forces invaded in April 2003. According to a Guardian/ICM poll, 71% want to see the troops withdrawn.

This is a catastrophe, a living nightmare, for the people of Iraq. Even from the imperialists own point of view the war is not going well. It is costing billions of dollars, and driving up the price of oil. Civil War looms. The arrogant intervention of imperialism has solved nothing and can solve nothing. The labour movement must step up the struggle to end this obscenity.

As internationalists it is our duty to fight for the withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Iraq, before Xmas.

Imperialist Troops Out of Iraq Now! □

CTRL Going of the rails as Westing House target agency worker...

by Kris Lawrie

TRADE UNION activity is building up at the Kings Cross Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) after a series of attacks on workers. The latest unrest was sparked off after a contractor - Westing House Rail Systems - victimised an agency electrical tester. RMT activist Steve Hedley was sacked when a piece of equipment went missing on a shift where he was team leader. In spite of his agency's offer to cover the cost of the equipment, for which it is liable, Westing House insisted that Hedley could not come back on site till he met the full cost from his own pocket. Steve refused to do this and was therefore sacked and told that he would never work for the company again.

This is all too common in the construction industry in the modern day. Agency workers are taken on in increasing numbers even in spite of the fact that they are often better paid than those on the cards. Agency workers can be sacked at a moments notice without any explanation and they are rarely in trade unions. The bosses are using them as a way of undermining the unions, and forcing through attacks on wages and conditions.

The only way of overcoming this problem is by recruiting agency workers into the union. This is a difficult task because many have never been in a union and don't have much of a collective consciousness. It doesn't help that workers on the same job are often on very different terms and conditions. Up till now many unions have talked about organising agency workers but they have not bitten the bullet.

Steve got the support of the London Joint Sites Committee for construction, and gathered together a number of supporters. We immediately picketed the gates around the CTRL site moving from gate to gate day by day, leafleting the workforce, demonstrating and blocking site traffic to raise press publicity for his dispute. Various industry journals, BBC London TV and Radio came down. We picketed the site with a 12-foot inflat-

able rat and a megaphone shouting slogans like chase the rats out of the industry! This caused hilarity among the workforce but the management were not laughing - they have constantly tried to move us with threats and by calling the police but we are not moving.

Many of the workers were sympathetic and took leaflets. During the course of the dispute we found out that Laing O'Rourke workers on the site have a dispute of their own running, where the management are trying to foist a national contract on them which will cut the basic rate of wages in half and attack other conditions. Basic rates of pay are to be cut to £7.50 an hour, this is a whacking cut and it will also lower the employers pension contributions which are linked to basic pay. Bonuses are going to be made discretionary which means that they can be reduced or withheld by the employer for any reason including union membership, taking days off for family emergency or even because your face doesn't fit.

The workforce is angry about the attempts to make them sign without any consultation - the management are trying to pick them off one by one and get them all signed up. The main O'Rourke union, UCATT, has signed a single union deal with the employers, and disgracefully is now recommending the contract.

We organised a meeting outside the site gates that was attended by around half the site, with most of the rest too frightened to come out but listening from inside the gate. The meeting was addressed by a leading member of the London Joint Sites Committee, sacked agency worker Steve Hedley and Steve Kelly an organiser from the GMB union. Workers from the site were reluctant to speak at this meeting because as they pointed out not only were the managers standing 20 metres away, but UCATT fulltime officers were there as well. In fact they seem to regard them both as one and in a subsequent well-attended

evening meeting the following day, to elect a provisional shop stewards committee, UCATT got almost as much of a savaging as O'Rourke themselves.

Over the last week we have broadened the campaign out to include leafleting of other O'Rourke sites around London at Canary Wharf, Holloway Road, Newham Hospital, and Heathrow Terminal Five.

Union organisation is weak across most of the industry. For a long time the unions have shirked the task of getting stuck into a struggle with the bosses over the basic issues of concern to members. Scandalously, in many cases they are working hand in glove with the employers. How can we blame workers for not wanting to join these unions? We need a return to militant organisation on the site - that can only come about as part of a serious struggle of the unions to raise wages, improve conditions, do away with agency labour, and sort out national agreements and force employers to implement them.

You can Help

Laing O'Rourke are a major contractor with an annual turnover of around £1.2 billion. The London Joint Sites Committee (LJSC) along with workers in Laing O'Rourke want to extend the campaign to sites across the UK. In order to help them Socialist Appeal will be putting a full list of O'Rourke projects on our websites (www.socialist.net & www.marxist.com) along with PDF copies of LJSC leaflets please let us know if you are able to assist in leafleting these sites - clocking on time is 7am till about 8am. □

Please send messages of support for Steve Hedley/Laing O'Rourke workers, or any other correspondence to:

stevehedley_18@hotmail.com
with a copy to
kl@socialist.net

General Motors: Workers fight back company cuts

GM EUROPE, makers of Vauxhall, announced this month that they are planning to cut 12,000 workers across the continent - the equivalent to 20% of the European workforce. GM Europe has been losing money for the last 4 years. The loss in 2002 was £51 million, by 2003 this had risen to £115 million. They are carrying through these attacks to put them back into profit.

Most of the job losses will hit plants in Sweden and Germany. At GM's two remaining UK plants there will be 340 job losses at Ellesmere Port and 94 at the Luton van plant. These come on top of an already massive closure programme of GM in the UK that saw the closure of its then largest plant in Luton nearly three years ago.

In response to the GM cuts 50,000 took action, at the end of last month, across 13 plants on the continent; 25,000 workers took to the streets in Bochum in Germany, which will be one of the main focuses of the job losses while 20,000 demonstrated in Rüsselsheim. At Bochum a spontaneous reaction of the workforce resulted in a seven-day strike that was only brought to an end after leaders of the IG Metall union undermined the strike by failing to give it backing. The IG Metall leader Ludyer Hinse was quoted as saying "I am sick of hearing all the talk about wildcat strikes. The unions want to keep things orderly here." The ballot that was put to the workforce posed the question "Should the works committee continue talks with the company and work be resumed?" This loaded question meant that workers voting against would be voting not to resume talks with the company. The action in Bochum forced a layoff at the plants in Ellesmere Port and Antwerp because of consequent component shortages of axles and exhausts after only six days, which was only lifted after the Bochum workers resumed work. This shows how easy it is for workers to put the screws on the company.

The numbers of car workers have been reduced both through productivity gains and by cuts in capacity over the

past years. Lean production has made production far more efficient because production and delivery is planned down to the finest detail. However these things have all come together to put far greater power into the hands of a smaller group of workers, because large stockpiles are no longer kept any stoppage, even in a small plant, has the power to hit production immediately.

The unions must exploit this situation. It is now easier to halt production by calling out strategic sections of the workforce. The industry is fighting a defensive struggle at the moment to preserve conditions that are coming under attack. Up to now the unions have taken a soft approach of partnership and compromise - in Britain especially the unions have presided over deals that increase flexible working practises and hold wages low. Workers have gone along with many of these deals out of an honest desire to save their jobs.

No job losses

The announcement of the cuts at GM come at the same time as the announcement of the loss of over 1,000 jobs at Jaguar in the Brown's Lane plant in Coventry. This in spite of the 1998 agreement which owners Ford signed guaranteeing the position of West Midland plants. This is the same old story; the bosses sign up to deals when there is money on offer, or when they want to blackmail the workers into accepting attacks - as soon as the bottom line takes them elsewhere deals are conveniently forgotten. It is important to get the bosses to sign up to such deals, but at the end of the day we must be prepared to back these up with force which is the only thing the employers understand.

Over the last decade the heart has been ripped out of the British motor industry with the closure of the biggest plants and the gradual chipping away at most of those which remain and the transfer of production into low wage economy's such as Poland, where wages

at the GM Gliwice plant, which opened in 1998, are as low as £2.88 per hour.

At the Rüsselsheim plant, in Germany, the IG Metall chairman of the Opel joint works committee, Klaus Franz, told the workers: "We were and are prepared to find a solution via dialogue." He said workers had to be prepared to make sacrifices - as long as income reductions did not exceed 10 percent! This cannot be allowed to go on - the unions need to have a change of approach.

During the dispute supporters of Socialist Appeal distributed leaflets at Ellesmere Port, produced in conjunction with our sister publication in Germany 'The Spark', with an appeal from the Bochum workers for international solidarity action over the job losses. The trade unions should now be calling for co-ordinated action across Europe to prevent the destruction of the car industry. In a situation of over capacity in the European car industry the unions should be arguing for government intervention through nationalisation for job protection and a shorter working week, instead of calling for wage reductions. They should also be assisting the Polish workers in Gliwice to raise their wages above the poverty threshold. □

□ **Only a fighting programme can save the auto industry.**

□ **The big three private sector unions must begin to use their muscle and link up an international campaign to defend jobs.**

□ **No further closures! No further job losses!**

□ **Pressure must be brought to bear on the Labour Government to nationalise any plant threatened with cuts under the control and management of the workforce.**

□ **If Labour will not act in the interests of the workers we must kick out the careerists and put in a leadership who will.**

PCS challenge government attack

by Rachel Heemsker, DWP East of England Chair

FOLLOWING THE announcement of an unprecedented offensive by the government on its own employees in the civil service the PCS (Public and Commercial Services Union) is mobilising its entire membership to take the government head on.

Over the summer we were confronted with a scene that would have been almost comic if it was not so serious. A Labour government vying with the Tories in a bizarre upward spiral of promise and counter-promise over who could deliver the greatest number of job cuts in the civil service.

Gordon Brown announced in July that the government plans to cut 104,000 jobs, one in five, from the service over the next three years. This will cause total chaos. In addition 20,000 jobs are to be relocated from London and the South East. The closure programme has already begun; the DWP announced the closure of the first 40 jobcentres and social security offices last month.

All this comes on top of years of attacks, the latest include changes to terms and conditions, longer hours, and an increase in retirement age to 65. Over the years attacks have been coupled with a vast increase in workload - this has had an effect on morale; in many departments it is at rock bottom and people are taking record amounts of time off work because of stress. The government wants to change sick absence arrangements and not pay for the first three days of sickness - however it is not possible to cure a disease by denying the symptoms.

The union swung into motion by attempting to open negotiations with the employers while building up and preparing their members for a national ballot of all 265,000 members. The union set the first strike action for November 5th, and called for a strong yes vote to give their negotiators more weight. And they got exactly what they

were looking for with two to one voting to take action (Yes 64.5%: No 35.5%) on a 42% turnout. The union is trying to build up a strong campaign and they are getting off to a good start by showing the bosses that they mean business and are prepared to take action to back up negotiation.

Through the media the government are trying to drive a wedge in peoples mind between backroom 'skivers' and the people in the front line 'who do all the work'. A cabinet spokeswoman justified the cuts by saying "Our decisions mean more police, teachers, doctors and nurses. We will not be diverted from this essential investment and we hope to continue to discuss with the unions in a constructive way."

This distinction between frontline staff and backroom staff is a nonsense it is obvious that one depends on the other to provide a service - cuts are not going to improve the service.

Exact details of how the cuts will be distributed have not been given but a rough breakdown between departments show that all will be hit and the impact will be greater in some than others.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), is one of the biggest losers - it is an easy target because of the constant tabloid onslaught against benefits claimants. In the DWP, as in all other departments these cuts are going to result in closures, and place a greater workload on remaining staff. It is also a painful irony that many of those who are sacked will end up sitting on the other side of the desk claiming benefit.

The union is prepared to negotiate but is standing by the principle of total opposition to any involuntary job losses or relocations. At the moment departments looking at the numbers they have to cut will also be keeping an eye on their budgets by trying to force out those who are cheap and easy to sack. And it is not only the

issue of jobs - if the government succeeds in carrying through these sackings they would be able to revise the terms and conditions of the entire workforce at will.

The union has so far planned a one-day strike and developed a programme of rally's and meetings in every area. This will build morale among members, a large number of whom are going on strike for the first time.

The example of the recent firefighters strike showed that the Blair government will try to use all their power to defeat and crush a union into submission. The civil servants will have to wage a hard struggle to defend their jobs and conditions. Negotiation is absolutely necessary, as is the tactic of a one-day strike. However if these do not change the governments mind the union will have to up the stakes by building up the campaign. The most effective tactic will be to pull out key sectors for longer periods to put the squeeze on the government.

The firefighters strike showed that the Blair government was not only prepared but was eager to take on the unions. But it also showed that public opinion, and the trade union movement as a whole will get behind this kind of struggle. Support from the movement will play a key role in the dispute if it is to be successful, and its outcome will be important for the rest of the movement.

This dispute also has a strong political aspect to it - these workers are directly employed by the state under a Labour government that is attacking workers in the interests of big business. That shouldn't be tolerated any longer. The trade unions must open up a struggle against the Blairites for control of the Labour Party to return it to socialist policies that reflect the aspirations and interests of working people. □

Discontent Simmers at LP Conference

by Steve Jones

IMAGINE A place where... fox glove puppets are banned from being sold... people are removed for not standing and applauding... hundreds of young men in black suits creep around with mobiles glued to their ears... and whatever time of day it is the pubs are full of people who should not be there. Yes, welcome to Labour Party conference 2004 in not so sunny Brighton.

To start with the last statement first, the reason that the pubs seemed to be always full was not because Brighton has a severe drink problem but because there was a limit to which delegates could bear to be stuck in a conference room where they were constantly being invited not to vote on anything.

This was supposed to be the pre-election conference where the proposals from the Warwick policy forum would be approved in readiness for the fight ahead. Indeed much was being made of the so-called Warwick agreement where the unions had hammered out with the leadership a set of proposals to go forward on. Whilst the measures agreed could at best be described as modest they nevertheless were correctly being presented as concrete evidence of the collective strength of the affiliated unions, in general, and the big four in particular. During the week the power of the main unions to decide the agenda and what was passed would be picked up and complained about, usually off the record, by the Blairites, who since they were now being forced to dirty their hands and negotiate with delegations, were well and truly

put out.

Of course, it didn't help that the leadership were constantly trying to stop things being discussed. Proposals on Foundation hospitals and votes at 16 somehow got withdrawn by the movers. The union contemporary resolutions on pensions, public services, employment rights and manufacturing were also all agreed by the NEC and therefore passed with little opposition - although the question should be asked, will these resolutions ever be implemented by a Labour government which, remember, has already been in office for seven years armed with huge parliamentary majorities.

This left three policy areas where the leadership was in opposition to resolutions from the floor. The first was on council housing. The resolution on this was carried by over three quarters of conference on a show of hands - defeat number one for the Blairites. Next was the call to renationalise the railways - carried on a card vote by 63.7% to 36.3%. Defeat number two.

Renationalise Railways

The argument that renationalisation would be a real vote winner, something that Labour could do with at present, had no effect on the top table. In truth the Blairites had no choice. They are firmly wedded to the mantra that private 'enterprise' is best. So they will be ignoring the resolution and proceeding to expand privatisation not end it.

The third area of division was, of course, on Iraq.

Having told us over the last two years how important the issue of Iraq was, the leadership were strangely unkeen to have the issue on the agenda for this year. This line proved wholly undefensible, especially since the original plan had been to invite stooge Iraqi premier Allawi to address conference as the main international speaker - this was later dropped and Bono shunted in as his replacement! Two composites were on the table. Composite 5 argued for the official status quo and hoped things would all work out. So largely did composite six except that this called for a date to be set for UK troops to be withdrawn from Iraq, something the Blairites were not having. This led to a week of pressure and threats, to scupper the resolution. In the end they used the device of yet another last minute NEC statement to ensure that the union delegations could be manoeuvred into supporting the leadership line and voting down composite 6 (with composite 5 being withdrawn.)

The position the NEC put was that the mandate for troops to stay in Iraq will expire in December 2005 and that anyway they would go earlier than that if asked to do so by the Iraqi government. None of this has any bearing on reality. The 'mandate' will be extended if needed, which seems increasingly likely as troops get evermore enmeshed in the conflict. As for the Iraqi government asking for the occupation forces to do something they do not wish... this will never happen. The Iraqi government, present and post 'election,' will do



what they are told by their masters, like an obedient dog on a lead.

One fact of note was the lack of enthusiasm for the "great leader's" speech. The delegates who were present sat largely stunned by boredom - even the apology that wasn't did not raise their spirits. One delegate from Mole Valley refused to clap at the end and held up a 'no to war' placard - incredibly he got chucked out of conference by the great democrats.

The divide between the left activists and the Blairite clique seemed to have sharpened over the last period. Now the task before those bodies like the Labour Representation Committee and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs is to use this to mobilise the left around a fighting socialist programme which challenges Blairism.

As for the fox glove puppets...well these were being sold on the stall of a harmless charity group until the party officials banned this dangerous act - so they were sold in great numbers outside. You couldn't make it up! □

Is this our last chance to save the NHS?

by Mick Brooks

TONY BENN often remarks that, "The National Health Service is the most popular thing that we (Labour) have ever done, and the most socialist." The NHS is indeed popular. The slogan, 'Your last chance to save the NHS' played a big part in getting the vote out for the Labour landslide of 1997. In the disturbing analysis provided by her book, *NHS plc*, Allyson Pollock reveals how, under the auspices of New Labour, our "popular and socialist" health service has been worm-eaten from within by privatisation.

The US system of health care is inefficient, riddled with corruption and, for the poor, simply terrifying. If you drop down in the street with a stroke and can't afford health insurance, the 'carers' will simply step over your prone body. The logic of a profit-driven health system is that if you haven't got any money you don't really exist. There are 45 million Americans who have no health insurance. And the American system is horribly expensive. It consumes more than 13% of US national income. Our National Health Service costs about half that as a proportion of national income and was set up on the principle of free unlimited health care for all who needed it from cradle to grave. So guess which system Tony Blair and his friends are trying to introduce by stealth into this country?

Our NHS system was set up by the reforming post-War Labour government of 1945-51. Its architect was Aneurin Bevan. His vision was of a salaried service offering universal care to all - a principle of pure communism. Concessions were made at the foundation.

Private practice by doctors was not abolished, and has proved a running sore for the socialised system ever since. Specialists had an incentive to perpetuate shortages so as to offer those with the money an opportunity to jump the queue - at a price. It proved irresistible for hospital administrators, trying to meet financial targets, to allow state sector beds to be used for private operations. But the overall effect was less facilities available for others and longer queues. Profiteering and public service inevitably produce different priorities and different outcomes.

The NHS was to be paid for from general taxation, not according to the insurance model where you get out what you pay in. It offered an end to insecurity - care from cradle to grave. This was to be implemented by an 'implicit contract between the generations'. The present writer, as a wage earner, is paying into the pot to look after those sicker than me. I'm glad I'm not them! I in turn expect to be looked after when I fall ill. I know the next generation who may have to pay for me exists. I've seen them running out of the local schools. So what's the problem? How come we 'can't afford' the present system? We could afford it in the late 1940s when the country was more than three times poorer than it is now.

Naturally the Tories hate the NHS. It shows a system based on principles of public service is more efficient than one based on greed.

They set up what they called an internal market in the NHS. They separated people who had been working together

as a team for years into purchasers and providers. This is like the army charging soldiers for the bullets they fire. In 1997 Labour was committed to abolish the internal market - and they did. But now it's back. Local general practitioners and community health organisations are grouped together in Primary Care Trusts. These are awarded budgets and buy in all the services that used to be provided automatically by other parts of the same outfit. For instance, GPs buy surgery from hospitals on behalf of their patients. All this administration is expensive and it's bureaucratic.

The Tories, in their attempt to 'marketise' health provision, also imposed a 6% 'capital charge' in 1992. That stays under New Labour. This is plain daft. Why should we be paying for buildings that have been paid for a dozen times over - such as hospitals built in the reign of Queen Victoria? The only reason for this ball and chain on the public sector is to give a chance for private firms that have to pay a profit to their shareholders to compete and grab a slice of the action.

Private Finance

Then there's the Private Finance Initiative. *Socialist Appeal* has dealt with this before, but to recap: instead of building a hospital and installing the staff and equipment, a private consortium stumps up the money. Then they own the hospital, run it and charge us for the privilege. What's the game?

- Private firms can borrow off-balance sheet, without breaching government borrowing limits.

- We're lumbered with paying through the nose for

thirty years, often paying the real cost many times over.

- The hospitals built under PFI have fewer beds, because it's cheaper that way.

- The operation often involves closing a city-centre hospital and building out of town. This is basically a scam by property speculators.

- The Treasury argues risk is transferred to the private sector. All the experience shows that we pick up the bill when things go wrong.

- There's a whole history of cost overruns on these projects. These get passed on to us - the mugs.

Alyson Pollock asked Gordon Brown why he was inflicting this stupidity on our NHS. All he did in reply was to repeat the mantra that the 'private sector is more efficient than the public sector'. He was too lazy to apply his allegedly massive intellect to the actual question asked. If you can't afford work on your house and have to hire a plumber, why not just borrow the money from a bank? Why let the plumber own your house till the job is done?

Aneurin Bevan's position, by contrast, was that we should have a dedicated staff of professionals salaried by the government out of general taxation (falling more heavily on the rich) to serve people's health needs. In principle we should not buy in outside help at all. After all doctors and other health professionals are trained at the expense of the state, and most of them work for the state most of the time. BUPA and other private health firms exist only at the margins of the NHS. If you got really ill in their hands, they'd pass you over to a National Health hospital, and you'd be grateful for it. There is no expertise in

health matters out there to be tapped in the private sector. All there is, is a bunch of cream-skimming crooks.

The NHS is also a mouthwatering market for private firms. It will be spending £10 billion on IT in the next few years. The big pharmaceutical companies have been coining it in from our misfortunes for decades.

But more than just nibbling at the edges, capitalism is going for the heartlands of health treatment. Pollock points out that the aim is to destroy general practitioners' effective monopoly over primary care. NHS Direct and NHS walk-in centres are a straight alternative to traditional doctors' surgeries. They will be competing not only for 'business' but also for the scarce resource of trained health professionals. In primary care, Boots are coming in. BUPA is coming in. These people can sniff easy money-making. In general practice the government is setting up a new initiative called the Local Improvement Financial Trust (LIFT). It's PFI for general practice. It's a 'partnership' between the public and private sectors, with more profitable opportunities for big business to make a mint.

Competing with NHS hospitals are the new private Diagnostic and Treatment Centres, seen as an opportunity for the private sector to 'help out' hospital waiting lists by doing routine operations (such as hip replacements) - at a profit. In fact they're also free-loading off the state sector's investment in training. This is not about 'choice'. The Health Ministry is insisting Primary Care Trusts include one private hospital in their calculations. They want private surgery to rise from 2% to 15% of the total as a result.

But the most dramatic spread of private provision is in care of the elderly. There is a narrow line between being old and frail and being ill, between health care and personal care.

When money is introduced into the equation, everybody starts passing the buck. Hospitals, lumbered with financial targets, have started to talk ruthlessly about 'bed blockers'. They don't want anyone who doesn't actually need an operation on the premises. As hospitals have tried to duck out, local councils were forced to take up the slack.

Thatcher recognised care of the elderly as a potentially lucrative arena of capital accumulation. The Tories starved local authorities of funds. At the same time they made income support due to the elderly payable to private care homes. Of course that was the only way most people could afford the fees. In effect the social security budget was looted by private capitalists, just using the needs of the elderly as a syphon.

Cut costs

Local authorities have been put under unremitting pressure, both under the Tories and this government, to cut costs. This has put them in an impossible position to provide publicly-owned care homes for the elderly. Dumfries and Galloway Council dabbled out by selling its homes to a capitalist for £1 each - they were worth £2 million! At the same time benefit rules have been changed so that the elderly who can't look after themselves may have to sell their own houses to pay for care. These elderly people dutifully paid their taxes when they were of working age on condition that they would be looked after by the state in their old age - and they've been betrayed.

As a result of these changes, there has been an explosion of private care homes, as lovely people see the money to be made out of 'granny farming' (their term, not mine). From 1979 to 2003, private provision has gone from 16% to 69% of the care 'market'. Never one to miss an

opportunity, Norwich Union has opened a string of homes. What do they know about looking after the elderly?

Once private care homes have an effective monopoly, they are in a strong position to blackmail users for higher fees. Allyson Pollock gives an example where residents were threatened with eviction before Christmas, if the home's owners didn't get their rise.

New Labour is now going where Thatcher feared to tread. They say the private sector always does things better. Well, actually no. Pollock cites the debate in the British Medical Journal as to whether Kaiser Permanente (a stateside private health behemoth) was 'cheaper and more efficient than the NHS'. The authors ignored the fact that Kaiser Permanente's customers are mainly young and in work, and therefore likely to be healthier. The NHS covers twice the proportion of over 75s. They ignored the fact that Kaiser Permanente's customers can afford US health insurance levels. So they do not include the poorest, who are more likely to be ill. Their figures made elementary mistakes inflating NHS costs. And they ignored the costs of training and research incurred by the state sector, costs that private firms like Kaiser Permanente free-ride off. This slovenly and frankly fraudulent piece of work has been incorporated into the Government White Paper 'Delivering the NHS Plan'. The NHS Plan itself was drawn up under the influence of advisers such as the chief executive of Kaiser Permanente. And one of the authors of this BMJ article had previously worked for Kaiser Permanente!

Fraud is ever-present in the

private health service across the pond. Columbia/HCA have had to pay back \$1.7 billion to the US government after they've been caught with their hands in the till. So they've decided to change their name before touting for business here.

A good example of the corruption endemic in the New Labour 'project' for health is provided by the career of Chai Patel. Patel made pots of money as head of Westminster Healthcare, which owned a string of care homes. Naturally he was co-opted onto the Cabinet Office Better Regulation Taskforce. His advice was clear and to the point. The government needed to invest more on care homes. Secondly they needed to open the sector up to the initiative and drive of the private sector - firms such as Westminster Healthcare. This stream of kindly and forward thinking advice was brought to an end when a scandal erupted around one of Westminster Healthcare's homes, Lynde House in Twickenham. It was discovered that residents had been grossly neglected and mistreated, with incontinence pads left on and people unbathed for months at a time. Moreover they or their families were paying up to £400 a week for this privilege.

It is time to call a halt to the privatisation of our health service. We can make Aneurin Bevan's dream of a universal public health service free at the point of use a reality. Allyson Pollock's book provides the ammunition for a fightback. ■

Allyson Pollock - NHS plc.
Verso £15.99, order from Wellred books (add 20% p&p)

Socialist Appeal fights for:

- Free Universal health care for all
- Nationalise the drug companies that leech profits from our ill health
- End private health care - Nationalise private insurance firms and incorporate their assets into the NHS

Hands off Venezuela at the European Social Forum

The trade union situation in Venezuela and Colombia

ON OCTOBER 16 the European Social Forum delegates had the chance to get a first hand report on the current situation in Colombia and Venezuela. The Colombia Solidarity Campaign and Hands Off Venezuela, supported by Marxist.com, organised a workshop at the ESF to explain the situation of the trade unions in these two Latin American countries. Around 65 campaigners, trade unionists and youth filled a tiny room. The room was so full that some members of the audience had to sit on the floor!

The meeting started with a contribution from Jeremy Dear. The NUJ General Secretary gave an account of the situation for trade unionists based on his own experience as a member of a TUC delegation to Colombia. The audience was terrified when they listened to all the security measures that trade union activists are forced to observe. He pointed out that trade union and peasant leaders are currently being killed or tortured by the army and the paramilitaries because they are in the forefront of the struggle against privatisation. Jeremy Dear compared the Colombian conditions with the Venezuelan situation for trade unionists and he highlighted the freedom that trade unions enjoy in Venezuela. He closed his contribution appealing to the audience to campaign for the defence of the Venezuelan revolution and in defence of Colombian trade union activity against US imperialism.

After the NUJ General Secretary spoke, Jorge Martin (Hands Off Venezuela International Secretary) explained the origins of the Venezuelan UNT (trade union) in relation to the defeat of the bosses lock-out at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003. He also said that in spite of the fact that the labour movement in Venezuela has not led the revolution, the workers played a very important role in the defeat of the lock-out and they even installed workers' control in some PDVSA (state oil company) plants and

occupied factories as a measure to protect production against the bosses' sabotage. On the links between the Chavez government and the UNT he pointed out that there is a healthy and friendly relation between trade union and government. However, the UNT is completely autonomous from the government. In fact the UNT has openly expressed disagreement with some measures taken by the government.

Dave Raby, recently arrived from Caracas after finishing a seminar at the Venezuelan Bolivarian University, also contributed to the discussion. He analysed the origins of the Venezuelan Revolution, and explained how the conscious action of the Venezuelan masses has changed the whole country. "What is happening in Venezuela is the beginning of a revolutionary breakthrough". He gave a full account of the "Misiones" (social programmes on healthcare, housing, etc.) and how they are implemented by autonomous organisations in the communities. He also talked about how economic treaties sponsored by the Venezuelan government seek to oppose the US backed treaties like the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement.

Gonzalo Gomez from Apoorrea.org (the main left-wing political website in Venezuela) began his contribution by talking about the "reciprocal solidarity" between Venezuela and the peoples of Europe and other advanced countries. He expressed the Venezuelan people's rejection of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. He linked the attacks launched by the US on Iraq with the active intervention of the US administration in Venezuela to plot against the revolution. In his contribution he also stressed the need to support the alternative media. He stated, "We cannot rely on the bosses media". He said that the media should be linked to the community and the labour movement. Gonzalo Gomez also hailed the process whereby the CTV (the tool of the oligarchy within the trade union movement) is being replaced by the UNT, the new and anti-

capitalist trade union. One of the main concerns of the Apoorrea.org editor was the bureaucratisation of the movement and the state apparatus in Venezuela. In order to stop this bureaucratisation the process which has been called "revolution within the revolution" was badly needed. He also said that the Venezuelan government was a popular government but not a government of the workers and the people yet because the bosses were still sacking workers. However, he denied that the Chavez government was a bosses' government and he enthusiastically supported all the progressive measures implemented by the government and the favourable conditions for the class struggle in Venezuela.

Andy Higginbottom introduced the Killer-Cola campaign. This campaign is the actual implementation of an international appeal launched by SINALTRAINAL (food and beverages processing workers' union in Venezuela) to raise awareness of the awful situation of the Colombian activists and to expose the Coca-Cola corporation for its involvement in the assassination of a long list of their workers and shop stewards actively involved in the union. He also linked the struggle against imperialism in Colombia with the Bolivarian Revolution. A victory for the Venezuelan Revolution will be a step forward in the struggle against imperialism and its puppets in Colombia. After his speech a very interesting question and answer session took place. □

Jeremy Dear, NUJ General Secretary and TUC General Council member, addresses ESF workshop



Venezuela and the Bolivarian revolution

"We have to learn the lessons of past solidarity campaigns"

IN DEFENCE of Marxism and the Hands Off Venezuela campaign organised a meeting on Venezuela and the Bolivarian revolution at the European Social Forum in London. Despite the fact that this important workshop had been relegated to an early Sunday morning, nearly 70 people turned up to hear Alan Woods, editor of Marxist.com, and Jorge Martin, on behalf of the Hands off Venezuela Campaign, speak on the events in Venezuela. The room was packed with young people and trade unionists from all over the world.

Before dealing with the actual subject, Jorge Martin started his speech with a reference to the organisation of this year's European Social Forum. Not enough attention had been paid to the subject of Venezuela, which is now one of the most important developments in the whole world. It is a real pity that no seminar could be organised as this meant that no simultaneous translation was available.

Having said that, Jorge turned to the reason behind the setting up of the Hands off Venezuela Campaign. The campaign had been started mainly to counter the vicious media blockade on the subject of Venezuela. On really significant events like the Bolivarian Revolution there is a wall of silence on the part of the Western media. Even worse, when they do refer to Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, he is nearly always portrayed as an authoritarian former army general, not as

a democratically elected president who has won in seven different electoral processes. Jorge Martin recalled a striking anecdote on the media lies. He was on his way to Caracas in an Air France airplane. Reading the Spanish daily El Pais, he read about Caracas being paralysed by a massive strike involving all important sectors of the economy, including the cancellation of all international flights. However, Jorge was flying precisely to Caracas and everything was perfectly normal there!

Then he posed the question of the Bolivarian Revolution. Since there has been no fundamental economic transformation, why do we say that the events in Venezuela are of a revolutionary character? The main reason is the massive political awareness in the country. Contrary to most Western "democracies", there is no apathy at all among the Venezuelan people. The recent recall referendum is proof of this. In other countries the participation level is always quite low, with only 40 or 50 percent of the people bothering to vote. Why would they vote if all politicians tell them the same things? In Venezuela, on the other hand, more than 90 percent of the people turn up to vote. This is because people can see that it does make a difference who is in power. Following the election of Hugo Chavez huge literacy campaigns have been conducted. For the first time poor people have access to basic medical health care, and

there has been significant land reform, etc. In short, since the 1998 election there has been a mass politicization. For the first time ordinary working people have a sense of dignity and now feel like real human beings. This is one of the most striking features when you travel to Venezuela and talk to people, Jorge said. They can see something has changed for the better and they want to maintain and extend these achievements. Precisely because of all the progressive reforms, Chavez has been able to maintain his support among a majority of the Venezuelan people. Not only once, but in seven electoral contests! Compare that to the West, where one government after another is voted out of office.

That is, of course, not to the liking of the so-called "Democratic Opposition". They could not even stand his initially moderate reforms, and obviously could stand even less the subsequent more radical reforms. Hence their various attempts at overthrowing Chavez's government by terrorist means, lock-outs and a coup. One criticism you can make of Chavez, Jorge told the audience, is not that he is authoritarian, but rather too lenient with the coup organisers. Those who pulled down a statue of Columbus on Columbus Day (October 12) were put in jail, but most of the organisers of the coup are still free and have been able to flee the country. Some are on trial now, two years after the coup, but

Pedro Carmona has only been put under house arrest. As a result, he fled to Miami and is now organising the opposition. Carlos Andres Pérez, now living in the Dominican Republic, said that the only way to remove Chavez is by violent means. These kinds of scoundrels are still free and have been able to organise the terrorist campaign of last year.

Jorge Martin then spoke on the trade union situation in Venezuela. The old CTV union has more than ever been discredited since its open support for the coup. Most of the workers have joined the new UNT, and what is more, they have done this on a radical programme. The UNT is now the real trade union in Venezuela and its programme includes workers' control over the economy. During last year's lock-out there were experiences of workers' control. This was not in a small textile company, but in the oil industry, one of the biggest industries in the world! The oil company in Venezuela is indeed highly technological (with most processes being run by computer and satellite systems). The workers refused to take part in the lock-out of the bosses and were able to run the whole industry without the bosses. This proves that if workers can run such a complex industry then they can run anything. On that point, Jorge also mentioned the case of the Venepal workers and the need for solidarity. (see page 26)

There is also the issue of the struggle between

Venezuela and the United States. The US was interfering directly in Venezuela during the 2002 coup. They cannot tolerate a government that is an example to workers all over the world, especially the masses in their backyard, Mexico and Latin America. But

Venezuela has some good trump cards, one of which is oil. Chavez has already threatened to cut off the oil supplies to the US if they interfere in their internal affairs. That would be an enormous blow, since Venezuela is the third biggest oil supplier to the US.

"So what is the next step then?" Jorge asked. The oligarchy is demoralised and demobilised after they lost the referendum. The balance of forces is extremely favourable to the revolution. In the Bolivarian movements there have been numerous debates about the need for a revolution in the revolution, about the fight against bureaucracy. However, the state is still the same old state, with the same bureaucracy at the head of it. Jorge said you cannot take over a capitalist state and make it serve the interests of the people.

Besides, some sections of the economy are still in private hands, most importantly the banks. Today two Spanish banks control the banking sector in Venezuela. The distribution of food and beverages is done privately, which enabled the opposition to paralyse the country during the lock-out by disrupting the supplies.

Jorge continued by saying that some important battles have been won, but that this is a war over control of the economy. There are opposing class interests involved, and these have not been solved yet. Jorge used the analogy used by 19th century peasant war leader Ezequiel Zamora. In the course of the Federal War against



the landed oligarchy, Zamora correctly said that "we must confiscate the property of the rich, since with it they make war against the people, we must leave them just with their shirts".

There is no precedent of a successful military coup being defeated by the mass movement of working people once it has already been installed. This gives hope for the future – something can be done. Also, it is foolish to moderate your viewpoints for fear of provoking the enemy. The opposition and US imperialism have already been provoked, as the coup proves. The excuse often used by workers' leaders that you can't have a radical program that "scares away" the voters has been proved utterly wrong. In Venezuela there have been seven elections, and each of them have been won by the left-wing government.

Alan Woods speaks

After Jorge Martin's speech, the floor was given to Alan Woods. He started with the same observation that we live in very exciting times. Fifteen years ago the capitalists were euphoric because, so they claimed, "Socialism has been proven not to work". They were talking about the end of socialism and communism, and some even dared to talk about the end of history. No change was possible in the best of all possible worlds. But they merely proved to be utopians. Now there is instability in the whole of Latin America, Africa is

in a horrible state, etc.

But Venezuela shows that change is possible. Contrary to all the lies of the media, Hugo Chavez is not a dictator but an extremely popular president. The recall referendum once again proved that the majority of the Venezuelan people are stand-

ing behind their president. A recall referendum is in fact a very democratic mechanism, and Alan could think of several other leaders who would greatly benefit from the application of this mechanism! That is, George Bush, but also Tony Blair. The latter defied public opinion by lying over the motives for going to war in Iraq. The British people clearly said they didn't want this war, and yet there is no way of removing Tony Blair from power.

Alan Woods then went on to explain why the Bolivarian Revolution is indeed a revolution, contrary to what some left groups claim. Paraphrasing Leon Trotsky, he said: "The essence of a revolution is the direct intervention of the masses in the political life of the nation." Millions of ordinary Venezuelan people began to move and started to take matters into their own hands. The indignation of the masses, who had suffered under 40 years of oppression and misery, was expressed in a peculiar way after the left-wing 1992 coup in the figure of Hugo Chavez. In 1998 he won the elections with an absolute majority. Eight years later, Chavez received 60 percent of the votes. How many governments in the world can claim this?

After vividly describing the anger and mood of the masses, he firmly warned that the revolution has not been completed. The basic position of Marxists towards the Venezuelan revolution is to support it completely against for-

eign intervention. That is what Hands Off Venezuela is trying to do. But there is more to it. It is not possible to make half a revolution. What the referendum campaign has shown is that Venezuelan society is extremely polarised between right and left. The counter-revolutionaries are regrouping their forces and are preparing for a new offensive once the conditions are more favourable (most likely the 2006 elections). As long as the oligarchy continues to maintain its hold on important sections of the economy, it will continue to act as an agent of US imperialism, sabotaging and undermining the Bolivarian revolution. That is why the property of the counterrevolutionaries should be expropriated and the power of the landowners should be broken. Alan made an analogy with the American revolution, which took drastic measures against the landowners.

The speech ended with an appeal. Not everything is fine and the revolution has not finished. Battles have been won, but not the war. The important point to stress is that everybody is able to do something. Alan appealed to the public saying that they can make a difference.

Trade unionists can discuss the situation in their branches and pass resolutions recognising the new UNT trade union, other people can counter the numerous media lies. Above all, it

is important to coordinate the different initiatives and set up Hands off Venezuela committees.

Ramon Samblas then opened the meeting for questions and contributions from the audience. Somebody from the audience made the point that the solidarity campaign for Chile started after the 1973 coup and that it is better to start organising while the revolution is going on. "We have to learn the lessons of past solidarity campaigns. All of them have failed because they started too late." He also said it was a real shame that Venezuela had not been discussed at a big session at the European Social Forum. Other contributions came among others from a young Norwegian trade unionist and Henry Suarez, professor of History at Caracas Central University.

The general conclusion of the meeting was that we must defend the Bolivarian Revolution unconditionally. However, it is also necessary to deepen the political analysis of the Venezuelan revolution and the way forward. Only by learning the lessons of past defeats can we guarantee victory this time. □



Marshall Aerospace: Ballot for action

by Mark Evans, Amicus Convener, Marshall Aerospace

WE ARE in dispute with the company because they are backsliding over an agreement we reached to implement a grading system.

Marshall is an aerospace service and repair company; we have members doing different jobs from electricians to airfreight fitters - to do these jobs effectively requires skills that can only be built through experience.

Yet we have never had a grading system in the past although we have been promised one as part of pay negotiations for the last four years.

At the moment everyone doing the same job is paid the same money regardless of skills & qualifications, experience, and long service. We have men who have been here for 40 years earning the same money as new starters.

We had a victory earlier in the year during the pay negotiations. The company came to us in April with an offer of 2.6% and to sweeten the pill they promised to bring in the grading system. When we rejected this offer they came back with an extra 0.4%. The members voted 80% against the 3% offer and we finally settled on 3.5%, which was a good step forward.

The latest problems came recently when we started negotiating the details of the grading system. The company proposed a differential between grades of ten and five pence an hour, which frankly we regarded as an insult - we were asking for 50 pence an hour. We were prepared to negotiate but

Marshall were not - they suddenly 'discovered' that there was no money for a grading system this year.

We are now about to ballot the members for industrial action and just waiting for the go-ahead from the union legal department. There is a mood of anger among the men at the company's backtracking on this deal.

Wages and conditions in the aerospace industry have declined quite rapidly over the past decade and it got worse with the recent downturn in the industry. Morale on the shop floor is at a low ebb; a lot of people are getting out of the industry. Most of them don't go into other aerospace jobs so skills are being lost. The company aren't taking anyone on at the moment - they rely on agency workers to plug up the gaps but it is difficult even to get them because of the bad money and the basic shortage of skilled labour.

Over the years the union hasn't done much for the members here and that is one of the reasons for the current problems. Most of the previous conveners have looked on the position as a stepping-stone to help their career in the company. They have had no interest in defending conditions, let alone leading a struggle to improve them. This has to change because there is no future for workers here if the union doesn't start fighting. The members at the site are happy that things are getting done now - we have a way to go, but we want to turn things around. □

US election: A tipping point

by Michael Roberts

BY THE time you read this, you will know who won the US presidential election. For the average American household it will make little difference to their well-being whether it is Bush or Kerry. And for that matter, despite the widespread hostility to the re-election of Bush among most of the people (and many governments) of Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America, it will make little difference to the way the US operates if it is under a Kerry or Bush presidency.

That's because of the reality of two things. First, the US government and US society is not controlled by one man (or woman) or even by the politicians operating in the White House or in the Capitol. American foreign policy is driven by the same forces that drives its domestic policy. And that is what ensures the best for US capitalist corporations and the whole system of production for profit and for the desires of the owners of capital.

That is why only the very rich can even stand for president and stand a chance of winning or even getting on the ballot. Hundreds of millions of dollars are needed for the campaigns, for the TV adverts, for the events etc. That means calling on the treasuries of the big corporations. And the likes of WalMart, Microsoft, BankAmerica, IBM, General Motors or Merck are not going to have a candidate that does not stand four-square behind the capitalist system. Through the tentacles of the corporate lobby system, the federal and state congress representatives act as political agents of American big business, making sure that the interests of capitalism dominate the minds

and actions of the president and legislature.

And second, what is much more important than who is the president will be, is the relative strength of US imperialism in the world economy and political and military control of the world.

The poverty of the abilities of either Bush or Kerry as a potential leader of the so-called free world (namely world capitalism) is manifest. Bush has presided over four years of conflict, violence, terrorism, torture and military aggression. At the end of it, US imperialism is in a weaker position, both economically and politically, than it has been for over 50 years.

But Kerry offers no alternative: he stands for more of the same in military occupation of Iraq, in threatening Iran and North Korea with action unless they tow the line on nuclear armament; and above all, with preserving the right of US corporations to continue to make profits at home or abroad with the minimum hindrance.

History of exploitation

And here is the key point. US capitalism has been around for over 200 years. It became fully fledged after the defeat of the slaveholders of the south in a bloody civil war of the 1860s. It was a resurgent capitalist power for the rest of the 19th century. In the late 1890s, it began to develop its own overseas empire (if you discount the annexation of Texas from the Mexicans after the Alamo in the 1830s). The US invaded the Spanish Caribbean and started its infamous rule of Cuba and most of Latin America as its backyard. It extended its Pacific influence by taking over in the

Philippines in a cruel war.

US imperialism then gained a foothold in Europe by joining the war against Germany in 1917, once the European powers had finally weakened themselves irrevocably in fighting each other. The inter-war period saw the battle for world supremacy between the old imperial powers led by Britain and the new rising powers of Japan and the US and the embittered and defeated Germany. The sun was setting over the great British empire that had lasted 200 years. The second world war clinched that and established the US as the new imperialist leader, bigger and more powerful than any before.

The one fly in the ointment for the US imperialists was that the war had also made the Soviet Union a significant obstacle to Pax Americana. The last 50 years saw the strengthening of US military power in the arms race and eventually the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of eastern Europe, with these countries returning to capitalism and falling under the political and military control of that arm of US imperialism, NATO.

But the irony of the fall of the Stalinist powers at the end of the 1980s is that this final victory of US imperialism over all opposing powers heralds the nexus of US imperialism and the beginning of its decline and fall.

Can I justify that claim? Back in the 1970s and 1980s, in Europe we all used to argue that US economic performance was weakening in relation to Europe and Japan. Whereas, US manufacturing claimed over 30% of world trade in 1950, by 1990 that had fallen to 15%. Japan's share had risen from 2% to 10% and Germany's from 2% to 12%.

Similarly, at the height of its economic power in the late 1960s, the US economy grew in size by an average of 4% a year. However, in the 1980s, it increased national output by only 2% a year compared to Japan's 4%. And there's profitability: US corporations consistently had lower profits per unit of investment compared to Germany or Japan throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

It all seemed to turn around in the 1990s after the fall of Stalinism and the start of the information technology revolution. US productivity growth picked up as American companies sacked their workforces, introduced new computer-based equipment and relocated much of their manufacturing base overseas in what was called the great globalisation. American companies became the biggest overseas investors.

So it seemed that American imperialism was set to have a new lease of life and leap forward again to lead the New World Order. However, all soon turned to dust. The hi-tech revolution went bust and companies went down in droves along with stock market prices. The US economy went into a mild recession and then along came 9/11.

The reality is that US imperialism had reached its zenith and is on its way down. US manufacturing is fast disappearing down the plughole, just as it has in the UK. The world leaders in manufacturing, whether it is the production of basic goods like chemicals or steel, or whether it is more sophisticated products like computers and other electronic goods, are now in Asia. China is fast becoming the world's leading manufacturing nation. After 1945, US



manufacturers produced 40% of world output with everybody else down around 10% or below. But now the US share is just 11%! The US is still the world's largest manufacturer and second only to Germany in manufacturing exports, but China is fast closing the gap.

More and more American imperialism is becoming like the Roman empire of ancient times. It no longer provides the necessities of life for its citizens through its own producers. It must rely on production being imported from abroad. Increasingly, it does not pay for this by its own exports. Instead it pays with dollars that it just prints itself. Because the capitalist world depends for its survival on US military might and because other countries want to sell their goods, they've been prepared to take the yankee dollar even though it has steadily declined in value.

US imperialism is now in huge debt to the rest of the world. It owes more than 25% of its annual output to other capitalist nations in borrowing it has run up to buy the goods and services it needs and no longer makes itself.

At the same time as manufacturing of necessities has disappeared from the economic landscape of America, it has been replaced by a decadent economy, one based more and more on parasitic finance capital. The

financial sector in a capitalist economy is necessary to oil the wheels of industry. It provides credit and enables capitalists through the money economy to move their capital around more efficiently and quickly. In return for these services, the finance capitalists can charge interest and fees.

Rise of finance

But now finance capital has become the dominant part of the US capitalist economy. Whereas in 1982, only 4% of the profits made by American corporations came from the finance sector, it is now 38%! All the profits of the labour of Americans are less and less appropriated by the productive sectors of American capitalism to invest in innovation, new products and machines and more and more are captured by the banks, investment houses, insurance companies and mortgage lenders, who speculate in the stock and bond markets and send their money abroad. American capitalism is now a casino economy of speculators, a rentier economy of bankers living off interest and a consumer economy importing from abroad.

The American empire is set to decline whoever wins the presidential election. A Kerry victory may mean a tactical turn towards trying to involve other capitalist nations in trying to control

the world, while the Bush administration may continue with its 'neo-conservative' adventure that aims to go it alone against those states that oppose untrammelled US rule. But either way will not re-establish the New World Order as America wants. That's because US imperialism has had its day.

The Roman Republic took two hundred years to establish its dominance of then known world to Western civilisations. Rome first had to defeat rival states in Italy. Then it had to smash other budding empires in the Mediterranean like that of Carthage. It did that brutally. Its superior peasant-based economy, supported by innovative technology learnt from the Greeks, enabled it to gain economic and eventually military superiority over Europe and the Middle East.

But in its drive for imperial dominance, it gradually dropped its citizen farmer economy, which did not provide enough manpower and military personnel to rule the world. It adopted a slave economy using captured peoples from its military conquests and started to 'globalise' the world. As Republic became Empire and democracy became dictatorship, the Roman Empire started its long and slow decline into eventual collapse over the next 300 years. The Empire buckled as its weakening economic foundations crumbled.

So it will be with US imperialism. And it won't take as long as Rome did to fall apart. Capitalist economies move much faster than slave or peasant economies and so do modern communications and war. The process of decline will be much quicker as a result. Bush or Kerry will preside over that decline. ■

Lenin and Internationalism

by Rob Sewell

"I think that after five years of the Russian Revolution the most important thing for all of us, Russian and foreign comrades alike, is to sit down and study... We must take advantage of every moment of respite from fighting, from war, to study, and to study from scratch." LENIN

MARXISM IS based on internationalism or it is nothing. This approach has nothing to do with sentimentality, but is rooted in the international character of capitalism itself.

Capitalism has created a world market, a world division of labour and a worldwide working class. The capitalist system, through its development of industry, overthrew the narrow restraints of feudalism and created the nation state and world economy. Having developed world capitalism to its highest level, imperialism - by which the planet is ruled by a handful of giant monopolies - these assets turned into their opposites and became decisive obstacles to future development and progress. The First World War was a direct product of this stranglehold of the nation state and private ownership on the productive forces. Only the overthrow of world capitalism could put an end to this contradiction and eradicate these fetters.

Capitalism on a world scale had laid the material basis in terms of industry and technique for the development of world socialism and classless society. World revolution and international socialism were the basis of the teachings of Marx and Engels, and fully understood by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks.

On these sound principles, Marx had organised the First International in the 1860s. "The emancipation of the workers is not a local, nor a national, but an international problem", wrote Marx in the statutes of the International.

"The First International (1864 - 72) laid the foundation for the international organisation of the workers for the preparation of a revolutionary attack upon capital",

remarked Lenin. In 1889, the Second International was born, which now embraced mass organisations of the proletariat in Germany, France, Italy and other countries. Unfortunately, the spectacular growth of the International took place within the framework of an organic upswing of capitalism, which affected the leading layers, and introduced opportunist currents into its ranks. "The Second International (1889 - 1914)", continued Lenin, "was the international organisation of the proletarian movement whose growth was extensive rather than intensive, and therefore resulted in a temporary increase of opportunistic tendencies, which finally led to the shameful downfall of this International..." The First World War witnessed the collapse of the International, with the leaders of each national section abandoning internationalism and siding with their own capitalist class. The Second International, in the words of Rosa Luxemburg, became a "stinking corpse".

Internationalists isolated

From 1914 onwards Lenin conducted an open struggle against those leaders who had betrayed the cause, social-chauvinists, as he called them. Together with a handful of internationalists, he fought to maintain the clean banner of international socialism and prepare the ground for a new International of the working class. For Lenin, the international was in essence programme, policy and method. Under these conditions of world war, the internationalists - Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, John MacLean, James Connolly and others - were reduced to tiny groups,

isolated from the working class. At the Zimmerwald conference in 1915, Lenin joked that all the internationalists in the world could be fitted into four stage coaches. But events would change all that. Within two years, imperialism would break at "its weakest link" in Tsarist Russia.

History does not proceed in a straight line, but according to the dialectical laws of uneven and combined development. A less advanced country absorbs the material and intellectual conquests of the more advanced, not as a carbon replica, but in a contradictory fashion. The grafting of the most advanced techniques onto pre-capitalist developments, as in Russia, led to a strange combination of different stages in the historical process, and assumed an uneven and combined character. The tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution could now only be resolved by the coming to power of the working class.

In 1917, the February Revolution overthrew Tsarism. Despite Russia's backwardness, foreign capital had established modern industries within her borders, and with it a virgin working class open to revolutionary ideas. The February Revolution, as in 1905, saw the establishment of Soviets, or workers' councils, which constituted "dual power" up until the successful second revolution in October. In the preceding nine months, under the leadership of Lenin, the Bolsheviks were able to win a majority of the working class and poor peasants to its side and take power under the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!"

From the very outset, since his first involvement in revolutionary politics, Lenin held true to an internationalist line. He tied the very fate of the Russian Revolution, even in its bourgeois-democratic form, to the European socialist revolution. An internationalist to his very core, he had no time for petty

nationalism within the revolutionary party. Even before the October Revolution, at the March Party conference, Lenin had proposed to change the name of the party from Russian Social Democratic Labour Party to simply Communist Party. "The name social democrat is inaccurate. Don't hang on to an old name which is rotten through and through", he said.

Despite the later distortions of the Stalinists, the Bolshevik leaders did not have any perspective of "Socialism in One Country", which had nothing in common with Marxism, but regarded the Russian Revolution as the beginning of the world revolution. If the revolution were isolated, it would be crushed. The material basis for socialism did not exist in one country, let alone backward Russia. Only world revolution could save the Russian Revolution, as Lenin repeatedly explained.

Four months after the Revolution, on 7 March 1918 Lenin explained, "At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German Revolution does not come, we are doomed." A few weeks later: "Our backwardness has put us in the front-line, and we shall perish unless we are capable of holding out until we shall receive powerful support from workers who have risen in revolt in other countries." The following month, in April, he stated, "But we shall achieve victory only together with all the workers of other countries, of the whole world..." In May, Lenin states again, "To wait until the working classes carry out a revolution on an international scale means that everyone will remain suspended in mid-air... It may begin with brilliant success in one coun-



try; and then go through agonising periods, since final victory is only possible on a world scale, and only by the joint efforts of the workers of all countries." These views were expressed on a regular basis right up until Lenin's death. Only in the autumn of that year, 1924, did Stalin come out with the anti-Marxist idea of "Socialism in One Country", reflecting the interests of the conservative bureaucracy that had become dominant in the party and state.

In fact, such was Lenin's internationalism that he was even prepared to sacrifice the Russian Revolution for a successful revolution in Germany. He was an internationalist not in words, but in deeds. The Stalinist idea of "building socialism in Russia" never entered his head, or anyone else's for that matter!

The revolution went through "agonising periods" with every international defeat and setback of the world revolution. In November 1918, revolution had succeeded in overthrowing the German and Austria-Hungarian monarchies and the Empire collapsed. Unfortunately, there was no Bolshevik Party to lead the revolution and it was defeated. In January 1919, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered by the counter-revolution. The short-lived

Hungarian revolution was also overthrown. "Europe's greatest misfortune and danger is that it has no revolutionary party", stated Lenin.

Lenin realised that the revolutions in other countries were going to be far more difficult than at first thought. Mass revolutionary parties had to be built, and the leaders had to be educated and trained. Only then could there be hope of success. A new Third International had to be established, especially as attempts were underway to resurrect the old corpse of the Second International. In January 1919 Lenin addressed an open letter to the workers of Europe and America urging them to found the Third International. Within a few months, a founding Congress took place in Moscow, attended by 35 delegates and 15 visitors. The relatively small number attending was due mainly to the imperialist blockade and the extreme difficulties in reaching Moscow.

The comintern

Nevertheless, the Manifesto, drafted by Trotsky, concluded: "Under the banner of Workers' Soviets, of the revolutionary struggle for power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, under the banner of the Third International,

workers of all countries unite!" The Third (Communist) International became the new World Party of Socialist Revolution.

"The Third International", stated Lenin to the Congress, "took over the work of the Second International, cut off its opportunistic, social-chauvinist, bourgeois and petit-bourgeois rubbish, and began to carry into effect the dictatorship of the proletariat."

"The international union of parties heading the greatest revolution in the world, the movement of the proletariat for the overthrow of capital, now rests upon the firmest ground; namely, the existence of several Soviet republics, which are putting into practice, on an international scale, the dictatorship of the proletariat, its victory over capitalism."

"The International World Revolution is near", wrote Lenin, "although revolutions are never made to order. The imperialists will set fire to the whole world and will start a conflagration in which they themselves will perish if they dare to quell the Revolution."

Soviet Russia constituted a "besieged fortress" of the world revolution, surrounded by hostile imperialist powers hell-bent on destroying it. The military defence of the Revolution was paramount. Trotsky was given responsibility for forging a mass Red Army that could defeat the Whites and the armies of foreign imperialist intervention. The whole of Soviet society was put on a war footing. This was the period of "War Communism".

Under gruelling conditions, the young workers' state managed to hold on by a thread. Workers internationally rallied to the cause of the October Revolution in a display of international solidarity. Eventually, the imperi-

alists were beaten and forced to retreat, licking their wounds in the process. Once these armies were defeated on Russian soil, the Soviet state quickly mopped up the remnants of the White armies. The defeat of imperialist intervention came however at a very high cost. The fate of the Revolution was in the balance on many occasions.

After the removal of imperialist forces, the Soviet regime quickly changed course and introduced the New Economic Policy in order to stimulate the battered economy.

In Europe, following the subsidence of the revolutionary wave, a certain equilibrium emerged. "We told ourselves back in 1919 that it was a question of months, but now we say that it is perhaps a question of several years", explained Trotsky. The Bolsheviks used this breathing space to shore up the regime and better prepare the forces of world revolution. With the founding of the Third International, there developed significant ultra-left tendencies within its ranks. These were mainly answered by Lenin and Trotsky at the Comintern's Second Congress in 1920, which unlike the First, was composed of large Communist Parties and organisations. It was at this time that Lenin wrote his famous work "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder". These ultra-left tendencies reached their height with the so-called March Action in 1921 in Germany, where the young German CP attempted to provoke a premature uprising. This resulted in a big defeat for the German party, which put in jeopardy the prospects for successful revolution in the west.

The consequences of the March Action were discussed at the Third Congress of the Comintern, and roundly condemned by Lenin, who together with Trotsky, were regarded as on the "right" wing. "Prepare the struggle. The enemy is strong because he has ruled for centuries and is therefore conscious of its strength and anxious to preserve it. The enemy knows how to fight a civil war. The Third Congress of the Communist International warns all Communist Parties that the proletarian struggle for power is threatened by the fact that the ruling and propertied classes have a well-thought-out strategy, while the working class is only beginning to develop a strategy. The March events in

Germany have shown how dangerous it is for the ranks of the working class, the Communist vanguard of the proletariat, to be forced to fight the enemy before the proletarian masses have begun to move", warned the Congress.

The United Front

The Third Congress moved on to develop the tactic of the United Front and the need through patient work in the mass organisations to win over the masses to the side of socialist revolution. "Every factory must become a stronghold of the revolution", stated the Congress theses.

The policy of United Front, of marching separately, but striking together, became a marked success in quickly building up the Communist Parties, especially in Germany. The German party was the biggest CP outside of the Soviet Union. In early 1923, a revolutionary crisis began to mature in Germany arising from the French occupation of the Ruhr. Inflation took off and reached levels of hyperinflation. Living standards plummeted. Throughout the summer, revolutionary crisis gripped the whole of Germany and many looked to the CP to offer a way forward.

The German party was urged by the International to make plans for an uprising. However, the party leadership was gripped with vacillation, as was the Bolshevik party on the eve of the October Revolution. Unfortunately, with both Lenin and Trotsky ill, the German leaders were told by Stalin and Zinoviev to proceed cautiously, even to wait until the attack of the counter-revolution! However, a revolutionary crisis cannot last indefinitely. Revolution has its own laws. When everything is in the balance, the time for decisive action can be telescoped into a matter of weeks or even days. Events will not wait for those who prevaricate! Unfortunately, the German CP leaders dithered and the revolutionary opportunity was missed. The bourgeois recovered their nerves and the crisis subsided. The failure of the German revolution was a colossal blow to the Russian masses, which desperately awaited revolution in the west.

The German defeat, together with Lenin's death in January 1924, combined to strengthen the growing bureaucratic cancer eating away at the Soviet regime. The consolidation of power into

the hands of the "troika" of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin, and the campaign of denigration against Trotsky, constituted a turning point in the degeneration of the revolution. In effect, power was passing into the hands of Stalin and the bureaucratic apparatus. "Reflecting at the time", wrote Ted Grant on the occasion of the dissolution of the Communist International, "perhaps unconsciously, the interests of the reactionary and conservative bureaucracy which was just beginning to raise itself above the Soviet masses, Stalin for the first time in 1924 came forward with the utopian and anti-Leninist theory of 'socialism in one country'. This 'theory' sprang directly from the defeat, which the revolution had suffered in Germany. It indicated a turning away from the principles of revolutionary internationalism on which the Russian Revolution had been based and on which the Communist International was founded."

Degeneration of the Third International

The glorious Third International, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, was the instrument of world revolution. With the advent of Stalinism, the International became increasingly the mouthpiece for the foreign policy of the Russian bureaucracy, ready for any twist and turn that was demanded by Moscow. The separate Communist Parties under Stalinist domination became simply border guards for the Kremlin. As Trotsky had brilliantly forecast in 1928, the adoption of the theory of 'socialism in one country' would result in the reformist and nationalist degeneration of the Communist Parties. In June 1943, as a gesture to the Allies, Stalin unceremoniously and without consultation or a vote, dissolved the Communist International. At the same time, the Internationale was abolished as the official anthem of the Soviet state, and replaced by a song in praise of Great Russia.

Leninism lived on in the struggle of Trotsky's Left Opposition. An essential part of this struggle is proletarian internationalism and the fight for world socialism, epitomised by the words of the Communist Manifesto: "Workers of All Lands, Unite!" ■

Cesar released on bail - The campaign continues for his unconditional release

ON MONDAY, October 11th, at 8.30 pm Cesar Zelada was released on bail from the San Pedro Penal, La Paz, Bolivia, where he had been arrested by the Bolivian authorities for nearly a month. The campaign for his unconditional release and for the freedom of other political prisoners at the San Pedro Penal continues.

Cesar is a student leader, organiser of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign in Perú and a member of the Left Socialist Force organisation in that country. He was arrested on September 14th in La Paz where he was part of a solidarity delegation to participate in a meeting of the Youth wing of the COB (Bolivian Workers' Union) and in solidarity with the struggle of the Oruro University students.

César was accused by the authorities of carrying a dynamite stick, of being suspicious since he was in the upper class district of La Florida without a justified reason, and of having entered the country for dubious reasons and of not having a fixed residence. All these allegations have been proven to be without any grounds. The chemical tests conducted on César's bag were negative (meaning he was NOT carrying explosives). César has proven that he was in La Florida visiting his friend Javier Orellana (a member of the COB Youth). Regarding the reasons for his trip he has proven that he had been invited by the COB National Executive and that he had met with COB national leader Jaime Solares on September 10th. Furthermore he has proven that he was staying at the Pullman Hotel. For all these reasons we demand the dropping of all charges against Cesar Zelada, and his unconditional release, since his is clearly a case of political repression.

While in jail César wrote a letter to Hugo Chávez in which he details the circumstances of his arrest and a letter of thanks to all those who participated in the campaign for his release. These

are only available in Spanish at the moment. It is clear that his release on bail was only the result of the extraordinary international solidarity campaign that we launched and that was mentioned by his lawyer. The campaign also online at www.marxist.com/appeals had also an impact in the media and was reported by one of Bolivia's main newspapers La Razon.

We make an appeal to continue the campaign to put pressure on the Bolivian authorities. Sign the model resolution (in Spanish: Resolución de protesta) demanding the unconditional release of César and the release of the other political prisoners at San Pedro Penal. You can also write directly to the Bolivian authorities:

Presidencia de la República (Carlos Mesa):

webmaster@presidencia.gov.bo

Ministerio de Gobierno, Dr Saúl Lara Torrico:

mail@mingobierno.gov.bo

El Viceinisterio del Interior de Bolivia:

vicemingob@mingobierno.gov.bo

With copies to:

solidaridadconcesarzelada@yahoo.com

And contact your local Bolivian embassies demanding the same:

<http://www.boliviaweb.com/embassies.htm>

It is also important to contribute financially to the expenses of the campaign (bail, transport, legal expenses, etc). Please consider making a donation at www.marxist.com/appeals □

Venepal Workers Solidarity Appeal

Further to the information we published on the occupation of Venepal paper mill in Venezuela by its workers, we have received a request for solidarity action. The workers are appealing for an international campaign demanding the nationalisation under workers control of this important industry.

Solidarity messages can be sent to:
rowanjimenez@hotmail.com
and
venezuela@elmilitante.org

Send messages also to the Venezuelan authorities asking for the nationalisation of Venepal under workers control. A model resolution in Spanish can be found at <http://venezuela.elmilitante.org/index> but you can use your own words. Messages should be sent to:
Presidencia de la República:
presidencia@venezuela.gov.ve

Ministerio de Trabajo:
dgtrabajo@mintra.gov.ve

Fax del Ministerio de la Presidencia:
+ 58 2122638179

Faxes del Ministerio de Trabajo: + 58 2124084250 y + 58 2124084246

again with copies to
rowanjimenez@hotmail.com
and
venezuela@elmilitante.org

Raise donations from trade union organisations for the hardship fund of the workers. The best way to send the money is if this is channeled through the local Hands Off Venezuela campaigns in your area.

In cases where this might not be possible, donations can be sent directly to the Venepal union (SUTIP) bank account: Cuenta de Ahorro 0108-0125-71-0200359704 del Banco Provincial, SUTIP

The Venezuelan Revolution and the University for all

by Ray Smith

ONE OF the fields where the Bolivarian Revolution has advanced is education. The Chavez government has created the "Mision Robinson" which has virtually eliminated adult illiteracy by bringing an education programme to up to one million Venezuelans.

However, the efforts of the Revolution to extend culture and education do not stop once the individual can read and write. In order to extend higher education to those layers of the population who have been historically excluded from University studies, the Venezuelan government created the "Mision Sucre". Its goal is to provide university education to anyone who wants to study.

Since 1998 four new universities have been opened in Venezuela. The first was the Maritime University of the Caribbean. Following that was the creation of the Armed Forces University that provides university studies to the troops. The third one was the Universidad Sur del Lago in Maracaibo. However, the university that really captures the imagination of the people in Venezuela and all over the world is the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV).

The UBV was created on July 1, 2003. The philosophy that inspires this university is the "entire formation of the student, basing this formation on a dual relationship of learning altogether. Through the permanent dialogue of the students and the professors, the students and the communities and the students between themselves we will create a culture of cooperation and shared learning" (Francisco Perez, UBV Communication Director and professor). In order to fulfil this target the three main disciplines are environmental management, social management and social communication (including journalism and mass media). Other more traditional studies such as medicine, law, IT studies and architecture are also

offered at the UBV.

All theses, academic research, experiments and essays push the students to go to the poor neighbourhoods and interact with the inhabitants of these areas. This progressive academic requirement reminds the students of where they come from and that university is a place to educate professionals at the service of the people and not for the creation of an elite which raises itself above the rest of society.

Youth are the key to revolution

77% of UBV students come from poor backgrounds and 17% come from the lower middle class (UBV sources). The UBV acknowledges extra-educational problems that the students have, such as family problems, violence, drugs and all other social problems related with poverty and misery. In order to reduce this problem the UBV has created an entire department that works with professors and students to analyse potential problems. Other measures that help the students to carry on with their education are health services, meals and transport provided by the University.

The role of the professors is also quite different from traditional universities. Professors at the UBV are real motivators for the students to learn. They also reject the "division of labour" amongst professors into those who teach and those who research. Both activities are seen as complementary and are duties for all professors. Another detail that gets the attention of people used to the traditional university system is how young the professors are. The youth are key for the development of the Venezuelan Revolution and the UBV has acknowledged this.

It is not an accident that the hierarchy of the traditional universities, historically linked to the local oligarchy, have strongly attacked the UBV. They see the UBV as something dangerous. They do

indeed have reason to be afraid of the UBV. Simon Bolivar once said that "a wise people is a tool for its own liberation, redemption, life and future". The economic and political rule of the oligarchy was partly based upon the illiteracy of the 80% of Venezuelans below the poverty line.

Since the very beginning the UBV has been linked to the unfolding revolutionary process in Venezuela, especially with the struggle against the oil lockout at PDVSA (state owned oil company). When the lockout was defeated by the spontaneous but disciplined action of the oil workers and their communities, the government found several office buildings completely furnished that had remained idle. These buildings were the playhouses of PDVSA management who misused them. These colossal buildings became the campuses for the new university in Caracas. But this is not the only contribution coming from PDVSA to the UBV, part of the revenue coming from the oil is invested in the Bolivarian University.

Finish the task

In only one year the UBV has managed to integrate 17,962 students from poor backgrounds into higher education (UBV Press, 28/09/04). This is an achievement of the Venezuelan Revolution and an inspiration for youth and workers all over the world. However, if the Venezuelan students from poor backgrounds want to keep the UBV and develop it further they have to reinforce the Venezuelan Revolution. On a capitalist basis it is not possible to keep great successes like the UBV forever. The Venezuelan Revolution must push aside its enemies and finish the task of creating a new society with no classes nor privileges for a tiny minority, a society that can actually ensure university education and other social services for all. □

The Motorcycle Diaries

Ernesto Guevara - A revolutionary in the making

by Maarten Vanheeuverswyn

"Always be capable of feeling deep inside any injustice committed against anyone anywhere in the world. It is the finest quality of a revolutionary."

Che Guevara

THE MOTORCYCLE Diaries, the recently released film about Ernesto Che Guevara, is an exciting adaptation of Guevara's writings of the same name. Also based on Alberto Granado's memoirs *Travelling With Che Guevara*, Che's travelling companion, the director Walter Salles was able to paint a graphic picture of a revolutionary in the making.

It is Buenos Aires in the year 1952. Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, a 23-year-old medical student, and his friend, the biochemistry graduate Alberto Granado, leave their cosy middle-class life and set out on a journey across Latin America. "Armed" only with an old motorbike ("the Mighty One"), both friends seem to be heading for a romantic conquest of this massive and beautiful continent. The method? Improvisation, says Ernesto. We see two young men, at times struggling with each other. But the main image that comes across is that of two nice guys keeping an eye out for the girls. Humour is never far away.

However, they soon discover that all is not peace and harmony on the continent. When they reach

Chile, Ernesto and Alberto are confronted with the reality of everyday life. Their bike breaks down and they are broke. But that is nothing compared to the misery of the world that surrounds them. They continue their journey on foot, thus coming upon two homeless peasants who have lost their land. This is only the first of their encounters with injustice and inequality, and it marks a significant darkening of the whole atmosphere of the film. The jokes have not disappeared but it is clear something has changed - there is a growing awareness of injustice.

Turning Point

After this turning point, Ernesto especially becomes more and more concerned with the poverty of the indigenous people, the miners, peasants, etc. He sees the ruthless bosses in action treating the workers like animals. Combine this with the devastating sight of the ruined Machu Picchu in Peru compared to the desolated city of Lima, and you see how the young student's consciousness is changing the further he travels. In a sense this is also reflected in his honesty. When he is asked by a man they are seeking lodging with about the lump on his neck, Ernesto frankly tells him it is a tumour. The same is true when he crudely tells his host that his self-written novel is unreadable. What



comes across is a Che that is incapable of telling a lie.

The climax is reached when Ernesto and Alberto arrive at a Peruvian leprosy colony. Even here the patients are treated with insolence and are kept apart from doctors and nurses. But Ernesto refuses to follow the rules set down by the nuns. Since leprosy is not contagious, he does not want to wear gloves when dealing with patients. No wonder both friends soon become popular figures with the leprosy patients. This is also the moment Ernesto starts to deliver his first political speeches. On his birthday he talks about the unity of all Latin American countries, hence defying the artificial boundaries imposed by imperialism. To his credit, he symbolically swims across the river separating the sick from the ordinary people. He is greeted by a mass of people welcoming him, just as the revolutionary Che will be greeted by the

masses in Cuba years later.

The Human Side

However, *The Motorcycle Diaries* is not about the later revolutionary fighter Che Guevara. The viewer is not presented with a hagiography of a person so often the subject of myth-making. Above all, this film deals with the human Ernesto Guevara de la Serna. The Che we see here is a sincere and simple man (and a clumsy dancer) suffering from bad asthma attacks, but also a compassionate person caring for his fellow human beings who is unwilling to reconcile himself with injustice. In that sense, this film certainly claims artistic qualities that go beyond the ordinary biographical sketches. Of all its merits, *The Motorcycle Diaries* is primarily a most enjoyable documentary that also aspires to the more universal themes of exploration, comradeship - and resistance. ■

Venezuela

The struggle of the Venepal workers - A crucial turning point for the Venezuelan revolution

by Jorge Martin

ON SEPTEMBER 7, 2004, the owners of Venepal, a paper mill in Morón, Carabobo, in Venezuela, decided to cease their operations and not pay their 400 workers their wages. This is not the first time something like this has happened. A year ago the company took the same decision alleging financial difficulties. At that time the workers decided to occupy the premises in a bitter eleven-week struggle. Now they are demanding that the government nationalises the company and puts it under workers' control and management. This is an extremely important struggle which could be crucial for the future of the labour movement and the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela.

Venepal is one of the main producers of paper and cardboard in Venezuela and its installations are located in Morón, in the industrial state of Carabobo. At one point it employed a total of 1,600 workers, controlled 40% of the national market and was one of the main producers of Latin America in this sector. But the company's management allowed the paper mill to slowly lose market shares and revenues. In April 2002, at the time of the short lived military coup against Chávez, some of its main shareholders were present at the swearing in ceremony for the new, illegitimate, "president" Pedro Carmona. During the bosses' lockout against the Chávez government in December-January 2002-03 the workers resisted attempts by the employers to paralyse the installations.

Finally, on July 4, 2003, the company declared bankruptcy and left 600 workers without jobs and owing them large amounts in back wages. The company had accumulated debts of \$100million with the banks (60% with international banks, and 40% with national banks), and a further \$30 million with the Venezuelan state in unpaid taxes, national insurance contributions, gas and electricity bills, etc.

By that time, the revolutionary

process that Venezuela has been living through since 1998 had given the workers enough confidence to take action to save their jobs. On a number of occasions president Chávez had called on workers to take over factories if the bosses shut down operations. After a mass meeting with the participation of the local communities, the workers decided to occupy the installations and run them under workers' control and management. The conflict lasted for 77 days. Rowan Jimenez, a trade union activist and member of the struggle committee, explains how during the occupation, "the workers organised production, broke all productivity records and reduced unproductive waste to a level never seen before" (El Topo Obrero, 16/09/04). After three long months of struggle and negotiations finally an agreement was reached. This included a schedule for payment of back wages, the maintenance of between 400 and 600 jobs. The paper mill would reopen under its former owners and the state would provide cheap credits.

The workers considered this as a partial victory, but they remained vigilant. Alexis Polanco, leader of the UNT in Morón, was clear in saying that he thought that the "contradictions with the company will continue and we must go towards a model in which the workers and the government run the company which should be state owned" (El Militante, October 2003) Though there was no formal agreement, the workers,

through the union, established a form of workers' control. All decisions taken regarding production, inventory, hiring and firing, etc., were supervised by the workers. This was an uneasy truce that could not last.

Multinational asset stripping take over feared

On September 7th of this year, the company again ceased operations and the workers' struggle started again. The decision is also linked to an attempt to hand over the company's assets to paper multinational Smurfit and transfer production to Colombia. Smurfit is one of the largest multinationals in the world in the paper and cardboard sector. The workers fear that this would be a ruthless asset stripping operation.

The workers have now taken over the installations and are demanding nationalisation under workers' control as the only way forward. On September 16th a delegation of 100 workers went to Caracas to protest outside the Ministry of Labour. Edgar Peña, general secretary of the Union of Paper Industry Workers (SUTIP), affiliated to the UNT, explained how, "Smurfit has been breaking up the company and taking over certain parts of it with the idea of taking overall control of Venepal" (El Topo Obrero 16/09/04).

Uniting the workers with the revolutionary people

The workers are clear about the need to involve the local community in the struggle to save their livelihood. Morón is a solidly revolutionary town of about 80,000 people where support for Chávez in the presidential recall referendum on August 15th reached 73%. The workers explain how Venepal could be used to benefit the revolution as a whole. On the one hand by producing paper for the "Misiones" (Bolivarian government social projects run by the communities) related to education, the Bolivarian University, etc. But there is



more. The company's installations include 5,000 hectares of land in Carabobo, Falcón and Yaracuy, most of it untilled, which the peasants have tried to cultivate against the wishes of the owners. There are also mills, abandoned houses, a school, grazing land for cattle, a baseball stadium, a hotel with a swimming pool, a power station and even its own airfield. Most of these installations are now standing idle and abandoned and the workers argue that they should be used as part of the revolutionary project to the benefit of the people. Land should be given to the peasant co-ops, the sports and educational facilities used by the communities, etc.

For this reason, on September 22nd the workers in struggle organised a mass meeting with the local Electoral Battle Units (UBEs), the organisations set up to fight the August 15th presidential recall referendum and that are now becoming the local organising bodies of the revolutionary movement. Ten of the local UBEs were present representing hundreds of organised people. There was a roll call of all the different UBEs present and their representatives explained to the mass meeting how many people they could mobilise and how they were prepared to help the struggle (by providing food, transport, etc). The mood at the rally was electric. A representative from an UBE said: "we are in a revolution and this struggle is our struggle. We are fighting for the workers of Venepal and their families, for the defence of the revolution and for our country", a Venepal worker added: "Here we see the strength of the working class, which is able to unite and mobilise the whole of the popular forces towards the same aim".

Alexis Polanco, leader of the UNT in Morón and general secretary of the workers' union in the Ferrelca metal factory, called on the Carabobo UNT to organise a regional march in support of the Venepal workers. "This struggle must become a rallying banner for the whole of the revolutionary movement. If Venepal falls into the hands of multinational Smurfit, jobs will be lost and an enormous amount of wealth which belongs to the Venezuelan people will be handed over to this multinational.



This goes against the revolutionary project we are fighting for. The struggle of Venepal is the struggle of all those who support this revolutionary process, of all the exploited, and we can win this struggle".

The next step in the struggle was a march through the streets of Morón on September 30th. More than 700 people participated and the mood was one of enthusiasm and confidence. It is clear that the victory of the revolutionary forces on August 15th, the third major defeat of the reactionary oligarchy after the April 2002 coup and the December 2002 bosses' lock out, has had a major impact on the consciousness of the working class. In Carabobo alone, a state which concentrates a large share of the country's private industry, dozens of factories are being organised in UNT affiliated unions.

Organising working class solidarity

On October 6th there was a meeting in Valencia called by the Carabobo region of the UNT with more than 50 trade union leaders from the state to discuss organising solidarity with Venepal workers. Present were union leaders and shop stewards from Coca-Cola, Pirelli, Ford, General Motors, and others, together with a delegation of Venepal workers. The solidarity from other unions was impressive. Ford shop stewards made a donation of 200,000 Bs, and Owen-Illinois trade union delegates handed over a cheque for 100,000 Bs. Workers at Venezolana de Pinturas decided at a mass meeting on October 9th to make a weekly donation to the

hardship fund and oil workers at El Palito refinery agreed to donate 10,000 Bs per worker. Other factories agreed to organise factory gate collections.

A manifesto was passed at this meeting which calls for the nationalisation under workers' control and management of Venepal, appeals to all UNT affiliated to support the struggle of the Venepal workers by participating in the mobilisation and raising the necessary funds to sustain it and it also calls for mass workplace meetings at all fac-

tories to explain the issue and raise weekly donations from all workers for the hardship fund. Finally the trade union leaders present called for a national and international solidarity campaign under the slogan "Nationalisation of Venepal under workers' control".

This is clearly a struggle which will be extremely significant for the future of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. From the very beginning the parasitical Venezuelan ruling class has been bitterly opposed to this revolution, despite the fact that the movement has not yet touched their private property of the means of production. For decades they have been completely unable and unwilling to develop the country in any progressive way and therefore they are aware that a revolutionary movement to fulfil even the most basic needs of the masses (health, education, jobs, houses, land) would clash head on with their control of the country's economy. And they are right. The struggle of Venepal workers shows clearly the way forward. In order to defend and advance the living standards of the masses of the Venezuelan people, the workers must take over control of the economy, so that it can be run through a democratic plan to the benefit of the majority of its people.

The workers are appealing for an international campaign demanding the nationalisation under workers control of this important industry. ■

www.handsoffvenezuela.org

For solidarity details see page 19

Death in the Sinai, Gaza and Iraq - Power cuts in the Lebanon All part of the same crisis

by our Middle East correspondent

ANYONE WHO examines the situation of the Middle East, not in each country separately but as a whole, must come to the conclusion that the days of social and economic stability are definitely over. Instead of economic stability we have crisis. Instead of peace we are caught in the crossfire between the imperialists' state terror and the individual terror of the Islamic fundamentalists.

One of the most recent cases that caught the attention of people around the world was what happened on the border between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai Desert when three explosions hit holiday resorts populated by thousands of Israelis. The irony is that those people who go to these kinds of resorts are just ordinary working Israelis who cannot afford to spend their holidays in far away countries.

The most devastating attack took place last Thursday, when a blast ripped through the Hilton Hotel in the resort town of Taba, close to the border with Israel.

A new organization, the Jama'a Al-Islamiya Al-Alamiya (World Islamist Group) later claimed responsibility for the Taba hotel blast.

While these kinds of terrorist attacks continue, the Israeli army continues killing in Gaza. More

Palestinians, including teenagers, have been killed in Gaza and according to the Israeli sources the number of dead, many of them women and children, reached 88 by the end of last week.

To justify the killing of large numbers of civilians the Israel army claimed that two young boys were trying to carry out attacks. The two, a 14-year-old and a 15-year-old, had been killed while playing at being militants, Palestinian witnesses said. Abu Foul's older brother, 19-year-old Mohammed, said he was told by the boys' friends that the two had been playing on the outskirts of Jabalya, about 200 meters from an IDF tank position. Mohammed said he was told the two boys were playing with an empty tube and gasoline-filled

bottles, imitating militants. Also Thursday of last week, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy from Jabalya died of wounds sustained from a missile fired at a group of people in the camp.

While the Israeli army continues to kill Palestinians, the US army continues to kill Iraqis. According to Al Jazeera, a US air strike on the Iraqi city of Falluja left at least 10 people dead. The US army immediately issued a statement that it had early on Friday targeted a so-called "safe house" used by supporters of al-Qaida linked to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. This is the same language the Israeli army uses, and the same kind of justification for attacking civilian targets. "Multinational forces struck an Abu Musab al-Zarqawi safe house in north-west Falluja on the

morning of 8 October. Credible intelligence sources confirmed Zarqawi leaders were meeting at the safe house at the time of the strike," the statement said.

Falluja, to the west of the capital Baghdad, is in fact targeted frequently by US warplanes on the lookout for supporters of al-Zarqawi. At the same time, the Islamic fundamentalists fired at least two rockets at the Sheraton and Palestine hotels in central Baghdad, causing damage and starting a fire in the area. Panic-stricken guests fled from the building, the lobby of which was littered with shattered glass and bits of rubble.

Thus both Israel/Palestine and Iraq are experiencing brutal state terrorism, with the army storming into civilian areas shooting and bombing ordinary working people. And at the same time we have individual terrorist attacks hitting ordinary working people in Israel. There are important differences between the situation in Iraq and that in Israel, but there are also common elements. In both cases we have people being oppressed by a foreign power. And there is no end in sight to this.

The instability of the Middle East is not only due to military conflict and occupation. The area



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is being affected by the general crisis the economy. This is expressed also in a worsening of the infrastructure. We saw example of this in the Lebanon recently.

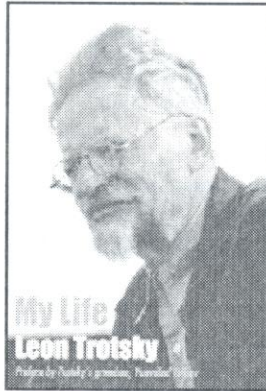
While we have dark clouds of fire and death over growing parts of the Middle East, the Lebanese people suffered literally from darkness last week. Because of the higher cost of fuel there were power cuts, which plunged the country into four days of darkness. Lebanese Energy Minister Ayub Hmayid has said that electricity would gradually return to normal as ships unloaded fuel. However, those supplies will last only until the end of this month.

This has led many to fear a winter by candlelight. The EDL power utility will be struggling to guarantee electricity supplies this winter.

Thus we see how the Lebanese ruling class cannot even provide what is a basic necessity for civilized existence. This problem in the Lebanon serves merely to highlight the crisis of the whole system in the Middle East. Everywhere the basic infrastructures are in decline. Everyday life is becoming more difficult across the whole of the Middle East, for Arabs, Jews, Druzes, Kurds. Unemployment, inflation, falling living standards, do not distinguish between one people and another. They affect all.

Last week's power cuts in the Lebanon are merely a taste of what is to come in the future. It is part of the hell of growing barbarism of the decaying capitalist order spreading throughout the entire region. And it will continue and deepen so long as capitalism survives in the region. The working class of all countries have the duty to transform this decaying social order into a socialist society based on a nationalized planned economy within a socialist Federation of the Middle East.

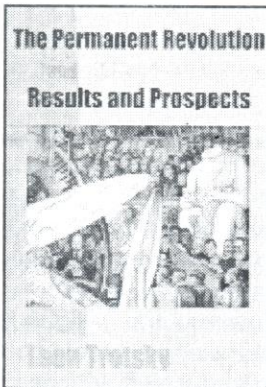
Until this is achieved we will see more wars, more terrorism, more conflicts between peoples. ■



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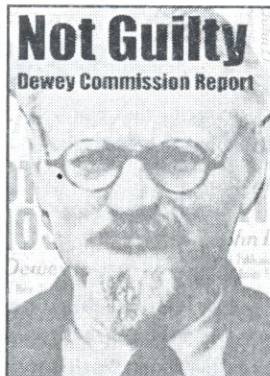


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This book has been out of print for some time and will be a valuable addition to those seeking better to understand Stalinism and its lie-machine.

Early next year Wellred intends reprint the sequel, *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, Trotsky's verbatim testimony to the Dewey Commission.

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Reawakening of the Dutch working class

Biggest trade union demo in recent history

by Erik Demeester

"FOR YOUR own safety we recommend you do not go to the centre of town," was the advice posted by the police on giant electronic boards in the Central Station of Amsterdam. This happened at midday on Saturday, October 2. Why was the police doing this? A terrorist threat? A riot? Criminal gangs occupying the town centre? No! The Museum Square in the heart of the city of the Dutch capital was filled with the biggest workers' demonstration for decades, if not in the whole of the country's history.

All the main avenues and little streets leading off the Square were filled with demonstrators from all over the country. The streets were so packed that there was no room to move forward or even backwards. "We are, we are angry," was chanted to the "We will rock you" song of the rock band, Queen. "Action, action, now," shouted other groups of workers.

The bulk of the demo was of course composed of workers, but there were also young students, old aged pensioners and unemployed people. The gathering was a faithful representation of all the discontented layers of Dutch society.

The media put the number of demonstrators at 200,000. But more realistic calculations indicate that the figure was more like 250,000 or even 300,000 people mobilised by the trade unions against the austerity package of the right-wing cabinet led by the Prime Minister Balkenende. Even

in 1981 during the massive anti-nuclear demonstrations - which were considered the biggest ever - the city had not seen so many people protesting.

How was such a thing possible in a country praised for its "peaceful" social relations, easy going social dialogue between the unions and the bosses carried out in backrooms, low levels of unemployment and a highly developed welfare system? Since the 1980s, the Netherlands have been the laboratory of what they would call the so-called "Poldermodel", where employers, unions and the government agreed to a common policy of wage restraint and social peace. The "Dutch miracle" became the envy of many governments in Europe and even of many trade union and Socialist Party leaders who have tried to emulate it.

Model Breaking Down

Now that model is breaking down under the pressure of the international crisis of capitalism. The "Poldermodel" succeeded for a time in hiding growing social inequality and frustration. The sudden surge - almost out of the blue - of the right-wing racist maverick Pim Fortuyn two years ago heralded the end of social peace. His electoral success followed by his assassination pointed to big tensions building up within Dutch society. Contrary to what many left groups

raised, who saw in Pim Fortuyn's popularity a sharp move in the direction of Fascism and a rightward shift in social and political attitudes, it opened the way to a new era of instability and polarisation.

As a Dutch paper pointed out after Saturday's gigantic demo: "Paradoxically the trade union movement is benefiting from the forest fire of discontent Fortuyn had created in 2002.

Paradoxically, because the FNV union (which is leading the protest) had been stigmatised by Fortuyn as a 'left Church'." (De Volkskrant, October 4, 2004).

The demonstrators were protesting against measures being carried out by the right-wing government of Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende aimed at reducing early retirement entitlements, raising the retirement age and "reforming" the social security contributions system from next January.

Two weeks earlier the Rotterdam workers paid tribute to the reputation of the city as being a "red fortress" - a reputation they superficially seemed to have lost with the "Pim Fortuyn" revolt with a general strike. The dockers paralysed what is the biggest port in the world for 24 hours. Their



workmates in the Terneuzen and Vlissingen ports even preceded them by stopping the night shift. In Rotterdam the building workers left their sites en masse to join the transport workers and other public service workers. Also in some of the factories the workers downed tools. As a result 60,000 workers turned up for the demonstration in Rotterdam. This was the prelude to another strike of public transport workers in Amsterdam a week later. Here 10,000 joined a protest demo. Meanwhile hundreds of factories and offices held lunchtime stoppages preparing for the big demo in Amsterdam.

Workers' Reaction

Clearly worried by the reaction of the working class the bosses' organisations are now calling for new negotiations and demanding that the unions and the government "jump over their shadows", by which they mean set aside their traditional differences. They want to reach a deal between the bosses and unions nationally, because they fear that the lack of an agreement with the government

would push the workers at factory or industry level to organise local strikes to "make up" for the losses they would suffer through Balkenende's austerity package. They fear a general movement of strikes at local, industrial and regional level.

An organised left wing is starting to appear inside the unions, especially organised around the dockers of Rotterdam. Different unions are already calling for a 24-hour general strike on November 9th. They correctly claim it is impossible to "convince" the government of the workers' demands. They understand that these need to be forced onto the government.

On the other hand, the union leaders have been clearly surprised by the reaction of the workers. They know that with a right-wing government on a collision course with the unions, there is very little room for manoeuvre for them. That's why they want to go back to the "good old days" of the past when they had the "Poldermodel". In pursuit of this utopian goal, they are proposing a referendum on the austerity



package instead of calling a general strike or small local strikes over the next weeks and months.

The "left" in the unions also fear that without a national and collective response and a follow-up to the historic success of October 2, the anger of the workers could be diverted into local and factory struggles. The readiness for action amongst workers, young and old, has been confirmed also by all kind of polls and sociological surveys during the last few months.

Whatever the short term implications of this movement one thing is clear: the Dutch workers have woken up from a long winter sleep.

In Memory of Della Clyne

With a deep sense of sadness we learned of the death of Della Clyne following a short struggle with cancer.

Although she was not known to many comrades, Della was a very remarkable woman with a passionate nature and an open and inquiring mind. She was not young in years but she seemed to be eternally young in spirit and possessed a tremendous and infectious enthusiasm that communicated itself to everyone near her.

Della joined the Labour League of Youth as a young woman and always had a lively interest in politics and a very progressive and humanitarian disposition. But it was only in the last few years that she developed an interest in Marxism, which opened up new and exciting horizons for her.

Della was an enthusiastic subscriber to Marxist.com and was firmly convinced of the correctness of our ideas. She was particularly enthusiastic about our work in Pakistan, and visited the comrades there shortly after the victory of the Pakistan Marxists in the elections when comrade Manzoor Ahmed was elected to the National Assembly. Della was immensely popular with the comrades in

Pakistan and she returned their affection by her unstinting support for The Struggle organization. She was personally responsible for publishing the English edition of Lal Khan's splendid book *Partition - Can it be Undone?* She was a perfectionist in all things, and she was still working on improvements on the book right up till the moment when her illness prevented her from continuing. Della assiduously followed our website and was always full of praise for it and for our work in general. Even when she was seriously ill in hospital one month ago, she expressed her firm determination to go to the world Marxist school in Spain next year.

Unfortunately, she will not be able to be present at that event. But she will always be present in the hearts and minds of all of us who knew her. She will be sorely missed.

Our deepest condolences go to Jonathan, Lena and the children, and to all her family.

Alan Woods, for the Editorial Board,
October 11, 2004

letters

Dear Comrades,

I'm writing to Socialist Appeal to complain.

Why you might ask?
I'll get round to that.

Every week or so, a friend of mine rings me and complains bitterly. He moans about this, he moans about that. Generally he moans because the political discussions he's a party to don't go into sufficient detail about the life of the workers. He moans about the plight of the futures market, the idiocy of the bulls and the silliness of the bears, but he always comes back to the conditions faced by the workers. He's fascinated by the short term obsessions of the money men. But he always comes back to the problems of the working class. He also moans about things like the demise of this or that gear mechanism in cars, or the shortcomings of the Big Bang Theory. In fact he talks about a lot of very useful things... generally.

He's an interesting bloke, incisive, witty, intelligent, confident in his ideas and eternally optimistic. And he always moans on at me to try and put things straight and improve the things he feels aren't quite up to the mark.

Maybe I ought to sell him a copy of this journal, you might say?

60 years ago in 1944, in the latter part of the second world war my friend led a strike of the Tyneside Apprentices against Ernest Bevin's order to send sections of them down the mines. Pilloried, witch hunted and condemned the Socialists deemed responsible for the strike were tried and sentenced by the bosses courts.

15 years ago, my friend played a huge role in the development of the mass campaign against the Poll Tax, a McKensie's Friend if you like!

In 1991/1992 my friend played an important role in the struggle to defend the ideas of Marxism, culminating in the launch of the www.marxist.com website and of Socialist Appeal in Britain.

Flushed with success at retiring from working for the bosses, this same friend of mine insisted in selling his house to his unsuspecting son. Shortly afterwards he bought himself an unnecessarily flash car and insisted on making me drive him

around the North East of England and beyond promoting the ideas of Marxism.

Not long after that he began to play an active role in developing the ideas of Marxism at a national level in Britain. This role and contribution have been greatly valued, particularly by the young comrades who have met him.

A couple of years ago he had a right go at me for not preparing adequately for a talk at a meeting. As it goes I'll let him off cos' the analysis was right! But the point is that not only was he there, but that he made an important contribution to our meeting that raised the level of the discussion, and it also contributed to the development of the Marxist tendency.

He has a thirst for ideas and reads voraciously, climbs ladders, baby sits and is often seen in deep and meaningful discussions with (usually female) workers.

Hundreds of people share my friendship with this Comrade. Dozens of people in the North East appreciate his contribution to the Labour Movement. Many of the sellers of Socialist Appeal in Britain have had the pleasure to meet him.

Comrades, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the supporters of Socialist Appeal in the North of England to thank Comrade Bill Landles for his outstanding contribution to the development of Marxism over the last 60 years.

Bill,

We would like, together with your family to offer you best wishes for your 80th birthday on the 26th October. Your confidence in working people and your sharp, critical and alert mind are evidence of a lifetime devoted to this movement.

Above all you remain an inspiration to us all. A Socialist, a Marxist and an Internationalist.

My complaint:

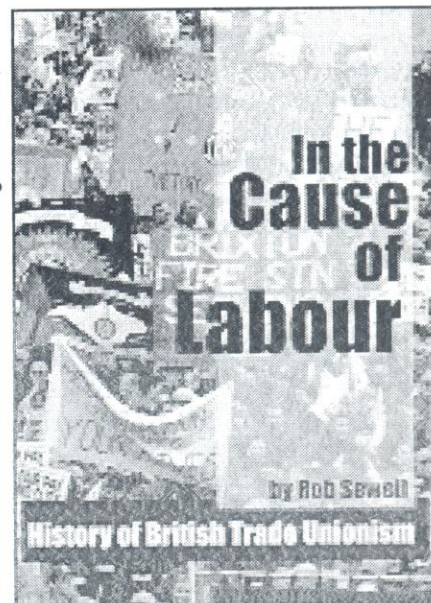
When they made Bill Landles they threw away the mould!

Terry McPartlan

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Autumn 2004 Edition of Asian Marxist Review - Out Now

AS THE continuing Iraqi resistance defies the might of US imperialism, cracks are beginning to widen between the various imperialist powers. Once again it is being proved in the alleys of Baghdad, Falluja and other cities of Iraq, that no power on earth, however strong it might be, can crush the masses in revolt. The ghost of Vietnam is once again haunting America. The rhetoric and shallow bravado of US politicians cannot conceal the inner worries, desperation and frustrations of the American ruling class. The courage and determination of the Iraqi masses is beginning to take its toll on the mightiest power on earth.

The aggravating instability in the Middle East, the seemingly endless conflagration in Palestine and Israel, the unstable regime of the Saudi reactionary monarchs, and the raging terror in the whole region are no solace for the imperialists.

In Iran the mullahs are now feeling the heat of the simmering lava that has been accumulating for decades under the relentless oppression of the obscurantist clergy. In spite of the facade of rhetoric the mullahs and the imperialists are equally terrified at the prospects of a revolutionary explosion in Iran.

Stability in Afghanistan has proved to be a mere "pipedream". The imperialist invasion has only led to the further devastation and destruction of this tragic country. In a primitive violent and fragmented Afghanistan all this talk of democracy and stability is so farcical that even the authors of this imperialist doctrine don't really believe in it. The sale of women, drugs and weapons smuggling are

still the basis of its battered economy. Karzai's helicopter survived yet another missile attack in Gardez and he rushed back to his rat hole in Kabul guarded by imperialist mercenaries. Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar are at large and the Taliban are far from defeated. The brutalities of the pre-medieval warlords have intensified; violence, bloodshed and destitution stalk the land.

The massacre of innocent children in Beslan, Russia shows the virulent nature of capitalist revival. Terrorism is a symptom of a diseased society. It is the distilled essence of a decaying system. The actions of the Russian Special Forces expose their demoralisation, brutality and professional incompetence. None of the ex-Soviet states is stable nor do they have any semblance of a genuine democratic set up.

A civil war is raging in Pakistan's North West frontier. The Pakistani army has been forced into a mess it can't solve. Paradoxically the so-called war against Islamic insurgents is creating fissures within the army itself. Armed forces personnel are under arrest for attempting to assassinate Musharraf. He might have survived at least three close hits, but his safety is far from secure. In spite of the accumulation of enormous powers Musharraf is a besieged person whose life is facing continuous threats and few would envy him. Pakistan lurches from one crisis to another and its future is bleaker than ever before. The economy is in shambles, the state in disarray and society in turmoil and anarchy.

The change of regime in India is in reality no change at

all. The oligarchy of finance capital has denied the will of the masses by imposing their stooge as prime minister. The new Congress led government is continuing the policy of "market reforms"; hence there is no respite in the plight of teeming millions who dared to challenge capitalism through the ballot box.

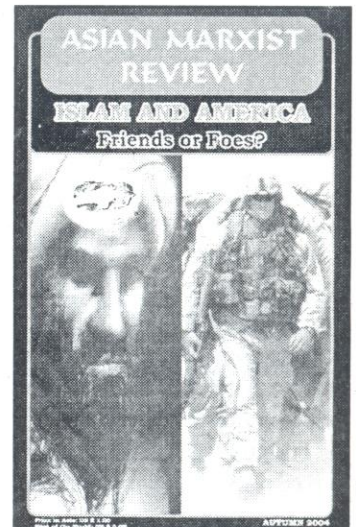
Their quest for change has been rejected. But they cannot wait for long. If their electoral expression has been ignored then they will have no choice but to move on to the path of more militant forms of struggle. Vigorous protests, demonstrations, strikes, general strikes and revolutionary upheavals loom large on India's horizon.

The misery being inflicted by capitalist exploitation, violence and natural disasters upon the masses of Bangladesh is a vicious cycle that has engulfed the country in spite of its national independence more than three decades ago. The new independent state has failed to put an end to the poverty and deprivation of Bengal.

The Asian tigers have yet to recover from the shock of the 1997 crash. Perhaps they will never do so, under the rule of capital.

The inequalities are perhaps the worst in the world in China. This uneven and combined development has brought China to the brink of unprecedented convulsions, turmoil and mass upsurge.

Across Asia instability has worsened. Terrorism rocks one country after another. State oppression is becoming more and more brutal and vicious. Poverty, misery, disease and unemployment are growing at a rapid pace. The whole continent has become a quagmire



of human degradation - the masses are yearning for a way out. There is no way forward under capitalism. Sooner rather than later a mass movement can erupt in any country of Asia. A revolutionary leadership and the socialist character of such a movement can transform it into a red blizzard that will sweep across the planet smashing the shackles of capitalist strangulation. The pain is so intense, the misery so agonising and the exploitation so tormenting that life itself has become an intolerable suffering for billions of Asians. This monstrosity can't go on forever. The only way out of this hell is on the road to a socialist revolution. If there is a socialist victory in just one country then the oppressed billions will storm the heavens and move to take their destiny into their own hands. This will begin the process of building a communist future, the only guarantee for the emancipation of the human race. □

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fighting fund

Drive for cash essential

LAST ISSUE in this column I had cause to comment on the Countryside Alliance. At this year's Labour Party conference in Brighton it was possible to come face to face with them as they lobbied the event on the Tuesday to co-incide with Blair's speech. Somehow they managed to outdo every impression you might have had of them. Like an English version of the Stepford Wives they all wore either Barbour Jackets or Public School rugby shirts, all brand new. Many were busy enquiring about the times of trains back to the rural backwaters of Kensington and Chelsea. They were there to act as the distilled essence of feudalism. With them were their workers who were under no illusion that as soon as they are no longer needed they will be out of a job. No wonder most people who actually live and work in the countryside hate these would-be Lords of the Manor.

Here we could see before our very eyes a full justification for the class war - because if we don't fight them and their system then they will fight back anyway to defend privilege and greed.

The following week was, of course, the Tory Party conference where Howard and co were trying to convince us of how normal they are all with videos about their first kiss, etc. Bearing in mind that these are people who wear pin-stripe suits out of choice it is a wonder everybody was able to keep a straight face. But behind the gloss we could see the old Tory face of reaction peeking

out. We need to be on our guard - the failings of Blairism have given these characters a lifeline.

The need to struggle for socialist ideas and a programme is not just about aiming for a better future, it is also about stopping a worse one! The revenge that the bosses are planning to inflict on the organised working class would, if they are allowed to get their '1st Eleven' back into government, put the days of Thatcher and Tebbit into the shade. So we have a mighty struggle ahead of us to stop this happening.

But to do this we need cash. We have launched a drive to raise a very modest £5000 in fighting fund by the end of Xmas. Merseyside readers have already chipped in, to get the ball rolling, with a donation of over £300, Peterborough readers have added £60 plus a number of small but important individual donations have also come through - we thank you all. We are also working out how much was raised at the E\$F event in London - when this is done we will have a grand total for the month of October. But we have a way to go and much to do. Every seller and reader must play their part. Individual donations are the bedrock but this must be added to by fund raising events etc.

So let's get started. Please send in what you can to help us fly the red flag. Donations should be made payable to Socialist Appeal and sent to us at PO Box 50525, London, E14 6WG.

Steve Jones

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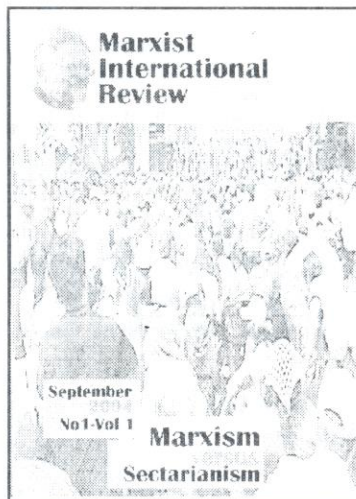
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✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.

✚ **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

Civil Servants strike to defend jobs and services

THE BLAIR government is putting the lessons it has learned in Iraq to good use in attacking workers at home. They have unleashed a campaign of shock and awe against their own workers in the civil service.

Over the summer Gordon Brown casually announced plans for the biggest campaign of attacks on the civil service in the whole of history. After playing a game of chicken with the opposition to see who would go highest, Brother Brown outdid the Tories and emerged victorious having promised to sack one fifth of the service over the next three years - that is 104,000 staff from across all departments.

In reality the government is playing Russian roulette. They have been heaping attacks on public sector workers for years and people are sick of it - the latest also includes, 20,000 jobs being relocated across the country from London and the South East, and a new proposal to change current terms and conditions, increase working hours, raise the age

of retirement, and restrict the number of sick days people can take.

The PCS union balloted all 165,000 members urging a bold yes vote to strengthen its hand in negotiations. The members responded with a massive two to one vote in favour of strike action. The union has called a one-day strike to take place on November 5th - this will be important in building the morale of the members for the struggle ahead.

The government are trying to build public support for their actions - they have said that they are driving through these cuts in order to improve the service - work that one out! How can cuts possibly improve the service? They have said that money will be diverted from 'wasteful' behind the scenes work into more frontline services. They are not telling us that for every one on the front line there has to be at least another one behind the scenes backing them up. These cut are designed to save money by running the

service down and nothing more.

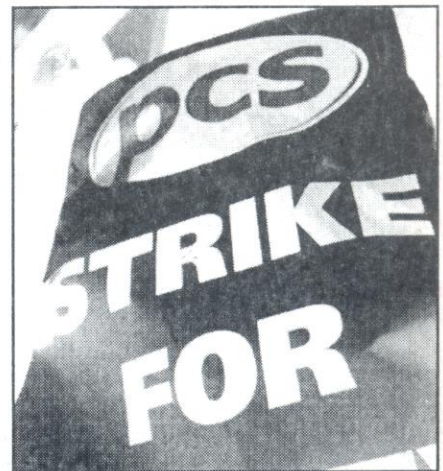
The governments plans will devastate services which every member of society uses - anyone applying for a passport, receiving tax credits, or sitting a driving test will suffer from these cuts. And of course the first to suffer are the civil service workers themselves who are right at the point of attack. If the cuts go through the employer will be in a strong position to launch an all-out offensive on the conditions that these workers have built up over generations of struggle.

It is essential that the whole movement gets behind this struggle, and gives its full support to the civil service workers. This dispute will not be a pushover. The government has shown in the past that it is determined to take the unions on. One way or another only an organised and determined fight will put a stop to these plans and

save the jobs.

But this struggle is also a political one. The Labour Government has been working in the interests of the bosses for years - now they have turned on their own workers. We have to put a stop to this now. The unions must use this dispute to mobilise against the Tories who are leading our party, to reclaim it and put forward socialist policies in the interests of working people. □

Victory to the civil service workers!



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