

# SocialistAppeal

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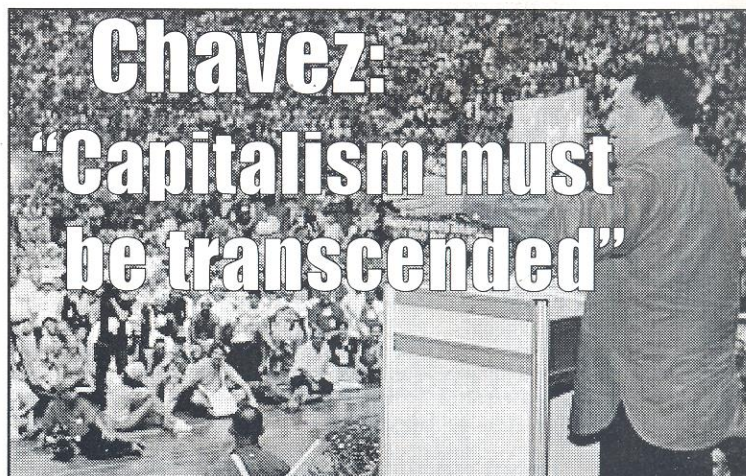
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## Imperialist troops out of IRAQ

**Defend the  
Venezuelan Revolution**

**Workers at HONDA:  
From apathy  
to solidarity**



**Chavez:  
"Capitalism must  
be transcended"**

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**index  
 this month**



**MAY  
 DAY  
 GREETINGS**

Editorial: Defend democratic rights.....3  
 News:  
 Young, gifted & unemployed.....4  
 Fight the bosses' greed! Defend jobs in the Telegraph!.....4  
 Health: Detention is good for your health.....5  
 Scotland:  
 Scottish Socialist Party - New Leader will not solve Problems.....6  
 Report: Newcastle protest against the imperialist occupation.....6  
 Trade Union: What's our attitude to the Super Merger?.....7  
 Railways: Five years on still no justice.....10  
  
 Pensions time bomb.....12  
 Hands Off Venezuela:  
 Ricardo Galindez speaking tour kicks off with  
 succesful meeting in House of Commons: "We Will Win!".....14  
 Dublin Hands Off Venezuela meeting -  
 Biggest ever held at AT&GWU offices.....15  
 UNT activist meets Irish trade union leaders.....15  
  
 Venezuela:  
 Chavez: "Capitalism must be transcended".....16  
  
 The new Bush administration attacks  
 the poor, the workers and the youth again.....19  
 World economy: The capitalist economic cycle - business as usual?...20  
  
 International:  
 Reason in Revolt at the Havana Book Fair:  
 The ideas of Marxism and Trotsky more alive than ever in Havana.....22  
 Report on the Karachi Labour Conference.....23  
 Historic victory of the Buenos Aires metro workers.....23  
 Mark Twain, Daniel De Leon and the war in Iraq.....24  
 The Israeli-Palestinian summit: A very short film.....26  
  
 Obituary: Arthur Miller, death of a committed artist.....27  
 Science: UBIQUITY - A confirmation of Dialectics.....28

An appeal to all Labour and trade union organisations.

It is our intention to once again carry May Day greetings from organisations and individuals from the movement in our May 2005 edition.

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

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**Trade Union**  
**Honda:**  
**From apathy to solidarity**  
**(pages 8-9)**

**Stop Press:**  
**Victory in equal pay**  
**claim struggle**  
**(page 7)**

# Defend democratic rights

"No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land."

## Magna Carta

THE CORNERSTONE of a freedom established almost 800 years ago is now under threat from a Labour government. Once again, under the guise of the "war on terror", we are faced with proposals which constitute an unparalleled assault on our civil liberties. The latest reactionary piece of legislation hands power to the Home Secretary of the day to hold those he claims to be suspected terrorists under house arrest indefinitely. The threat posed by these draconian measures to our hard won democratic rights must set alarm bells ringing throughout the labour movement.

Bush and Blair have tried to portray the farcical elections in Afghanistan and Iraq as great victories for their version of 'freedom and democracy'. Meanwhile, back home basic democratic rights fought for over generations are being undermined.

In a hurried measure last year the Blair government pushed through a law allowing any future Home Secretary to hold foreign terrorist suspects without the troublesome delay of a hearing before a judge. However, the law lords determined that this was discriminatory against foreigners. New Home Secretary Charles Clarke squared this circle with the greatest of ease. He simply redrafted the law so that it applied to British citizens as well!

It is ironic that holding someone under indefinite house arrest on the order of a politician will require an opt out from the European Convention on Human

Rights. Meanwhile the Lord Chancellor uses the Human Rights Bill to defend Prince Charles' right to remarry. We have always known there was one law for the rich and another for the rest of us. Now, apparently, the rich are entitled to human rights while the rest of us can be exempted.

Blair, Clarke and co think that hiding behind their constant claims of the 'imminent threat to national security' permits them to undermine the most basic of our democratic rights. Clarke even had the effrontery to use the example of the Madrid bombing as a threat, "the Madrid [bombing] atrocity took place during a general election... Such things can always be possible here, too." In reality it is the criminal invasion of Iraq - which was supposed to be part of the 'war on terror' - which has served to increase the threat of terrorism a thousandfold.

In the same way the right wing reactionary Aznar cynically exposed the Spanish people to the kind of suicide bombing that so cruelly devastated Madrid one year ago.

Sooner or later reality will catch up even with the most stubborn people. Aznar was thrown out by the people of Spain. The cause of his downfall was his shameful support for George Bush's war in Iraq. Tony Blair can go the same way. What is required here, however, is not replacing Blair with the Tories, but the rank and file of Labour and the unions showing him the door, replacing him and his New Labour cronies with a leadership of

genuine socialists prepared to defy the dictates of big business and Washington, and carry out policies in the interests of the working class.

There are clear indications of a growing revolt against Blair, even inside the Parliamentary Labour Party. The second reading of this bill in parliament saw the government's 159 majority cut in half. The bill was passed by a majority of 76, but thirty-two Labour MPs voted against what successive speakers dubbed 'draconian infringements of personal liberty'.

Throughout history the working class has fought for democratic rights, while the ruling class has always struggled to restrict them. Those who talk so much about 'bringing democracy to the people of Iraq' ought to take a good look at the real situation in 'democratic Britain', where all the democratic rights won by the working class over generations are gradually being wittled away. The right to strike in Britain has been so severely restricted that British laws contravene the rules of the ILO.

We do not have illusions in judges, the courts or parliament as it is presently constituted. Our democratic rights are severely restricted, we have no control over who becomes a judge, or who runs the Bank of England, or the police, yet these people have a decisive impact on our lives. In reality the banks and big monopolies make all the serious decisions in our society. Nevertheless even the limited freedoms and rights we have in this system were hard fought for and should be defended. It is self evident that the working class needs the maximum level of democracy attainable to conduct its struggle against the bosses and their system.

This is not a secondary issue. These measures have

to be seen alongside the abolition of the right to trial by jury; the introduction of Identity Cards; and all the anti-union laws still in effect after eight years of Labour government.

Just as the reforms conquered by the struggle of the working class on the length of the working day, or free healthcare and education, have been undermined, so too democratic rights and freedoms are being attacked. These changes are not restricted to Britain, they are not the whim of one government, but represent a process whereby the capitalist system politically (as well as economically) is refining the instruments of the state to better suit their needs in a new situation. They are preparing for the crises they see developing in their own system.

The proposed measures are unparalleled in peace time. Yet Britain is not at war. The battles the ruling class are preparing for are at home, with the working class, the battles they have started with their attacks on jobs, pensions, healthcare, education and housing.

The entire labour movement must take a stand on this issue. We already knew that capitalism could not guarantee us jobs, hospitals or schools. Now they are demonstrating that even basic democratic rights cannot be guaranteed under this system. In the same way that the struggle for free health care and education is a fundamental part of the struggle for socialism, so too the only way we can defend the limited rights and freedoms we have won in the past, and extend them to gain real democratic control over all aspects of our lives, is through the struggle for the socialist future of society. □

# Young, gifted & unemployed

by Igor McClean

FOR THOSE of us unlucky enough to find ourselves unemployed today, as many people do, there can be no doubt that despite the claims of the bourgeoisie who insist that "there are plenty jobs", getting back in to work is a very frustrating and difficult thing to do.

The ruling class, and the apologists of the "free market" speak with euphoria and glee about the great opportunities available for the unemployed. Supermarkets and call centres claim to be taking on hundreds of workers (usually for low paid jobs), but despite this bold claim it can be difficult for many people to become one of these "hundreds" of employees due to the sluggish application processes that are in operation in many large companies.

Despite the wonders of the computer, combined with the job centre attendant's claims that you "should have a CV prepared" in case a potential job comes up, the companies seeking to "recruit hundreds of workers" choose to ignore both, providing you instead with a large application form to be filled out in pen, asking you exactly the same questions you had typed out on your CV.

Once the application forms are handed in, the person may then be lucky enough to be invited to a "test" or "assessment". These "tests" can be a rather patronising experience, ranging from primary school maths questions, to watching mock video situations and grading "how well the employee has handled the situation".

Before or after the great "test" some companies will also force the poor applicant to sit through a "presentation" which basically tells them how wonderful the company is, and how great it is to work for them. The bored and frustrated applicant of course is thinking "just give me a bloody job then!"

Once this session is over, the applicant will return home having been told that "we will be in touch", or, if they are very lucky, they will be invited to an interview the following week, which means another week on the dole, more travelling expenses and more hanging around.

It is ironic that when the apologists of capitalism denounce socialism, they say that "people will not work", when under the system they claim to be "fair" and "natural", many who are willing to work and are actively seeking a job, have the door slammed in their face. Willing and able workers are frozen out by the system, whilst our brothers and sisters in employment are usually working long hours and taking on the workload of more than one person.

In a fair system the willing and able unemployed people would be given work beside the overworked people to ensure that the hours and the workload would be reduced, making life better for all. Unfortunately, we live in a capitalist system, and the only people who benefit from such a system are a small minority of profit making employers who ruin the lives of millions in their endless quests for capital. Today, more than ever, we need to fight for a classless society which can provide fair treatment for workers. □

## **Fight the bosses' greed! Defend jobs in the Telegraph!**

by Ramon Samblas, NUJ Central London Branch member, personal capacity

FOR THE past year the sale of the *Telegraph* group has occupied many pages in other newspapers, but now there is very little news about the 90 jobs in the company - and 200 journalist on non-staff contract - that are going to be gone very soon.

When the Barclays brothers bought the *Telegraph* group - it owns amongst others the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper - everybody knew that measures to "modernise" and "improve efficiency" the company would soon be undertaken. One of the first things that the new owners of the *Telegraph* group did was to appoint Murdoch MacLennan as chief executive. Without blinking an eye MacLennan sent a communication to the 521 journalists who are working in both newspapers announcing that 90 of them would lose their jobs. He also had the cheek to state that "Journalists are the lifeblood of any newspaper, however action to secure our titles against the competition is also vital". This massive lay off is not confined to the journalists, other departments like IT and marketing will lose up to 30% of staff. In total 300 jobs will go together with 200 freelance journalists who depend on the media company. MediaGuardian stated "it is the biggest single clear-out of editorial staff from a British newspaper group for 20 years".

The plans of the company are not a secret. They pretend to improve efficiency by cutting staff and publishing 8 more pages. Of course, what MacLennan and the Barclays brothers have never thought about is cutting spending by reducing the lavish wages and expenses of the superstars like Dave King, John Allwood or Katie Vanneck in executive posts.

On February 4 the NUJ chapel in the company held a very heated meeting where up to 125 brothers and sisters passed a motion rejecting the *Telegraph* group's proposal and called on the management to withdraw the plans on February 7 or face a ballot for industrial action. When the *Telegraph* workers saw that the deadline had expired and there was no reply from the company they decided to go ahead with the ballot. Jeremy Dear, General Secretary of the NUJ stated "The union executive has declared we will be 100 per cent behind any efforts on the part of the chapel to oppose the redundancies, and that could include industrial action if necessary."

There can be no doubt that these workers are going to fight to the end. They can see that there are no jobs waiting for them anywhere else since the other media groups are planning to take similar measures (*News International* and *Financial Times*) or have already undertaken them (*Reuters* and *BBC*). The NUJ must take a strong stand to face this wave of job cuts all over the Media industry. Only with militant unions can we oppose greed of the bosses! □

- For full employment
- The right to a job or decent benefits
- No compulsory overtime
- For a 32 hour week with no loss of pay

# Detention is good for your health

by Caron Walker

WHILE THE Home Secretary has been loudly promoting home arrest and unlimited detention for people who might be a danger some time in the future, another form of detention is being proposed under the guise of health. A new draft mental health bill, to replace the current Mental Health Act is currently going through Parliament. If passed, it will further erode civil liberties and give the state greater powers by allowing the forcible detention and treatment of people who are considered to have a wide range of mental health problems. Opposition to the Bill is widespread and on 31 January this year more than 300 mental health service users, carers, activists and health professionals attended a rally organised by the Mental Health Alliance to demonstrate their opposition.

The forcible detention of people with some mental health problems is not new. The current Mental Health Act, introduced in 1983, allows for people to be detained against their will. In 2000-1 alone 47,200 detentions under the Act were made. The mental health charity MIND have calculated that formal admissions have increased at a steady rate over the last ten years - from 18,000 in 1990-91 to 26,700 in 2000-01. Official figures show that the proportion of all psychiatric patients detained in England has risen steadily over the past five years - from 18.7% in 1994-95 to 25.2% in 2000/02. Interestingly, the number of formal admissions to private facilities (run for profit) has more than trebled in recent years, from 418 in 1990-91 to 1,406 in 2000-01.

What is new is that the new Bill rewrites the definition of mental disorder to now include

anyone who has "a psychological dysfunction arising from any disorder of the mind or brain". People who fall within this definition and who are deemed to be at risk of harming themselves or others can be detained and compelled into treatment, even if they have committed no crime. Another new aspect is that compulsory treatment can be imposed on people living in the community as well as those in hospital through the introduction of Community Treatment Orders. Sounds familiar? People placed on these compulsory Community Treatment Orders can be told to take certain medication, attend regular appointments, and not to engage in specified conduct, which could include seeing certain people or going to certain places. Those who do not comply with the order face detention in a hospital because doctors have the power to over-ride a person's decision if they believe the treatment is in the best interests of the individual.

A serious concern about the new Bill is that the new definition of mental disorder is very wide and vague and could be interpreted to include almost anyone who is deemed a danger. "A psychological dysfunction arising from any disorder of the mind or brain" - how many people in the Houses of Parliament would fit this definition? As John Wadham, director of Liberty pointed out, "There is a real risk of people being detained on dubious grounds, having done nothing wrong, and with no treatment in prospect. Despite the promised safeguards, the scope for injustice in this situation remains alarming." The Law Society has said the Bill could breach patients' human rights and their

Strategic Policy Director said, "The introduction of community mental health orders will create the equivalent of psychiatric anti-social behaviour orders to be imposed on people with mental health problems."

## Turning nurses into prison warders

These greater powers of compulsion and detention not only increase the power of the state but are likely to deter people from seeking help from health services. The Royal College of Psychiatrists believes that, "because suicide and other risks are largely assessed from information given by the patient, it is necessary for the person to feel able to talk freely. Fear that being open will lead to loss of liberty does not aid this process. Hence if mental health law is seen to be overly coercive it will lead to patient avoidance of mental health services and, paradoxically, an increase in risk both to the individual and the public." Other health workers are also concerned because they will have the job of assessing whether a person needs to be locked up. They have pointed out that the Bill risks turning psychiatrists and mental health nurses into prison warders.

The Mental Health Alliance - a 60-member grouping that includes the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Mental Health Foundation, Royal College of Nursing, Mind and the National Union of Students - has called for Community Treatment Orders to be scrapped. A mental health service user at the recent rally explained, "if people are ill enough to warrant compulsory treatment, that is, they are at risk of suicide or could potentially harm others, then how

could they be well enough to comply with the conditions of a compulsory treatment order?" Another at the demonstration said that the Bill was protecting the wrong people. "This Act is coming about because of a perception that 'mad' people are dangerous and yet most violent crime is committed by people who do not have a psychiatric diagnosis."

Due to the pressures of capitalism on working people - including long working hours, low pay, inadequate and expensive housing - many people in Britain experience mental health problems. Over 91 million working days are lost to mental ill health every year and half of the days lost through mental illness are due to anxiety and stress, many of these caused by working conditions. What's more, any of us could develop mental health problems in the future. Evidence suggests that 1 in 6 people will have depression at some point in their life (depression is most common in people aged 25-44 years) and 1 in 10 people are likely to have a 'disabling anxiety disorder' at some stage in their life.

What is needed for people facing mental health problems is prompt access to good quality health services. We do not need a system that punishes people for being ill. As socialists we must campaign against this Bill because it will further punish the working class. We must also oppose it because it will become another tool to be used by the ruling class in times of social or political unrest to forcibly restrict or round up people who are deemed a threat or 'undesirable'. □

## Scottish Socialist Party - New Leader will not solve Problems

by Rob Sewell

AT ITS recent annual conference the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) elected a new leader, when Colin Fox, a party MEP, defeated Alan McCombes by 254 votes to 152.

The election was the result of last November's sacking of the party's founder Tommy Sheridan by the Executive Council after the News of the World printed allegations about Sheridan's personal life. Sheridan has throughout denied the allegations, but this did not stop certain leading figures in the party from staging, what was, in essence, a "coup" to remove Sheridan from the leadership.

Following a lengthy period of rancour and splits within the party and growing resentment at Sheridan's public profile, McCombes and Caroline Leckie MSP were among senior party members who saw an opportunity to oust the man with the tan.

What the conspirators failed to understand was that Sheridan, given his past record and profile, was vital to their party's successes. Even more, the SSP's very survival depended primarily on this populist leader, who was able to convince the rank and file of ongoing political progress. This period now appears to be over for the SSP.

On the same day that Fox gave the hapless McCombes a drubbing, two different opinion polls showed that public support for the SSP had fallen to between 2 - 3 percent. If this result were replicated in an election, the SSP would lose all of its MSP's. Indeed, they need only drop just over a percentage point to lose 5 MSP's.

When Sheridan, McCombes and their followers launched their political adventure in 1991, the comrades of the Socialist Appeal opposed this line. Our analysis of the situation then, remains as valid and consistent today. Long ago Lenin explained that support for the right of national self-determination for Scotland did not mean that Marxists were obliged to advocate or even support Scottish independence. We warned about the dangers of pandering to petit-bourgeois nationalism - which is exactly what the SSP and their forerunners have been doing over the last decade and more.

Ignoring the Marxist approach to the National Question left the door open for

all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas, in particular a capitulation to petty bourgeois nationalism and an attempt to find a solution within capitalism. A bit of this, a bit of that, and leaving out anything which did not suit the immediate trend. Neither do Marxists stand for so-called "national cultural autonomy" which means the values, rules and institutions of the bourgeois nationalists who are implacably opposed to working class solidarity, socialist ideas and internationalism. Any support for the right of self-determination for oppressed nations must always be subordinate to considerations of the class struggle and the overall interests of the working class.

Under the new leadership of Colin Fox, the SSP will continue much as before, cosying up to nationalism and watering down socialist demands for fear of losing respectability. The crisis in the SSP will not be resolved by changing leaders. With the party in £200,000 of debt, some of the MSP's have been forced to take out personal loans to keep the sinking ship afloat. However, desperate to maintain their "success", plans are already underway to stand in EVERY one of the 51 seats in Scotland in the forthcoming General Election. If the pollsters are right, that's a lot of lost deposits, and will add to the crisis. The squabbling and petty jealousies are set to continue. Recent press reports quote Tommy Sheridan as already referring to fellow SSP MSP's Caroline Leckie, Rosie Kane and Frances Curran as "the three witches".

Within a matter of hours of Fox's victory, Rosie Kane announced that she will not be standing for the executive and will be stepping down as an MSP at the next election.

In any event the adventure is well and truly over. The working class have had to pay the price with another false dawn, with the abuse of their resources and energies by ambitious politicians and with the confusion and set back by the entire rash failure. We issue an appeal to socialists in the SSP to join us in the fight for socialism under our banner, using the method, the theories, the traditions, the history and the ideas of genuine Marxism in the true traditions of Lenin and Trotsky. ■

## Newcastle protest against the imperialist occupation

by Bjorn Ovrevik Oysten

THIS WEEKEND the Labour party held their spring conference in Newcastle upon Tyne. The venue chosen for the gathering was the newly opened Sage Music Centre. Like all spectacular venues, this 70 million pound building is paid for by the taxes collected from all and used by few.

On January 29, a demonstration was arranged by the anti war movement to protest against the occupation of Iraq.

The demo started at 11am, it was peaceful and lively with the mingling sound of different blocs shouting and chanting slogans of protest against imperialism in the Middle East.

There was a wide range of activists from different campaigning groups as well as trade unions, even Fathers 4 Justice were there. Many more people attended the demonstration numbering in all close to a thousand showing solidarity and unity in the front against the imperialist war in Iraq.

Their discontent and purpose found a voice as the parade arrived at the quay side, opposite the Sage music centre where the conference was being held.

Speakers expressed the injustice of the occupation and demanded the withdrawal of our and America's occupying troops. Banners were held, one which stretched the length of four people, displaying a figure of the estimated amount of people who had lost their lives in this western voyage for oil, masked in the tainted flag of "democracy".

This demonstration and many to follow display the fact that despite the recent televised practice in "democracy", it is still blatantly obvious that no justification can account for the actions of this war.

And even in the imagined scenario that they could, this election is merely one step in a long process of elections that are necessary for the occupiers to inject their version of "democracy" to legitimize their imposed power upon the Iraqi people. ■

# What's our attitude to the Super Merger?

by Gordon Martin

THE PROPOSED merger of the three major unions into a so-called "super union" raises many serious questions that require a real debate within the labour movement. The leaderships of Amicus, T&G and GMB have begun talks about the setting up of a new trade union that will have 2.3 million members if the members of these three unions vote for the merger. Why are the leaders so keen to form this super union?

Tony Woodley, general secretary of the T&GWU is on the record as saying that this proposed new union "sends a message of hope to every worker", he goes on to say that its creation will bring an end to "petty and pointless inter-union squabbling". But the leaderships of the unions should be looking to defending workers' terms and conditions in order to improve union membership amongst the working class. If they gave a positive fighting lead to improve job security, pensions and pay and conditions for the

members they represent, many more people would join a trade union. Sweetheart deals, capitulation to the Blair government and the bosses is not the way to ensure growth for the trade union movement.

Tony Woodley talks about the proposed new unions 300 plus Labour MP's. These are the same MP's whose silence has been deafening during the Blair government, keeping the anti trade union laws, supporting PFI, not to mention the imperialist occupation of Iraq. Would this group of MP's intervene if the union's assets were seized during an industrial dispute? The trade unions should ensure that all sponsored MP's actually represent the interests of the members whose money they are happy to take. The union should be using its influence within the Labour Party to alter the Tory legislation that ties workers in legal knots with postal ballots, that prevents secondary action and all the other measures designed to hamper workers from taking effective strike action.

The talks over the GMB/TGWU/Amicus mergers are likely to lead initially to a ballot to agree the principle of merger, with the details of a new rule book to be discussed and voted on in the lead up to full merger, as happened both with the AEEU/MSF merger into Amicus during 2003 and the discussions over the NUPE/COHSE/NALGO mergers that led to the formation of Unison in 1993.

The principle of the proposed mergers does have a logic within a lot of industries, which could lead to a strengthening of the collective action of the workers. But the crucial question that has to be answered is will the members be able to exercise democratic control over a union bureaucracy that such a large union would create?

In this the rulebook is far from a secondary academic question that the leadership will no doubt try to claim. Democratic accountability, with the decisions of the workforce being carried out rather than

opposed by unelected unaccountable officers, is an absolute essential. Derek Simpson, the general secretary of Amicus, was elected on a programme of election of officials and this must be an essential part of any new union rulebook. Control by the members over the union structure is also vitally important, with members in different industries able to determine the policy within their own sector.

All of these questions must be answered before any decision is asked for from the members. If democratic accountability cannot be assured then a merger will benefit no-one other than the bureaucracy of the unions who are desperate to cling onto their perks and privileges. It will be the job of the broad lefts in the unions to ensure that any merger proposals contain this guarantee of democracy. ■

## Stop Press:

### Victory in equal pay claim struggle

As we go to press the biggest equal pay claim in the world is being settled. Socialist Appeal has reported in the past the struggle of Unison members in the North East of England to secure equal pay for work of equal value. After a long campaign, involving mass meetings and negotiations with management, the North Cumbria Acute NHS Trust has been forced to accept the validity of the claims advanced by the local union on behalf of 1300 domestics, cooks, administration and clerical workers and nurses, particularly at Carlisle and Whitehaven hospitals.

The claim is worth a total of over 300 million. This can and should mean the end of Agenda for Change, if the union leaders were prepared to combine such equal pay claims with a struggle on behalf of their members. Not only will these workers get payments backdated for up to 14 years - some individuals will receive in excess of 200,000 - there will also be substantial and immediate pay rises. Nurses for example will move from 18,500 to 26,000. A full report of this dramatic victory will be published in next month's Socialist Appeal. ■

# Honda: From apathy to solidarity

by Alan Tomala, Amicus Site Convenor, personal capacity

THE ANNALS of history are replete with literature chronicling the birth & struggles of the trade union movement. In recent times, technological changes and globalization have changed the world of production and the ability of big business to maximise its level of profitability. Constant attacks and anti-trade union legislation, implemented by the Thatcher government, have placed intolerable pressures upon the trade union movement and its members.

Despite these pressures, today there is a resurgence of the collective belief, as well as a change of leadership throughout the trade union movement, a movement towards the left, which in the fullness of time can only benefit the trade union movement as a whole.

This article depicts this changing mood, through the example of a recent struggle within one of the most anti-union UK based car manufacturers.

Honda of the UK Manufacturing Ltd, otherwise known as HUM, is situated in Swindon, Wiltshire and came to prominence in the 1980's. At that time, Britain, as well as the trade union movement, was experiencing a turbulent period.

The Miners' strike brought home to us the reality of the working class struggle and the importance of the trade union movement, within that struggle. However, the Thatcher government, with the assistance of their media machine, endeavoured to bring down the NUM, the trade union movement as a whole and subsequently quell the dissatisfaction displayed by the working class. Anti-union legislation soon followed, which undermined the effectiveness of the trade union movement, as well removing the barriers for big business.

However, situated along the M4 corridor, comfortably placed

within the affluent South West and geographically isolated from those areas more synonymous with the trade union movement, Swindon was a prime location for Honda to open a plant.

## From The Ashes of Apathy

Since the mid eighties the site at HUM, has grown from a PDI (Pre Delivery Inspection) facility, to a site which now contains an engine production plant as well as 2 car production plants, employing approximately 4000 employees.

There is a school of thought, which suggests that the Thatcher government gave some assurances that the trade union movement would present no problem, as an inducement for Honda to situate in Swindon, as the introduction of anti-union legislation would prevent them from doing so.

This was a noticeable factor when I commenced my employment at HUM in February 1995. I work in car production Plant 1, within the Assembly Frame Department. Many of the employees were from the Swindon area and were relatively young. As mentioned previously, Swindon is not synonymous with

the trade union movement. Therefore much of the workforce at that time had no experience of the trade union movement.

Furthermore, fear, threats, intimidation, a misrepresented view and apathy proved to be persuasive barriers in terms of organizing and recruiting for the purposes of seeking trade union recognition. In the absence of that recognition, the employer had a free hand to exploit and oppress the workforce. Unquestioned flexibility; unlimited compulsory overtime; no negotiation on pay terms and conditions; no representation on discipline or grievances; and no Health and Safety Reps, to name but a few.

Despite this, there was a small group of no more than 20 employees who were members of the AEEU. They met covertly, in each others homes and under the cover of darkness as they feared for their jobs. At that time I was a member of the TGWU. As there were no members of the TGWU which I knew of within the plant, I subsequently switched my membership from the TGWU, to the AEEU. On the membership form I requested that my subs be taken out of my wages. I was subsequently invit-

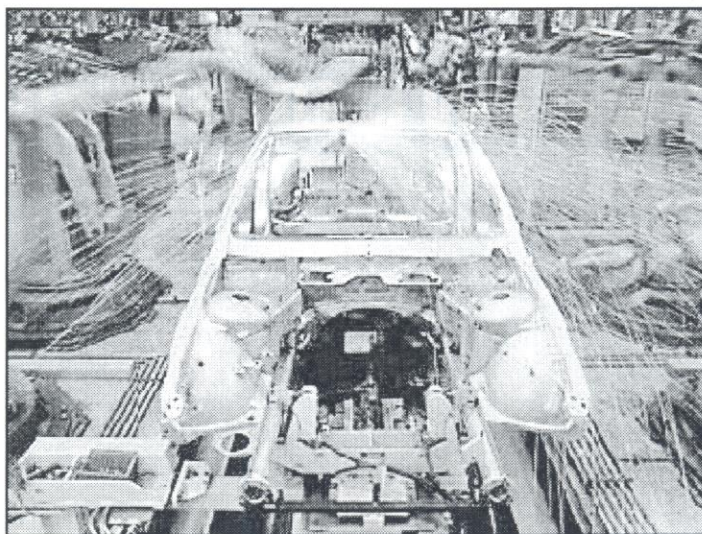
ed to see the Plant Manager who reminded me that union membership would not be tolerated and if I or any employee was seen to be active within the Plant, then dismissal would ensue.

At that time, officials of the AEEU began mounting a recruitment drive, whereby they would stand outside of the Plant distributing membership forms. However, any employee stopping to take a form, would have their registration number taken by security and then reported to management. Seemingly management at HUM would stop at nothing in order to prevent trade union activity and the endeavours of those seeking trade union recognition.

## The Birth of Solidarity

The turning point came in the late 1990s. The ARC (Associate Representative Council) which was the Company's works council, with no powers as such, either to negotiate or influence decision making, was holding its elections for Departmental Representatives. It was felt within the activist cell, in order to maximise recruitment and for the purposes of spreading the message of trade unionism, a number of us would stand for election. Subsequently, 3 key activists were elected, Dave Smith, Donald McDougall and myself. Once elected, our first objective was to recruit the remaining representatives and then set about organising an internal recruitment campaign, in conjunction with the AEEU's Regional Officer.

With a significant majority of Reps recruited, the recruitment campaign began. The fundamental aim was to achieve the 50% + 1 required to make an application for recognition. Organisation, becoming active on the shop floor, distribution of





literature, workplace mapping which identified the strong areas and weak areas, were all seen as essential tools if this was to be achieved. The literature which was distributed throughout the Plant was hard hitting, it had to be, as we were dealing with an oppressive and anti-union regime. "Workers of Honda dispense with your shackles of oppression", "When does slavery end and commitment begin", became typical slogans. Used in conjunction with literature outlining the benefits of trade unionism, meeting small groups of employees, recruitment increased.

In addition, and despite our misgivings, the AEEU were offering free membership, until such time as recognition was achieved.

Another facet as to why membership increased, was the migration of labour. Thatcher's attempted demolition of the trade union movement, the working class and its associated industries, only served to benefit our efforts to secure trade union recognition, at Honda, in the affluent South West. Labour started to migrate from those effected areas, to the more prosperous areas of the UK, of which Swindon was one. With this migration, came the migration of working class, trade union values and the importance of the labour struggle.

Fear and apathy began to diminish and so the birth of solidarity began.

From its starting point the AEEU estimated it would take approximately 5 years to achieve the 50% + 1 which was required to make an application for recognition. We achieved this figure within 18 months, which is testimony to the commitment of those activists, under extreme circumstances, no more so than when the company considered dismissing Donald McDougall, Dave Smith and I, before recognition could be achieved, as we were identified as the principal protagonists.

As a consequence of the recruitment campaign, membership rose from its initial paltry figure to well over 1500. With the required figure reached in order to make an application to

the CAC, for recognition, the emphasis turned from a recruitment campaign to a "Vote Yes For Recognition" campaign.

In mid to late 2001 a small group of activists, along with officials from the AEEU, began planning for this campaign. Honda was the last bastion of anti-trade unionism within the major UK based car manufacturers, and this was seen as the AEEU's most important project in recent times.

### Trade Union Recognition

For the purposes of letting the employees decide on the issue of recognition at the ballot, Honda declared a position of neutrality. Whilst they made no public attacks, they used more subtle tactics. Intimidation, e-mails stating union recognition will culminate in the closure of the plant. In the access period which the AEEU officials had within the Plant, prior to the ballot, the company even attempted to lock those Officials in a room between meeting times.

In late 2001, the workforce at Honda was balloted on the issue of trade union recognition. The result was a resounding 70+% "Yes" vote for trade union recognition. It is my understanding this was one of the AEEU's biggest majorities in such ballots.

It is also my understanding that this achievement sent reverberations throughout the trade union movement. In the early part of 2002, negotiations for a Recognition Agreement began. After an arduous negotiation process, the Recognition Agreement was finally signed in December 2002.

However, it is my belief that the Recognition Agreement is a legacy of the then General Secretary Sir Ken Jackson. The union rights are exercised through the ARC (Company Council); arbitration, as opposed to industrial action, is the preferred method of dispute resolution; there is no mention of Shop Stewards. It is evident the agreement favours the economic aspirations of big business, namely profit, as opposed to the requirements of the members of the trade union.



Upon completion of the Agreement, the issue of converting free membership into paying members began. This proved to be a difficult process, as human nature would suggest paying for something is not as attractive as when it is for free. However, in the 2 year period since the Recognition Agreement was signed, there are now over 1000 paying members.

At our first Conference in Blackpool, there was an underlying focus, on the forthcoming election for General Secretary. The delegates from Honda made no secret as to their position, that of supporting Derek Simpson. Having attended the Gazette (the AEEU Broad Left) Meeting and speaking to Derek personally, much to the consternation of those who were lending their support to Sir Ken Jackson, it was evident from our conversations with Derek Simpson and Des Heemskerker that we shared the same visions of trade unionism. Trade unions are not the extended hand of big business. Trade unions are not about the full time officials. Trade unions are about the members and their struggles and that is the position to which trade union movement should return.

Subsequently we ran a "Vote for Derek Simpson" campaign within the Plant. The news that Derek Simpson had been elected was welcomed by the membership at Honda.

It was obvious that the winds of change were spreading within the trade union movement.

### The Here and Now

Despite trade union recognition being achieved at Honda, the struggle continues. However,

there have been achievements, most notably within a recent overtime dispute.

As mentioned previously, the contract of employment contains compulsory overtime, which has been the bane of the workforce. The only absolute to this provision was the Working Time Directive. Prior to this however, there were no absolutes.

In 2002 there was an agreement which gave us an understanding that there would be limits on compulsory overtime. However, in June 2003, Car Plant 2 went from a 2 shift operation to that of a 1 shift operation due, in the main, to a fall in sales. However, demand and subsequent sales increased and in the absence of a 2 shift operation in Car Plant 2, the company decided to disregard said agreement and use overtime as a means of meeting both demand and sales.

Given the company's disregard of the agreement a dispute was imminent, and it would last almost 18 months.

At the height of the dispute, a new found solidarity emerged. A number of the workforce began walking out, as a demonstration of their dissatisfaction.

In late 2004, the company were reminded that if they would not make concessions, then the procedures would be exhausted and industrial action would ensue.

Negotiations commenced, through which a significant majority of our demands were met. This was subsequently endorsed by the membership within a ballot and changes to terms and conditions came into effect from 4th January 2005.

From the ashes of apathy to the birth of solidarity, the struggle at Honda, epitomizes the strength and importance of working class and trade union values, which has coincided with the emergence of elected-left wing trade union General Secretaries.

In recent times, those values are beginning to come to prominence again, despite those dark days of the Thatcher era.

However, much work is still to be done and for us at Honda, the struggle has only just begun. □

## Five years on still no justice

by Kris Lawrie

ON 17TH October 2000 a London to Leeds Intercity express train left the rails near Hatfield in Herefordshire, it was travelling at 115mph. Four people were killed and 102 injured. The reasons for the crash are clear to the majority of the public, as is the question of who is responsible. Yet almost five years on relatives and survivors are still waiting for justice.

The derailment took place at a bend in the track. A dangerously worn rail broke and carriages and the buffet car came off and began to hit the overhead cable supports at the side of the track. The serious fault in the rail had been identified almost one year before the accident - but it had not been repaired and there were no speed restrictions enforced. The replacement for the track had been ordered and was sitting at the side of the line at the time of the accident - it had been there for months. Work had been due to commence the previous February.

Following the crash the rail network went from bad to worse. The immediate upshot of the crash was to bring all the decay and degeneration of the network to the attention of the public. Railtrack hurriedly began checking the network and within hours discovered 300 instances of serious concern. Large parts of the system were closed and heavy speed restrictions implemented.

Railtrack, whose main role after the contracting out of maintenance was mainly supervising work to make sure it was carried out on time and to standard [!], seemed to have been blissfully unaware of the true state of the network

prior to October 2000.

Labour should have taken advantage of the public mood to renationalise rail transport and the ill-gotten gains of the privateers. Hatfield was the final straw for Railtrack - it exposed to everyone the lunacy of a railway run for profit. Everyone, that is, except for the City of London and their bought and paid for politicians.

The attempt by the CPS to prosecute former Railtrack executives over the Hatfield deaths failed last year because under current law the prosecution has to establish direct personal responsibility for the failings that led to the deaths. The CPS had to drop the case because they didn't have enough evidence to prove a direct connection. Three former Railtrack directors walked free - these included the former Chairman, Gerald Corbett. Corbett resigned from Railtrack after Hatfield, leaving behind him a terminal crisis. Happily he managed to walk into a new job almost immediately at the shop chain Woolworths - not on the tills though, that might have been a bit above his station given his past performance.

Ironically the laws designed to prosecute directors who kill workers and customers is written in such a way that it tends to protect the very people it is meant to work against. This is not a coincidence - the laws are written to protect the great and powerful when their actions inadvertently kill someone.

The CPS could not prosecute the organ grinder so they were forced to turn on the monkey instead. The recent

prosecutions in the media have involved five middle ranking executives who are charged with manslaughter; three from Railtrack and two from Balfour Beatty. Also Balfour Beatty is being charged with corporate manslaughter and Railtrack, now Network Rail, with a lesser health and safety charge.

### Disaster waiting to happen

The prosecution have condemned the system that allowed the damaged rail to go unreplaced for a year; citing evidence from independent experts who have said that the condition of the track is one of the worst cases they have seen. A prosecution spokesman recently described the crash as "no accident, but a disaster waiting to happen".

Railtrack had been aware of the terrible state of the East Coast mainline for months. A meeting took place six months before the crash to try to find a solution. It was accepted that the 43-mile stretch of line immediately to the north of Kings Cross had at least 200 maintenance defects. Balfour Beatty were behind with work deadlines and Railtrack agreed to turn the clock back to zero. Work that under the rules should have been carried out earlier was postponed by agreement - the worn track that caused the Hatfield disaster was part of that backlog.

The current prosecutions have been brought against those responsible for managing that part of the line, who firstly let the repair backlog build up, and then set the deadlines for repair back to zero.

The defence are trying to hide behind the general disaster of rail privatisation. It seems that the hope is to obscure the issue by taking advantage of the fact that there is no clear chain of responsibility within the industry. By blaming the fragmentation of the system they might be able to pass the blame on to someone else - or better still the system in general.

The defence have said that Balfour Beatty reported the fault in question to Railtrack in November 1999 and it was to be replaced by February 2000. However they have said that the sub-contractor who agreed to do the work did not carry it out.

At the time of privatisation the railway network was put into the hands of the privateers who huddle like pigs around the trough whenever the government subsidies are being doled out. Railtrack, a private company itself was given ownership of the network, and hence the task of handing out maintenance contracts and subsidies to the privateers.

So the whole system was broken into pieces and placed into the hands of smaller maintenance companies who did the actual work with Railtrack, the big daddy, sitting on top. The government subsidies had to pay the profits of Railtrack, each of the maintenance companies, and god knows how many layers of subcontractors below - anything left over was used to maintain the track! The whole system tended towards disorganisation.

The 're-nationalisation' of Railtrack was forced on the government - they had to act -

costs were spiralling out of control. But Network Rail is still run on a business model and it has not taken all maintenance in-house - it still uses contract maintenance firms.

It is likely that the buck passing of the defence will pay off. It is very unusual that any individual of a big company is ever found guilty of manslaughter in a case like this - it is too difficult to prove individual involvement and a chain of responsibility. In this case even if the prosecution succeeds they still have not managed to convict the top executives. The king has escaped - if we are lucky they might get the heads of a few courtiers. It is likely the five will walk away and that Railtrack and Balfour Beatty will be given a fine for negligence.

Labour has been promising a toughened up law on corporate responsibility since before 1997. It has been included in two manifestos, and now it is in a third because it will not go through before the next election. Since Labour won in 1997, 1500 people have been killed at work. The Health and Safety Executive has said that in 40% of these cases management were culpable but could not be prosecuted under law because a 'chain of responsibility' could not be established. This does not even go in to those killed in rail and other accidents.

A new law on corporate manslaughter was announced in the last Queens speech, and will form part of the 2005 election manifesto. It was one of the concessions that Labour made to the unions under the Warwick agreement in return for support in the election campaign.

But looking at the details of the corporate manslaughter law it seems we have sold our souls cheap. There will still be no clear individual liability for executives - it will still be necessary to go through the current rigmarole. Instead the bill will help in focusing on the

wider failings in strategic management and will apply to management collectively. There will be no jail sentences - punishments will be restricted to fines.

## Cuts = profits

The Hatfield crash has shown up rail privatisation as a scam in which individuals are enriching themselves at the public expense while allowing the service to decline. This is the same across the privatised utilities and industries. Profit is being allowed to get in the way of safety - and nothing is allowed to get in the way of profit. Workers are forced to accept not only wage cuts, sackings and the general decline of the service; we are forced to accept conditions that are putting our lives at risk.

For two terms Labour has done nothing much for workers and a lot for the bosses. It is time for the unions to come out against the pro-business policies of the Blairites - we need a coordinated struggle within the party to chuck them out. That is the only way we are going to get properly funded and maintained public services. □

**□ Justice for the victims, relatives and families of Hatfield and the other rail disasters.**

**□ Labour must change the law to threaten negligent bosses with jail - fines are nothing to multinationals - what they pay in fines today they get back in subsidies tomorrow**

**□ Labour must renationalise the railways to prevent further tragedy. Confiscate the assets of the privateers. For a massive programme of investment to bring the system up to scratch.**

**□ The unions need to wage a struggle in the Labour Party for socialist policies. Break the link with the City of London!**

# "LOVELLY JUBELLY"

by Kenny McGuigan

NICE TO see failed PFI and railway maintenance company Jarvis struggling on in the great British tradition after what must have been a hellish past couple of years for shareholders. The company is £275 million in debt and must be worried to death - bailiff's letters, debt collectors hammering on the door. We've all been there, eh? But they're coping. Oh yes, and even running a wee bit of London Underground, on top of all their own problems. As if this wasn't enough, those bad men from officialdom are investigating the company and they might even be prosecuted following the Potters Bar rail crash when 7 people died. Nobody appreciates them, they have even had to give back one of their contracts to Network Rail because they weren't maintaining the track.

Jarvis's current problems came to light about 18 months ago when one of their companies went bankrupt owing Lothian Council nearly £40 million and leaving the council high and dry for plans they had to build new schools.

Lothians Council "wrote off" Jarvis's debt and instead, the council tax payer in the region will now pick up the tab.

That was one big problem out of the way. And the other councils throughout Britain who have paid deposits and retainers to Jarvis for PFI work, they'll just have to wait because Alan Lovell, Chief Executive, has suspended all PFI work despite the fact that he has signed contracts with the councils, the health boards, the trusts, the Scottish

Executive and so on. For example, the half-finished PFI built Whittington Hospital in North London which Jarvis agreed to build has been abandoned because "the shareholders have suffered enough" says Lovell.

Jarvis have also cleared out the old board of directors. But don't be thinking their all languishing on the dole watching Trisha and Countdown, because Lovell explains with a dead-pan face, "The old executives did receive a pay off, but that was part of their contractual agreement". Does that mean, they got their week's lying time and any holiday money they were due? Well, not exactly, their individual payments averaged £480,000 each. Well, you can't break a contract, can you? Hold on, what about all the PFI contracts...?

Steven Norris (remember him - failed Tory minister whose grubby fingerprints are all over the privatisation of public utilities) is the Chairman of Jarvis. He offered Lovell the job of Chief Executive over breakfast at the Ritz in London! Isn't that just typical, the amount of times I've eaten breakfast at the Ritz and nobody comes up and offers me £450,000 a year plus a hefty bonus package plus a BMW 5 series company car...But it's hard for everybody and we all have to tighten our belts. We should be grateful that there are sound business people around like Norris and Lovell who continue to make Britain such a wonderful place to live. □

**JARVIS - A GREAT BRITISH SUCCESS STORY!!**

## Pensions time bomb

by Mick Brooks

PENSION PROVISION in this country has been described as a 'time bomb'. In fact Tory and Labour governments have pursued policies which make pensions an explosive issue for all who hope one day to draw a pension, and that's all of us.

The government is pressing the panic buttons about a £57 billion savings gap. They say we should be saving £57 billion more to pay for our pensions or millions will have to spend their old age in poverty. The not-so-subtle message from New Labour is 'work till you drop'. They are treating us like galley-slaves!

Both major parties are trying to scare us with talk of the 'pensions time bomb' to make working people bear the burden of the pensions crisis. The options we are given are: work more, save more or pay more tax. Is there really a crisis, and, if so, how can we deal with it?

What are the pension options? First there's the basic state pension. At present it stands at £79.60 for a single person. Nobody can live on that! The state pension was never very generous, but the real damage was done in 1980. Before then, pensions were linked to earnings. The Tories linked them to prices, which don't go up so fast. So pensioners were not to share in rising prosperity. In 2004 a single pensioner was £30 a week worse off because of that decision. If they carry on like this by 2050 the basic state pension will be £100 a week, below Income Support level. This can't go on!

New Labour decided not to restore the link with earnings. As a sop they introduced a minimum income guarantee for pensioners. They guarantee to top up a single pensioner's income to £102.20 - not a lot to live on. You get the extra by means testing. The form is quite complicated and 27% of pensioners are not getting what they are entitled

to. As a result 2.2 million pensioners live in poverty. Means testing acts as a severe disincentive to saving for your old age. The government say they regard saving as a good thing. They also say they don't want to introduce a 50% tax rate on the wealthy because they say it will act as a disincentive. (Disincentive to being rich?) But means testing in effect means a 100% rate of tax on saving - Gordon Brown will get the lot. That's a real disincentive. Why should anyone bother to save for their retirement?

The reason the Tories took the decision to allow the state pension to wither on the vine is because they wanted us all to take up private pension plans. The state pension is unfunded - current pensions come out of current government revenue. Private pensions are called funded. That means we put the money aside for our retirement, like squirrels hiding nuts for the winter. This, in turn, means our money is lobbed at the Tories' friends in the City to play about with in the meantime on the stock exchange. The first result of privatising pensions was an orgy of mis-selling, or fraud, as it should be called. The second result was pervasive insecurity for millions of people

because whether they would have a decent retirement or not came to depend on how share markets are doing. Nobody knows how much shares will be worth in 15 or 20 years' time. There is no guarantee how much money there will be in the pot when you retire. You're on your own!

In fact the idea that money is put aside for use later on is an optical illusion. Present pensions come from present national income, just as this year's apples come from this year's apple trees. This is important, as we shall see later on.

### Company Pensions

The third source of pension provision is occupational schemes. Like private pensions, these are funded - the money is punted on shares. Unlike private schemes, until recently most company plans were 'final salary', because the company guaranteed you a certain proportion of your final salary, whatever happened to the stock exchange. Also the employer matched your contribution pound for pound. Private firms have nearly all abandoned these schemes because 'they can't afford it'. This is a liberty. When the stock market was booming, these same companies took 'pension holidays' - in other words didn't bother to pay in. It is ridiculous that millions of people depend for their livelihood on the gyrations of share prices and the "goodwill" of employers. At present final salary schemes are largely confined to the public sector.

Alan Johnson, the Minister for Work and Pensions, says the problem is people are retiring too young, before they reach official retirement age. Some of these people have negotiated good severance packages. Others are sitting on favourable company schemes. Jolly good luck to them! But these are the

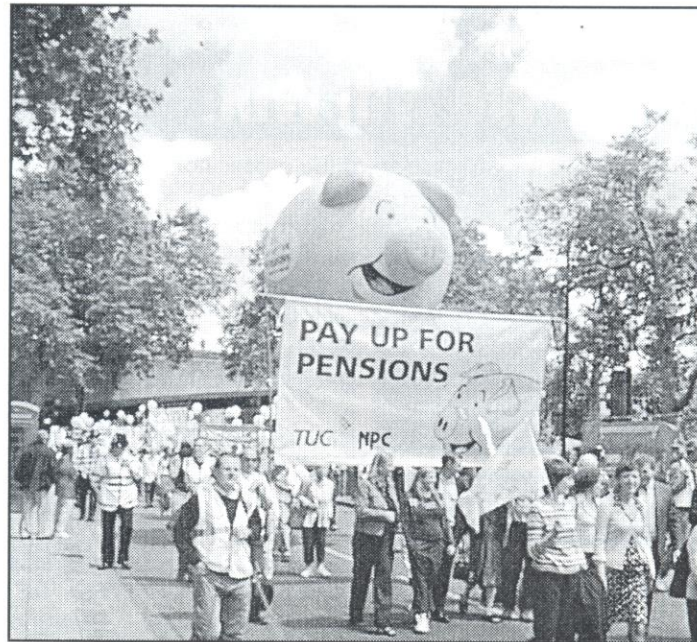


sort of arrangements that are disappearing down the swanny.

What the government is really up to is continuing the Tory policy of making the state pension so miserable and unattractive that we will all be forced into the embrace of capitalist pension interests. New Labour is covertly privatising pensions. And they defend what they're doing as 'necessity'. But they're only spending 5% of their budget on pension provision. The average for the European Union is 11%. It's not 'necessity' that our government is made up of skinflints! And if they chose to defend working people and stand up to the rich instead of bowing down to them, then no doubt they'd manage to find a few quid for our pensions

Adair Turner's report on pensions says the problem is there are too many pensioners compared with those in work supporting them. This support ratio has fallen from 4 in 1990 to 3.4 today and will fall further to 2.4 by 2041. The alarm bells they press about this trend are nonsense. Productivity has been rising at a steady rate of more than 2% a year throughout the last century and is set to rise faster this century. So fewer people in work can support more and more people in retirement. The real question is: do we think working people should enjoy the benefits of increased productivity, or should we all be made to 'save' more - that is to chuck our earnings at the City?

In any case the report's comparison is bogus. The support ratio measures those of working age as a proportion of those of retirement age. But not all those of working age are in work - more than 8 million such people in the UK can't get a job. This is more than 20% of those of working age. If we were able to put them to work, the problem would be solved. Think



about it. More than eight million would like to work and can't. More than eight million would like to be paying into the pot and instead they're taking out. And we get lectures about economic reality!

For instance there are 1.5 million men on Incapacity Benefit. These are mainly older workers in economically depressed areas. Doctors have been persuaded to sign them on, in the sure knowledge that under capitalism they will never work again. New Labour pretends we have full employment. We don't. If we did, we would not have a 'pensions crisis.'

Capitalism produces unemployment. It produces more unemployment in a slump than in a boom, but unemployment is a structural feature of the system. In Wales only 61% of men of working age are in a job while 76% of such men are economically active in the South-East. Capitalism produces regions that are booming, while others are depressed. Wales has been a region hard hit by the decline and disappearance of traditional industries, such as mining. Where else are men in the Welsh valleys to get a job after the pit goes? A planned economy would bring

jobs to the people. Capitalism expects workers to chase the jobs.

Employers also have a prejudice against hiring older workers. If bosses are in a position to pick and choose, then older workers are effectively frozen out of the labour market. B & Q is one employer who has taken advantage of this and found workers over fifty a good deal. But capitalism wastes resources, including human resources, on a grand scale.

### We are being mugged

The scare stories about pensions are a distraction, like the crook who bumps into you from one side while his mate picks your pocket from the other side. People of pensionable age have worked hard all their lives. They are entitled

to a decent standard of living. The proposals to make workers retire later is an act of mugging.

Pensioners are our people. We are paying for their pension while we work. We're happy to do so as long as someone does the same for us later on. If they want to tax us more or force us to save more, they are robbing us.

Any society has to make provision to support those who are not working for whatever reason. There is no reason why this involves dependence on the vagaries of the stock exchange. It is ridiculous that as 'the country' gets richer, the people who do the work that generates the wealth are being asked to make more sacrifices. What is really a conscious decision to make us poorer in order that capitalists can fleece us is presented as a result of the ineluctable workings of the 'demographic time bomb' because people are living longer. How inconvenient for the government!

We say people of retirement age are entitled to a state pension they can live on. They've paid for it. They deserve it. We need to take a transparent, democratic decision as to how much our retired people should get (bearing in mind that we'll all be retired one day) That is part of the process of planning the economy. And pensioners will get a bigger share of the resources when policy is decided by and for working people and not big business. □

- No to the privatisation of pensions
- Restore the link between pensions and earnings.
- The TUC must defend public sector pensions - Call a national one-day public sector strike.
- For the right to retire at 55 on a living pension

# Hands Off Venezuela

## Ricardo Galindez speaking tour kicks off with successful meeting in House of Commons: "We Will Win!"

by Rob Sewell

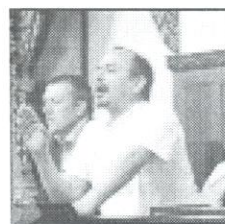
RICARDO GALINDEZ'S tour of Britain kicked off with a big success. Around 80 people filled the Grand Committee Rooms in the House of Commons to hear the Venezuelan trade union leader outline the latest developments in the Bolivarian Revolution.

The meeting was sponsored by John McDonnell MP, the honorary President of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and chaired by Jeremy Dear, the general secretary of the National Union of Journalists.



John McDonnell opened the meeting by explaining the vital importance of the Hands Off

Venezuela Campaign in raising the issue of the Venezuelan revolution throughout the labour movement. In particular, in this general election year, it was essential to put pressure on Labour MPs and through them on the Labour government. "In the past we supported the cause of revolutions that had been crushed by imperialism, now we have a chance of supporting a revolution in the making", he said.



Ricardo Galindez spoke of his experiences in the fast moving events of the Venezuelan Revolution. He explained the masses, aroused by the election of

Hugo Chavez, had faced up to every challenge, including the recent Referendum, to deal a blow to the counter-revolution and the rule of the oligarchy. "On the day of the Referendum, the Opposition suffered a serious blow", he said. "It was produced by the strength of the masses and introduced profound demoralisation into the ranks of the Opposition. They disappeared from the streets." However, Ricardo warned that the counter-revolution would never give up. "They continue to conspire and plot. They keep factories closed." They were behind the

recent assassination of the prosecutor investigating the coup organisers.

Ricardo then explained that the recent kidnapping of the FARC representative in Caracas by Colombian special forces in alliance with some Venezuelan military officials was a provocation, behind which lies the hand of Washington.

He went on to explain that the UNT is a growing force. The working class has put its stamp on the revolution and the nationalisation of Venepal is a "turning-point", he said. Ricardo welcomed the comments of President Chavez in explaining that the Bolivarian revolution could not remain within the confines of capitalism (see page 16). Only by taking the socialist road and nationalising the banks, finance houses and major companies can we succeed. He warned, however, that the revolution is not complete. To avoid defeat it must go forward and break the power of the oligarchy by nationalising their property and placing it under workers' control.

Comrade Galindez ended his speech with the words: "We shall win. We have got to win. We WILL win!"



The next speaker was the Venezuelan Ambassador to London, Alfredo Toro Hardy. He explained that President Chavez

was well aware of the fine work of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign in Britain. "In fact, I spoke to President Chavez a few days ago and he was keen to make a short stop-over visit to Britain to meet with you", stated Mr Hardy to rapturous applause.

The Ambassador outlined the policies of the Chavez government and the grave difficulties Venezuela faced from the aggressive stance of the United States. Hugo Chavez had won 8 different electoral processes in addition to his presidential election in 1998, and yet the hostile media are calling him a dictator!

The model of free-market capitalism that the United States is attempting to impose on Latin America has been a disaster, he said. Latin

American indicators are worse in the 1990s than in the 1970s. "The model advocated by President Chavez is rational", he explained. He ended his speech with the appeal: "We need your help."



Comrade Manzoor, member of the Pakistani Parliament, who met President Chavez in Venezuela last year, also

addressed the meeting. In his contribution, he drew comparisons between the Bolivarian Revolution and the revolution in Pakistan in 1969. In Pakistan, the revolution under the leadership of Bhutto, went half way, and resulted in the counter-revolution being able to muster its forces and overthrow Bhutto in a military coup. The conclusion he drew was that it is necessary to carry through the socialist revolution to the very end. There was no other road, stated Manzoor.

A lively period of questions and discussion followed from the floor. A collection was also held which raised an excellent £150 for the funds of the campaign. After a brief reply from the Ambassador and Ricardo, Jeremy Dear summed up the meeting and appealed for the Campaign to be raised in every corner of the labour movement. He also expressed his deep appreciation to John McDonnell for his help, which was also heartily appreciated by thunderous applause from the audience.

Once again, the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign has held a successful meeting in the House of Commons. The task now is to take the Campaign to every trade union branch, every trades council, every shop stewards' meeting and every student union, to build it into a mass movement in defence of the Venezuelan Revolution. □



# Hands Off Venezuela

## Dublin Hands Off Venezuela meeting - Biggest ever held at AT&GWU offices

by Ray Smith

THE MEETING of the Hands off Venezuela campaign held in the offices of the AT&GWU in Dublin was the biggest meeting on Latin America ever hosted there. These were the words of the brothers and sisters of the LASC (Latin American Solidarity Centre). 115 people attended the meeting to hear Ricardo Galindez speak.

Richard Gott, former Latin American correspondent for *The Guardian*, was present at the meeting and explained the events that have unfolded since the very first electoral victory of Hugo Chavez. He pointed out that even then a strategy to oust him was being prepared. The British journalist said he had been to Venezuela and that he had witnessed the development of the social programmes known as "misiones", and explained how beneficial they were for ordinary working people.

Mick McCaughan, the author of *The Battle for Venezuela*, was also at the meeting. He briefly spoke about the position of the Venezuelan revolutionary process in the context of the general struggle taking place across the whole of Latin America, where important struggles and movements have been developing in countries like Bolivia, Peru and Argentina amongst others.

Ricardo Galindez explained just how important the revolution in Venezuela is. The ability of the Venezuelan masses to mobilise and organise themselves has been demonstrated through the formation of the Bolivarian Circles, UBEs (Electoral Battle Units), the social programmes, and the creation of new trade unions and the UNT itself. What this shows is that the revolutionary process is on the ascent.

Galindez stressed the need to develop solidarity with the revolution because international solidarity can be a powerful weapon in the struggle against US imperialism and the transnational corporations that are attempting to isolate the revolution.

He also explained that the leadership of Hugo Chavez has been evolving. Chavez began his presidency on the basis of democratic demands and by standing against "neo-liberal capitalism", and has now moved to an anti-imperialist position. He recently pointed out that the root cause of the problems of the Venezuelan people was capitalism, and that the only solution to these problems was the establishment of a socialist society - a genuine socialist society.

An anti-globalisation activist also took the platform and gave a first hand report of her experiences at the World Social Forum where Chavez met with activists and trade unionists from all over the world.

The interest in what is happening in Venezuela was so big that even after the meeting was officially over the discussion continued. At the end of the meeting a number of those present came up to the speakers to carry on the debate. They asked further questions about the revolutionary process in Venezuela and wanted to know a lot more about what is really happening.

This short trip to Ireland showed that the Irish workers have a keen interest in what is happening in Venezuela. Links with important trade unions were forged and the ground has been laid for future solidarity activities in Ireland. □



## UNT activist meets Irish trade union leaders

RICARDO GALINDEZ'S trip to Ireland was a big success. Ricardo was a delegate to the founding conference of the Venezuelan UNT, a union that was built in opposition to the completely bureaucratized CTV that has gone over to the reactionary oligarchy in Venezuela. He is currently an official of the union and trade union adviser. The trip was part of Galindez's speaking tour to build international solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution.

During his 36 hour-long visit comrade Galindez met with some Latin American Solidarity Centre (LASC) activists, who organised the Dublin part of Ricardo's tour.

On the evening of February 5, Galindez, along with LASC and Hands Off Venezuela activists, visited Jack O'Connor, President of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). During the two-hour meeting with O'Connor Galindez outlined the current situation in Venezuela. He analysed the revolutionary process and the situation the Venezuelan labour movement is facing. He explained that the workers are leaving the empty shell of the discredited CTV in droves and are moving into the UNT.

The CTV was closely associated with the bosses who were behind the 2002 coup attempt to overthrow Chavez. It is openly supporting the forces of imperialism rather than the interests of the Venezuelan workers. On this basis Ricardo explained the importance of recognising the UNT as the legitimate Trade Union Confederation in Venezuela.

O'Connor was also invited to visit Venezuela together with other trade union leaders so that they could see for themselves what is really happening in the country and see first hand the massive campaign of slander and lies which is being mounted against the Venezuelan revolution and the democratic and anti-capitalist movement represented by the UNT.

O'Connor was also asked to invite Venezuelan trade unionists to address the leaders and the rank and file of the Irish trade union movement. O'Connor praised Galindez's visit and promised to address the different bodies of the union with regards to Venezuela and analyse what exactly the SIPTU could do to defend trade union rights. He expressed his full support for the Venezuelan people and the referendum victory on August 15, 2004. □

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## Chavez:

# "Capitalism must be transcended"

by Alan Woods

"Everyday I become more convinced, there is no doubt in my mind, and as many intellectuals have said, that it is necessary to transcend capitalism. But capitalism can't be transcended from within capitalism itself, but through socialism, true socialism, with equality and justice. But I'm also convinced that it is possible to do it under democracy, but not in the type of democracy being imposed from Washington."

Hugo Chavez

AT THE end of January, Venezuelan President Chavez gave a speech at the Gigantinho Stadium at the closing session of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In this speech, President Chavez gave further indications of the direction in which the Bolivarian Revolution is moving. This speech, reported in *Venezuelanalysis.com* (Caracas, Jan 30, 2005), deserves to be studied by every class conscious worker and revolutionary youth.

The Bolivarian Revolution started out as a national democratic revolution, aimed at freeing the people of Venezuela from the rule of a corrupt and degenerate oligarchy that acted as the local agency of imperialism. The Marxist tendency always stood firmly for the defence of the Bolivarian Revolution against its twin enemies, the oligarchy and imperialism, but also pointed out consistently that the only way in which the Revolution could save itself and advance to a final victory was by overthrowing landlordism and capitalism.

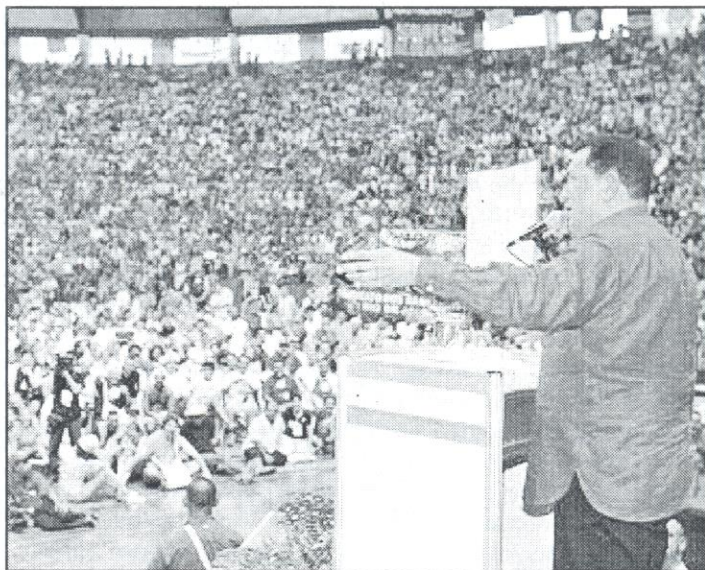
The recent nationalisation of Venepal and the decree on agrarian reform marked a clear turn of the Revolution in the direction of a decisive confrontation with its enemies. These revolutionary measures will have been greeted enthusiastically by workers and peasants everywhere. However, they have

aroused the fury of reactionaries from Washington to London. The enemies of the Revolution are preparing a new counteroffensive against it. The only way to defeat them is by striking new and decisive blows against them.

But here a problem arises. It is well known that some in the leadership of the Bolivarian Movement do not share the President's enthusiasm for the Revolution and that some of his advisers are upset by his constant and outspoken criticisms of US imperialism. The President is clearly not impressed by this advice. In reference to the recommendations of some of his close advisors, he said that "some people say that we cannot say nor do anything that can irritate those in Washington." He repeated the words of Argentine independence hero José de San Martín "let's be free without caring about what anyone else says."

### Courage and integrity

These words are absolutely characteristic of the man. Hugo Chavez is a man of great courage and integrity. He has shown himself to be implacable in his attitude to U.S. imperialism. Chavez blamed the bad political relations between the U.S.A and Venezuela on the "permanent aggressions from there". He criticized U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who recently asserted that Chavez was "a negative force in the



region." He said those relations will stay unhealthy as long as the U.S. continues its policies of aggression. "The most negative force in the world today is the government of the United States," he said.

The President criticized the U.S. government for asking other countries to put pressure on Venezuela in the crisis with Colombia over the kidnapping of a Colombian guerrilla activist in Caracas last December. "Nobody answered their call... they are more lonely every day." Chavez added that U.S. imperialism is not invincible. "Look at Vietnam, look at Iraq and Cuba resisting, and now look at Venezuela."

The Bolivarian leader pointed out that Venezuela was prepared to defend itself arms in hand against any aggression, and added that his country's military forces are undergoing a period of modernisation of its weapon systems and resources, but asserted that it is aimed at defending the country's sovereignty. "Venezuela will not attack anybody, but don't attack Venezuela, because you will find us ready to defend our sovereignty, and the project we are carrying forward," he declared.

Like Simon Bolívar, that other great leader of the national democratic revolution in Latin America, Hugo Chavez has understood that the Revolution cannot triumph if it is isolated in a single country. He has stated publicly that Trotsky was right against Stalin when he argued that the Revolution cannot ultimately succeed in an isolated state. He has publicly stated that the aim of the Bolivarian Revolution is to spread to every country in Latin America - and beyond.

In his speech Chavez highlighted the



recent creation of Latin American satellite TV network TeleSur, "which will allow us to tell our people's reality in our own words." He added that TeleSur will be at the disposal of the people, not of governments. The Venezuelan President visited the Lagoa do Junco agrarian settlement in Tapes set up by Brazil's Landless Movement (MST), and later held a press conference with more than 120 media organizations, where he criticized the U.S. government for claiming to lead a fight against terrorism while undermining democracy in Venezuela. These actions are not likely to earn him the plaudits of Washington!

Despite the repeated provocations and aggressive conduct of US imperialism, the Venezuelan President always distinguishes carefully between the people of the USA and their rulers. Pointing out that all empires come to an end, he said. "One day the decay inside U.S. imperialism will end up toppling it, and the great people of Martin Luther King will be set free. The great people of the United States are our brothers, my salute to them."

The President continued:

"We must start talking again about equality. The U.S. government talks about freedom and liberty, but never about equality. They are not interested in equality. This is a distorted concept of liberty. The U.S. people, with whom we share dreams and ideals, must free themselves... A country of heroes, dreamers, and fighters, the people of Martin Luther King, and Cesar Chavez."

He also said: "We can't wait for a sustained economic growth of 10 years in order to start reducing poverty through the trickledown effect, as the neoliberal economic theories propose." The President lambasted the US-sponsored Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA). He told the closing meeting: "The FTAA is death, what they got was mini-FTAA's because U.S. imperialism did not have the strength to impose the neocolonial model of the FTAA."

He paid tribute to the cooperation with Cuba, which, along with several Central American countries, receives Venezuelan oil at below market prices, in exchange for assistance in health-care, education, agriculture and other areas. He explained that about 20,000 Cuban doctors work in Venezuela at free medical clinics in poor neighbourhoods, and that Venezuela has used a Cuban literacy method approved by

UNESCO that has allowed more than 1.3 million Venezuelans to learn how to read and write. He said Venezuela is using Cuban vaccines, which now allow poor children to be vaccinated against diseases such as hepatitis.

The President poured scorn on the stories spread by the western media about alleged plans by Fidel Castro and him to spread Communism in the Americas, overthrow governments and set up guerrillas, "after 10 years it seems like we haven't been very successful."

He said:

"Cuba has its own profile and Venezuela has its own, but we have respect for each other, but we celebrate accords and advance together for the interest of our peoples." He said that any aggression against either country will have to confront the other, "because we are united in spirit from Mexico down to Patagonia."

"When imperialism feels weak, it resorts to brute force. The attacks on Venezuela are a sign of weakness, ideological weakness. Nowadays almost nobody defends neoliberalism. Up until three years ago, just Fidel [Castro] and I raised those criticisms at Presidential meetings. We felt lonely, as if we infiltrated those meetings."

He continued:

"Just look at the internal repression inside the United States, the Patriot Act, which is a repressive law against U.S. citizens. They have put in jail a group of journalists for not revealing their sources. They won't allow them to take pictures of the bodies of the dead soldiers, many of them Latinos, coming from Iraq. Those are signs of Goliath's weaknesses."

"The south also exists... the future of the north depends on the south. If we don't make that better world possible, if we fail, and through the rifles of the U.S. Marines, and through Mr. Bush's murderous bombs, if there is no coincidence and organisation necessary in the south to resist the offensive of neo-imperialism, and the Bush doctrine is imposed upon the world, the world will be destroyed," he said.

### **"Capitalism must be transcended"**

Chavez warned that global warming would bring catastrophic events if no action is taken soon, in reference to uncontrolled or little regulated industrial activity. Chavez added that perhaps

before those drastic changes take place, there will be rebellions everywhere "because the peoples are not going to accept in peace impositions such as neoliberalism or such as colonialism."

The most interesting part of his speech, however, was when he posed the need to pass from the national democratic tasks to the socialist transformation of society:

"Everyday I become more convinced, there is no doubt in my mind, and as many intellectuals have said, that it is necessary to transcend capitalism. But capitalism can't be transcended from within capitalism itself, but through socialism, true socialism, with equality and justice. But I'm also convinced that it is possible to do it under democracy, but not in the type of democracy being imposed from Washington," Chavez said.

These words mark the first clear indication of a decisive shift in the Bolivarian Revolution. Until now, Chavez never suggested going beyond the bounds of capitalism. But the real march of events has posed the question with ever greater clarity: it is impossible for the national democratic revolution to succeed unless it makes deep inroads on private property, unless it takes the decisive step of expropriating the landlords, bankers and capitalists.

The only hope for the Venezuelan Revolution is to transform itself into a socialist revolution. But the model of so-called "real socialism" that collapsed in the Soviet Union holds no appeal to the masses in Venezuela, imbued in the spirit of democracy. What is required is to return to the democratic traditions of the October Revolution, to the programme of Lenin and Trotsky. Only this can guarantee success! In this respect, Hugo Chavez said: "We have to reinvent socialism. It can't be the kind of socialism that we saw in the Soviet Union, but it will emerge as we develop new systems that are built on cooperation, not competition," he added.

The President stated that Venezuela is trying to implement a "social economy". He said, "It is impossible, within the framework of the capitalist system to solve the grave problems of poverty of the majority of the world's population. We must transcend capitalism. But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one,

which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That's the debate we must promote around the world, and the WSF is a good place to do it."

Socialism is democratic or it is nothing. From the very beginning, the control and administration of industry, society and the state must be in the hands of the working class itself. That is the only way to prevent the formation of a bureaucracy - that abominable cancer on the body of the workers' state - and to ensure that the masses are actively identified with the Revolution from the start. The active participation of the masses is the first rule of socialism.

The President added that in spite of his admiration for Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara, he said Che's methods are not applicable. "That thesis of one, two, or three Vietnams, did not work, especially in Venezuela." That is quite correct. Che's aim of spreading the Revolution to Latin America was correct and necessary. But unfortunately the tactic he adopted was mistaken. This led to his tragic death which deprived the Revolution of an outstanding leader.

It is necessary to draw a balance sheet and speak clearly: over a period of decades, the tactic of guerrilla war has led to one defeat after another in Latin America. The Cuban Revolution took the US imperialists by surprise. But they learned the lessons and applied them. As a result, every time a "foco" appeared, they immediately crushed it before it could develop further - as we saw with the tragic fate of Che Guevara in Bolivia.

Guerrilla war is a necessary auxiliary to the proletarian revolution in countries like tsarist Russia or China where there was a big peasantry. But it makes little sense in Latin America where the big majority of the population lives in towns and cities. So-called urban guerrillaism is only individual terrorism under another name. That tactic was always rejected by Marxists - particularly the Russian Marxists. It is a recipe for defeat, as the people of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia know through bitter experience.

The great advantage of the Venezuelan Revolution is that it is a mainly urban revolution (though with important support in the peasantry) based on the active movement of the masses, in particular the working class and its natural allies, the urban poor, the unemployed, the revolutionary

youth, the women and the progressive intelligentsia.

## Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle

Hopeless sectarians think that parliamentary struggle can play no role in the Revolution. This shows they have no understanding of Revolution - or anything else. The Russian Bolsheviks paid careful attention to the parliamentary struggle. They skilfully combined democratic slogans with the economic and social demands of the proletariat, linking them to the idea of taking power. That is the only way to build a mass base, to mobilise the masses and thus to create the objective conditions for a revolutionary overturn. There is no other way.

The Bolivarian-Revolution began on the electoral plane and has dealt one blow after another against the counter-revolutionaries, culminating in the magnificent victory in the August 2004 recall referendum. By this means it has rallied the masses behind it. But the struggle is by no means over. It is a dialectical law that the struggle in parliament must eventually be resolved outside parliament. Reformists and parliamentary cretins do not understand this. That is why they always lead the movement to defeat - as in Chile. If the pro-bourgeois reformist wing of the Bolivarian Movement wins, the same fate awaits the people of Venezuela.

However, the pro-bourgeois and reformist elements have not yet won. The masses are pressing from below. They want the Revolution to advance, to strike blows against its enemies, to take power. The workers demand nationalisation of the factories, the peasants want to put an end to landlordism. This is a decisive fact! The Revolution has not ended, as the reformists claim. It has scarcely begun!

Whatever the limitations of the Bolivarian Movement, its vacillations and inconsistencies, its ambiguity and lack of a clear programme, it undoubtedly has the merit of having roused the masses to struggle, mobilising, inspiring and organising millions of oppressed people who were never organised before. That is a tremendous achievement! And the man who inspired this magnificent movement and provided it with a leadership and a banner is Hugo Chavez.

Those who try to denigrate Chavez,

to belittle his role and also to attack the genuine Marxists for supporting him (while maintaining our organisational and political independence) show their complete inability to understand Revolution or the role of Marxists in a Revolution. What is necessary is not to criticize and grumble from the sidelines but to participate actively, shoulder to shoulder with the most advanced workers and revolutionary youth, explaining patiently what is needed, while at the same time pushing the movement forward. Anything else is just the sterile impotence of sectarianism.

Marx pointed out that for the masses one step forward of the real movement was worth a hundred correct programmes (and Marx knew very well the importance of a correct programme). Lenin said that for the masses an ounce of practice was worth a ton of theory (and Lenin never underestimated the importance of theory!). The masses in Venezuela have learned a lot from their experiences in the last few years. Their confidence has grown by leaps and bounds. Above all, they have developed a very keen sense of democracy. They will not tolerate bureaucracy and autocratic methods. This is the greatest guarantee against the danger of a future totalitarian state. It will be impossible (or at least very difficult) to impose a Stalinist dictatorship under such conditions. What is on the order of the day is a healthy, democratic workers' state - like the original Soviet state established by Lenin and Trotsky in October 1917.

## For a Socialist Federation of Latin America!

In his speech, President Chavez cited Marx's phrase, quoted by the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, that "each revolution needs the whip of the counterrevolution to advance." He listed actions by the opposition and the U.S. government to drive him out of power. "But we resisted, and now have gone onto the offensive. For instance, we recovered our oil industry... In 2004, from the oil industry budget we utilized \$4 billion in social investments, education, health, micro-credits, scholarships, and housing, aimed at the poorest of the poor, what neoliberals call waste of money. But that is not a waste of money because it is aimed at empowering the poor so that they can defeat poverty." He added that "that money before stayed out of Venezuela or just benefited

the rich."

He criticized privatizations by saying that "privatisation is a neoliberal and imperialist plan. Health can't be privatised because it is a fundamental human right, nor can education, water, electricity and other public services. They can't be surrendered to private capital that denies the people from their rights." All this is very true. It is necessary to fight against privatisation. But the real solution is to establish a genuine socialist plan of production under the democratic control and administration of the working class.

There were, of course, some elements in Chavez's speech which Marxists would disagree with. He defended Brazilian President Luis "Lula" Da Silva, who has been sharply criticized by the Latin American left, and who was booed during his speech at the World Social Forum. Apart from the natural reluctance of a guest to criticize his host, Chavez naturally sees leaders like Lula in Brazil or Kirchner in Argentina, or the new leaders of Uruguay as potential allies in the fight against US imperialism. This also explains his favourable reference to President Putin of Russia.

There is nothing wrong in attempting to make use of every opening, no matter how small, on the diplomatic front that may help to break the wall of diplomatic isolation that Washington is attempting to construct around Venezuela. On the contrary, the Bolivarian Revolution is obliged to do so. It is compelled to seek diplomatic and trade relations with friendly states as long as the Revolution remains isolated. But no firm reliance can be placed on these diplomatic points of support. To imagine (as some people do) that the Bolivarian Revolution can depend on this is to lean upon a broken reed. These supposed points of support can collapse - or even turn into their opposite - in 24 hours.

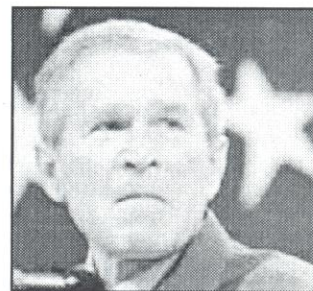
The only really reliable point of support for the Bolivarian Revolution is the millions of oppressed workers and peasants of Latin America and the Labour Movement of the whole world. The Bolivarian Revolution already counts on the sympathy of millions of people. If it shows that it is capable of taking the decisive step of breaking the stranglehold of Capital and ending capitalist slavery once and for all, that passive sympathy will be immediately transformed into militant action. US imperialism would be paralysed and unable to intervene because it would be faced with uprisings everywhere - and a mass movement inside its own borders.

The revolutionary idea of Simon Bolivar has been betrayed for 200 years by the Latin American bourgeoisie. It will become a reality only when the workers of Venezuela and the whole of Latin America take power into their hands. What is needed is a bold lead. Armed with the correct policies and programme, Venezuela can give it. □



## • The new Bush administration attacks the poor, the workers and the youth again

by Ray Smith



• DRAMATIC CUTS that could mean the end of the already feeble American Social Security system were announced by the re-elected Republican administration during the first week of February. The Neo-Conservative clique installed in the White House announced a reduction on public health spending and social welfare to help pay for tax

• cuts and the imperialist war in Iraq. The package of anti-social measures contains cuts in up to 150 government programmes. Amongst the programmes that are going to be cut we find housing grants for the disabled and Aids patients. \$1.1bn (£582.9 million) will go from the food stamps programme which helps the poorest people in the US to buy groceries. Medicaid (the scheme that provides healthcare to the poor), cuts in drugs subsidy for veterans, education programmes aimed at tackling drugs in schools and illiteracy are not going to be let off the hook. Health training for nurses, dentists and other professionals will be slashed by 64%. In addition we find plans to privatise the state pension plan. In return the US administration will offer the option of redirecting part of their social security contributions into personal saving accounts.

• It is not entirely clear how the Bush administration is going to manage to sort out the deficit by making cuts in a Social Security system that has more to do with charity than a Welfare State. *The Economist* stated the following "It will worsen the short-term fiscal imbalance: the upfront transition costs will add \$754bn (£404bn) to government borrowing over the next 10 years" and with regards to the "alternative" proposed by the US government they said "And it will do nothing to raise America's low savings rate, because the increase of private accounts will be offset by higher public borrowing"

• George W. Bush has excluded the workers that are 55 and older from these measures in order not to jeopardise his electoral support basing himself on the empirical fact that young workers do not vote. However, all these attacks on social and living conditions will backfire. No doubt tax cuts will benefit the 1% of Americans that represent the wealthiest US citizens. On the other hand the imperialist adventures in the Middle East are producing the slaughter of the Iraqi and Afghan population. In return the American working people and the youth are seeing how their civil rights are axed and their brothers, husbands and fathers are coming back wounded or in plastic bags as a result of the "War on Terror".

• A Labor party that will emerge from the trade unions and that will gather the youth, the ethnic minorities and women led by the working class must be formed to lead the struggle against social cuts, the war in Iraq and the cuts in political rights imposed on us by the representatives of US capitalism, regardless of whether they are called Bush or Kerry. □

# The capitalist economic cycle - business as usual?

by Michael Roberts

LAST YEAR, the US economy grew by 4.4% in real terms i.e. after accounting for inflation. That's a sharp pickup from 3% in 2003 and just 0.8% back in 2001. At the same time, inflation remained relatively moderate at about 2.5% while employment and jobs improved. In 2004, over 2m new jobs were created.

It seems that the very mild economic slowdown (not even recession) of 2001 has given way to another capitalist economic cycle of growth that could last years. No wonder stock market prices in the US, Japan and Europe continue to move up. They've risen 60% since reaching a low in the summer of 2004. Of course, share prices are still below levels achieved back in the great hi-tech stock market bubble that collapsed in March 2000. But capitalist investors are getting more confident that the good times are returning and are here to last. Are they right?

Well, it can be plausibly argued that global capitalism has entered a cyclical upswing similar to those of 1983-90 and then 1992-00. Each of those seven to eight-year cycles followed an economic recession that laid off millions of workers, bankrupted thousands of businesses and lost 3-5% of world output. But once companies had reduced their costs of production by stopping investment and laying off workers, their profitability improved and the capitalist business cycle of boom and slump could start again.

Throughout the mid-1990s economic growth in the rich capitalist economies moved along at a 3%-plus annual pace and reached 4% in 2000. Will this happen over the next five years to 2010?

Economic growth began to pick

up in the advanced capitalist economies from just 1% in 2001 to over 3.5% last year. If the cycle plays out as it did in the 1980s and 1990s, then we could expect reasonable economic growth of about 3-4% a year in the rich countries for perhaps another three to four years before economic recession becomes a threat and unemployment rears its ugly head again.

Is that how it is going to pan out? Well, this time it could be different, for many reasons. The first reason is the odd nature of the last economic downturn in 2001. Sure, national output growth in the rich countries fell back from nearly 4% in the peak boom year of 2000 to just 1% in 2001. But output (GDP) did not fall back absolutely. And sure, unemployment started to rise and reached 6% in the US by 2003. But this was a very mild economic recession because American and British households went on spending. Indeed, in 2002, Americans and Brits increased their spending by nearly 3% after inflation.

How could they do this? The most important reason was a massive injection of credit by the central banks of the US and parts of Europe.

## Fictitious Capital

Interest rates to borrow money fell to record lows in the US and the UK. And mortgage rates reached bargain basement levels. As a result, a massive housing boom took over to replace the collapse of the stock market in 2000-2. House prices rose 20-30% in the UK, Australia, Spain and even 10% in the US and France. Suddenly, homeowners (and they now constitute nearly two-thirds of

all households) felt flush. They took out more debt and spent it.

All this new capital was fictitious and not backed up by any extra value in the economy - or at least by not enough. Sure, the spending boosted sales and more goods in the shops were made and sold. But much of the credit went into boosting real estate prices or into speculative investments. Household debt in relation to average annual income in the US and the UK is now well over 100% and the amount that the average household saves out of annual income after all spending has fallen to zero in America from about 10% back at the beginning of the 1990s. But this cheap credit allowed the rich countries to spend their way out of a slump.

Also, capitalist governments switched to spending more. Out went all the old Thatcherite and 'monetarist' policies of the 1990s that governments should cut back spending and deliver balanced budgets. Instead in came the old discredited capitalist policies of Keynes who advocated government spending and cheap credit to avoid a slump.

Instead of running annual surpluses of 1% of GDP in 1999 and 2000, governments starting having big deficits. Both European and the UK governments are now in annual deficit to the tune of 3% of GDP, while Bush's federal administration has managed to engineer a 4% of GDP deficit.

Bush made huge tax cuts to the rich and to the big corporations in his first term of office. And he increased defence spending and started wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that have already cost half as much as the whole war in Vietnam did in the 1960s.

All this buying of missiles, tanks

and recruiting of troops filtered income through the armaments companies and soldiers into the wider economy and helped keep spending up. But again, none of this spending has been productive. Tanks don't make anything, they just destroy things.

But all the spending did help keep the economy going.

And there were two other big factors that helped make the slowdown in 2001-2 so mild. First, China went on expanding at a 9-10% rate through 2001-2. And China is now a force to be reckoned with in world trade, with 7-8% of world manufacturing exports. Cheap Chinese labour drove down the prices of a whole range of goods that we buy in the shops every day and killed inflation. That stimulated spending in the rich capitalist countries.

Second, the US dollar was strong. It reached the height of its value against the pound and the euro at the beginning of 2002. That meant imported goods in WalMart (and cars and other goods brought into America) were really cheap. Again spending was boosted.

Let's sum up. Low interest rates, a housing boom driven by increased mortgages, heavy government spending and tax cuts, a booming Chinese economy and a strong dollar. This was the explanation of the mild recession. But it is also why there must be serious doubts about the likelihood that the rich capitalist economies of America, Europe and Japan will be able to stage a lasting economic boom right through to the end of this decade as they did in the 1980s and in the case of the UK and the US in the 1990s.

The mild recession has



been at the expense of creating huge excesses and imbalances in the world capitalist economy that make it a weaker vessel to sail the economic oceans from here.

Never have the households of the US, the UK, Scandinavia, Australia and even parts of Europe been so indebted. If interest rates rise, then the cost of financing this debt will start to be very painful. Many people could lose their homes. At the same time, if mortgage costs rise, people will be reluctant to buy houses.

### Profitability peaked

That is what has started to happen in Australia and now Britain, where house prices have slipped significantly and the boom is over. So far, the US has not experienced a downturn. But the Federal Reserve Bank in the US has started to hike interest rates and is talking of pushing them up even more this year. It is confident that this won't break the back of the US housing boom. But the bank could be wrong.

Just as important is the peaking of productivity and profits in the US.

US corporations have

boosted the productive power of each of its workers over the last few years by reducing the workforce and making the others work harder and longer (Americans work many more hours in a year than Europeans). Also they have used the new technology, particularly in the supermarkets and warehouses, to reduce the workforce while maintaining output. Production costs have dropped significantly and profits have risen. Indeed, US corporate profitability reached near a record high at the end of 2004 and the top 500 companies achieved an average 20% rise in the mass of profits.

But the productivity and profits boom is coming to an end.

Productivity growth has already fallen from 4% in 2003 to just 1% now. With more workers in the factories and offices (even if not at higher wages), labour costs are rising (especially if health benefits are included). And American households will be spending less this year as the cost of all their debt rises. US corporations (and British companies) will make less profits this year. When com-

pany profits go down, then eventually (usually about a year later) they start to cut back investment and jobs and the economy turns down.

And the dollar is no longer strong. Indeed, it has collapsed 30% against the euro and 20% against the pound in the last three years. That will shift up prices in American stores and hurt the pockets of consumers there and it will also make more difficult for Europe and Japan to sell their goods into the US, a key market. That's bad news for overall growth in the world capitalist economy. And this time China will not be able to provide support for growth, as its increasing exposure to world capitalist markets will cause it to suffer too.

The huge demand for credit by governments running budget deficits will also drive up interest rates and make it more difficult for the capitalist corporations to finance investment.

The excessive credit of the late 1990s and early 2000s created fictitious capital. That capital kept the capitalist economies of the US, the UK and others going through the period of low profits, low investment and economic recession in 2001-2. Indeed, it made the recession very mild. But this fictitious capital has left huge debts for government, individuals and even corporations. And now the profits are set to turn down.

This time the 'normal' economic cycle of modern capitalism, of recession and then 7-8 years of growth building up to boom, could well be cut short. World capitalism may escape a slump in 2005, but the jobs and livelihoods of hundreds of millions could take a tumble by next year. □

## Reason in Revolt at the Havana Book Fair:

### The ideas of Marxism and Trotsky more alive than ever in Havana

AROUND THIRTY-FIVE people participated in the presentation of the book *Reason in Revolt*, held at the International Havana Book Fair. Celia Hart Santamaría introduced the event and pointed out this was a very courageous book of struggle, and that the book had appeared at a time when the ideas of Marxism were being vilified.

Jordi Martorell of the (Spanish) Frederick Engels Foundation of Socialist Studies explained the context in which *Reason in Revolt* had been written by Alan Woods and Ted Grant. It was published for the first time ten years ago, in 1995, in commemoration of the centenary of Frederick Engels' death. At that time, after the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, the bourgeoisie had launched a ferocious campaign against the ideas of Marxism. Woods and Grant took up the challenge to answer this onslaught of the bourgeoisie and demonstrate the validity of Marxist philosophy, i.e. dialectical materialism.

Jordi explained that the book set as its task the vindication of the ideas of dialectics in the light of the most recent scientific discoveries. Thus, one can see the laws of dialectics being reflected in the theory of punctuated equilibria, an evolutionary theory put forward by Stephen Jay Gould, or in chaos theory and the ubiquity theory.

Ten years after the publication of *Reason in Revolt* - today there are several editions in Spanish, English, Turkish, Greek, Urdu, Italian, German and soon there will also be French, Bahasa Indonesia and Dutch editions - all the promises of capitalism about a "peace dividend" after the end of the cold war, the "end of history", etc., have been shattered by reality.

Capitalism offers us a world of wars and crises, but by necessity it also breeds revolutions as in Venezuela. That is why the meeting also served as the presentation of the international Hands Off Venezuela campaign, launched in December 2002 by Alan Woods, one of the authors of *Reason in Revolt*.

Jordi Martortell said that the defence of the Bolivarian revolution is an

extremely important duty for revolutionaries all over the world. This revolution has shown once again the fighting capacity of the masses, despite the open betrayal of many of its leaders who have openly sided with the reaction. Clear examples of this are the defeat of the coup in April 2002, workers' control in the oil industry in December 2002 and January 2003 and more recently the defeat of reaction in the referendum of August 15.

The development of the Venezuelan revolution has posed the need to transcend the capitalist system - as Hugo Chavez explained in his speech at the World Social Forum - and that is only possible under socialism. Jordi Martorell linked this idea to the concept of the founder of the Cuban Communist Party, Julio Antonio Mella, that this was not the era of the French Revolution in 1789 but of the Russian socialist revolution. Che Guevara also spoke about the "socialist revolution or a caricature of revolution." These ideas are the basis of Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, Jordi said, together with the other mainstay of Trotsky of the need to extend the revolution internationally, which is what Che Guevara also strove for.

Jordi Martorell finished off by highlighting the importance of the Venezuelan revolution, its socialist victory and its spreading to an international level, as a means of defending the Cuban revolution.

After this there was a debate with the public and with the participation of comrades from Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba itself. A Cuban comrade, veteran of the revolutionary war and close collaborator of Che after the 1959 victory,



finished the question-and-answer session, emphasising the need to vindicate the ideas of Trotsky, his struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR and the theory of the permanent revolution.



The meeting ended in the spirit of proletarian internationalism with the slogan of "workers of the world, unite!"

Twenty-one copies of the Spanish edition of *Reason in Revolt* were sold at the end of the meeting. Due to the interest generated by the book, the possibility of a Cuban edition is now being discussed. □

**The first English edition of *Reason in Revolt* is now almost sold out.**

**A new edition will be published soon. More information in a future issue of *Socialist Appeal*.**

# Report on the Karachi Labour Conference

by M.K Hamdani, Karachi

A JOINT labour conference against IRO 2002 (an anti-labour law) was held by trade unions, workers' federations and journalists' organizations at the Karachi press club in January. Opposition leader Senator Mian Raza Rabbani and Member of the National Assembly and President of the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign Ch. Manzoor Ahmed made special appearances. The President of the Sindh Bar Association Akhter Hussain (Advocate) was the special guest. Distinguished Labour leader S.P Lodhi presided over the conference.

Senate opposition leader Mian Raza Rabbani said that after seeing the workers' struggle against IRO 2002 and the presentation of the amendment to the bill in parliament, the government now seems ready to amend this reactionary law and wants to present its own amendment to the bill in parliament. However, Rabbani stressed that if this new bill ignores the interests of the working class, the joint struggle against it would continue.

Member of the National Assembly Ch. Manzoor Ahmed said that workers are uniting due to the anti-labour policies of the government and that soon the day will come when this exemplary union of workers and poor people will challenge the government and imperialism. He added that although bills have been presented in parliament against IRO 2002, the struggle against these reactionary laws must be speeded up and strengthened.

Labour leader S.P Lodhi said that the government's ambitions will be defeated and that our struggle will succeed. Akhter Hussain said that the community of lawyers supports the workers' efforts and that the time for a joint struggle has arrived.

Distinguished politician Miraj Khan, President of the PFUJ Ahfaz-ur-Rehman, Mazhar Abbas and Fazil Jamili of the KUJ, labour leaders Habbib-ü-Din Junaidi, Kamran Chaudry, Manzoor Razi, Karamat Ali, Saeed Ghani, Latif Mughal, Liaqat Sahi and M Saeed also addressed the labour conference, and Sheikh Majeed of the People's Labour

Bureau presented the resolutions. The leaders of various trade unions including Agha Jafer, Usman Baloch, Manzoor Badauni, Malik Rafiq, M Iqbal, Syed Majeed Ahmed, M.K Azmati, Hassan Akhter, M. Khan Ahmedani, Farooq Bhutta, Muhammad Ali, Farid Khan, Shrafat Ali, Maqsood Mirza, Chander Lal also attended the conference.

## Resolutions of the Conference

Sheikh Majeed of the People's Labour Bureau presented the following resolutions which were accepted unanimously:

1. This Labour Conference condemns the implementation of the anti-labour bill IRO 2002 and demands that the amendment to the bill as presented by the PPP in parliament be accepted.

2. This Labour Conference demands the cancellation of article 27-B, 2A and the Presidential Ordinance 2000, which has allowed wholesale dismissals and job losses.

3. This Labour Conference rejects the minimum wage of Rs 3,500 and the pension minimum of Rs 1000 declared at the WEBCOP convention and demands that the minimum wage be equal to 1 tola of gold and that the minimum pension amount be set to the same amount found in the present law for government servants.

4. This Labour Conference demands the implementation of the Seventh Wage Board Award for journalists and workers of newspapers.

5. This Labour Conference condemns the attacks on the Lahore Press Club by a religious organization.

6. This Conference calls for an end to the privatization of KESC and all other government departments, especially the utilities departments.

7. We demand the restoration of the trade unions in PIA, KESC, Pakistan Steels, the railways, the banks and at all financial institutions.

8. This Conference demands an end to the contract system in all public and private sector departments and demands that all concerned employees be made permanent.

9. This Labour Conference declares solidarity with the employees of the PC Hotel and declares support for their demands.

10. This Labour Conference expresses its concern over the crisis in Baluchistan and demands that the problems be solved by taking all opposition parties in confidence rather than through the actions of the army.

11. This Labour Conference salutes the struggle of the farmers of Okara and expresses its deep concern over the reaction of the military government and demands that the ownership rights of these farmers be accepted. □

## Historic victory of the Buenos Aires metro workers

In the last year, the metro workers have written one of the most inspiring pages in the history of the Argentinean working class of the last 30 years. First, they achieved a historic victory in their struggle for the six hour working day. Four months ago they launched an all-out struggle for a wage increase and after an intense struggle they defeated the bosses. We thank everybody who participated in the international solidarity campaign. For further information on the outcome of the conflict please see [www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)



## Mark Twain, Daniel De Leon and the war in Iraq

by Fred Weston

AT THE beginning of December, the Pentagon's Defence Science Board issued a statement that President Bush would not want to be widely publicised. The statement was frank and to the point.

"Coalition" forces were not only losing the battle for Iraqi "hearts and minds" but "may also have achieved the opposite of what they intended".

Occasionally, reality gets a look-in among US Pentagon analysts! But Bush carries on regardless. He continues to spout lies and distortions. He may even be so limited in his understanding of what is going on that he believes his own propaganda. He is helped in this by the corporate media, especially the major US TV channels who try to convince everyone that everything is going according to plan; the elections being a further step in transforming Iraq into a "normal" country.

In this world turned on its head, what is real becomes unreal and what is unreal becomes real! Experts in the Pentagon can see what is happening but the media present the exact opposite.

We are presented with a view that so-called Iraqi "insurgents" are the criminals, while the invaders, the imperialists, are the legitimate force of law. This is like a police officer arriving at the scene of a burglary and declaring the thief the rightful owner of the house and the owner the criminal.

This is not the first time in history that we have seen this kind of reporting. It is always the method of imperialism to present itself as "helping", even "civilising" the people they are oppressing. They want to convince people at home, and their own troops on the ground, that what they are doing is right.

If we go back 100 years to the beginning of the 20th century, we had a similar scenario in the war of the USA against Spain which led to the Spanish being thrown out of the Philippines and the US replacing them as imperialist masters. The US government, of course, presented the

whole things as "liberating" the Philippines, as they say they are doing for the Iraqis today. In the same period the British were "liberating" South Africa from the Boers. In reality they were rounding up the Boers, women and children included, and herding them into concentration camps where they suffered terribly and thousands died. Meanwhile, the blacks, the huge majority that inhabited the land, were not even considered as human beings!

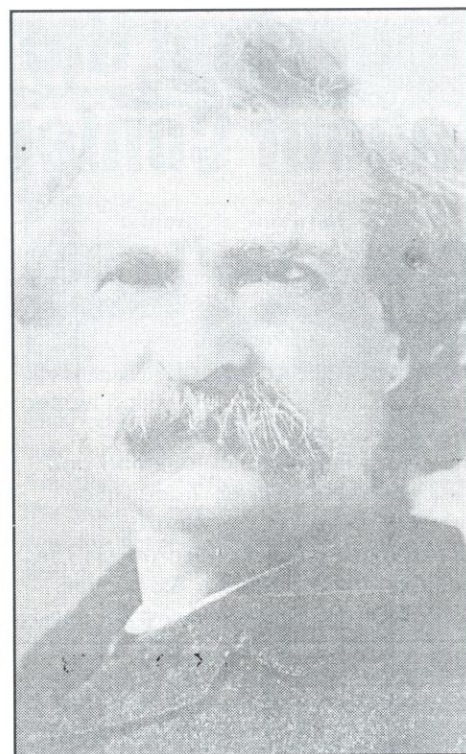
America was then beginning to emerge as a world power. In the Spanish-American War of 1898 it seized Spain's colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific. A national liberation struggle had been going on in the Philippines (as also in Cuba) against Spanish colonial rule. The US government skilfully exploited this to its own ends.

### Filipino rebels

The Americans destroyed the Spanish fleet at Manila, but to take the interior they used the Filipino rebels. They brought the exiled Filipino revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo from Hong Kong to the Philippines. Aguinaldo had the advantage over the Americans that his supporters were the Filipino people themselves, and thus he could muster an army on the ground. The bulk of US troops were still to arrive.

As in all wars of independence the local people fought bravely and overwhelmed the Spanish forces. In just under two months they had practically defeated the Spanish on the main island of Luzon. What remained of the Spanish troops was bottled up in Manila. In June of the same year, the Filipino rebel leaders issued a Declaration of Independence based on the US model.

Typically, the 15,000 remaining Spanish troops only surrendered to US forces in August. The United States and Spanish imperialists reached an agree-



ment whereby the Filipino independence fighters were not allowed to have anything to do with the surrender.

The US administration then refused to recognise the newly independent Filipino Republic. In October of the same year it declared its plans to annex the Philippines. To justify this position President McKinley apparently said that "God Almighty" had ordered him to transform the Philippines into a US colony. No doubt today's Bush has similar delusions. However, it had not been a war of liberation, but one step in the building of the US Empire! In 1899, to back up this decision to annex the Philippines, US troops moved against the Filipino fighters and went on to crush them in blood.

The US was expanding its domination in the Caribbean and in the Pacific. The Philippines were seen as a gate into the Chinese market. (In fact, later, in 1900 the United States used the Philippines as a base from which to send troops into China to help put down the Boxer Rebellion.)

Tragically, the Filipino fighters were no match for the military might of the USA, but they fought bravely and gave the Americans a lot to think about. More than 126,000 US soldiers were sent to the Philippines. At least 250,000 Filipinos, in large part civilians, were killed. The number of US soldiers killed was 4,200.

The Filipino guerrilla struggle was supported by the overwhelming majority of the population. The U.S. military responded brutally. They resettled whole popula-



tions in concentration camps. They burnt down their villages, carried out mass hangings. They combined all this with systematic raping of women and girls, and used torture. One of the US Generals, Jacob Smith, ordered his soldiers to "kill and burn," to target "everything over ten," and to transform the island of Samar into "a howling wilderness." Another US General, William Shafter, went as far as to say that it might even be necessary to kill half the Filipino population before "perfect justice" could be granted to the other half!

Although eventually the US forces defeated the Filipino fighters, fighting continued for years, especially in the south. Then as now, the US government declared the rebels as "bandits".

However, not all Americans were blind to what was going on. Among these stands none other than the famous Mark Twain, who made a name for himself as author of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. What is less known - or less highlighted at least - about Mark Twain is that he was one of the founders of the New England Anti-Imperialist League which was set up in Boston. In George W Bush's America he would no doubt be classed as an unpatriotic traitor. He was in fact a progressive and a defender of basic democratic rights.

Twain turned his attention - with his renowned razor sharp wit - to what was happening in the Philippines and wrote a satirical letter "to the person sitting in darkness". By this he meant the oppressed peoples of the colonial world. He turned his attentions to what the British were doing in South Africa during the Boer War, and wrote the following:

"Mr Chamberlain manufactures a war out of materials so inadequate and so fanciful that they make the boxes grieve and the gallery laugh and he tries hard to persuade himself that it isn't a private raid for cash but has a dim vague respectability about it somewhere, if he could only find the spot; and that by and by he can scour the flag clean again after he has finished dragging it through the mud and making it shine and flash in the vault of heaven once more."

Replace Chamberlain for Bush or Blair and the same words could be used to describe what these imperialist bloodsuckers are doing today in Iraq! Then as now atrocities were committed, all in the name of "saving," "liberating," even "civilising" the colonial peoples. Surrendering Boers were bayoneted by British soldiers, as were Filipino "insurgents" by the Americans.

In the Philippines the US imperialists served themselves of the help of Filipino independence fighters, who had been struggling to oust the Spanish, only to betray them later by taking over the country for themselves. The Kurds in Iraq should draw a lesson from this, as should all oppressed minority peoples today who think that an imperialist power can be trusted to defend their interests. Whole countries have been conquered throughout the ages by imperialists using local conflicts to play one group off against another in order to subdue all of them.

After they had used the local Filipino nationalists to oust the Spanish, the Americans turned on them. Mark Twain satirised the whole thing with these words:

"There have been lies; yes, but they were told in good cause. We have been treacherous; but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil.

"True, we have crushed a deceived and confiding people who have trusted us... We have stabbed an ally in the back and slapped the face of a guest; we have bought a shadow from an enemy that hadn't it to sell; we have robbed a trusting friend of his land and liberty; we have invited our clean young men to shoulder a discredited musket and do bandit's work under a flag which bandits have been accustomed to fear, not to follow; we have debauched America's honour and blackened her face before the world, but each detail was for the best. We know this."

His anger at what US imperialism was doing was revealed in this line: "We can have just our usual flag with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and cross-bones."

### Independence

Mark Twain found the idea that Filipino independence fighters could be classed as rebels as an absurdity. For him how could you be a rebel in your own home? Also today the resistance in Iraq is criminalized by the mass media. Undoubtedly there is a fringe of the resistance movement that uses barbaric methods. But the numbers taking part in the resistance are estimated to be upwards of 200,000 and they have mass backing. Just as they were not criminal or bandits in the Philippines 100 years ago, the large majority of the "insurgents" in Iraq are not criminals but the people of Iraq fighting for the right to govern themselves.

Mark Twain was what we could define

as a genuine bourgeois liberal of his time. But there was another American who went a lot further than Twain, namely Daniel De Leon. He was an American Socialist theoretician and political leader. He had studied the works of Marx and Engels and tried to apply them to the struggle for the defence of the rights of American workers.

This is what he said in an editorial, written in response to the US Army's repression of the Filipino struggle in 1899, entitled, "Ramrodding freedom".

"Last week's battle of Manila is said to have cost the lives of over 5,000 Filipinos.

"These men had a notion that the country of their birth is their own. Arms in hand, they resisted the Spanish yoke, and succeeded to the extent that Spanish sovereignty over the whole Archipelago never was more than a nominal fact. A quarrel broke out between their tyrant and a foreign nation. They looked with joy at what seemed divine interposition, and aided the United States to drive out Spain. Freed from Spain, they imagined themselves freed from all foreign yoke.

"Not so. Our capitalist Government forthwith claimed possession by 'conquest,' and assumed the role of a dispenser of freedom in a style quite its own. 'These Filipinos,' our Government claimed, 'do not know what freedom means; we must teach them.' The teaching is now going on; the first lesson has been given. With the ramrod as instrument, 'Freedom' is to be jammed down the throats of the insurgent patriots whom our expansionist capitalists insult with the name of 'insurgents.'

"But the freedom ramrodding process is not going on in the distant Philippines only. For every Filipino slaughtered beyond the Pacific a workingman is slaughtered, or the foundation is being laid for his being slaughtered right here in the United States. Over the prostrate bodies only of the 'insurgent' Filipinos can our Government march to the establishment of its peculiar 'freedom' promoting social system in that Archipelago. The establishment of American factories in the Philippines is equivalent with a levelling process of wages here that will be given the name of 'equalization' but which in fact spells MURDER." [From "The People", Vol. III, No. 46, Sunday, February 12, 1899].

These eloquent words can equally be applied today to what US imperialism is doing in Iraq. Just as then, while the US administration wages war on the people of Iraq it also wages war at home against the American workers. □

## The Israeli-Palestinian summit: A very short film

by Yossi Schwartz from Jerusalem

IN THE Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh the Prime Ministers of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) made announcements yesterday at a summit meeting. Abbas announced a cease-fire, while Sharon promised to end Israeli military operations in the territories if the Palestinian violence stops. The media around the world made a big deal out of this, saying this time there is a real chance for peace.

In reality it offers nothing of the kind. Since Israel has asked the European Union to declare Hamas a terrorist organization, in reality Abu Mazen will declare a cease-fire while Israel will continue its military actions in the 1967 occupied territories. Abbas, although elected, cannot speak for all the Palestinians or all the organizations that operate on Palestinian territory. In order for this deal to hold he must be in a position to offer the Palestinian people something concrete.

What does not bode well for the Palestinian people is that those taking part in the summit were all supporters of US imperialism: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and King Abdullah II of Jordan. The Egyptian protocol officers decided that Abdullah would arrive first, followed by Abbas and then Sharon.

The four main characters in this show held a press conference after their meeting at which each delivered a speech, but in order to avoid any public airing of disagreements, they did not take questions from reporters. The day before the summit the Israeli and Palestinian teams actually exchanged copies of Sharon's and Abbas' speeches

and tried to blur their disagreements. This kind of game can make a good TV show but it doesn't solve the real underlying problems.

Sharon spoke of the importance of not missing the opportunity that has been created, calling for "deeds, not words" in the war on terror and reiterated Israel's commitment to the road map peace plan. Finally, he detailed Israel's planned goodwill gestures to the Palestinians, such as the release of 900 prisoners.

Abbas reiterated his declaration from the 2003 Aqaba Summit about the need for the PA to have a monopoly on armed force within its territory. It didn't work then, it won't work now. How can Abbas impose this on the armed groups operating on Palestinian Territory?

He also expressed his hope that the current Israeli-Palestinian dialogue will lead to implementation of the road map, while warning that many thorny issues, such as the separation fence (the wall) and the settlements, remain to be addressed in the future. So these key issues remain as festering problems that will not satisfy the Palestinian people.

Bush added his little bit when he promised money for the PA last week. As it turns out he didn't offer very much. The White House asked Congress to release \$40 million immediately. Of this, \$8 million will be earmarked for assistance to the private sector, \$3 million for health care and \$13 million for improving the PA's water infrastructure; the remainder will be devoted to higher education, community services and job creation.

The White House is also requesting \$200 million to renovate houses in Gaza,

rehabilitate the Palestinian economy, facilitate cargo transfers between Israel and the PA and improve health-care and welfare. Bush also plans to ask Congress for \$150 million for the PA in 2006. Whether the money will actually be released is another matter, but for now it looks good.

All this amounts to peanuts compared to the real needs of the Palestinians, and it shows more than anything else that he is not really serious about solving the burning problems of the Palestinian people. Bush needs to show that he is making progress in the Middle East. After the "successful" elections in Iraq - which were nothing of the kind - he now wants to show that he is also "sorting out" the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### Expectations

The Palestinian masses are expecting to get something real out of this summit. The main issue on which the Palestinians are expecting immediate results is the release of their prisoners. However, according to Mohammad Dahlan, the PA's "achievement" has been Israeli readiness to establish a joint committee to discuss changing the criteria by which Israel releases prisoners. So again, nothing concrete, just promises to talk again in the future.

Last week, Israeli leaders did approve the release of 900 prisoners, none involved in violence, most of them arrested on charges like entering Israel to find jobs without licenses. But Israel holds more than 7,000 Palestinian prisoners, many of them arrested during the last four years on charges of violence. Over decades of conflict, tens of thousands of Palestinians have spent time

in Israeli custody, many without any official charges. The main Palestinian demand is freedom for 237 such prisoners in jail since before the Oslo agreement, most of them sentenced to life in jail. On this the Israeli government is less pliable. Already, on the day before the summit there were demonstrations in a number of places in the West Bank and Gaza organised by prisoners' families.

According to Danny Rubinstein of the Haaretz newspaper, a Palestinian in an interview yesterday on a Gulf state news show said, "If Abu Mazen and the committee agree on 900 prisoners who will go free soon, and some are just Palestinians who were caught working illegally in Israel, we'll throw shoes at him."

Palestinian spokesmen, just before the summit, tried to lower expectations saying in official statements that the gathering in Sharm is the start of a process, not the end of one. But in some places in the territories, Palestinian journalists were reporting that the public was anticipating a real change, such as an end to the construction of the separation fence, removal of checkpoints, and the return of large numbers of Palestinians to work in Israel. This is extremely unlikely to happen, and therefore disillusionment will set in very quickly.

Thus it is clear that as a result of this summit Abu Mazen will be very welcome in Washington but not so much among the Palestinians who will see him in his true colours.

We have seen this film before, a similar scenario as the one after Oslo, except that this time the film is much shorter. It is a repeat, therefore it won't have the same impact as those in the past. □

# Arthur Miller, death of a committed artist

by Maarten Vanheeuverswyn



Last week, Arthur Miller, the dramatist who wrote plays that dealt with big moral and political questions in America, died. The legendary playwright, who continued his commitment to art and politics until the end of his life, was 89.

Arthur Asher Miller was born October 17, 1915, in New York City, and was the son of a prosperous clothing manufacturer. With the crash of the stock market in 1929, the Millers' were ruined, and the family moved to Brooklyn. The Depression clearly left its traces in his mind and lay the foundation for many of his works. He was quoted in the London Times, saying: "Until 1929 I thought things were pretty solid and somebody was in charge, probably a businessman and a realistic, non-nonsense fellow. In 1929 he jumped out of the window. It was bewildering." The awareness that you could lose everything in one go, that capitalism hardly ever raises somebody from rags to riches but is more likely to violently throw people into deep poverty, remained with Miller throughout his life. Consequently, he could not simply stand aside from the outside world and its miseries and devoted his life to a committed form of art.

Because there was no money to go to university, Miller became a low-paid shipping clerk in an automobile parts warehouse. He started reading avidly and developed an interest in politics and in literature. His own working and reading experience drove him in a leftward direction. Though never a Marxist, Miller had embraced a certain form of socialism, which was more of a liberal-humanist kind. Social class is a recurrent theme in his plays, as seen in his first Broadway hit "All My Sons," in which a military manufacturer knowingly sells defective parts, causing the deaths of American pilots.

His breakthrough, however, came with the now classic play "Death of a Salesman", a simple story about an American family crushed under the boot of American capitalism. Salesman Willy Loman has come to embody the victim of a hostile and commercial world. Gradually, the salesman loses control over his own fate and falls into decline. Although Willy has worked hard his entire

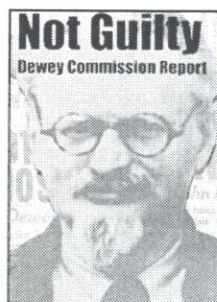
life, he gets sacked from his job. The idea that if you simply work hard, you will be lucky in life, is shattered. The American Dream proves to be an illusion.

Ironically, his growing success made Miller into a millionaire. At the same time, the reactionary voices of political persecution called his plays anti-American. The playwright was indeed despised by the American establishment. In the 1950s this culminated in a witch-hunt against him along with so many other left-wing artists and people in general. The House Un-American Activities Committee even turned to Hollywood looking for names. Only by naming others could communists clear themselves and escape further torture by the inquisition. In true McCarthyite fashion, he was dragged before the Committee in 1956. But unlike Elia Kazan, the director of several of Miller's plays, he refused to name names, even though this put his career at risk.

"The Crucible", set during the 1692 witch-hunts in Salem, Massachusetts is a clear allegory of the "Red Scare" anti-communist policies of McCarthyism. In 1692, in Salem Village some children accused other villagers of being witches in league with Satan. In the play protagonist John Proctor would rather die than name

names. He keeps his conscience clean.

Fast forward fifty years later. George W. Bush wages a "war on terror" and wants to get rid of the "bad guys". Just like with Senator McCarthy, you are either with the United States or against them. Until his last days, Arthur Miller objected to the foreign policy of the hawks in the White House. About Bush he said: "He's not a very good actor. He's too obvious most of the time, he has no confidence in his own facade, so he's constantly overemphasizing his sincerity." That verdict may be too mild but one thing is certain: Miller remained a committed artist until the end of his lifetime, and that is quite an achievement considering the number of left intellectuals turning cynical in their older age. Some of his plays grabbed people by the scruff of the neck and made them think about the present world. Miller liked to say theatre could "change the world". Given the limits of what an artist can do, he did not change the world... but he definitely changed American theatre. □



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# UBIQUITY - A confirmation of Dialectics

by Espe Espigares

EVERY DAY, a range of scientists are tending more and more to use a dialectical method in their investigations. This is certainly the case with the studies of Mark Buchanan, which are reflected in his book "Ubiquity" (Britain, 2000, Weidenfeld & Nicolson). A very refreshing book, described by some critics as "mind-blowing", in which Buchanan describes, with dozens of examples, the same laws that seem to apply to the whole universe, from earthquakes to the stock markets.

Buchanan's studies are based on systems that are in a "critical state", meaning on the verge of big changes. He concludes that what pushes these systems into crisis is not one special event, but the accumulation of previous contradictions. These drive the system to a knife-edge instability, where any new event, which ordinarily would have little effect, can push the situation over the edge.

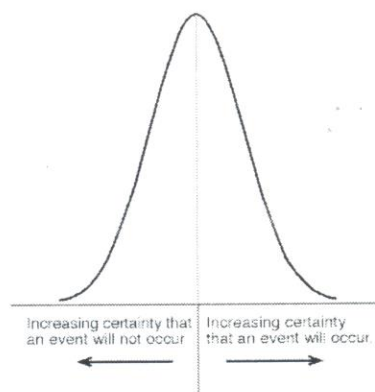
This appears a very ambitious and innovative theory, but is it new? Not for Marxists, who understand its dialectical outlook. Ubiquity is a most welcomed contribution to understanding the world around us.

Buchanan applies this dialectical method to almost everything: stock market crashes; avalanches; volcanoes; natural fires; patterns of weather; the development of paths in green spaces; the psychology of human behaviour and the formation of cities; plankton floating in the oceans; the way that the human hearts beats; the origin of life; the evolution of species; the extinction of dinosaurs and other mass extinctions; world wars; chaos theory; superfluids; quantum theory; pulsars and the development of science itself.

All these examples are of systems which are critically self-organised. The term "Critical state" underlines their dynamics. This is the way that they work and the critical state

cannot be avoided. It is an integral part of nature. In the words of Buchanan: "beyond the labels 'disaster' and 'upheaval', each of these events erupted from the soil of its own peculiar setting. The link between all, the 'ubiquity' that links everything, is that they all obey what the physicists call 'power-laws'."

This means that whatever event you are studying, if it follows a power-law, the vast majority of instances of the particular event will tend towards some kind of average, and the further away from this average the concrete example is, the less likely it will be to occur. Buchanan uses several examples to explain this: "weigh a thousand onions or apples, give a test to five hundred students or measure the speeds of a few thousand cars as they rush by on the highway: in each case the numbers will fall on a bell-shaped curve, with the vast majority falling close to some average. If the statistics of anything follow the bell curve, then the numbers cluster together within a narrow range and finding any number far beyond that range is extraordinarily unlikely."



In some instances this can be expressed with a mathematical law, as for example with earthquakes which became four times less likely each time you double the energy they release.

Buchanan uses the data collected by dozens of scientists, who work in different fields, to study the how many systems enter into crisis. In 1987 three physicists, Peter Bak, Chao Tang, and Kurt Weisenfeld, decided to study artificial avalanches. For these experiments they sprinkle grains of sand one at a time onto a tabletop. As the pile grows, its sides become steeper and it becomes more likely that the next falling grain will trigger an avalanche. The next grain could provoke a small avalanche, moving just a few grains of sand or could trigger one moving hundreds. It could also affect thousands of grains or it could unchain a catastrophic avalanche that would practically destroy the pile of sand.

There is no typical avalanche. It is impossible to predict what the effect of one single grain of sand would be.

They carried on their studies with computer simulations in which they would colour the grains in the pile in to different categories according to the steepness and instability: green for the stable grains and red for the unstable ones "ready to go". They found that as the piles became more red more unpredictable the effect of the next grain would be.

They also found that this process follows a power-law so extraordinary big and extraordinarily small avalanches would be less likely.

The grain that "caused" the avalanche was not anything special in itself. What is crucial, is the contradictions within the pile of sand before it collapses. At a certain critical point, one extra grain causes a collapse. In dialectics we call this the transformation of quantity into quality.

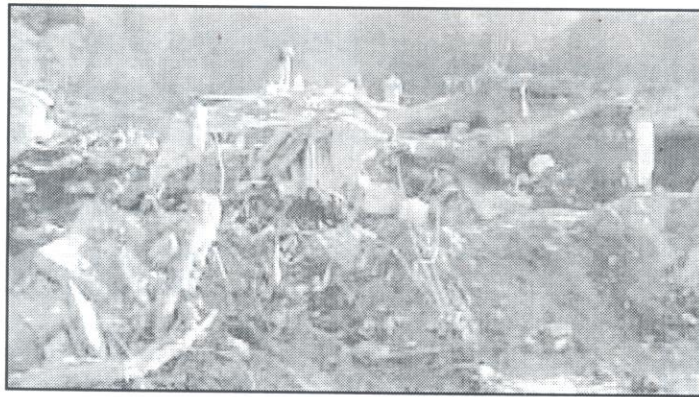
There is also a cause and effect relationship here, in which cause becomes effect and vice versa. The position of a grain dropped onto

the pile will have an effect on the structure of the pile itself.

Dialectics explains that everything is in a constant state of change and part of a continual never-ending process. The past affects the future and how is determined by the interaction of the different parts that make up this process of change. We can describe the individual properties of those parts, but the interaction between them forms a complexity which is qualitatively different to the individual parts that form it.

Marxism uses the method of dialectic materialism in its analysis and outlook of the world. In that way, Marxists also see this "ubiquity" in which there are general laws that affect all things. This is a very important thing, not only for science and philosophy but also as a guide for the struggle for the transformation of society.

We can draw a very good analogy from the example of the pile of sand to the development of the class struggle. The capitalist system, which is based on exploitation for profit, is founded on contradictions. The attacks of the capitalists on the workers could be seen as the drops of sand in a pile; the pressures and contradictions accumulate more and more. Every new attack would have an effect, but not all of them would "provoke an avalanche." However, the increasing quantity of attacks would push the situation more and more towards a "critical state." Once the system is at the edge, any new attack on the workers' conditions can provoke an explosion. It is impossible to predict how big this explosion will be. It may provoke just a "small avalanche", which would release just a small amount of pressure, or perhaps this very same attack could provoke a complete "earthquake". All we know is that with the greater accumulation of contradictions, the more likelihood



there is of triggering bigger events. For a long period workers may be prepared to shoulder the attacks. Yet underneath the surface contradictions accumulate, driving the system to a knife-edge waiting to be set off even by an accidental event. Marxists describe this as the expression of necessity through accident.

The other interesting field to which Buchanan applies the law of the transformation of quantity into quality is the development of science. Buchanan recognises that scientific research takes place in a more or less closed community in which scientists influence one another. He also says "scientists are not so open-minded and rational as they would have you believe." He quotes Kuhn from Harvard University, who produced long historical studies of some of the most dramatic episodes in science. "Kuhn noticed instead that scientists at any moment seem to be emotionally committed to a shared set of ideas, and will not even consider rejecting these ideas unless their 'maladjustment' to the nature they are meant to describe becomes obviously and intolerably great."

Buchanan describes science as a huge network of ideas and paradigms that form its foundations. Into this huge network of accepted ideas, new ideas or theories are "dropped." Some of them will have more of an effect than others. Some will be accepted, some will not. Other ideas may have to readjust partially to the basic

network. But every new idea will have an effect. At a certain point the system will reach a critical point in which the old ideas are not compatible with the new ones. A "scientific earthquake" will take place in which the old scientific foundations will have to be changed.

This is a very simplified way of explaining the development of science. Experiments collected in the systems studied by Buchanan are also very simplified. It would be impossible to conduct studies that take into account all possible variants. What may seem a simplification in reality is a very effective way of getting to the root of the question, by separating out what it is secondary and what is not.

In science and in other fields that deal with human history and social development, we cannot ignore the economic and social system in which development takes place. This is what many scientists, philosophers, economists, and historians do. In human society, the fact that we live in a capitalist system that creates inequalities is not a secondary aspect, but an important element that needs to be taken into account. For example, when we study the psychology of human behaviour we cannot take an isolated view, but must take into consideration that we are members of a society that interact with each other, in a system based on contradictions driving towards a critical state.

It is very important to dis-

tinguish what is secondary and what is not. Obviously the system that we live in is not a secondary thing. It colours everything, including science. The development of modern science went hand in hand with the development of capitalism. The new merchant society needed new technology to produce faster and cheaper methods of production and transportation.

With the development of capitalism technology advanced tremendously and the new sciences played a vital role in overcoming feudalism and laying the basis for modern society.

The capitalist system has played a very progressive role in the development of science and technology. However, this has come to an end. It now acts as a colossal brake on the productive forces.

This is also reflected in the development of science in where the potential for progress is also blocked.

Even under capitalism there are great advances, discoveries and ideas, that are laying idle at the back of the draw because they would not be immediately translated into profits for the capitalist, or because they compromise profits that the capitalists are already making.

Instead science is often used by capitalism to justify the miseries created by the system based on profit rather than need.

This is expressed by RC. Lewontin, S. Rose and L.J. Kamin in the introduction to their important book, "Not in Our Genes": "We share a commitment to build in the future a fair society - a socialist one. We recognise that an objective science is part of the struggle for this society and we also believe that the social function of most of today's science is to avoid the creation of this society by the preservation of the interests of the dominant class...". □

# fighting fund

## A right royal drive on finances needed

AS WINTER draws to an end (mind you the country is in the grip of severe snow as I write this) thoughts turn towards spring and with it a likely general election. Equally exciting evidently is news of a royal wedding set to take place at around possibly the same time as an election, what a surprise! Charlie boy - who has started to look like Cesar Romero playing The Joker in the old Batman TV series - is set to marry Carmilla, who many older readers may remember from the 70s Hammer film 'The Vampire Lovers', well after the stake had been banged in anyway. Some of you may have cynically drawn the conclusion that all this is intended to distract us from the real issues facing us as we all prepare to cast our important votes. However I doubt if people really will be rushing out to buy their souvenir mugs just yet - except as bad taste presents maybe.

What they will be asking about is what the hell happened to this Labour government that they twice elected into office by a huge margin, first in 1997 and again in 2001. Where are the policies designed to benefit working people as against the bosses and the City of London? The answer is that the New Labour government is just a polished up version of Old Tory. Naturally the real Tories under the un-inspiring leadership of Michael Howard (wasn't he in the Vampire Lovers too?) have been trying to regain the initiative with a series of even more right-wing measures. Already it looks like the race card is going to be played with both leaders trying to outdo each other with a series of hardline 'tough' proposals on immigration/asylum seekers/terrorists - code words all for

what they really mean. The ultra-right wingers lurking in Ukip have already been pushing this sort of stuff as well as Kilroy-Silk's new party of one. Many Labour and trade union activists will rightly be sickened by all this and especially by the way that the Labour leadership seems to be going along with it.

So what is to be done? Yes we want to see Labour win the next election and the Tories get a sound thrashing. But voting is not enough. The fight against Blairism and for socialism needs to be taken up by everyone who wants to make a stand against the status quo. Socialist Appeal can play a role in this but only with your help. Over the last year around £16,000 has been raised for our fighting fund - all of which has been needed. This has involved a few very large donations together with many smaller but equally important amounts. But the struggle goes on and with it the ongoing need for cash to enable us to keep producing the material and fighting for socialist ideas.

We hope that, based on what you have read in our pages, you will want to become a Socialist Appeal seller and start pushing the ideas of Marxism in your workplace, college or estate. But we certainly hope that, come what may, you will be able to make a donation to our funds to ensure that the red flag keeps flying and that the forces of reaction are challenged and defeated.

Please send what you can to us at PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG - we thank you in advance.

Steve Jones

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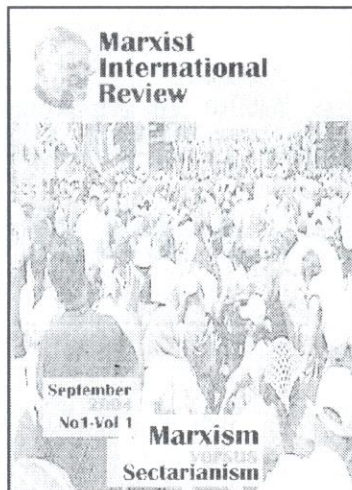
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# noticeboard

## March 2005

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

## Public sector pensions in crisis - For a one-day strike of all public sector workers!

OVER THE last few years we have become used to hearing about pension crises. Apparently it is not enough that we have to live in fear of losing our jobs, now we also have to live in fear of losing our pensions and any hope of a reasonable standard of living in retirement.

Under recent plans unveiled by the government almost every area of the public sector is due to have its pension arrangements 'reviewed' (Whitehall newspeak for cut). First in the firing line are local government workers in England and Wales with proposed changes due to be implemented this April. Workers in most other sectors will face similar changes in one year's time. As we go to press local government workers in UNISON, Amicus and T&G are being balloted for industrial action against this attack. PCS members - who are also facing massive job cuts, alongside the attack on their pensions - are threatening action too. This could mean more than a million workers striking. United and co-ordinated this could be the biggest strike in Britain since the General Strike of 1926.

The threatened changes will raise the retirement age from 60 to 65, and reduce the final payout. Public sector union, UNISON, has estimated that this will mean a 30% cut in pensions. Low pay is common in local government, the average pension is £3,800 a year and the government wants to cut this figure further.

The government, backed by the CBI, is using the excuse that there is not

enough money to pay for the current 'generous' provision. What they do not explain is: why did the money exist last year and for the ten years before? Why does it not exist now? Where has it gone? The truth is that the government wants to slash our pensions and cut spending in general because they are acting in the interests of big business and the city of London, instead of the working people who elected them.

This attack on local government workers is being hustled through quickly to try to catch the unions and the workers on the hop. This is no reason to give up however, quite the opposite - all the more reason to take determined and decisive action. If we stand united, a strike of more than a million workers on the eve of a general election can have a big impact. Blair and co can be forced to back down. A militant stand now can be the start of a fight to lower not raise the age at which we can retire. Not one year on the retirement age! Not one penny off our pensions!

It is important that the union leaders take the mood that exists for a fight and build upon it to defeat the government plans. We cannot allow the excuse of 'don't rock the boat in an election year' to hold us back. The only real threat to Labour winning the election is the policies of Blair and the rightwing, not because the unions are 'too left' or 'too militant'.

The union leaders must build for a one-day national strike of all public sector workers to defend our pensions. This

would be a powerful opening shot in a campaign to show the government that we mean business. Without waiting to be told members are already discussing the pensions struggle and the way forward in every public sector union branch. To build for this action meetings should be organised in all areas to explain the issues to workers and set up strike committees. Local and regional leaderships of the members themselves should be built up to recruit non-unionised public sector workers and coordinate action in all the areas.

If we stand together we can win, but we will be fighting against a determined opposition. If a one-day public sector wide strike is not enough to make the government back down we must take further action. The TUC must be prepared to call a one-day general strike if Blair and co refuse to retreat.

United action by workers in the public sector can force the government to scrap its pension cuts. Local government workers can win a victory for the whole movement.

We need militant action to save all public sector pensions

Public sector unions need to unite their members in a co-ordinated struggle.

**The call must go out for  
a one-day national strike  
of public sector workers!**

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