

Socialist Appeal

September 2005 issue 135

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**Stop Shoot-To-Kill
Stop the Lies and Cover-Ups**

**Defend
Democratic
Rights!**

End The Imperialist Occupation of Iraq!

Venezuela

**Chavez renews
call for
Socialism**



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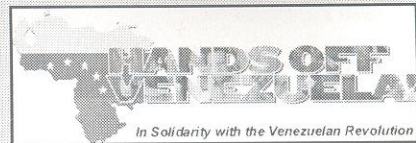
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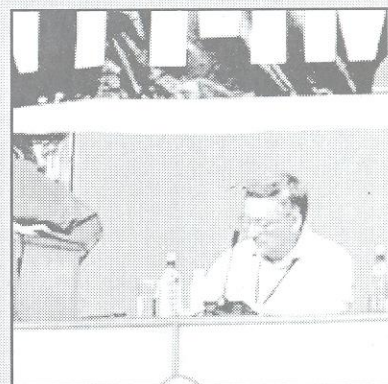
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The Deadline for Issue 136 is September 17

Shoot to kill must be stopped

THE BRUTAL execution of Jean Charles de Menezes on July 22 cannot go unanswered. This atrocity must not be swept under the carpet. That is what the government and the Metropolitan Police are trying to do and they must not be allowed to succeed. So far their attempts to cover up this outrage have been no less incompetent and criminal than the killing of Mr de Menezes itself. However, this is about far more than just incompetence. This young, innocent, Brazilian man - an electrician by trade, just 27 years of age - is the latest victim of the so-called 'war on terror' that now extends from Afghanistan and Iraq to Guantanamo and all points in between, including London. He is a victim of the undermining of civil liberties and the strengthening of the powers of the capitalist state, which hides behind the cover of that 'war', and which has accelerated since the appalling bombing of London on July 7th.

The immediate response of most people to the news of this shooting was a profound feeling of shock. Without any previous public discussion or parliamentary scrutiny, suddenly Britain's police force was operating a shoot-to-kill policy.

However the widespread media coverage of the police account of events quickly acted to link the shooting with the atrocity of July 7th, and the aborted bombing just one day before, on July 21st. We were encouraged by one expert after another to think that, as disturbing as this

shooting was, nevertheless this is the only way to deal with a suicide bomber. Or, at least, a suspected suicide bomber. Very quickly this became 'perhaps not a suicide bomber, but a man acting suspiciously who ran from the police and had connections with the suicide bombers'. This soon became an 'unfortunate but necessary evil', and before long 'a mistake, but an understandable one in these extreme circumstances!'

Since then each passing hour has produced new, more startling revelations exposing these fictions and lies. There is a general mood of unease in British society, particularly in and around London, which is palpable and has intensified since the appalling events of July 7th. This can only be compounded by the shock caused by this shoot-to-kill policy, combined with the bungling incompetence of those charged with operating it, and the scandal of those in charge of it attempting to cover up their actions, their lies, their attempts to prevent an inquiry. Add to this too, a government who continue to claim there is no link between terrorist attacks on London and the imperialist occupation of Iraq, and the result is profound instability.

At first we were inundated with reports that a man, followed from an address thought to be linked with the suicide bombers, was chased onto the underground where he hurdled a barrier, running from the police, exposing wires hanging out of his padded jacket. One does not have to be a

genius to draw conclusions from this account. The problem is that it is false from beginning to end. It has since emerged that Mr de Menezes walked normally into Stockwell tube station in south London, passed normally through a ticket barrier, and stopped normally to pick up a free paper. He then ran a few short steps on hearing his train pull in. All quite normal. The events that followed, however, were not.

Mr de Menezes' everyday behaviour was apparently recorded by the now omnipresent CCTV cameras. The recording however is missing! The initial witness statements described a man wearing a padded jacket vaulting a barrier chased by the police. It later emerged that the man being described was in fact one of the police officers giving chase.

The new police guidelines called Operation Kratos (after the mythical enforcer of Zeus in Greek legend), recommend "shooting to kill to protect" suspected suicide bombers by firing at their heads so that the bullets will not accidentally detonate explosives strapped around their bodies.

Shot while held

However in this case, a surveillance officer has revealed that he grabbed Mr de Menezes and was holding him before he was shot. "I heard shouting which included the word 'police' and turned to face the male in the denim jacket. He [Mr de Menezes] immediately stood up and advanced towards me and the CO19 officers ... I grabbed the male in the denim jacket by wrapping both my arms around his torso, pinning his arms to his side. I then pushed him back on to the seat where he had been previously sitting ... I then

heard a gun shot very close to my left ear and was dragged away on to the floor of the carriage."

A soldier staking out Mr de Menezes' block of flats had identified him as he left his home as IC1 - police terminology for ethnic white. Yet the suspected bomber had already been captured on CCTV and was known not to be white. Why was a man, looking nothing like any of the suspects, who was clearly not carrying a bomb, had not run from the police, and had been physically restrained, still shot eight times?

Mr de Menezes 'crime', for which he has paid the ultimate price, was to live in the same block of flats as a man thought to be connected with one of the suspects in the failed bomb attack of July 21st.

Now the man the police thought they were following has spoken out. Abdi Omar, a Somali-born bus driver, was one of two men detectives were looking for when they began following Mr de Menezes. Mr Omar knows one of the four suspects, Hussain Osman, and rents a flat above the apartment where Mr de Menezes was living.

Police had been watching the block where both men lived because they had discovered Mr Omar's gym membership card in a rucksack holding the bomb intended to blow up a tube train in Shepherd's Bush, west London. Mr Omar says he had lent his membership card to Hussain Osman, a suspect since arrested in Rome and facing extradition to Britain.

According to members of Mr Omar's family, his mother-in-law was manhandled by armed police when they raided the home of his estranged wife a few hours after the death of Mr de Menezes. The family said three plain-clothes officers

with submachine guns surrounded his wife, Aziza Hassan, the couple's 12-year-old son, and her 74-year-old mother as they emerged from their home in west London. The old lady subsequently suffered a heart attack and had to undergo surgery.

Questioning Ms Hassan, detectives realised her husband had left the country five days before the bombing. Mr Omar went to see the police when he returned to London two weeks ago. "They questioned me like they weren't interested ... By this time they knew all about the gym card, and they told my lawyer later that they were not interested in me."

From the beginning, the most senior police officers and government ministers, including the prime minister, claimed the death of Jean Charles was an unfortunate incident occurring in the context of an entirely legitimate, justifiable, lawful and necessary policy.

There is an attempt now to present the killing of Mr de Menezes as a tragic accident arising from a lack of communication. This is no doubt the direction being pursued by the current inquiry. To whatever degree criminal incompetence contributed to these events it cannot explain the subsequent concerted attempt to cover up the facts. This is done in order to protect a policy.

Basic civil liberties and democratic rights in this country, won over many years of hard struggles, have faced a sustained attack for a period of years. This process has accelerated during the Blair government and taken on a full head of steam behind the cover of the 'war on terror'.

Naturally the de Menezes family are demanding the resignation of Metropolitan police chief Sir Ian Blair. They also demand a public inquiry, and they are certainly right to have no faith in the 'Independent' Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) who are now conducting an investigation. At first the Met tried to prevent even this semi-internal inquiry.

A statement from the Met later revealed that despite eventually agreeing to allow in 'independent' investigators, the IPCC was kept away from Stockwell tube in south London for a further three days.

The labour movement must back the family's demand for a public inquiry with action. Even then we would have to demand that a public inquiry was not simply the usual board of ex-judges

and police chiefs, but comprised community organisations and trade unions, people the man's family and the rest of us could trust. Neither an inquiry that drags on for years, nor one that scapegoats this or that individual is enough. The task must be to expose the individuals and the policy to blame for the killing of an innocent man.

The labour movement, and for that matter all those who wish to defend democratic rights, must go further. The latest assault on civil liberties has already killed one innocent man. Shoot to kill must stop now! The shadowy bodies and covert operations linked to Operation Kratos must be disbanded.

Civil liberties under attack

Many of the policies now undermining our civil liberties are knee jerk reactions by a government desperate to be seen to be doing something. At the same time we must see them in the context of the long-term process of strengthening the state machinery which exists to protect the capitalist system and the ruling class, not to combat terrorism.

The government has already conceded that Identity Cards will not contribute to combating the threat of terrorist attacks. After all, they did nothing to prevent the atrocious bombing of Madrid. Yet they insist on pursuing this costly measure. Why? Let us be clear, all the policies pushed through now under the guise of fighting terrorism will be used against the labour movement in the future.

Trials without juries, the right to hold suspects indefinitely, the imposition of identity cards on the entire population, and the right to shoot to kill, none of this will halt terrorism nor make any of us safer. On the contrary. The combination of demonising a section of the population with the attacks of new legislation and the continued occupation of Iraq will only serve as recruitment agents for the terrorists. The suspect captured in Rome revealed that he was not lectured on the need for holy war, but shown videos of atrocities taking place in Iraq.

Tony Blair now demands the right to expel from the country anyone who holds 'extreme views' not in line with the traditional British 'culture of tolerance.' To talk of tolerance in this context is an insult. In any case the history of British imperialism, up to their present actions in Iraq, demonstrates quite

the opposite.

The Daily Telegraph has helpfully published a list of "10 core values of the British identity" whose adoption, they claim, would help to prevent another terrorist attack. These were not values we might choose to embrace, but "non-negotiable components of our identity". Among them were "the sovereignty of the crown in parliament" ("the Lords, the Commons and the monarch constitute the supreme authority in the land"), "private property", "the family", "history" ("British children inherit ... a stupendous series of national achievements") and "the English-speaking world" ("the atrocities of September 11, 2001 were not simply an attack on a foreign nation; they were an attack on the Anglosphere"). These values can be readily shortened to their more common name - capitalism.

This is not a matter of patriotism, but a class question. Whose values do they mean? Not ours, clearly. After all most of us oppose the war in Iraq, are against privatisation, and do not want this horrendous killing covered up.

It is Blair and his government by their slavish support of US imperialism that has placed the people of Britain in the line of fire of terrorist attacks like the one that claimed so many lives on July 7th. The first step to removing that threat is not to allow our right to protest, to organise, to fight for a better society to be undermined. It is to withdraw British troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. Those who claim to be fighting for democracy abroad seem only too keen to destroy our hard won democratic rights at home. It now falls to the labour movement to fight to defend our civil liberties, just as we must fight for our jobs and our wages and our conditions. None of these are safe in the hands of capitalism.

- **We must protest at the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes**
- **Build the September 24th demonstration**
- **No Shoot to kill! Disband covert operations!**
- **Defend democratic rights! No to ID cards and judge-only trials.**
- **Oppose all attacks on our civil liberties!**
- **End the imperialist occupation of Iraq!**

MRSA: Superbug aided by profiteers?

by Steve Jones

OVER THE last year the tabloid press has increasingly been filled with alarming stories about the so-called hospital killer bug MRSA. Since going into hospital is always a stressful experience for anyone - even if just for minor treatment - these stories seem to have struck a nerve. Until recently the official line was that MRSA was just 'one of those things' which could and was being eradicated by getting everybody in hospital, staff and visitors, to be just a bit more careful about cleanliness. In other words, it is was all our fault.

But is that the whole story? A recent incident involved a dying woman being discharged from hospital because the "substantial risk" of contracting MRSA meant patients were safer at home, according to a senior doctor giving evidence at the inquest.

Professor Sherwood Burge, consultant chest physician at the hospital said. "There's a substantial risk of infection at Heartlands Hospital and other hospitals with MRSA," he added. "It's not a terribly safe place to be. It's usually safer at home."

This case was widely reported in many papers but the news report in the *Observer* added the following paragraph: 'Department of Health figures published last summer showed Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust had the seventh worst rate of MRSA infection among general acute hospitals in England. Sub-standard cleaning practices were exposed in a BBC Panorama documentary and contract cleaners threatened to walk out last year in a row over pay discrepancies with their "in-house" counterparts.'

Just a one-off incident? Well, consider the case of the Woodend hospital in Aberdeen where patients and their families led a campaign to expose the "appalling" conditions in the hospital. According to the *Scotsman on Sunday*: '...the hospital had one of the worst known MRSA rates in the country, with one in every 62 patients catching the bug last year. Latest figures show the rate has soared in 2005, with 30 more patients being infected in the first seven months of the year, compared with 2004...photographs taken inside

the hospital by relatives of patients reveal the shocking conditions that have led to the spread of the superbug.'

Interestingly this article concluded with the following: 'Robert Herbertson is suing NHS Grampian after falling ill with MRSA at the hospital...He said: "When I was moved from one room to another they would not clean the room properly afterwards, and put another patient straight in there. How is that going to stop MRSA spreading to other patients?'

In both these cases there is clear evidence that the MRSA problem is both more serious than originally presented and is not just about washing your hands and wearing protective rubber gloves on a more regular basis - however important that is.

Things become clearer when you look at what MRSA actually is. MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. Staphylococcus aureus (SA) is a common type of bacteria that can live harmlessly on the skin but sometimes it can cause a number of common infections including wound infections. MRSA includes several strains of the SA germ that are not killed by the usual antibiotics. Around 40% of cases of SA in the UK are resistant to Methicillin and other antibiotics. These are the ones called MRSA. These types of SA tend to be most common in hospital where they breed and can have a terrible effect on those whose ability to withstand them is already reduced by illness. In other words the problem lies with the hospital environment itself rather than just patients general health - you are safer outside it appears!

What has gone wrong?

So we need to look at what has gone wrong with our hospitals to lead to such a terrible problem developing. The cases reported above contain the evidence. Both refer to poor general standards of cleanliness and ward maintenance. The first report specifically refers to 'sub-standard cleaning practices' from contractors - and here we hit the nail on the head.

For some time now the cleaning and maintenance of our hospitals have been contracted out to private companies. These companies bid for contracts on the basis of levels of service that they often never live up to. They employ low paid staff, who may be frightened to complain about cutting corners, and hope for the best. Until now they have largely got away with it. Hospital administrators and government officials have been able to ignore union complaints so long as nothing serious happened and the books added up. But now the pressure is on. Firstly, something serious - MRSA - has happened, secondly the books are no longer adding up.

Contractors have started to look at making cuts in staff levels and hours worked in order to keep costs down - and profits up. For example, Initial who supply cleaners at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor, and Llandudno General Hospital in North Wales want to reduce hours by 300 per week. Unison stated that the firm has been cutting back since getting the contract 7 years ago and MRSA support group spokeswoman Sheila Whiteside, of Rhyl, added: "These are very serious issues. We need more cleaners not less cleaners. That's absolutely essential." Those involved with fighting MRSA have clearly made the link between poor and declining standards of cleaning and the continuing grip of MRSA. With NHS trusts seeking to balance books and deal with budget shortfalls saving money wherever they can, the situation - despite all the government promises about overcoming MRSA - does not look good. Action is needed. The private sector in all its various guises must be chucked out - the contractors, the PFI scammers and the rest of the vultures making money out of our health - and a fully publicly owned and run NHS with proper funding and decent wages paid must be established. With proper cleaning services re-established in our hospitals once again, the MRSA problem could be tackled with a degree of confidence and hospitals made safe again for treatment and cure. □

Re-instate sacked Gate Gourmet workers

by Kris Lawrie

AT THE beginning of August a dispute which had been bubbling away for some time blew up. Gate Gourmet, the exclusive supplier of on-flight catering for British Airways (BA), sacked 600 staff for taking unofficial strike action to defend their jobs.

The company has been threatening compulsory redundancies for months after staff voted earlier in the year to reject a package which would have cut pay and conditions. Things came to a head last month when, while still threatening layoffs, they brought in casual staff to cope with basic demand. This provoked the walkout which Gate Gourmet managers then seized on to carry out the sackings.

Workers, 70% of whom are middle aged Asian women, were then frogmarched off the premises by security staff. Up to 30 'bouncers' removed their security passes, staff identity cards, and locker keys. Some people were forcibly removed after refusing to leave, including a pregnant woman who, it was reported, was carried out by the arms and legs. People outside the gate were told by a supercilious manager barking into a megaphone that they were all sacked and would receive their P45s by post. The workers were not cowed. They set up a picket on the hill opposite the plant.

Word got around the airport and especially BA staff, who have a close relationship with Gate Gourmet workers. Until 1997 they worked for the same company, and to all intents and purposes Gate Gourmet still functions as part of BA group. By the afternoon 1000 BA ground staff, check-in staff, and baggage handlers at Heathrow terminals one and four were on strike in sympathy in a marvellous display of solidarity. Without these critical workers all BA flights from Heathrow had to be grounded, and as time went on more and more of BA's world operations ground to a halt. In doing this they demonstrated not only the tremendous power



of the workers when they are on the move, but also just how insignificant the anti-union laws are when they are subjected to a serious challenge.

As queues of angry holiday makers lengthened BA executives issued frantic statements apologising for the disruption but pointing out that the dispute was not of their making. For all of their assertions of how 'dashed unfair' the whole thing was they could do nothing to get the staff back to work. The workers remained solidly out in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Gate Gourmet.

The dispute at Gate Gourmet has been brewing for a long time. In 1997 BA sold their on-flight catering operation to Gate Gourmet, then owned by Swissair, since then it has been acquired by American venture capitalist firm, Texas Pacific Group. They did this to drive down the cost of catering for their flights. BA and its associate airlines remain the major customer for the service, and Gate Gourmet in Britain is still geared to producing for them. But this doesn't add up. How does simply spinning off catering into a separate concern cut costs? If the quality of the food remains broadly the same, and costs are to be cut, there is only one other way to cut costs and that is by making what they call 'efficiency savings'.

BA and Gate Gourmet both responsible

Gate Gourmet have been cutting back on wages and conditions using the threat that, unless they were delivered, BA would take their business elsewhere. In other words

posing the question to workers: What would you rather have a pay cut or your P45? In this way they hoped to cut £14 million of their running costs this year by inflicting misery on hundreds of workers. For BA this is not a problem, this was their original intention! BA's assertion that the dispute has nothing to do with them is untrue, by getting rid of the in-house caterers BA washed their hands of the whole affair. They pressurise Gate Gourmet management to cut costs and they simply pass the pressure down to their staff, who are already low paid and work in bad conditions.

Now they have decided that the only way to cut costs, while maintaining profits, is to sack the existing staff who are already forced to work for peanuts, and hire workers from eastern Europe who can be forced to work for even less.

It has since emerged that this was all part of an orchestrated plan by Gate Gourmet management. Documents leaked to the *Daily Mirror* newspaper reveal that management planned a detailed strategy to force the workers into taking unofficial strike action so that they could go ahead and fire them. The documents are very clear that BA and British Airport Authority (BAA) should be informed of these in advance. Gate Gourmet deny that they carried this plan out. But one way or another it is exactly what happened. This is an attempt to smash the T&G in Gate Gourmet and to bring in even lower paid and more exploited workers.

Gate Gourmet managers are implementing these attacks but BA stand squarely behind them. This dispute is indirectly with BA who are applying the cuts from on high. That is why the workforce in BA, already sick of cuts in their own wages and conditions, instinctively rallied round the sacked Gate Gourmet workers. The workers at BA have been increasingly militant over the past years, staging unofficial strikes every year for the past

three. This has been in response to the savage cuts implemented by BA as a result of increased competition in air travel since 9/11 and the expansion of budget airlines.

In the wake of 9/11 BA announced the sacking of 13,000 staff. They now have plans to go far deeper with the cuts. A large number of the new cuts will fall on staff at their international base at Heathrow, including 10% of check-in and baggage handling staff who will lose their jobs when all operations move to the new Terminal 5 building in 2008.

BA's managers seem to be blissfully unaware of the effects of their cuts on morale. The chairman of BA, Sir Rod Eddington, last month infuriated workers by saying that the strike was caused by the agitation of a few troublemakers and announcing that an official enquiry would take place into the sympathy strike and that the ring leaders would be disciplined. Surprisingly they don't seem to see the connection between four years of job cuts, increasing workload, more job cuts looming, and low staff morale which has resulted in an unofficial strike after strike.

Last month Gate Gourmet was attempting to take a tough line with the strikers. They also promised to take back some of the sacked staff but not all of them. They are trying to drive a wedge between the sacked workers by branding some of them troublemakers who provoked the strike, and others as good people who got swept along in the heat of the moment. They have accused a small hardcore of workers of staging the strike through bullying and intimidation. That is some claim - What are they saying? That a small minority of 20-30 workers intimidated 600 Gate Gourmet workers into going on strike, and then for an encore intimidated a further 1000 BA workers into taking solidarity action! The real bullies are Gate Gourmet and BA who provoked this strike for their own reasons, without any regard for the people whose lives they are ruining, and now are doing everything they can to try to defeat it.

Behaving like children at the end of last month Gate Gourmet managers announced they are thinking of going home and taking their ball with them. They have said they are considering pulling out of their British operation altogether, this is unlikely because the business is potentially profitable. To



add fuel to the fire BA have even come in and said they will not be extending Gate Gourmet's contract, only to contradict themselves the following day. Everyday the story changes and it seems to be designed to create maximum confusion. Gate Gourmet and BA are locked in a turbulent love affair, one day the engagement is on, the next day it is off.

In any case it is not the job of the unions to make concessions to keep exploitative employers in business. The bosses can say what they want, they can threaten to close down or they can promise the earth. They are not bound to keep their word, and they do not have to deliver anything. That is why it is dangerous for the union to engage in horse trading with the members jobs and conditions.

This is a winnable dispute provided it is linked with a campaign against the cuts in BA of which it is a part. The mood is strong among Gate Gourmet staff who have maintained a picket line at the gates for weeks now. BA workers are frustrated and annoyed with the attacks they have suffered over the last years and the ones which now loom over the horizon. That is why they are willing to fight to defend the sacked Gate Gourmet workers. It is right that the unions should negotiate but that doesn't mean making concessions. They are negotiating from a very strong position. The demand should be for immediate reinstatement, back pay to cover all loss of earnings, and a pay rise for all staff.

Gate Gourmet workers must win

If Gate Gourmet managers want to act bullish then we should see what effect a few extra days of strike action has. The wildcat strikes crippled BA's worldwide operations for two days which caused chaos for weeks. While the workers lost two days pay; BA lost over £50 million. In this event if Gate Gourmet managers refuse to settle then BA will instruct them to.

The Gate Gourmet workers can win

their jobs back and strike a blow against the attacks of the company and BA. The union must take a tough line with the employers. The union is in a very strong negotiating position which is the result of the magnificent movement of solidarity by BA workers.

However if the bosses think they can string us along and we will go away, we will need to employ tougher measures. The union should plan a series of strikes; ballot all remaining Gate Gourmet staff at other locations in the UK. They should put out an international appeal for solidarity action at Gate Gourmet internationally, and lastly to really put the thumb screws on they should ballot for action in BA. These could begin as one day strikes and build up until the objective is met. Every time the workers lose a day's pay BA loses £50million.

A victory for the workers at Gate Gourmet would be a massive setback for the programme of cuts at British Airways which has been 'modernising' by trampling over workers and cutting services since privatisation. The profit motive of big business has ruined our transport infrastructure. Now BA are pushing through seemingly endless rounds of cuts in pursuit of profit. The Labour government should nationalise BA, Gate Gourmet and all major companies which were formerly part of the BA group. □

● **Victory to the Gate Gourmet workers!**

● **Reinstate them now!**

● **All lost wages to be paid!**

● **An improvement in pay and conditions all round!**

● **Labour must repeal all anti-union legislation!**

● **No more cuts at BA! Take the profit motive out of air travel!**

● **The Labour Government must nationalise BA and Gate Gourmet now with no compensation!**

● **Sack the current management and let the workers run the company!**

TUC 2005: Words must be turned into action

by Jeremy Dear, Gen. Sec. NUJ and TUC General Council (Personal Capacity)

THE DIRECTION and success of this year's TUC Congress will be set right from the start. The T&G will move the opening motion calling for a vigorous campaign to win millions of new workers to unions. Congress will stand and applaud the Gate Gourmet workers and those BA workers who took unofficial action in support of them. Congress will reaffirm its commitment to the repeal of the anti-trade union laws and issue a call for genuine trade union freedoms and rights. And then what?

In too many previous years the calls for active campaigning, for unequivocal support for those who challenge the anti-union laws, for active and high-profile campaigning for workers rights have been diverted in to a series of seminars, workshops and other campaigns aimed at persuading New Labour ministers and employers to grant small concessions to trade unions.

As the T&G motion points out - we measure our success by "winning in the workplace" and by organising workers to fight for their rights and that as a minimum that requires the repeal of all the anti-union legislation, the right to take solidarity action, employment rights from day one and stronger protection for union reps (as the sacking of Jerry Hicks at Rolls Royce shows) and workers.

New Labour has steadfastly refused to budge on all the key anti-trade union laws, laws which were introduced not to democratise unions and give them back to members as Margaret Thatcher used to claim but to undermine the ability of unions to effectively act on behalf of their members - as Labour used to say in opposition.

If we are to force the repeal of the anti-trade union laws we have to be prepared to actively campaign against - and where necessary act in defiance of - those laws. The BA workers showed that the

laws are only scraps of paper when it comes to a serious challenge against them. BA managers backed down from disciplining those who took unofficial action on the grounds that they risked provoking a major more serious dispute. In the post office CWU members have taken unofficial action time and time again - even some of my own members at BBC News 24 have taken unofficial action this year and won a new deal on staffing. Yet for every success there have been times when unions have faced injunctions, threats of fines and sequestration and have called off industrial action in order to protect the finances of the union or to protect those workers who could face being dismissed.

Repeal all anti-trade union laws

No one union alone can fight these laws - and why should they, they affect us all. But imagine if the TUC were to lead a major protest against the laws, explaining to workers how they are used to make unions less effective and prevent solidarity action even when employers can act together. Imagine if the TUC took that campaign in to every workplace and organised on behalf of 7 million union members a direct challenge to those laws - that would have more effect than any number of seminars and workshops and would put unions in a stronger position to win.

That's why as a first step it is important to support the RMT motion which calls for support for a Trade Union Freedom Bill - 100 years after the 1906 Trades disputes act which removed trade union liability for damages caused by strike action - and importantly for the TUC to organise a national march, rally and lobby of Parliament next year in support of

the campaign to repeal the anti-union laws.

Pensions will again feature highly on this year's TUC agenda as workers face attacks in both the public and private sector. Unison calls for co-ordination amongst public sector workers "to defend and improve the public sector schemes, including through further industrial action if necessary". In the face of the concerted action of several unions the Government, prior to the election, were forced to retreat on their plans to make public sector staff work until they drop. Now, after the election, the Government feels emboldened and has done little to even try to address union concerns. It is now vital that public sector unions co-ordinate further action and bring on board the teaching and education unions. A concerted campaign of industrial action by millions of public service workers can achieve victory - and serve as a beacon to those in the private sector fighting to defend their schemes against rapacious employers who use the much-hyped 'pensions crisis' as an opportunity to close defined benefit schemes and replace them with worse (and from the employers point of view cheaper) schemes. The PCS motion sets out a campaign strategy to ensure maximum unity amongst the public sector unions and should be supported.

The PCS will also be leading the attack on the civil service job cuts and privatisations proposed by the Government last year and, in particular, the moves by the Government to offshore public sector work to "seek to exploit the inferior pay, terms and conditions of workers abroad who do not enjoy the protection of strong trade unions and employment legislation".

Opposition to privatisation will again be a key issue for delegates. The CWU will lead calls for the



Government to abandon any plans to privatise or part privatise the Post Office and for the TUC to continue to campaign to this effect. The TSSA will call on Congress to confirm its policy for the public ownership of the railways, while the NUM will call for the renationalisation of the deep mine coal industry; the POA and NAPO will condemn privatisation of the justice system; and the NUJ and BECTU will demand the BBC abandon plans to privatise further parts of the corporation.

In every case privatisation has meant fewer jobs, worse terms and conditions and in the case of the railways the impact has been even greater with staff and passengers becoming the victims of the profit before safety mentality of the railway privateers.

Internationalism

For trade unions internationalism has always been writ large on their banners and this year's Congress will be no different with strong motions from the Bakers Union BFAWU calling for cross-border union organising to combat the impact of globalisation and motions calling for the withdrawal of UK troops from Iraq. The CYWU states that "the continued presence of British troops in Iraq is morally and legally indefensible" whilst both they and NATFHE support calls for links to be built between workers in Iraq and Britain.

The campaign by Hands off Venezuela has helped to ensure the issue of support for the Bolivarian Revolution is on the agenda with NATFHE tabling a motion expressing solidarity with Venezuelan trade union-

ists and the TSSA urging backing for the UNT, with ASLEF noting the 70% support for Chavez's programme and calling on the TUC to campaign against US intervention.

For the past few years the TUC Congress has passed a series of progressive policies - on employment rights, against the war in Iraq, against privatisation and so on. All too often they have remained just that - motions. Congress will undoubtedly pass some extremely important motions this year too - the key now is to turn the words into action. □

Edinburgh Meeting Held to Support Strikers

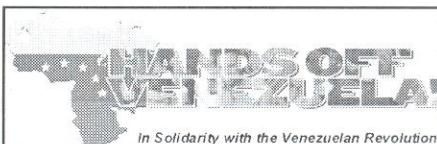
A RECENT meeting was called by Socialist Appeal supporters in Edinburgh to support striking bus drivers and cleansing workers. A T&GWU negotiator outlined the issues as well as the effects of the privatisation. A ballot of First Bus would be held in September.

Several T&GWU Cleansing D Service members spoke about the pressure on them from the Council. Health and safety rules were being flouted with higher targets being set for workers. While extra vehicles being used meant more being cleared and the working day shortened, the council attacked the staff for finishing early, despite the work being done. So overtime was banned and collection times increased and disrupted.

A very good discussion was held about local, national and international issues. Good contact had now been made with these workers under attack. The immediate step is for us to raise support for these workers in our branches and change of policy by the councils. Labour willingly takes the T&GWU money for elections, so the Party must stand by these members in return.

By Tam Burke, Edinburgh

Hands off Venezuela TUC FRINGE MEETING



Hear:

- **Orlando Chirino**
and **Marcela Maspero**
(National co-ordination of UNT)
- **Ruth Winters**
(President, FBU)
- **John Wilkin**
(President, NATFHE)
- **Bob Crow**
(General Secretary, RMT)
- **Jorge Martin**
(International Secretary of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign)

Chair:

- **Jeremy Dear**
(General Secretary, NUJ)

Wednesday
14 September,
5.30pm

(immediately after close of Conference)

Quality Hotel,
West St, Brighton

(2 minutes from Conference Centre)

(Refreshments provided)

www.handsoffvenezuela.org

Hands Off Venezuela

The campaign sends its first youth delegation to Venezuela

by our correspondent in Caracas

"Thanks for being here, in revolutionary Venezuela, in this Venezuela that is being born again to say to the world - in the same way you are doing - that Venezuela is not alone. It will never be alone, because the struggle of Venezuela is the struggle of the peoples of the world for equality, freedom, fraternity, peace, sovereignty and a world of equals"

Hugo Chavez Frias, Opening Ceremony of the 16th World Festival of the Youth and the Students, August 8, 2005

17,000 internationalist youth from 144 different countries gathered in Caracas during the second week of August. The reason was to hold the 16th edition of the World Festival of Youth and Students. During one week delegates attended various seminars and workshops hosted by different delegations. The festival was not only made up of discussions. There were organised visits to the countryside where delegates could see the level of organisation amongst the peasant communities. Clinics and schools created by the bold social programmes implemented by the government in the most deprived areas of Caracas were also visited by the del-

egates. Amongst these anti-imperialist youth there were Hands Off Venezuela supporters from Denmark, Britain, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Austria, Russia, Mexico and the US. HOV supporters were particularly glad when we saw our US brothers and sisters carrying a big banner where everybody could read "US Hands Off Venezuela". In the 100 strong British delegation there were 15 representatives of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign who had the chance to see the profound social transformation which is taking place in the Latin American country firsthand.



Here we reproduce some reports given by different Hands Off Venezuela delegates to the 16th World Festival of Youth and Students

"The great thing about the Festival of Students and Youth is the opportunity to meet young people on the left from all over the world. From the perspective of the Hands off Venezuela campaign, the most interesting aspect is listening to the delegates' view of the process in Venezuela. Some, particularly from Europe, came to Venezuela with limited knowledge of the Bolivarian revolution, or worse, misinformation from the mainstream media. It is gratifying to see how impressed they are, not only with the obvious achievements such as the missions (social programmes), but with the level of political consciousness amongst workers and the poor, as well as the democratic and revolutionary nature of the UNT, the new union, and the contrast with unions in their own countries. People I have spoken to were also incredibly impressed by how involved people are in the political process, and how much control they have over their own lives - what real democracy means, of course.

What this means, we as a campaign would hope, is that the delegates (and I cannot offhand think of any countries not represented here) will not only provide more solidarity with Venezuela in future but will also take what they have learned from the revolutionary process here back to their

own countries and, inspired by what they have experienced, build similar democratic, revolutionary movements of their own.

From workshops on the Miami 5 to talks on the uprisings in Bolivia, the one constant theme is how the Bolivarian revolution is a shining light for Latin America and the rest of the world. The opportunity for Bolivar's dream of a united Latin America to be realised has never been greater."

Rodrigo Trompiz, Britain



"The historically oppressed majority in Venezuela has decided to change the state of affairs. There is a huge degree of popular participation in all aspects of Venezuelan society. People in the 'barrios' (shanty towns) have

created committees to supervise and control all the social programs promised by the government and ensure that they are implemented on time in their areas. They are trying to supply water to all the houses that do not have water. They also look after all the refurbishing works in all the houses that need it. They clear out the way for the Cuban doctors that work with 'Barrio Adentro' (healthcare programme). Taxi drivers are organised to do whatever their trade allows them to support the revolution. During the last local elections they gave free lifts to all of those who wanted to vote as a way to break the boycott that the reactionaries had organised. We have met people who said that in spite of not having the chance to study for more than 25 years, now they were taking full advantage of the different 'misiones' (social programmes) on education. There has been a popular explosion in the media. People come together and organise community radio stations to look after proper sources of information and entertainment for their communities. Revolutionary newspapers are also all over the place.

This level of organisation is not just confined to the urban communities. The trade union movement is also getting impregnated with this spirit and the creation and strengthening of the UNT demonstrates it. The countryside communities are also struggling to fight against the reactionaries while implementing agrarian reform. 140 of them have paid with their lives to end oppression and landlordism in the countryside.

Not even the state apparatus is in an ordinary condition. Army and National Guard rank and file troops mix with the civilian crowd and they are no longer seen as their enemies but as their brothers. The Ministry of Information has printed Che Guevara's pamphlet "Against Bureaucratism" and recently Hugo Chavez announced the printing of 20 million copies of revolutionary books to be distributed freely amongst Venezuelans. However, the revolution is not free from a critical spirit. People do not hesitate to point out those who behave like bureaucrats or are suspected of being corrupt in spite of hiding themselves in a revolutionary disguise. The Venezuelan working people and youth are pointing out day by day that there is a way out of the capitalist nightmare."

Ramon Samblas, Britain

"Venezuela is a country full of contradictions. Entering Caracas is not exactly entering paradise: most buildings are ugly and the pollution is enormous. However, this is in complete contradiction with the dynamic and enthusiastic mood of the people there. Ordinary people on the streets debate and discuss all kinds of issues. You can notice that everybody wants to participate in all aspects of Venezuelan society. For instance, the volunteers in the World Festival have

worked very hard and they have spent days with no sleep in order to help organise the festival. They have seen this festival as a very important chance to break the diplomatic isolation of Venezuela through getting the support of the revolutionary youth. It is clear that the Venezuelan working people have decided to take control over the destiny of their lives. That only made it easier for us to discuss socialism and Marxism, ideas for which there is a great thirst."

Maarten Vanheeuverswyn, Belgium

"Some of the most inspiring speakers at the festival are the Venezuelans, who continually defend the revolution and its conquests, and speak of the desire to push the revolution forward.

The main slogan of the festival is "For peace and solidarity, we fight against imperialism and war". But some seem to have gone beyond this slogan, and at most of the sessions socialism is discussed as a way of achieving peace.

The mood here is revolutionary, even most of the soldiers stationed to protect and help the delegates of the festival are talking about the revolution with great sympathy. They are mainly young conscripts who, as well as other large parts of the working class of Venezuela, have benefited from the revolution too.

The volunteers of the Festival are very revolutionary as well, and many of them see their help to the Festival, as helping to spread the Venezuelan revolution to other countries. Many layers of Venezuelan society (except, of course, for the bourgeois press and the opposition in general) are helping out with the Festival, and you often feel that the state supports the Festival too. One worrying thing is the bureaucracy that one can see in the organisation of the World Festival. While thousands of volunteers work very hard to organise everything and we hear about some of them going 2 or 3 days with no sleep whatsoever, we also hear about problems and manoeuvres in all the Preparatory Committees from all over the world, including the Venezuelan Preparatory Committee.

Apart from the Festival there are many little things you hear and see, which tell you about the revolutionary process here in Venezuela. For instance, you see loads upon loads of revolutionary slogans on the concrete walls of Caracas, in the form of large paintings or smaller graffiti. Imagine for instance any European or North American city that replaced huge chunks of the normal hiphop-graffiti and nametags, with slogans in support of the revolution! Slogans like "¡Uhh! ¡Ah! ¡Chavez no se va!" and "Chavez, amigo, el pueblo esta contigo" (Chavez, friend, the people are with you) are quite common. In some rare places pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Bolivar standing together in profile can be found, typically together with socialist slogans."

Klaus Munster, Denmark



T&G Biennial Delegate Conference at Blackpool 9th - 15th July 2005

by Rachael Webb
Delegate from 1/888 Branch Region 1 RTC Trade Group

OUR 5-DAY BDC ended with those who are committed to a fighting democratic member led union feeling there is some possibility and some hope over the next period. Although the situation is very complex and the future will depend on a correct Marxist approach on a number of fronts. Three issues dominated the Conference: workers democracy, the proposed merger with Amicus and GMB and the labour movement response to the tragic deaths in the London bombing.

On the first day we had various speeches including an address from Andy Stern of the USA American union SEIU. This union has worked with the T&G on the issue of workers in the bus and coach industry fighting back against bosses attacks on pay and conditions in firms who operate in several countries, such as First National who are based in the USA and the UK and various other countries. SIEU has grown in the States whilst other unions have seen a declining membership; this is because they have adopted a fighting back approach to attacks on wages and conditions and have organised amongst previously non-union workers.

Tony Woodley and Andy Stern have stated that they work closely together in developing an international approach to globalised companies. Capitalists are multi-national, we have to be multi-national or else they will just play one country off against another.

A rally and tribute to Jack Jones gave the respect and approval he deserves as he stands head and shoulders above many union leaders who came to the fore during the Thatcher years. Although Marxists would criticise him for the incorrect role he played in supporting Wilson giving into the

IMF and capitalists during the Labour years of the 70's.

Delegates came to Conference with 267 Resolutions from Branches, Trade Groups and Regions. These were composed by the General Executive Committee and the movers had to argue their case composite by composite with a GEC appointed Committee before the Composite was considered or rejected. The success or otherwise of member led democracy therefore depends heavily on the composition of the GEC as well as on branch and regional activity.

The merger is a case in point. The GEC supported Tony Woodley in seeking approval for a GEC appointed sub committee to have authority to negotiate with the GMB and Amicus. This was opposed at the Conference, with a demand for a recall conference after negotiations have produced proposals for a new rulebook and other merger proposals. Tony Woodley acceded to this demand and we will therefore have the recall conference, enabling the lay member structures to have a say in any final proposals. This will also put pressure onto the leaders of the GMB and Amicus unions to allow the same procedure of lay member democracy.

On Monday a very well attended Broad Left meeting was held at which a member of the "Amicus Unity Gazette" and *Socialist Appeal* supporter Des Heemskerk spoke along with a number of leading left activists in the T&G.

Talks have already been held with left elements in GMB as well as the left in Amicus and this meeting established the need for the left in all three unions to come together to ensure that it is the members who make the policy, not full-time officers or a self perpetu-

ating layer of lay members who get paid generous expenses and stand down pay etc.

Tony Woodley promised to pursue a demand for British troops to come home from Iraq by the end of the year. The Conference demanded "by the end of the year" be changed to "immediately" and Tony agreed to abide by Conference decision. This shows the leftward direction that lay activists are moving in.

The conference agreed to assemble outside at noon on Thursday to remember the London dead and express our opposition to any form of racism or hatred worker against worker. We assembled in the road and like in many other places stopped the traffic for two minutes.

Socialist Appeal organised a fringe meeting on the vital issue of support for "Hands off Venezuela". 10 delegates attended we collected £37 and had a very interesting and informative discussion. We need to build support for HOV within the T&G and this meeting was a very useful part of us doing this. We sold 44 copies of *Socialist Appeal*, which is roughly one to every 10 delegates present.

The fight now starts for left policies and lay member democracy to be adopted in the debate over the new merged union. □



Young, working class and graduated: A finished recipe to be unemployed...

by Mark Glover

AFTER SITING in stuffy lecture theatres for three years listening to learned professors prattling on about the demise of the working class, that we are all middle class now, Marx was too economically deterministic and that we now live in a post-modern society, etc etc. I find that I have now graduated from university after scraping a 2.1 in Political Science and Sociology. It was now time to enter the world of work.

Surely I thought employers will be dying to take on a bright young graduate like myself? How wrong I was. I had missed deadlines to apply for the Civil Service Graduate Fast Track Scheme. I was sure that Blue chip employers would not look at me and I was sure I would not pass muster at Sandhurst and the like. So what were my options? After accumulating a massive debt in the form of student loans at university (about £9,500) and reaching the limit on my overdraft, I thought it best to earn money quick. I entered my details on graduate websites and expected offers to come rolling in. It seems the only positions offered for graduates is as trainee recruitment consultants. In fact there are more of these types of positions than there are other jobs.

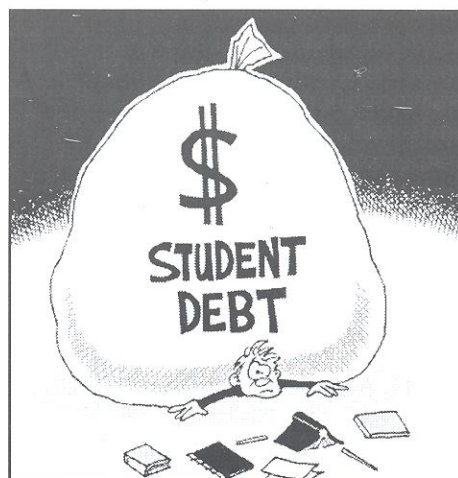
I attended my University Career Service in the hope that they could find a solution. I spoke to the amiable advisor who told me to draw a spider diagram in order to work out, what sort of position would best suit me. Flip charts aside this is not going to help me pay the bills that are mounting up for everyday that I have graduated. Though this does not seem to worry the careers advisor who replies 'can't you ask your parents for financial support?' Such a stupid question requires no answer. What with their own financial worries and debts being hard pressed working class folks themselves.

Nevertheless, I persist in my quest to earn a living. I enrol at job agencies (despite their bad reputations) where other recent graduates looking for work have already inundated them. Apparently my three years at university do not add up to much as I have no real relevant office experience, I am told. It would seem that I am not even

qualified for basic positions and there are few graduate opportunities. This seems to be a common situation facing other graduates who like me have done the rounds signing up with different agencies and chasing the same few jobs.

Similarly looking at the vacancies at the local job centre bears no results either, there simply are no jobs -not unless I desire to work a mere eight hours a week in a well known supermarket. In desperation due to my dire financial position I am forced to claim Job seekers allowance, which gives me a whopping £40 every two weeks. Thus I find myself fresh and eager to work after graduating from university, only to sit helplessly on the sidelines in a seemingly futile search for work. But luck would prevail and I am currently employed in a bar job for the short term working unsociable hours for low pay, whilst I look for that elusive first opportunity.

What is most depressing is that I know that I am not alone in my tight situation. In fact, I have often heard from fellow graduates that they feel they have been cheated: what with their hard work and sacrifices over the last three years, and the end result being that their degree is not worth the paper it is written on in terms of helping find a job. What is more they find themselves in low paid and repetitive work which does not fully utilise their skills. Thus early on they find out what their worth is to employers in the job market and that worth would seem to be not much. □



...Low paid and in debt

by Pablo Sanchez

WHILE BEING a student we are told that we are having the time of our lives, it is true as we are going to spend the rest of it paying for our excesses (studying that is). In 1992 only a third of students owed money. Now 90% are in debt. That is a hard price to pay for the foolishness of going to university, but the nightmare has just begun. Almost 40% of all 16-25 year olds work in distribution, hotels and restaurants. That means Tesco's, big hotels for rich people, and all sorts of pubs. That means that 5.5 million work in these areas, some of them while studying at university, some of them after their studies have finished. The Government should start a course in shelf and packing studies, it will be more useful than IT skills for many young people. Those economically active among 18-24 year olds stands at almost 3.4 million and unemployment among this age stands around 400,000 which represents 10% of those economically active, a much higher rate than the average unemployment rate (this is Winter 2003 data from the TUC).

But male students should be grateful(!) as female students with jobs earned on average 16 pence per hour less than male students in 2000. This was an increase in the gap, which had been 14 pence in 1998. That means that to pay off student debts female students will have to work more and therefore their academic results will be under threat. But when they finish their studies things do not improve, recently a spokesperson for NUS Scotland said that they estimate that women students can expect to earn 15% less than their male counterparts within three years of graduation. The Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland figures show that women working full-time earn on average £559 less per month than men do (The Scotsman 24/08/05). Because they are worth it! Maybe our dear Mark should be grateful because he is a man? □

The life blood of capitalism

by Michael Roberts

LET'S KEEP it simple. Profits are the lifeblood of capitalism. If a capitalist investor or owner of a business cannot make a profit, he or she soon stops investing capital or employing workers to produce things or provide services. It's the law of the market, say the economists of capital.

Marxists agree with the economists. Profits are the fuel of capitalist production - without them there would be no production. But the apologists of capital make two other propositions. First, they say there is no other system of human social organisation that works. So a profit-based system will continue forever. Second, a profit-based system of production and social organisation works for the benefit of all, maybe to differing degrees, but nevertheless for all.

It is here that Marxists disagree. Marxists reckon that there are other systems of social organisation that have worked (in a fashion) before capitalism where production for profit played no role. Moreover, in the future, human beings can develop social organisation that will work without profit-making being necessary. And the profit system of production and organisation, far from working for all, leads to huge inequalities between rich and poor, both within nations and between nations on the globe. Moreover, the capitalist profit system actually breeds periodic crises that generate massive unemployment, poverty and war.

So, if profits are the lifeblood of capitalism, their size and growth must be an excellent guide to the health of the capitalist system. The bigger the profit for the capitalists, the more likely is the capitalist system of investment and production to thrive, at least for a while.

If that's right, what does that tell us about the current state of the world capitalist economy? Well, we can get the best figures on profits from the data provided in the US, the world's largest economy.

And what do these figures show? We can most easily measure profits as a share of annual national output (GDP). This is not the correct or Marxist

definition of profits in a capitalist economy. Marxists would define profits as the surplus value produced by an economy's labour force. That surplus value is the value of annual production sold in an economy minus the cost to the owners of all the businesses of paying its workers. Also, Marxists would measure profits against the cost of investing in machinery and raw materials as well as employing workers. The US government measure merely takes profits against sales, not costs.

Even so, the official government data can still show trends in the size and growth of profits. That's helpful to judge the health of US capitalism. And what do the figures reveal? They show that US corporate profits as a share of GDP have moved up from lows in 2001 to reach near record levels in 2005. But if you look over the much longer term, US profits are still below the levels achieved in the 'golden years' of capitalism back in the 1960s.

Profits

The profits of US companies (excluding the banks and after paying tax) are about 8% of total sales this year. That's much higher than the low of around 4% achieved in November 2001, nearly equalling the low of the 1979-81 economic recession. The figure is now just below the peak of 1997 of 9% of sales. That peak was the highest level of profits reached since the 1960s, when it was common for US profits to be 10-12% of sales. That was truly the 'golden age' of US (and world) capitalism).

The steady decline of the ability of capitalists to extract profits from their workforces is revealed even more clearly when we look at the profit figures before tax. In the 1960s, US corporations achieved annual profits of 15-20% of sales annually. Then came the first post-war economic slump or crisis of 1969-72 quickly followed by the worldwide economic crisis of 1973-74, which signalled the end of the 'golden age'. In 1974, profits before tax fell to just 9% of sales, half the levels achieved in the golden age. Economic recovery up

to 1978 took the profit rate back to 14% but then the 'double-dip recession' of 1979-82 saw profits fall back to an even lower level of 8%.

Capitalists in the advanced capitalist economies then launched a major offensive against the working-class to remove all the gains achieved by the labour movement during the golden age. The 1980s saw the Thatcherite battles in the UK and Reaganite ones in the US. Trade unions were shackled and crushed. The welfare state was dismantled through spending cuts and privatisation of state industries.

Even so, the profit rate only crawled up to a peak 10% in 1989 before the next recession drove it back down to 8% again. Further attacks on the wages and conditions of the labour force followed with 'downsizing' (i.e. cutting back on the labour force and driving up unemployment). This helped to take profit shares back up. In the late 1990s, the hi-tech revolution also added to profitability. By 1997, before tax profits reached 13% - still way below the golden age, but a lot better than in the 1980s.

But the very 'mild' economic recession of 2001 was not mild for US capitalism. Profits slumped to 6% of sales before tax. The boom since then has taken them back to nearly 12%.

But again this new peak reached this year is still below the peak of the 1990s, just in line with that of the 1980s and still below that of 1970s. And of course it is way below the golden age levels of the 1960s.

What does this history of US profits since the 1950s tell you? It shows that the long-term health of capitalism is deteriorating. US capitalism, the rising economic power of the early 20th century, the strongest economic power of the post-war period, is now getting old. Whatever, US corporations do: cut the workforce, employ casual and temporary labour, use the latest hi-tech equipment, relocate to cheaper places around the globe, try to protect their profits with tariffs and trade restrictions, it seems that they cannot restore the great days of the 1960s.

And the secular decline in US corporate profitability is mirrored in the figures for profits in the UK, Europe, Japan and Australia. Modern capitalism is weakening.

Marx's great economic law of the tendency of the rate of profit to decline is visible in these figures. Sure, there are periods when the use of new technology and the ability to weaken the ability of the workforce globally to obtain decent wages and conditions allow capitalists to restore somewhat their profitability.

But that is achieved only after destructive periods of economic recession or slump when millions lose their jobs, small businesses collapse in their hundreds of thousands, or even worse capitalists engender wars to enable them to get labour or resources cheaper. The post-war period of secular decline in profitability has been accompanied by the powerful American state overthrowing progressive anti-capitalist governments in Latin America, conducting a horrifically damaging war in Vietnam, installing an agent provocateur state, Israel, in the midst of the oil-rich but 'unstable' Middle East, and of course now occupying a major oil state directly with US troops.

The huge cost, not just in lives and livelihoods for the masses, but also in productive resources and profits made by capitalism, was necessary - for capitalism. It was needed in order to try and reverse or slow the inevitable decline in the economic health of the system.

So 60 years after US capitalism became the dominant economic, political and military power on the globe, it has been unable to restore the profitability of its capitalist companies. With the next recession, profitability will plunge to even lower depths and will require even more destruction and struggle to rise again.

If profits are the lifeblood of capitalism, then the blood of the US and the top capitalist nations keeps seeping away. They desperately suck harder on the labour power of the working-class globally to get more blood. And for a while, they succeed. The latest upturn in profitability has now lasted four years. But eventually, profitability starts to fall back again.

The two great propositions of the apologists of capitalism: that it is the only system of human social organisation that works and that it brings with it prosperity for all, are thus exposed. □

G8 lies exposed

WHEN THE 'Great Deal' on poverty and debt was announced at the G8 binge in Scotland in July, people rushed to cheer it - although many remained sceptical in the light of the G8s record as protectors of the interests of the rich countries and the rich within them. Now, as the real facts come out, the truth confirms the G8 promises for what they really were. For example, an article by Mark Curtis in the *Guardian* of August 23rd contains the following in relation to the promised aid increase of \$48 billion a year and Blair's promise to cancel 100% of multilateral debts:

'First, in recent evidence to the Treasury committee, Gordon Brown made the astonishing admission that the aid increase includes money put aside for debt relief. So the funds rich countries devote to writing off poor countries' debts will be counted as aid...The debt deal is not "in addition" to the aid increase, as Blair claimed, but part of it.

'Far from representing a "100%" debt write-off, the deal applies initially to only 18 countries, which will save just \$1bn a year in debt-service payments. The 62 countries that need full debt cancellation to reach UN poverty targets are paying 10 times more in debt service. And recently leaked World Bank documents show that the G8 agreed only three years' worth of debt relief for these 18 countries. They state that "countries will have no benefit from the initiative" unless there is "full donor financing".

'The deal also involves debts only to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, whereas many countries have debts to other organisations.'

The article continues:

'The government's claim that debt relief will free up resources for health and education is also a deception. The deal explicitly says that those countries receiving debt relief will have their aid cut by the same

amount. If, say, Senegal is forgiven \$100m a year in debt service, World Bank lending will be slashed by the same amount. That sum will be retained in the World Bank pot for lending across all poor countries, but only when they sign up to World Bank/IMF economic policy conditions'

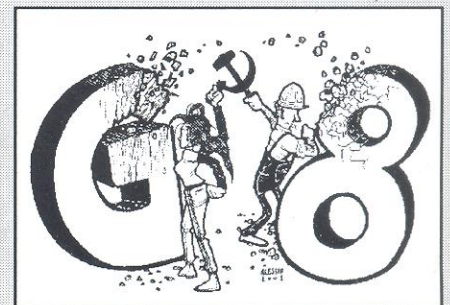
The article notes how increasingly privatisation is being forced on the poorest countries as an explicit condition for aid:

'Blair's assertion that aid will come with no conditions is contradicted by Hilary Benn, his development secretary, who told a parliamentary committee on July 19 that "around half" of World Bank aid programmes have privatisation conditions. Recent research by the NGO network Eurodad shows that...Eleven of 13 countries analysed have to promote privatisation to receive World Bank loans, the two exceptions having already undergone extensive privatisation programmes.

The articles concludes:

'Poor countries are free to do what rich countries tell them. The cost is huge. Christian Aid estimates that Africa has lost \$272bn in the past 20 years from being forced to promote trade liberalisation as the price for receiving World Bank loans and debt relief.'

The announcements made at the G8 summit grabbed the headlines. The truth behind their extravagant claims is harder to come by. It will be exposed by the reality of continued poverty, starvation and death in those countries. They will get no relief from the rich capitalist nations of the G8. □



Socialism or Barbarism

by Rob Sewell

MORE THAN a decade ago, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the strategists of Capital launched an unprecedented ideological offensive against socialism and Marxism. For them, capitalism had won. However, what had collapsed was not socialism, but a system of bureaucratic rule, i.e., Stalinism. Nevertheless, this ferocious offensive had the effect of starting an ideological stampede to the right within the working class movement internationally. The left-reformists switched sides, like a man changing his shirt, to become rightwing attorneys for capitalism. In Russia and Eastern Europe former "Communists" transformed themselves into capitalists. Since that time, the political pendulum has swung far to the right, epitomised by the victory of Blairism in Britain and of neo-Conservatism in the United States.

While the forces of socialism were isolated in this period, the ground was being prepared for a titanic shift to the left. The domination of the American Empire and the vociferous greed of the monopolies in intensifying their exploitation of the planet were preparing a backlash. Given the harsh austerity of neo-liberal policies, Latin America was propelled to the forefront of this radicalisation. And within Latin America, Venezuela is in the vanguard of revolutionary developments.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Hugo Chavez has moved further and further to the left. Earlier this year, Chavez raised the need to study and re-examine socialism. "I am convinced," he said, "and I think that this conviction will be for the rest of my life, that the path to a new, better and possible world, is not capitalism, the path is socialism, that is the path: socialism, socialism". Over the last period he has consistently reiterated this point and has stimulated discussion about socialism not only in

Venezuela, but everywhere. "We want socialism of the 21st century", he said, and stated the choice was between "Socialism or Barbarism". It is these ideas which now terrify the international bourgeoisie, starting with the Washington gang, so convinced that socialism was dead and buried long ago.

With millions of workers and youth across the world becoming increasingly radicalised, Chavez's clarion call for socialism has extreme importance. It has become a focal point. For those who, sickened by the miseries of capitalism and imperialism, have stated another world is possible, a clear alternative is vital. However, within this "anti-capitalist" movement there are a host of views, from liberalism to anarchism, offered up as a way forward. Marxists have a responsibility, as we have done with great effect in Venezuela, to engage in this debate and help clarify the socialist alternative.

Reform is not enough

There are those in the anti-capitalist movement who are content with simply calling for the reform of capitalism, as if you can transform a man-eating lion into a vegetarian. For them, all we need to do is simply lessen the burden on the downtrodden masses, instead of removing the burden altogether. The capitalist system must be more "humane", "fairer", "gentler", less capitalistic! They are like the liberal-reformists of the past who wanted to change the system bit by bit, then eventually in a hundred years time everything would be for the better. But as R.H. Tawney once put it, "you can peel an onion layer by layer, but you can't skin a live tiger claw by claw." It is not possible to change the nature of capitalism, which, as Karl Marx explained, is based upon the constant extraction of surplus value from the labour of the working class. It is a system of human exploitation with

its own laws, and despite attempts to make this exploitation "softer", it inevitably breaks down as the system moves into crisis.

More than 150 years ago, before the advent of the modern working class, socialism existed in an immature "utopian" form. Great thinkers like Robert Owen, Saint Simon and Fourier outlined socialist alternatives to capitalism. They were bitter critics of the system, but their alternatives, enclaves within the sea of capitalism, could not work.

With the development of the working class, more advanced socialist thinking emerged. One of the leading theorists of the British Chartist movement, Bronterre O'Brien, wrote:

"The history of mankind shows that from the beginning of the world, the rich of all countries have been in a permanent state of conspiracy to keep down the poor of all countries, and for this plain reason - because the poverty of the poor man is essential to the riches of the rich man. No matter by what means they may disguise their operations, the rich are everlastingly plundering, debasing, and brutalising the poor. All the crimes and superstitions of human nature have their origin in this cannibal warfare of riches against poverty. The desire of one man to live on the fruits of another's labour is the original sin of the world. It is this which fills the world with faction and hypocrisy and has made all past history to be what Gibbon so justly described it - 'a record of the crimes, absurdities, and calamities of mankind.' It is the parent injustice from which all injustice springs."

This was written in 1835! How clear! How erudite compared with our present-day radicals! He went on to explain that the miseries of the working class were not due simply to the malice of the capitalist, but the automatic operation of

the capitalist system itself. In other words, no amount of pleading with big business will help matters. It is not a question of "good" and "bad" capitalists. It is the economic laws of capitalism which dictate to big business (and governments), and not the other way round.

"We do not," he wrote, "accuse the moneyed capitalists of intentional robbery. To do this would be as unjust as it would be malignant... These spoliations they commit, not from sinister design, but from [their] accidental position in society; or, rather, the spoliations are committed for them by the silent operation of causes over which they have no control under the existing arrangements of society. Those of the middle class are, like all other men, the creatures of circumstances. Their characters are formed by institutions and their relative positions in society to other classes."

However, it was Marx and Engels who went on to develop these ideas and place socialism on a scientific basis. They were able, basing themselves on the most advanced ideas of the time, to work out a new world outlook. The publication of the "Communist Manifesto" in 1848 constituted a milestone in socialist theory. It was the most far-sighted work of its kind, then and possibly today. Marx and Engels, more than any of their contemporaries, were able to see far into the future. Today's buzzword of "globalisation" was analysed by them more than 150 years ago.

They were able to achieve this by applying the method of dialectical materialism in their analysis of all things. This philosophical outlook was based on materialism, the belief in one material world, where ideas are a product of the material brain, and reflect the world around us. It is also dialectical in the sense that it sees everything in a process of continual change, an endless maze of relations and interactions. Dialectics is the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought.

These laws exert themselves unconsciously in the form of external necessity in the midst of an endless series of seeming accidents. This is also the case for the most part in human history. Marx and Engels explained that while men and women make history, they do so in circumstances not of their own choosing. While the economic circum-

stances are decisive, they are not the only determining factors in history. There is a complex reciprocating interactions between economic, social and political events.

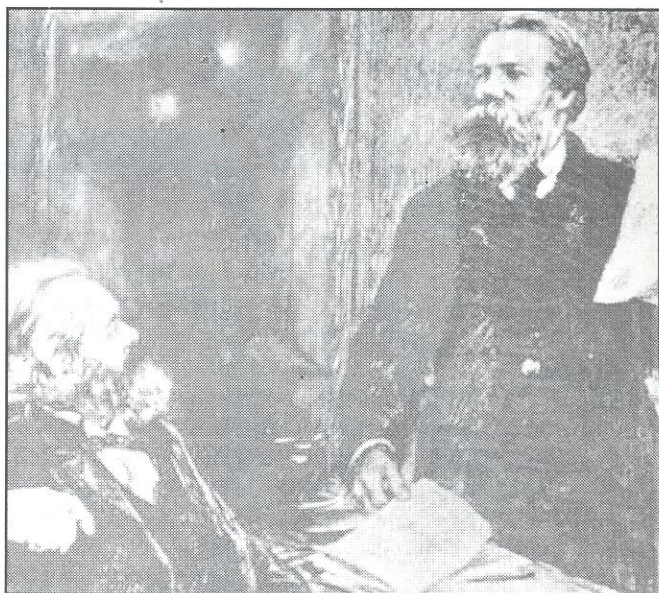
Marxism attempts to understand the "driving forces of the driving forces" behind the actions of men and women.

For Marx and Engels, the motive force of history was the class struggle. Each society (slave, feudal, capitalist) throws up its own

unique economic relations and its class structure. All societies serve to develop the productive forces, but there comes a time when these forces rebel against the constraints imposed upon them by the out-dated superstructure of society. A new class emerges from the womb of the old society, whose task it is to overthrow the old order and lay the basis for a new reorganisation of society. Under capitalism, which has created the world market and laid the material basis for socialism, the working class is born, not only as a source of exploitation, but as a revolutionary class. Experience through mighty battles teaches it to become conscious of its role, firstly developing a class consciousness and then a socialist consciousness. In other words, it is the task of the working class to overthrow capitalism and bring about socialism. "The emancipation of the working class, is the task of the working class itself", wrote Marx.

A new vista for humankind

The historic mission of capitalism was to lay the foundations of a new world order, on the basis of the world market and the world division of labour. It has now become a fetter on the further development of society, and is rotten-ripe for overthrow. Over the last 100 years, the working class has tried again and again to eliminate capitalism, but has been frustrated by its leadership. Only in Russia in 1917 did it succeed. Under Lenin and Trotsky, the task of the young soviet republic was to spread the revolution worldwide. Unfortunately,



the betrayal of the revolutions in the west by the social democratic leaders resulted in the isolation of the Russian Revolution in a backward country. It was this that led to its degeneration and the emergence of Stalinism. A river of blood separated the workers' democracy of Lenin and Trotsky from the totalitarian regime of Stalin.

As Hugo Chavez said recently, in the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, Trotsky was right - it is not possible to build socialism in one country. Only with an internationalist perspective, based upon the ideas of the Permanent Revolution, can the socialist revolution succeed. There can be no solution by tinkering with capitalism. It has thoroughly exhausted its historic role. In 1820, the gap between the richest and the poorest countries was three to one. By 1950 it had risen to 35 to one. Today it is 74 to one. Within nations, the class divide between rich and poor has never been greater. In the United States, the citadel of world capitalism, since 1979, the median family income have risen by 18% but the income of the top 1% has gone up by 200%. Tensions are building up everywhere, as the working class is remorselessly squeezed. Despite all the acclamations of the soothsayers of capitalism, this is a recipe for all-out class war. The basis for world revolution has been prepared by the actions of the imperialists and the contradictions of capitalism. One successful revolution would transform the world and open up a new vista for humankind. That is the perspective that lies before us. □

Back to Connolly – Forward to Workers' Unity

by Phil Mitchinson

"An Irish Republic, the only purely political change in Ireland worth crossing the street for will never be realised except by a revolutionary party that proceeds upon the premise that the capitalist and the landlord classes in town and country in Ireland are criminal accomplices with the British government, in the enslavement and subjection of the nation. Such a revolutionary party must be socialist, and from socialism alone can the salvation of Ireland come."

James Connolly, *The Harp*, March 1909

NEXT YEAR we will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Seven years after the above words were written, James Connolly, wounded in that struggle and unable to stand, was tied to a chair and shot dead by the British army. Nine decades later England's first colony remains one of British imperialism's last possessions. Five years after that Rising was brutally crushed, Ireland was criminally divided by British imperialism and remains so to this day. Throughout the intervening years there has always been an organisation calling itself the Irish Republican Army fighting some kind of armed struggle with the declared aim of driving out British imperialism and re-uniting Ireland. Until now.

The recent declaration by the leadership of the Provisional IRA that the armed struggle is over has been reported in the media as an historic turning point and a fundamental departure in Irish politics. In reality it is the inevitable continuation of the process that led to the ceasefire declared in 1994, and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Several statements had already been issued about arms being "put beyond use" and "the complete cessation of violence" so, in one sense, this is nothing fundamentally new. However, these earlier statements were not enough for the Unionist politicians who are preventing the devolved Stormont assembly from meeting. The Sinn Fein leadership has pinned all its hopes on the convening of that assembly, and so a further statement was needed.

The impact of the Northern Bank robbery, and even more so the murder of Robert McCartney, compelled the leadership of Sinn Fein to go further than before. The new international atmosphere – the so-called war on terror – had an effect too. They were coming under renewed pressure from several angles, not least from the Establishment (the Irish, American and British ruling classes) from whom some of them crave acceptance.

Of course, the Unionist leaders greeted this statement with suspicion and hostility. Nothing will ever be enough for Paisley and co. whose only purpose is to oppose any step towards a united Ireland, whose only policy is to instil fear into the Protestant population that they would suffer oppression and discrimination as a result.

The roots of this decision to announce the end of the armed struggle can be traced back to the mid-1980s and the change of tack by the Sinn Fein leadership with the turn to the policy of the Armalite and the ballot box. As one republican wittily commented this has now been traded in for the Armani and the ballot box.

In another sense one could say that the roots of this latest development go all the way back to the abandonment of armed struggle by the IRA in the 1960s, and then the split which led to the creation of the Provisional movement in the first place. From this point of view many will be asking now what was the point of the last 30 years? Dolours Price asks in *The Blanket* in an *Open Letter to Gerry Adams*: "So

Gerry it has come to this. Not a lot when all is considered, nothing that didn't already exist since the creation of the State. Constitutional Nationalism has been a part of Six County politics since forever... Not a lot to see so many people dead for, hardly a resounding victory, not even a resounding compromise." (*The Blanket*, 31/07/05)

In this sense the end of military operations is an important turning point, particularly for the Provisional Republican movement. As Marxists we support the end of the military campaign but we have to ask what is to replace it? Marxists are not pacifists, nor do we glorify violence. We base ourselves on the struggles of the working class internationally, its traditions and methods of struggle. As Marx explained the task of the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves. For that reason Marxism has always opposed the methods of individual terrorism, a campaign of bombings and assassinations, not for sentimental reasons, but above all because it could not work. Where such methods were used they could never defeat British imperialism, worse they were counter-productive, serving to drive a section of the Protestant population into the arms of reactionary loyalism, and therefore reinforcing the sectarian divide.

We base ourselves on Connolly who organised an armed force in the shape of the Irish Citizens' Army - in the first place to defend workers from the attacks of scabs and the bosses' hired thugs - as part of the mass movement of the working class. Connolly explained a thousand times that we must change society "peacefully if possible, by force if necessary."

We are in favour of participating in elections, in using them as a platform to reach workers with our ideas, of using the council chamber or the floor of parliament for the

same purpose. But this is not nearly enough on its own, it must be combined with organising workers and youth around a programme of socialist revolution. In the case of Sinn Fein the armed struggle and the ballot box has been replaced with nothing but more ballot boxes.

At least a section of the Provisional Republican movement will now be feeling demoralised and betrayed. They and many others, especially the young people who have just started to become involved in politics, will want to know - what next? If the goal remains a united Ireland free from the domination of British imperialism, as the Provisionals' statement says, then how is that to be achieved? Clearly not by the kind of armed struggle we have seen over the last decades because that has failed.

According to some all we have to do is wait. The development of the market, globalisation and economic necessity will inevitably lead to a united Ireland in the end. Former Labour Party Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley, for example, argues in *The Guardian*: "The hopes of Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera will be realised courtesy of the global market and the European Union. The inexorable pressure of economic reality is dragging the six counties closer and closer to the republic. Where economics leads, politics is bound to follow. Industry and commerce grow closer day by day and the institutions of government will soon reflect that shift from partnership to integration... the war is won, because time and logic are on the side of Irish unity. All they have to do is wait."

Exactly how much longer that wait will be he does not inform us. Frankly the Irish working class has 'waited' long enough. Now they should wait without jobs, in poor housing, in a divided society until the rich southern bosses simply buy the north? This is no more plausible than the old idea of waiting for the size of the Catholic population to overtake the Protestant population. This 'theory' never took into account that the fears of that Protestant population, of becoming an oppressed minority, stirred up by the sectarian loyalist politicians, would not simply vanish the day there were more Catholics north of the border than Protestants, even if that were ever to happen. On the contrary, along the way those fears would have been whipped up into a frenzy.

The economic inevitability argument



holds no water precisely because it completely ignores the sectarian divide in the population. It is an economic 'theory' completely divorced from politics and the real situation that exists. In the same way politicians like Hattersley think European integration is inevitable, ignoring the different interests of the different national ruling classes, which block the path to a more rational pooling of the resources of the continent. The division of the world into rival nation states, and of society into contending classes is inherent in capitalism. One of the historic tasks of capitalism was to create borders. The struggle against borders is the struggle for socialism.

What next for Sinn Fein?

What is the way forward being offered by the leadership of Sinn Fein? The leadership of the Provisionals has recognised that their military campaign failed and could not win. The next stage in the process will be to dump arms. The whole of the last period has been dominated by calls for Provisional IRA weapons to be decommissioned. Meanwhile the loyalist paramilitaries have no intention of giving up their guns. According to the Ulster Defence Association, "if people think loyalism is just going to follow suit, it's a non-event. There's an awful lot of dialogue to get through." (*The Guardian* 29/07/05)

The loyalist organisations are currently engaged in a ferocious turf war where criminal gangs fight, maim and kill over drug dealing and racketeering. For this reason alone they will not hand over their weapons. They remain a serious threat to workers from all communities, as the current violence in

Ardoyne demonstrates.

Now, with the cover of armed struggle removed, those elements in the Provisional Republican movement who have been engaged in criminal activities have also been exposed. The Northern Bank robbery and the brutal murder of Robert McCartney are only the most recent examples of a descent into gangsterism by a section of the Provisionals.

There is a great deal of sarcasm in the British press now about Provisional IRA members becoming 'as harmless as the British Legion'. Some of these wiseacres talk about 'poachers turning gamekeepers', proposing their inclusion into the police force. That piece of the jigsaw is unlikely to fit, but Sinn Fein into the PSNI can go, indeed this will probably be their next step. Their supporters will want to know what is the next stage of the struggle. The answer would appear to be that Sinn Fein will join the policing board, no doubt behind the cover of needing to defend communities from sectarian attack.

The leaders of Sinn Fein have pinned all their hopes on a purely parliamentary campaign. They have swapped their ideals for ministerial portfolios. The peace process has meant that Sinn Fein has already made big electoral gains in the north where it has eclipsed the SDLP. This is, in part, due to the initial (perceived) success in gaining devolution, and promising peace and progress. It is also partly a response to the growth of Paisley and co. At the same time, Paisley and the DUP have gained votes and seats overtaking the UUP by whipping up fears that the British government was making too many concessions, and in response to the growth of Sinn Fein. They are two sides of the same coin. As the one has grown so too has the other. This is yet another indication of how the Good Friday Agreement has acted to entrench sectarianism.

Sinn Fein has built up its support in the south too. The latest polls put them on 11 percent. Repeated in an election this would increase their representation in the Dail, and, in the immediate future, that support will probably increase again. Adams and co. imagine they can become at least junior partners in coalitions north and south of the border simultaneously. Well, that remains to be seen, perhaps they can - but so what if they do? They can become junior partners in a capitalist

Ireland

government in the south that does not want to unite Ireland, and be responsible for implementing their anti-working class policies. After all, if the prospect of uniting Ireland is dependent on the growth of southern capitalism, and the wealth of the southern bosses, the national interest will be to do whatever is necessary to increase the profits of Irish companies. That of course can only be achieved by attacking the wages and conditions of Irish workers. This is what comes of putting 'national interests' (i.e. the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie) before class interests.

Sinn Fein entering a coalition government in the south would not mean a single step in the direction of uniting Ireland. It would gain them more ministerial portfolios, get their foot further inside the door of the establishment, but achieve nothing for the Irish working class.

Stormont

Meanwhile Sinn Fein is now the second biggest party in the north, but there is little likelihood of Stormont meeting any time soon. The biggest party in Stormont (and at Westminster from the six counties) is Paisley's DUP. If Stormont does eventually meet then Paisley has made it quite clear that they will not accept a single step in the direction of unification. "there can be no place in any future government of Northern Ireland for IRA/Sinn Fein... Into their counsels the unionists of Ulster will never enter nor will they gain their goal of a united Ireland."

Protestant workers are hardly likely to be convinced of the benefits of becoming a minority in a united Ireland that cannot provide for the needs of everyone. Paisley and co. present the Good Friday Agreement and Stormont as steps in the direction of unification. They are not. Yet, ironically, they are aided and abetted in this misrepresentation by the leaders of Sinn Fein who also present the institutions of devolution as progress towards a united Ireland.

In short, the leadership of Sinn Fein does not just see the Good Friday Agreement as a means to achieve their objectives; they now see it as their only means. We will repeat what we said from the beginning. This agreement is a sham and a deception and a lie. There have been some concessions. Some prisoners have been released, the RUC has changed its name, some watchtow-

ers are coming down, and there is the prospect of some troops being removed. Three battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment are to be disbanded. There is a promise of discussions about 'on the runs.'

It must be said that in the main these concessions have been to the consequences of the last thirty years. What there has not been is one single step in the direction of a united Ireland, and on the basis of this phoney agreement there will not be.

Down this road there is no path to unity and the expulsion of imperialism, only a dead end, a cul-de-sac of accepting partition and reinforcing the sectarian divide.

Even if the Assembly meets it can make no difference to the lives of working class families. Its task is to oversee the implementation of a capitalist policy in the six counties. It is possible that it can be resuscitated for a while, but as the much-vaunted solution to the problems of Ireland it is dead.

At present we have another period of direct rule from Westminster. This can be the source of further crises within Sinn Fein the longer it continues. The Sinn Fein leaders need Stormont to be restored; their reputations and their support are tied to the rickety chariot of devolution.

British imperialism, too, is keen to restore devolved power. The purpose of the peace process and devolution from the point of view of British imperialism is, partly at least, to be able to cut costs. They would like to create stability for the more thorough capitalist exploitation of the Irish working class. Short of that they would at least like to cut back on the £4 billion a year they are spending in Ireland.

There are currently more troops stationed in the six counties than in Iraq. Now the Secretary of State talks of 'normalising', of a new situation where bobbies patrol their beat on bicycles, without any military back-up. He paints a pretty picture, but this is also a lie. They intend to keep 5000 troops stationed in the six counties, this is hardly 'normal', it is scaled down occupation, and it tells us a lot about their perspectives.

Although there is no prospect of a return to armed struggle at present, in the long run since capitalism cannot solve one of the problems facing Irish workers, and those problems are the breeding ground of sectarianism, the

ruling class evidently foresees a new descent into violence at some stage. This is a tacit admission that they are powerless to solve the mess they created. Clearly this is a class brim full of confidence in the future and in the abilities of their system!

The old Sinn Fein policy of getting rid of the border first then socialism in the sweet by and by has been replaced by winning elections in two parliaments first, then unification in the sweet by and by. Socialism does not even get a look in. To the old 'two stages' it seems they have now added a few more. They seem to have fallen for the *Sunday Business Post* line that "peace can only come when dreams of total victory are surrendered."

Socialism versus sectarianism

The first problem with this policy is that the southern bourgeoisie do not want to unite with the north. The southern capitalist class abandoned any demands for unity some time ago. Meanwhile a big section of the population in the north fear becoming an oppressed minority in a united Ireland of poverty and unemployment. The Nationalist leadership of Sinn Fein have effectively abandoned an armed struggle and the 'two stage theory', in favour of a purely parliamentary road to holding office north and south (and power in neither) then, eventually, some time later, a united capitalist Ireland.

But this cannot succeed either. The Protestant population could not be bombed into a united Ireland, nor will they be voted into one that cannot offer them jobs, houses, healthcare and cannot guarantee their rights. The biggest barrier to uniting Ireland is sectarianism. The sectarian divide created and spread by British imperialism is inseparably bound up with the capitalist system. The sectarian politicians live on the inability of that system to provide for the needs of all. To overcome that divide it is necessary to overcome those conditions and that means breaking with capitalism. The struggle for a new form of society that guarantees the rights of all, that has no interest in any form of oppression or discrimination and can provide for the needs of all - in other words a socialist society - is an alternative that can be attractive to workers from all backgrounds.

Class politics is the only means by which Protestant and Catholic workers can be united. Of course, this is not a

simple matter. Merely to erect a banner announcing workers' unity will achieve precisely nothing. In the last thirty years and, even more recently since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, that sectarian divide has grown still further. Today it is a yawning chasm that will not be easily closed.

Despite the remarkable level of segregation in workplaces the trade unions remain the only non-sectarian mass organisations. As such they have the potential to act as forums through which class unity can be built up. They are linked to the unions in the south and in Britain, and that is an important factor in overcoming the fears of workers from different backgrounds. Of course, they do not exist in a vacuum, they have been affected by the events of recent years too. However they remain the vehicles for united workers struggles over wages and jobs, and against discrimination and sectarianism. Just look at the magnificent example of the one-day General Strike in January 2002 following the murder of postal worker Daniel McColgan by loyalist paramilitaries. This demonstrates what is possible. However, none of this is automatic, it requires the conscious intervention of socialists in the trade union movement.

In Britain it is vital to raise the point that Afghanistan and Iraq are not the only countries in the world occupied by British imperialism and although there are many differences with the situation in Ireland, nonetheless we have a particular duty to oppose the imperialism of 'our own' ruling class.

In the British trade unions the call must be made to participate with workers from Ireland north and south in creating forums to promote working class unity and solidarity.

Yet, having been united in various struggles on the industrial front, these workers would still return home to find that come election time there is not a party to represent them. The working class is disenfranchised, and they are left with little alternative but to participate in the sectarian head count that passes for an election in the six counties, which itself is a further barrier to unity.

The idea of building branches of the British Labour Party would obviously be anathema to one section of workers in the six counties, whilst the same would apply to the Irish Labour Party amongst another section of workers. That is

without mentioning the current policies and leaders of those parties which would be enough to disillusion workers from any background.

Nevertheless raising the need for a mass, non-sectarian, working class party in the six counties inside the labour movement in Britain and in Ireland gives us the opportunity to campaign for workers' unity and for a socialist solution. This alone would be a worthwhile effort.

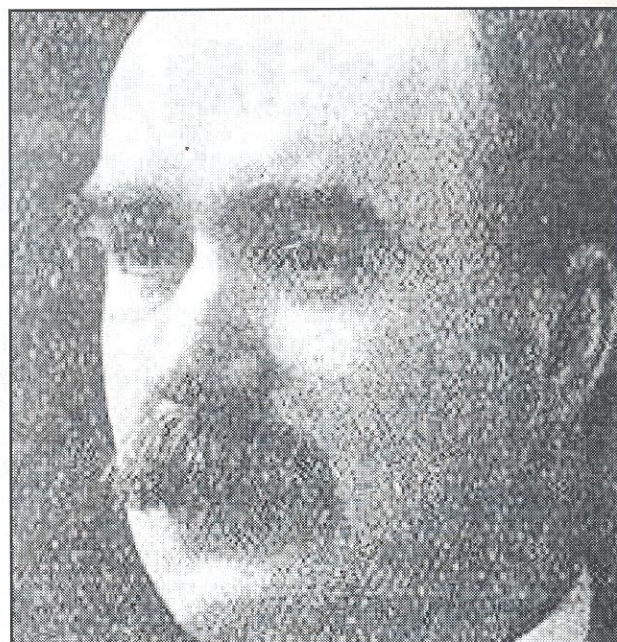
If such a party could be built it would be a giant step forward, but it still would not have solved the problem. For that we need to build a revolutionary party that will fight for socialist policies inside the labour movement, amongst workers and youth of all backgrounds. The fundamental problem of Ireland is the rule of capital, the sectarian veil behind which it hides must be ripped asunder to expose the truth.

Back to Connolly!

Many in and around the Provisional Republican movement will now be searching for some new way forward. We believe that there is no better place to look for those answers than in the life, the struggle and the writings of James Connolly.

There is only one way to achieve the republic and that is through the socialist revolution. The only 32 county republic that can be achieved is the workers' republic, the socialist republic. To create that it is necessary to build workers' unity, and to build a revolutionary party. Above all at this turning point in the long struggle of the Irish people for freedom, at his crossroads for republicanism, the task is Return to Connolly! Study the writings of James Connolly, the greatest Marxist to have been born in these islands. Study Marxism. We need to learn the lessons of our own experiences and the experiences of the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples for freedom internationally. Those lessons and experiences have to be married with the history, tradition and concrete reality of Ireland today.

Of course many will say the idea of workers' unity and socialist revolution is utopian and not practical. We have



heard all this before. We have seen too where their practical solutions lead – precisely to today's impasse. That great Irish Republican, revolutionary, Marxist James Connolly answered in advance all the cynics who will claim we are utopian and impractical.

"Revolution is never practical – until the hour of Revolution strikes. Then it alone is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromisers become the most visionary and futile of human imaginings. For that hour let us think, work and hope. For that hour let us pawn our present ease in hopes of a glorious redemption: For that hour let us prepare the hosts of labour with intelligence sufficient to laugh at the nostrums dubbed practical by our slavemasters – practical for the perpetuation of our slavery: For the supreme crisis of human history let us watch like sentinels with weapons ever at the ready."

James Connolly,
Workers' Republic, June 1900

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Israel: The withdrawal from Gaza ... a step towards peace?

by Yossi Schwartz in Jerusalem

FOR DAYS Israelis and Palestinians have been glued to their TV sets watching the developments in Gaza Strip. The army and the police, under the Sharon-Bush "disengagement plan", have been evacuating 21 settlements in Gaza and 4 of the 120 settlements in the West Bank.

For weeks the supporters of the settlers have been wearing orange ribbons on their arms. In many places one sees the nationalist slogan "A Jew does not expel a Jew". This is a slogan that can mean either "non-Jews expel Jews" (supposedly referring to the Israeli Army) or "Jews expel non-Jews".

The evacuation of the Gaza Strip began last Wednesday. The settlers were evacuated in the gentlest way possible. The operation was called "A Hand to our Brothers". Soldiers and police carried the settlers who refused to leave of their own accord out of the area as if they were carrying fragile eggs. Many of these right-wingers had an orange Star of David pinned to their chests. Many of their children walked with their arms up in the air as if they were the victims of the Nazis – not simply colonialists who stole the land from the people of Gaza and built large farms on the backs of cheap local Palestinian labour.

The settlers insulted the soldiers and threw paint, stones and other objects at them. Yet the army officers spoke to them as if they were their lost brothers and sisters. A man named Shamir told TV reporters, "until now I believed this state was mine – not anymore". Then he added with tears, "What will happen to us? We had 300-400 dunams (1 dunam = 1,000 m²) each, and now they put us in hotels". Later on the Minister of Housing, a member of the Zionist Labour Party, explained that those who agreed to leave voluntarily had already received new villas, while the others were being put in 5 star hotels until the government could find them a new home. Another

man, a father holding his daughter, shouted hysterically at a soldier: "Take my daughter like the Nazis did to the Jews in Europe!"

For 30 years 1,500 families, altogether some 8,000 people who settled in Gaza after the Israeli occupation 38 years ago, saw their businesses flourish. They received large tracts of land for free in one of the most densely populated areas in the world. They also received great villas that cost them almost nothing. Nor were these people removed from Gaza without making the evacuation good for business. Each family was well compensated, receiving at least half a million dollars, in addition to receiving new farmland inside the green line. For instance, according to the agreement, farmers who leave their greenhouses will receive \$4,000 per dunam. The Gush Katif greenhouses cover an area of 3,000 dunams! This comes at a time when the number of people living under the poverty line in Israel has risen in the last year from one million to one and a half million!

Palestinian workers

While the settlers and many of their orange supporters took care to show their tears to the TV cameras, the bourgeois media did not bother to ask what would happen to the Palestinian workers who have worked for the settlers for 30 years, getting paid pennies. Would they at least receive compensation in the form of unemployment benefits? Of course not.

Some of the Palestinian workers who were busy packing the furniture, clothes, and religious books of their slave masters received gifts of 50 dollars. Some even received small ventilators. However, most of them received nothing at all. Some Palestinians are sorry that they have lost their jobs, even if they were only paid pennies. Unemployment in the Gaza Strip stands at around 80

percent. However, no one is sorry to see the settlers themselves leaving.

Some Palestinian children are happy for the first time in their lives. They believe that they will be able to fly a kite without fear of being shot. This however, is a sad illusion.

On Thursday, as expected, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who for years has been the faithful servant of US imperialism, praised Sharon for his courage and leadership in acting on his plan to withdraw from Gaza. "This will lead to peace in the Middle East", he promised. What else could we expect from the man who supports the phoney elections held under the bayonets of imperialism. His well paid job is rather simple, when all he has to do is repeat the words of his master, George W. Bush.

Annan also repeated Sharon's condemnation of last Wednesday's massacre when a Jewish settler in the West Bank grabbed a gun from a security guard and killed four Palestinian workers. No one bothered to ask how an unarmed settler was able to grab a gun without any resistance.

Annan of course does not seem to know that the settlers are carrying out more terrorist acts against the Palestinians – a golem created by the Israeli state to terrorize the Palestinians and grab more land and which is now out of control and has a mind of its own. Nor did Annan mention the fact that two days after the massacre the Israeli army moved to grab an additional 1,200 dunams of Palestinian land from the village of Gabel El Hamara near Ali and Shila – the same settlements where the four workers were murdered. Perhaps he believes that this is another step in the direction of peace?

The Israeli government will not stop the right-wing, messianic movement it created because this movement is useful to the ruling

class. It is useful because the ruling class can use it not only to terrorize Palestinians, but in the future it can be used against workers struggling for their rights.

While Sharon presents the instructions he received from Bush as a great strategic step and promises that there will now be more money for education and health, this will never happen. At the same time the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was presented by the Palestinian Authority as a great achievement of the policy in support of Pax Americana.

The actual role of the PA was described by Amira Has, a courageous reporter for Haaretz, who wrote on August 16 that thousands of PA police were seen ready to assist the Israeli evacuation. However, these same police were not to be seen anywhere while Dahalan's death squads, dressed in black and armed with Kalashnikovs were terrorizing the people of Gaza.

The trouble is not only isolated in Gaza. Last Thursday an attempt was made on the life of Hassan Youssef, a senior leader of Hamas in the West Bank. He describes the assassination attempt as designed to intimidate the Islamic group for its refusal to end the fight against Israel.

Puppet government

The Palestinian masses are well aware of the role of the this puppet government. On August 17, Naser el Kadwa, the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs was supposed to deliver a very happy speech in Gaza about the withdrawal. However he could not deliver this speech because of a demonstration of the mothers of prisoners, who blamed him for ignoring their children held in Israeli jails for fighting against the occupation. One of the mothers stated that she was very sorry she had voted for Mahmoud Abbas, who has done nothing to fulfill his election promises. She also said that the only thing Prime Minister Ahmed Karia cared about was selling cement to the Israelis so that they could build the Apartheid Wall.

The tension is growing both within Fatah and between Fatah and Hamas. Last week, Faruk el Kadumi, Chairman of Fatah's Central Committee and Chief of the Political Department, issued an order from Tunisia to remove all commanders and employees from the Palestinian security forces which are

controlled by Dahalan, a man who has been groomed by British and US imperialism. He also ordered that those removed should be replaced by a new militia totally subordinate to the Palestinian revolutionary struggle. This is a clear challenge to the PA and to Abu Mazen (Abbas), who is increasingly seen by a growing number of Palestinians as a collaborator of Sharon. This statement is in support of the forces of armed opposition within Gaza. Two weeks ago, he also called for the organization of a popular militia of all the forces opposed to Abu Mazen. These include members of Fatah, Tanzim, and people like Musa Arafat, who has some control over military intelligence. During the last few weeks there have been incidents where forces loyal to Dahalan and those opposed to him have exchanged fire.

On the eve of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Muhammed Azhar, said in a speech that Abu Mazen's programme was for "one authority, one law, one gun". Azhar asked, what authority, law, and what gun is he talking about? The guns of the those who fight against the occupation, or the weapon of the police?

Another Hamas leader, Ahmad Andur, explained that Hamas would not give up on its weapons and would not become a part of the PA apparatus. He also said that Hamas would not initiate an attack on Israel, but that it would use its weapons to defend itself.

Our position against the acts of terror of Hamas against innocent Israelis is well known. It is not simply because of humanitarian reasons, but because these acts drive the Israelis into the hands of Sharon. We want a Palestinian/Israeli workers' state, not a religious state. Our enemies are the big banks and the exploiters, not the Israeli people. However, we also unconditionally defend the Palestinian people against the horrors of Israel's state terrorism. In the event that Sharon attacks Gaza in support of Dahalan and Abu Mazen, any honest person in Gaza would surely demand the formation of an anti-imperialist front to fight against the occupiers.

Let us be clear. The evacuation of Gaza is no more than a bone that US imperialism has thrown to the masses in a desperate attempt to gain industrial peace while it continues to occupy Iraq and while Israel continues to build settlements in the West Bank. The Road

Map to Peace in the Middle East is in ruins, and with instability spreading from Iraq throughout the whole region like a plague, the US is desperate to appear to be doing something, to appear to be trying to put out the flames.

The withdrawal from Gaza will only serve to cause further division between Israelis and Palestinians. It will also increase the tensions amongst Palestinians themselves. People will notice that as Israel withdraws from Gaza, more settlements are being built in the West Bank. This will fuel the desire amongst Palestinians for the return of both the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This will drive many into the open arms of the militants. Already the militants in Gaza are making public displays of strength. The strong arm of the Israeli state in Gaza will be replaced with the collaborationist PA of Abbas, who will be forced to reign in the militants to keep Israel happy.

Socialist Federation of the Middle East

The withdrawal will also foster divisions amongst Israelis as well. The withdrawal has divided Israel as it has never been divided before. Bush and Sharon, and their mouthpieces in the bourgeois media are trying to present the withdrawal from Gaza as a concrete step towards peace. Some even whisper that it may be a step towards the creation of a Palestinian state. The disengagement plan will achieve neither. The Palestinian Authority, in becoming the long arm of the Israeli state, will not have the support to exert its control. The withdrawal from Gaza will only serve to fuel future conflicts.

There is no way that the Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace as long as capitalism continues to exist. The state of Israel, backed by the US, will never give up on East Jerusalem, will never give up on the large blocks of settlements, will never solve the question of the refugees, and will never free all of the Palestinian prisoners. The only way to end this vicious circle of blood is the road of Bolshevism, the road of Lenin and Trotsky – the road of socialist revolution and the establishment of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East, where all nationalities, from the Kurds to the Israelis to the Palestinians can have territorial autonomy within this federation. That is the road to peace. □

16th World Festival of Students and Youth

Chavez again calls for socialism

by Maarten Vanheeuverswyn and Ramon Samblas in Caracas

AUGUST 8 saw the start of the 16th World Festival of Students and Youth, which is being held in Caracas this year. Under the slogan "For peace, solidarity and against imperialism", more than 15,000 young people from all over the globe gathered to discuss an entire range of issues, all of them anti-imperialist in nature.

Very much to its credit, the Venezuelan government is sponsoring this important event and opened up the Military Academy, Fuerte Tiuna to receive the delegates for the official opening rally. Delegates from an impressive 144 different countries from all continents lined up for the opening rally. The Cuban delegation was among the biggest with 1,800 youth present. There were 2,000 delegates from Colombia and the Venezuelan delegation was composed of more than 3,000 delegates. The audience at the ceremony were surprised and glad that there were 720 delegates present from the United States.

The delegates were greeted by the slogan "Welcome to the Socialist Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela". After all the delegations had paraded in front of President Chavez there were performances of indigenous culture. Representatives of the Guaranis and other indigenous Venezuelan peoples presented Hugo Chavez with different items that represented their cultures.

Equally impressive was the team of volunteers who welcomed the visitors. Apart from the translation teams, the food catering teams and the National Guard, a sizeable section of the Bolivarian youth joined the march, singing songs, shouting revolutionary slogans and performing dances.

At the end of the parade, when

all delegations had finally marched to the main square and after the performances, President Chavez officially opened the Festival. After a long wait, Chavez addressed the thousands of youth (as well as the not so young people who were also present) who listened eagerly to what he had to say. He started by looking back sixty years to when the atom bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. President Chavez paid tribute to the victims of this genocide and condemned these acts of terrorism. "Today," he said, "there is an atomic bomb of youth in the valley of Caracas." They had come to see Caracas, the place where Simon Bolivar was born and were very much welcome at this Festival. This has been a great challenge for Venezuela and more than two years of preparation were invested in this event, involving a lot of coordination, and requiring plenty of logistical and political support.

Chavez then recalled the main events of the last six decades. At the end of the 1940s there was the Chinese revolution, one of the greatest events in human history.



This great event was followed by the Cuban Revolution a decade later. Chavez described it as a tremendous inspiration for all of Latin America. This great event marked the path for the future, the President affirmed.

In the 1960s American imperialism suffered a humiliating defeat in Vietnam, which proved that the Empire was not invincible. "A people that wants to be free cannot be defeated", he said, praising the heroic Vietnamese resistance against imperialism.

The 1970s were a period of hope in Latin America, where we saw the Chile of Allende, which was unfortunately brutally crushed by US imperialism. The end of the 1980s in turn signified a universal earthquake with the fall of the Soviet Union. The old political equilibrium was destroyed and after the fall of the socialist camp, the capitalists declared the "end of history". "Neo-liberal globalisation," Chavez said, "is no more than another word for imperialism, and imperialism," he continued, "is the highest stage of capitalism, as Lenin said". In the 1990s the word capitalism had disappeared from dictionaries and a moral and ideological crisis set in, creating a period of intense doubt and confusion. However, like a phoenix rising from its ashes, the President explained that the fighters and revolutionaries would reappear and that they were in fact reappearing. "We are starting a new process, a new dawn where the ideas of justice, peace and equality will be central."

Chavez claimed he was profoundly convinced that the last years had been very demanding and difficult. However, despite the great frustration, in the first decade

of the 21st century, thousands of youth are gathering in Caracas. This, Chavez proclaimed, points to more than simply a new sense of hope. It is an opportunity to debate and to open the battle for ideas. For his part, Chavez does not believe in a struggle in one isolated country. As he said at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre at the end of last year, Chavez again stated that socialism was the only true path and the only way to build a new world. "It is our duty and our challenge to save our planet from the most powerful imperialism that has ever existed, i.e. US imperialism." Significantly, Chavez did not see all American people as one reactionary mass. On the contrary, he firmly saluted and congratulated the American delegation present in Caracas and recognized the "great fighters of the American people", mentioning the name of Martin Luther King. In a bold but very true statement, he said, "The future of the world depends on the consciousness of the American people. When they unite, they can save the world from war and destruction."

Chavez then went on to explain that this was in fact the best moment for the Festival to be held, in these terrible conditions under capitalism and despite the existence of most powerful and hypocritical form of imperialism in history. "The Roman Empire," he said, "was at least not as hypocritical, since they called themselves an Empire. American imperialism, on the other hand, shamefully proclaims to 'fight for democracy'", after which he gave the examples of the role of the US in Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Panama and Haiti to prove the opposite. "The whole of America has suffered the attacks of US imperialism. Bolivar was right when he said in 1826, 'The United States of America seems destined by providence to plague America with misery in the name of Liberty.'"

Then he turned the audience's attention to Venezuela, "where US imperialism has suffered some nasty surprises". US imperialism is not invincible, a fact which has not only been proven in Venezuela, but also in Cuba, where the revolutionary people have struggled against US imperialism for 40 years. Chavez

greeted Fidel Castro, who was watching his speech that was also broadcast on all Venezuelan TV channels. "We came here to debate about peace. But to the hawks in the Pentagon we say, 'If someday you get the crazy idea of coming to invade us, we'll make you bite the dust defending the freedom of our land,'" after which the crowd loudly started shouting "el pueblo armado, jamás será aplastado" (The armed people, will never be smashed). In plain language Chavez concluded by saying that "we would rather die on our knees".

"The struggle of Venezuela is the struggle of the people of the whole world", proclaimed Chavez as he began to sum up his inspiring speech. He recalled the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, who in the 1960s on his visit to Cuba wrote, "Conditions and circumstances impose upon us a revolution." He called for a moral revolution to save the world and for a "revolutionary humanism". But he also added that this was not enough. A political revolution was needed - a political revolution through democracy. Not the false democracy but real people's democracy, like in Venezuela. "Thus," he said, "we need a moral, social, political and economical revolution in order to destroy the perverse mechanism of this capitalist system."

"The only path is... socialism"

By way of conclusion, repeating what he had said earlier in his speech, Chavez proclaimed: "I have said this earlier. I am convinced more than ever, and I will retain this belief until I die, that the only path to destroy capitalism is socialism. It is the only way to save the planet and the new generations."

To this a pedant would have only a few commas to add. Some references to Jesus Christ and "moral revolution" might be a bit confused, but one thing is clear: such a radical speech made by the President of a nation is quite extraordinary, and can only be welcomed by all progressive people of the world. It was, for that matter, a very inspiring start to an exciting week that will be spent with revolutionaries from all over the world. □

Death threat against Hugo Chavez

LAST MONTH Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition of America and a former Republican presidential candidate, openly called for the assassination of the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. "We have the ability to take him [Chavez] out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability," stated Robertson, our devout Christian.

With the developing revolution in Venezuela, Chavez has emerged as the number one enemy of US imperialism. Over the past years the US has been behind attempts to overthrow Chavez, beginning with the April 2002 coup, the bosses' lockout and then the referendum campaign. The failure of the US-backed opposition has led a section of the Bush Administration to contemplate other means of getting rid of Chavez.

Of course, US officials have denied this, as they have done in the past. But behind the scenes, they are busy plotting Chavez' downfall. Robertson merely states what the others are thinking.

"I don't know about this doctrine of assassination, but if he [Chavez] thinks we're trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it," Robertson said. "It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war... and I don't think any oil shipments will stop."

But our evangelist is wrong. The assassination of Chavez would provoke a wave of revolutionary feeling throughout Latin America and beyond. Oil shipments to the USA would be cut immediately and action would be taken against US property on the continent.

This blunt language is normally reserved for private conversation amongst the ruling circles of America. Robertson is not simply a nutcase. He is a prime force within the Republican Party and a close ally of Bush.

In their simple-mindedness these people may believe that killing one man will solve their problems. They are fooling themselves if they do. For behind Chavez are the millions of workers and poor of Venezuela who have risen up and gained dignity in the revolution that is unfolding. Everything must be done to protect Chavez; he embodies the Venezuelan revolution. The best way of doing it is to put an end to Venezuelan capitalism and its imperialist backers. □

Alan Woods speaks at the World Youth Festival

by our correspondent in Caracas

On August 11, a conference on militarism with over 1000 participants from Venezuela and many other countries took place at the 16th World Festival of Youth and Students in Caracas. Amongst the speakers was Alan Woods, editor of the Marxist.com website, author of many Marxist books and founder of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign.

In the Salon Venezuela in Fuerte Tiuna, the biggest military barracks in Caracas, Alan Woods started the meeting by saying that we live in a period of great change. Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, the defenders of capitalism proclaimed the "end of socialism" and even the "end of history". But what has become of the promise of peace, democracy and prosperity, Alan asked the audience. Fifteen years have passed and there is more instability in the world than ever. Unprecedented crises are taking place with one war after the other, and terrorism spreads like a plague throughout the globe. Such is the state of affairs in the first decade of the 21st century.

On the other hand, thanks to the developments in technology and science, humanity has the possibility of eliminating all the old evils of hunger, war and illiteracy. But what is the reality? 1.2 billion people are living under the poverty line, and every year 8 million men, women and children die as a result of this. This, Alan stated, is nothing less than a holocaust on a world-

scale that nobody talks about. This is what capitalism has to offer today.

Switching to the subject of war, he asked where wars come from. Is it from the heads of Bush and Blair? Nothing of the kind, Alan said, it is an expression and a symptom of a system in decay. Or as Chavez stated, it is capitalist slavery. In the United States every year 500 billion dollars is spent on weapons. With that money

alone it would be possible to build enough hospitals, schools and houses for everybody and to end hunger in the world.

Alan continued with the statement that we live in a peculiar historical period. Earlier there were more imperialist powers, but now there is only one real giant, i.e. the United States, and ancient Rome was nothing compared to the United States at present. Thirty

eight percent of military spending in the world comes from the U.S., including their own weapons of mass destruction. US imperialism is truly the biggest counter-revolutionary power on earth in history. With colossal power, however, comes colossal arrogance. George W. Bush is rapidly doing away with all international rules and diplomacy patiently built up over centuries. US imperialism, Alan stated, grants itself the right to intervene everywhere.

Washington tries to present Venezuela as a threat to the USA. The 100,000 Kalashnikovs ordered by Chavez from Russia are nothing compared to American nuclear power. Venezuela is no military threat at all to the USA, Alan stressed, but the people of Venezuela clearly have a much more powerful weapon. That weapon is the weapon of ideas, which is more dangerous to imperialism than all the big weapons in the world. It is the realisation that ordinary people have the right to decide over their own destiny.

Alan Woods countered the assertion that we have to be very careful not to provoke US imperialism. He pointed out that US imperialism has been active in Venezuela already, referring to the coup in 2002. And they will intervene again when necessary. That the United States are very powerful is a fact, but this has its limits too, as is proven in Iraq. The imperialists invaded Iraq two years ago and proclaimed that the mission



had been "accomplished". In reality Iraq is in a shambles and has no functioning national army. 150,000 American soldiers have not been able to defeat the Iraqi people, though at least 100,000 Iraqis have been killed. The goal was to plunder Iraq, but what has been achieved? Nothing but a terrible haemorrhage of blood and gold. One billion U.S. dollars are spent on this dirty war every single week.

Alan asked if there were any power in the world that could overcome the power of US imperialism? The audience burst out in applause after Alan gave the answer to this rhetorical question: "Yes, the working class! Not a light bulb shines, not a wheel turns and not a telephone rings without their consent!" The problem is that they have this power but they do not know it. There is no room for pessimism and cynicism now. Venezuela proves that it is possible to resist and to change society!

Turning back to the war in Iraq, the editor of Marxist.com told the audience that war is terrible but he immediately quoted Lenin's reply to this statement, "Yes, terribly profitable". The multinational Halliburton is receiving 1.8 billion dollars from the American tax payer for its reconstruction operations in Iraq and it is no coincidence that vice-president Dick Cheney was for a long time an Executive of this company, which also gives big donations to the Republican Party.

Hugo Chavez dared to stand up against American imperialism. US imperialism in turn wants to destroy the Venezuelan revolution because it has given an example and brings hope to the rest of Latin America. There is one big cause driving the revolution, and that is the cause of socialism. After defending the ideas of Marxism as a necessary tool for arming the Venezuelan revolution and pushing it forward, Alan dealt with the question of the possible assassination of President Chavez. That is a real danger, but as Chavez himself said, if you think the revolution would be destroyed by this, you are wrong. "There are hundreds of thousands of Chavezes." After this statement, sections of the audience stood up and started shouting slogans like "Long live Chavez", "Long live the revolution", "Another world is possible, and that is Socialism!" Alan continued, "Chavez said that there is one destiny for the Venezuelan people, and that is socialism. We are at a historical turning point, not only in Venezuela but in the whole of Latin America, and even in the USA and the whole world. Venezuela is a beacon and international socialism is the only way to get out of this sick nightmare."

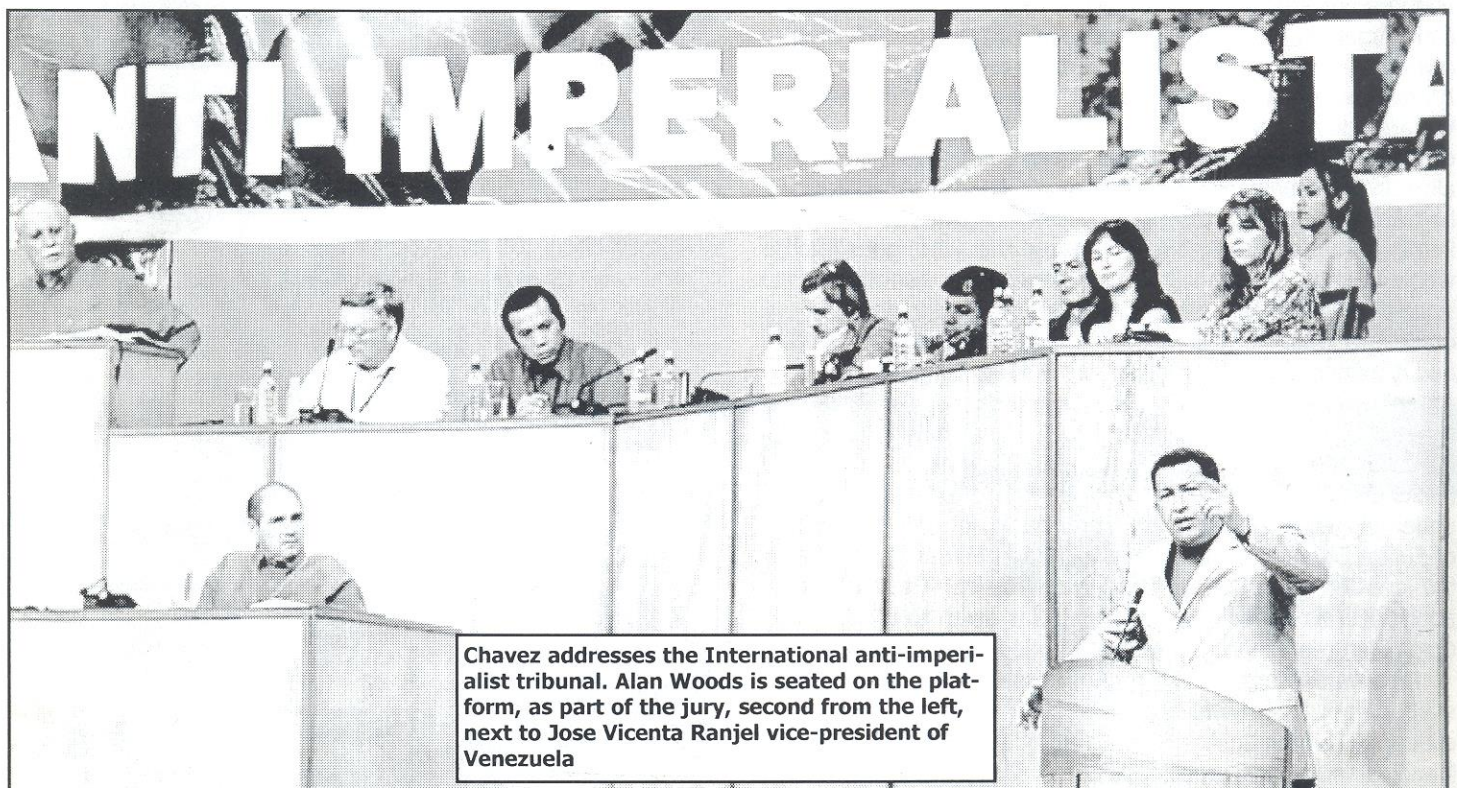
Alan finished his speech with an appeal to the Venezuelan people in the room, who formed the vast majority of the audience. "It is up to you! Mobilise around the ideas of socialism in

Venezuela. Long live the Venezuelan Revolution! Long live the revolution in Latin America! Long live world socialism!"

After Alan Woods' speech, which was followed by an enthusiastic ovation, the floor was given to the president of the World Peace Council, a member of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) who gave a general report on the terrors of imperialism around the globe and expressed his support for the oppressed people of the world. However, his statement did not contain a single atom of revolutionary or class politics. It received only polite applause.

One of the other speakers was Gabriel from the Young Communist League of Colombia. He mainly talked about Colombia but stressed that the events in Colombia are very much connected with events worldwide. Plan Colombia or the so-called war on drugs is in reality nothing more than a strategy to spread US interventionism in the Latin American region. "Colombia", the comrade summed up, "is the Israel of Latin America, and the Latin American youth must stand up and fight." The audience responded warmly to the appeal for solidarity with the people of Colombia, who are facing terrible repression under the reactionary pro-US regime of Uribe.

A very brief and general talk was given by a Cambodian participant, after



Venezuela

which the North Korean delegate read out his nationalist anti-Japanese speech through his translator. This long and tedious statement only succeeded in sending most of the audience to sleep.

The audience was then given quite a lot of time to participate in the debate. Most of the speakers were Venezuelans who spoke directly of their experience of the revolution. Prominent among the foreign delegates who spoke from the floor was Juan Jose Lopez, the General Secretary of the Spanish Students Union, and a member of the International Marxist Tendency, who underlined the points made by Alan Woods and expressed the firm support of the Spanish students for the Venezuelan revolution. Another speaker from the floor was Klaus Münster from Denmark, who emphasised the need for a clear socialist policy.

Finally, Alan Woods got a few minutes to finish the debate. He dealt with the question of the conditions from which wars originate. It is wrong to take a sentimental view on this matter and just cry over the victims of war. Marxists do not hold a pacifist view and make a clear distinction between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence. The root cause of war is the struggle for the conquest of markets, for raw materials like oil and spheres of influence. On the question someone from the audience asked whether it was possible that there would be another world war in the near future, Alan answered in the negative. "No country in the world is capable of fighting the United States." However, this does not mean at all that wars will not happen again. On the contrary, there are wars going on every day. Most importantly there is the constant war between the poor and the rich, between the oppressed and the oppressors, and in this war the Bolivarian Revolution has a big role to play. Alan joked about feeling sorry for George W. Bush because he is like a man jumping from a twelve-storey building, who, when passing the third storey exclaimed, "So far, so good!" before being crushed. The same false confidence is true for Bush in Iraq. He is supposed to want peace in the Middle East and Latin America. "Yes, they want peace, but peace under their own brutal control."

Alan summed up by stressing the need to speak clearly. We are talking here about the fight against imperialism and capitalism. "How is it possible to wage a war against imperialism in Venezuela without waging war against the enemy at home, the local oligarchy?" They are the agents of imperialism and the backbone of reaction, and the same goes for the whole of Latin America. It is necessary to talk about ideas since you cannot kill an idea. A great idea is the idea that oppressed people can take their future into their own hands, and it extends beyond frontiers, as Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and others prove. This is in essence what socialism is about. "The revolution in Venezuela is not finished and will never be until the power is taken out of the hands of the banks and the oligarchs. There is no future for this world under capitalism. It is necessary to study not only the ideas of Simon Bolivar, Che Guevara, Mella and Mariategui, but also the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky." The audience applauded his appeal, and the floor was given to the Colombian representative who concluded the conference.

Afterwards, there was a great interest in the international stall of Marxist.com and El Militante, where many people, especially from Latin America, asked about the ideas of Marxism and bought a lot of material. □

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The Latin American Revolution Today

Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution

Speaker: **Alan Woods** (editor of Marxist.com and author of "The Venezuelan Revolution")

Lessons of the Bolivian Revolution

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(co-ordinator Bolivia Solidarity Campaign, invited)

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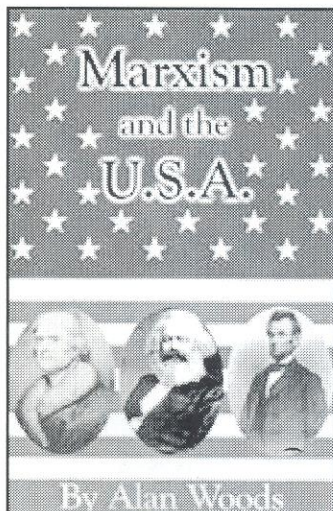
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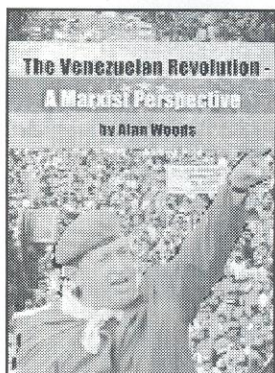
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The Venezuelan Revolution - A Marxist Perspective

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nesses 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 lightning speed of events happening before our very eyes.

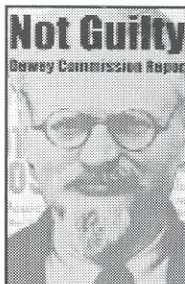
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

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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fighting fund

Fighting Fund: Autumn push called for

THE FIGHTING fund drive usually goes rather quiet during the summer holiday period - this is also the period when we traditionally ask for support for an international appeal to help fund the work of In Defence Of Marxism, of which more later. However this time we have had a number of splendid donations for the Fighting Fund come in including £100 from Jim in France, £29 from Southend readers, £69 collected in 'extras' at the G8 demo, £10 from Myrna Shaw, £20 from Roger Gow, £10 from G. McCartney, £100 from 2 Unison activists and a surprisingly large number of other small amounts collected in from around the country. Thanks to you all. To this must be added the magnificent contribution of over two and a half thousand pounds made by Socialist Appeal sellers and supporters in the UK towards the annual international appeal to help support IDOM and the struggle to build the ideas of Marxism around the world. Once again this shows the importance which socialists and Marxists attach to the principles of internationalism and workers unity. Anyone who would, even at this late stage, like to add to this should send their donation into us, made payable to Socialist Appeal, and we will pass it on.

However we now need to get moving on the Autumn drive to build the Fighting Fund. All sellers should be working out plans to systematically ask for and get in the donations - even if it is just getting the solidarity price for the journal. Collections should be organised at meetings, fund raising social events set up, collecting tins at the ready on stalls and at demos - including the anti-war demo in London on the 24th

September. If during September we got in just 200 donations of £5 each that would enable us to hit the £1000 per month target for this month - and I am sure that there are many more readers who would, if asked, give more. The key word here is 'ask'. Making a donation to our fighting fund is a political act. The support of ordinary working class people, students and youth and the Labour and trade union movement represents our only source of finance. We have no big business backers and do not want any. So the responsibility lies with you to help us keep the red flag flying. Please send what you can to us at PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG - made payable to Socialist Appeal.

In welcoming new readers who have bought Socialist Appeal for the very first time - be it at the TUC or the Anti-war demo or the Labour Party annual conference, we would ask you to consider two things. Firstly, how about taking out a subscription to ensure that you get each issue direct to the door. Simply fill out the form on this page and send it in. You can also subscribe online by going to www.wellred.marxist.com and clicking on the link. Secondly how about becoming a seller of *Socialist Appeal*? We can send you even just a few copies of Socialist Appeal to sell each month - to your friends, at your college or workplace, at your trade union or LP branch, or whatever. To arrange this contact us now using the contact options listed on the inside front cover or visit our stall on the Sept 24th demo. The more of you there are, the more the voice of Socialism will be heard.

Steve Jones

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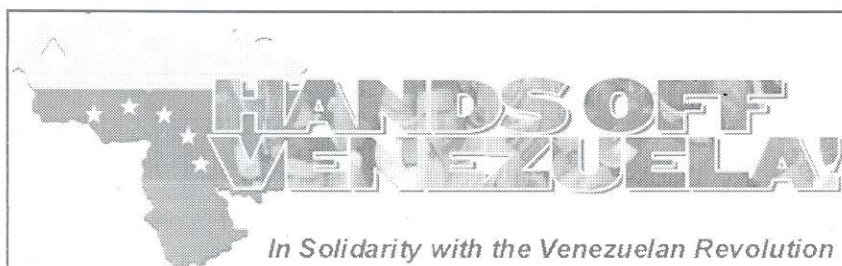
Colombia/Venezuela: Building trade union solidarity

Carlos Rodriguez, General Secretary, CUT, Colombia
Orlando Chirino, UNT, Venezuela,
Jeremy Dear, General Secretary, NUJ

Come and hear the leaders of the trade union movement in Venezuela and Colombia explain the struggles of Latin American workers and how unions in the UK can deliver practical solidarity to those who in very different ways are at the forefront of the fight for a better world.

Thursday 15 September 2005 @ 6.30pm
NUJ, Headland House, 308 Grays Inn Road, London

Organised by National Union of Journalists in conjunction with Justice for Colombia and Hands Off Venezuela



notice board

September 2005

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Socialist Appeal Stands for:

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

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

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

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

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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.

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✎ **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

TUC:

Action Needed to Support Gate Gourmet Workers and Stop BA Cuts



THE NEWS was dominated last month for over a week by the inspiring walk-out by British Airways (BA) staff in sympathy with 600 sacked workers of in-flight catering company, Gate Gourmet (Gate). Word soon spread round Heathrow and the unofficial walkout spread as quickly as the news of the sackings. Within hours 1000 BA workers were on strike.

This shows the truth behind the paper tiger of the anti-union laws, dangled over our heads and used to block action. But when workers move seriously into action these laws are not worth the paper they are printed on.

Neither Gate nor BA has even mentioned the possibility of using the law to extract compensation from the union. They would not dare. Two days of unofficial strikes meant the loss of two days pay for the workers; BA lost a little more than that: over £50 million. Launching an all out attack on the workers and their union by taking them to court could increase that figure ten times over.

BA and Gate management brought this dispute on themselves. BA sold their in-house caterer to Gate so they could impose cuts indirectly. Gate staff, already low paid, have made sacrifice after sacrifice. Management use the stick and the carrot, but more often the stick, by threatening the workers with redundancy.

After their initial shock BA and Gate tried to take a hard line. In a clear attempt to divide the strikers they promised to rehire some but not the 'troublemakers'. In an attempt to buy them off one by one they offered a 'deal', with compensation for anybody prepared to walk away.

It was a mistake for the union to agree this deal. After the workers' tremendous show of strength they are in a very strong position. The demand should be for immediate reinstatement, back pay to cover all loss of earnings, and a pay rise for all staff.

The TUC must act in solidarity with the workers at Gate Gourmet. We must support their industrial action and the campaign of to get their jobs back and prevent further attacks across Gate Gourmet and in BA.

Above all we must put an end to all anti-union legislation. We have waited for eight years for a Labour government to do something about it. The TUC must follow the lead of the BA workers and where necessary be pre-

pared to break the anti-union laws in order to get rid of them. At the same time we must put whatever pressure is necessary on the Labour government to get these laws repealed. This will mean getting rid of the business friendly clique of careerist interlopers who have taken over our party and replacing them with genuine workers representatives.

- **Victory to the Gate Gourmet workers!**
- **Reinstate them now!**
- **All lost wages to be paid!**
- **An improvement in pay and conditions all round!**
- **Labour must repeal all anti-union legislation!**
- **No more cuts at BA! Take the profit motive out of air travel!**
- **The Labour Government must nationalise BA and Gate**
- **Gourmet now with no compensation!**
- **Sack the current management and let the workers run the company!**

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