

Iraq • Youth • Venezuela • Miners • Economy

# SocialistAppeal

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**Don't let the  
Tories in...**

**... and kick them out of  
Labour**



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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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# The least inspiring election

DURING THE next four weeks we can expect to be subjected to the least inspiring general election campaign for over a century, with polling day expected to be in early May. The rabid reaction spewing forth from Tory campaign posters and candidates is a timely reminder of why none of us wants them back. They propose to create a national border police to keep out the hordes of illegal immigrants they spuriously claim are trying to enter the country. They turn their venom on travellers, and hint at a new attack on abortion legislation. Their ignominiously dismissed deputy chairman, Howard Flight, spilled the beans on the devastating programme of cuts they would implement if Michael Howard got his hands on the keys to Number Ten.

The Tory threat should have been eliminated by eight years of Labour government introducing measures in the interests of ordinary working people. Instead Blair and Co.'s slavish support for the City bankers at home - privatising, cutting jobs and pensions - combined with their servility before US imperialism and its adventure in Iraq, have chronically undermined Labour's support and allowed the Tories room to recover.

Nevertheless, Labour will probably win the election in spite of Blair, and in spite of the Labour leadership's worship for the market economy. On the morning after there will be no street parties. This election result will be greeted with the least enthusiasm of any Labour victory in history. Given the experience of the last eight years how could it be different? The prospect of more of the same is hardly an edifying one. 100,000 civil service jobs are to be

axed. The attack on public sector pensions has only been postponed. It is little succour to know that the situation would be even worse if the Tories won.

Is there an alternative to voting Labour? With all due Respect to George Galloway and friends, their new party will go the same way as all their many predecessors, quietly into the night. In the recent past the Scottish Socialist Party has garnered some electoral support, however their own internal crisis suggests their blend of nationalism and reformism will not gain further ground. In fact, polls suggest they will face wipe-out in two years. Meanwhile the nationalists in both Scotland and Wales may bandy around a few left phrases, but beneath their national flags lurk pro-capitalist policies.

## Challenge

As for the Liberals their radical side always shines more brightly the more distant they stand from any serious challenge for office. They talk about renationalising the railways, yet where they lead councils they are enthusiastic supporters of PFI privatisation. Their fate is to be crushed between the two main parties. To win support in working class areas they must lose support in Tory strongholds and vice versa. They are not so much a third force in British politics as a fifth wheel.

With no real alternative available many workers will go to the polling booths to put a cross next to Labour whilst holding their noses. The only real alternative before them is to stay at home. No doubt that is the way in which many will choose to protest. It is hard

to blame them. However the low turnout should still not be enough to allow the Tories back in.

They will make a certain recovery (inevitable given the historic low of their last result, their worst election since 1832), regaining many of those who supported UKIP in the last European elections, by moving further to the right themselves. UKIP - split over the ego of Robert Kilroy-Silk - will not repeat their earlier success. Nevertheless the growth of such groups is a symptom of an important development which may be hidden beneath the headline results of an election, the growing class polarisation of British society.

The media claim low participation in elections is a sign of apathy - people in general, and young people in particular, are not interested in politics. Utter nonsense! Look at the millions who have demonstrated against the war. It is not politics that fails to inspire but careerist politicians, the stench of corruption seeping from the corridors of power and the deceit and deception of government ministers. Many people feel "they are all the same", like the betrayed farmyard in Orwell's *Animal Farm* one looks from government bench to opposition MPs and cannot see the difference.

A re-elected Blair will imagine he has a mandate to continue to privatise and to attack public sector pensions. The Blairites will claim the low turnout is only a reflection of "voter contentment". They will be in for a shock.

A third term for Labour will be very different to the last eight years. Until now, a boom based on credit and speculation has served to mask the continued decline

of British capitalism. Property prices continue to defy gravity, but they cannot avoid the laws of physics forever. They are now like the coyote in the Road Runner cartoon who runs over the edge of a cliff, but does not realise immediately that there is nothing beneath his feet. When he looks down, however, he plummets at great speed.

The British trade unions have begun to change. The massive vote to fight the attacks on pensions reflects the growing anger of workers across the country. As a result of the war in Iraq Blair and Co. are widely seen as a pack of liars who cannot be trusted. This is not the basis for a renewal of a honeymoon!

Economically, politically and industrially a new Labour government will face an entirely different situation. Blair may win the election, but Blairism is already dead. Facing new crises, Blair may finally decide to retire to his expensive new home, handing over to Brown. However, this would represent the most minor cosmetic change. The trade unions and the party rank and file must set their sights much higher than this.

No-one wants the Tories back. But we don't want them leading the Labour Party either. The only alternative is to be found in the organised trade union movement, in a militant defence of jobs, wages and conditions, and at the same time in a struggle to purge the Tory interlopers from Labour's ranks.

- **Keep the Tories Out!**
- **Drive them out of the Labour Party!**
- **No to capitalism - Fight for real socialist policies!**

## NUJ To Fight BBC Job Cuts

THE NUJ is leading the way in protesting at the latest savage wave of job cuts at the BBC presented during March by the corporation's boss Mark Thompson. A further massive 2050 job losses have been announced on top of the 1730 already declared. Every area will be hit with 735 jobs going from the regions, 420 from news services and 66 from sport. All this being just the tip of a very nasty iceberg which will amount to a cut of around 19% of the total workforce if all this goes through. Thompson has called this announcement 'a difficult and painful process', which should earn him a nice fat bonus as he slashes an estimated £355 million from the BBC accounts. But he adds: '...all divisions are now finding ways of achieving these savings through genuine improvements rather than crude cuts.' So there you are! BBC journalists facing the dole can relax, they are being 'improved' not sacked.

What we are seeing here is the old tried and tested methods of reducing costs by cutting numbers and hoping that those who remain can keep things going on the cheap and not very cheerful - so much for quality broadcasting! As NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear put it in the NUJ website:

"Throughout this whole turbulent period he (Thompson) has still failed to answer the single most important question - how can the BBC maintain the quality and standards it is justifiably praised for whilst axing one in five staff.

"How can hard working staff maintain quality whilst trying to do not only their own job but that of thousands of their colleagues too. The inevitable result is that staff will face burn out whilst standards and quality will be damaged. That will have extremely serious consequences for BBC journalism and programme making and the BBC's ability to meet its charter commitments. "

All the unions involved must start now to co-ordinate plans to oppose this decimation of staff numbers and mobilise the maximum number of people to stop the BBC from becoming a cheap and not-very-cheerful backup for the big media multinationals who will be eying up what profits can be made at all our expenses.

## Rail chaos grows

A REPORT from left think-tank *Catalyst* has revealed that the taxpayer could save half a billion pounds each year if the government were to take the railways back into public hands. Contrary to the claims of politicians over the past decade, it has now been shown in practise that private is not most efficient. The private railways have been a disaster and a massive financial drain from start to finish.

Quality and reliability have declined along with public confidence while prices have soared. In the meantime it seems to be impossible for the privateers to run their service at a loss no matter what they do - year on year most of the firms have been scooping up massive profits. These 'profits' would be better dubbed 'charity' because they are funded by government subsidies. The main rail union, the RMT, estimates that £800 million has been passing straight into the private coffers each year since 1996.

The RMT has begun a campaign for the re-nationalisation of the railways - Rail Against Privatisation (RAP!). One of the main activities will be South East Trains (SET). SET was nationalised several years ago following the collapse of operator Connex, who had driven the service and their business to rack and ruin. Since it was taken out of private hands the service is improving in spite of the fact that the current SET does not receive the £1 million subsidy a month that Connex got.

Another major issue that the campaign will take up is the part-privatisation of the London Underground. The Transport Select Committee recently rejected Public Private Partnership (PPP) saying that it is an expensive scheme to pay out guaranteed profits despite the failure of contractors to carry out improvements. Not only have the contractors failed to meet the targets (which were specifically lowered for them!) but there is no confidence that they will be able to hit any of the future targets.

Bob Crow of the RMT said: 'The only winners from these rip-off contracts are the contractors who are pocketing £2 million a week in profits.' The Committee accepted evidence presented by the RMT that shows that part-privatisation of London Underground has undermined health and safety on what used to be one of the world's safest railways. □

## Students occupy UCL in protest against the imperialist occupation of Iraq

by Ramon Samblas

A GROUP of students organised in the UCL Social Forum, UCL Stop the War Society and the UCLSSWS, together with other activists, occupied the UCL (University College London) on the eve of the national march against the occupation of Iraq. The aim of this protest was to bring attention to the imperialist war in Iraq while also providing somewhere to stay overnight for other students who were arriving from all over England to attend the demonstration that took place on March 19.

The action started with the music of the Samba band "rhythms of resistance" on the evening of March 18. Around 60 students broke into one of the rooms and for 16 hours provided a space where discussions on the forthcoming General Elections, the G8 summit and the current struggles of the Trade Unions were held. Room for stalls was allocated in order to allow campaigning groups to distribute their propaganda. Within a few hours, they were joined by dozens of students and activists from outside UCL. Some anti-war activists, trade unionists and Hands Off Venezuela supporters went there to express their solidarity with the students. The political debates were followed by various bands that entertained the students.

The students put up banners with slogans such as, "Students are not products, teachers are not tools, Universities are not factories." Another banner read, "Students are revolting. Our college, our space".

In the morning the students headed for the demonstration and joined the thousands of protestors who met in London to demand the troops be brought home. □

## Workers Unite Yorkshire

We are very happy to publish here the text of a leaflet that has been distributed in West Yorkshire. The authors of the leaflet are a small but committed group of young socialists who are based in the area. These young comrades have come to the conclusion that Marxism is the best revolutionary programme through which workers and youth can break with capitalism and establish a new society.

### WORKERS UNITE

- Are you sick of war, inequality, racism, unemployment, sexism, homophobia, ignorance, hunger and oppression?
- Are you sick of the corporate dominated media?
- Are you sick of the steady decline in real wages, education and health spending?
- Are you sick of the way the environment is being destroyed in the name of profit?
- Are you sick of feeling like there is nothing you can do to change this?

You are not alone! There is something you can do! You can make a difference!

**Workers Unite** is an organisation linked with thousands of other organisations worldwide, dedicated to bringing an end to the oppression of all people.

### The Changing Mood

Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a spirit of optimism in the west. US Imperialism had "won" so to speak, and in the words of President George Bush, we could

"look forward to a New World Order of peace, freedom, full employment, and the crushing dominance of the US in world affairs and trade". Marxism was declared dead, and there was a massive campaign to discredit the struggle for socialism. This outlook, coupled with one of the most powerful economic booms in history, led many to believe in the capitalist system. But this outlook is defiantly beginning to change!

To look at the stock market, the economy is still healthy. But real wages are at only 80% of what they were just 15 years ago, and for the first time since the early 1990s, workers are seriously worried about losing their jobs. This is not "the good life" that the west was promised.

It is this fact that explains the constant and bitter attacks on all aspects of Marxism which have been delivered by every conceivable defender of the existing social order—from the Tory to the Fabians, from the Jesuit priest to the University professor. From the very spleen of these attacks, to the fact that they have to be kept up continuously despite the fact that every single one of the pundits in turn claims to have "finally disposed" of Marxism, the thinking members of the Labour Movement can deduce two facts. First, that the defenders of capitalism recognise in Marxism the most dangerous challenge to their system, and thereby also instantly confess the truth in it, despite all their attempts to "disprove" it. Second, that far from disappearing under the heap of abuse, quack "exposures", and flagrant distortions, the theories of Marx and Engels are steadily gaining ground, particularly within the active layers of the Labour Movement, as increasing numbers of workers, under the impact of the crisis of capitalism, strive to discover the real meaning of the forces that shape their lives, in order to be able to consciously influence and determine their own destiny. □

## Leon Trotsky's In defence of the October Revolution

by Kamo Torosyan

WRITTEN 15 years after the Russian Revolution, an event which profoundly shaken the world, the lecture (which has been turned into a booklet) was given to a group of students in Copenhagen. This shows the importance of spreading and encouraging revolutionary ideas amongst the youth. This also applies to the youth of Britain. There have been 'arguments' flung around that the youth in Britain are not open to revolutionary ideas, and are rather more concerned with consumerism today. For us youth this is both patronising and on a practical level, an incorrect conclusion. The events of the last period such as the huge participation of youth in the anti-globalisation events worldwide, the anti-war movement (both official and unofficial such as the student strikes nationwide) and the increasing participation in the tuition struggle (which were it not for the cowardly and inactive leadership of our students and NUS would be much bigger and more effective).

The booklet itself deals with the October Revolution and the major questions which have arisen from it since:

- Why and how did this revolution take place? More correctly, why did the proletarian revolution conquer in one of the most backward countries in Europe?
- What have been the results of the October revolution?
- Has the October Revolution stood the test?

The booklet gives an excellent introduction to the events surrounding the Russian Revolution, beginning with the events of the major terrorist plot in Russia, attempted by Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin's older brother and the first Russian Marxist grouping of 1883.

Later Trotsky explains the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917 and the task of the Marxist party in the period in between. With this explanation we see the characteristics of the Tsarist regime, followed by those of the bourgeoisie regime.

However, arguably the most interesting part comes under the section of the October revolution and whether revolution was justifiable, and by what means

can we say it was justifiable or successful. We then see the great historic achievements of the young Soviet state (along with the admission that not everything was yet in its perfect form)

This should be an inspiration to all who read this booklet, that capitalism has outlived itself, not only here in Britain, but globally, and that if we are to progress as a society, we must initiate a more advanced system of organizing society both politically and economically. Trotsky shows the fruits of the socialist system in the young USSR compared to the poor figures of the capitalist countries. These figures, however good they were at the time, would pale into insignificance next to the figures any Socialist Britain or European state would produce. Above the statistics we would also see a new, just society, based on the foundations of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.

The booklet which was given to students at the time shouldn't simply be used as an academic historical source, but as a calling for all youth and workers to build up and organize, to make our society end poverty, want and hunger. □

## The Struggle Postponed

by Kris Lawrie

WORKERS IN the public sector scored a partial victory last month in the struggle to defend their pensions. The government panicked at the eleventh hour and buckled in the face of a 24-hour strike of civil service and local government workers in the run-up to the general election. The Labour government was surprised by the groundswell in the mood for action that has stirred the depths and extended to even normally quite moderate layers. This was expressed by the massive votes in favour of action in all the unions taking part. There was obviously great enthusiasm for the action in spite of the weak lead that was given by many of the trade union leaders. The dispute has been effectively postponed by agreement till after the general election. If the strike had gone ahead it would have prepared the way for future action that could have buried the attacks on pensions for good.

Workers in local government and the civil service are at the sharp end of cuts in pensions at the moment. Both were to see the quality of their payout slashed and the minimum retirement age increased from 60 to 65. It is now off the agenda at least until after the election. This is a setback for the government's plans albeit a temporary one - the Blairites have shown, that while not particularly farsighted, they are determined to take on the unions so it is not the end yet.

### Panic

It is obvious that the Blair government completely misjudged the mood of anger that exists among public sector workers. The response of the workers to the call for a strike took them off-guard and caused panic. It

was reported that in a tense cabinet meeting Tony Blair told the ministers that they had 'mishandled relations with the unions and failed to communicate adequately on issues vital to the low paid, such as pensions....' Of course he was not reprimanding them on their treatment of the 'low paid' but rather on their jeopardising Labour's chances in the run-up to an election.

Former union man Alan Johnson, Work and Pensions Minister, was forced to issue a sheepish statement admitting that there has been no proper consultation and that the government had "been proceeding by diktat". Assurances have now been given to the local government and civil service unions that the changes will be postponed and will go to negotiation before they are implemented.

This will not be a solution - once the election is over the wolves will shed their sheep's clothing and they will be in no mood to negotiate. The government has plans to slash billions off the public sector pension bill and local government workers were to be the thin end of the wedge. It now looks as though they may be forced to put off any changes in their schemes till next year when similar changes are due for most of the rest of the public sector. This will put them in a weaker position; rather than try to pick the workers off one by one they could be presented with a strike of the entire public sector.

At the behest of their friends and masters in the city of London the government is busily attacking our pensions - Britain already spends less than half as much on pensions per head of population as her main competitors in Europe and the current reforms will

slash still further. One by one they are destroying the conditions that our forefathers fought for. Now they say that they cannot afford to pay decent pensions. Yet they can afford a war in Iraq - the oil companies and the banks are doing very nicely out of that - but they cannot afford to give us dignity and rest in retirement. During the 80s and 90s under Tory governments the public sector pension funds were taking contribution holidays - that's one of the reasons they are short now - this was a crisis created by the bosses but as usual they will try to make the workers pay for it.

One of the main reasons they say that the country can't afford it is because life expectancy has increased while the average retirement age has dropped. The public sector union UNISON has produced statistics that refute this claim - showing that in manual and clerical workers in local government there has been no significant rise in life expectancy in the past 30 years. But even if we accept this argument how do they explain that after all the development of the past 20 - 30 years they still cannot afford for pensions to stand still? Why are we the first generation since World War Two to face a decline in our pensions?

The government is carrying through the agenda of the bosses who are pushing for big cuts in all areas to boost their profits. They might have been thrown back some way but that is not the end of the struggle. The trade unions can play a crucial role in the coming struggles so it is vital that the leadership have the right approach. The government has just agreed to negotiations

- of course the unions must take them up on that offer but that does not mean that a compromise should be made. The unions must show the employers that we mean business - negotiations must be undertaken but if they fail, as is likely, the unions must be prepared to take action to defend pensions - including calling a national strike of all public sector workers.

The unions must be geared up for a fight. This should involve meetings and organisation to coordinate activities in all areas and to explain the issues and the reasons for the action. There must be no compromise - we want the same as we have now or better. We should be clear that this is a defensive struggle - any compromise is a defeat because we are giving something up. At the same time the only way to get a win out of the situation is to coordinate and take the struggle forwards.

### Take the fight to Blair

Ultimately this battle must be fought politically as well as industrially, which will mean taking the struggle to the Blairites in the Labour Party. Only a Labour government with socialist policies along with the trade unions can lead a struggle for socialist policies and give everyone dignity and rest in retirement. □

- Oppose any rise in retirement age. The right to retirement for all at 50.
- Defend occupational pensions - any shortfalls take them back from the bosses.
- For a full living state pension for all index linked to earnings.

## Equal value: Carlisle women health workers win massive payout

**NEXT MONTH:** special report on the Carlisle Equal Value claim. How it was done and how you can do it. Plus interviews with the victorious Carlisle workers.

LAST MONTH the extraordinary story of the Carlisle Equal Value claim, which has been over eight years in the making, unfolded before the eyes of no-doubt bemused NHS managers and executives. The tribunal results were known by the beginning of the month - all the cases were successful. People knew they were in for a big payout but still couldn't quite believe it. By the end of the month the true figures hit home and knocked everyone for six. Of the 1500 people whose case was being taken up each was to receive between £35,000 and £200,000.

The Equal Value claims were launched in 1997 in two hospitals which form the North Cumbria Acute NHS Trust. They compared low-paid health workers, predominantly women, with higher paid workers, mainly males. For example C grade nurses on approximately £17,000 were compared with Medical Technicians on about £27,000 - they were compared on the basis that their work was of equal value. The tribunal found that they had been discriminated against, and that they were entitled to a pay rise, backdated pay for six years prior to the claim (i.e. since 1991), compensation and interest. C grade nurses are the biggest winners from the claim their backdated pay will be around £200,000 each, though it will also vary according to other things like overtime etc. Other groups of workers in the same boat are healthcare assistants, clerical officers, sewing machine assistants and telephonists, each group will get a different amount of backdating and pay rise.

Early estimates for how much all this will cost the trust were set quite conservatively around £42.5 million but estimates of up to £300 million were talked about. It has become clear the real figure will be closer to the top end estimate. If these claims were replicated across the whole NHS they would swallow up all the current funding and more. What that means is that for years the forgotten, undervalued, women workers in the NHS have technically been funding the whole service through their unpaid labour.

It is time that these people were paid what they deserve. The law will never replace militant trade unionism, but as long as these laws exist the unions must take advantage of them to improve the members pay and conditions. The government is trying to play down this case - trying to suggest that this case is specific to Carlisle - it is not. All people are entitled to put a claim to a tribunal under the Equal Value laws and where a genuine grievance exists you have the right to the same payout as the Carlisle workers - Carlisle has set a precedent that the government does not like.

- The union must make the resources available to carry through these claims in all areas - if it can be done in Carlisle it can be done elsewhere!
- For Equal pay! Pay women workers what they deserve!

## STUC: UNITE AND FIGHT

by an STUC Delegate

THE SCOTTISH Trade Union Congress (STUC) gathers in Dundee this month facing an unprecedented wave of ferocious attacks on the movement - from a Labour Government! While Gordon Brown never tires of telling us we are living through "a record period of unmatched economic growth" for millions the reality is low pay, massive workplace stress, job insecurity, pension black holes, poverty and work till you drop! Bubbling beneath the apparently calm waters is a potential eruption of mammoth proportions as growing resentment among workers, stretched to the limit, approaches breaking point.

The looming dark cloud hanging over the heads of 100,000 civil service workers is just part of a concentrated campaign by the Blairites of further attacks on public services, jobs, wages, conditions and pensions. The main casualties of such attacks will be the elderly, the unemployed, the sick and the low paid. In other words the working class under severe attack in a period of boom. All things considered, despite the gloating of Brown, the attacks on the trade union movement, the pensions fiasco, underfunding of public services all expose a massive contradiction. If we are living in a period of unequalled economic growth then how can it be that we can no longer afford basic public services and a decent welfare state? The truth is that the capitalist system is in crisis. As *Socialist Appeal* has explained in great depth during the current epoch, the so-called boom is down to inflated property prices and consumer credit. The American economy is already slowing down and Britain's economy will follow in the coming period. Slump follows boom just as night follows day, clear signs are now emerging throughout the world that productive growth is slowing or stagnating, all the classic signs

point to a downturn in the near future.

At the TUC annual conference backroom deals were done to allow the Blairites off the hook over the invasion of Iraq. While conference unanimously condemned the war, the subject was allowed to go largely unaddressed, this was a monumental tactical error and gives an insight into what happens when the Government is allowed to influence conference business and agenda. As for the argument made by Ian McCartney MP, Blair's robotic mouthpiece, that cuttings public services is a requirement for fiscal prudence, delegates could have countered this nonsense by pointing to the billions of pounds being squandered flattening Iraq with bombs and murdering innocent Iraqis.

The point has been reached where there is now an urgent need to unite the struggles of all public sector workers so that industrial action has maximum impact. Preparations should be put in place for, at minimum, a one day strike across Britain. Bold, militant action would send a clear message to New Labour that they will not be allowed to treat the organised working class in this way.

The decaying and deviant system of capitalism has run its course. Throughout the world it is clear that we desperately need socialism to provide the answers to the evils which capitalism perpetually visits on the vast majority of the population. These problems cannot begin to be solved unless delegates are brave enough to raise the mighty banner of trade unionism and fight until we have a government who will represent the working class instead of pandering to big business and profiteering upstarts. Let the STUC in Dundee be the catalyst which fights for socialist policies to put an end to the misery and hardship endured by millions. □

## No room for profit in social housing

by Mick Brooks

THE GOVERNMENT is producing new plans to deal with what even they can see is a housing crisis. In 2001 175,000 houses were built, the lowest level since the Second World War. At least the government sixty years ago had the excuse that the Luftwaffe were impeding their efforts to improve the housing stock by bombing the homes we already had. At the same time we have seen a ballooning of house prices. Over the past ten years the prices of housing for sale has doubled.

Is that a boon for those already on the magic roundabout? That depends. If they regard buying a house as bricks and mortar, then they're really no better off. Their house may be 'worth' twice as much as ten years ago, but any house they care to move to will probably cost twice as much too. Of course people try to play the housing market, but that's a game where if someone wins somebody else loses. Most people can't just regard their house as a capital asset - not if they live in it. But over the past few years houses have 'performed' better than shares, which dipped alarmingly in 2001.

As a result more money poured into house buying. So the price of houses went up because more people were buying them; and more people were buying them because prices were going up. That is the classic definition of a house price bubble.

Now under capitalism higher prices and profits are supposed to stimulate house building. But, as we see, they don't. In fact the failure of private house building companies to respond to market signals by building more houses and so bringing prices down has caused the bubble in house prices. The losers are those who can't get their feet on the roundabout - first time buyers. Over the past few years house prices have risen by up to 25% a year, while earnings went up by an average 2-3%. Decent housing soared out of reach. The market is failing people who regard houses as a way of putting a roof over their heads. According to the Royal Bank of Scotland nine in ten first time buyers just can't afford a house, while in London

and the South East it's nineteen out of twenty.

One reason the market fails the people is this: building a house is fantastically lucrative for the firms that do it. They get a mark-up of 15-20%, way above the general rate of profit. But it can be even more profitable not to build houses. Here's how. Building firms can and do hoard land banks with planning permission approval on the land. If house prices are going up at 20% a year, land prices are likely to keep step with them. Builders don't pay tax on unused land: But if they try to build on 'brownfield' sites (that is land already built on in blighted urban areas) they get walloped for VAT! But we want them to build on areas that have been used previously - not the green belt. We want declining urban areas to be regenerated, but the tax regime procures the opposite result.

### A million homes

New Labour has come to the opposite conclusion to us. They hired an economist, Kate Barker, who says the way to bring down the rise in house prices is to let house building rip. Controls on building are the problem! John Prescott has come out with plans to build over a million homes in the South East over twenty years. Major new development areas are being designated, such as the Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes and the South Midlands, around Ashford and the London-Cambridge corridor. Predictably, Prescott is being accused of wanting to concrete over the countryside.

The critics have a point. They emphasise that there are 600,000 more homes than households in this country. Meanwhile 100,000 are homeless, mainly living in hostels. How is this possible? A nation divided into rich and poor will also have house-rich and house-poor. If someone is wealthy enough to afford two houses, they can still only live in one at a time. And if the other one's price is going up at 25% a year, why should they care if it sits empty? To them, it's a nest egg, not a

potential home for someone else.

The old private rented sector dominated by slum landlords has long been regarded as in secular decline, and a good thing too. But, particularly since stocks and shares took a hit in 2001, the smart money has been pouring in to 'buy to rent'. In addition wealthy people who have done well out of the property market have been 'rewarding' themselves with second homes in picturesque parts of the country. They pay less council tax than the locals because, they say, they're not there all the time. We say - tough! By driving up house prices, you are driving people out of areas where their families have lived for generations. The only jobs available in these places are skivvying for the incomers. If some people insist on having two houses, and are allowed to get away with it, then that's one reason why it's so hard to supply enough houses for everyone else.

As the reader has worked out the housing tax system has been rigged as a vast featherbed for the well-to-do. Why don't they pay Capital Gains Tax on their houses as they would on other capital assets? This sort of thing skews the overall flow of cash through the economy. And, of course, there is a connection between the huge sums of 'investment' pouring in to the housing market in search of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and the chronic lack of funds available to retool British industry.

Britain appears to be a nation obsessed with home ownership. Of course the notion of a 'property owning democracy' doesn't really give home owners a stake in the capitalist system, not if it's just a roof over your head. Miners historically have owned their own houses, but it didn't stop them taking militant action against the system in defence of their jobs. And since house prices are really a bubble, they may well burst. In that case millions will find themselves living in a 'negative equity owning democracy' - where their house is worth less than what they paid for it.

In any case we're not top of the home ownership league in Europe. In



Spain, Greece and Ireland about 80% own their own homes. In the UK it's 71%. Germany is the lowest with only 40%. But of course Germany has the best housing stock, much better than Greece. If there are adequate alternatives, people are not obsessed by the notion of ownership. They'll be just as happy to rent, as long as there's security of tenure.

There are other reasons why houses lie unused while people are homeless or sharing with in-laws because they can't get on the housing ladder. Apparently there are plenty of good affordable houses in Burnley. Let's all move to Burnley! The reason we don't, of course, is because it is a rundown town with declining industry and high unemployment. Capitalism is a system characterised by uneven development. This unevenness exists between regions as well as industries. Burnley was actually once part of the leading sector of world capitalism. No more. Only planning can revive regions abandoned by capitalism.

You can't just build houses in a field and hope the jobs will follow - which is what the government seems to be doing with the Thames Gateway and other programmes. Why should employers move to these areas? They need infrastructure. That's not just roads, sewerage systems and public transport. The reasons for the location of industry are subtle and complex. High tech industry has tended to settle around Cambridge because of the abundant supply of that scarce resource - science graduates. But Cambridge University has been there for centuries. How do you replicate such a business opportunity in a field in the South East?

Even if the jobs are there, you will probably end up on a soulless estate with no facilities where you have to go everywhere by car. Meanwhile the nearest town centre is boarded up and vandalised. This would not happen if they asked the people they expect to live in these schemes what they wanted. Housing is and must be part of social policy. People don't just want a house; they want a home with schools conveniently nearby, social facilities of all kinds, local health provision and a decent bus service, specially as they get older, entertainments, shops - and a job within reasonable travelling distance. This won't just happen. It has to be planned.

In the past the private rented sector

was the slum sector. After the Second World War local authorities built millions of decent, affordable council houses so as to move people out of the slums. Unfortunately the profit motive ensured that many cheap, nasty, insensitive and downright uninhabitable dwellings were added to the council stock. Many of these high rises and deck access dwellings soon became a modern generation of slums. That's capitalism for you.

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher decreed that council tenants could buy the house they lived in at a discount. If you'd been a tenant long enough, you could get a 45% discount. Now the council house building programme hadn't just been paid for by council tenants. It had been paid for by everyone. This policy represented a huge looting of public assets, a housing stock that would always be available for those millions of people the housing market failed.

Not surprisingly, when people see fivers lying on the street, they pick them up. The best council houses disappeared into the private sector. The remaining council estates became, in too many cases, isolated ghettos with a big proportion of people on benefits who couldn't afford to buy, and very often wouldn't want to buy the dumps they lived in anyway. So the social housing sector was throttled by the Tories. Housing Associations were half heartedly pushed in to the vacuum to provide the obvious need for affordable social housing.

### Withered on the vine

Social housing is subsidised housing, one way or the other. But what is the point of pouring in money when you know it will just drain away? Who is actually being subsidised? Not the poorest, who are completely dependent on social housing, that's for sure. Who would be stupid enough to build more social housing when it just vanishes into the private sector, where the people it is intended for can't afford it? As a result, new social house building has withered on the vine. Kate Barker reckons, "An extra 22,000 sub market houses are required per annum to fill the gap left by those right to buy properties that have moved previously into private ownership." It's time we put a tourniquet on this haemorrhage!

As a rule of thumb, you can get a

maximum mortgage for a house for up to five times your annual salary. That is stretching young people's incomes to the utmost. On top of that the financiers will want a £15,000 deposit up front. How are first time buyers supposed to stump that up without help from their family? At housing hotspots such as Reading house prices start at £200,000 making a home completely out of reach for nurses and other essential workers in such areas. So we are now hearing a lot about the importance of subsidised social housing for essential workers. This is a bit like the concerns of Victorian gentry, who made sure their mansions had servants' quarters. This was so the servants could get up, make up the fires and get the house warm and cosy before the master and mistress rose from their beds.

'Social' housing should not be a little treat handed down from above. It cannot be an add-on to a market-based system when the housing market is fundamentally flawed. Housing is a right, a basic requirement. Yet Prescott is almost begging the capitalists who build houses for profit to incorporate a few social houses on their schemes, so the people who move in will have nurses to attend to them if they fall ill and teachers when their kids go to school.

Kate Barker's proposal on social housing is to replace the right to buy with 'Homebuy'. This is a proposal for the better off living in social accommodation to part rent, part buy. They will not be able to remove the dwelling from the stock of social housing if they leave. And the massive discounts we so kindly hand out will disappear. The Tories want to extend the right to buy to Housing Association properties. The right to buy has destroyed 'social' (affordable) housing in the council house sector. So they want to extend the right to buy to the only sector with a residual duty to cater for those in greatest need.

Prescott's proposals involve releasing publicly owned lands to build 23,000 social houses - twice the current rate of building.

But this is still only scratching the surface of the problem. We say all housing should be social housing - in the sense that it's too important to be left to the market. The problem, to put it in a nutshell, is that housing is provided for profit. It should be provided for need. □

# Despite new leader, difficulties continue

by an SSP member, Glasgow

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Party (SSP) has emerged from months of internal squabbling to announce it will stand candidates in every Scottish seat in the coming Westminster general election. The party remains in serious crisis following the sacking of its best known political figure, Tommy Sheridan, as leader by the Executive Council followed by a non-sensical leadership contest which has compounded the damage done to the SSP's credibility in Scotland. This is being reflected in opinion polls which show SSP support stuck at 2%. If the polls are correct the party would lose all 6 of its MSP's at the next Holyrood elections.

Leaving aside the unceremonious dumping of Sheridan and the disastrous effect this had on the membership which has been covered at some lengths in previous *Socialist Appeal* articles, the pernicious antics of leading members in the last period has worsened the crisis.

Colin Fox MSP immediately indicated he would stand for the leadership and only much later did the SSP policy coordinator, Alan McCombes, throw his hat into the ring. Publicly both candidates maintained there was no significant political differences between them - so why have a contest at all?

In reality the SSP is split from top to bottom over the direction in which it was being led by McCombes. More importantly, Fox has never at any time, publicly challenged McCombes on his perspectives. For example, last year's electoral manifesto, drafted by McCombes for the European parliamentary election did not mention the word socialism once! In watering down the most basic socialist demands McCombes sought respectability. The gamble was the result of the ongoing financial mess and mounting debts (£200,000 and growing) and McCombes and the clique around him hoped for an SSP MEP on the list system. An MEP would have turned the financial situation around. But no such victory was forthcoming among a multitude of reformist and

nationalist candidates. Similarly, when the Queen opened the new Parliament building in Edinburgh last year (ten times over budget and 4 years late), the SSP issued its own "Declaration of Calton Hill" document, again consciously omitting the term socialism, instead promoting "an independent Scottish republic". Clearly the abandonment of Socialism will survive only to reinforce nationalism and support for the Scottish Nationalist Party.

In reality, the leaders of the SSP have abandoned the idea of fighting for socialism. Now they seek to build a "cross-class capital" with nationalism to "break apart the UK state", as McCombes says. Around 18 months ago, the SSP Executive Committee, at Alan McCombes instigation proposed a cross party "independence convention" attempting to involve the SNP, the Greens and themselves. This new "popular front" would seek to break apart the British State. However, SNP leader Salmon swiftly ridiculed the plan saying it would be "a talking shop of parties already in favour of Independence and will lead nowhere". True to form McCombes ignores he can simply bypass the class, any social base or desire for independence, the trade union movement (for whom a split would have serious consequences), the electorate in general and a large section of his own party! And this at a time when support for independence has crashed from 51% in 1999 to just 39% today, according to respected political commentator, Professor John Curtice from Strathclyde University.

Currently the SSP needs only to drop 1% in electoral support to lose 5 of their 6 MSP's. If the current polls are correct, they will lose them all! Like all populist political movements, the crisis, along with the inability to continually deliver ongoing success, will demoralise the membership and have a negative effect on the party's electoral support. The precarious financial situation means the donations from wages of the MSP's are vital to the SSP if it is to survive. The

capitulation to Scottish nationalism and the irrevocable split in the rank and file over the issue, together with the abysmal performance of the leading cabal over the past 6 months, mean the writing is on the wall for the SSP. Sooner or later it will all end in tears. As has been pointed out many times and as the whole history of the working class movement shows, nationalism - Scottish or otherwise - has no answer to the problems faced by the working class. Bourgeois nationalism is a political path and ideology implacably opposed to socialism because it is opposed to international working class struggle and solidarity and sets itself against basic socialist ideas. The SSP leaders have embraced petty bourgeois nationalism and now look for an answer to the miseries caused by capitalism... within capitalism!

To those members of the SSP who can see through the self-serving charade acted out by the SSP leadership at the expense of the honest rank and file, we offer a Marxist internationalist perspective. The period opening up before us will be the best for a generation to build the genuine ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. It is the method of Marxism which allows us to see clearly the beginnings of future developments - which will need to be tapped into correctly, otherwise we will lose another unique opportunity. A new epoch is opening up that will become ripe for the bold socialist programme based on the international struggle of the working class. Only on this road can the aspirations of workers in Scotland and elsewhere be satisfied. We must play your part in this. □

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# Worldwide Demonstrations Against the Imperialist Occupation of Iraq

by Ray Smith in London

FROM THE main squares of US cities to the streets of Istanbul, from London to Sydney, demonstrators came out in support of the Iraqi people and in rejection of the two year long imperialist occupation of Iraq.

Significantly, London held one of the biggest demonstrations, with a 100,000 strong crowd marching from Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, where various speakers addressed the protestors. Amongst them were Jeremy Dear (NUJ), Paul Mackney (NATFHE), Tony Benn and Rose Gentle, the mother of a Glasgow soldier killed in Iraq and activist in Military Families Against the War.

One of the most interesting comments was made by Jeremy Dear. He highlighted the struggle of the Venezuelan people against imperialism and for democracy. The Venezuelan Revolution must be a source of inspiration for the anti-war movement.

In numbers, the March 19 demonstration did not compare with the massive two million-strong demonstration that took place just before the war. This is understandable at this stage. The massive turnout two years ago expressed clear mass opposition to the war, but it did not stop the war from taking place. Many people on that demo must have thought that with such a huge turnout the government would be forced to listen. Of course it didn't. Many must have thought, "What else can we do to stop this war?"

As Marxists, we understand that to stop the capitalists from going to war you have to overthrow them. When it comes to their most direct and crucial material interests, capitalists are not moved simply by "public opinion". What is necessary is a wider movement, involving the working class.

This does not mean that such demonstrations have no use or meaning. Far from it! Big, successful demonstrations can boost the morale of labour movement and youth activists. They can show them that something in society is stirring.

The fact that these demonstrations were nowhere near as big as those of

two years ago is not the end of the story. What is interesting is who was on the demonstrations. Soldiers, soldiers' families and even veterans from the first war in Iraq in 1991, have been getting involved. Even the bourgeois media could not ignore this. AP quoted Ray Hewitt, 34, a veteran of the 1991 Gulf War: "I disagreed with [the war] to start with because I was suspicious of the weapons of mass destruction claims, I saw the Iraqi army in 1991 and we destroyed it." After the demo Ray contacted us at marxist.com to ask us to let our readers know how strongly he feels, "I joined the army to defend the weak, not to be a hired gun for US imperialism."

Statements like this show that there is growing discontent that is reaching new layers of society. One British soldier has already called for a mass refusal to serve in Iraq. Lance Corporal George Solomou from the Territorial Army recently echoed the discontent of a growing number of soldiers when he stated, "I am not going to Iraq, point-blank. I am a conscientious objector to this war... I would rather spend a year in prison than a minute in Iraq as part of an illegal war" (The Guardian, February 15, 2005).

## Strategy Needed

What is missing is a concrete strategy on the part of the leadership of the anti-war movement to link up the anti-war mood with other social and class issues. Opposition to the war is not an abstract question. It expresses opposition to the policies of the capitalist class. Recent internal disputes about the nature of the Iraqi resistance have also seriously undermined the Stop the War Coalition.

There were very few speakers at the rally who dared to mention the word imperialism.

The Stop the War Coalition has insisted on remaining a single-issue campaign that refuses to take on board new issues. This is also not positive for the movement.

The Stop the War Coalition leadership should broaden its outlook and



**"I joined the army to defend the weak, not to be a hired gun for US imperialism." Ray Hewitt, veteran of the first Gulf War, told us.**

start to take on board new anti-imperialist struggles that are catching the imagination of a growing layer of trade unionists and youth activists - like the Venezuelan and Cuban Revolutions or the struggles of the Bolivian people against the looting of their hydrocarbons by US companies. This would be the way to revive a movement that is passing through a lull, not just in Britain but also internationally.

In the US, protests took place in New York and San Francisco amongst other cities. In New York, up to 400 anti-war activists stopped traffic and marched carrying US flag-draped cardboard coffins to mark the second anniversary of the war in Iraq.

In Istanbul, more than 15,000 people marched in the Kadikoy neighbourhood to protest against the US led occupation in Iraq.

In Athens, Greece about 3,000 trade unionists, members of peace groups and students blocked the city centre for about three hours as they marched to the US Embassy. In Sweden, about 300 anti-war activists came together in Sergel Square in downtown Stockholm, chanting: "USA, out of Iraq!" Up to 5,000 people (local police said 3,000) came out in Barcelona behind a banner that read, "All troops out! No to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine."

As the imperialist forces become further bogged down in Iraq, and as the growing social problems at home assume more importance, we will see a movement that will combine opposition to imperialist war with opposition to the capitalists at home. □

# Hands Off Venezuela

## Successful *Hands off Venezuela* meeting after anti-war demo

THE LONDON Hands off Venezuela campaign held an excellent meeting at the Walkers of Whitehall pub just off Trafalgar Square after the anti-war demonstration on March 19, 2005. Hands off Venezuela had a stall at the demonstration that attracted a lot of attention, where DVDs, pamphlets and leaflets were distributed on the revolutionary events in Venezuela.

There was a bit of a problem with the original venue for the meeting. Even with the problems and the quick change of venue some 60 people turned up for the meeting.

Scandalously the meeting was disrupted just five minutes after it began by the Metropolitan Police, who entered the pub and demanded that the meeting be disbanded. The manager of the pub came downstairs to the meeting and informed us that we had to vacate the premises immediately because the police had arrived demanding that we leave. Some members of the Hands off Venezuela campaign asked if we could speak to the police and clarify the issue. The police clearly believed that we were holding a "subversive" meeting planning some sort of violent action. We wanted to clarify that we were holding a peaceful meeting, and that it was our democratic right to do so. When members of the campaign got upstairs to speak to the police, they discovered that they had already left. We explained to the manager of the pub that we were holding a peaceful meeting and that there would be no trouble. He then agreed to allow us to continue our meeting, but that we

would have to leave the pub by 7:00. It is an absolute scandal that our meeting was disrupted and truncated by the Metropolitan Police. This issue will be raised with MPs and a formal complaint will be made against the Metropolitan Police.

When the meeting got under way David Raby (Institute of Latin American Studies, Liverpool) spoke about the significance of the Venezuelan revolution in Latin America and around the world. He pointed out that many on the left had failed to recognise that there was a revolution taking place in Venezuela because it did not fit into any historic mould, but now that Chavez had spoken about the necessity of socialism as the way forward for the revolution, many had woken up to the reality of the Bolivarian movement. He explained that what was taking place in Venezuela was a genuine revolution because of the participation of the masses in the political and economic life of the country and because the masses had taken their own destinies into their hands. This was seen in the recall referendum in August of last year with the organisation of the Electoral Battle Units (UBEs) where one million people were mobilised for the election.

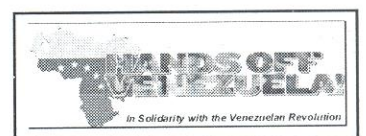
Ramon Samblas, Secretary of the British Hands off Venezuela Campaign then spoke on the achievements of the revolution in Venezuela. He explained the importance of the victory of the masses against the attempted coup in April 2002, and the victory over the bosses in the oil lockout of 2002/2003. He men-

tioned the importance of the new social programmes for literacy and healthcare, and explained the struggle of the peasants for land reform. He explained that perhaps one of the most important developments in the revolution was the nationalisation of Venepal under workers' control. He finished by saying that the Venezuelan revolution would have major implications for the whole world, and in particular for Cuba and that one of the most important things we could do in the UK would be to join the Hands off Venezuela campaign and take part in defending the Venezuelan revolution.

Heiko Khoo, a Hands off Venezuela activist who has recently been to Venezuela, spoke about the politicisation of the masses. He explained that while people in the UK and most other Western countries were talking about football, the masses in Venezuela were talking about politics. He explained that when walking down the street or when in bars and cafes one can hear people speaking about events in Venezuela and around the world, about the law, and about history. This was because the masses had been awakened to struggle and have understood the importance of these things to their daily lives. He explained that one good example of this was the field of mass communications, where everywhere there are local, independent radio and television stations being opened under the control of the masses and the communities they are based in. He pointed out that nearly everybody has potential access to the

media, including school children who are involved in making a weekly educational programme on state television! He contrasted this with the situation in the UK, where technology should allow nearly everyone access to the media, yet in London, there is only one station where people can have some limited access. Heiko then connected the struggle in Venezuela and the anti-war movement by explaining that all anti-imperialist struggles must be seen as part of the wider struggle against imperialism itself. He explained that it was vitally important to be involved in the anti-war movement and against imperialist aggression in Iraq, but that similar things were being planned for Venezuela.

After the speakers there was a lively debate and discussion. Many people commented on the rottenness of the Blair government and the need to reclaim the Labour Party. Others spoke on the hypocrisy of imperialism and the lies being spread around the globe about the situation in Iraq and Venezuela and the necessity of defeating imperialism and capitalism both at home and abroad. There were several contributions on the importance of Chavez's announcement on the necessity of socialism, saying that this was the only way forward, and was an inspiring step for the masses of Latin America and the whole world. □



[www.handsoffvenezuela.org](http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org)

## Hands Off Venezuela meetings in France

by Greg Oxley

COINCIDING WITH the anniversary of the February 27, 1989 uprising in Venezuela, La Riposte organised a very successful speaking tour in France with Jorge Martin of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign. The activities were organised together with the Bolivarian Circles of Paris and Toulouse and in Portes-lès-Valence by the local section of the Communist Party. The first meeting was in Paris on March 1st, and took place in the headquarters of the Communist Party of the 10th District, and was chaired by Daniel Yegres, president of the Paris Bolivarian Circle. The meeting room was completely packed with about 60 people present despite the very cold weather. This is the 3rd time meetings on the Bolivarian Revolution have been organised in these premises, so quite a lot of the people present were already acquainted with the events. Nevertheless, the recent turn in the Venezuelan revolution in which Chavez has openly raised the need to go beyond capitalism and move in the direction of socialism made it a particularly enthusiastic gathering. There were a number of comrades from the local Communist Party section in audience, including the branch secretary Jean-Pierre Leroux, who is an enthusiastic supporter of the campaign. The collection raised around 120 euro, and 40 copies of different pamphlets on the Venezuelan revolution produced by La Riposte were sold. The next meeting took place on Thursday, March 3rd at the University of Toulouse (Le Mirail) and was organised jointly with the local Bolivarian Circle, which was established after the previous meeting of the campaign there in

November. The meeting was chaired by Christophe Cambefort, a member of the Toulouse Bolivarian Circle and the secretary of the local Young Communist branch. More than 130 people filled the amphitheatre and again were very interested to hear about the latest developments in Venezuela, including the nationalisation of Venepal under workers' control, the speeding up of the land reform, the question of socialism raised by Chavez and the renewed campaign of Washington against the Bolivarian revolution.

Finally, the meeting organised in Portes-lès-Valence by the local Communist Party section and chaired by its secretary Pierre Trapier, was particularly interesting. More than 30 people turned up at the George Brassens municipal meeting hall, including a number of PCF members and CGT trade unionists. Just about all the people present signed up to get involved in the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign, and the idea of creating a local Bolivarian Circle was enthusiastically taken up. This work will be coordinated by Maxence Fay, a young member of the PCF in the area and supporter of La Riposte. In the course of the debate, a CGT member raised the question about the need to campaign within the trade union movement in France in order to gain recognition for the recently created UNT trade union confederation in Venezuela. We particularly would like to thank the PCF members in Portes-lès-Valence for the extremely warm, friendly and hospitable way in which they received us. □

## Support the CNV Workers in Venezuela

WORKERS OF the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas (National Manufacturer of Valves) Los Teques, Miranda State, in Venezuela, have not received their salaries for two years and three months. After having come into conflict with Andrés Sosa Pietri (the owner of the factory), one of the industrialists that was involved in the April 2002 coup, the factory was closed. After the nationalisation of Venepal, these workers, who had already occupied the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas for several months a year ago, have occupied it again and are demanding that it also be nationalised.

The Revolutionary Marxist Current in Los Teques has promoted a Support Committee for the workers of the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas and we are calling upon all unions nationally and internationally to send economic aid to the following account 0039-01-0100309746 Banco Industrial de Venezuela under the name of Jorge Paredes y Rosalio Castro for the Resistance Fund, and solidarity resolutions to his email [coopcnvb@hotmail.com](mailto:coopcnvb@hotmail.com), to the President [presidencia@venezuela.gov.ve](mailto:presidencia@venezuela.gov.ve), and the Ministry of Labour [dgtrabajo@mintra.gov.ve](mailto:dgtrabajo@mintra.gov.ve).

### MODEL RESOLUTION

Given the situation faced by the workers of the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas (CNV) in Los Teques (Miranda State), who have not received their salaries for two years and three months after having confronted the coup-involved industrialist Andrés Sosa Pietri, and considering that they are now occupying the factory and demanding its reopening under workers' control, we assert the following:

1. We entirely support the struggle of the workers of the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas and put ourselves at the disposal of the Action Committee to organize solidarity with their struggle in our workplaces, neighborhoods, etc
2. We call upon the Bolivarian Government to act on this as soon as possible and, as was done in the case of Venepal - which was also abandoned by its owner - to nationalise the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas.
3. We believe that the nationalisation under workers' control of the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas will not only allow to defend jobs but will also generate more employment in the area and ensure the production of valves for the State Oil Company PDVSA, given that the Constructora Nacional de Valvulas is the only enterprise that manufactures such valves in Venezuela.
4. While this is in process, we ask the authorities of the Work Ministry of Labour and the Presidency to subsidise the workers. At the same time we call upon all unions belonging to the UNT (National Union of Workers) and all social organizations that support the Bolivarian revolutionary process to organize active financial solidarity with this struggle and collect funds to help the brave resistance of these workers. □

## UK Budget 2005: Never Had It So Good?

by Michael Roberts

Way back in 1959, some of us older ones can just remember the slogan of the then Tory prime minister, Harold Macmillan, as he went into an election, that Britain has "never had it so good." The 1959 election took place after four to five years of steady economic growth and employment.

In his March budget, just a few weeks before New Labour announces a widely expected election for May, Chancellor Gordon Brown harked back to the same idea as the Conservative leader of the late 1950s. Only his claim has even more hubris. According to Gordon, the UK has enjoyed, under his stewardship, the longest period of sustained economic growth since 1701!

Far be it from me to deny that Gordon is right. I don't have the data before me to prove otherwise. But it does not say much for capitalism and the British variety of it that the longest period of economic growth in its history is just seven years.

Of course, Gordon's proud claim was mainly designed to whip up support for another victory for New Labour in the upcoming election. And perhaps even more important, it was the foundation for his bid to take over the leadership from Blair some time in the next couple of years. He may well succeed in getting both these objectives.

But much more important for the rest of us who have to live under New Labour's management of British capitalism is, first, do we really feel that we have never had it so good? And second, can we really expect this much-vaunted prosperity to last through the next parliament?

Are things really so good, Gordon? Each day we read of another horror story in the hard-pressed NHS, whether it is MRSA

deaths because of the lack of skilled cleaning staff, people left on trolleys in corridors because of the lack of beds, people waiting years for operations, or hospital trusts going bankrupt.

In education, education, education, we hear of schools with huge vacancies for teachers as more leave the profession than are recruited or of so-called privatised academy schools finishing bottom of the qualifications league despite various companies and business tycoons being fed huge dollops of taxpayers money to run them in any way they like - apparently one academy in the north-east is teaching the creationist view of the universe because it is owned and run by some Christian fundamentalist businessman!

And then we have transport. Thanks to New Labour and particularly to Gordon Brown and his obsession with the so-called Private Finance Initiative, we have a rail system that remains privatised and broken up into 'franchises' run by a bunch of private bus companies, cowboys and Richard Branson. And the annual cost of subsidising these people is now greater than the subsidies to British Rail and yet the punctuality and safety are near third-world levels.

### Pensions

And don't forget pensions. The state pension has been stripped to the bare minimum, despite some small improvements by Brown and now the government is slashing the benefits of public sector workers and making them work longer or until they drop to get it. Of course, private sector workers have already said goodbye to final salary schemes and any other benefits won over the last 50 years since Macmillan said that they had never had it so good.

And as the pages of this journal have explained in previous issues, all this takes place in a society where inequality of wealth has widened under Gordon Brown and New Labour, while the gap between the poorest income earners and the fat cats in the City with their bonuses has never been greater. No wonder British jails (many privatised) are bursting at their seams with a prison population second only to Turkey in Europe and where one-third of female prisoners try to injure or kill themselves through depression.

Okay, okay, Gordon might respond, but the capitalist economy is growing well and unemployment has never been so low. And these other things will get better.

The reality is that the apparent success of British capitalism is based on the fact that is hardly British. The UK economy is increasingly an economy of international finance capital and professional services. Manufacturing makes an ever smaller contribution, less than 15% towards annual national output and less than that towards employment. The UK is increasingly dependent on the success of the world's stock markets, banks, insurance businesses and property. It now runs an ever-widening trade deficit with the rest of the world for the goods that we need to consume or use in the services sector. The UK is what we call a rentier economy; dependent on the fees and rents it can get from countries that do actually make things.

Because of this, the success of UK capitalism depends on the success of world capitalism like it has never done before. So far, it (and Gordon) has been lucky. The US economy continues to motor on, based on its own property boom and cheap money pumped into the economy by the Federal

Reserve bank and by the Bush administration's big budget deficits.

But huge debts are building up both in the US and the UK. American and British households now have an average debt (mostly mortgages) equivalent to 120% of their annual income. So far, the cost of paying the interest and repayments on this debt has not been too severe because interest rates have been so low. But now interest rates are on the rise in the US as well as in the UK. The Fed is set to double interest rate levels over the next year in order to try and control rising inflation. That will hit the housing boom. Even more worrying has been the news that General Motors, once the flagship of US manufacturing superiority has run up such a large debt burden (\$11bn) that its creditors are now demanding early payment of their bills!

Rising interest rates in the US will mean the same in the UK. Even after successive rate hikes last year, the Bank of England is still planning to raise them further again after the election. And it is not just rising interest rates that the UK citizen faces after the May election. Taxes will go up again too. The Institute of Fiscal Studies reckons that an increase equivalent to 3p in the £ in personal taxes is necessary if the Gordon Brown is to keep to his 'golden rule' of budgeting. This states that the government should not borrow any money from the City of London unless it is for capital investment.

## A Taxing Problem

There is a problem now because the government's tax take is down while spending commitments are up. Tax revenues have been less than expected because British corporations are paying even less tax than under the Tories in the 1990s and other incentives to businesses have reduced their tax burden so much. At the same time, the average UK family has faced rising national insurance contributions and various other hikes in petrol duties, insurance premiums etc.

At the last election, New Labour pledged to step up public spending to solve the chronic state of public services. Under Gordon, after years of cutting back, public spending rose by over 4% a year over and above inflation. But the budget that Gordon presented last month revealed that the 'golden



**Much of the inward investment into UK capitalist businesses comes from the US, and of course, the US and UK financial markets are like two brothers. If big brother falls down, little brother will drop too.**

days' of public spending are over. From here, spending will be no faster than any growth in the economy.

Of course the government expects 3% annual growth from here. But most experts reckon that 2.5% would be good going. Why the difference? Well, the experts reckon there is one sector of the economy that does not want to pull its weight and that's big business. Despite huge tax cuts under New Labour, business is expected to invest hardly any more in the British economy. The likes of Shell, Glaxo, Vodafone, Tesco, etc continue to 'globalise' their business. In other words, they prefer to invest in cheaper wage-cost, lower tax countries like Eastern Europe, Latin America or Asia, than in the UK.

And what if the world should slow down? The US is key to British capitalism. The US economy is expected to grow by around 3.5% this year. That would be good news for the UK. But the risks of a sharply slower outcome are high.

America's huge trade deficit, now 6% of annual output, is getting wider. At the moment, this is being financed by Asian and OPEC oil exporting countries recycling their export dollars back into the US to buy US government bonds or companies. The trouble is that as soon as they buy them, their value falls as the dollar weakens. And each sale they make to the US is paid

in dollars that are worth less. So the Asian and oil exporters are being fleeced. How much longer will they put up with it, strong-armed as they are by the US government to go on buying American bonds?

Already, there is increasing talk among the officials of China, Japan and even Saudi Arabia that they may want to switch their surplus cash into euros, which are gaining in value, and away from dollars. If they start to do that in a big way, then the dollar will plummet and interest rates will rise even more and the US will slip into economic recession.

That will hurt the UK more than any other G7 economy. A sizeable proportion of its goods and services sold abroad go the US. Much of the inward investment into UK capitalist businesses comes from the US, and of course, the US and UK financial markets are like two brothers. If big brother falls down, little brother will drop too.

It may not happen this year, but it's on the cards. Then British capitalism's apparent stability that Gordon Brown wants to take the credit for will crumble away. Remember that Macmillan won the 1959 election and promptly the economy entered its first post-war recession in 1960-61, complete with spending cuts and rising unemployment. The Tory government fell in 1964. □

## Faith: A Dramatic Tribute to the Miners' Strike of 1984-85

by Phil Mitchinson

TWENTY YEARS ago last month, the heroic year long struggle of the British miners to defend their jobs and their communities came to an end. This was the most important battle fought by the British working class since the second world war. The whole period is rich in lessons for a new generation which has been starved of the truth. It was never enough for the ruling class to defeat the miners' struggle, they insist furthermore on trampling on its memory, lest it serve as an inspiration for a new generation.

The first casualty of war is always the truth, and the Miners' Strike was a war, a class war, with the workers on one side and on the other everything the ruling class could muster: the courts, police, and not least the lies and distortions of the media, exemplified by the distilled poison and venom poured into the outrageous Channel Four documentary broadcast last January to mark the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of the strike which began in March 1984

That tawdry rubbish was meant as a warning to a new generation of workers: the miners lost and so will you if you try to fight, you will be beaten - in both senses of the word.

However, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the end of the strike we were presented with a far superior television programme. The BBC drama *Faith* broadcast on Monday February 28 was like a breath of fresh air, an antidote to that earlier filth masquerading as an 'impartial documentary'.

For the first time in the national media the role of the state - its specially created national police force, its media, its secret services, and all the weapons employed by the ruling class to fight the miners - was vividly exposed. As Engels explained, in the last analysis the state can be reduced to armed bodies of men in defence of private property. However, it rarely is reduced to just that, particularly here in apparently sleepy Britain. Between 1984 and 1985 the masks of Democracy and Legality, behind which the ruling class usually hides, were stripped away, revealing the true, ugly face of the state apparatus, and its role in preserving the capitalist

system.

At the same time the filmmakers tell their story not with the left-wing bias now being claimed (without any sense of irony) by the Tories and their mouthpiece the *Daily Mail*, but with sympathy for the miners and an equal measure of antipathy for the brutal treatment they endured.

In the telling of history there is no such thing as the spurious objectivity the *Mail* and co. so hypocritically demand. There are indeed two sides to the history of this struggle, theirs and ours; the lies and fictions we had to endure during the struggle and for all the years since, and the truth of which we rarely see even a glimpse.

### Conditions Determine Consciousness

Thatcher infamously denounced the miners as 'the enemy within', horned devils fighting to overthrow the system. This is the image which has persisted in the mainstream media ever since. All miners were dangerous reds under the bed. What we find in *Faith* is the reality of ordinary working people and their families desperately struggling to defend their livelihoods and their communities. Through their experience of the lies of the press, the cruel activities of the police and the courts, many began to draw profound political conclusions. As Marx long ago explained conditions determine consciousness. The film's central character, Michele, is a living example of that process of politicisation through experience.

For the miners this was a struggle to defend jobs and communities. For the ruling class, however, this was about a lot more than pit closures. It was about their right to hire and fire, their right to close, sack, drive down wages and conditions without the troublesome interference of the trade unions.

Back in 1984 Britain had 170 collieries in production employing over 170,000 miners. Today there are just 9 working collieries employing about 3,000 miners and even those pits and jobs are constantly under threat. The coal industry, like so much of British manufacturing, has been decimated. In the case of coal how-

ever, this was more than just the short sightedness of the British capitalists chasing a quick profit through privatisation and speculation. The attack on the miners was political as well as economic.

When Thatcher's Tory Party came to office in 1979 they were still smarting from their humiliation at the hands of the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, which brought down Ted Heath's government. Although revenge coloured many aspects of the dispute it was not the fundamental cause of this orchestrated attack on the miners and their communities. For the ruling class confronting and defeating the miners - seen as the vanguard of militant trade unionism - was the vital prerequisite for an all out assault on the working class as a whole. Reforms aimed at placating the working class could no longer be afforded. There was no longer any room for consensus. The response of the ruling class to the decline of British capital was to attempt to restore profitability at the expense of the working class, just as they had done in 1926.

This was never solely an economic question, however. Billions of pounds was squandered over a period of decades on nuclear power and on oil demonstrating the anxiety felt by the ruling class at the dependence of the British economy on coal, and the power this concentrated in the hands of militant miners.

The Tories had been preparing for this fight since the mid 1970s. Having avoided a false start from a weaker position in 1981, by 1984 they felt ready and began closing pits on so-called 'economic' grounds. The National Union of Mineworkers warned that it was the Coal Board and the Tory government's intention to wreck the industry and destroy thousands of jobs. 'No, no,' Thatcher and the Coal Board promised, there were no such plans. Here the long litany of lies that characterised the bosses' propaganda throughout the strike, and ever since, began.

The NUM's website quotes an extract from a letter sent to miners and their families in 1984, 14 weeks into the strike, by the Chairman of the National Coal Board, Ian MacGregor.



"This is a strike which should never have happened. It is based on very serious misrepresentation and distortion of the facts at great financial cost. Miners have supported the strike for 14 weeks because your leaders have told you this. That the Coal Board is out to butcher the coal industry. That we plan to do away with 70,000 jobs. That we plan to close down around 86 pits. Leaving only 100 working collieries. If these things were true I would not blame miners for getting angry or for being deeply worried. But these things are absolutely untrue. I state that categorically and solemnly. You have been deliberately misled."

Indeed, in one sense he was telling the truth. They did not destroy 70,000 jobs but far more. Striking miners received letters like this regularly. Nevertheless this combination of threats to their jobs and pensions on the one hand, and bribes and inducements to return to work on the other, failed to break the resolve, the militancy and the solidarity of the miners which permeates every scene of the film *Faith*.

This was a powerful drama which cannot have failed to stir the emotions not only of those who remember the events of 1984-5 - not least those who participated in that immense struggle - but also a new generation who until now will have seen nothing but distortions and falsehoods about this most important period in the history of the struggle of the British working class.

The strike was a more prominent feature here than in the film *Billy Elliot*, with which this film shared a certain feel, perhaps partly due to the fact that they feature the same actor in a leading role as well as a setting. In *Faith* the strike was not merely background but dominated the drama from beginning to emotionally charged end.

In dramatic terms all the characters were thoughtfully drawn, and it is the miners and their families, particularly the newly politicised Michele - the film's central character - with whom the viewer can identify and sympathise. Michele is married to Gary, a striker, whose frustrations at the turmoil created in his life by his experiences of such a long struggle are realistically portrayed. Towards the end, before his death, he explains to his wife that he doesn't feel the same way as she does about the strike. She has become deeply involved and is drawing political conclusions. He on the other hand is on strike because of loyalty, out of *Faith*, giving meaning to the film's title.

Michele is drawn into activity through the local support group, and begins to address public meetings and rallies. Her sister, Linda, is married to a local policeman, Paul, who for many years has been Gary's best friend. However, as the strike progresses, and Paul begins to relish his role as the liaison with the Metropolitan police brought in to fight the miners on the picket lines, Paul's relationships with both his wife and his best friend begin to break down. Gary and Linda have an affair which further sours relations between the two men, resulting finally in a fight on a picket line towards the end of the strike which leads to Gary's tragic death.

Whilst the miners and their families are wholly likeable characters, the police officers fighting them on the picket lines, waving their overtime money in the miners' faces, sending in snatch squads to pick off individual strikers, particularly the Met officers - who advise their local liaison to remove his numbers from his lapels, so 'no-one can tell tales' - are wholly unlikeable. Yet the film does not resort to caricature even in the case of the villain of the piece, the slimy MI5 spy, who we are first introduced to as a 'Labour Party activist who works in social services.' We will return to him in a moment.

Thus not only do we get a glimpse of the truth about important events throughout the course of the strike, we get a sympathetic hearing for the miners cause, with heroes and villains on opposite sides of the barricades, and, for once, the heroes are on the miners' side.

### Orgreave

Remarkably, the battle of Orgreave is told from the miners side for the first time on prime time television. The Tories may well prattle on about there being two sides to the story, but - in relation to Orgreave especially - their side, the side reported by the BBC at the time, was pure fiction.

The events which took place at the Orgreave coking plant near Rotherham between the end of May and the middle of June 1984 led to the most violent confrontations witnessed by the British labour movement since the first world war.

NUM pickets assembled on one side of the plant while the police gathered in their thousands at the front, with mounted brigades lined up in a neighbouring field. Police with dogs, on horseback, and thousands more in riot gear surrounded the pickets. As soon as the lorries had entered the plant, the riot police launched their



offensive. The mounted divisions rode into the surrounded miners, followed by truncheon wielding foot police. This was a military operation. For all the beatings and arrests, the miners were bloodied but unbowed.

Then, on June 18, 5000 strikers turned up to be met this time by an even greater number of police and an unprecedented orgy of violence. The forces of 'law and order' ran riot that day, beating and bludgeoning the miners. From their experiences on the picket lines, many ordinary miners who before the strike had respect for the law and the police who upheld it, learned a bitter lesson from the end of a truncheon, that the law, the courts and the police are arms of the state for the defence of private property, that is, for the defence of the capitalist system.

The capitalist media portrayed Orgreave as the height of picket line violence... by the miners! It was at this moment that Thatcher infamously denounced the strikers as "the enemy within". In the Falklands she said they had fought the enemy without, and now they would fight the miners, this in other words was to be their 'industrial Falklands.'

Labour leader (now Lord) Kinnock was joined by Willis, the TUC leader - both desperate to prove their respectability - in condemning both sides 'even-handedly', reserving most of their venom for the pickets. Doctored film footage was shown on the BBC - which years later conceded that a 'mistake' had been made - demonstrating that the miners attacked first.

In *Faith's* version of events pickets returning by bus bloodied and torn are asked in the local club why they attacked the police since they would obviously retaliate. The miners are dumbfounded. That is not what happened. The mounted police waded in to the miners wielding their truncheons, and only then did the miners fight back to defend themselves. On the BBC news the footage had been shown 'in the wrong order'. One of the wives in the club comments "Moira Stuart does not lie" (referring to the presenter of

the BBC news programme). How much more persuasive is a lie when the teller can usually be expected to speak the truth. The serious press report the truth nine times out of ten to be all the more readily believed the tenth and crucial time. This lie would be used throughout the strike as evidence of miners' picket line violence. Here, in this film, for the first time, a glimpse of the true picture has been given.

Of course this does not make up for the lies and distortions that the BBC broadcast during the strike and ever since. We do not expect the BBC, nor the media in general, to support the struggles of the working class. Nor do we make any pointless appeals to 'objectivity'. The media is owned by the capitalists and serves their interests. It is self evident that the BBC is a central part of the establishment, in this sense the media is also a part of the state apparatus. At the same time, however, there are many independent minded film makers and journalists who attempt to expose the truth. Occasionally they manage to reach a wide audience with their ideas. Usually such an avenue is blocked to them.

The Tories' claim that this film was broadcast in support of the Labour Party as a general election draws near holds no water. In the first place it will not be that welcome to Blair and co. who have repeatedly praised the hated figure of Thatcher, and are certainly not advocates of militant trade unionism.

It is interesting, however, that such a film should be broadcast at a time when there is much discussion about the independence of the media and the reorganisation of the BBC by the Blair government. We have no illusions in the independence of the media in general nor the BBC in particular, however what little freedom of movement they have enjoyed is now being further curtailed by a government intent on establishing central control. This is not a whim of Blair and co, it is a process which has been developing for years and must be seen alongside the strengthening of the powers of the state, the centralisation of control away from parliament, and even the cabinet, to Number Ten. Nor are such changes confined to Britain. A similar process can be seen in the US and Europe. This represents preparations by the ruling class, refining the apparatus through which they rule, in readiness for the crises and events to come.

As well as raising many of the central issues of the strike, *Faith* also portrayed its

human side. The international solidarity expressed in the food parcels and toys sent to miners' children from workers around the world - images of which were movingly accompanied by Band Aid's Feed the World - demonstrated the level of international support that the miners enjoyed.

Instead of the usual portrayal of striking miners as red devils, here we see a picture of comradeship. In one of the most emotional scenes in the film, an older miner is made to return to work by local union officials, to prevent him losing his pension entitlement. Pickets turn their backs at the man's request, so that they do not witness his shame. He enters the deserted colliery with tears rolling down his cheeks, shared no doubt by many watching at home.

Similarly a man returning to work as a scab - because his wife is seriously ill - on an empty coach, surrounded by a massed police guard, is peacefully convinced to stay out. He leaves the coach and rejoins his comrades greeted by cheers and the promise of the local union official to look after him and his wife.

The Tories take great exception to the truth being revealed about events at Orgreave. They are foaming at the mouth too at the unsympathetic portrayal of Thatcher. Yet this is mild compared to the real feelings of miners and their families towards the Iron Lady. She is reviled and occupies a place next to her own hero Winston Churchill in the gallery of enemies of the working class. The praise heaped on her by Blair and co is a dreadful insult to the miners, their families and all the rest who suffered at the hands of her government.

## Role of the State

The Tories are angry about all these things, but what will worry the ruling class more is the portrayal of the police and the security services, especially the thugs with no numbers. Here the film pulls no punches. There is no attempt to engender sympathy with the police, no spurious impartiality.

The creation of a national police force to take on the miners, to prevent them fraternising with the local police is clearly exposed. Paul, the local policeman who grows to relish his role as liaison with 'the outsiders' (the Metropolitan Police, or special forces, soldiers in police uniform etc), is virtually ostracised by his own sergeant in the local pub as a 'scab'. He is warned 'we have to police this area when these



people have gone home'.

The use of surveillance cameras in a nearby house to spy on Michele, in dramatic terms, serves to expose the affair between Gary, the young miner at the heart of the film, and his wife's sister. At the same time these scenes demonstrate graphically the extent to which the state spied on miners and their families, raiding houses, tapping phones, etc. After all, this is not even a union leader being spied upon - bad enough in a so-called democracy, but hardly a surprise to anyone - this is a young woman involved in the marvellous work of the support groups like thousands of others around the country.

Yet this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to spying, which brings us back to the MI5 spy, the local 'activist who works in social services'. This character makes a point of establishing a close relationship with Michele, even promoting her to speak in meetings, ostensibly because he is attracted to her, although she rebuffs his advances. Whilst believably played the 'activist who works for the security services' is, from the outset, a rather suspicious character. When Michele confides in him that she is hiding £5000 of the union's funds (which could not be deposited in a bank because following the sequestration of the union the money would be seized by the state), his claim to have been asked to do the same thing by the union rings hollow. His role in spying on Michele, and turning over the union money that she was hiding to the authorities, leads to a confrontation between the two, in which the cynical bile he pours forth - "I used to be where you are now. I used to sell the papers and go on the demos... it's no use... I'd rather be with the people who have power" - contrasts sharply with the honesty, integrity and character of a young woman politicised by her involvement in the struggle. Here too we have an explanation of the film's title. The spy was a turncoat, a renegade, but Michele kept her faith, just as Gary

(and thousands of others) had done. This indomitable spirit is what frightens the ruling class. It should, in the end it will defeat them.

The film ends with Gary's return to the picket line. He has been agonising over what to do next. He feels frustrated and wants things to go back to normal. Just days before the strike ends, after a heart to heart discussion with his wife, his return to the picket line ends tragically. He is killed beneath the wheels of the scab bus.

Following a scene at the graveside of this fictional character, the names of those real people who died during the strike appear on the screen; followed by the fact that the Nottinghamshire police years later were forced to pay compensation to some 39 of those falsely arrested at Orgreave; and the admission by Dame Stella Rimington (the former head of MI5), that surveillance, phone tapping and agent provocateurs were used by the secret services against the miners and their struggle.

The ruling class threw everything they had into this fight. After enduring this for an entire year, at the start of 1985 there was a drift back to work. The miners and their families had fought valiantly for 12 whole months against everything the state could throw at them. Their solidarity and sacrifice remains an inspiration to this day. They could have done no more.

On March 3, 1985 delegates at a special conference voted by 98 - 91 to return to work. On March 5, the day the strike ended, there were still 27,000 miners out. All over the country miners returned to work, their families alongside them, behind colliery bands and banners, heads held high, proud of their tremendous struggle.

The strike had cost the ruling class over £5 billion. This fact alone tells us how important this battle was for capitalism. From their point of view this was money well spent. New anti-union legislation was pushed through. The counter-revolution on the shopfloor to drive down workers' wages and conditions across industry accelerated.

The miners had struggled against a constant barrage of propaganda, the siege of their communities and violent confrontations on the picket lines. Yet, ultimately, it was not any of these measures, nor even their sum total, which defeated the struggle, but the betrayal of the leaders of the Labour and trade union movement.

There will be many more struggles in the years ahead, some even more decisive than this, yet the miners' strike of

1984-85 will never be forgotten, nor should it be. In the end, the real value of a strike lies in the lessons the workers draw from it. The miners were defeated, but those who participated in this colossal school of the class struggle, have its lessons forever stamped on their consciousness.

The ruling class may desperately try to prevent these lessons from reaching a new generation, but they will have as little success as old King Canute when he tried to prevent the tide from coming in. As time goes on, memories fade and lessons are forgotten. It is therefore all the more necessary to remind ourselves of the real lessons of this titanic class battle. In war, and in the class struggle, it is better to fight and be defeated than to slink away from the struggle and surrender ignominiously. The miners fought with great heroism. They lost, but that was not their fault. In the crucial moment they were abandoned by the leaders of the TUC and Labour Party. The whole working class paid a heavy price for that betrayal. The role of leadership and the vital importance of building both a leadership and a programme worthy of the courage shown by the struggles of the working class - this is the fundamental lesson to be drawn from the experience of the 1984-85 strike.

### Faith in the Socialist Future

The consequences of the miners' defeat for the working class as a whole were profound. As the bosses launched attack after attack, the mood of workers became "if the miners can't win no-one can."

In the two decades since, we have endured Tory governments, privatisation, anti union laws, and Labour governments who have aped their Tory predecessors. The triumph of social partnership (class collaboration) at the tops of the unions and Blair at the top of the Labour Party, represented a real low point in the history of the British workers' movement.

The right wing always rests upon defeat and inactivity. They consolidated their grip on the leadership of the movement for a period as a result of the combined effects of defeat and the boom in the economy. Their triumph however, was only temporary. Eventually the working class recovers from defeat, and is forced by the conditions imposed upon them by capitalism to return to struggle once more.



Now things are beginning to change again. In time memories fade, but wounds heal too. The pain and demoralisation of defeat is eventually replaced by a new mood and a new generation with no choice but to stand up and fight against the incessant attack of the capitalist system.

Twenty years ago Britain was at war, (as the policeman Paul explains to his wife) but that war did not end in 1985. The miners' strike was just one battle in this war. The enemies of the working class may wish to bury the memory of the miners' strike so that the new generation will not learn anything from it. They will not succeed. We will defend the memory of this epic struggle and pass on its many great lessons to the new generation that is destined to continue the fight to a victorious conclusion. In that victory we have an unshakeable Faith, not of the mystical or religious kind, but one based on the sound science of Marxism.

Marxists must be the memory of the movement. We remember the lessons of the 1926 general strike, and we remember too the lessons of 1984-5. Blair and co. will soon assume their rightful positions in the dustbin of history where they will quickly be forgotten. They will not even merit a footnote whilst the Miners' Strike will always remain an important chapter in the history of the struggles of the British working class. As the philosopher Spinoza once explained our task is "neither to weep, nor laugh, but to understand." Faith helps us to do all three. In the end learning from all these struggles will be integral to the final victory of the working class. To the degree that we succeed in marrying the lessons of these struggles with the courage and determination shown by the miners, their families and communities in 1984-85, then we can have confidence, we can have faith in the socialist future of mankind. □

# New From Wellred



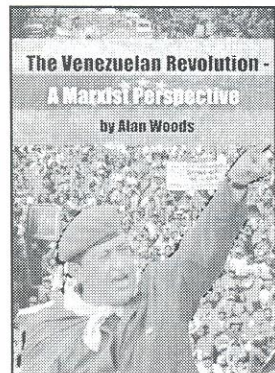
## Wellred launches new book on Ireland

Wellred Publications is proud to announce the publication of a new book by Alan Woods entitled "Ireland: Republicanism and Revolution". The book is a unique account of the struggle for Irish free-

dom from its origins in the revolutionary-democratic movement of Wolfe Tone to the present crisis within Republicanism.

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent ceasefire of the Provisional IRA after 30 years of armed struggle raises the question: after so much sacrifice and bloodshed, what has been achieved? Yet this question is being studiously avoided by the leaders of Sinn Féin, who have exchanged the armed struggle for a minister's portfolio. Though they publicly deny it, the unification of Ireland is off the agenda. The strategy, methods and tactics of non-socialist Republicanism have ended in complete disaster.

Marxists have always been in favour of a united Ireland,



## The Venezuelan Revolution A Marxist Perspective

This book by Alan Woods is essential reading for all those who want to understand what is happening in Venezuela today. But this is no mere description of events. It is a powerful Marxist analysis of the Venezuelan Revolution, its weaknesses and

strengths, its contradictions and unique characteristics. The book was not written with hindsight. Every chapter, beginning with the coup of April 2002, was written as the events themselves were unfolding, and trace the winding course of the revolution. They reflect the immediacy and lightening speed of events happening before our very eyes.

Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolution-

but, following in the footsteps of James Connolly, have also understood that this goal can only be achieved as part of the struggle for a socialist Ireland and a socialist Britain. This can only be brought about by class and revolutionary methods. The prior condition is to unite the working class in struggle and to return to the revolutionary traditions and programme of Larkin and Connolly - the programme of the Irish Workers' Republic.

The preface written by Gerry Ruddy, a leading member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, recommends the book to all Republicans and socialists as a positive contribution to today's debate over the future of Ireland.

"Serious revolutionaries, genuine Marxists, committed Republicans will read this book with thoughtful interest. They will give it the respect it deserves... We firmly believe that if this book by Alan Woods begins a process by which Republicans and socialists return to Connolly and the best ideas of the Irish and international left, then the future struggle for socialism in Ireland will be greatly advanced."

□ Readers of *Socialist Appeal* are being given the offer of purchasing these books at a special introductory price (add 20% p&p):

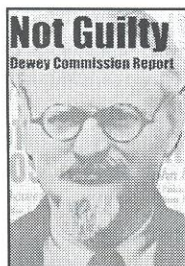
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ary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say that Venezuela is now the key to the international situation. It therefore follows that the class-conscious workers and youth in Britain and elsewhere must closely follow the events in Venezuela and assist the revolution with every means possible.

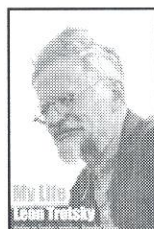
Alan Woods has been a consistent champion of the Venezuelan Revolution since its inception. He helped initiate the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign. He has held personal discussions with President Hugo Chávez, which are recounted in this book.

The author concludes that the Venezuelan Revolution cannot stop half-way and holds up the perspective of a victorious socialist transformation. Only by expropriating the power of the oligarchy can it succeed and spread to the rest of the Continent. This is no foreign idea, but in essence is the vision of Simon Bolivar in the context of the 21st century, of the creation of a democratic Socialist Federation of Latin America.



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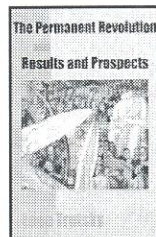


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# Zanon Workers Under Attack - International Solidarity Needed

THE WORKERS of Zanon are once again under attack by the government and business interests in Argentina who are trying to evict the workers of the ceramics factory in the southern province of Neuquen. Since 2001, the employees have successfully managed the factory, setting an example for the working-class worldwide and demonstrating that workers can produce and manage their workplace better on their own than with a boss or owner.

In the past four years, workers have battled against eviction threats and intimidation, but in the past weeks the government and security forces representing the factory's old ownership have used tactics of torture and kidnapping - reminiscent of Argentina's military dictatorship (1976-1983) in which 30,000 people, mostly activists, were disappeared in the dirty war.

Zanon's workers and supporters are mobilizing to stand up to the death threats and attacks - to tell the government that workers and their families will not give in to these threats. More than ever the workers, with the support of the community and other sectors acting in solidarity, are proving their strength and willingness to defend this successful case of self-management.

Some 5,000 protestors participated in a march to Neuquen's government house on March 8 to denounce cases of death threats, physical attacks and torture. Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires, social movements and human rights groups organized another protest outside of the provincial government's offices in the city centre.

On Friday, March 4 a group of four individuals (three men and a woman) kidnapped the wife of an employee at Zanon. They forced her into a green Ford Falcon, a car model that security operatives used to kidnap activists during the dictatorship, sending a chilling reminder of the dirty war. They tortured her and cut her face, hands, arms and breasts. They gave details of how they carefully followed her and have detailed information about her movements.

Again, on Saturday, the woman was attacked by the same group of people in her home. Police were guarding the

front of the house, but the group snuck in through the back door.

While the men were cutting her they threatened to kill Raul Godoy, Zanon worker and General Secretary of the Ceramists' Union; Mariano Pedrero, the union's lawyer; and another worker, Alejandro López. At a press conference held at Hotel Bauen (a hotel managed by its workers) in the city centre of Buenos Aires, López reported that the woman's attackers threatened: "We want you to go home with your face and hands dripping with blood, and tell Godoy and López what is going to happen to them, that this has to do with Zanon. That union is going to run with blood."

In the last few weeks, Godoy and Lopez have received telephone death threats and messages. Delegates from the subway's wildcat union, which recently won a 44% wage hike after weeklong strikes, have also received phone threats. The government is targeting Zanon because it is at the vanguard of the many recovered factories and enterprises that are proving that occupying and taking over production is a solution for workers to defend their jobs.

They have also said that it is not a coincidence that delegates from the subway are also receiving threats. Subway workers set an example and showed that it is possible for the working class to fight for wage hikes, even though the Argentinean average monthly salary has stagnated at 600 pesos (200 dollars) for over a decade.

"This government is holding political prisoners, women in Caletta Oliva and around the nation. We are not going to wait for a death inside Zanon to go out into the streets," said Elisa, a worker from Brukman, a suit factory in Buenos Aires run by a workers' cooperative. Subway workers who have been organizing wildcat strikes have expressed their commitment to defend Zanon. "Zanon has helped to coordinate workers in struggle. We are ready to do whatever is necessary to defend the struggle of the compañeros in Neuquen," said Arturo, a subway delegate.

The workers from Zanon have

declared that they are going to intensify the battle against these threats and defend their factory. However, they are making it clear they are not on the defensive. "We have a lot of enemies to fight against - the bosses, the bureaucratic unions, provincial government and the national government. We are not going to accept that this national government, which says it respects human rights, can turn a blind eye to our reports of death threats and a case of a compañera who was mutilated," said Lopez.

The workers of Zanon have self-organized and managed the factory, gradually increasing production without any government subsidies. They have hired over 200 new workers. They have defended the factory against five eviction orders along with compañeros from unemployed workers organizations and other social movements. "They aren't going to win by threatening us and telling us that we can't run a factory."

- In defence of Zanon and all worker occupied factories!
- If they mess with one of us, they mess with all of us!
- Permanent expropriation of all factories and companies producing under workers' control!
- For the release of all political prisoners!

## SEND PROTEST FAXES AND EMAILS TO:

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  - Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Legislatura de la Provincia de Neuquén: email: [comisiones@legislaturaneuquen.gov.ar](mailto:comisiones@legislaturaneuquen.gov.ar)
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Visit the web site of the Zanon workers: [www.obrerosdezanon.org](http://www.obrerosdezanon.org)

# The War in Iraq - Two years on

by Rob Lyon

AS WE pass the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the US and British led occupation of the country is falling apart. Some 1500 US soldiers have been killed in the conflict, along with tens of thousands of Iraqis. Everything that the Bush administration said about the war has been exposed as a lie. Far from improving the lives of Iraqis, things are even worse than under the hated regime of Saddam Hussein. Millions have no water or electricity, there is mass unemployment and wages are not being paid. There are plenty of reports of human rights abuse such as arbitrary arrests and torture at the hands of the Iraqi security forces and police - not to mention the torture being handed out by the forces of imperialism. Nothing in the war has gone the way the imperialists hoped it would.

The US and UK first claimed that the war was to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction, which of course Iraq had acquired from the US and UK in the first place. Most of these had been destroyed after the first Gulf War in the 1990s. When no weapons could be found, Iraq was suddenly being occupied in order to fight the "war on terror" and "spread peace and democracy throughout the Middle East". With the instability in Israel/Palestine, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and now Lebanon, all the plans of the imperialists are back-firing. Far from spreading peace and democracy, the war in Iraq has only spread instability and discontent.

The imperialist forces also believed that the occupation of Iraq would pay for itself through Iraq's massive oil resources. At this point, next to no oil has left Iraq, and the costs of the war are spi-

ralling out of control. The imperialists have not been able to achieve any of their goals in invading Iraq and are being dragged further and further into the mess with no real idea of how to extricate themselves. As we explained all along - no matter what the imperialists did in Iraq, it would be wrong and only cause them further problems. If they stayed, they would be faced with a growing insurgency, the threat of being sucked into a prolonged conflict and even a civil war, and would face troop casualties which would only increase the opposition to the war at home. If they left, they would lose any chance of gaining what they had hoped for by invading in the first place, and the new power in Iraq, whoever it may be, would be hostile to US imperialism.

Opposition to the occupation, both in Iraq and at home, forced the US and the UK to attempt to create the veneer of legitimacy and democracy as a cover for the brutal occupation. Hence they attempted to establish an Iraqi government, which would legitimise the occupation. Six weeks after the "election" of this "government", what has happened?

## Political power stems from the barrel of a gun

The new Iraqi government met for the first time on March 16, six weeks after it had been elected. Many people were beginning to wonder what had happened to it. After the euphoria about the "successful" election, bolstered by the western bourgeois media, the new Iraqi government had seemed to disappear. Political disputes between the rival blocs prevented the assembly from meeting, and

again yesterday prevented it from forming a government.

The first session of the assembly was greeted by a series of explosions across Baghdad and mortar fire that rocked the building, rattled windows, and caused the lights to flicker. The meeting was opened, there were a few speeches, some debate, and then the session was closed so that the rival groups could return to their backroom deal making on the formation of the new government. Having failed to find agreement on the formation of a government, there was little for them to do other than accept their oath to office. It is not even clear when they will meet again.

The western media spoke of the ceremonial nature of this first session of the assembly, however it would be more accurate to say that the entire government is ceremonial. Everything from the election, to the formation of the government and the writing of the constitution will simply be a smokescreen, behind which lies the true power in Iraq - US imperialism.

The Iraqi government was elected by a very small percentage of the population and lacks the support of the Sunni population. The Americans are playing with fire, intriguing with the various national groups, and stirring up national antagonisms and playing them off one another. The Kurds are demanding the return of Kirkuk, the once Kurdish-majority oil-rich town of the north excluded from the Kurdish autonomous region. The Shia majority are reluctant to even speak about the issue, using delaying tactics and waiting for the drafting of a new constitution.

Another problem is the Kurdish militia, the pesh-merga, which the Kurds would like to keep as their regional security force within the framework of the national army. Again the Shias are reluctant - deferring to the law again which says that groups with ethnic or political loyalties must be split up and absorbed into the regular force. The risk is that the Kurds may be pushed into breaking away if they do not get what they want, causing massive instability and conflict throughout the entire region - dragging Turkey and Iran into the quagmire.



Everything is being delayed until the writing of the constitution - the classic delaying tactics of the imperialists and capitalists. All national and religious groups in Iraq have many hopes in their newfound "freedom" and look to the constitution to guarantee these hopes and aspirations. If these are not met, particularly in the case of the Sunnis and the Kurds, there is the danger that the Iraqi constitution could be the spark that ignites a wider conflict.

In the end, the Iraqi government will be a government without power, entirely dependent on the occupation forces. How could it be otherwise? Iraq is in flames. The insurgency is growing and becoming stronger and more daring with every passing day. With no security forces and no police force with which to defend itself and enforce its rule and laws, the Iraqi government will be entirely dependent on the only other major armed force in the country - the US and British armies. Political power stems from the barrel of a gun, or as Engels explained, the state is in essence armed bodies of men, and this means that state power will remain in US hands - not Iraqi hands.

### The not-so-willing coalition

The US and UK will, of course, not find it easy to maintain their rule in Iraq. The only thing that the imperialists are facing in Iraq - sooner or later - is defeat. The human and monetary costs of the war continue to grow, and has caused the unravelling of the so-called

"coalition of the willing".

The scramble by coalition members to get out of Iraq has taken the multinational force from about 300,000 soldiers in early in 2003 to 172,750 and falling. The coalition has been reduced from 38 to 24, more than a dozen members of the coalition have pulled out and some 150,000 US troops shoulder the bulk of the responsibility and suffer most of the casualties.

Spain's Socialist Party government pulled its troops out of Iraq after last year's March 11 train bombing. The population of Spain was overwhelmingly against the war, and the pressure of the masses forced Zapatero to deliver on his promise and withdraw troops. Now the Netherlands, Poland and Ukraine have announced that they will be withdrawing their troops later this year.

Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced this past Tuesday (March 15) that Italy would be withdrawing its troops in September. "I've spoken to [Tony] Blair about this," he explained on live television. "We've got to construct a precise exit strategy. Public opinion expects it, and we shall be talking about it soon" (The Guardian; March 16, 2005). He added that, "A progressive reduction of the presence of our soldiers will start from September," and that the withdrawal would take place "in agreement with our allies".

Comically, the Bush and Blair governments claimed to have had no idea about Italy's plans for withdrawal. Both US and British officials explained that Berlusconi's comments were "an aspira-

tion" or "political guess-work".

Aside from the UK, Italy was the only remaining European country to have a sizeable force in Iraq with about 3000 troops based around Nasariyah. They had the fourth largest contingent next to the US, UK, and South Korea. The anti-war mood in Italy has been very strong from the beginning. Some of the largest anti-war demonstrations took place there. With the kidnapping of journalists and death of some 20 soldiers, the opposition to the war was strengthened. The

straw that broke the camel's back was the killing this month of an Italian agent, who was protecting freed hostages, by US forces. There is now massive pressure on the Italian government, one of the staunchest US allies in the occupation, to withdraw its troops. Local elections in Italy will be held next month, and Berlusconi is aware that the continued presence of Italian troops in Iraq could contribute to his downfall.

Berlusconi has now bowed to pressure from Blair and Bush, both of whom said that no troop withdrawal from Iraq has been ordered and that the Italian leader would not act unilaterally. Berlusconi did as he was told and the next day explained that what he said about the withdrawal was a "wish". He added that, "If it isn't possible, it isn't possible. The disengagement must be co-ordinated with the allies". Berlusconi is clearly caught in the middle between the pressure of the overwhelming majority of the population to withdraw the troops (and his desire to win the next round of elections), and the needs of imperialism. Either way he is doomed. If the troops stay, he will lose the elections. If the troops leave, he will lose the election anyway (as there are also many pressing domestic issues that the masses are angry about), but relations with the US and the UK would definitely become strained, and Italian capitalism is already preparing to jettison Berlusconi and replace him with the so-called Centre-Left coalition headed by Prodi.

An official spokesman for Blair said the following:

"What's become clear is that Mr Berlusconi's remarks have been misinterpreted. The future of the multi-national force will depend on the capability of the Iraqi forces, and any withdrawal would be as a consequence of that increasing capability. The timing would be determined by the increase in Iraqi-ization. What Mr Berlusconi actually said is that withdrawal would depend on the ability of the Iraqi Government to provide adequate security structures. That's precisely the same position as we have."

In many ways Blair is in the same position as Berlusconi. Blair faces a general election later this year, and there is intense hostility to the continued presence of British forces in Iraq. Seeing Spain, and now Italy forced to withdraw their troops due to pressure from the masses, Blair was terrified of the prospect of an Italian withdrawal. This would isolate Blair, and give momentum to the anti-war mood, and anti-war movement in the UK. The withdrawal of Polish, Dutch, Ukrainian, and Italian troops, who are based mainly in the south, will mean that more British troops will be called upon to fill the void. This "mission creep" is something that Blair has already specifically said would not happen after the transfer of the Black Watch just before Christmas. The situation in Iraq is one factor that will eventually lead to Blair's downfall.

## Iraqi Security Forces

Now that Italy is seriously considering withdrawing its troops before the UN mandate expires in December of this year, many questions are being asked about an exact withdrawal date of occupation forces. Many are wondering if there is even an exit strategy for the imperialists. Clearly there is not. Both Bush and Blair have said, "Our troops will come home when Iraq is capable of defending herself" (The Guardian, March 16). A recent US Congress report has confirmed what everybody already knows - Iraqi security forces are far from ready to take over. The Iraqi security force is numerically weak,

ill equipped and ill trained, and suffers massive morale problems. Some Iraqi security troops refused to aid in the assault on Fallujah, while others have even defected to the insurgency. The imperialist exit strategy depends on the training of these forces to take over security. Cynically Blair calls this "Iraqi-ization", using the same language the US used in Vietnam with the "Vietnam-ization" of security forces - and we all know where this led the US. It would seem the lessons of the past have not been learned by the imperialists. The Iraqi police and security forces, having been branded collaborators, are targets for the insurgency, and seem unable and in some cases unwilling to fight the insurgency in the name of the new government. In these conditions, there is no way that the new Iraqi government would last 2 weeks without the presence of US troops.

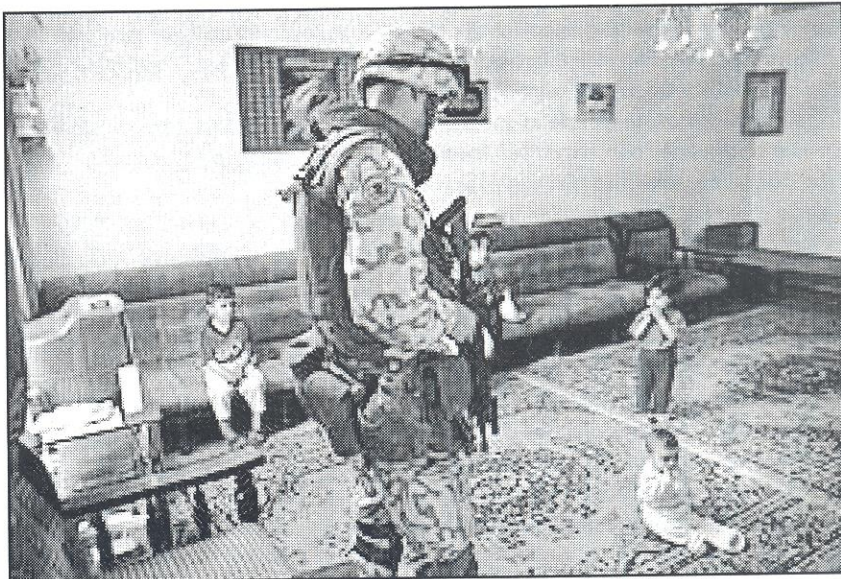
## The Costs of War

As disgusting as the hypocrisy, legal wrangling, political manoeuvring and military brutality of the imperialists and the new "government" are, it is in the field of economics that the war perhaps becomes the most grotesque. The US military budget will top \$400 billion this year. The US has spent some \$210 billion on the war in Iraq (costofwar.org). On four occasions now the Bush administration has asked Congress for additional

spending for the war. The first was a request for \$54.4 billion for the Iraq War in April 2003; the second was for \$70.6 billion in November 2003, and the third \$21.5 billion for 2005. The Administration made a fourth request in February of this year for \$81.9 billion of which \$61 billion is earmarked for the war in Iraq. It is estimated that the war in Iraq costs the US some \$4 billion to \$6 billion dollars a month (some even say this is a conservative estimate)- this is a colossal drain on the US economy.

The UK spends approximately £30 billion a year on its military budget, and the war in Iraq has cost some £6 billion pounds. With no exit strategy in sight these figures will continue to skyrocket. Yet in both countries we are told there is no money for social programmes. In the UK we have seen the destruction of the NHS, top up fees for students, rising taxation, eroding infrastructure and now attacks on pensions. Schools in Britain are told to budget a mere 37 pence for a child's school meal, when even 50 pence could provide a much healthier diet than the present reprocessed muck they feed our children. So while local councils seek desperately where to find the extra 13 pence per child, billions of pounds are spent on killing thousands of Iraqis!

In the US we have seen tax cuts for the rich and there is now an all out assault planned on Social Security - in effect the end to the





gains of the past and the New Deal. We are told there is no money for social spending and everything is about cuts, cuts, and still more cuts. Still, billions are spent on death and destruction in Iraq and elsewhere. This is money that could be used on health care, social security, housing, education, job creation, etc. The Bush and Blair administrations are clearly pursuing a policy of "guns over butter".

The imperialists in the US and UK were embarrassed into giving some \$400 million dollars in relief to the victims of the Asian tsunami disaster, yet they have no problem spending hundreds of billions of dollars on arms. Military expenditure and the arms trade form the largest spending in the world at over \$950 billion. Total world military expenditure is more than the estimated amount of money necessary for providing the world's population with decent basic services, access to clean water, and decent education. This would cost around \$80 billion a year for 10 years. In the 2005 US budget, the total request for discretionary spending was \$818 billion, 51% of which was for military expenditure (\$399 billion). In comparison, the next two largest items on the budget were health and education, receiving \$51 billion and \$60 billion respectively (facts on military budgets taken from Global Issues - [www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/Spending.asp](http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/Spending.asp)). This massive discrepancy clearly shows where the priorities of ruling class lie.

And where has this massive military expenditure taken the US and the UK military forces? They are both stretched to the limit. In a recent US Socialist Appeal article, John Peterson reports:

### Colossus With Feet Of Clay

"Before the invasion [of Iraq], it was estimated that just 30,000-40,000 troops would be required for the occupation, freeing up nearly 100,000 troops for other operations - Syria, Iran, and even Saudi Arabia were likely targets. But the reality has been far different. Two years after the relatively quick invasion and GW's "Mission Accomplished" photo-op, roughly 150,000 U.S. troops remain stationed in Iraq with no end in sight ...

"As a result, the U.S. military is stretched to the limit. The U.S. now has some 446,000 active troops at more



than 725 acknowledged (and any number of secret) bases in at least 38 countries around the world. They have a formal "military presence" in no less than 153 countries, on every continent except Antarctica, and nearly a dozen heavily-armed fleets on all the oceans. Yet far from having the capability to fight two major wars at once, U.S. imperialism has exposed itself as a "colossus with feet of clay", unable to cope with the occupation of a small, impoverished country weakened by a decade of crippling sanctions. It's one thing to smash a regular army with the help of the most technologically advanced killing machines in the world. It's another matter altogether to hold down an entire population that doesn't want you there."

([www.socialistappeal.org/antiwar/two\\_years\\_of\\_the\\_war\\_in\\_iraq.html](http://www.socialistappeal.org/antiwar/two_years_of_the_war_in_iraq.html))

And what of the UK's military, which has been plagued by a lack of equipment, including right-foot boots, personal armour, and in some cases even food? A report from British lawmakers earlier this week says that, "The U.K. armed forces may be left unprepared for future battles". It goes on to say "Across the services, equipment is being withdrawn over the next two to three years but new equipment in the same areas will not enter operational service until after 2010," the report said. "Some of the replacement equipment has

already encountered difficulties."

Under these conditions, the lack of equipment, the fact that many *soldiers* face extended deployment or even open-ended deployment in Iraq, and the daily attacks on coalition forces, the morale of the occupying troops is very low. Many are reservists and simply want to go home. They, probably better than anyone, know that they are not in Iraq for the reasons they were told. Rather than being seen as liberators, the imperialist troops are seen as hated foreign occupiers. The USA is the most powerful country on earth - but not invincible. They lost in Vietnam to a ragged, but determined guerrilla force, and they face certain defeat in Iraq.

However, the real defeat will come at home. A recent poll Washington Post/ABC News poll (March 16) shows that the mood is changing in the US. 53 percent said the war was not worth fighting, 57 percent said they disapprove of the president's handling of Iraq, and 70 percent said the number of U.S. casualties, including more than 1,500 deaths, is an unacceptable price. President Bush's early wartime job approval rating reached 77 percent, while it is 50 percent now. His approval, specifically on Iraq, was 75 percent as the main fighting ended, but has reached a career low of 39 percent now.

This must eventually lead to a new and massive wave of protests against the war. With the cuts in social expenditure and the skyrocketing costs of the war, many people can see this disgusting contradiction, and will want to do something about it.

Pressure from home and mounting casualties in Iraq will force the imperialists to withdraw in defeat. They may cling on for several months, or even years, but the fate of the imperialist occupation is sealed. When they leave they will leave behind a trail of death and destruction and profound instability, but also something else - a hatred of imperialism that will lead to new uprisings and anti-imperialist struggles throughout the whole of the Middle East. The struggle against the war at home in the US and the UK, linked to the growing battle against counter-reforms and deep social cuts, i.e. capitalism itself, will give strength to the struggle against capitalism and imperialism world wide. □

## Up to one million demonstrate against US imperialism in Lebanon

by Yossi Schwartz in  
Jerusalem and Fred Weston

LAST MONTH hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, most of them Shia Muslims, marched through Beirut in support of Syria. The demonstration was organized by the Lebanese Shi'ite movement, Hizbollah, together with another 17 smaller pro-Syrian groups.

The slogans on the placards sent out a clear message: "Thank you to Assad's Syria", "No to the USA", "All our disasters are from the USA", "No to Israel", "No to 1559" (referring to the UN resolution calling on Syria to withdraw its troops), "No to foreign interference" and so on.

Some Hizbollah officials and a pro-Syrian security source estimated the demonstration as being one million strong, with people waving the flag of Lebanon. Initial news reports estimated the crowd as being half a million as the demonstration was gathering. Later reports quoted the figure of one million. Whichever figure is true, it was an impressive display of strength, in a country of barely four million inhabitants!

People flooded into Riad al-Solh Square in central Beirut, dwarfing last week's (Tuesday) protests demanding that Syrian troops quit Lebanon. The largest pro-American demonstration was estimated by the pro-imperialist press as 60,000 mainly Maronite Christians.

What is striking is the news coverage in the west. When a relatively small movement erupted last week against Syria and in favour of the US, our TV screens were showing constant footage of the demonstrations. Yesterday's anti-American and pro-Syrian demonstration, at least ten times bigger than last week's, has not received the same coverage. This shows the bias of the press in the west, which couldn't believe their luck when they saw what could be presented as a pro-US demonstration in a Middle East country.

It is worth noticing the difference between the coverage of the capitalist mass media in Israel and the news coming from the Arab states. Haaretz

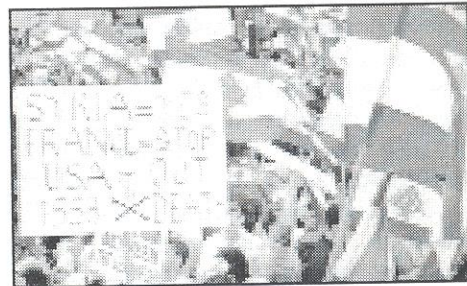
the main bourgeois newspaper in Israel, in its English language edition, did not mention one word about the large demonstration. It just continued to report on the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. But the same newspaper in its Hebrew edition has tried to minimize the extent of the gathering, while at the same time emphasising the threat to Israel, none of which appears in Al Jazeera or other sources. Of course, the truth is always concrete. How could anyone believe that while the US forces are oppressing the Iraqi people, while the US continues to back Israel in its oppression of the Palestinian people, that in Lebanon the masses would all come out in favour of the Americans? With what courage does Bush order the Syrians to leave Lebanon, when American troops are on Iraqi soil? The hypocrisy of American imperialism is clear to anyone who has eyes to see.

### Hizbollah

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah the leader of Hizbollah, spoke at the demonstration saying, "We thank Syria and its army," and then went on to "apologise to Syria for the ingratitude" of the Lebanese opposition. Thus we see how this leader has swung one way and then the other. He seemed to be leaning towards the pro-US opposition, but now that the pro-Syrian groups have shown how strong they are, he has swung back to an anti-US position.

Yesterday he called for "a government of national unity and reconciliation" and rejected UN demands for the Syrians to leave and for his own militia to disarm. Today in fact the president of Lebanon, Emile Lahoud, will start talks for the formation of a new government, after the pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami resigned.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah went on to remind the US that in its last intervention in Lebanon American troops were forced to leave Beirut in 1984, a few months after a bomber killed 241 marines at their base in the capital. "We have defeated them in the past and if they come again we will defeat them



again," he said, drawing chants of "Death to America" from the sea of demonstrators.

He added that his organization has no problem with a Syrian pullout under the 1989 Ta'if Accord that ended Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war, after 150,000 people were killed in the conflict. But he opposes UN resolution 1559 calling for a Syrian withdrawal and militia disarmament. "Those who insist on [Resolution] 1559, we say to them your insistence is a revolt against the Ta'if Accord ... and that means a revolt against national consensus," he added.

The immediate response of Bush was to announce that, "Either Syria goes, or it will be further isolated," while speaking at the National Defense University. He went on to stress that the US and its allies were determined in their plans to pose Syria with this alternative.

Bush believes he can bully and cajole the peoples of the Middle East into doing his bidding. But things aren't so simple. The masses in the Middle East can see very clearly what US imperialism, and its allies, are doing in the region. They are rightfully seen as the oppressors. They back reactionary regimes throughout the region. They have come into conflict with Syria recently over the ambiguous position the Syrian regime adopted during the war against Iraq. Bush has not forgiven the Syrian regime for this. As in other cases, not one ounce of opposition, to US policy, however mild, is tolerated. However, whereas the Syrian regime has buckled under pressure, and has begun a gradual pullout of its troops, the masses in the Lebanon think otherwise.

Instead of getting what it wants in Lebanon, US imperialism is simply stoking the fires of ethnic conflict. Clearly

the danger of renewed civil war is growing once again in Lebanon due to the intervention of the imperialists.

Around 16,000 Syrian troops have been based mainly east of Beirut and in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. This deployment of Syrian troops was in fact legitimised by the Arab League during Lebanon's civil war and through the Ta'if Accord and accepted by US imperialism! The Syrian regime had so far justified its continued deployment of troops in the country by citing the Lebanese government's requests and the failure of the Lebanese Government to implement all of the constitutional reforms established by the Ta'if Accord.

However, Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 changed the balance of forces within the country. That is why some Lebanese groups started raising the demand for the withdrawal of Syrian troops as well.

What accelerated the process was the voting of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in October of last year. This resolution calls on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon and end its "interference" in Lebanese affairs. This further emboldened those Lebanese groups opposed to Syria's presence in Lebanon, and explains also the eruption of last week's protests.

## Divide and Rule

Yesterday's demonstration, as we have seen quite clearly, shows that the spectre of another civil war has not disappeared. Lebanon is a patchwork of different ethnic and religious groups. It was artificially created by the imperialists in the past, putting together diverse groupings with the old and tested method of "Divide and Rule".

It is a small country of just under 4 million people. And although the overwhelming majority of the population is made up of Arabs (95%), these are divided along religious lines. The Muslims constitute almost 60% of the population, but these are divided into Shi'ites, Sunnis, Druzes, Isma'ilites and Alawites. The Christians constitute 39%, but these are also divided into several groupings, Maronite Catholics, Melkite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Roman Catholics and Protestants. In fact seventeen religious sects are officially recognised.

Imperialism has always used the Christian minority as a tool to enforce

its policies and defend its interests within Lebanon. Thus we have seen de facto alliances of some of the Christian groups with Israel. Israel's withdrawal weakened the position of these groups.

For a period Lebanon had managed to establish some form of relative stability after the 1975-91 civil war. The civil war was an absolute disaster for the people of Lebanon. The economic infrastructure of the country was seriously damaged. Its national output was halved. There was a flight of capital from what used to be considered the "Switzerland" of the Middle East.

Since 1991 Lebanon had made somewhat of a recovery. In 1993 the government launched its so-called "Horizon 2000" plan. By 1994 GDP had started to recover, with quite significant growth up until around 1997. Since then growth has slowed down again with a recession in 2000.

A lot of the growth depended on reconstruction, and this was financed by heavy indebtedness. By 2003 this debt stood at 185.1% of GDP. It was in order to cut this growing national debt, that the Hariri government introduced an economic austerity programme. This involved increased taxation and plans for major privatisation of public resources. As in so many other countries, this policy provoked greater social polarization. Now close to 30% of the population lives below the poverty line.

This pressure on the ordinary Lebanese workers and poor explains the growing militancy of Lebanese workers. This was confirmed by last May's general strike. The strike was against the increase in the price of fuel. Participation was massive and the state responded with brutal repression. This general strike was preceded by another in October 2003.

Unfortunately, as we have explained in the above quoted articles, the Communists and the Left in general have not been able to place themselves at the head of the movement. This is due to their policy of two-stageism, i.e. looking always for a so-called "progressive" wing of the ruling class to support. The Syrian regime has also played an important role in holding back the Syrian left.

It is in this context that we understand the development of the Hizbollah movement, an Islamic fundamentalist movement. This movement, apart from its religious and political ideology, is also involved in a lot of welfare work,

especially among the poorer layers of society. Thus it has roots among the population. It combines this with anti-imperialist rhetoric, and is therefore seen as a point of reference by many of the population. Yesterday's demonstration shows that its support is far stronger than the imperialists could have hoped.

The lack of a genuine working class alternative, however poses the real danger of ethnic conflict once more. One small incident yesterday serves to underline this. Some of the demonstrators started shouting slogans against the Druze opposition leader, Walid Jumblatt. Hizbollah stewards stopped this, as they had been given orders that the demonstration had to have a "national" character. However, according to local news sources, at least 75% of those present on the demonstration had been mobilised by Hizbollah.

That explains Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah's call for a government of national unity. However, the road forward is not a national unity government with the bourgeois and the religious parties but the struggle for a workers' government as part of the social transformation of the entire Middle East.

## Genuine Anti-Imperialist Struggle

This demonstration of one million indicates that massive subterranean forces are being unleashed in Lebanon. The masses are clearly against imperialism. These forces can be harnessed for a genuine anti-imperialist struggle. If the movement is led by the workers' parties and is mobilised around the demands of the working class, such as jobs for all, decent wages, good housing, etc., then the mass of the Lebanese workers and poor can be united in one struggle against the common enemy, the Lebanese bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers.

If this does not happen, then in the long run, Lebanon could be facing a nightmare scenario. Another civil war would be disastrous for all ordinary working people in Lebanon. In the vacuum that is forming in Lebanon, Islamic fundamentalism can hijack the mass movement as it did in Iran in the past, with the reactionary priests taking power and crushing the revolutionary wave and killing many left wing activists while forcing others into exile.

Now is the time to raise the red flag not the nationalist and the green flags in Lebanon. □

## **The 24th Congress of The Struggle**

### **Pakistan Marxists on the eve of a breakthrough**

THE 24TH congress of The Struggle - the Pakistan Marxist Tendency - opened on Wednesday 23rd March in the impressive Alhamra Hall number one in central Lahore. This is the biggest meeting hall in the city with a capacity of one thousand, but more than 1,100 comrades crowded the hall, at times sitting in the aisles or standing at the back.

They came from every province, region and area of the country: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Pashtoonkhawa, and Kashmir. Every major city was represented: Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Hyderabad, Dadu, Peshawar, Malakund, Banno, Dera Ismail Khan, Sadiqabad, Rahimyarkhan, Bhawalpur, Faisalabad, Kasur, Jampur, Rawlakot, Muzaffarabad, and many other cities, towns and villages.

The podium was impressively decorated with huge portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and slogans in Urdu. On the main banner were written the celebrated words of The Communist Manifesto in English: "We have nothing to lose but our chains, and a world to win."

There were international visitors from Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sri Lanka. Messages of solidarity were received from Marxists in Britain, Italy, USA, Canada, Cuba, Argentina, Nigeria, France, Macedonia, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, and Russia. Tragically, an important delegation of 27 comrades from India was denied permission to enter the country by the Pakistan authorities. This shows the



complete hypocrisy of the so-called policy of conciliation allegedly being pursued by the ruling classes of India and Pakistan. As a sign of solidarity with their Indian comrades, the entire Congress came to its feet at the opening session and gave a standing ovation to the absent Indian delegation.

The organisation of the Congress was outstanding, down to the smallest detail. Every delegate received credentials. Four different types of credential had been printed by the organising committee, each with a hammer and sickle and a different design: delegate, visitor, member and security. However, credentials were only issued to those who had paid the Congress fees, which, by Pakistani standards, were quite substantial. It is important to emphasise this point, because other NGO and "Left" conferences are usually free, with travelling and lodging thrown in as a perk. By contrast, the delegates and visitors at this Congress spent colossal amounts of money

paying for their own transportation, travelling across vast distances. They not only paid their transportation and Congress fees, but also donated generously to the collection. This is a genuinely Bolshevik organisation, which is establishing new and revolutionary traditions.

Particularly impressive was the arrangement for food. To arrange meals for over a thousand people for two days in a country like Pakistan requires a very high degree of organisation. A special team of cooks was hired, together with all the necessities utensils, cooking pots, tents and transport. Everything went off without the slightest complication, and the food was delicious!

The delegates and visitors were a mixture of young and old, but mainly young. Particularly impressive was the delegation from the troubled province of Kashmir. Nearly 200 came from this one region alone. The comrades of The Struggle now enjoy a commanding position in the youth and student

organisations of Kashmir, where they have defeated the nationalist and fundamentalist tendencies.

There were 120 from Sindh; 150 from Rawalpindi-Wah; 150 from Multan-Janpur; 150 from Central Punjab, 80 from the Pashtoonkhawa, 80 from Southern Punjab, 65 from Balochistan. The remainder came from Lahore.

There were workers and students, trade union leaders, peasant activists, writers and artists, PPP militants and two members of the National Assembly, Zulfiqar Ali Gondal and Manzoor Ahmed. Javed Shaheen, the well-known poet and writer composed a poem especially for the occasion, which he read from the rostrum. Also present was the celebrated columnist and writer, Munoo Bhai, whose articles in the Jang are read daily by millions of people, as well as the veteran PPP left activist and governor of Central Punjab, Nazar Mohammad Gondal. The district governor from Malakand in Pashtoonkhawa, Ghufan Ahad Malik also attended.

Among the trade unionists were the leaders of the Peoples Labour Bureau from Karachi Steel, the biggest steel plant in Pakistan, leaders of the railway workers, Pakistan International Airways (PIA), Postal workers, Clerical Workers, the Water and Power Authority (WAPDA), gas workers, bank workers, transport workers, fertilizer factories, local government workers, oil workers, hospital workers and teachers.

In recent months The Struggle and the Pakistan Trade Union Defence

Trade Union Defence Campaign (PTUDC) have played an important role in launching a nationwide campaign against the reactionary labour laws of the Musharaff government. Many of those present have been active in this agitation. In the trade union commission held during the congress there were no fewer than 200 trade union leaders.

From Sindh alone there was Sheikh Majeed, the general secretary of the PIA and of the Karachi Peoples Labour Bureau; Naveed Aftab, vice general secretary of Pakistan Steel; Pershoutam, president of Sindh hospital workers; Manzoor Razi, president of the railway workers union; Sarwar Abbasi, general secretary of the fertilizer workers union, and many others. Ali Mardan president of the oil and gas workers union and Shaukat Satti of the telecommunications workers union.

There were also important trade union leaders from Punjab, Pashtoonkhawa and Balochistan, including Nusrat Ali Toor, general secretary of APCA, the very militant All-Pakistan Clerics Association.

Among youth organisations represented were activists and leaders from the JKNSF (Jammu Kashmir National Students Federation); JKPSF (Jammu Kashmir Peoples Student Federation); JKSLF (Jammu Kashmir Students Liberation Front), PSF (Peoples Student Federation), DSF (Democratic Students Federation); PSF (Pushtoon Students Federation) BSO (Baloch Student Organization), PYO (Peoples Youth Organization), and The Youth Campaign Against Unemployment (BNT) and YFIS (Youth for International Socialism).

The packed agenda was made up of the following subjects: World Perspectives, led off by Alan Woods; Pakistan Perspectives, led by



Manzoor Ahmed; commissions on youth work, trade union work and women's work. The following day opened with a session on Venezuela and permanent revolution, led off by Ana Munoz; organisation report led off by Lal Khan; regional reports, departmental reports. A resolution in solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution was passed unanimously. The international report and closing remarks were made by Alan Woods. The congress ended by singing the Internationale in Urdu and English.

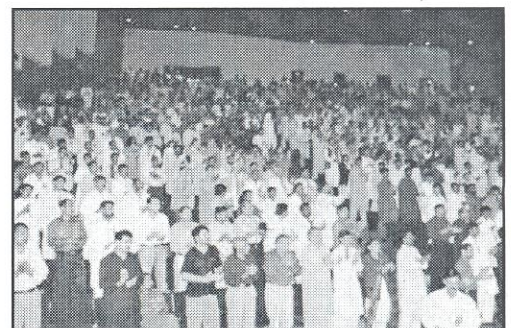
The mood of the congress throughout was electrifying. The young delegates were particularly enthusiastic. One Pushtoon comrade commented: "This congress has given me a new lease of life." A large number of visitors joined The Struggle during the congress. The very high level of morale and enthusiasm was strikingly revealed by the collection, which raised an astonishing figure of more than half a million rupees - 5,000 pounds (around \$9,000). For a country in which the monthly wage is 3,000 rupees - 30 pounds (\$50), this was an

outstanding achievement.

This congress marks a real turning point in the development of the Pakistan Marxist organisation. The Struggle has now firmly established itself as the largest and most important organisation on the left in Pakistan. No Communist Party in the whole history of Pakistan has ever achieved a comparable position. The Struggle has no real competitors on the left, and it is now poised to become a real mass force. It already has thousands of supporters at all levels of Pakistan society: workers, youth, women, and the best of the progressive intelligentsia. It has a powerful national trade union base, and a significant voice in Parliament. It is now a focal point for militant workers and youth throughout the country.

The congress of The Struggle is an extraordinary achievement, particularly when one considers the difficulties of conducting revolutionary work under conditions of extreme

reaction. Although the Musharaff dictatorship is extremely weak and unstable, it still imposes severe restrictions on the trade unions, students organisations and all progressive activity. In addition, Pakistani society is still plagued by the evils of fundamentalism, obscurantism and backwardness. It is also under the yoke of American imperialism, which is perpetuating the criminal occupation of Afghanistan. Under these tremendous difficulties, the comrades of The Struggle have achieved astonishing victories in the last period. However, the days of the Musharaff dictatorship are numbered, the discontent of the masses is growing by the day and explosive events lie ahead. The Pakistani Marxists are poised on the eve of a tremendous breakthrough. □



## Build for socialism

AT THE moment hoardings around the country are all covered by posters from the Tory party saying: 'are you thinking what we are thinking?' Well, I should certainly hope not since what they are really saying is 'are you racist, hate foreigners, gypsies, single parents, anyone in fact?... then vote for us, because we hate them too (but keep it quiet!)' Up and down the country the Tories are hard at work stirring it up, appealing to the lowest common denominator in a shoddy attempt to win votes. Of course they save the worst for when they are safely behind closed doors or away from prying eyes but it doesn't require much imagination to guess what that is - no coded references to multiculturalism there. So the Tories deserve to be thrashed at the next election and the best way to do that is for Labour to offer a clear alternative ...which they are not doing under Blair at present.

Were New Labour plc to ask the same Tory question: 'Are you thinking what we are thinking?' the answer from many would be the same - No! The only way forward for Labour is to adopt socialist policies and a fighting socialist leadership to go with it. This is what Socialist Appeal and its supporters are fighting for. It is time to reclaim the party and this time claim it for socialism. But this will not be an easy task. We are having to operate on very limited funds and require the ongoing support of all our readers and sellers. This is why we ask for donations, however small, towards our fighting

fund - so called because it enables us to fight the class enemy wherever it may lurk.

We have received a number of donations both small and large over the last period. At one end we had a £300 donation from Jim Brookshaw made via the internet at the wellred book-site. £50 has also come from Harry in Brighton and £25 from Paco. At the other end of the scale we have had a rush of small amounts given, including £30 from Glasgow readers, £20 from Coatbridge readers, £23 from Newcastle readers, £23 from West London readers and £10 from Lynne in Hackney. These amounts may not seem big but add them all together and they start to have an effect - just like the working class, as individuals we are small but together we can change society. Think about it.

You can donate in a number of ways. Using your credit card by going to [www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com), by cheque or postal order (made payable to Socialist Appeal) sent to us at PO Box 50525, London, E14 6WG, by cash at any post office using transcash into Girobank account 56 252 8601, or by making a regular standing order - write or e-mail us on that one and we will send you the form needed. Loads of options but all with one single effect - that of enabling to keep up the fight for socialist ideas so that when we ask 'Are you thinking what we are thinking?', the answer come back, 'Yes, comrade!' ☐

**Steve Jones**


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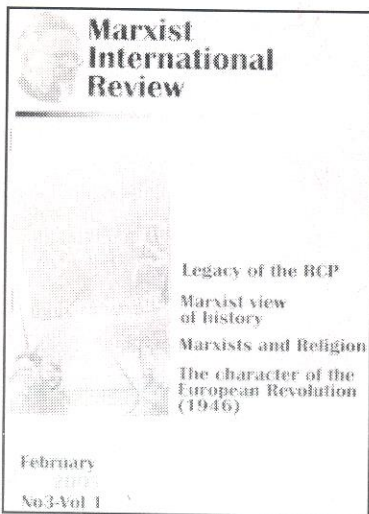
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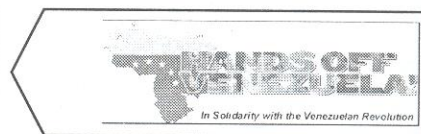
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✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

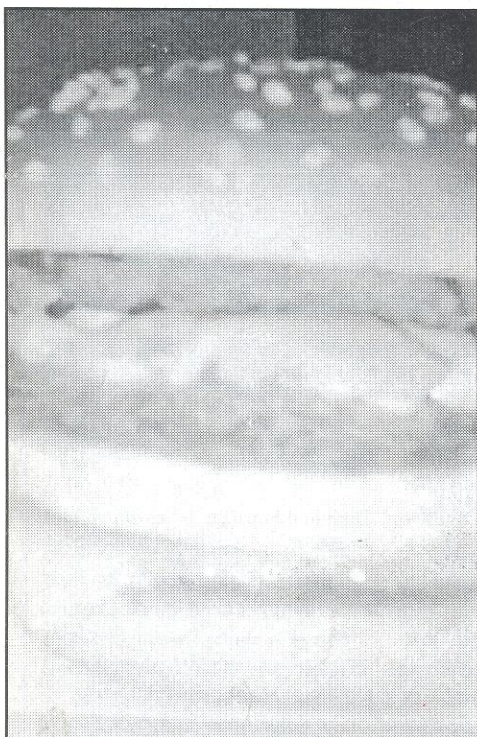
✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises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

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

# Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

## Boot Privateers out of Public Services



JAMIE OLIVER'S television programme has highlighted the scandal of junk food school meals being served up to our children by private firms. In some cases a pathetic 37p is being spent per child. This is the inevitable consequence of allowing profit hungry privateers anywhere near our children's health and education.

Private firms now provide 40 percent of school dinners, while catering staff are paid an average of just £82 a week. Schools at the bottom of a new meal league table, compiled by the Soil Association, have less than 40p allocated to ingredients for dinners, while those at the top get up to 70p.

Local education authorities for

Rotherham, Greenwich, Redcar and Cleveland, Birmingham and Stockton-on-Tees all spend less than 40p per child for a meal, while the more affluent London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Wandsworth come top with spending of 65p and 70p respectively. This is an absolute disgrace.

The appalling quality of the food being dished up to our children is directly linked to the growth of obesity, ill health in general, and affects the ability to learn, which, in turn, is directly linked to the mounting problem of illiteracy.

More than a million children have been failed by Labour's national literacy strategy, which has left them unable to meet basic standards of English, according to a new report from the Centre for Policy Studies. The right wing think-tank blames education methods, but fails to draw the obvious link with the lack of nutrition.

The profit motive is undermining our children's health in school and even in hospital. The privatisation of hospital cleaning is directly linked to the spread of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and other infections.

At least nine pre-school children have died after contracting the superbug MRSA since Labour came to power.

Between 1993 and 1996 no children under five died from bloodstream MRSA, the most serious kind of hospital-acquired infection, but at least one has died in almost every year since 1997.

The spread of the MRSA hospital 'superbug' is clearly linked to the 45% cut in cleaning staff since the NHS allowed the private sector to compete for con-

tracts. UNISON has published independent research showing there were 55,000 cleaners in the NHS in 2003-04, compared with 100,000 20 years ago.

Private firms exist to make money not to provide services. The market is not capable of providing school meals for our children, nor cleaning our hospital wards, any more than it is of running the railways. The consequence of penny pinching, profit hungry firms being able to leech money from our children's health is as much a disaster as the train crashes that have resulted from rail privatisation.

Feeling the pressure over the school meals disaster, Blair and co have attempted to jump on the bandwagon. There have been plenty of sound bites but no concrete action. The government's response has been pathetic.

They have failed to commit any new money to improving our children's dinners. The proposed new Schools Meals Trust is to include representatives from big food companies - the same companies that make profits from serving up rubbish to school children at present.

Catering in our schools, cleaning in our hospitals, and all our public services must be taken back into public ownership.

- For a massive programme of investment in school meals.
- Serve our children healthy food and pay school meals staff living wages!
- End Competitive Tendering and clean up our hospitals!
- Kick Private Profit out of Public Services!

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