

1905 • Iraq • Tsunami • Middle East • Venezuela

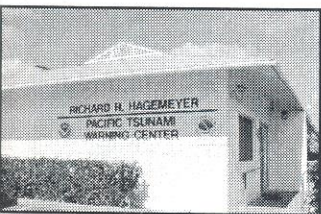
# Socialist Appeal

February 2005 issue 129

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



## Elections in Iraq: A Cynical Deception



Tsunami Disaster:  
Horror Without End

[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

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

# index

## this month

www.marxist.com

Editorial:	
The Torture of Basra - Britain's Abu Ghraib.....	3
Public Sector Pensions.....	4
North Lanarkshire Trades Council.....	5
Edinburgh: Lismore School Campaign.....	5
It's No Way To Run A Railway.....	6
NUJ Left Conference.....	6
Stress At Work.....	7
Royal Mail ride back into profit on workers' backs Office.....	8
Wealth Gap.....	10
Hands Off Venezuela.....	11
Economy: China: Contradictions Of Development.....	12-13
Tsunami Disaster: Horror Without End.....	19-21
Iraq Elections: A Cynical Deception.....	22-25
Middle East: Elections in Palestine: Imperialism gets the man they wanted - but can Abbas deliver?.....	26-27
Venezuela: Chavez announces "war against the latifundia".....	28-29
Fighting Fund.....	30

### Royal Scandal - page 9

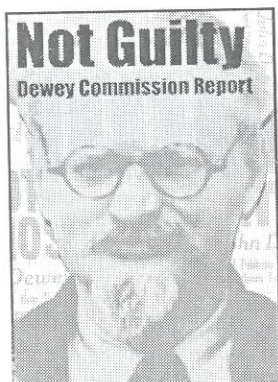
● The trouble with Harry



### 1905 - page 9



● Marking The Centenary



**New From Wellred:  
 Not Guilty!  
 page 18**

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

The Deadline for Issue 130 is February 14

# The Torture of Basra - Britain's Abu Ghraib

THE TRUTH will out. When photographs were released exposing the systematic torture of Iraqi prisoners by the US military at Abu Ghraib prison, the propaganda machine here went into overtime to question the authenticity of pictures showing British troops engaged in the same appalling acts.

From the beginning there has been an attempt by the British media to contrast the 'civilised' behaviour of the British military with certain criticisms of US methods. However, the latest scandal surrounding the publication of 22 photographs by the court martial of three British soldiers in Osnabruck - revealing yet more grotesque and abhorrent scenes of sexual humiliation, and violent beatings of prisoners - has demolished the lie that there is some moral superiority on the part of the British military forces over their US counterparts.

The images of naked Iraqi prisoners forced to simulate sex acts, soldiers punching and kicking bound detainees, and one of a prisoner tied to the raised tines of a fork lift truck, bear a striking resemblance to those from Abu Ghraib. This is no accident. These are not the acts of one or two sick individuals, but a systematic policy of torture, and that torture is not just the method of US imperialism, but is being used by all the forces of occupation.

The response of Blair to these revelations was truly nauseating. After a pseudo-apology - consisting of the usual excuse that these are the actions of a 'few bad apples' - he joined Tory

leader, Michael Howard, in genuflecting to the wonderful 'courage and honour' of the British military forces in Iraq.

According to Blair "the difference between tyranny and democracy is not that bad things do not happen... but that people are held to account." What democracy is he describing? The farce of elections at gunpoint in Iraq? Or British democracy, where the majority opposed the war, and now demand the troops are withdrawn, but are blithely ignored?

## Democracy

The difference between democracy and tyranny, it seems - at least in Blair's terms - is that in a democracy one or two low ranking individuals are prosecuted, so that something is seen to be done, the better to cover up the fact that their actions were part and parcel of a general policy.

The excuse "I was only following orders" always raises hairs on the back of the neck. There is no excuse for such inhuman behaviour. Yet it is not enough to prosecute one or two practitioners of abuse. These are not the isolated actions of a few "bad apples". Undoubtedly the most sadistic elements have been given free reign to exercise their personal perversions, but, in reality, what we have seen in Iraq is systematic torture.

Now that the myths and legends of weapons of mass destruction have evaporated, we are left with the claim that this was a war to overthrow a tyrannical regime and bestow all the blessings of civilization and democracy on the people of

Iraq.

That Saddam was a tyrant is beyond doubt. However, the systematic torture of Iraqi prisoners by the imperialist forces of occupation has demolished the lie that this was a war for the human rights of the Iraqi people.

The pictures from inside Camp Bread Basket graphically show how Iraqi prisoners are treated by their "civilized" guards. They illustrate precisely the way imperialism views the Iraqi people. Underlying the ideology of every imperialism is the notion of their own national and racial superiority. The occupying forces regard the Iraqis as inferior beings. They do not even regard them as human, so why bother to respect their human dignity.

The British army, like all armies, is a reflection of society as a whole. Within the ranks of any army there are thugs and psychopaths prepared to carry out any atrocity asked of them. This section is usually a small minority. At the other extreme there is another minority that is open to revolutionary ideas and is prepared to speak out. In between there is the big majority whose mood and opinions are moulded by experience.

These latest atrocities will have a profound impact, not least on the morale of the troops, and public opinion in the west. The formation of Military Families Against the War is one illustration of the mounting discontent felt by a section of troops.

Already one British soldier has called for a mass refusal to serve in Iraq.

Lance Corporal George Solomou, from the London regiment of the Territorial Army (TA reservists are being increasingly deployed), said: "I am not going to Iraq, point-blank. I am a conscientious objector to this war... I would rather spend a year in prison than a minute in Iraq as part of an illegal war."

His objections to the war are highly revealing, "I believe the occupation of Iraq to be illegal. They have tried everything - weapons of mass destruction, the connection to al-Qaeda - none of it was true. Now the fundamental bedrocks of democracy are being trampled by this war, with the American treatment of prisoners. Added to that, the Iraqis can see oil tanker after oil tanker coming out of Iraq while they haven't even got electricity. This war is a turning point in history and is about America setting itself on a course to control the world's petroleum." Mr Solomou claims that many other soldiers agree with him.

Imperialism has given nothing to the people of Iraq but misery, destruction and torture. These latest revelations will serve to strengthen the resolve of the Iraqi people to continue their struggle until the US and British forces are made to leave.

The only way to end the torture of the Iraqi people is not simply the prosecution of one or two individuals, but the expulsion of imperialism from their country. The labour movement must demand the end of the occupation and the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq! □

## HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS - Unions Must Prepare for Strike Action

Ray McHale, Service Conditions Officer - Cheshire UNISON (personal capacity)

PUBLIC SECTOR workers in the Civil Service, NHS and Local Government now face a concerted attack on their pension schemes. This has provoked a furious response and immediate demands for strike action. Local Government workers are first in the firing-line, with some cuts in benefit due to be implemented in April, even though these proposals are still out to consultation.

Blair, however, doesn't seem to understand the whirl-wind he is unleashing in the run up to a General Election. An initial day of strike action is proposed on 23rd March for UNISON members of the Local Government Pension Scheme. This doesn't just include Council workers, but support staff in Police and Fire, staff in Housing and Leisure Trusts, the Probation Service, Connexions, council-run Bus companies, the Environment Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, all Further Education Colleges, many Higher Education Colleges (mainly former Polytechnics), and many other privatised and voluntary sector organisations. If the NHS and Civil Service are brought into the action there will be the basis for a complete shut down of the public sector, involving millions of workers

There was a time when public sector employees regarded their jobs as safe and their pensions set in stone. Unlike in the private sector, employers have not been able to take pension contribution holidays, or to close final salary schemes. But as stock market investments fell, employers - such as local councils - have seen their contributions to the schemes rocket to meet the shortfall. While employees continue to pay 6% of salary, employer contributions have risen from about 4% to 16 or 18%. This has to be found by increases in Council Tax, or from NHS budgets, or from Government funds for Civil Servants.

Far from resisting moves to cut pension provision in the private sector, the government is now planning a massive "reform" of public sector pensions. This aim is to reduce the cost of such schemes by cutting back benefits. The biggest employers such as the NHS, Local Governments and the Civil Service are proposing massive changes to the way their pension funds are run. These will raise the minimum retirement age to 55, and in many cases downgrade the schemes from final salary schemes to average salary schemes. Those

currently able to retire at 60 if they have sufficient service will find they have to work to 65, or take a significant cut in what is paid out.

These moves have created an angry response among workers and pushed the TUC to organise a national pensions Day of Action on Friday 18th February. Unfortunately this day of action has been called on a timescale that will prevent ballots for legal strike action, thus confining protests to lobbies and demonstrations. UNISON, the biggest public sector union is pushing ahead with its own ballot for strike action in Local Government, to try to stop the changes due to be introduced on 1st April in England and Wales. Other unions may well join this strike action.

The NHS faces a similar overhaul of its massive pension fund, with the final payout being cut to new entrants and younger members. You will also have to wait longer to get it - new entrants from 2006, and all existing applicants under 60 in 2013 will be forced to work until 65 before the pension begins to pay out. The scheme is also due to be downgraded from the standard final salary scheme which pays 1/80th of the annual salary for every year of work to an average salary scheme which works out your career average and pays 1/60th of that figure for every year of work.

In the Civil Service as well as the massive programme of cuts workers are facing a whole raft of changes to working practices which include changes to the pension scheme, raising the normal retirement age to 65 for all new entrants and those who are under still under 60 in 2013.

In all these services the specifics are different but the general thrust remains the same - increasing retirement age while downgrading the quality of the pension, often increasing the level of contribution, or reducing the pension from final salary to cheaper schemes.

Many workers in the public sector, particularly those in physically, or emotionally demanding, or stressful jobs simply cannot work to the age of 65. These measures will force many to work until they drop. Statistics show that nearly 73% of ambulance paramedics retire before normal retirement age through work-related illness. UNISON has pointed out that raising retirement age will lead to more early retirement on health grounds, though the

employers are also moving to make ill-health retirement even more difficult than it is currently.

Public sector workers naturally show great commitment and sacrifice in their work. All too often the government exploits this dedication to foist low wages and long hours on them. A reasonable pension has been one of the few compensations. How, in our booming economy, can it be possible that there is not enough money to pay for decent pensions? Why can't they even be maintained at the current basic level?

The government is trying to force through cuts which will condemn workers to poverty in retirement. The public sector unions must use their strength to force the government to abandon these proposals. They must also work to ensure all public sector workers, particularly low paid women, actually join their pension schemes.

Two years ago MPs introduced changes to their pensions - of course these were massive improvements. An MP now pays 8% of his or her £57,000 salary into their pension, slightly more than the 6% paid by most public sector workers. However, where as a public sector worker has to work 40 years to get a pension of half their salary, MPs get this after just 20 years in the job. Clearly improvements to some people's pensions are affordable! □

- Protect workers pensions - no to imposed cuts in benefits
- Defend the right to retire at 60
- No more pension holidays for private sector schemes
- A living state pension for all, linked to wages, to ensure dignity in retirement.

### The TUC must:

- Use the pensions day of action on February 18th to get workers organised on this issue. It should be the start of a joint union campaign to force the government to back down.
- Call a one-day coordinated strike of all public sector employees, before the general election, against cuts in pensions and social services to warn the government that they are playing with fire.

## Trades Council Growing in Strength

by Gordon Martin, Vice Chair North Lanarkshire  
Trades Union Council, personal capacity

DELEGATES ATTENDING the final meeting of the year of the North Lanarkshire Trades Council have good reason to feel proud and positive as we enter the new year. In just two years the Trades Council has grown from a handful of affiliated unions, with a small group of delegates, to its current position of twelve affiliates with forty delegates and contacts.

As readers of Socialist Appeal will know North Lanarkshire, only a generation ago, was heavily populated with steelworks, coal mines and major engineering factories. In those days many of the towns that lie within the boundary of North Lanarkshire had their own Trades Councils, and May Day parades were a common occurrence within the district.

The Thatcher government's blitzkrieg on the industries of

Britain appeared to have smashed forever the influence and solidarity of the union movement in North Lanarkshire. In the two years since its formation, the Trades Council has dispelled this myth and is now a respected and influential organisation in the area.

The elected officers of the Trades Council have built up good contacts with the local press and we have regular press releases published in the various local papers advertising our meetings and the campaigns we are involved in. We have made good interventions in the ongoing PCS dispute, as well as providing practical and moral support to the FBU in their long-running clash with the Blair government. We have also played our part in a couple of local disputes.

Many delegates to the Trades Council are leading shop stewards, branch secretaries and class fighters in the area. The delegates are members of various political parties, but we operate in a comradely and non-sectarian manner. In 2005, as in every other year, this unity will be essential in our battles with the bosses' class. □

Send us reports of your local trades council or union  
branch to: [appeal@socialist.net](mailto:appeal@socialist.net)

## Subway workers in Glasgow strike over pay

by Ray Smith

DRIVERS, TICKET collectors and safety workers of Glasgow Subway decided that enough was enough and staged a walk-out on January 20, from 2.30pm to 6.30pm. The industrial action came about due to disagreement over holiday rota imposed by the management as well as disagreement over pay agreement. The Glasgow Subway workers refused a two-year pay deal worth 5.9% after a ballot of the 186 subway staff eligible to vote was held. The Glasgow Subway workers are employed by the council-funded Strathclyde Passenger Transport. They are T&GWU members along with the other council workers. SPT is using the other workers who accepted the 5.9% increase pay deal to divide the council workers. SPT organised a replacement bus service for free and used non-unionised workforce to break the strike. The strike that took place on January 20 might be the first of a long and bitter struggle. The Subway workers are up for a fight. They walked out last July after a union official was disciplined. T&GWU leadership should spread the struggle to other council workers who are affected by the same sluggish pay deal. □

## SUCCESS OF LISMORE CAMPAIGN AGAINST SCHOOL CLOSURES

by Heather Scott,  
Labour Party  
member, personal  
capacity

*Editor's note: This report was received some time ago, but omitted through lack of space. We know many readers will have been following this struggle and will be heartened to hear of its success, if a little belatedly.*

Parents and pupils of Lismore Primary School in Edinburgh are celebrating the success of their hard fought campaign to save the school from closure. The collapse of the Lismore sell-off plan came after three rebel Labour councillors abstained from the crucial final vote on the school's future, and amidst fierce protests against the closure of two other schools. The result has sent shock waves through the ruling Labour administration, suffering its first defeat on

any issue since 1992. Although the vote was decided by the narrowest of margins, it has been clear throughout the campaign that the Labour Group was seriously split on the issue, with the local MP, Gavin Strang, several councillors and local party members determined to stand by their socialist principles and to support the deprived community at Lismore. Their principled stand, and the brilliant campaign organised by the parents, have sent a message to the Labour administration that they can no longer impose right-wing policies unhindered.

The surprise blocking of the Lismore closure means that the proposed closure of other primary schools looks increasingly unlikely to go ahead. This will have a knock-on effect as the council had been relying on the revenue from the sale of the schools and surrounding land to help fund the second phase of a Public/Private Partnership project to set up new schools in different areas

of Edinburgh. Education leaders admit they are now under pressure to find a new way to fund the local authority's contribution to the PPP before the project is put out to tender next month. The present hasty negotiations with the city's Finance Department confirm the parents' suspicions that the 'consultation process' had been a sham from the start. No-one would deny that the replacement of old schools may be a very good thing, but this affair has highlighted the pitfalls and risks associated with the whole policy of Public/Private Partnership deals which are springing up throughout Britain. Public services and private profit can never go hand-in-hand.

Encouraged by the Lismore result, the campaigns in support of other schools under threat will continue. The people of Edinburgh are showing that they are not prepared to accept Tory policies in the guise of New Labour, and that they will not tolerate threats to their public services without a fight. □

# Trade Union

## It's no way to run a railway

by Kris Lawrie

RAIL UNIONS have condemned the government decision to re-privatise South East Trains (SET), which runs Kent services coming into London. SET was taken back into public ownership about a year ago when Connex lost its franchise after an appalling record of lateness. This was already a tacit admission that the privatised rail system is unviable because rail providers always put profits ahead of service and safety. Connex like other providers ran the service into the ground, and became known for its lateness and ancient rolling stock.

Britain's rail network is already a national embarrassment more like a third world service than one fit for 21st century Europe. But the Labour government has not learned from its mistakes and is determined to plough on with the agenda of the rail privateers, in spite of the fact that rail union motions supporting a nationalised rail network were carried by Labour conference.

Since it has been brought back under public control, the service has shown dramatic signs of improvement. Punctuality tests have shown that SET is outperforming its nearest rivals, Southern and South West Trains. Customer complaints are also down from nearly 24,000 in the last year of Connex to just under 17,000 in the last year.

The RMT and ASLEF have both come out strongly against the decision. Bob Crow of the RMT said "In public hands, SET has registered improvements in punctuality in every quarter since it was rescued from Connex a year or so ago. The government has said it will stick with what works, and they have the chance to prove it by

leaving South Eastern Trains in the public sector to continue improving."

The Labour government under the leadership of the Blairites has followed the agenda of big business on the railways. The bourgeois press glibly talk about the 'bad old days' of British Rail. The fact remains that the privatised rail network has become a black hole for government subsidies - which have in reality become subsidised profits for the train and maintenance operators. A Labour Government worthy of the name would have renationalised the railways in its first term. Instead they have allowed the service to deteriorate - compromising punctuality, reliability and safety while the privateers rake in millions.

Many workers will not vote at all in the coming election; others will vote Labour grudgingly for fear of getting the Tories back in. The problems we face cannot be solved until we have a government that will represent the working class. It is up to the unions to turn this situation round, to wage a campaign within the Labour Party to take it back and bring about policies in workers interests. □

- No More Privatisations!
- Take the whole network and transport infrastructure into public ownership!
- No compensation for the leeches in the City of London!
- Confiscate the assets of the privateers to fund a massive programme of investment in transport!
- For a rail service democratically planned and run by workers and passengers as part of a socialist integrated transport policy!

## Building the Left in the NUJ

Sylvia Courtnage, NUJ member, personal capacity

THE NUJ Left meeting in Manchester is a vital chance to start seriously organising to renew and strengthen our influence in the union.

The Union benefits from a left majority on the NEC and a left General Secretary, as well as a tradition of left stances on many issues. Perhaps this has contributed to a certain complacency in recent years in the belief that this can continue without too much effort on our part.

Recent events - including the loss of the ballot to establish a political fund last year and a possible strengthening of the right on the NEC - suggest that this confidence is dangerously misplaced.

Where a number of left groupings are involved, it is necessary to cooperate on policies on which we can all agree, to build a foundation for our ideas within the wider union. The Statement of Principles adopted in 1989 provides an initial basis for this.

We need to get properly organised and forget the old practice of operating as an election machine just before conference. It is essential to honestly discuss our ideas and publicise them on a regular basis among our supporters in an effort to reach out to the wider membership.

Our supporters need to agree to contribute regular (modest) funds to pay for meetings and a regular journal supplemented by email circulars. We need to have an ongoing committee with the responsibility for organising and maintaining the publicity.

The NUJ Left has to break out of its small meetings advertised only to 'those in the know', and to discuss our ideas with members within our areas and chapels. There are so many members out there in the union who form our natural constituency and we often only need to talk to them to discover that they already share many of our ideas.

Our union has the massive advantage of a young membership, which is prepared to fight for better conditions. We have seen growing membership and a number of successful recognition campaigns and strikes, which have achieved improvements in pay.

We, on the left, have a responsibility to try to widen that struggle - to explain its limitations and the need to strive for a socialist future. We need to build links with other union lefts and internationally to help further those ideas.

Let's be clear - we don't want to have an alternative union - but to strengthen and build the one that we have. □

NUJ Left Conference

Date: Saturday, 12 February 2005

Time: 11am - 4pm

Venue: The Mechanics Institute, Manchester

Discussions include:

IRAQ,

FIGHTING JOB CUTS AND LOW PAY,  
BUILDING THE LEFT IN THE UNION.

Food will be available and a pooled fare will operate.

More details from 07810 824223,  
email: leftnuj@yahoo.com

All NUJ members welcome

## Ragged Nerved Philanthropists: Stress And The Fight For A Shorter Working Week

by Kris Lawrie

NEW RESEARCH published by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) shows that the average worker in Britain will be effectively working for free for the first eight weeks of 2005. Unpaid overtime is reaching new levels. The average is 8 hours a week, which effectively means the employers get a free day out of us every week - and in many cases a lot more.

This means that on average we are passing up an extra £4000 a year that we are not paid. This comes to a staggering £23 billion annually to say nothing of the extra profit we are creating during the work.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) responded to the research saying "we do not recognise the picture which these figures paint". We would not expect the bosses to recognise the picture, after all they do not have to live with the reality. But for a large number of workers increasing hours are cutting into family life and health.

The TUC has responded by declaring February 25th 'work your proper hours day' where workers should only work their contracted hours to show the bosses how loyal and hard working we are the rest of the year. What ambition from the leaders of the British working class! Workers in Britain have a proud tradition of fighting for reductions in the working day. The majority of British workers would rather fight for a 'work your proper hours year' and we want to see it every year!

The increase in overtime and workload, both paid and unpaid over the last period has built up enormous stress

on the shoulders of workers. It has led a rapid rise in stress related illnesses such as mental health problems, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease as well as destroying family life.

In a Survey carried out by Lloyds TSB, 66% of workers said they would prefer a reduction in working hours to an increase in salary, while only 20% would rather work longer for more money. Work/life balance has been high on the agenda at almost every union conference over the past few years.

Although overall Britain is still low down the European rankings for days lost through sickness, this doesn't say much because it was recently reported by the BBC that 75% of workers said that they routinely go in to work even when they are too ill to do so. This is no solution because it tends to exacerbate illness and stress.

### Pressure Mounting

The tactic of the bosses has been typical - that of denying the problem and hoping it goes away. They have changed the definition of illness; they have placed restrictions on sick pay; they reorganise the workplace so that when you are off your work builds up and must be caught up when you get back. The CBI recently claimed that 15% of illnesses, long and short term are bogus!

The bosses are intentionally cranking up the pressure on workers to increase profits. This is making the lives of thousands a misery without any end in sight. The Health and Safety Executive has esti-

mated that employers are losing £353 million a year from stress and related illnesses while society as a whole is laying out £3.7 billion a year. Yet they continue piling on more and more work, cutting staff numbers, changing work practices and increasing hours. Why do they do this?

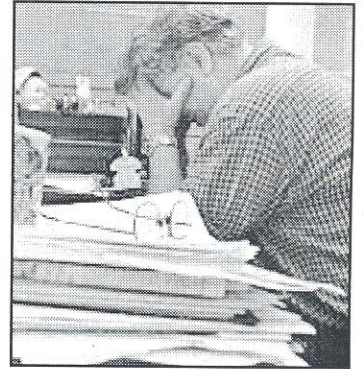
The figures speak for themselves - we are giving the bosses £23 billion in unpaid overtime alone; they are raking in profits from this extra work as they are from the massive increase in the intensity of work. Beside these figures £3.7 billion lost through stress pales in comparison.

The BBC recently ran a human interest story advising workers who are suffering from stress to take a cold shower every morning because they found that this has a significant effect in "increasing mental toughness". There are a legion of these ideas, usually put forward by the bosses themselves. They involve physical tasks, bonding exercises and group problem solving. But it is impossible to solve these problems by merely becoming 'tougher' since the workload will always increase in proportion.

For all those workers who do not want to start a winter day with an ice-cold shower there is only one solution. The union movement must take up the issue of working hours. And it must do this not only in endless conferences on agendas and order sheets but in the workplace itself.

The unions should begin by asking some questions...

Why are working hours longer now than they were



20 years ago?

Why has all the new technology in industry and services not been used to cut the working day?

Why do we have young people struggling away in badly paid work with no prospects while others are slaving with longer and longer hours without the financial recognition?

And most important of all - what are we going to do about it?

An increasing number of workers are crying out for a solution to these problems. Only a coordinated militant campaign on the part of the unions can force the bosses to back down and cut workloads and the working day. The unions should be putting forward the modest demand for a 35-hour week without any loss of pay. Share the workload! Take the youth out of the call centres and MacDonalds and give them decent jobs with a decent wage. This could be used to give everyone a four-day week, increase family and leisure time and solve all the problems of work related stress in one go. □

● Fight for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay!

## Royal Mail ride back into profit on workers' backs

by our industrial correspondent

THE POST Office, have announced the planned closure of 300 directly managed crown offices, over half of the total. This comes on top of the 800 closures of Post Offices and sub-Post Offices already planned by the end of this financial year. The Post Office has said that it is losing £70 million a year. The sale of these buildings many in city centres will rake in a fortune.

The closures have enraged Post Office staff up and down the country. There were a walk out in Post Offices around the country at the end of last year, when management tried to change the working practice of finishing three hours early Christmas Eve which has been established since the 1970s.

The management tried to blame staff for disrupting the service for customers - apparently they were able to keep a straight face saying this days after closing 300 outlets! They are trying to move the Post Office away from its role as a public service in order to compete with other businesses and they are trying to use the need to compete as a stick to beat staff with.

These closures are part of the restructuring of the Royal Mail that has been ongoing for

the past two and a half years to prepare the way to sell-off the profitable parts. Both the Royal Mail management and the Department of Trade and Industry denied a report that there are plans to begin sell-offs after the next election. According to the report in the Mail on Sunday in December the government plans to hand ownership of 20% of the Royal Mail to its workforce with another 31% to be sold to investors, leaving a minority 49% in the governments hands.

Business mail has been 'liberalised' for some time and the Royal Mail will lose its exclusive right to deliver domestic mail in 2006. Competition in the postal service is a sham and totally unviable. Royal Mail has an absolute monopoly - it owns or controls all the Post Offices, it owns all post boxes and it is the only service that has the facilities and number of staff required to deliver mail. How does the government get round that problem? Private firms advertise for business mail which they pick up and drive in a van to Royal Mail sorting offices to be delivered. They pay the Royal Mail at or below cost for this service. That is how "competition"

works in the mail service.

For decades the Royal Mail was a net contributor to the treasury. Due to the sell off of some profitable parts and creative accounting which has taken others off the balance sheet the Royal Mail has been plunged into a crisis and has lost money in recent years. However over the past year there has been so much painful restructuring with the onset of 34,000 redundancies and changes in working practices that the Royal Mail management has cut it's way back into profit, relying on workers to do more and more while keeping wages at the same rate.

The mood of anger and frustration among postal workers boiled over about 15 months ago after managers went on the offensive following a failed national ballot for industrial action. Workers, especially drivers, were asked to do tasks which went way beyond previous agreements provoking a mass unofficial walkout that rapidly spread through London and the rest of the south. The strike was in danger of spreading around the whole country when the Royal Mail management caved in and told local managers to give in and meet all demands.

The mood is clearly there

among Royal Mail staff to fight back against the programme of privatisation. The management might be able to keep a lid on this mood using the £800 bonus payout. But the stick and carrot approach will not work for long.

So far the privatisation plans have remained on track but the workers are not happy. The CWU must put itself at the head of this mood and lead the workers in a struggle to save and improve jobs, wages and conditions and save the Royal Mail as a public service. The management backed by the government will certainly not back down lightly. It will require industrial action to defeat them. It might take quite a struggle but with enough determination, support and the proper leadership the postal workers can win. If they do not struggle they will certainly lose. □

● No to privatisation. End all private involvement in the postal service

● For an efficient properly funded service.

● For a rise in wages to pay postal workers a living family friendly wage - thank you for the £800 bonus lets have it every year!

### Heathrow Terminal 5: Welcome to Guantanamo BAA

by an Amicus Steward on T5

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS on Heathrow Terminal 5 are taking a tough stand against the employer, BAA. Workers on T5 have dubbed the site 'Guantanamo BAA' because they are bussed onto the site amid strict security measures.

The electricians are demanding travel allowance to cover the journey time to the site and are being backed up in the claim by other workers who will also stand to benefit. Long journeys, poor travel facilities and complicated security checks are creating travelling times of up to two and

a half hours. This means that a 10-hour working day can become a 14 or 15-hour one. We are asking for an allowance of £25 a day each; to implement this for one year would cost £15 million. That is peanuts for BAA; they are spending £3 million a day on the job; £15 million represents five days spending.

BAA has a lot to lose if they do not come to an agreement, they have borrowed heavily to fund this project and cannot afford any trouble that will affect share prices. Strike action, bad publicity and the danger of going over deadline are the last thing they want.

Workers on the site are being balloted on strike action. The mood is good and the men are determined.

BAA had already created a lot of bad feeling at the site when in a separate incident three Amicus members were sacked. The steel erectors were sacked after a breach in safety. The workers were secretly filmed as they unclipped their safety harnesses while working. While safety is an important issue, this is a very harsh punishment that many of the workers feel was taken at the insistence of BAA who it is said are paranoid about bad press. The issue is going to a second internal appeal at the moment and if that does not resolve the problem it will go to an independent appeal. This has created a lot of anger and the men are ready to take action to get them reinstated if the appeals fail. □



# The trouble with Harry

by Steve Jones

CURRENTLY RUNNING on Channel 4 is a series called 'Shameless', concerning a dysfunctional Northern family, living off state benefits and operating in a mire of drugs, sex and/or booze. Down south in Buckingham Palace there is another dysfunctional family living off state benefits and staggering from one crisis to another - again usually involving drugs, sex and/or booze. Sounds similar? Well yes but with certain differences. The family in 'Shameless' has no money and is fictional. The family at Buckingham Palace has loads of money and is very real indeed. Welcome to the ongoing story of the fall of the house of Windsor.

In recent times the main star of the show was Princess Diana, until she got herself killed and was elevated to martyred sainthood by the mass media. Now we have the crown prince of fun himself, Diana's son, Harry. To list all the scandals this young fellow has been involved in would take up a whole book. From nearly getting expelled from school for drunkenness and drug taking, through to fights with journalists as he staggers out of nightclubs right up to the latest fiasco to hit the front pages of the tabloids - the list seems endless. At Prince Charles 50th birthday party, the young lad did a Full Monty style strip and cavorted around the quests completely drunk. On another occasion Harry was banned from his local pub after calling a barman 'a fucking frog' Now, this year he has been photographed at a fancy dress party dressed as a Nazi officer (it would have to be an officer of course) complete with a prominent swastika. To say this was tasteless would be putting it mildly but as we shall

see Harry and his chums have a very different view of life to us.

Harry operates in a world far removed and very separate from that of ordinary people. This is not just about who has money and who does not. It is also about class. From public school onwards they are encouraged to see themselves as a cut above, reflecting both wealth and social origins. Prince Harry's friends are all from the same small social clique and are all blessed with more money than sense. In fact the main problem for them is boredom since they usually don't have to work hence a tendency to go from one expensive social event to another. For these young toffs their world is one full of hedonistic pleasure with no intellectual content to tax their limited minds - very important given the lack of brains in the British royal family. Hunting, polo, drinking, partying - this is what fills their lives.

Behind close doors they are also free to express the reactionary prejudices of their class. These are deep seated and are there from an early age. A quote, published in the Sunday Times of January 16th, from a former pupil of Eton explains how this works: 'any pupil at Eton gets fed up with having pc liberal values shoved at them everyday... there's a strong backlash to that, not racist but definitely right-wing.' Not unsurprising these people have few friends who are even middle class let alone working class and black faces are noticeable by their absence. It is worth recording that the fancy dress party in question was held under the title of 'Colonials and natives' - no worry about political correctness there.



To add to the embarrassment about Harry's fascist uniform is the problem that the British Royal family have with Nazism in general. During the Second World War it was clear that Hitler intended to put the abdicated King Edward VIII back on the British throne after the invasion due to his clear pro-Nazi sympathies. Many of Prince Phillips family were also pro-Hitler during the war and could not be invited to his wedding to Queen Elizabeth. Through the years one story or another about the right wing, racist views of individuals royals have sneaked out and however much they like to be seen as 'one of us' they all share a distaste towards any attempt to not recognise their royal status..

Now all this may seem very amusing and a useful diversion from more serious matters but for the ruling class the sad saga of the House of Windsor presents a big problem. In the modern world the royal family have no real power as such but still have a purpose. Presented as being 'above society' they are there as a useful reserve should it prove to be needed. If the preferred system of parliamentary democracy ever had to be put aside, say during the period of

major social unrest, then the royal family could be used as figureheads of an alternative government. It is for this reason that we have Her Majesty's armed forces, police and civil service - it is to her that allegiances are sworn not to any elected government. Ultimately the Queen is legally head of state even if not in practice - but in a social division we know on which side they would come down. On a more day to day level they are there to extol the virtues of capitalist Britain, to act as a symbol of the status quo.

But all this depends on them having the authority to carry it off. In times past the foibles of the royal family were hidden from view. But over the last few decades people have started to be able to see them as they really are - and the magic has gone. At present it is confined to a debate about who should be or not be a future head of state. Increasingly it will turn to a general debate about whether we need these feudal relics at all. Prince Harry is not the exception but very much the rule and should be dumped in the dustbin of history along with the rest of the royal family. □

## Wealth Gap A Yawning Chasm

by Dennis Harper

ACCORDING TO a recent report published in December, produced by the government's Office for National Statistics and based on the 2001 census, the wealth gap in Britain is increasing, with the top 1% of the population now owning 23% of all wealth, compared to 17% in 1991.

The report entitled 'Focus on Social Inequalities' also shows that 25% of the population now own 75% of the wealth. Wealth is measured in UK ownership of property, life insurance, pension funds, savings and stocks and shares.

Income distribution is just as unequal with 10% of the population grabbing 28% of all income. There are 1.6 million individuals in the UK with an income above £1000 per week. The percentage of the population living in "low income" poverty (defined as households with less than £194 per week) is 17%, which represents a higher degree of inequality than most other EU member states.

This increasing inequality impacts on every aspect of life, as the report very effectively demonstrates.

In 1992, 60% of children with parents in managerial/professional occupations attained five or more higher grade GCSE's, compared with 16% of children with parents in 'unskilled manual' occupations - a gap of 44%. In 1998 this gap

rose to 49%. Final year students in higher education are leaving with an average debt of £8666, with those in the highest amount of debt coming from the "lower social classes", following the abolition of student grants.

In 2001, 50% of young people from non-manual backgrounds (those from professional, managerial and intermediate occupations) participated in higher education, compared with 19% of young people from manual social class backgrounds (those from skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled manual occupations) - a gap of 31%. In 1960 the gap was 23%. People who manage to obtain a degree earn, on average, gross weekly earnings of £632 in full time employment compared to £298 for those with no qualifications, with the effect of further perpetuating this class divide.

The health of the population is also affected by being part of the advantaged or disadvantaged groups, with differences in mortality rates between professional occupations and manual occupations showing a gap of 7.4 years for 1997-99. This is an increase of 3.6% for men from 1986, although there was no increase over the same period to the gap of 5.7 years for women. The difference in mortality for social class is reflected in regional differences to mortality

rates, with average male life expectancy in Glasgow at 68.7 years compared to 79.3 for North Dorset. Infant mortality rates are effected by socio-economic status with lower rates recorded for babies of managerial & professional groups compared to manual occupations. Mental health is also shown to be affected, with people in unskilled occupations more than twice as likely to suffer neurotic disorders compared to those in professional occupations.

The government statistics contained in this report offer a damning indictment of the growing social inequality in Britain, brought about by the ever-increasing wealth gap under capitalism. This only serves to show the increasing need for a socialist programme to end inequality and improve life for the whole of society instead of the few.

If you have a computer (only 20% of households on the lowest incomes have a computer compared to 90% on the highest income) you can obtain a free copy of 'Focus on Social Inequalities' on the Office for National Statistics website at: [www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/socialinequalities/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/socialinequalities/default.asp).

The rest of you can rely on Socialist Appeal to bring you the necessary facts in order to change society and consequently fundamentally alter all future reports! □

## Prescott playing with fire

AS WE go to press top fire officials of South West Management Board are meeting to finalise plans to cut the number of control centres from seven to one single centre covering the whole South West.

This is the thin end of the wedge for the future of fire service control rooms and confirms what the FBU was saying during the disputes over the last few years.

The John Prescott's office is drawing up plans which will replicate this in every area, scrapping the current 46 control rooms, which are all locally based, and replacing them with nine regional control centres. Staffing levels could be cut from the current 1,500 to around 600 with

an estimated future saving of £750 million.

Nick Raynsford, the infamous fire service minister, has asserted that these cuts are designed to improve the service, stating that the government could not support proposals that could lead to a worse fire and rescue service.

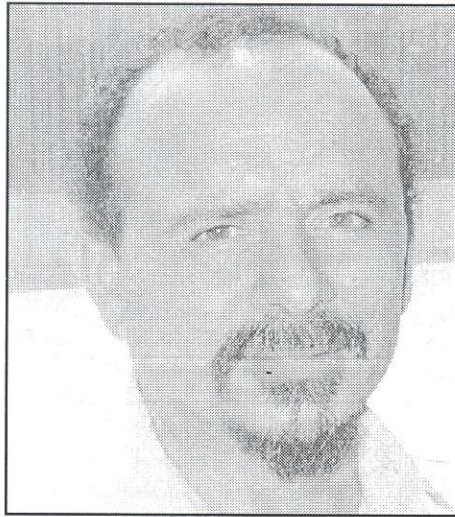
The FBU have condemned the decision as a disaster waiting to happen. FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist commented "If such a key part of the fire service collapses into total failure then lives will be lost. If the government presses ahead with this folly they will have taken leave of their senses. □

## Venezuelan Marxist Ricardo Galindez comes to Britain and Ireland!

by Ramon Sanchez

THE SUPPORTERS of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign are going to start the new year almost in the same way they finished 2004 -raising the profile of the Venezuelan Revolution. In December 2004 Hands Off Venezuela supporters in London organised a speaking tour for Oscar Negrin. Oscar Negrin is the head-teacher of a school in Caracas which was occupied by the pupils and the community as a response to the bosses' lock-out of December 2002).

In February Hands Off Venezuela supporters are going to host the Venezuelan Marxist, Ricardo Galindez. This comrade, originally from Barquisimeto, has been the editor of the socialist journal *El Topo Obrero* for more than 20 years. He has participated in the revolutionary process since the very beginning. His involvement in leftwing politics cost him the hatred of the bosses in the state of Lara and a bullet in his chest that almost killed him. That was not the only time that the bosses' thugs picked on him. He was also on the front line during the creation of the UNT. Since the very first moment he pushed for resolutions outlining the anticapitalist nature and class struggle approach of the new Venezuelan trade union. In February labour movement activists and youth in London, Cambridge and Dublin will have the chance to hear a first hand report of what is going on in Venezuela at the moment. Hands Off Venezuela is aiming to extend the solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution across the left. Galindez is going to meet students, trade union activists, progressive MPs and anti-war activists during the 10 days he will be spending in Britain and Ireland. This is a very interesting moment for the Venezuelan Revolution. On the one hand occupied factories like Venepal are raising the question "who runs the country?" and demonstrating to everybody that bosses are not necessary to run society. Galindez is a leading figure in the solidarity committee with the Venepal workers. On the other hand, Chavez is accelerating the process of land reform. This process of speeding up



the land reform has been stirred up by the intervention of "El Charcote". This is a cattle ranch owned by the British company Vestey Group Ltd. This intervention is the first of a chain of 15 landed estate interventions just in the state of Cojedes. This measure attacks the interests of the Venezuelan oligarchy, which has continually plotted against the Venezuelan Revolution head on. All of us will have the chance to discuss all these issues with Ricardo Galindez, and find out what more can be done to support the Venezuelan revolution. □

### Do not miss Ricardo Galindez speaking in Parliament!

Wednesday 2nd February,  
7.30 pm,  
Grand Committee room,  
House of Commons  
(St. Stephen's  
entrance).

Nearest tube station: Westminster.

Other speakers:

John McDonnell MP and Mick Rix  
Chair: Jeremy Dear

Check [www.handsoffvenezuela.org](http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org)  
to find out details of o  
ther meetings in  
London, Cambridge and Dublin.

### German HOV Supporters visit Venezuelan Consulate

by Hands Off Venezuela, Germany

WELL OVER 1,000 signatures collected by German HOV supporters in recent weeks were handed over by a delegation of eight activists to the Venezuelan General Consulate in Frankfurt on December 16. The signatures included those of several euro MPs, regional MPs, shop stewards and union full timers, student activists and artists. César Osvelio Méndez González, the Consul General, gave the delegation a warm welcome and spent well over an hour discussing with the delegation about developments in Venezuela in recent years.

"We have been following events in your country since the failed coup in 2002 with sympathy and solidarity", said Hans-Gerd Öfinger as he handed over the pile of sheets to César Osvelio Méndez González: "Whereas elsewhere in the world governments are busy attacking the rights and living standards of working people, in Venezuela real social reforms in the interest of the poor are on the order of the day. The revolutionary process in Venezuela shows that another road is possible".

The Consul General, who proudly confessed his commitment to the Bolivarian movement, appreciated our solidarity and outlined how events had developed in Venezuela since the early 1990s.

HOV in Germany is fighting for the recognition of the new militant union federation, UNT, and for the building of direct links between German unions and the UNT. □

## China: Contradictions Of Development

by Michael Roberts

ZHAO ZIANG died last month. Just over 15 years ago, Zhao was general secretary of the ruling Chinese communist party. When the great student uprising got under way back in 1989 and thousands occupied Tiananmen Square in the capital Beijing, Zhao came down to the square to sympathise with the students, hinting that he would meet their grievances and tried to persuade them to end their protests. The next day he was put under house arrest by the rest of the Chinese communist leaders and the army moved in to crush (literally) the protest.

In the last 15 years, China has been undergoing an economic transformation of global and unprecedented proportions. The Chinese economy is growing at 9-10% a year compared to about 5-6% in the rest of Asia, 1-2% in Japan and Europe and 3% in the US.

China now takes over 7% of world trade. That does not sound like much, but the figure has doubled in just the last few years and, at the current rate, it will double again in the next five years.

Already, the US, the world's greatest economic power, is running a huge trade deficit with China, buying \$150bn more in Chinese imports than the US exports to China every year. Exports are rising at nearly 40% a year.

It is well known that, like the UK in the mid-19th century and the US in the mid-20th century, China has become the industrial workshop of the world in the 21st century. But there the similarity with those previous industrial giants ends. There are a host of differences and China's development will not follow the pattern of Britain or America.

It may be able to compete in world markets in manufacturing goods, but it still remains relatively

small in terms of its national output, at \$1trn a year, compared with the US at \$11trn, and still smaller than the ageing economic force of the UK, which generates \$1.5trn a year.

Also the super-imperialist power of the US, with its huge military might and formidable financial biceps, can still keep China in check. The US has close allies in Japan, Taiwan and Korea that are determined to 'contain' any Chinese expansion. As Marx and later Trotsky explained, the ex-colonial countries (China was colonised by Britain, France, Japan and the US) face a huge problem in developing their economy because their growth will threaten the interests of the existing imperial powers.

### India

In the early 19th century, India had built up a significant textile and steel manufacturing sector, financed by British investors, that began exporting to the UK. But once British industry got under way, the imperial power made sure that India's rival manufacturers were blocked and eventually destroyed. Only now is India starting to have an industrial revival, but in new sectors like software services, where their well-educated graduates can compete against their peers in Europe and the US because they will accept such low wages. But even here, there are voices now calling for the blocking of 'outsourcing' of software jobs to India.

And there are many in the US that yell hard and long about China's 'unfair competition', demanding quotas and restrictions on Chinese imports.

So far, these voices have been blowing in the wind. That's because now the big multinationals prefer to invest directly into China with their car plants and sports

shoe factories and then export back into the US.

That seems much more profitable than trying to stop Chinese imports and continuing to use 'highly-paid' Americans or Europeans that demand proper conditions, holiday pay, pensions etc.

Investment by the multinationals into China has been huge. Sure, most capital investment still takes place between North America, Japan and Europe. Only about 20% goes to other places. But of that, China takes the lion's share, with around \$50bn a year over the last 15 years since Zhao went into house arrest.

But that very investment also indicates why China will not develop into a major imperialist power like the UK and later the US. It's not just because US imperialism is in the way. It is because China is not a straightforward emerging industrial capitalist economy as the so-called G7 nations were in the 19th and 20th centuries.

China had a social revolution around 60 years ago that did not just establish the foundation for a capitalist class and industrial development, as the revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries did for North America and Britain. In order for China to escape the grip of imperialism, where there was a correspondingly very weak national capitalist class, a small educated urban class had to galvanise the multi-million strong peasantry in a war first against Japanese occupation and then against pro-capitalist and American forces that expropriated private property, nationalised or redistributed land to the smaller peasantry and organised state ownership and planning of infant industries. China could only develop through by-passing capitalism.

The irony of history was that China's so-called communist lead-



ers never expected or wanted to break with their national capitalist class. They were forced to in order to survive. Above all, they had no intention of letting the urban working class operate as an independent class force - 'workers democracy' was ruled out and crushed from the beginning.

That is the one policy that the Chinese leadership has followed through all its twists and turns from the Great Leap Forward to NEP to this day, as Zhao Ziang found to his cost.

So China remains a curious grotesque of history. Even in 2005, around 40% of industry is in state hands. And the vast bulk of agriculture is controlled by communes and not by modern capitalist farmers or multinational agro companies. At the same time, most of the new industry, particularly those sectors making consumer goods or hi-tech products are privately owned, usually through joint ventures with foreign corporations (that provide the funds and know-how) and Chinese companies owned by the sons and daughters of the Chinese communist leaders (who provide the labour force, the legal approvals and the corruption).

The state sector continues to employ the bulk of the industrial workforce in ageing steel, textile and mining sectors, while the real gains from industry are milked by the private and foreign-owned companies.

China is a great economic and political hybrid. Its leaders continue to go through the motions of having a 'Communist' political system. But they talk less and less of 'socialism', while they drive hell-bent on converting the economy into a global capitalist power. But a hybrid is contradiction. And contradictions cannot stay unchanged forever. Eventually something will have to give.

China will not become a major capitalist economic power unless two things happen. First, there must be a major confrontation with the existing imperial superpower, the US. Either China will come to blows over its aim of annexing Taiwan, long a running sore in the side of the Chinese leaders, or its economic

emergence will force reactionary forces in the US to act against China's economy.

That's the external contradiction for China under world capitalism.

The internal one is that, as the state sector is dismantled and with it, the livelihoods of millions of miners, steel and engineering workers; and as inequalities of income and wealth expand (as they inevitably do under capitalist development), huge resentment and antagonism is going to arise.

### Apparent growth

China is already smouldering beneath the surface of apparent growth and prosperity. If you doubt that, just read the excellent and astounding article written by Heiko Khoo last December. He shows that it is not just Zhao Ziang who has been under house arrest for last 15 years in the grip of a corrupt, autocratic and militarist clique. The whole of the Chinese masses have been under arrest too.

What provoked the Tiananmen 'incident' over 15 years was not just the desire for political freedom, but also a realisation that the 'capitalist path' adopted by the Chinese leaders was distorting the economy, widening inequalities and driving corruption. Inflation had been moving up sharply, particularly in the cities, and economic growth and employment had slowed.

As we enter 2005, the Chinese economy seems far from being in that state of crisis. Economic growth is still strong at around 9% (if we can believe the government figures) and exports are motoring. But the contradictions remain.

The old worry about China was that it would grow fast enough to be able to provide jobs for those hundreds of millions living in countryside desperate to get off the land and end their miserable poverty. The usual story was of thousands lying around the railway stations waiting to get a free ride to the big cities.

The new worry is that China has over-invested in capital equipment and plant to produce all the cheap goods that the Western imperialist countries are sucking in. Any slowing of the world capitalist economy could leave China with a huge debt hangover that will blow the economy apart.

So far neither of these worries have materialised into a full-blown crisis. But that is partly because state control and planning have weakened the volatility and anarchy of the capitalist market. With Chinese leaders almost day by day dismantling the state sector and planning controls, they are increasingly exposing their people to the forces of the world market, as they greedily reap the rewards of the profit economy.

China has already joined the World Trade Organisation, the trade body of capitalism. Under the terms of its accession, it has had to open up its economy to foreign investment and in 2008 it must free its currency from state control. Next time the world dives into a recession, China will not escape the impact of global capitalist crisis as it did in the 1980s and 1990s. □

● Read Heiko Khoo's article on China at [www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

# The 1905 Revolution - marking the centenary

by Rob Sewell

"In the history of revolutions there come to light contradictions that have ripened for decades and centuries. Life becomes unusually eventful. The masses, which have always stood in the shade and have therefore often been ignored and even despised by superficial observers, enter the political arena as active combatants. The masses are learning in practice, and before the eyes of the world are taking their first tentative steps, feeling their way, defining their objectives, testing themselves and the theories of all their ideologists. These masses are making heroic efforts to rise to the occasion and cope with the gigantic tasks of world significance imposed upon them by history."

Lenin, Revolutionary Days, January 1905

THE 9TH January marked the centenary of one of the greatest events of the twentieth century. The stormy events of 1905 formed the majestic prologue to the revolutionary drama of 1917, and were described famously by Lenin, as the "dress rehearsal" for the October revolution. Revolution puts parties and individuals to the acid test and clarifies programmes, ideas and perspectives. In reality, the success of 1917 was due in very large measure to the experience acquired by the generation in the 1905 revolution.

The 1905 Revolution was no surprise to the Russian Marxists, who had long predicted the revolutionary movement of the Russian masses. Yet when revolution came, the sweep and scale of events was truly historic.

"Events of the greatest historical importance are developing in Russia", wrote Lenin a few days after the massacre of Bloody Sunday. "The proletariat has risen against Tsarism... Events are developing with astonishing rapidity. The general strike in St.

Petersburg is spreading. All industrial, public, and political activities are paralysed... The revolution is spreading."

The 1905 Revolution was a product of the accumulation of contradictions deep in Russian society. Tsarism was in a blind impasse and could not develop society any further. The emergence of the proletariat placed revolution on the order of the day. But there were more immediate causes that produced the spark of revolution. The events of 1905 grew directly out of the Russo-Japanese war, just as the revolution of 1917 was the direct outcome of the First World War. The military defeats of Tsarism, combined with the intolerable burdens imposed by the regime on the backs of the masses, was the final straw that broke the camel's back.

Tsarist Russia had long been the most reactionary power in Europe. Ruled by a feudal autocracy, capitalist development had come late to Russia. Capitalism had been largely imported from the West and artificially grafted onto backward economic and social relations. Unlike its counterparts in the West, the Russian bourgeoisie was extremely weak and incapable of carrying through a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would create a modern democratic republic. In fact, rather than play a revolutionary role, it played a counter-revolutionary one. The bourgeoisie was terrified of the masses, and while seeking "reforms", it above all sought protection from the Old Order. Everything fell to the newly-emerging Russian proletariat to carry through a revolutionary struggle against Tsarism. But the struggle would not end there. As Trotsky explained in his brilliant theory of Permanent Revolution, which he developed largely from the experience of 1905, the workers would fight to come to power,

carry through the bourgeois tasks and then proceed to the socialist tasks. The revolution would inevitably break through national confines and become part of the chain of world socialist revolution.

## Leading Role of Proletariat

The leading role of the proletariat in the coming revolution, as explained by both Lenin and Trotsky, was confirmed in the events of 1905. It was the first time that the Russian working class had decisively entered upon the stage of history and attempted to take destiny into its own hands.

"In the revolution whose beginning history will identify with the year 1905", wrote Trotsky, "the proletariat stepped forward for the first time under its own banner in the name of its own objectives."

The tsarist dictatorship, the burden of war, as well as the harsh conditions in the factories, drove discontent in the working class to new levels. This reached its climax with the explosive strike at the Putilov arms factory in December 1904. A sea change was taking place in the working class, as strikes spread from one industry to another. It represented the ferment that preceded the explosion. However, the 1905 Revolution finally erupted over an incident: with the presentation of a petition to the tsar on 9th January. Led by a priest, Father Gapon, a peaceful demonstration of some 140,000 marched to the Winter Palace to appeal for help from the tsar, known affectionately as the "Little Father".

"Sire, our strength is at an end! The limit of our patience has been reached; the terrible moment has come for us when it is better to die than to continue suffering intolerable torment."

But their pleas fell on deaf ears. Instead of sympathy, the demonstration was faced with a

massacre - some 4,600 people were killed or wounded by government troops - and went down in history as "Bloody Sunday". The savage reaction of the regime transformed the situation within 24-hours. The pent up revolutionary energy of the masses finally exploded.

Marx explained that the revolution sometimes needs the whip of the counterrevolution to drive it forward. The massacre of January 1905 acted as such a revolutionary catalyst. The cry went up everywhere: "Arms! Arms!"

"The working class", wrote Lenin from exile, "has received a momentous lesson in civil war: the revolutionary education of the proletariat made more progress in one day than it could have made in months and years of drab, humdrum, wretched existence. The slogan of the heroic St Petersburg proletariat, 'Death or Freedom!' is reverberating throughout Russia."

On 10th January barricades were erected in Petersburg. Within a week, 160,000 workers had struck work. Strikes quickly spread to other areas. In January around 400,000 workers went on strike throughout Russia. The revolutionary wave swept through Poland and the Baltic states, Georgia, Armenia, and Central Russia.

The tsarist autocracy took fright. Rather than teaching the workers a lesson, they had provoked a revolution! "The vast majority of people seemed to go mad", wrote Count Witte in his memoirs. But all revolutions appear mad by those it seeks to sweep aside. On 18th February, under pressure of a growing strike movement, the tsar issued his first Manifesto, hinting at a constitution and reforms. Of course, this concession "from above" was simply a manoeuvre, aimed at splitting the movement and defusing the situation. But the movement continued and intensified.

The Russian social democracy - both



Bolsheviks and Mensheviks - originally met with hostility from the masses before 9th January. Now, for the first time they connected with the mass movement and their influence grew by leaps and bounds.

Conditioned by years of clandestinity, Lenin urged the Bolsheviks to immediately open up their ranks. "We need young forces. I am for shooting on the spot anyone who presumes to say that there are no people to be had. The people in Russia are legion: all we have to do is to recruit young people more widely and boldly, more boldly and widely, and again more boldly without fearing them. This is a time of war."

He went on: "Get rid of all the old habits of immobility, of respect for rank, and so on. Form hundreds of circles of Vperyod-ists [the Bolshevik paper] from among the youth and encourage them to work at full blast."

"To sum up", he said, "we must reckon with the growing movement, which has increased a hundredfold, with the new tempo of the work, with the freer atmosphere and the wider field of activity. The work must be given an entirely different scope. Methods of training should be refocused from peaceful instruction to military operations. Young fighters should be recruited more boldly, widely, and rapidly into the ranks of all and every kind of our organisations. Hundreds of new organisations should be set up for the purpose without a moment's delay. Yes, hundreds; this is no hyperbole, and let no one tell me that it is 'too late' now to tackle such a broad organisational job. No, it is never

too late to organise."

### "Committee-Men"

These remarks were aimed at the "committee-men", the professional revolutionaries who ran the party and who had, in reality, a con-

tempt for its working-class followers. They wanted to continue the methods of the underground period, which were now completely out of date.

How very different is this Lenin from the caricatures drawn by bourgeois academics and Stalinist commentators alike, who portray him as a ruthless party dictator, a conspirator, who, fearing the masses, held on to power at all costs.

At the same time, Lenin poured scorn on the liberals with their illusions in peaceful constitutional reform, as well as the Mensheviks who clung to their coat-tails. The question was poised point blank: to arm the workers and overthrow Tsarism. This was the urgent task facing the revolutionary movement.

Throughout the spring and summer the pendulum swung continually to the left. While the workers of Petersburg took a breather, the provinces rose up in struggle. Strikes took on an increasingly political character and there was mutiny in the Black Sea fleet. The threat of revolution at home forced the regime to end the war with Japan.

Alongside peace with Japan, the authorities announced a new Manifesto in August, promising a new parliament or Duma. However, the proposals gave the vote to the landlords and urban middle class, but disenfranchised the bulk of the population. Given the revolutionary conditions, the Bolsheviks correctly came out for a boycott of the elections. They explained that only the overthrow of Tsarism by the revolutionary actions of the masses could prepare the ground for genuine democracy.

A new revolutionary impulse came in the autumn, beginning with a print strike in Moscow that quickly spread to the railways. "This small event", wrote Trotsky, "set off nothing more or less than the all-Russian political strike - the strike which started over punctuation marks and ended by felling absolutism."

By October, there was a general strike on the railways involving some 750,000 workers. The movement became generalised and again raised the question of power. On 10th October, a political general strike was proclaimed in Moscow, Kharkov, and Revel; the next day in Smolensk, Kozlov, Yekaterinoslav and Lodz; in a few days the strike was declared in Kursk, Byelgorod, Samara, Saratov, Poltava, Petersburg, Orsha, Minsk, Odessa, Riga, Warsaw and elsewhere. "The October strike", noted Trotsky, "was a demonstration of the proletariat's hegemony in the bourgeois revolution and, at the same time, of the hegemony of the towns in an agricultural country."

"In its extent and acuteness," Lenin explained later, "the strike struggle had no parallel anywhere in the world. The economic strike developed into a political strike, and later into insurrection."

Terrified of the revolution, "Nicholas the Bloody" was forced to make concessions and sign a new Manifesto on 17th October. "Herod's got his tail between his legs", remarked a worker. But the Manifesto solved nothing, only to detach the liberals from the tailcoat of the revolution. However, with Tsarist concessions came bloody repression. This was the time of General Trepov's famous order: "No blank volleys, and spare no bullets." An orgy of reaction was unleashed by the Black Hundred gangs, resulting in up to 4,000 people murdered and a further 10,000 injured in pogroms. The experience demonstrated, above all, the need for the revolution to arm itself in its own self-defence. In Petersburg, the Soviet organised the arming of the proletariat and the setting up of worker militias.

The revolution brought the proletariat to its feet. It raised its class-consciousness and self esteem. Above all, it gave rise to self-organisation in the form of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, established on 13th October.

"The Soviet came into being", wrote Trotsky, "as a response to an objective need - a need born out of the course of events. It was an organisation which was authoritative and yet had no tradi-



tions; which could immediately involve a scattered mass of hundreds of thousands of people while having virtually no organisational machinery; which united the revolutionary currents within the proletariat; which was capable of initiative and spontaneous self-control - and most important of all, which could be brought out from underground within twenty-four hours."

### The Soviet

The initiative for the Soviet organisation came from the St Petersburg Mensheviks. Trotsky had a similar idea when he arrived from Finland. The general strike needed an extended strike committee to coordinate things, and the Soviet played this key role by drawing in delegates from the factories (one delegate for every 500 workers). To have the necessary authority in the eyes of the masses, it had to be based upon the broadest representation. Astonishingly, the Soviet was rejected by a part of the Bolshevik leadership who were in Petersburg, fearing it as a rival political organisation to the party. They even went to the Soviet with a resolution: either accept the full revolutionary programme of social democracy or disband! This sectarian attitude towards the Soviet, which resulted in the Bolshevik faction failing to gain a leading position in the events, lasted until Lenin arrived in November.

Of all the revolutionary leaders of the social democracy, it was Trotsky who

played the most prominent role in 1905. By this time none of the main leaders had returned from exile. Martov only returned to Russia after 17th October; Lenin on 4th November. Trotsky, on the other hand, had arrived in Kiev in February.

Lunacharsky, who was one of Lenin's closest collaborators at the time, recalled: "His [Trotsky's] popularity among the Petersburg proletariat at the time of his arrest [in December] was tremendous and increased still more as a result of his picturesque and heroic behaviour in court. I must say that of all the social democratic leaders of 1905-6 Trotsky undoubtedly showed himself, despite his youth, to be the best prepared. Less than any of them did he bear the stamp of a certain kind of émi-gré narrowness of outlook which, as I have said, even affected Lenin at that time. Trotsky understood better than all the others what it means to conduct the political struggle on a broad, national scale. He emerged from the revolution having acquired an enormous degree of popularity, whereas neither Lenin nor Martov had effectively gained any at all. Plekhanov had lost a great deal, thanks to his display of quasi-Cadet tendencies. Trotsky stood then in the very front rank."

Since the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903, Trotsky had broken with the Mensheviks and attempted to unite both factions. On political questions, however, Trotsky was very close to Lenin. On Lenin's return to Russia, he took up the need for the reunification of the two wings of the social democracy - the RSDLP.

Trotsky was only 26 when he became president of the St Petersburg Soviet. The first brief chairman of the Soviet, the Menshevik sympathiser G S Khrustal'yov was an accidental figure, like Father Gapon. Trotsky wrote the most important declarations and resolutions of the Soviet, and was the natural replacement after Khrustal'yov's arrest. "Well, Trotsky has earned it by his brilliant and unflagging work", commented Lenin.

Trotsky thrived in the leadership of the St Petersburg proletariat. He immediately connected with the revolution and threw himself into its work. He took over the tiny Russian Gazette and transformed it into a fighting organ. As a result, its circulation rose from 30,000 to 500,000. Closed down by the government, Trotsky put his efforts into a



new political organ, *Nachalo* (The Beginning), which was a great success. He also wrote editorials for the *Izvestia* (The News), the official organ of the Soviet, as well as its manifestos and resolutions.

"The fifty-two days of the existence of the first Soviet", wrote Trotsky, "were filled to the brim with work - the Soviets, the Executive Committee, endless meetings, and three papers. How we managed to live in this whirlpool is still not clear, even to me."

While the October manifesto produced concessions, they were of a partial and temporary nature. The Soviet's response was to continue the general strike. However, the strike had lost its momentum and the decision was made to end the strike on 21st October. But this was no solemn act. Hundreds of thousands marched with the Soviet at its head demanding amnesty, which was partially granted.

Once more, feeling the lull in the struggle, the counter-revolution reared its ugly head. Pro-tsarist demonstrations were organised, led by clergy and bishops. The bands played "God Save the Tsar", the hymn of the pogromists. Police direct crowds of hooligans in the wrecking of Jewish homes and shops. Some 3,500-4,000 people were killed and as many as 10,000 maimed in 100 towns. Thanks to the workers no pogroms took place in St Petersburg, but workers' detachments were steadily dispersed and arms confiscated. The manifesto and amnesty concessions represented only a momentary truce, nothing more.

In Kronstadt, on 26th and 27th October a mutiny flared up. Martial law was declared a day later and the mutiny was crushed. Many revolutionary soldiers and sailors were threatened with execution. Pressure mounted on the Soviet to act against this open provocation. The Soviet issued an appeal for a general strike on 2nd November, under the slogans: "Down with court-martial! Down with the death penalty! Down with martial law in Poland and throughout Russia!"

The success of the appeal surpassed all expectations. Once again the authorities were wrong-footed and conceded that there would be no court martial. Given that the struggles nationally were on the wane, the leaders of the Soviet decided to end the strike on 7th November. However, the return to work was undertaken with the same degree of spirit and unity as when it

began.<sup>4</sup>

It was a turning-point for the revolution as a whole. The St Petersburg proletariat after ten months of tremendous exertions were finally exhausted. On 3rd December, the whole of the St Petersburg Soviet was arrested. The life of the Petersburg Soviet had come to an end.

Fifty-two members of the St Petersburg Soviet were finally placed on trial in September 1906, on the charge of "preparing an armed uprising" against the existing "form of government". From the dock, Trotsky defiantly turned his speech into an attack on the autocracy and a defence of the Soviet and the revolution. "The historical power in whose name the prosecutor speaks in this court is the organised violence of the minority over the majority! The new power, whose precursor was the Soviet, represents the organised will of the majority calling the minority to order. Because of this distinction the revolutionary right of the Soviet to existence stands above all juridical and moral speculations..."

### Moscow

For now, with the arrest of the Petersburg Soviet, the revolutionary initiative moved to Moscow. On 2nd December a mutiny had broken out in the Moscow Rostov regiment, but was suppressed. Nevertheless, despite this setback, the mood in the factories was reaching fever pitch. They were prepared for resolute action, even some layers proposing armed insurrection. This mood affected the Moscow Soviet, which declared a general strike on 7th December. But under the circumstance, everyone knew this to be a vote for an insurrection. The appeal for solidarity from Petersburg had partial success, with 83,000 coming out on strike.

The spark for the insurrection in Moscow was a government provocation - troops were sent to disperse workers' meetings. There were clashes and barricades were thrown up as a general strike began to spread. Despite this advance there was vacillation in the Soviet leadership and the counter-revolution struck back. This provoked the masses further and an armed uprising broke out. Barricades were thrown up throughout the city and there was extensive street fighting. Unfortunately, the government troops remained loyal and the insurrection was eventually put

down. The Moscow defeat constituted a heavy blow to the revolution.

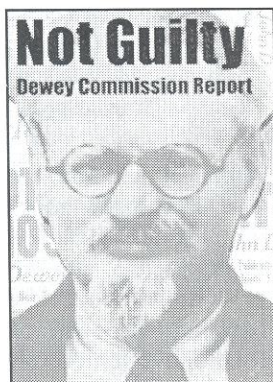
### Vital Experience

Although defeated, the struggle had not been in vain. Without this experience, the October Revolution would not have been possible. The experience served to crystallise the political differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism. Plekhanov's famous remark that "they should not have taken up arms!" was the plea of one who was moving away from revolution. Lenin in reply, stated that "On the contrary, we should have taken up arms more resolutely, energetically and aggressively; we should have explained to the masses that it was impossible to confine ourselves to a peaceful strike, that a fearless and relentless armed struggle was indispensable." The Mensheviks were increasingly looking to the liberal bourgeoisie to lead the (bourgeois) revolution, while Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks were relying on the working class for leadership. Eventually, this would place the Mensheviks on the wrong side of the barricades in the October Revolution of 1917.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to finish with a quote from Trotsky's book, 1905: "In 1905, the working class was still too weak to seize power, but subsequent events forced it to gain maturity and strength, not in the environment of a bourgeois-democratic republic, but in the underground of the Tsarism of 3rd June. The proletariat came to power in 1917 with the help of the experience acquired by its older generation in 1905. That is why young workers today must have complete access to that experience and must, therefore, study the history of 1905." □



For more on the history of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks order a copy of *Bolshevism, the road to revolution* by Alan Woods from the usual address or buy online.



## New From Wellred

# Not Guilty:

## Dewey Commission Report

by Rob Sewell

NOT GUILTY! contains the report of the Dewey Commission, an independent public inquiry, which was established in the spring of 1937 to investigate the charges made against Trotsky in the Moscow Trials. The Commission was headed by John Dewey, an American philosopher and educationalist, and made up of well-known individuals with great moral authority.

The Moscow Trials, which lasted from 1936 to 1938, have gone down as the greatest frame-up in history, far greater than the Spanish Inquisition. The whole judicial frame-up, which was based on false confessions tortured from the accused, ended with the physical liquidation of the entire Bolshevik old guard, and was the means by which Stalin consolidated his power as head of the bureaucratic caste that ruled the Soviet Union.

Above all, Stalin was desperate to obtain the head of the "arch criminal" Trotsky, the chief defendant who was accused of all kinds of false accusations, lies and filth: collaboration with the Gestapo, orchestrating the assassination of prominent Soviet leaders, sabotage, poisoning workers, etc.

Fortunately, Trotsky had already been driven into exile by Stalin, and forced to seek refuge in Turkey, France and Norway. This had saved his life for the time being.

However, by February 1938, Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, had been murdered by the GPU in Paris. Trotsky himself was finally hunted down and assassinated in

Mexico by a Stalinist agent in August 1940.

The Commission's hearings took place in Mexico City between 10 and 17 April, 1937. The report of the Commission constitutes a devastating rebuttal of these charges and exposes the trials as a fake. "On the basis of all the evidence herein examined and all the conclusions stated," concludes the Commission, "we find Leon Trotsky and Leon Sedov not guilty."

Given the hue and cry of the Stalinists about "Trotskyist counter-revolutionaries and fascists", this conclusion upheld the revolutionary integrity of Trotsky and his supporters. Trotsky fully understood the importance of the Dewey Report and urged its early publication. "The first job is to publish as soon as possible - in any case before the dog days - the full report of the Coyoacan inquiry, that is the investigation, Goldman's speech, my closing speech, and the most important documents in English translation as an appendix", stated Trotsky. "All our comrades must concentrate their efforts on bringing this report to the workers, even through small meetings." Whoever wants to learn the truth, or at least come near to it, should begin by comparing the two stenographic reports, the one from Moscow, the other from Coyoacan.

Not Guilty! has been out of print for many years. This new edition contains a new preface by the Marxist historian Pierre Broué. Readers of Socialist Appeal have the opportunity to purchase this

book at a special price of £10 (list price: £14.99).

Later this year Wellred will be re-publishing Trotsky's testimony to the Commission, entitled *The Case of Léon Trotsky*, the companion volume to *Not Guilty!* □

### NOT GUILTY! Dewey Commission Report (1937)

No. Pages 450

Price: £14.99

Wellred Publications

Order NOT GUILTY! from Wellred, PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG. For just £10. Make cheques payable to Wellred. Please add £2.50 post and packaging.

Also Available from Wellred at the same address:

### My Life by Leon Trotsky



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

Our Price £9.99

### The Permanent Revolution by Leon Trotsky



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

Our Price £7.99

# The Tsunami Disaster - Horror Without End

by Rob Lyon

TEN DAYS after the devastating tsunami that wreaked havoc in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 it is becoming increasingly clear that much more could have been done to avert the massive destruction and the death of 146,000 people (so far) in the region. It is also clear that a lot more could be done to assist in aid and relief after the disaster.

Colin Powell, currently on a tour of the area to assess the damage claimed that the damage caused by the disaster was worse than if a war had taken place. And Colin Powell should know about the destruction caused by a war - aside from the fact that he cited his own experience in the Vietnam War he also helped to organize the current war in Iraq, where the US and the UK are responsible for the destruction of the country, its infrastructure, and the deaths of over 100,000 people.

The images of the carnage have moved millions of ordinary people around the world to donate millions of dollars in aid to the region, but it must be asked - could this all have been averted in the first place?

Tad Murty, a Canadian tsunami specialist, estimates that 90-95 percent of lives lost could have been saved if there had been a tsunami warning system in place for the Indian Ocean. He pointed to Japan as an example of a country that is hit regularly by tsunamis and suffers few casualties. "The waves are totally predictable," he said. "From where this earthquake happened to hit, the travel time for waves to hit the tip of India was four hours. That's enough time for a warning." (*Globe and Mail*, 29/12/04)

In fact there is a warning system in the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) as well as the Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis (DART) system, developed by wealthy nations like Japan and US. No such system exists in the Indian Ocean, because "tsunamis are rare", and because governments in the region claim that the equipment is too expensive. Yet DART's total running cost for 2002 was only \$2 million - a fraction of the cost of some of the military budgets in the region.

The PTWC monitored the 9.0 earth-

quake off the northwest coast of Sumatra. The PTWC contacted member nations stating that there was no threat of a tsunami in the Pacific Ocean.

Significantly, of the 11 countries affected by the disaster only Thailand and Indonesia are members of the PTWC. Charles McCreery, director of the PTWC said: "we tried to do what we could. We don't have any contacts in our address book for anybody in that particular part of the world."

Geophysicist Barry Hirshorn said: "We started thinking about who we could call. We talked to the State Department Operations Centre and to the military. We called embassies. We talked to the navy in Sri Lanka, any local government official we could get hold of." Later Mr. McCreery also confirmed that the PTWC warned the US Navy, the US State Department and the government of Australia. The State Department claims to have notified India, but the Indian government says that it received no warning in the two hours between the earthquake and the arrival of the tidal wave. The Sri Lankan government also received no warning.

It is estimated that with as a little as a 15 minute warning, and a clear directive to flee, most people who had no idea of the impending doom approaching, could have been saved.

In the countries that were warned a response to the disaster was slowed by lack of preparation, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratism. Many who received the warnings did not know how to interpret them, or were indifferent to them. In Indonesia, the seismologists recorded the earthquake but could issue no warning because they had no telephone line in their office after being relocated in 2000.

Seismologists in Thailand registered the earthquake, and Thai Meteorological Department officials were attending a



seminar when the news reached them. Sources at the meeting said that the danger was discussed, but that it was decided to issue no warning to unsuspecting citizens and tourists.

There were no tidal sensors in place, and there was no way of confirming whether there was in fact the risk of a tsunami. More than that though, they feared the response of both the government and tourist businesses if they issued a false warning. Keep in mind that the earthquake occurred during peak tourist season and that hotels and beaches were full. One official told *The Nation*, "If we issued a warning, which would have led to evacuation, [and if nothing happened], what would happen then? Business would be instantaneously affected. It would be beyond the Meteorological Department's ability to handle. We could go under if [the tsunami] didn't come."

## Profits Before People

This would seem to be consistent with previous events. Chcheep Mahachan of the Thailand seismological bureau said, "A proper warning was not given. If we had given the warning and then it didn't happen, then it would have been the death of tourism in those areas." The chief of the bureau, Sulamee Prachaub, cited a recent example: "Five years ago, the meteorological department issued a warning of a possible wave after an earthquake in Papua New Guinea, but the tourism authority complained that such a warning would hurt tourism." An alert was never issued and 2000 people died and thousands were left homeless after the tsunami that followed.

The logic of the tourist industries is

# Tsunami

ridiculous. They fear that a false warning will damage the tourist industry, which is vital to many of these countries. If a false warning would damage the industry, what about a disaster occurring where no warning was issued because profits could have been damaged? Tourists would feel much safer, and be more inclined to visit a country that would have their safety and lives in mind, and would appreciate a false warning over no warning any day. Had there been a false warning in Papua New Guinea or in Thailand, many tourists would be inclined to return knowing that their safety was a concern of the government and the tourist bureau. What about now? Who wants to visit these countries knowing that only profits are a concern, and not the safety of tourists? Who would want to go there now knowing that warnings of tsunamis were suppressed in order to save money?

## Even More Profits over People

Despicably, it was reported yesterday that banks and credit card companies are making massive profits on charity and aid donations made in the UK for disaster relief.

It was only after massive public outcry that these banks and credit card companies agreed to repay some £300,000 in profits they had made from the tsunami appeal. The profit was made on a 3 percent fee charged on charitable donations made over the phone and on the internet. It is estimated that this £300,000 could pay for 140 tanks, which could provide water for 420,000 people.

Obviously people were incensed and disgusted that banks and financial institutions would be taking profits from charitable donations and from the suffering and deaths of hundreds of thousands. People around the world have been moved to donate money to aid and relief for the millions of people affected by the disaster - the total amount donated in the UK reached £76 million yesterday. Banks and credit card companies making profits from charitable donations is still causing controversy in other countries, such as Spain, where they have not yet agreed to pay the money back made on charges to donations.

US President George Bush seemed positively irritated that he had to interrupt his holiday to announce \$15 million in aid. This was a full three days after one of the greatest natural disasters in the last 100 years.

The initial \$15 million in aid was

ridiculed in the press worldwide, which prompted the US government to increase the amount to \$35 million. Compared to military spending in Iraq, this amount was laughable.

After much controversy the US then announced that it would give \$350 million dollars in aid. But compared to government's response to the hurricanes that hit Florida this year, \$350 million dollars is a drop in the hat. Some \$3.17 billion dollars was pumped into the state after the hurricanes that killed 116 people. The financial response to the disaster in Florida was 100 times greater than the response to the tsunami disaster in South Asia.

The British government initially offered £1 million, moving this up later to £50 million, even though they said they would match donations from the public, which have now reached £76 million. *The Guardian* compared government spending on other programmes to emergency aid after the tsunami, stating that "The cost of the new national identity card scheme, for example, bringing food and shelter to no one, is estimated at £3.1bn." (*The Guardian*, 05/01/05). This puts the aid donation of the British government in a new, shameful light. Ordinary working people in the UK have donated £76 million, profoundly moved by the images of destruction and suffering from the disaster, yet the government could only initially offer £1 million.

A Spanish NGO coalition says that 90% of the "aid" promised by the Spanish government will be in the form of soft loans, linked to the purchase of Spanish goods and services. Thus, only 5 million euro will be an actual donation, while 53 million euro will be soft loans which will eventually end up in the coffers of Spanish companies.

Bush has now come out in favour of the construction of a worldwide warning system against natural disasters, modelled on the PTWC built by the US and Japan. The cost of this system is estimated to be around \$150 million dollars, far, far less than the cost of one week in the war in Iraq, which is estimated to be \$5 billion.

*The Guardian* published an article with the following figures:

"The US government has so far pledged \$350m to the victims of the tsunami, and the UK government £50m (\$96m). The US has spent \$148 billion on the Iraq war and the UK £6bn (\$11.5bn). The war has been running for 656 days. This means that the money pledged for the tsunami disaster by the

United States is the equivalent of one and a half days' spending in Iraq. The money the UK has given equates to five and a half days of our involvement in the war.

"It looks still worse when you compare the cost of the war to the total foreign aid budget. The UK has spent almost twice as much on creating suffering in Iraq as it spends annually on relieving it elsewhere. The United States gives just over \$16bn in foreign aid: less than one ninth of the money it has burnt so far in Iraq." (*The Guardian*, 04/01/05)

Most major financial journals and magazines have been running cold-blooded articles from a financial perspective since the disaster. Knowing that the world economy is extremely fragile, and that a major disaster such as the tsunami could have a major impact on it, even to the extent that it could tip the world economy toward a crisis, these articles have concluded that the events of the last 10 days were not important at all and that there will be no major economic impact. This is a way of calming the nerves of investors, urging them not to panic and that everything will be fine.

*The Financial Times* estimates that the tsunami disaster will cost insurance companies around \$14 billion, far less than the pay-outs after the Florida hurricanes. One reason is that the tsunami is classified as an "Act of God", so most people will not receive pay-outs. The other reason is that "the tsunami largely affected economically poor areas with little industry or infrastructure".

The poverty in the areas means that most peoples' property and lives were not insured, and coupled with the fact that the tsunami can be classified as an Act of God, the costs will be greatly reduced to the world insurance and financial system.

Just a few days after the disaster, major New York papers were running articles about Christmas bonuses handed out on Wall Street next to articles about the disaster. The bonuses on Wall Street amounted to \$15.9 billion for 2004, which easily towers above the money offered in aid after one of the greatest



natural disasters in decades.

Bush has now employed his father and Bill Clinton to drum up corporate donations, which have been predictably stingy. *The Guardian* published some revealing figures from the UK corporate elite:

"Corporate Britain was quick to realise it needed to stand with the public mood and publicise its concern. The major companies doubtless feel proud of their generosity. They shouldn't. They should be ashamed.

"Vodafone announced it would be giving £1m and matching all staff donations. A million pounds is a lot of money to you and me, but not to Vodafone, to which it is pocket change. The company's annual profit, registered last May, was £10bn. That means the company made substantially more than a million pounds an hour. Yet that is all they gave - less than an hour's profit. It is less than they gave their new boss, Arun Sarin, for his annual bonus.

"Put another way, Vodafone has given a mere one tenthousandth of its annual profit. (Not its total revenue, mind, which would be a larger figure, just its profit.) Think of your own annual income, after you've paid off all your expenses. Now work out what one ten-thousandth of that sum would be. If you had given just that amount to the tsunami appeal, would that be enough? Would you announce it with pride? (...)

"BP gave a healthy looking £1.6m: fine, until you realise the oil giant's expected profits for 2004 weigh in at £9bn.

## Corporate Shame

"Abbey National's trading profit from its core businesses topped the billionpound mark in 2004, even if the company made an overall loss. Times must be tough, though, because when it dipped in its corporate pocket it found just £25,000. I've done the sums: on my comfortable *Guardian* salary, that's the equivalent of me giving less than two quid.

"Tesco is proud that it has sent food, water and hygiene products to Thailand and Sri Lanka - but it's still a shock that, with annual profits of £1.7bn, it only managed to give an anaemic £100,000.

"Philip Green, the BHS boss, is a famously generous man, giving serious sums to charity. But even his £100,000 in cash and £1m worth of clothes looks like less of a sacrifice when one notes that his Arcadia group paid him a dividend of £460m last year - and that he spent £5m

on a toga party to mark his 50th birthday two years ago.

"None of this should really come as a surprise. Battlehardened viewers of Children in Need and Comic Relief will have noted the corporate givers' eagerness to grab free publicity - handing over a cheque on TV - combined with their stunning levels of stinginess. The sums they give are the coppers down their sofa, the lint in their pockets - and we are expected to be grateful.

"The problem is not just rich companies, but rich individuals. According to the Charities Aid Foundation, the wealthiest 10% of UK income earners give just 0.7% of their household expenditure to charity, while the poorest 10% allocate 3% of theirs." (*The Guardian*, 05/01/05)

Compare these corporate and government donations with the incredible amount of money donated by ordinary working people around the world. It reveals the cold, stingy, greed of governments and corporations, and that true human compassion and empathy comes from ordinary working people, moved by the images of destruction and suffering seen around the world. As ordinary people, we can empathize and know that we would be desperate for help and assistance in their situation, and are ready to offer a much more sizeable portion of our incomes to help our fellow man.

British Chancellor Gordon Brown is spearheading a plan to place a moratorium on debt payments to countries affected by the tsunami. He estimates that his plan could save the worst affected countries of Indonesia and Sri Lanka \$3bn a year alone. But problems have already developed as Australia has already ruled out debt relief, in particular to Indonesia which owes Australia \$1.4 billion dollars. The Australian government hypocritically claims that the reason for this decision is that debt relief is not the answer because the money saved would not necessarily go to the people in need.

According to the World Bank the total external debt (and that debt as a percentage of national annual income) of the countries affected is:

**Indonesia \$132.2bn (80%)**  
**India \$104.4bn (21%)**  
**Thailand \$59.2bn (48%)**  
**Sri Lanka \$9.6bn (59%)**  
**Maldives \$270m (45%)**

(Source: *World Development Movement*)

These figures mean that annual repayment costs are:

**Indonesia \$13.7bn**  
**India \$13bn**  
**Thailand \$17.9bn**  
**Sri Lanka \$653m**  
**Maldives \$20.8m**

Based on those figures, the WDM said that Mr Brown's \$3bn in annual debt relief "will cover one-and-a-half months" of debt repayments for the five countries most affected by the tsunami disaster. What this means is that most of the money donated in aid for victims of the tsunami will simply end up returning to western banks in the form of debt repayments. These figures put into context the so-called "generosity" of capitalist governments around the world.

## The failure of capitalism

What this all comes down to is that capitalism has failed the people affected by the tsunami disaster - both in terms of protecting their lives and offering them safety by being unable to offer an advanced warning system. It has also failed in that the governments and corporations of the world are unwilling to offer even a fraction in aid of the sum made in profits or spent on military adventures.

150,000 people have died, and millions are homeless. Hundreds of thousands more people are expected to die as a result of disease and starvation after the disaster. The scope and scale of the disaster reveal that no one country alone has the resources to protect people against such disasters or pay for aid and relief afterwards. The scale of the tsunami disaster has revealed the weakness of capitalism and the weakness of the regimes in the region - to the extent that many of these governments could be facing revolutionary upheavals once the initial shock has worn off.

The world capitalist system was unable to plan for such an event, and is unable to plan its resources to respond and rebuild afterwards. As a result hundreds of thousands have died needlessly. If the world's resources were owned and coordinated into a democratically planned economy by the workers and the poor of the world, we could ensure that damage caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis is minimized and that relief and aid afterwards to rebuild would be much more efficiently organized and generous. □

## Iraqi Elections: A Cynical Deception

by Alan Woods

WHILE THE whole world mourns the fate of the thousands killed and made homeless by a natural disaster in Asia, a man-made disaster is continuing to spread death, destruction and misery in an ancient country on the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris.

Bush, Blair, Rumsfeld and Powell shed crocodile tears over the victims of the tsunami and wring their hands in public. They send a few millions in "aid" to demonstrate their "humanitarianism", but are spending tens of billions on their criminal war of occupation in Iraq.

Long after the war in Iraq was supposed to be over, they are still flooding that unhappy country with more troops, guns and weapons of destruction. The number of US troops in Iraq is at least 150,000 and rising. They have levelled whole cities and devastated whole communities. Fallujah lies in a heap of smouldering ruins - a modern Guernica.

At least a hundred thousand people have perished; countless more are maimed, homeless and hungry. And the perpetrators of all this misery pose before the television cameras as great humanitarians, liberators and representatives of civilization.

Every war is characterised by lies and propaganda that seeks to turn the aggressor into the victim and the victim into the aggressor. That is nothing new. But the hypocrisy of the aggressors in this case has acquired a level unsurpassed in the sordid annals of the history of diplomacy.

The imperialists complain loudly of "a bloody campaign to disrupt Iraq's upcoming parliamentary elections". But they conveniently forget that these "elections" are being held in a country that is forcibly occupied by foreign armies. The real power in Iraq is neither the present puppet Allawi administration nor any hypothetical government that may emerge out of these so-called elections. It is the US army and its masters in Washington. As long as Iraq remains under the American jackboot, all talk of elections and democracy will remain a

fraud and a sham.

The people of Iraq continue to fight to free themselves of this hateful foreign rule. A few days ago the insurgents assassinated the governor of Baghdad. This shows that they have the ability to strike at the heart of the puppet regime even under the noses of the occupying forces. The Economist comments:

"Iraq's insurgents have once again demonstrated their ability to strike at the heart of the country's leadership, with the assassination of Ali al-Haidri, the governor of Baghdad province, on Tuesday January 4th. The governor and a bodyguard were killed when gunmen opened fire on his car, in the west of the capital. A statement apparently from a group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an ally of al-Qaeda, said the governor was killed for being an 'American agent'. Hours earlier, a suicide bomber killed eight Iraqi policemen and three civilians at a checkpoint near the high-security Green Zone, which houses the interim government and foreign embassies. On Monday, a suicide car-bomber killed two people while trying to crash through a roadblock near the headquarters of the Iraqi National Accord - the party of Iyad Allawi, the interim prime minister - shortly before the party had been due to announce its list of candidates for the parliamentary elections on January 30th."

### Resistance Continues

All this indicates that despite the extreme violence demonstrated by the US forces in Fallujah and other parts of Iraq, the resistance continues and has intensified. The above mentioned actions were only the latest in a string of audacious attacks aimed at showing that the resistance is still very much alive and disrupt the imperialists' planned "elections". This has provoked the imperialists to a new paroxysm of righteous indignation. "The insurgents are against democracy! They want to make the country ungovernable and prevent a return to normality!"

What the Iraqi resistance fighters want to make impossible is the consolidation of a criminal and illegal occupation of their country by means of fraudulent elections. The occupying forces want to bring about a kind of "normality" in which they can enjoy the fruits of their victory over the people of Iraq. The big US oil companies want "normality" to begin to exploit Iraq's huge oil reserves. The big US construction companies want "normality" to fill their coffers with billions extracted from the Iraqi people for profitable reconstruction projects, and so on and so forth.

In order to have this kind of "normality", they require a "normal" democratic government, run by obedient Iraqi stooges who will willingly collaborate with the occupiers of their country, handing over the eagerly awaited billions. Washington will democratically dictate its policies over the telephone to its ministers in Baghdad. The latter will hopefully take over at least some of the dirty work of crushing the insurgents currently being performed by the American and British troops. In exchange, they will be allowed to keep part of the loot obtained by plundering Iraq's oil wealth for themselves.

This is the pleasant scenario that has been prepared for Iraq by its masters across the Atlantic. The script has been drawn up and well rehearsed. Everything is ready. But at the last minute, some of the actors seem to have forgotten their lines. This week, Mr Allawi's intelligence chief, Mohamed Abdullah Shahwani, told the French News Agency (AFP) he reckoned there were perhaps 200,000 insurgents (including those who provide logistics and shelter to the fighters), easily outnumbering the American troops in Iraq.

This news came at a most inconvenient time for Bush, Rumsfeld and Blair. The Bush propaganda machine attempts to play down the strength of the insurgents, which are presented as a few hundred foreign fanatics and a few thousand diehard Baathists. But Iraq's intelligence minister confirmed there

were indeed now more insurgents than ever - some 200,000, he guessed, of whom he deemed 40,000 "hard core" - operating in Iraq.

These figures, despite their approximate character, have comprehensively demolished the lies of Washington's propaganda machine. Yet they undoubtedly underestimate the real state of affairs. For every fighter actively involved in the resistance movement, there are ten, twenty or a hundred other Iraqis who sympathise with the insurgents and hate the Americans. This is the reason for the persistence of the insurgency, its ability to operate even in heavily defended areas, and maintain its fighting strength against an army of 150,000 equipped with the most modern weaponry and backed by the world's greatest superpower.

In their eagerness to play down the level of support for the insurgents, the imperialist propaganda has attempted to exaggerate the religious-sectarian divisions in Iraq. They say the rebel forces are mainly drawn from Iraq's Sunni Muslim Arabs, who make up only about a fifth of the country's 26m population but have long been used to ruling the country, during Saddam Hussein's regime and before. They claim that the Sunnis are opposed to a democratic vote because it would result in a government dominated by the country's Shia Muslim majority.

### Divide and Rule

One of the most pernicious effects of the imperialists' rape of Iraq is precisely that it has served to stoke the fires of religious, national and sectarian divisions in Iraq. The imperialists are accustomed to using the ancient tactic of divide and rule in order to weaken the national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples everywhere. Iraq is no exception to the rule.

Right from the beginning the US imperialists cynically used the Kurds and Shiites in Iraq for their own purposes. They played on the national oppression that these peoples had undoubtedly suffered under the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, hypocritically posing as their "liberators".

This was a blatant lie. From the start, the imperialists showed the most callous indifference to the suffering of the Shiites and Kurds of Iraq. As always they use the fate of oppressed peoples and

small nations as the small change in their diplomatic manoeuvres and intrigues.

When Saddam Hussein used gas to bomb the Kurds, Washington was silent. They were still selling arms - including chemical weapons - to Saddam Hussein, whom they saw as an ally against Iran at that time.

At the time of the last Gulf War, launched by George Bush's father, the Americans cynically incited the Shiite population of the South of Iraq to rise up against Saddam Hussein, and then stood back with arms folded and watched them being crushed.

No! American imperialism is no friend of the Kurds and Shiites! It is only using the incipient religious and national divisions in Iraq as a tool to manoeuvre between the different religious and linguistic groups in order to divide the Iraqi people and strengthen their own position. This is a criminal policy and one that can have the most frightful consequences for all the people of Iraq in the future. If there is a danger of Iraq degenerating into ethnic and sectarian conflicts, that is exclusively the responsibility of imperialism.

Marxists are implacably opposed to the dismemberment of Iraq. Such a development would be against the interests of all the Iraqi people. It would seriously weaken the national liberation struggle against imperialism. Fortunately, after generations of struggle against imperialism, an Iraqi national consciousness has been forged, which will not easily be destroyed. Most Iraqis feel themselves to be Iraqis, irrespective of religious, linguistic and cultural differences. This was shown in the long war between Iran and Iraq, where very few Iraqi Shias supported Iran, where their co-religionists constitute the overwhelming majority.

Despite all the efforts of the imperialists to sow division in the ranks of the national liberation movement, both Shias and Sunnis have participated in the uprising against the foreign invader. Both communities have shed their blood



and both hate the occupying forces and desire to rid their country of them.

The real reason why the insurgents are opposed to the "elections" is because they are a cynical lie and a deception of the people of Iraq and world opinion. They are not intended to introduce a genuine democracy. How can any people be free with a foreign jackboot on its neck? The real purpose of the so-called elections is quite clear: to legitimise the American-led invasion of Iraq and disguise the cruel reality of foreign occupation under the façade of a puppet administration.

What would the main aim of such a government be? First, to maintain good relations with America and ask its troops to stay. The Iraqi Quislings are not strong enough to survive without the presence of the US army. It would not last a week once the American forces were withdrawn. But by requesting the foreign troops to remain, it would provide an alibi for Bush and Blair. They would say to their critics: "We do not intend to stay in Iraq a moment longer than necessary. But we must respect the wishes of the people of Iraq, expressed through the democratically elected government that is asking us to stay."

The situation is more or less as follows: a bandit bursts into a house in the middle of the night. He kicks the front door in, shoots the master of the house and intimidates the whole household. He breaks all the furniture, smashes the cups and plates, and eats all the food. Then he makes himself comfortable, puts his muddy boots on the table and announces that he has come to protect the family and that he would really like an invitation to stay for a few weeks - or months. Who is going to disagree with him? The family anxiously agree to his demands and he immediately tells the

whole neighbourhood how much he is loved and how the family have begged him to stay as long as he likes - for their own good, naturally.

The excuse of the invaders - like the brigand in our story - is that they have come to "defend" the people of Iraq against terrible enemies, who would inflict appalling suffering on them if they could. But in view of the fact that as many as 100,000 Iraqis have already perished, whole cities razed to the ground and a formerly relatively developed and cultured country reduced to a level close to barbarism, the question may fairly be asked whether the damage inflicted by these other enemies could be any worse.

Washington and its apologists have attempted to draw a link between the Iraqi resistance and Osama bin Laden. But it has been established beyond any doubt that al-Qaeda had no base in Iraq until the US invasion opened the door to it. Osama bin Laden has George W. Bush to thank for giving him that base. Not for the first time terrorism and imperialism feed upon each other.

## National Liberation Movement

In any national liberation movement there are all kinds of different and even contradictory tendencies - reactionary as well as progressive. It cannot be denied that there are Islamic fundamentalist reactionaries fighting against the Americans as well as genuine Iraqi freedom fighters. In the same way, in the Resistance against the German occupation in Europe there were reactionary monarchists as well as Communists. This fact can in no way be used to call into question the progressive character of the national liberation movement in either case.

In any case, it is the unalienable right of the people of Iraq to determine what kind of government they want to live under. That decision cannot be made for them by imperialist "democrats" in Washington and London. The Iraqi people will be able to decide their own future only when these foreign "friends" are shown the door.

Allawi heads the "Iraqi List", a Shia-led alliance that includes the interim prime minister's party and some "moderate" Sunnis. It promises "law and order". It is challenged by the United Iraqi Alliance, a Shia coalition whose leaders include Abdelaziz al-Hakim, a cleric close to Mr Sistani, and Ahmed Chalabi, a secular politician who used to be backed by Washington but has fallen out with his former Pentagon pals.

However, there is no agreement on the advisability of calling the January elections even among those who are supposed to be involved in it. The Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is pressing for the elections to go ahead on schedule, but some "moderate" Sunnis, and even some leading Shias, are calling for a delay.

On December 27th the Iraqi Islamic Party, a large and "moderate" Sunni group, became the latest to pull out of the elections and call for their postponement, on the grounds that the continuing violence, which is concentrated in Sunni-majority areas, made it impossible to conduct a fair vote. Other Sunni groups, such as the Muslim Scholars' Board, have been adamant that they will not take part in an election while American-led forces continue to occupy the country.

The vacillations of the "moderates" (i.e. collaborators) are understandable. If they take part, they face assassination. On the other hand, if they boycott the elections, they will be excluded from any access to "power" (that is, the loot). In short, they are between a rock and a hard place.

The Americans' plans are appearing ever shakier with each day that passes. The insurgents are stepping up their offensive, candidates are dropping out, there have been calls for a postponement even from among members of Mr Allawi's interim administration. On Monday, the defence minister, Hazim al-Shaalan - a secular Shia - said while visiting Cairo that he was asking Egypt to try to persuade Iraqi Sunnis to take part in the election but that if they continued to boycott it, then the vote should be put off.



Speaking to Reuters news agency on Tuesday, Iraq's interim president, Ghazi al-Yawar, a Sunni, called on the United Nations to consider having the election postponed. The next day, as the deadly attacks continued with the killing of at least 15 people at an Iraqi police academy, Mr Allawi insisted, yet again, that there will be no postponement. In this he has America's and Mr Sistani's firm backing.

Despite everything, Washington is insisting that the elections must go ahead as planned, even if a great part of the population has no possibility of participating in them. They argue: "imperfect elections are better than no elections." But the truth is that the elections are only for show, for public relations at home and abroad. They are needed as a rubber stamp for the occupation. Therefore, whether they comply with the most basic democratic criteria or not has not the slightest importance. It therefore seems most likely that the election will take place on January 30th in most parts of the country.

America and its allies are hoping for a repeat of last month's election in Afghanistan, in which threats of widespread disruption by Islamist militants failed to materialise, and the American-backed interim president, Hamid Karzai, "won" the majority. However, such an outcome is far from guaranteed in Iraq and even in Afghanistan it by no means signifies stability. Karzai's rule does not extend far beyond the outskirts of Kabul. Just like Allawi, he is sitting precariously on American bayonets. As *The Economist* moaned: "In both countries, the militant groups are far from finished and the reformed Iraqi and Afghan security forces are still weak, ill-



trained and prone to desertions and infiltration. Afghanistan's newly elected president and the elected parliament that Iraq is due to gain shortly will remain vulnerable for some time to those hell-bent on attacking both them and the concept of democracy itself."

## Democracy

The word "democracy" is a proud one. The democratic rights of the working people in Britain, the US and all other countries was won by the working class over generations of struggle against the rich and powerful, who resisted it. It is not a word that sits easily on the lips of people like Bush, who was "elected" as President by fraud in the first place.

That other great western "democrat" Tony Blair has repeatedly shown his contempt for democracy when, together with his friend in the White House, he launched the criminal war in Iraq against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the British people.

There can be no talk of democracy without self-determination. That elementary truth was clear to the people of the United States ever since they forcibly expelled the British army from their soil in the 18th century. If this was good for the people of America then, why is it not good for the people of Iraq now?

The farcical "elections" in occupied Iraq are a cynical deception that must be denounced by the labour movement of all countries. Those who want to defend the freedom and democratic rights of the Iraqi people must call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraqi soil. Let the Iraqi people decide! □

## America says "NO" to the war in Iraq

A FULL 70 percent of US citizens think the war in Iraq has carried an unacceptable casualty cost, a Washington Post-ABC News poll published at the end of December said.

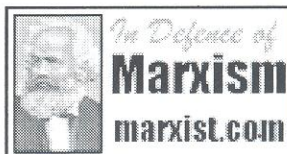
Fifty six percent said that the war was "not worth fighting," which is an 8-point increase compared to last summer. Significantly, this is the first time a decisive majority of American people have reached that conclusion.

On the question whether Iraq is prepared for elections at the end of this month, 58 percent of respondents believed the country is not ready. Still, 60 percent want elections to go forward as planned, even though 54 percent quite rightly do not expect honest results with a "fair and accurate vote count."

Bush's main trump card - public confidence in his leadership in the "war on terror" - is going down the drain too compared to last year's results. Fifty three percent approve of his record on terrorism, while 43 percent do not. Those numbers were 70 percent and 28 percent a year ago.

Similarly, an AP poll taken at the beginning of January confirms that a majority of American people take a dim view of the handling of Iraq, with 44 percent approving and 54 percent disapproving, according to the poll of 1,001 adults. On Bush's foreign policy, people were evenly split with 50 percent approving and 48 percent disapproving.

Whatever the figures are, the trend is clear: the hawks in the White House are losing support, and sooner or later the boomerang of public protests will hit them in the face. □



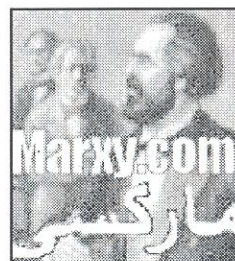
## News from the Web

The marxist.com website now has a wide readership in countries around the world. Articles are regularly posted that we know would be of great interest to our readers, but for which there is not enough room in the pages of our journal. Some of these will be appearing in our new publication the *Marxist International Review*; many others will not. Therefore in future issues we intend to advertise some of these articles to draw your attention to them.

This month however we are reporting instead on the proud announcement by marxist.com of the launching of our new Arabic website at [www.marxy.com](http://www.marxy.com)

This initiative is intended to respond to the growing demand for a Marxist alternative coming from the area stretching from Saudi Arabia over Palestine and Egypt to the western corner of the Maghreb in Morocco.

From almost every country in the Arab world we have been contacted in the last years by individuals and small groups - often from a Stalinist, Maoist or Marxist Leninist background - wanting to know more about Marxism and especially about the meaning of the ideas of Leon Trotsky. The growing authority of the International Marxist Tendency in this part of the world derives fundamentally from the analysis published on our website



[www.marxy.com](http://www.marxy.com), especially our internationalist position on Israel/Palestine, but also from the consistent anti-imperialist activity of the Spanish Student Union (Sindicato de Estudiantes), led by the Marxists of El Militante and the successes of the Pakistani comrades of The Struggle.

In the first stages Marxy.com will be updated slowly. It will combine the publication of in-depth analysis of current events and questions with the classics of Marxism and especially Arabic translations of the works of Leon Trotsky. We appeal to our Arab readers to help us in spreading as widely as possible news about our website but also to help us in translating articles, making suggestions and criticisms and sending in reports about what is happening in their country.

More importantly, Marxy.com wants to become a point of reference in the building of the forces of Marxism in the Arab world which understand that the only way out of the capitalist nightmare is through the Socialist Revolution.

□ The new website can be contacted at [contact@marxy.com](mailto:contact@marxy.com)

## Elections in Palestine: Imperialism gets the man they wanted - but can Abbas deliver?

by Yossi Schwartz in Jerusalem

THE FINAL results of the elections in the occupied territories of Palestine, held under Israeli bayonets, showed that Palestine Liberation Organization chief Mahmoud Abbas known as Abu-Mazen, won 62.3 percent of Sunday's vote for Palestinian Authority chairman. Abbas has been a member of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) since 1968 and is the man counted on by the United States, the European Union and Israel to revive the so-called peace process and put an end to the al-Aqsa Intifada.

He has shown his true colours as a pro-imperialist for decades. He led the Palestinian delegation to the negotiations with Israeli General Matityahu Peled, which led to the announcement of principles of peace based on a two-state solution (declared on January 1, 1977).

### Secret Talks

Abbas also held secret talks with the Israelis through Dutch intermediaries in 1989 and coordinated the negotiation process at the Madrid Conference in 1991.

Besides being the man behind the secret negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords, he also led the negotiations in Cairo, which led to the Gaza-Jericho Accord.

While Washington and London praise him as the Palestinian moderate who is capable of rescuing the peace process, Abbas is often labeled as an Israeli collaborator in many Palestinian circles.

Abbas' main challenger, Mustafa Barghouti, who pinned his hopes on the European imperialists, won about 20 percent, and five other chairmanship candidates - ranging from small left parties such as the ex-Stalinist "People's Party" and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine to an

academic under U.S. house arrest on suspicion of funneling funds to Hamas - received very few votes.

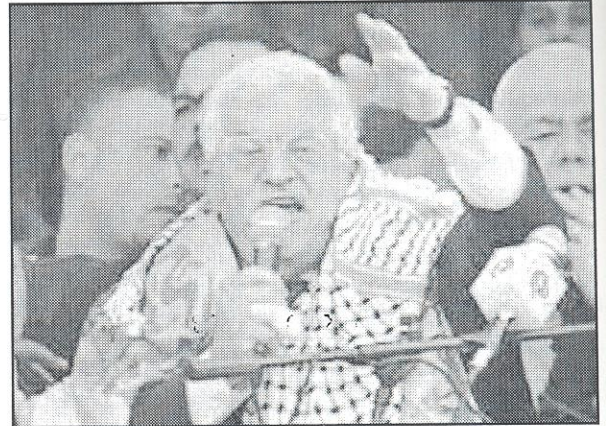
The PA, fearing a low voter turnout, changed the voting regulations in the last hours of the election. Around 5 P.M. Sunday, the Palestinian Central Election Committee extended the vote casting deadline to 9 P.M., and also allowed Palestinians to vote solely based on their identity cards without any need to check them against the voter roll or population registry. This prompted the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and Mustafa Barghouti camp to claim that there may have been widespread fraud in the election process.

The head of the Palestinian election commission, Hanna Nasir, declared a preliminary turnout of up to 70 percent of the 1.1 million registered voters, as well as 10 percent of the 700,000 Palestinians who failed to register but who were allowed to vote because their names appeared on the census count.

Along with the change to voting procedures that took place midway through the election which kept polling stations open an additional two hours, voters were allowed to cast ballots at any location and not just in their hometowns.

One election official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the changes came due to heavy pressure from Fatah, who feared that a low turnout would weaken the vote for Abbas.

The AFP reported that Abbas received 483,039 votes, while 153,516 people voted for Barghouti,



who stood as an independent. Tayssir Khaled, standing for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) took 3.5 percent of the votes, People's Party candidate Bassam Salhi 2.69 percent, independent candidate Abdelhalim Al-Ashqar 2.68 percent, Sayyed Barakah (independent Islamist) 1.27 percent and Abdelkarim Shubeir (independent) took 0.67 percent.

According to the main bourgeois newspapers in Israel voters received a mark on their hand with a special ink - but one international observer said that the ink caused major problems in recent elections in Africa and Afghanistan, as it wipes off after an hour or two, so it is possible that many people may have voted more than once.

Contrary to all evidence, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, one of 800 international observers of the election naturally declared that "There is no [Israeli] intimidation I have seen." Another official U.S. observer, Sen. Joseph R. Biden (D-Delaware), said Sunday morning that the elections appeared "well-organized."

According to the imperialist and the Zionist mass media such a massive victory for Abbas would give him a clear mandate to renew peace talks with Israel, with the backing of the US.

Ra'anan Gissin, an aide to Israel Sharon said "I think this vote shows a change in the Palestinian street", hoping that this will mean that the victory of Abbas will mean a move away from support of violence. He also added that "We certainly welcome this and hope that from this mandate Abu Mazen will lead the Palestinian people on the path of reconciliation."

US President George W. Bush said he was "heartened" by the Palestinian election. He congratulated Mr. Mazen and said that the election was an essential step toward the ultimate aim of statehood. He promised that the US would play an active role in helping the new president in a renewed push for peace talks with Israel. Bush also said he would welcome Abbas to the White House, offering an invitation that he refused to give to the late Yasser Arafat.

European governments also welcomed Abbas' election. Messages of congratulations, support, and hope for the future of the peace process were received from Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Russia, and clearly show that Abbas is imperialism's man in the occupied territories.

Shortly after the results were announced Abu Mazen declared, "There is a difficult mission ahead to build our state, to achieve security for our people ... to give our prisoners freedom, our fugitives a life in dignity, to reach our goal of an independent state."

However, the true aim of these elections was revealed by Silvan Shalom, the Israeli Foreign Minister, who said openly that the new Palestinian leader should begin to fight "terrorism immediately". By this

he meant that any armed resistance to the Israeli occupation and endless killing of Palestinians should be crushed.

It was in Israel's interest for the elections to go smoothly, "so that starting from tomorrow, the new Palestinian leadership will be able to do what it is required to do," Shalom said. "I think that the leader who is elected will have to wage a genuine struggle against terror immediately and carry out reforms [in the PA]."

The Palestinian people are politically demoralized and have had enough of the criminal terrorist tactics which have only led to more death and suffering. Winning elections in these conditions was a relatively easy task for Abbas. But whether he can actually deliver the promises of an independent Palestinian state and the return of the refugees will be another story altogether.

Israel must persuade the Palestinians to resume peace negotiations. In order to do this, Israel must ease the oppressive policies towards the Palestinian population and improve their lives. Due to the lack of such concessions coming from Israel, along with the fact that Sharon plans to grab more lands in the West Bank, Abbas will soon be attacked at home as being an agent of imperialism in the services of the Sharon and Bush administrations.

Furthermore, as the Israeli Foreign Minister Shalom made so clear, Israel is unlikely to help Abbas unless he takes direct and immediate action against Hamas and other such organisations. Should he take such action, however, Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Al Aqsa Martyrs will work to undermine him.

It is only a question of time, and not very much time, before Abbas will be seen by most Palestinians as the head of a puppet govern-

ment, just as the Iraqi people view the Interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

The leadership of the reformist left in Israel has once again thrown their weight behind the imperialists' plans. Last week Zo Haderch, the Communist Party weekly, came out with an article praising Abu Mazen and his "sincere struggle for an independent state". Yahad, the Zionist Social Democratic Party has declared its support for the new Sharon-Labour government.

The victory of Abbas in the elections will not lead to a solution to the problems facing the Israeli and Palestinian masses. The bourgeois press is full of optimism and hope for the future of the peace process, and views the new Sharon-Labour government, and the new Abbas administration in Palestine as the beginning of a new era in the region. Abbas will be exposed as a stooge of imperialism, and the new governments will quickly smash the hopes of the masses and bring only further misery.

## Independent Working Class Party

The only way out of the death trap for the Palestinians and the Israeli masses is the formation of an independent working class party, which would pursue independent class politics leading to a fundamental transformation of capitalist society. For this the working class requires a completely different leadership, one that is independent of imperialism and committed to the road of Lenin and Trotsky.

The similarity of the situations facing the people in Israel/Palestine and Iraq is becoming more and more clear to the suffering masses. The role of the rulers of the Arab states in support of the US is being exposed on a daily basis. From this the working class and poor will be able to draw the lesson that the road to be taken is not the road in service of the imperialist order, whose policies are those based on robbery and death, but the road that leads to the foundation of the Socialist Federation of the Middle East. □



## Chavez announces “war against the latifundia”

by Jorge Martin

AT A mass rally of 10,000 people on Monday January 10, Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez announced a new decree aimed at speeding up land reform. He was speaking in front of a massive banner with the slogan of 19th century peasant war leader Ezequiel Zamora “Free land and men – War against the latifundia”. This comes after the Christmas period, during which a number of regional governors, elected in the October 31st elections, passed regional decrees along the same lines.

Since the Land Act was passed in December 2001, the National Land Institute has already distributed 5.5 million acres of land (2.2 million hectares) to peasant cooperatives. But up until now all the land distributed has been state-owned land and there have been no expropriations. The new decree, called Decreto Zamorano, and passed on the anniversary of the death of Ezequiel Zamora, is aimed at the large landed estates (latifundia) that have been left idle or are poorly used. But even so, the Decree is not based on expropriation of private land. A special land commission has been appointed to look into the issue of land ownership and usage. This commission will then issue reports on two aspects. The first is whether large landed estates which are privately used actually have proper land titles. In Venezuela, over the years, there have been many cases of private

landowners occupying land that belongs to the state and de facto appropriating it. The other issue will be whether the land is being used or is being left idle. If landed estates are found not to be productive, then they can be seized (with compensation) and distributed to peasant cooperatives. Chavez has made it clear, both now and during the October 31st regional election campaign, that his preferred option is to solve this through negotiation with the land owners (in which they can give up land they do not use), but also that if no agreement is reached, the full strength of the law and of the army will be used to implement land reform.

### Lord Vestey

On the face of it, this is in fact quite a moderate decree and in its wording is far from a wide-ranging threat to private property, as has been presented by the Western media. The Financial Times for instance has talked of “what is likely to be a number of Zimbabwe-style expropriations of big estates”, when referring to the intervention at the El Charcote estate. The FT chose to describe this move, which took place on Saturday January 8th, as “seizure”, when in reality what happened is something else completely. The El Charcote estate is owned by AgroFlora, a subsidiary of the British Vestey Group. The Vestey group, belonging to the family of Lord Vestey is a

major meat and food multinational which has been operating in South America for decades.

The El Charcote estate has 13,000 hectares (32,000 acres) of land and produces some 450,000 kilos of beef every year. The Venezuelan government argues that a large part of this land is not actually owned by the Vestey group and that they are illegally using property belonging to the Venezuelan state. Local peasant leaders argue that the land was bought by dictator Juan Vicente Gomez in the 1930s and that subsequently, all land owned by the dictator was passed over to the Venezuelan state. Vestey Group administrators complain that parts of the ranch have been occupied by peasants since 2001 when the Land Act was passed. The intervention at the El Charcote estate was carried out by the governor of Cojedes, Johnny Yáñez, with about 200 national guardsmen and police along with helicopters which will allow them to survey the ranch.

As part of a regional review of land ownership the Cojedes regional governor sent a commission of enquiry to El Charcote. The ranch has not been “seized”, as the Financial Times claims, but rather there has been an “intervention”. There is now a technical team on the ranch which will investigate the claims of the British group over the land titles and whether the land is being used to its full capacity



or whether parts of the ranch have been left idle.

### Land Ownership

As Chavez explained in his speech on Monday, the structure of land ownership in Venezuela is scandalously unfair. A 1998 census found that 60 percent of Venezuelan farmland was owned by less than 1 percent of the population. Chavez yesterday said that nearly 80 percent of the country's land is owned by 5 percent of landowners. Meanwhile, the smallest landowners representing 75% of agricultural holdings have to share 6% of the land. The 1998 census also revealed that 90 percent of farmland given to the poor under a 1960 agrarian reform had since returned to large landholders. “A democracy that permits such a situation of injustice will lose its democratic character and will end up turning itself into a pantomime of democracy. A revolution that permits this injustice cannot call itself a revolution,” said Chavez.

This is at the same time that Venezuela, despite having large extensions of very fertile land with a benign climate, imports about 60 to

70% of all the foodstuffs that it consumes. Some have called it a "harbours' agriculture", since most agricultural products come from [...] the harbours through which they are imported. For instance, every quarter, 14,000 tonnes of black beans (caraotas) and other pulses, which are an important part of the staple diet of poor Venezuelans, are imported. Production of caraotas actually collapsed in the 1990s, from 31,376 tonnes in 1988 to 18,627 tonnes in 1999, while the Venezuelan population increased by 20%.

In fact, agriculture is one of the most extreme expressions of the backwardness and parasitical character of the Venezuelan oligarchy, this reactionary alliance between capitalists, bank owners, landowners and multinational corporations that has ruled the country since it achieved independence. For them it is preferable, and more profitable, to live off the state and oil resources, gamble on the stock exchange, buy government bonds, invest their money abroad, and import luxury goods, than it is to develop national production in any field.

In these conditions it is difficult to see how an amicable agreement can be reached with the landowners to voluntarily distribute land to the hundreds of thousands of land hungry families that need it. The struggle for the land has been one of the most contentious issues of the Venezuelan revolutionary

process so far. It was the passing of the Land Act in December 2001 (together with the Hydrocarbon Act and others) that triggered the opposition to organise the April 2002 military coup against the Chavez government. The hopes of thousands of peasant communities were again lifted during the regional election campaign last October, when Chavez delivered belligerent speeches against the latifundio and instructed the Bolivarian gubernatorial candidates to tackle the problem of land reform straight away.

### Meaningful Land Reform and Private Property

The president of the ranch owners association, Betancourt, reacted strongly to the decree, saying in an interview on the Globovision television station that "If they eliminate private property rights, they will also be eliminating the peace in Venezuela". This is an ominous threat. Some 100 peasant leaders and activists have been killed in disputes over land property with big landowners in the past 4 years. In some areas along the border with Colombia ranch owners have for some time armed white guards modelling themselves on, and sometimes getting advice from, the infamous paramilitary gangs from neighbouring Colombia.

If you have a situation in which 5% of landowners control nearly 80% of the land,

then it is clear that one cannot carry out a land reform policy that will please both the owners of large landed estates and landless peasants.

Even the Cojedes governor, Johnny Yanéz, had to say that private property "is a right, but not an absolute one, since the collective interest, public need, and food security are parameters that must justify this private right".

This is not just about land. If the conflict over land reform deepens, as it is bound to do, and land is expropriated and given over to landless peasants, then workers in industry are bound to draw similar conclusions. Instances like that of the Venepal paper mill, which the owners declared bankrupt and the workers took over and are now demanding to be nationalised under workers control, will spread. On the other hand, Venezuela's landowners are an inseparable part of the Venezuelan ruling class. An attack on them will be rightly seen by the capitalists as an attack on the very principle of private property of the economy.

The analysts of the ruling class can clearly see the implications of these moves. According to business analysts Bloomberg, Benito Berber, an analyst with HSBC Securities in New York said: "The erosion of private property rights may undermine long-term economic growth as capital inflows slow and investors lose confidence in the country's future".

The problem is precisely that, as in other areas of the progressive government of Chavez, any social justice measures implemented, no matter how "moderate" they might be, clash head on with the vested interests of the owners of industry, capital and the land. We must remember that, even though the Bolivarian revolution has not directly infringed on the rights of private property, the capitalists and landowners have attempted the violent overthrow of the government on several occasions. The

fact is that the basic needs of the working people of Venezuela (free health care and education for all, a roof over their heads, decent food on their table, means of earning their livelihood) are in direct contradiction to the existence of the capitalist system based on private profit and the benefits of a wealthy minority. And this is why the very existence of a revolutionary movement in Venezuela is seen by the oligarchy, rightly, as a threat to their interests.

### Economic and Political Power

The Bolivarian revolution should understand this basic fact and move to wrest from the oligarchy the levers of economic and political power they still control as the only guarantee for the victory of the revolution. □

## Stop Press!

On the morning of January 19th, in the Ayacucho room of the Presidential Palace in Caracas, and with the presence of Venepal workers and trade union leaders, Chavez signed decree number 3438 which expropriates Venepal. From now on it will be co-managed by the workers and the state.

This is a very important victory for the workers of Venepal but more than that it is a massive step forward for the Bolivarian revolution.

For more information and regular updates go to [www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)



# fighting fund

## Build our fighting fund in 2005

THE NEW year is traditionally a time when people look forward with optimism and hope to the coming months and wish for better times. It is also a time when we all look forward to seeing how the Xmas Fighting Fund appeal has turned out. Of course you will be reading this column in February when the final result is known whereas I am writing these words in the middle of January with a couple of weeks still to go.

So there is little I can do here to get the cash in to us in time to be counted towards the finished total. But life moves on and so does the need for donations from readers and sellers towards our funds so we can keep the red flag flying. If you have forgotten to contribute towards the Xmas appeal now is your chance to make amends by sending something in, however small.

We rely entirely on contributions from ordinary people, some of whom have very little to give but see the need to do so in order to fight for socialism. We get and want nothing from big business - but then, apart from the rich few, who does?

The last few weeks have been dominated by the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami disaster. Pictures of the terrible destruction and laying waste of whole communities have filled our television screens each day and naturally people have wanted to do something. It is therefore to be expected that people have been making donations towards the relief effort. What has been noticeable is the fact that the poorest people have proportionally given the most as a percentage of their income, as compared to big business

and the wealthy. Indeed much criticism has been made of the slow response by Western governments. But then again, these were the people who helped insure that no warnings got to those in danger because it cost too much. We should also note that many people died because the local infrastructure was so poor that the waves were able to sweep everything away with little chance of early rescue or help.

Here we have seen both the inbuilt desire of people to help whatever the cost - so much for the self interest that right wingers always go on about - but also a terrible example of the price that is being paid for capitalism and imperialism. Many of the estimated quarter of a million dead could have survived had things been different, but few bosses will lose sleep over this. We need to redouble our efforts to fight for a socialist society that acts in the interests of people not profit. But we need your help - the cash for our fighting fund must keep flowing in and be built up so that the ideas of Marxism can be heard during 2005.

There are far too many names this time for me to be able to thank all those who have donated over the last month and a bit, but I must just list a random few: £100 (Harry), £30 (Andy), £75 (Mandy), £20 (Halifax readers), £20 (Coventry reader), £280 (readers in central London) - to these comrades and all the others we say, thanks!

Let's make 2005 even more successful than 2004. Send what you can to PO Box 50525, London, E14 6WG - make cheques etc. payable as usual to Socialist Appeal.

Steve Jones

## Subscribe to Socialist Appeal

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

# Socialist Appeal

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

### Vauxhall threaten closure: Workers ballot for action



## Militant Action

### the only way

2001 YEAR

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

Surfing: Three months after the fall of Milosevic  
Russia at the crossroads  
How the Big Left created the Trotskyist movement

[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)

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

I want more information about Socialist Appeal's activities

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

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

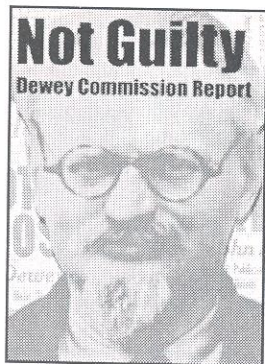
Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

E-mail.....

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



## New Publication Out Now!

### NOT GUILTY! Dewey Commission Report (1937)

No. Pages 450  
List Price: £14.99  
Our Price: £10 - order direct from Wellred books now

# noticeboard

## February 2005

## Marxist International Review

Issue 2

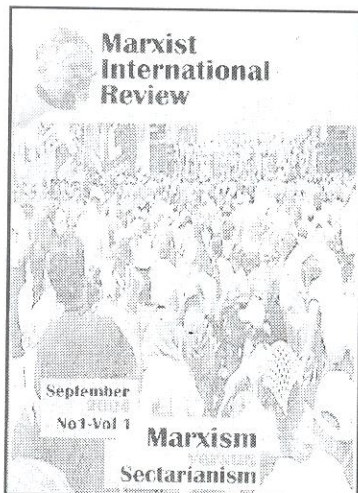
### Contents include:

- 40 years of Militant
- Articles on the Venezuelan Revolution
- A Marxist history of the Jews

Available only by subscription.

£25 for 6 issues (includes postage)

Send your orders to Socialist Appeal, PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG or order on line at [wellred.marxist.com](http://wellred.marxist.com)



### NUJ Left Conference

Saturday February 12, 2005  
11am - 4pm  
The Mechanics Institute, Manchester

Discussions to include Iraq, fighting job cuts and low pay, and building the left in the union.

Food will be available and a pooled fare will operate.

More details from 07810 824223, email: [leftnuj@yahoo.com](mailto:leftnuj@yahoo.com)  
All NUJ members welcome.

Wellred Books on line at [wellred.marxist.com](http://wellred.marxist.com)

## Socialist Appeal Stands for:

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

✚ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £8.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.

✚ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.

✚ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.

✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining.

Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.

✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.

✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.

✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

## Education Must Be A Right Not A Privilege

By Pablo Sanchez

IT IS OFFICIAL: class affects university access. A few days ago the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) released their annual report. It states that: "Most of the new places created at universities have gone to young people from middle class areas". The report confirms something that has become fairly obvious to anyone who is studying, or has studied, in the British university system since Tony Blair's New Labour won the General Election in 1997, with a manifesto that stood for: education, education, education.

New Labour has abandoned the traditional Labour principle of a free education for all and has embraced the "Neo-liberal" agenda which seeks to transform a non-profitable institution into a money making machine for banks and Government. We hear all the time that there is not enough funding for education and a solution is needed.

The Government abolished grants in 1997 and fees were introduced, in direct contradiction to the pledges of New Labour. This has created a situation where the market dictates who is and who is not going to university, who will finish higher education with a massive debt and who will not start.

Those living in areas with a "good" school get a better education but that put the prices of the houses up. So much for market choice. This creates a vicious downward spiral. Good schools are always in good neighbourhoods that become so because their inhabitants can afford it, and local councils will have more money in the form of taxes. But if you cannot afford to buy a house near a good school your kids will go to a "bad" school. At the end of the day our education depend on the luck you have finding a house, and what neighbourhood you can afford.

The participation rate in Kensington and Chelsea is 79%, followed by City and Westminster on 65% and the well-heeled Glasgow suburb of Eastwood on 63%, where more than 1,100 students gained university places (*Guardian* January

19). That is not the end of the story, the highest level of first year drop-outs takes

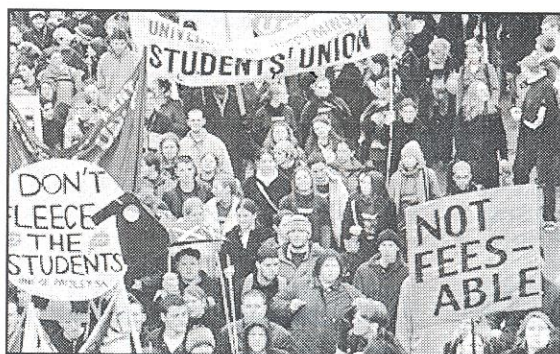
place in those universities with more 'Class C' students (East London University for instance), so it is not only a matter of who goes to University but who is able to stay on and finish.

If you have to work in a KFC part-time or go from agency to agency in order to reduce your 20K debt, obviously your study time will be reduced. This is yet another confirmation that, despite the propaganda, classes do exist and one of them (us) is having a raw deal.

We read a lot of propaganda about the great benefits of the European Union, and according to the European Constitution education is a right. In fact the European Commission has set up the "Bologna Agenda" which is an attempt to extend the American model throughout Europe.

Rights are always limited by the power of the market under capitalism, we need to fight against the evil logic of the market that puts profits before the general interests of society. We need more doctors and nurses, more teachers and scientists but for capitalism that is not important - making money is.

Education is a vital part of society and will not be changed independently from the struggle to change society. We need to get organised and fight for our rights!



**EDUCATION IS A RIGHT NOT A PRIVILEGE!  
SCRAP FEES, RESTORE GRANTS!  
FOR A LIVING GRANT FOR ALL OVER 16 IN  
FULL TIME EDUCATION!**

[www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)