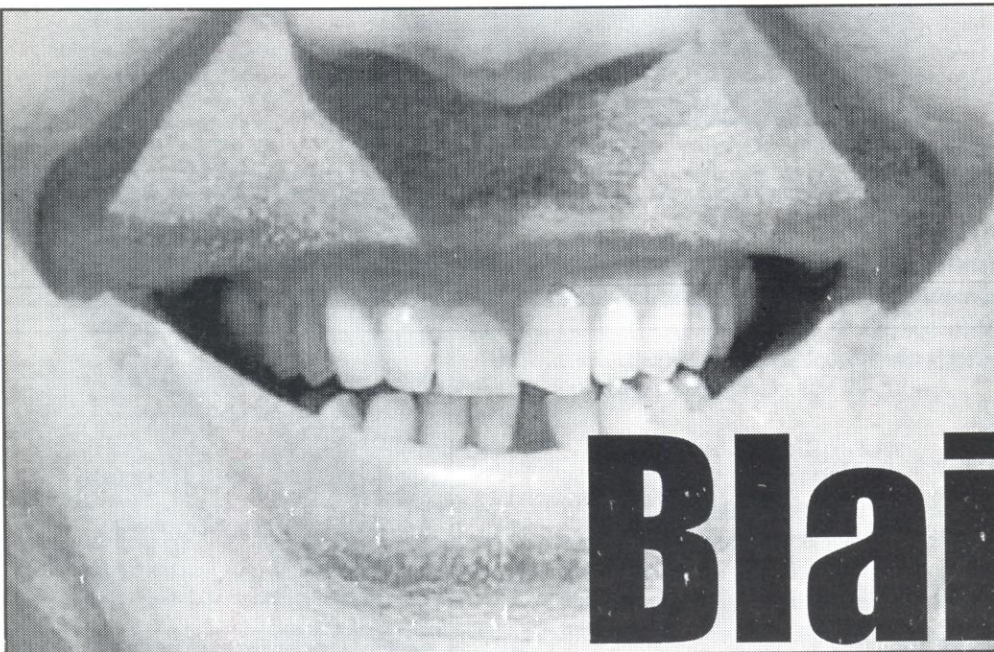


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October 2005 issue 136

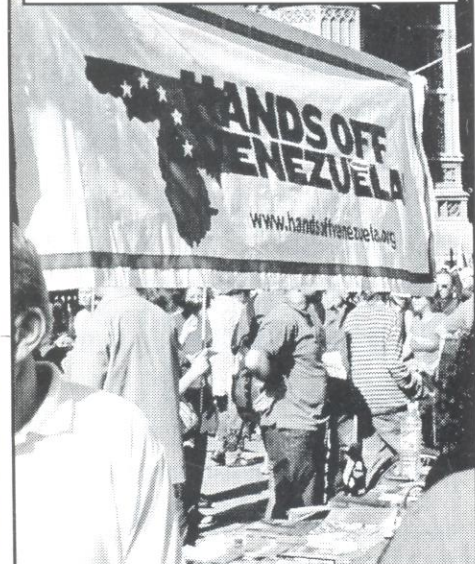
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National Conference**

(See Inside)



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**National Conference
 Saturday 3rd December
 2005, London**



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The Deadline for Issue 136 is October 19th

Blair Must Go But Brown Is No Better

THE 2005 Labour Party Conference was the setting for clearing up one of the great myths expounded by many seen as being on the left of the labour movement, particularly the leaders of several trade unions, that somehow there was 'clear red water' between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The idea that Brown has been secretly opposed to privatisation, to the war in Iraq, to the Labour government's assault on civil liberties - but keeping quiet through 'loyalty' (to his career that is not to the Labour Party or working class Labour voters) - is patently absurd.

In his Brighton conference speech Brown cleared up this confusion once and for all. "New Labour Renewed" was his battle cry. But there are none so blind as those who refuse to see, and none so deaf as those who refuse to listen.

Derek Simpson (Amicus) and Dave Prentis (Unison) for example, continue to see what is not there. More, they quote what isn't said, while blithely ignoring what is. "He didn't try to defend New Labour policies about private sector involvement in the NHS" said Prentis. No, but he did say he would continue with Blair's 'reforms' and 'modernisation' and 'choice'.

They talk a lot about choice, but they are not so keen on the labour movement making a choice in a leadership election. It must now be clear that the 'choice' between Brown and Blair is like choosing between Tweedledum and Tweedle-dee, or between the devil and the deep blue sea.

One Minister after another now appeals for the heir apparent to be handed his crown peacefully. They want Brown to be anointed with no discussion and no opposition. Not only are we expected to accept a single candidate, but also apparently we should wait until they are good and ready to reorganise themselves at the top with no reference to the rank and file. Blair has said he will go before the next election (ie sometime in the next four years) and that should be good enough, "just rejoice at that" as Thatcher once said.

There should be a challenge mounted to Blair immediately, he has already bought his retirement mansion and he should be forced to move in right away. All the bluster about getting rid of Blair following the last election has, it seems, been silenced by

the desire not to undermine career prospects on the eve of a new Brown era.

Brown, meanwhile has booked the removal van for his move into Number Ten. He promises a tour of every region to "listen, hear and learn" then, presumably, as his attitude to party conference decisions demonstrates, ignore every single word and continue with a big business agenda.

Brown hurriedly made it clear that he intends to completely ignore the conference vote - by 60 to 40 percent - demanding that secondary strike action be legalised again in the wake of the magnificent struggle of the Gate Gourmet workers. There was not a word of opposition to Blair's latest plans to privatise the NHS and to force those on disability benefits into work. He has even started to sound like Blair, the absence of verbs from both their speeches metaphors for inaction.

Blair Must Go Now

If Brown's speech contained no reference to any difference with his boss, then Blair's speech the following day was noteworthy for the lack of any mention of standing down. Despite the fact that, as we have long pointed out, Labour won in 1997 regardless of Blair, won again in 2001 in spite of him, and in 2005 the government won barely 35 percent of the vote precisely because of Blair and his capitalist policy at home and abroad.

Blair entered the conference hall to the sound of 1970s punk band Sham 69's *The Kids Are United*. Their contemporaries, The Clash's *Should I Stay or Should I Go Now*, would have been more appropriate. 55 percent in the latest ICM poll want him to go now or go soon.

For years we have heard about the feud between Brown and Blair. The fundamental difference beneath these arguments can be summed up as who gets the top job. Many rushed to support Brown simply because he is not Blair. Now he has made it clear that he wants to be Blair the second. Just to swap one for the other now would be no advance.

Those on the fringes of the movement busily creating new mass parties of two and three will see this as a confirmation that Labour is now just another bourgeois party. They are as blind to the real situation as those who

dupe themselves that Brown is to the left of Blair. They confuse the leadership and the government with the rank and file and the links with the trade unions. Labour remains the mass party of the British working class in spite of the current bourgeois leadership and capitalist policy.

Whether Brown likes it or not New Labour is dead. It cannot be renewed. Its time has passed. It lives on only in the cabal around the prime minister's office. Blair still seems keen on beating his idol Thatcher's eleven years in Number Ten taking him on until 2008. Brown wants nothing more than to swap his own clique for Blair's when the time for his succession comes. Ultimately the decision rests with neither of them.

Events at home and abroad can scupper their best laid plans. The economy is already faltering under the weight of debt. Iraq continues to bleed.

There must be a real challenge to the Blair/Brown big business agenda at every level of the labour movement. We cannot wait two, three, or four more years. Those union leaders who have been backing Brown must wake up to reality. The alarm must be sounded by the ranks. If the trade unions united their resources behind a real left candidate they could have a big influence. No support should be given to any candidate who does not support withdrawing troops from Iraq, who does not oppose privatisation, support renationalising the railways, and abolishing the anti-union laws. This is a minimum requirement.

A left candidate like John McDonnell, for example, even if he did not win a leadership election could open the door to real debate about the need for socialist policies throughout the movement.

The process of questioning in society, of changes in the unions, which has already begun, will not go away. The task of socialists and trade unionists must not be to rally around any candidate who might win, regardless of their policy, but instead to organise the discontent, the searching, the mounting militancy in British society into a real force for change. Change inside the labour movement, and change inside the Labour Party, as steps toward the change that really matters - the radical socialist transformation of society. □

Consumer bubble bursting

THE GLOOM that has settled over Britain's high streets is the deepest it has been since 1983 and looks set to continue, according to the latest survey from the CBI. The employer's body said the underlying annual sales trend among retailers in August was the weakest in the 22 years it has been compiling its retail survey. That trend appeared likely to extend into September with a third of retailers believing sales volumes next month will be worse than a year ago.

Retailers are more despondent about their prospects than at any point in the past seven years. According to the CBI's distributive trades survey, which covers 20,000 retail outlets responsible for 40% of employment in the industry, one in five retailers said the overall business outlook - including sales volumes, prices, costs and supply issues - would deteriorate over the next quarter.

Only 13% of retailers thought the business outlook would improve. It is the first time for seven years that more have been negative than positive about the prospects and only the second time this has happened since 1992.

Sales of DIY goods, furniture and carpets, white goods and electrical items were hit hard in August because of the continuing malaise in the hous-

ing market, according to the survey.

The CBI figures came as KPMG's summer review of UK manufacturing painted a similarly depressed picture. Its business outlook survey showed optimism among manufacturers had sunk to its lowest level since KPMG started the survey three years ago.

Recently the menswear chain *Ciro Citterio*, the furniture retailer *Courts* and the *Sofa Company* have all gone into administration. Large retailers such as *John Lewis* and *Next* have described this as the worst retailing environment since the last recession in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, the UK's leading DIY store, *B&Q*, saw half-year profits slump from £225 million to £149m. The downturn has sparked huge job cuts. The current consumer downturn has forced a number of once well-known names to stop trading altogether. Chains such as *Courts*, the *Gadget Shop*, *Ciro Citterio*, *Alders*, *Tiny Computers*, *Dickins & Jones* and *Littlewoods* have all left the high street in recent months. Consumer spending makes up 70 per cent of the UK's GDP and it is in the slough of despond. Increasing property and energy prices, plus the downturn in the housing market, have burst a consumer bubble that until now had been swelling relentlessly for 10 years. □

51% want troops out of Iraq

A Guardian/ICM poll published at the end of September shows that voters want Britain to set a timetable for pulling troops out of the country immediately. The poll also shows rapidly rising dissatisfaction with Mr Blair's leadership. Only 41% of voters are persuaded by the prime minister's claim that troops have 'a duty to remain in the country until things improve'. By contrast, a majority of voters, 51%, want the government to set out plans to withdraw troops from Iraq regardless of the situation in the country.

The poll, taken after the recent attack on British troops in Basra, shows that a clear majority, 64%, believe the situation in the country is, in fact, getting worse despite the presence of British forces. Just 12% now share Blair's belief that British troops are actually helping to improve the security situation. At the start of this year ICM found 38% of voters believed the war against Iraq was justified, with 47% arguing that it was not.

The poll also shows the surge in support for the prime minister in the wake of the London bombings is fading fast. Most voters, 58%, are now unhappy with the job he is doing as prime minister. □

Stop Press: Dissent violently silenced at Labour Conference

ANYONE WHO doubted the wider implication for civil liberties of Blair's 'anti-terror' legislation need look no further than the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. 82 year old Walter Wolfgang, who fled Nazi Germany in 1937, was roughly manhandled out of the hall by a pair of heavies because he had the bare-faced temerity to shout out "nonsense" when Foreign Secretary Jack Straw defended the continued occupation of Iraq. Labour left activist Steve Forrest was also ejected for the crime of trying to defend Mr Wolfgang from the thugs who had grabbed him by his shirt collar.

Mr Wolfgang is a lifelong party member who joined before Blair was born. It is scandalous enough that not even this level of dissent can be tolerated by the Blairites. Even more outrageous is the fact that when Mr Wolfgang attempted to re-enter the conference he was prevented from doing so - under section 44

of the Prevention of Terrorism Act! So, if we were in any doubt exactly what Charles Clarke and co mean by 'fomenting hatred' now we know, it extends to pensioners expressing a view held by the majority of the population by politely heckling a government minister.

When Blair was forced to apologise for this outrage he said more than he intended:

"I think it is a bit of a leap [to evoke a wider civil liberties debate]," he told the BBC's *Today* programme. "I have just been through an election campaign when people had the chance to criticise me." The implication is clear - you had your chance to 'criticise' in the election - and millions did, Labour only secured 35 percent of the vote - but now you should shut up and do as you are told.

Despicably, defending his anti-terrorism legislation, he continued, "when people do something like go onto the

tube or a bus and kill innocent people then the public expects me to act on that". How must the family of Jean Charles de Menezes, making an emotional visit to the scene of his brutal execution in Stockwell tube station in south London, have felt hearing this. They will rightly demand action like stopping shoot-to-kill, and scrapping the repressive laws that have done nothing to prevent terrorism, but have already killed an innocent man.

Now they hide behind 'anti-terror' to bully an old age pensioner. The threat posed by this so-called 'war on terror' to our democratic rights is clear. The entire labour movement needs to take the struggle for civil liberties in general, and for democracy inside the labour movement, seriously. Neither are safe in the hands of the arrogant bullies we saw in Brighton. □

Five years after Hatfield: Bosses Still Getting Away With Murder

by Kris Lawrie

ON OCTOBER 17th 2000 a London to Leeds express train passing Hatfield went careering off the line. The damaged track had been reported as critical as early as January 1999. 21 months on the track was still deteriorating. Speed restrictions should have been imposed but this never happened because that would have meant that Railtrack would have had to pay GNER hundreds of thousands in compensation for delayed trains. Reports were coming in about the deteriorating condition of the rail but neither Railtrack nor the contractor Balfour Beatty took any action to fix the problem. Deadlines for the repair work on this and other defects had been reached and breached but Railtrack took no action to penalise contractors, they merely extended the deadlines.

As the express train travelling at well over a hundred miles an hour hit the defective rail it splintered into over 300 pieces. Four people were killed in the accident and 102 people were injured. All along the replacement rail sat alongside the track waiting to be fitted.

The Hatfield crash sparked a major crisis for the privatised rail network. Fearful of the media spotlight Railtrack managers immediately introduced a massive number of speed restrictions to the network. Within weeks the 87% of trains which arrived on time had declined to under 60%. In 2002 under pressure to sort out the mess of the railways the government effectively renationalised Railtrack and set up Network Rail.

Last month five former Railtrack and Balfour Beatty middle managers were acquitted of manslaughter in the disaster. Balfour Beatty and Network Rail, which has taken over the liabilities of Railtrack, pleaded guilty to safety breaches leading to the dispute. Charges of corporate manslaughter had already been dropped meaning that none of the top executives could face charges.

Commenting on the verdict, Bob Crow of the RMT rail union said: "How can it be that safety rules were broken but nobody is responsible? ... When

there's money to be made there's no shortage of executives ready and willing to pocket fat bonuses, but when there's some responsibility to be taken for something going horribly wrong there's a deafening chorus of 'not me, guv'."

Even the judge in the case, Mr Justice MacKay criticised the limiting nature of the law on corporate manslaughter. In dismissing the charges of corporate manslaughter last month he said: "This case continues to underline a long and pressing need for the long-delayed reform of the law in this area of unlawful killing." The Lawyer for the victims of the disasters, Mr John Pickering, echoed the judge by stating "The law as it currently stands is unsatisfactory and proves ineffective in establishing responsibility at a senior level."

Law Protects Profits Not Lives

The law is currently written to make it difficult to establish the guilt of those at the top because you must prove that they are directly responsible by their actions. This is intentionally very difficult to prove. It has led directly in this case to a fairly minor charge of health and safety violations for the companies involved and a trial that would at best have convicted some middle managers. Your modern executive obviously does not subscribe to the idea of US President Truman (usually a great friend to the bosses), "the buck stops here!" Or to coin a new phrase if you take the profit, you take the blame.

But it gets worse. Immediately following the trial the Daily Mirror published an exclusive revealing that they have worrying information on the state of the track on the stretch of line concerned. This could not be revealed until after the trial because Network Rail had secured a gagging order against them.

Daily Mirror research reveals that three years after the disaster, and one year after Railtrack collapsed and all maintenance operations were famously taken back in-house, there were still repeated failures to fix track problems within the required time scale of 13

weeks for serious defects. The report identifies 354 potentially lethal hazards in the Hatfield region, all of which are a disaster waiting to happen. A large number of these repairs are months overdue. Clearly the problems which caused Hatfield and other disasters are still there.

The whole issue underlines the need for a change in the law. Both customers and workers in the rail and other industries are being put at risk in the interests of profit.

This month is the fifth anniversary of the Hatfield disaster. For five years relatives have been waiting for justice, and now they find that they will get none. It is high time Labour put an end to the unfair system that lets directors off scott free when their companies kill in the pursuit of profit. We need strong laws on corporate manslaughter. The emphasis should not be on proving that an individual boss has caused a death by his actions. The managers should be accountable for all the practices of the company. We need tough prison sentences for employers who break the law.

As well as tackling the law to bring employers to justice, the government must also tackle the root of the problem with the railways. The private profit motive has spelt disaster for the railways leading to a collapse in service and health and safety. The government must immediately renationalise the entire railway network with no compensation for the fat cats in the City of London. This is a campaign which should be taken up in the Labour movement. There is a lot of public support for rail renationalisation and a victory in this field could stop Blair's privatisation agenda in its tracks. □

● **For tough laws on corporate manslaughter to protect workers and customers!**

● **Renationalise the railways!**

● **For a massive injection of cash as part of a socialist integrated transport policy!**

Merchants of Death

by Gordon Martin

SURVIVORS OF the horrific explosion at ICL Stocklines Glasgow factory, and the relatives of the nine workers who died, have launched a campaign trying to force the Lord Advocate to hold a public inquiry into the events of that tragic day. The reasons for this disaster, which was the worst in a Scottish workplace since Piper Alpha in 1988, have still not been explained to the victims and their families 17 months on. What is becoming clearer since the explosion occurred on May 11th 2004, is the owners of this factory are viciously anti union, with industrial relations of the worst kind. Any individual brave enough to raise health and safety concerns was immediately ostracised or sacked. Press reports in the immediate aftermath of the explosion portrayed the company as a small family concern, trying hard to stay in business and providing steady employment to a happy workforce. Readers of *Socialist Appeal* will not be surprised to learn the reality differs greatly from the media myth. In fact, rather than being in financial difficulty, the company had amassed almost £1 million pounds in their books. Substantial alterations had been made to the Victorian building, without the appropriate building warrants being applied for. The company's approach to the health and safety of the workforce was comparable to the worst Victorian employer. Inadequate ventilation, office staff on the floors above the workshop ordered to keep windows closed, despite continually complaining of headaches. The working conditions of the employees in the coating shop were dreadful, with high levels of dust and extreme heat, the HSE investigators say this was "potentially a lethal combination". Further evidence of management's disregard for the workers health and safety was the construction on site of an industrial oven from an old bin lorry, "innovative technology" the factory owner called this. Criminal negligence in my opinion. This dis-

aster raises questions the government must answer, such as why is the funding not in place to employ and train inspectors qualified to inspect the type of oven this factory used. Currently only one inspector in Scotland is capable of doing these inspections. This industrial disaster also asks questions and raises problems for the trade union leaders and us, the rank and file activists. Union density in Scotland stands today at only 33% of the workforce. Many private sector companies have no union recognition agreements in place, and most like ICL Stockline are very anti trade union. However, even in companies and in the public sector where the unions have secured recognition 55% of these workplaces have no union representative on site. This is hardly surprising when you consider the victimisation many union activists suffer every day at work. The situation with Jerry Hicks, the Amicus convenor at Rolls Royce in Bristol is a clear example of the treatment dished out by bullying managers to effective trade union reps. The union movement must start using our industrial, political and financial muscle to protect today's union reps, and to campaign to recruit and organise the two thirds of the workers who don't hold a union card. The arrogant owner of ICL Stockline suggested the blast had been an "act of god". Immediate changes to the law which should bring massive fines and stiff prison sentences will provide directors of these firms with plenty of time to pray to the god of profit. Class solidarity, actions not mealy-mouthed words from union leaders, the building of rank and file shop stewards movements into powerful workplace organisations, these steps will take us some way to avoiding disasters like ICL Stockline in the future. Only the full might of the labour movement can put a stop to these merchants of death whose ruthless pursuit of profit condemns the working class to ill health, and like the workers in this Glasgow factory, an early grave. □

HANDS OFF OUR HOMES

By Kenny Cairns, Edinburgh Tenants Federation (personal capacity)

EDINBURGH CITY council has declared its intention to bring forward the proposed sale of the city's 25,000 remaining council houses. The council feel confident that the tenants will vote in favour of a transfer before the year is out, mainly because they sent a large group of Council staff armed with questionnaires, to mis-inform and intimidate the tenants into accepting the robbery (the federation has already received many complaints from frightened residents, particularly the elderly).

Edinburgh Tenants Federation members (organised around EAST- Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer) have vowed to fight this theft, and have agreed that a coordinated campaign, involving the wider Labour movement, is required to kill-off the transfer altogether. This process is already under way with a city-wide leafleting campaign, funded by trade union donations. We remain confident that the proposed sell off will fail, and demand that the government write off the debt without transfer, and engage in a house building programme instead.

**Hands Off Our Homes!
Vote NO to Privatisation!**

Nursery school costs

by Janice Martin

EARLY LAST month our daughter began her journey into what passes for the education system these days when she joined the local nursery. The nursery is located within the local primary school and is run by North Lanarkshire Council. The week before the new term started all the parents were invited to the local community centre to receive information about the nursery and to purchase t-shirts and sweat-shirts which the children "should" wear to nursery. We were informed that North Lanarkshire Council only provide funding for 33 weeks of the year, however, if parents paid £5 per week per child this would enable the nursery to open 40 weeks per year. So, 8 years after the election of a Labour Government at Westminster, 5 years of New Labour at Holyrood, with a local council totally dominated by the local New Labour "mafia", working class parents have to pay £225 per year to ensure our kids receive twelve and a half hours basic pre-school education per week, this coupled with a hefty council tax bill is yet another example of the "free education" young people endure under New Labour's tired old devotion to this out-dated free market capitalist system. □

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Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution

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

Lessons of the Bolivian Revolution

Speaker: **Amancay Colque**
(co-ordinator Bolivia Solidarity Campaign, invited)

Defending the Cuban Revolution

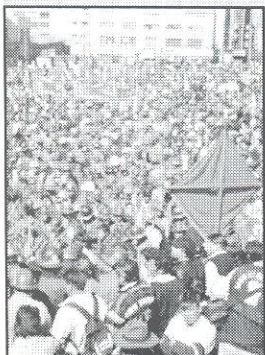
Speaker: **Jorge Martin** (International Secretary of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign)

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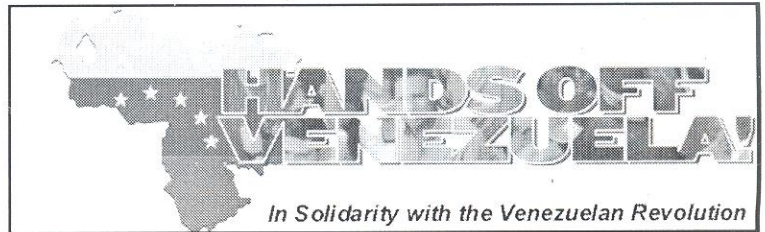
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Hands Off Venezuela

National Conference
Saturday 3rd December
2005, London

The Hands Off Venezuela national conference is of great importance. Events in Venezuela have speeded up enormously over the last six months or so since the nationalisation of Venepal. President Chavez has come out now in favour of socialism as the way forward for the revolution. He has held this up as a perspective not only for Venezuela or even Latin America, but for the world. The imperialists and the oligarchy are striving to overthrow Chavez. They will never be reconciled to the Bolivarian Revolution. While they have suffered setbacks, they are still busy plotting to remove Chavez, even by assassination if they can get away with it.

The national conference of Hands Off Venezuela is an important event of solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution. To attend the conference you need to be a member of HOV, but don't worry, you can join today (see page 31) or you can join at the door. Every readers must make an effort to attend one or both. It is essential we build up awareness of what is taking place in Venezuela and Latin America. Put these events in your diary and get your friends and work mates to come along! Don't stand on the sidelines - get involved! **Contact us for details today!**

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British Trade Union Congress unanimously supports Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution

by Ramon Samblas

The TUC voted unanimously in support of the Venezuelan Revolution. This makes the TUC the first trade union confederation in Europe to give support to the Venezuelan Revolution. Orlando Chirino, accompanied by Hands Off Venezuela (HOV) supporters received massive applause as he stood with clenched fist in the gallery. This is the culmination of months of intensive work by the HOV campaign.

The British Trade Union Congress (TUC) expressed its unconditional solidarity for the Venezuelan Revolution in the third session of its conference held on Wednesday 14th September in Brighton.

Up to 1500 delegates representing 6.7 million workers unanimously voted in favour of motion 79 as amended, which expressed wholehearted support for Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution and the National Union of Workers (UNT), the new Venezuelan trade union confederation, formed after the CTV bureaucracy betrayed the Venezuelan working people in 2002, during the aborted anti-Chavez coup. This was the culmination of years of patient work by the Hands Off Venezuela campaign, the only solidarity campaign that has consistently supported the UNT and the Bolivarian revolution from the beginning. HOV has been engaged in intensive work over the last few months, moving resolutions and holding fringe meetings at every single trade union conference in Britain. Now this work has been crowned with success.

Motion 79 was presented to the TUC congress by NATFHE - the University and college lecturers' union - which is one of the main trade unions supporting the Hands Off Venezuela campaign. In fact at the previous two national conferences of NATFHE motions in support of the HOV had been passed, making support for HOV official union

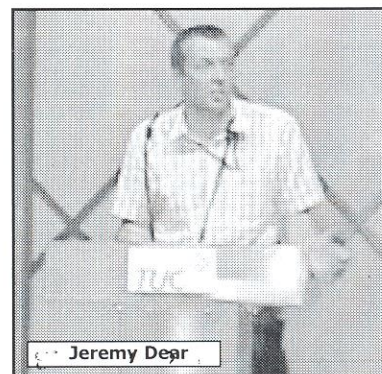
policy. This was thanks to the consistent work of HOV supporters in the union over some years.

NATFHE President John Wilkin took the floor of the TUC congress to defend motion 79. In his address, Wilkin explained the great achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution. In spite of the short time he had to defend the motion, he gave a very balanced account of the achievements and changes introduced by the Chavez administration.

"Need Bolivarianism Here"

At one point during his speech, he said, "We need a bit of Bolivarianism in Britain". He mentioned that, shamefully, among the allies of imperialism in Venezuela there is a trade union confederation - the Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV). In order to illustrate how corrupt this so-called union had become he explained what they had done during the lock out of December 2002 to January 2003. He asked his colleagues, "Can you imagine a general strike called by the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) together with the TUC to overthrow a Labour government in Britain?"

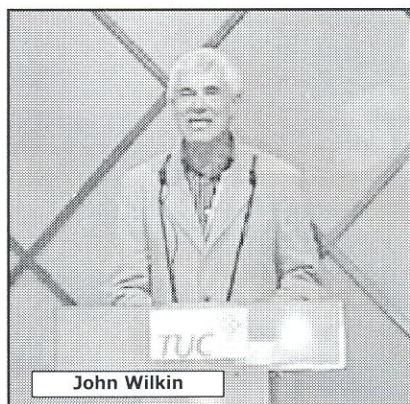
Then John Wilkin explained how the vacuum left by the CTV had been filled by the UNT. He mentioned that the UNT was the response of democratic and revolu-



tionary trade unionists to the betrayals of the CTV. At this point in his speech he turned to address Orlando Chirino, national coordinator of the UNT, who was in the visitors' gallery listening to the debate accompanied by Hands Off Venezuela supporters. He addressed him in Spanish. Comrade Chirino responded to the applause by standing up and clenching his fist in front of the approximately 1500 delegates present in the hall. The NATFHE representative concluded his speech by saying that Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution is an inspiration for all fighters all over the world.

Motion 79 was amended by AUT (Association of University Teachers) and railway workers' unions TESSA and ASLEF. TESSA's amendment urged the General Council to "establish relations with the Venezuelan National Union of Workers (UNT) to ensure that news of trade union issues, at least, is more widely reported." This resolution adopted by the highest body of British trade unionism now opens the doors to collaboration with their legitimate Venezuelan counterparts.

Jeremy Dear, General Secretary of the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) and sponsor of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign, championed this motion by saying "the TUC is the first trade union confederation in Europe to give support to the Venezuelan Revolution". □



Orlando Chirino addresses TUC Hands Off Venezuela fringe meeting



A VERY successful fringe meeting of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign was held at the TUC conference in Brighton. Orlando Chirino, national coordinator of the UNT spoke about the unfolding Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. FBU President, Ruth Winters, NATFHE president John Wilkin, NUJ general secretary, Jeremy Dear and Jorge Martin of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign also spoke.

Jeremy Dear opened the meeting by saying that the "TUC is the first European Trade Union confederation to give support to the Venezuelan revolution" noting the motion that had been unanimously passed earlier that evening at the plenary of the Trade Union Congress.

After his opening remarks, John Wilkin took the floor to reiterate what he had said in his speech to the TUC, "what we need in Britain is a bit of Bolivarianism." The NATFHE leader had recently been to Venezuela and had clearly been inspired by what he had seen. He said that he agreed with Richard Gott's analysis about the Bolivarian Revolution being a "slow motion revolution" but he added, "It is a revolution anyway."

John Wilkin gave a good account of the achievements of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. He focused on what has been achieved in the education system and talked about the inspirational and unique experience of Venezuela's Bolivarian University. This institution really represents the values of the Venezuelan revolution.

The NATFHE leader also pointed out the huge scale of involvement of the Venezuelan masses in the revolutionary process when he said, "the level of involvement and commitment is amazing."

Ruth Winters started off her speech

by saying that she enjoyed speaking at fringe meetings because she had the chance to speak for more than three minutes, "unlike at the plenary conference, where ministers and business experts are allowed to lecture us about privatisation." That was a clear reference to the fact that the rightwing chancellor Gordon Brown had addressed the congress the day before.

The firefighters' leader expressed her pride at being among the founders of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and she linked it to the long history of internationalism of the FBU. They have always been very supportive of the Palestinian cause, the Colombian trade unions and now Venezuela's revolution.

Although she recognised her lack of a deeper knowledge about Venezuela - because she had not had the chance to visit it yet - she said that it was very important to work together within the TUC to get motions like motion 79 passed and wage serious solidarity work. "We have to work together on the left and in the trade unions, because if we don't work together the Venezuelan people will suffer." This was a clear warning to those who wish to split solidarity movements such as the Venezuelan solidarity movement.

Then came the main speaker, Orlando Chirino. He opened up by saying, "Bolivarian and revolutionary greetings to the British trade unionists on behalf of the Venezuelan working class". After sending fraternal greetings to all Hands Off Venezuela supporters that had made his first visit to Britain possible, the Venezuelan trade unionist gave a very comprehensive account of Venezuelan history.

Orlando Chirino also gave an account of all the social programmes that have been implemented. The fact that the Venezuelan masses managed to regain control of the oil industry, combined with the high price of oil, has made these reforms possible.

The birth of the UNT is the result of the defeat of the sabotage carried out in the oil industry and throughout the whole of the Venezuelan economy at the end of 2002. "The CTV acted as an agent of imperialism" Chirino said. The CTV allied itself with the imperialists and the Venezuelan bosses; therefore



they lost any right to represent Venezuelan labour.

He said that once the UNT manages to do away with the remnants of the CTV they will erect a monument upon the ashes of the CTV and there will be an inscription that will read "Never again will a workers' organisation ally itself with imperialism to kill class brother and sisters".

Comrade Chirino also touched the process of co-management in different companies such as INVEVAL (valve construction), INVEPAL (paper mill) and Alcasa amongst others.

The UNT leader explained that his trade union confederation has presented a bill to accelerate the process of establishing co-management and workers' control within the state and private companies. He described co-management as the "learning process for the working class to run the country on



their own." He ended by welcoming the current debate that is taking place around the issue of socialism.

After his speech questions and answers followed. The meeting was a very inspiring one and it that has helped to raise awareness among the active layers of the trade union movement in Britain about what is really happening in Venezuela. It represents another big step in the work of consolidating solid links between the Venezuelan and British trade union movement. □

Hands Off Venezuela

UNT leader Orlando Chirino speaks to journalists at NUJ headquarters

by Maarten Vanheuserswyn

THE LONDON branch of the NUJ held a joint meeting with the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and Justice for Colombia on September 15, with the general secretary of the Colombian CUT and Orlando Chirino, leader of the Venezuelan UNT, who gave an outline of the trade union and political situation in Venezuela, emphasising the need for an internationalist trade union movement.

Carlos Rodriguez, General Secretary of the CUT in Colombia, started the meeting by explaining briefly the plight of Colombian trade unionists. He explained that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist. More than 3,000 trade unionists have been killed since 1986. Only last week Luciano Romero, a leading member of the food and beverages union SINTRAINAL, was found dead with his hands tied and stabbed forty times.

This point was confirmed by the chair of the meeting, Jeremy Dear, General Secretary of the NUJ. Jeremy paid a visit to Colombia last year and saw with his own eyes the serious protective measures ordinary trade union militants have to take every time they go out.

After this, the meeting turned to Venezuela. Orlando Chirino, one of the main leaders of the UNT, addressed the audience and sent greetings to all activists building international solidarity. He started by expressing his happiness about the solidarity resolution with Venezuela, which had been passed unanimously the day before at the TUC conference. This, he said, will only strengthen the resolve of the Venezuelan workers, who have been on the move since 1998. Orlando then went on to praise the Hands Off Venezuela campaign, since "the campaign was instrumental in spreading the truth about what is happening in Venezuela".

Orlando Chirino then gave some background information about recent Venezuelan history. To understand what is happening now, he said, it is necessary to learn about the 1989 Caracas.

Then the Venezuelan people rose up in protest against the government that had introduced IMF policies. A liberal economic package was introduced together with brutal repression, during which 7000 people died or disappeared. From then on, workers were no longer prepared to allow themselves to be robbed in the same way. Orlando elaborated on the failed military rebellion in 1992 staged by Hugo Chavez as a genuine attempt to put an end to the misery in which the Venezuelan people had been living for many years.

Turning to the trade union situation in Venezuela, Orlando explained about the negative role of the CTV, the former trade union confederation in Venezuela. The CTV, he said, had been part of the regime since 1958. He reminded the audience that one of the first actions of the CTV leadership back in 1999 was to accept a 10% wage cut for public sector workers and it had always been clear how rotten the structures of the union were. In 1997 this open collaboration with the oligarchy came to a head when the CTV agreed with the then government when it introduced a labour law that did away with several social gains. This clearly indicated that the CTV leaders had decided to become a tool of the oligarchy and imperialism in the region.

In 1998 Hugo Chavez came to power with 60 percent of the votes. One of the first measures of the Chavez government was to hold a referendum about the question of whether there should be a Constituent Assembly or not. As we know now, the overwhelming majority of Venezuelans voted in favour of this assembly. Orlando stressed that this showed that the Venezuelan people clearly supported Chavez and that his was a way of telling the world that they did not want to go back to the past.

In the debate about the constitution all sectors of society took part: women, indigenous people, disabled people, etc. During this process, Orlando said left-



wing trade unionists like him had demanded a court case against CTV leaders who had never been elected. There had never been direct elections for the national leadership of the CTV and in many factories the union secretaries had held their positions for 35 years without calling an election. By way of conclusion, Orlando explained about the gains of the revolution: the improvements in healthcare, education, the various misiones. Finally, after talking about the closed factories being expropriated, and the beginnings of workers' control, the audience gave Orlando Chirino a big applause, grateful that the chair of the meeting had allowed Orlando to go well over his time.

After the speakers there was room for contributions from the audience. The first speaker from the floor explained how important it was to have a joint meeting about Colombia and Venezuela because you cannot separate the two countries. He had spent his holidays in Latin America and saw that in Bolivia the nationalisation of gas is the main issue amongst the working class. Calls for socialism are not just made by small left groups but are widespread.

Finally, Alan Woods, editor of Marxist.com and NUJ member, concluded by recalling Chavez's own words about him making the mistake to attempt to reconcile capitalism and socialism, and how necessary it was to take the revolution forward in order to avoid another coup. □

(A longer version of this report can be read at www.marxist.com)

Hands Off Venezuela brings message of revolution to anti-war protest

by Rodrigo Trompiz

FOLLOWING THE "Bring the Troops Home" march in London on September 24, over 60 people crammed into the function room of the Carpenters Arms pub, near Hyde Park, for a public meeting called by the Hands Off Venezuela campaign. The march had been heavily leafleted by HOV campaigners, and people from all walks of life and political backgrounds had arrived, eager to hear about the exciting process taking place in Venezuela. The meeting was chaired by HOV's Espe Espigares, who began by explaining that the campaign was founded in a response to the right-wing coup in April 2002. Its task is to combat disinformation spread by the mass media and to forge links with trade unions and other groups within Venezuela.

The main speaker was Jorge Martín, international secretary of the campaign. He began with the exciting news that the TUC had just passed a motion expressing solidarity with the process in Venezuela. This is great news for the campaign, and a credit to the hard work of campaigners, as the TUC and is the first European trade union confederation to pass such a resolution.

Jorge then talked about President Hugo Chávez's recent explosive appearance at the UN. Chávez did not beat around the bush, so to speak - he began by saying that the UN had been in terminal decline for 60 years, i.e. since its founding! He also argued that it cannot be reformed, and needs a revolution within it. Extremely radical ideas, especially for the UN, where meaningless diplomatic statements are the norm. Chávez also called for the veto power to be scrapped, for countries of the South to be incorporated, and for the organisation not be based in the country which

has violated far more UN resolutions than any other - the United States. This speech illustrates how Venezuela has become a point of reference in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Chávez also visited poor communities in the South Bronx, where he gave a speech saying that capitalism is not working and that we must fight for socialism - not the kind of thing we in the West are used to hearing from our 'leaders'! The Venezuelan president stressed once again that the conflict is not with the US people, but with the Bush administration. Jorge then spoke of the "revolution within the revolution" - the Zamora decrees speeding up land reform, the increased rate of expropriation, as well as the nationalisation under worker control of companies such as Venepal, and the recent seizure of the Heinz tomato processing plant.

Another important topic raised was the threat to the revolution from within - the reformist bureaucrats on one side against the revolutionaries on the other. Chávez is clearly with the revolutionaries, having stated time and time again that the problems of capitalism cannot be solved within capitalism.

There followed a series of questions and comments from the audience, demonstrating once more how taken people are with the process in Venezuela and how keen they are to spread the message and to get involved. There were many new faces in the audience, and almost all expressed a desire to learn more about Venezuela and to work with the campaign. Jorge ended the meeting by reiterating the importance of spreading information and forging links. This struggle is not just within Venezuela, it is taking place across the continent of Latin America, and across the entire world. □

HOV arrives at Leeds University

by Ben Currie,
University of Leeds student

ON SEPTEMBER the 19th two supporters of Hands off Venezuela set up a stall outside the Leeds University Freshers Fair, neither having been in Leeds for more than 24 hours. Having little idea of what to expect, we were pleasantly surprised by the response.

Initially we faced the usual barrier of NUS bureaucracy, forcing us to move from the grass outside the union to outside the gate. Despite this we received a very positive response from the students. There seemed to be widespread support for the ideals of solidarity forwarded by the HOV campaign and empathy for the Bolivarian Revolution. Literature was also sold at a good rate; the number of ABC's of the Venezuelan Revolution unsold quickly diminishing. The two copies of Che Guevara's Motorcycle Diaries were also eagerly bought, a reflection of the double-edged popularisation of Che Guevara's adventures, as works of greater theoretical importance went unsold. We were also able to get quite a few contact details and had a number of good discussions with interested students. Possibly the most positive development was the eager support offered by a particular officer of the NUS. Hopefully we will be able to capitalise on the two day's events. We can best hope to consolidate our activity by forming a society and by having a video screening later this year. □

Chavez Thanks Hands Off Venezuela!

London, 16th September 2005

Mr. Alan Woods
Hands Off Venezuela

I have the honour to transmit on behalf of the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, his most sincere gratitude for your diligence in achieving the approval of motion 79 presented before the TUC, as a Resolution supporting his government. President Chávez was very pleased with this Resolution and he especially instructed me to convey his testimony of gratitude. This Resolution constitutes a milestone in our relations with the United Kingdom, as well as a step forward of great significance in the struggle against the media misinformation campaign regarding Venezuela and the actions of its government.

Sincerely yours,
Alfredo Toro Hardy
Ambassador

Growing Impatience with Labour

By Kris Lawrie

GROWING TENSIONS between the unions and the Labour government were thinly veiled at last month's annual TUC conference in Brighton. Many delegates noted that the pre-election Warwick Agreement had been a late beginning after eight years in office, but pointed out that now we need to demand its implementation.

The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, addressed the conference promising more of the same from New Labour. He listed Labour's dubious achievements in the form of the minimum wage, working families tax credit and eight years of economic stability. But he underlined that there is no going back to the 'cosy relationship' of the past. Instead he offered the union movement the chance to participate in his vision of a highly skilled, flexible workforce which can compete in the economy of tomorrow - Amen! He was given a polite response from delegates.

Various international discussions took place on subjects from the war in Iraq and the resultant terrorist bombings of London. The TUC affirmed its policy for the withdrawal of troops and solidarity with Iraqi trade unionists. The other main highlight of the international discussions were those of trade union struggles around the world. Solidarity motions were discussed and passed on Colombia, Venezuela and sub-Saharan Africa.

The agenda and events of conference were, however, dominated by recent attacks on workers at home. Subjects up for discussion ranged from the London bombings, and safety at work, to the struggle against the far right.

Plans to begin attacks on public sector pensions were put on ice earlier this year because of the election. Now the government is back for another bite of the cherry. Public sector pensions was therefore very high up the agenda.

As conference began newspaper headlines were full of reports of a threatened pensions strike of 3 million public sector workers. This would cripple almost every public service including the civil service, local government, NHS, schools, universities and the fire service.

PCS National President Janice



Godrich pointed out that the threat of united action by the public sector unions had forced the government to back down before the election, she went on to say "If we are to succeed in protecting the futures of the millions of public sector workers then the unity needs to continue."

The motion was passed in favour of joint action against pension cuts. The motion also commits the TUC to organise a national demonstration in London next year.

In the wake of the Gate Gourmet dispute and the secondary action of British Airways workers, the repeal of the anti-union laws was catapulted into the limelight. The TGWU put forward an emergency motion on this subject condemning employers who carry out attacks on workers using the anti-union laws as a shield. The motion, which was passed by a large margin, calls for the repeal of the anti union laws. However as in previous years it offers little in the way of a concrete guide to action.

In reality the anti-union laws will probably be broken in practice before they are repealed. British Airways and Gate Gourmet workers demonstrated that the employers do not have the guts to take a union to court. The T&G should have continued the solidarity action at Heathrow and threatened to broaden it unless the Gate Gourmet workers were reinstated. That way the laws could have been shown up as impotent.

John McDonnell MP, speaking at a fringe meeting of the Labour

Representation Committee (LRC), said we should be saying to our sponsored MPs, "If you cannot support this bill as an MP, what is the point in being part of a trade union group? ... Across the trade union groups we have sufficient numbers of backbenchers to vote this bill through. No government could withstand the combined force of the trade union groups."

John McDonnell, who is also the Chair of the LRC (which is committed to recapturing Labour with left policies), went on to say that we have to get active inside the party. Since the election, he said, the majority is now slimmer than at any time before, and he quoted the close votes in the past years on many issues from the war in Iraq to university funding. Alluding to the speculation all week long about an imminent handover of the party reigns from Blair to Brown, John pointed out that the leadership question is a bit of a red herring for us; the real question is one of building to take over the party from the ground up.

This year's TUC was more combative on the main issues than in previous years. This undoubtedly reflects the impatience and tension bubbling up from the shop floor creating divisions and differences of approach at the top. The TUC has taken a tougher line on a range of issues but chiefly pensions and on the issue of workers rights, which could be the main battlegrounds in the year ahead. It is now time for them to translate these words into action to take government attacks off the agenda and force them to implement the programme of Warwick - and then some.

It is one thing to pass motions about what we expect from the government. But if they are not listening then we need to take action to make them listen. The unions must get to grips with the task of reclaiming the Labour Party instead of sitting on the sidelines or merely trying to influence ministers. Blair and Co have made clear that where influence is concerned the City of London can shout ten times louder than us. We need to get rid of the whole rotten clique and return Labour to the working class. □

Capitalism wastes technology

by Steve Jones

NOT A MONTH seems to go by without some new piece of media technology being thrust upon us. PlayStation Portable (PSP), Ipod Nano and now the latest generation of mobile phones which it appears will do everything short of letting the cat out at night! There seems to be a frenzy in which the large media corporations are hell-bent on bringing out as many products as they can in the shortest time span imaginable. To find out why you need to go back to the old technology days of Karl Marx.

In Chapter 13 of Vol 3 of *Capital*, Marx gives an explanation of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall within capitalist production over a given period. He explains that - to cut a long story short - the continuing ability to exploit surplus value from the working class will increasingly be overwhelmed by the growth in expenditure in maintaining and replacing constant capital i.e. the solid costs of production: factories, machines, raw materials etc. thereby reducing the rate of profit even where actual profits are rising. Now what has all this stuff written in the 19th century got to do with a world of iPods, DVDs, plasma TVs and so on?

When the Compact Disc (CD) format was publicly launched in 1982 - all the companies had agreed a common compromise format around the Phillip Red Book Standard thereby avoiding costly format wars for once - it seemed to open up a bright new era of massive profits which would last forever. But that was not to be and Marx shows us why - indeed the history of the CD could serve as a classic demonstration model of his laws.

Although initially the rate of profit per cd (and cd player) produced rose as costs fell and demand exceeded supply, very quickly the shops started to fill up with machines and discs. As the advantages of economies of scale and mass production wore out, fixed costs increased and the volume of unsold stuff over the sold began to squeeze profitability - a classic crisis of over-production. The effects of this were initially hidden by the sharp rise

in total sales and profits - getting less per item did not matter if you were selling 10 times as much as you did a year ago - but as the market reached saturation point and companies began slashing prices to try and undercut each other and protect their share of the market so actual profit decline set in.

This curve of rise, peak and fall was noted also in relation to LPs over the period of 1950 to 1980, it was the same for VHS and seems to be the same now for DVDs.

DVD was launched as a replacement for VHS and again things looked promising. Whereas 8.4 million DVD players were sold in the US in 2000, this figure had risen to 22 million by 2003 but in 2004 it fell to 20 million and this year, as at the end of July, it has only hit 6.6 million.

Market Limitations

But hey, don't panic - let's create yet another new El Dorado and save the day. Sony have weighed in with the PSP which uses a new format of DVD called Universal Media Disc (UMD) which will play on these little machines with their massive 4 inch screen. And coming soon - or not as the case might be - are two new competing formats of high definition DVD to tie in with the new high definition TVs. In one corner is to be found HD-DVD and in the other Blu-Ray. Attempts to bring the two new formats together have failed to date and Sony are intending to bundle Blu-Ray in with the next generation PlayStation 3 which is set to be launched in Japan next year. Whether they can avoid the problems of market limitations - don't expect high sales of £2,000 TVs and disc players in India or South America! - or the ever rising costs of maintaining this huge production process is another matter.

Meanwhile on the music side of things with CD sales falling, the companies are now putting all their hopes into the downloading market. Now this has been a real goldmine so far with people paying high rates for the privi-



lege of downloading songs at a sub-standard quality for not much less than the cost of the equivalent CD - all the profits for a fraction of the overheads. And they are getting greedier and have opened discussions with Apple - who run the downloading market leader iTunes - about raising the cost per track. The truth is that as things develop they will have to, in the end, actually slash download costs in order to maintain levels of usage - as was the case with CDs and now DVDs. Again the tendency for the rate of profit to fall will kick in and in the end they will be forced to look to new ideas as the market saturates and clogs up. Under such conditions companies will go to the wall and jobs will be lost as is already the case in the UK computer industry.

We should reflect that despite all these marvellous advances in technology, society is still unable to eradicate poverty, starvation, avoidable disease, bad housing and all the other by-products of capitalism and imperialism. Offering a nice new mobile phone to a starving person in the Third World is not going to be appreciated. Of course these great monopolies are not interested in such things anyway, their remit is to make money at our expense. What we do know is that there are tremendous technological resources available both to improve the quality of our lives and tackle the major problems facing humanity today. We know that capitalism and their representatives in the governments of the world will do nothing. That is why we must fight for a socialist world and the arming of the working class with a programme to achieve that aim. □

Oil price shock

by Michael Roberts

AS HURRICANES Katrina and Rita ravage the US coast of the Gulf of Mexico, does the fast-rising oil price presage a worldwide economic recession?

Prior to the current episode, there have been three major oil shocks in the last 30 years, all stemming from geopolitical disturbances in the Middle East.

Following the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War of October 1973, the subsequent oil embargo imposed on the West by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) led to a quadrupling of oil prices.

In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Iranian-US hostage crisis and the Iraq-Iran War of 1980 led to a near tripling of oil prices.

Then there was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that triggered a brief spike in oil prices to \$40, or a doubling from prices prevailing before the outbreak of hostilities.

And now it's the US-Iraqi war. The track record of oil shocks is close to perfect. In the case of the US, each of the previous three oil shocks was followed by recession. The first shock led to the deep recession of 1973-75. The second was followed by a brief recession in 1980, eventually followed by a severe recession in 1981-82. And the Gulf War Shock was followed by a mild recession in 1990-91.

These cyclical contractions all had one thing in common: the US economy was already vulnerable when it was hit by a shock. In the final three quarters of 1973, real GDP growth had slowed to a 2.2% average annual rate. In the first half of 1979, average annualised growth slowed to just a 0.6% pace. And in the three quarters prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, real GDP growth slowed to a 2.2% clip. In all cases, the US economy was at or near its "stall speed" when the oil shock occurred.

Why would a sharp rise in oil prices cause an economic recession? It's because oil remains so important to the profitable running of capitalism worldwide. Sure, there are other forms of energy: natural

gas, coal, water, nuclear power, that can fuel industry. But oil and its refined product, gasoline, are still just about the only form of fuel that can power transportation of goods (trucks, planes) and the movement of labour (cars, buses and planes).

The rail industry was once an alternative. But the combination of quicker journey times for trans-continental trips in North America, Europe and Asia, getting across oceans quickly and most important, the growing demand for private (as opposed to public) transport in cars, removed this option.

Capitalism could make much more money from selling cars than it could from providing public transportation through rail or buses. Now capitalism communications and movement depend on oil as by far the most important part of energy.

Rising oil prices not only drive up costs for the economy, they also cut back on the purchasing power of working people and their families.

People have to buy petrol to fuel their cars. If petrol prices rise, people cut back on buying other things. So oil prices hit consumption.

Less demand for goods and services that capitalists sell means less sales revenue. Capitalist profits get hit two ways: from higher costs and less sales.

This effect is particularly heavy for the world's largest capitalist economy, the US. This is the ultimate gas guzzler economy. Thanks to the lack of public transport and tax incentives to buy cars, there are now more huge gaso-

line-using sports utility vehicles (SUVs) sold each year than ordinary cars.

In the US, you are really poor if you don't have a car. The flooding after Hurricane Katrina showed tragically why, when the poor (and mainly black) of New Orleans could not escape Katrina as they had no cars and could not afford transport. The authorities left them to their fate.

An economic recession is very likely then if oil prices stay high. And that looks very likely. Much of the upside seen in crude oil prices has come from increased global demand. The main contributors have been China and the US.

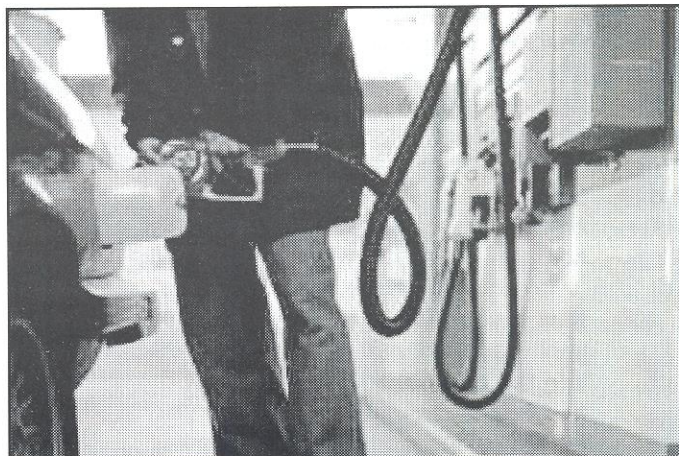
Chinese car sales are booming. In the last year, more than 2.5m were sold. China is a whisker away from eclipsing Japan as the second-largest car market. On current trends, more cars could be sold in China than in the US within the next 15-20 years. That means an awful lot of future demand for crude oil.

And the Chinese regime does nothing about energy conservation or environmental controls. According to the International Energy Agency, in 2002, China's oil intensity -- primary oil consumption per unit of GDP -- was 2.3 times that of the average OECD developed country; India is even worse -- fully 2.9 times the OECD average. Little wonder that China, which makes up slightly less than 4% of world GDP, accounted for fully 7% of the world's crude oil consumption in 2003.

Oil prices are going to stay high not just because of strong demand, but also because world production is reaching capacity. OPEC is already pumping oil at record rates. The only OPEC producer that claims to have more capacity is Saudi Arabia. It is currently pumping near 10.0mbd.

Back in the 1980s, Saudi output briefly peaked at 10.5mbd. So that suggests there is virtually no Saudi spare capacity left.

The big debate among the oil experts is whether there is



going to be much oil left in the next five or ten years. Some argue that the world is voraciously draining away the more than a trillion barrels of proven reserves that are still in the ground. Others argue that new technologies will make it possible for oil companies to find new sources of oil and extract new oil from old sources.

There are three reasons for this lack of consensus. First, because oil is buried underground, it is hard to measure: how much oil remains is largely guesswork. Second, the world of oil is shrouded in secrecy.

Saudi Arabia won't even allow its reserve and production data to be audited. For the past 17 years the Saudis have claimed 263 billion barrels of reserves, yet in that time, they have extracted 55 billion barrels of production. So, unless they have somehow replaced that output with new unknown reserves, their figures must have declined.

Moreover, doubts are emerging that Saudi Arabia is even capable of maintaining current production, let alone supplying more of the world's future oil requirements. Saudi Arabia has been highly reliant on the super giant Ghawar oil field for the best part of 50 years. However, Ghawar is an aging oil field and there have been no new significant discoveries in the Kingdom over the past 35 years.

That's not to say the Saudis haven't tried. Saudi Aramco, the state oil company, has invested billions of dollars and utilised the best technology money can buy, but the results have been mediocre, to say the least. Should Ghawar experience significant production declines, Saudi oil output will have peaked.

Sure, Saudi reserves are still huge, so it will take many years before they are exhausted, but the cost of extracting them will go on rising. That will keep the oil price up.

Crude oil supply may not yet be quite at a maximum, but supplies of refined gasoline are. Even before Hurricane Katrina, US gasoline production capacity was running at peaks.

Over the next few months, the damaged Gulf of Mexico refineries will reopen and perhaps gasoline prices will recede a little, but petroleum demand has been running ahead of refining capacity for years. That's unlikely to be rectified in the immediate future.

No new refinery has been construct-

ed since 1976, so the US has to import 10% of its gasoline needs. The table below shows that gasoline refinery capacity has never been as stretched in 30 years as it is now.

	<u>Refinery capacity</u> (mbd)	<u>Oil demand</u> (mbd)
1978	78	63
1979	80	65
1980	81	62
1981	82	60
1982	79	58
1983	76	58
1984	74	59
1985	73	59
1986	73	60
1987	74	61
1988	73	63
1989	74	65
1990	76	65
1991	76	65
1992	74	66
1993	75	66
1994	76	67
1995	77	68
1996	78	70
1997	80	72
1998	81	73
1999	81	74
2000	82	75
2001	83	75
2002	83	77
2003	84	78
2004	85	81
2005	85	83

A further problem is the lack of spare capacity in the right type of crude oil. Saudi Arabia may still claim to have spare capacity.

However, the bulk of that capacity is in heavy sour crude oil, which is not suitable for refining into gasoline. The US has only 15 days of demand in gasoline inventories, half of what it had just over 20 years ago.

Embarrassingly, in the Katrina crisis, the US had to consider offers from Venezuela and Europe for gasoline. Having 700million barrels of crude oil in the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve was no help with the Gulf coast refineries down.

Crude oil prices have been rising for the past five years. Up to now, US consumers have shrugged off this extra cost of energy. However, every time the real price of gasoline has risen in

excess of 20%, as in 1974 and 1979-80, it induced a sharp consumer spending slowdown that led to economic recession. Now, even if US pump prices fall back under \$3 a gallon for the rest of the year, the real gasoline price will still be up more than 20%.

In the last three oil price shocks that led to economic recession, the oil price in real terms (after taking into account general inflation) reached at least \$40 per barrel. The current oil price of \$65-70 per barrel is equivalent to a real price of about \$45-50 per barrel (see table below). So if oil and gasoline prices stay where they are over the next six months, the US and the world economy could be staring recession in the face. □

	<u>Excess Capacity</u> (millions of barrels)	<u>Real Oil Price</u> (2003 US \$)
1970	4.1	9.99
1971	4.4	11.68
1972	4.4	12.31
1973	2.8	12.98
1974	4.1	41.85
1975	7.6	36.21
1976	4.3	38.21
1977	4.8	38.96
1978	6.5	36.51
1979	4	74.06
1980	5.7	79.21
1981	7.1	69.01
1982	9.3	61.02
1983	9.8	53.77
1984	9.2	50.52
1985	10.2	46.79
1986	8.3	23.79
1987	8	29.46
1988	6.1	22.97
1989	5.4	26.58
1990	3.2	32.36
1991	1.2	26.16
1992	1.8	24.96
1993	2.9	21.37
1994	3.1	19.79
1995	3.1	20.77
1996	2.9	23.89
1997	3.1	22.08
1998	3.2	14.76
1999	5	19.86
2000	3.1	30.16
2001	4.1	25.28
2002	5.6	25.52
2003	1.8	28.89
2004	1	36.48
2005	0.5	48.5

The Decisive Role of the Individual in History

by Rob Sewell

ALAN WOODS in his book on the Venezuelan Revolution recalls a conversation he had with Hugo Chavez, the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution. "I read a book by Plekhanov a long time ago", commented President Chavez, "and it made a big impression on me. It was called 'The Role of the Individual in History'." The President pondered the title and said: "Well, I know none of us is really indispensable." Alan interjected, however, and corrected the Venezuelan President on this point: "There are times in history when an individual can make a fundamental difference." A case in point is the role of Hugo Chavez himself.

Hugo Chavez has come to personify par excellence the Bolivarian Revolution unfolding in Venezuela. He is completely connected with the forces unleashed by the revolution, namely the oppressed masses. Chavez personifies their hopes and aspirations. He influences them and they influence him. He is totally identified with them. He has become bound body and soul to the unfolding revolution. In the eyes of the masses, he has the necessary authority to see the revolution through to the end. It is a graphic example of the role of the revolutionary leader in history, described by Plekhanov.

In the past, the role of the individual in history (the "subjective factor" in Marxist terminology) has been the subject of heated debate. There are many bourgeois historians even today who believe that history is made by "Great Men and Women", kings and queens, statesmen and politicians. Supposedly through their force of character, they have shaped history while the masses play little or no role. Thus, Hitler started the Second World War and the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand began the First. Little attention is paid to economic, political or social forces which operate largely behind the scenes.

There are those who argue that individuals determine nothing, but are thrown about by the greater objective forces of history. This school of thought represents fatalism, where individuals act as mere marionettes, their strings pulled by some invisible hand. This idea

is derived from a Calvinist doctrine that all human action is divinely predestined, like some lunar eclipse. It is the frame of mind expressed in Luther's words, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise." The domination of Fate rules out any idea of individual freedom and the independent activity of the masses. We are all reduced to the role of pawns.

This is however not the case. History is made by people. Marxists, unlike the superficial fatalists, do not deny the role of the individual, his initiative or audacity (or lack of it), in the social struggle. It is the task of Marxism to uncover the dialectical relationship between the individual (the subjective) and the great forces (objective) that govern the movement of society. Historical materialism does not dismiss the role of the individual, of personality, in history, but sees this role in its historical context. Marxism explains that no person, no matter how talented, capable or farsighted, can determine the main course of historical development, which is shaped by objective forces. However, under critical circumstances, the role played by individuals can be decisive, the last decisive link in the chain of causality. Under certain circumstances, the "subjective factor" can become the most important fact in history. The role of Lenin in the Russian Revolution is such an example, to which we will return later.

Social Conditions

Plekhanov's brilliant essay on the role of the individual in history constitutes a polemic against the Russian Narodniks, who portrayed the individual hero, usually armed with a bomb, as the creator of history. The Russian masses were regarded as mere on-lookers. These subjectivists, writes Plekhanov, "out to endow the 'individual' with the greatest possible role in history have refused to recognise mankind's historical development as a law-governed process."

While the individual in history can be seen to have played essential roles, such role could only be undertaken in the given social conditions. Such was the case with the French Revolution of

1789, explained Plekhanov. "It was the alignment of those forces which, in the final analysis, accounted for Louis XV's nature and the caprices of his mistress exerting so deplorable an influence on France's fate... Clearly, what lies at the root of the matter is not a particular weakness but the social position of the person affected by it." In other words, the causes of the French Revolution lay in the nature of the social relations. The personal qualities of the leading individuals play their part, but only within the general context, and are subordinate to the broader historical forces at play.

"It follows, then, that individuals can influence the fate of society by virtue of definite traits of their nature", continued Plekhanov. "Their influence is sometimes very considerable but the possibility of its being exercised and its extent are determined by society's organisation and the alignment of its forces. An individual's character is a 'factor' in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be."

In other words, there are definite limits to the role of individuals. "No great man can impose on society relations which no longer conform to the state of these forces or do not yet conform to them. In this sense, indeed, he cannot make history, and in this sense he would be trying in vain to shift the hands of his clock: he would not be accelerating the passage of time or turning it back."

Towards the end of his life, Fredrick Engels provided us with a summary of historical materialism, within which he dealt with the individual in history. "Men make their history themselves", wrote Engels in January 1894, "but not as yet with a collective will according to a collective plan or even a definite, delimited given society. Their aspirations clash, and for that very reason all such societies are governed by necessity, the complement and form of appearance of which is accident. The necessity which here asserts itself athwart all accident is again ultimately economic necessity. This is where the so-called great men come in for treatment. That such and such a man and

precisely that man arises at a particular time in a particular country is, of course, pure chance. But cut him out and there will be a demand for such a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found." Engels goes on to furnish us with examples of this phenomenon. "That Napoleon, just that particular Corsican, should have been the military dictator whom the French Republic, exhausted by its own warfare, had rendered necessary, was chance; but that, if a Napoleon had been lacking, another would have filled the place, is proved by the fact that the man was always found as soon as he became necessary: Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell, etc." (Marx and Engels *Correspondence*, pp.467-68)

While historical materialism gives primacy to the objective factors in history, such as the level of the productive forces and the existing class relations, the subjective factor can play an important role. However, there is more to this relationship. The division of phenomena in history between "objective" and "subjective" is not absolute and depends upon their relevant relationship. For example, the world market is objective to each nation that composes it. Each nation is subordinate to the world market and inescapably linked to it. Meanwhile, the nation is objective to the classes that constitute its social structure. In its turn, the ruling class is objective to the working class, and the class is objective to its party. The individual has a subjective position in regard to all these factors.

However, the influence of an individual in the historical process can span from one of insignificance to absolutely decisive. The degree of this influence will depend upon the stage of development of historical conditions, the correlation of social forces, and the role of the individual within these forces. There are often long periods where even the most far-sighted cannot have any effect on the course of history. On the other hand, at certain times, under critical conditions, an individual's role can be decisive. In other words, what social forces or class interests lie behind the individual, and how well does he or she represent these forces?

Helvetius once said that every epoch calls forth persons of adequate stature, and if it cannot find them, invents them. In regard to Wellington, Engels remarked, "He is great in his

own way, as great as one can be without ceasing to be a mediocrity." Such a description could easily apply to Stalin, whose narrow personality certainly left its stamp on the character of the political counter-revolution in the Soviet Union.

While Trotsky represented the period of revolutionary upsurge, Stalin represented the period of retreat and counter-revolution. He became the figurehead of the bureaucratic reaction within the Soviet Union. As Trotsky described Stalin: "And yet, all in all, he remains mediocre. He is capable neither of generalisation nor of foresight. His intelligence lacks spirit and buoyancy, and is unsuited to thinking logically. Each sentence of his speeches serves a practical end; never does a speech rise to the height of a logical construction. This weakness makes for his strength. There are historical tasks which can be carried out only if one renounces generalisations; there are periods when generalisations and foresight are a bar to immediate success; such are the periods of decline and fall, and reaction." (Trotsky, *Writings*, 1936-7, p.69)

Lenin's role

In relation to the importance of decisive leadership in the socialist revolution, Lenin's role in 1917 stands out as decisive. Could another Bolshevik leader, even Trotsky, have substituted Lenin's role? Trotsky believed not. Given the concrete conditions, where the Bolshevik Party had to be rearmed in April 1917 for the socialist revolution, only Lenin had the necessary authority in the party. The conservative pressures from the other leaders would have been too great an influence without Lenin. In other words, the importance of the conscious subjective factor stood out with greater force than ever before. Lenin's role could not have been duplicated. This was due not simply due to his personal qualities, but his exceptional standing within the Bolshevik Party. While the Bolsheviks led the



workers and peasants, Lenin led the Bolshevik Party. He was the leader of the leaders.

One of the fundamental reasons for this critical role of leadership or the subjective factor in our epoch, stems from the fact that all the major objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism are rotten ripe (the integration of the world economy, the inability of capitalism to take society forward, the chronic instability and impasse of the system, the elements of barbarism emerging, the existence of mass unemployment, etc). The defeat of the numerous revolutions since the October Revolution of 1917 has been due to the failure of leadership of the mass organisations, whether they are social democratic or Stalinist. For the successful socialist revolution, a mass party is needed with a far-sighted revolutionary leadership schooled in the ideas of Marxism ("the memory of the working class"). The Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky were able to provide this. They provided the dialectical unity of the objective and subjective factors.

As Hugo Chavez explained: the choice facing mankind is the choice between Socialism or Barbarism. The task today is to develop the cadres, individuals with the necessary knowledge and experience of Marxism, who, on the basis of events, can provide the subjective factor needed to see the historic task through to the end. That is, in the words of Trotsky, to make conscious the unconscious strivings, the organic tendencies, of the working class to overthrow capitalism. In this process, the role of the individual can be decisive. □

The failure of the peace process

by Phil Mitchinson

OVER THE last month the announcement that the Provisional IRA had decommissioned all its weapons was drowned out by the blasts of the loyalist paramilitaries using theirs. The worst scenes of violence witnessed in years only made the lead item on British TV news until England secured their victory over Australia in the Ashes. The media here continue to claim the peace process is succeeding, remaining silent about the increase in sectarianism and the failure of the Good Friday Agreement, so that when scenes like those witnessed a few weeks ago are reported they come as a shock. Yet these events were not some one-off moment of madness that can quickly be forgotten. They were the climax of an ugly and violent mood that has been building all summer, including a bitter and bloody feud between rival loyalist gangs.

There has been a dramatic increase in extreme sectarian violence against Catholics in the Ballymena area (represented in parliament by the DUP leader Ian Paisley), for example, but this goes unreported. Nothing must tarnish the image of 'peace' in their propaganda.

The success of that 'peace process' was supposed to be celebrated with a live link to the Last Night of the Proms from a stage in front of the City Hall. But the Union Jacks waving in Belfast weren't swaying to the strains of Land of Hope and Glory. While the orchestra fiddled, the streets of Belfast burned and reverberated to the sound of gunfire, bomb blasts and water canon.

Bricks and bullets flew and burning barricades were erected across the city; petrol and blast bombs were thrown at the police and Army. Automatic gunfire was heard amid the wreckage of the debris-strewn Shankill area. Scenes more reminiscent of Iraq than "peace-

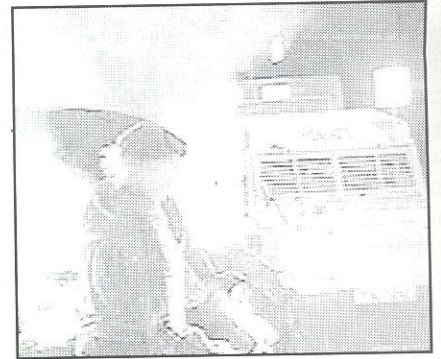
time" Belfast were repeated at flashpoints all over the north and west of the city.

The spark that lit this blaze was the rerouting of one relatively small Orange march at Whiterock in north Belfast, by less than 100 metres, away from Catholic homes and the gate in the peace wall - that solid evidence of the failure of the Good Friday Agreement - between the two communities being welded shut so it could not be forced.

This was the spark, but the combustible material was provided by years of sectarian propaganda that the GFA was a step towards a united Ireland where the Protestants would be an oppressed minority, swapping places with the Catholic population of the six counties. It was provided by the appalling social and economic conditions facing young working class Protestants, and it was provided by the criminal feuds of the loyalist gangsters and their battles over territory.

The Orange Order and unionist politicians whipped up the fears of Protestant working class people about the erosion of their 'cultural traditions' (i.e. the 'right to march' through Catholic areas). There has been much written about this 'right to march', but there is a clear difference between the right to demonstrate, to protest, or even to celebrate some historical event and parading your superiority in the faces of residents in their own homes. There can be no such 'right'.

The loyalist murder gangs of the UDA, the UVF and the LVF temporarily put aside their differences (the turf war between the UVF and the LVF had already claimed the lives of four Protestants this summer) and came onto the streets in a show of force attacking the police and trying to provoke a reaction from local residents in a wide number of areas. In an attempt to retrospectively justify the violence, politi-



cians from all the Unionist parties suddenly discovered the marginalised and neglected position of the Protestant working class. These are the same politicians who for years only waved the Union Jack to distract those same people from their real social and economic conditions. Of course, what this is all about is the battle for control of the Protestant masses by the various elements of unionism using the sectarian card. It is about maintaining the unnatural division upon which the sectarian politicians feed, and upon which the continuation of the capitalist system rests.

It is striking that the main complaint made by the loyalist rioters was that the authorities are doing too many favours for the 'other side' - that is, for republicans and nationalists. There is high unemployment and widespread social decay among working-class Protestant communities in West Belfast and elsewhere, this undoubtedly played its part in swelling the ranks of the riots. At the same time they were being stirred up by loyalist claims that their community is being ignored while republicans, in their eyes, are being feted.

According to the *Guardian* website one rioter complained that the government is 'ignoring us' while 'always listening to the republicans and Catholics'. Another pointed to the Catholic ghetto of New Lodge and said, 'They are getting everything that's going. We are getting nothing. They've got new doors and new floors'.

David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, said the riots were caused by a 'sense that the Unionist community has been set aside while the [British] government plays footsie with the republicans'.

A similar line was being put for-

ward by the Democratic Unionist leader, Ian Paisley, as he denied whipping up the trouble. He claimed Protestants were being deprived their fair share of government money. But while unionist politicians argue that their working class areas suffer "the worst social and economic deprivation in Europe", a government report found "Catholics are more likely to live in areas that are less organised and less able to attract funding". Official government figures suggest that Protestants continue to have better job prospects than Catholics, as we reported last month. In truth, both are right. The fact is that the working class of all backgrounds endure appalling social and economic decay. The blame lies not with one or other section of working class people but with the capitalist system which so ruthlessly divides workers in order to keep them in their place.

It is also evident that Protestant communities are being corroded from within by paramilitarism. The Ulster Volunteer Force is furious with the police for attempting to thwart the murderous feud in which it hopes to obliterate its rival, the drug-financed Loyalist Volunteer Force. Riots had already erupted over recent weeks when police tried to make searches linked to the feud.

This tension was further stoked when Paisley threatened that the Whiterock parade could prove "the spark which kindles a fire there could be no putting out". Paisley had been due to address the parade before the rally was abandoned when loyalist paramilitaries opened fire on the police and army and the first gun battle broke out.

The march clearly provided an excuse for the two major outlawed Protestant paramilitary groups, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, to launch a pre-planned rebellion against police authority. To the extent that they have any political aim it is to overturn the Good Friday Agreement and maintain sectarian division. Much of their activities are linked to criminal battles over territory, drug dealing and money laundering.

Some of those on the streets were there because of the appalling conditions they face, and the sectarian politicians are whipping them up into a frenzy by blaming the Catholic population for supposedly 'getting their share.' Here one sees a glimpse of what would happen were there any real attempt to

unite Ireland on a capitalist basis.

It is clear from all that they have said and done over the past year that the leadership of Unionism is not even prepared to countenance a power sharing government with nationalists. Sinn Féin's main Protestant opponents, the Democratic Ulster Unionist party, have refused to discuss restoring the assembly until the IRA proves it has given up arms for good. Meanwhile, the loyalist paramilitaries continue not only to hold weapons but to use them.

Sinn Féin has donned the worn out, second-hand clothes of the SDLP but this will not get them into power. Destroying most of the weapons of the Provisional IRA will not either. Their policy is now based upon sharing office north and south of the border. They are unlikely to achieve either goal. Even if they did gain such seats this would solve nothing for the working class. It would not create one job or build one house. All that working class people can look forward to in the coming years is more of the same, more sectarian violence, more loyalist attacks and feuds, more unemployment. The social and economic conditions of working class Protestants and Catholics will not improve under this system. They will not be improved while they remain divided by fear and sectarianism.

GFA: A Sham, A Lie, and A Trap

There is no peace. There is no move towards unification. There is no basis for creating jobs, building better housing or improving healthcare and education. Even if Stormont were to meet they would be able to do nothing about the problems facing working people. They would simply implement the British government's policy of privatisation, the DUP, the UUP, Sinn Féin and the SDLP alike.

The Good Friday Agreement has provided not one step towards Ireland's unity. On the contrary it has legitimised and constitutionalised partition. It has not brought even limited devolution and democracy to the six counties. The democracy of Stormont is turned on and off like a tap at Westminster. If and when it does meet it is a temporary balancing act between sectarian parties. Assembly members make decisions 'not by a simple majority' as in other parliaments, but on the basis of what is called 'sufficiency of consensus' - basically meaning that 'any agreement that

was to be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum would have the broad agreement of the representatives of both parts of the community'. This presents Catholics and Protestants as utterly irreconcilable communities, with sectarianism used constitutionally to mask the shared interests of the working class.

The GFA has not created peace, but endless peace walls, the segregation of workplaces and communities, the creation of a form of apartheid - with this difference, the Protestant working class do not enjoy a pampered existence, only the fear of worsening their already appalling conditions.

It has not removed troops from the streets. Hain and co have promised to cut troop numbers (currently there are more British soldiers in the six counties than in Iraq). Nevertheless more than 5000 are to remain.

The real achievements of the Good Friday Agreement are: segregation, increased sectarianism, and the reinforcement of the crime of partition. The peace process has been from the very beginning a sham, and a lie, and a trap. It is presented by Sinn Féin as a step towards unity and a spurious equality to bolster their electoral support, and simultaneously it is presented by the UUP as a step towards unity and inferiority to whip up fear amongst the Protestant population.

Protestant working class people will never accept minority status in an Ireland of poverty and deprivation, the only Ireland capitalism can ever offer. Catholic workers will never get jobs, houses, or schools from the profit system. Sinn Féin's waffle about 'equality' and 'esteem' echo Blair's words about 'equality of opportunity.' Capitalism can offer no such equality, only a redistribution of poverty, solving nothing for workers of any background but adding fuel to the fire of sectarianism.

It is not equality of poverty under capitalism that is required but class unity in a struggle against capitalist poverty, exploitation and oppression. The events of recent weeks demonstrate that achieving such working class unity is more difficult than ever. For all that, the only way to defeat British imperialism and capitalist exploitation is, as James Connolly explained nearly a century ago, through the united working class struggle for socialism. Every other method has ended in abject failure. □

After the elections: Where is Germany going?

by Hans-Gerd Öfinger in Germany

"There you are", sighed a disappointed and frustrated commentator in today's editorial of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany's leading bourgeois newspaper. On behalf of his class, this bourgeois journalist deplores the mess that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's venture of an early election has created. In his desperate gamble, Schröder had urged the Federal President of the Republic to dissolve parliament in order to strengthen the political stability needed to continue his policy of "reforms" (i.e. counter-reforms). In the end, his coalition was defeated last Sunday. At the same time, the editorial also rebukes their (i.e. bourgeois and Christian Democratic) Federal President Horst Köhler for his obvious miscalculation. In spite of all respective legal doubts due to the restrictions of the German constitution, Köhler had obviously considered that by dissolving parliament and clearing the way for a snap election he could help his party to achieve an electoral triumph and be swept back into office.

There is greater instability in Germany than ever before in post-war history. Both big parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) lost considerably. The virtual deadlock is caused by the fact that after a short and very polarised election campaign both camps failed to get anywhere near a majority of seats. The ruling class had prepared for an all-out attack on the working class after a desired takeover of their traditional parties, the CDU/CSU and FDP. On the other hand, Schröder and leading Social Democrats who are increasingly out of touch with the harsh reality many people find themselves in had (mis-)calculated that by calling an early election he would catch the shattered left wing forces by surprise, keep them divided and out of parliament. Yet the leaders of the (still mainly Eastern) PDS and the (mainly Western) WASG, a left split of disenfranchised SPD members and trade unionists, recognised that they could only win on the basis of a common



slate. So they stood together and won. Thus, the left representation in parliament has risen from 2 to 54. This re-emergence of the left is historical since it puts a significant left force back into the parliamentary arena. Their share of 8.7 per cent nationally by far eclipses the 4 to 5 per cent the PDS has had in the past as well as the 5.3 per cent scored by the old German Communist Party (KPD) in the first Bundestag election in 1949. Although bourgeois politicians and social democrats did their utmost to discredit the Left Party and their new leader Oskar Lafontaine with a dirty filth and slander campaign, the party advanced on all fronts, East and West. Their parliamentary party also includes a number of well known trade union full timers and even former prominent SPD leaders such as Oskar Lafontaine and Ulrich Maurer.

Election analyses indicate that the Left Party gained one million votes from the SPD, 400,000 votes from the camp of "non-voters", i.e. people who did not bother to vote last time as well as a sizeable number of votes from all the other major parties. Thus, the Left Party vote played a decisive role in preventing a right wing majority of seats and votes.

Shift to the left

Given the fact that both SPD and Greens fought a relatively left wing campaign, promising to keep the social balance and defend the interests of ordinary working people, the elections in a way reflect a shift to the left in German politics. Whereas the CDU/CSU

and FDP represent a combined vote of some 21.2 million, the "camp" represented by SPD, Greens and Left Party is considerably stronger, representing a total of well over 24 million voters. Yet unlike in France, Spain or Scandinavia, a parliamentary co-operation of the "left" is excluded at this stage. While celebrating the fact that a Thatcherite victory under the CDU/CSU and FDP was prevented, the SPD leaders have stressed before and after the elections that they would not even talk to the representatives of the Left Party, let alone co-operate with them. This policy of branding the Left Party as "extremist" and "populist" could strengthen the left even more since - for the time being - there is no temptation for them to join a reformist government and thus get involved in some form of counter-reformism.

Although there is a lot of confusion and speculation as to possible coalitions and alliances, the ruling class will sooner or later put pressure upon their representatives to cobble together some sort of coalition. So far, leading spokesmen of different big business associations have put forward two possible options that they are seriously considering: On the one hand, a coalition of Christian Democrats, Liberals and Greens is a theoretical possibility. Although there are some differences on questions like ecology and women's rights, the Greens have widely accepted neo-liberal premises and many of their leaders might well come to terms with the CDU/CSU and Greens to get or save well-paid jobs. Yet after their left wing phrase mongering in the election campaign and attacks on the right wing parties, to enter such a coalition could cause trouble with parts of their rank and file and even promote a split.

On the other hand, given the enormous opportunism and statesmanship of the SPD apparatus, it is not excluded that the SPD could become a junior partner in a "Grand Coalition" with the Christian Democrats. The SPD right wing would be prepared to swallow quite a lot to keep their government

The Iranian workers are not alone!

**Support the week of Solidarity
with Iranian workers - October 3-9, 2005**

positions and delusion of power. To appease their rank and file, they would argue that by forming a block with the Christian Democrats they had prevented the worst anti-union hardliners of the Liberals from coming to office and carrying out their programme. To clear the way for a Grand Coalition, however, it might be necessary for both parties to find an excuse to dump their leaders, Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel, since both of them were the losers of the election yet still claim the chancellorship and with their stubbornness might block the road towards an agreement.

Whatever government will be formed, it will be under enormous pressure from big business to launch new attacks against the working class. The shocking level of state indebtedness will lead to a new round of cuts of public spending. Social protest will be inflamed.

Polarisation

Given a possible Grand Coalition, a polarisation is also opening up within the union movement. Whereas the more moderate elements that are dominant in the executives of some unions will seek a compromise with such a government and try to prevent any head-on confrontation, IG Metall chairman Jürgen Peters has openly come out in favour of a government of the SPD, Greens and Left Party and criticised the SPD's refusal to consider such an option. This is significant as Peters, like most other top union leaders, still holds an SPD membership card, whereas a surprisingly high number of full time and lay union officers have supported an appeal to vote for the Left Party. Peters argues that SPD, Greens and Left Party are "natural allies" and that there is a "left majority" in the country.

In any case, this is the beginning of a new period of instability in Germany. The good old days of the economic miracle are over for ever. People will be faced with the harsh reality of capitalism and increasingly seek a way out. □

We, the signatories of this leaflet announce in a loud and clear voice that the Iranian workers and toilers are not alone in their struggle against the constant attacks of the capitalist regime of the Islamic Republic in Iran, a government that is depriving workers of their most basic rights.

Our aim is to support and defend workers, who are insulted, threatened and killed by the repressive capitalist order in power in Iran. We are calling on you to support the following demands of Iranian workers:

- 1 - Recognition of the workers' right to strike, to set up their own independent workers organisations, the right to free speech, the right to assembly.**
- 2 - An end to all intimidation and attacks on workers, including physical attacks, imprisonment, torture and execution of workers and toilers in the Kurdish areas**
- 3 - Unconditional release of all political prisoners**

In the week of solidarity with Iranian Workers we will be active on an international scale in every city and town, to organise demonstrations, pickets in front of Iranian embassies, consulates... We will organise meetings in the language of the host country to raise the issues concerning Iranian workers, we will collect funds to support workers' hardship funds, we will try and speak in local and national radio and television stations and we will address the trade union movement in the host nation to call for practical solidarity with Iranian workers.

Fellow workers comrades!

Sign this petition; join us in an International Campaign to defend Iranian workers.

Let us transform the first week of October into a week of solidarity with Iranian workers.

Let us make sure that progressive forces throughout the world hear the voice of Iranian workers, in every factory, in every workplace, let us raise the slogan 'Iranian workers are not alone'.

Coordinators of the Campaign:

The committee for solidarity with Iranian workers- Stockholm,
Abroad Committee of Communist Party of Iran,
Progressive exiled Iranian workers -Switzerland,
Workers Left Unity- Iran,
Union of Iranian Socialists - North America,
Iranian Left Unity- Washington - USA,
Iranian Revolutionary Socialist League (IRSL),
Committee for a Marxist International (Marxist.com),
Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network,
Socialist Solidarity with Iranian Workers- Paris,
Foreign Committee of the Organisation of Revolutionary Iranian Workers
(Workers Path)

**Please send your messages of support and solidarity to:
kargar.iran@gmail.com**

The New Orleans Disaster:

The Real Face of "Capitalism of the 21st Century"

by John Peterson

"And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society."

**Karl Marx and
Frederick Engels,
The Communist Manifesto**

NEARLY 100 years ago, V.I. Lenin explained that under capitalism, life for the vast majority of humanity is "horror without end". Misery, degradation, squalor, hunger, lack of clean water, electricity, and housing - let alone access to jobs, health care, and education - is the wretched fate of literally billions of people on this planet. Until recently for most Americans, this grim reality existed only in places "far, far away, about which we know very little" - and in the American inner cities where the media's cameras never shine.

Literally overnight, this has all changed. Now, images of unimaginable devastation and anguish are splashed across our TV screens, beamed in not from Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, but from the historic home of Mardi Gras and Bourbon Street: New Orleans.

In nature and in society, seemingly routine, insignificant incidents can set off chains of events with profound, far-reaching consequences out of all proportion to their beginnings. In an unstable situation, in a "system on the edge of chaos", even the smallest shock or change can unleash tremendous



forces further down the line. Under certain conditions, all it takes is one flake of snow or a single cough to set off an avalanche on a snow-covered mountain - the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back".

In the science of Chaos Theory, this is often referred to as sensitive dependence on initial conditions, or the "butterfly effect". Under certain conditions, the normally insignificant airflow generated by a butterfly's wings could in theory let loose tremendously powerful forces; in other words, this small amount of energy can push the system "over the edge". How much more so a category 4 super storm with winds exceeding 100 miles an hour? Hurricane Katrina, which at first appeared to be "just another storm", will prove to be just such a "push over the edge".

The full implications of Katrina's devastation cannot be quantified at this point in time. The 2000 election, the attacks of September 11, the collapse of Enron, and the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq all shook the consciousness of the American working class. The accumulated cobwebs of decades of relative

lethargy and indifference to U.S. and world politics were violently shaken out. Millions of Americans began to open their eyes to the realities of the world, and took an increased interest in politics, both local and global.

Now Katrina, a non-economic, non-political, non-social, non-military disaster will have vast economic, political, social, and military consequences. This force of nature has only just begun to send the whole decrepit system of U.S. capitalism reeling. Hurricanes may be "natural", but the lack of advance planning for prevention, evacuation, and relief are an entirely human-made disaster. The full responsibility for this calamity rests with the government of G.W. Bush and the entire class he represents. Every person killed by hurricane Katrina and its aftermath must be considered a direct casualty of the war and occupation of Iraq.

**Connecting the Dots:
Capitalism Means
War and Misery!**

From the comfort and safety of Air

Force One, the U.S. President surveyed the damage and called it "historic". His words will prove prophetic. Katrina will long be remembered as a decisive, historic turning point in the consciousness of the American working class. Already there is a growing feeling that this will "bring things to a head" in the U.S. Millions of Americans are making the connection between the war on Iraq, the farce of "Homeland Security", deep cuts in social programs, the jobless recovery, tax cuts for the rich, and the inept planning for a killer storm the authorities knew for decades would come sooner or later.

Since September 11, we have explained that the war on terror is a war on working people at home and abroad. Nothing since then has demonstrated this as clearly as Katrina and its aftermath. We've suffered vicious attacks on our living standards, working conditions, and democratic rights over the past 4 years, all in the pursuit of super-profits for the rich. But the ruin of New Orleans is the most graphic evidence possible of the putrid nature of this system.

Hundreds have already died as a result of the storm, and many estimate the final count will likely be in the thousands. As of Thursday, more than 2.3 million people in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida remained without power. Gross negligence and the impersonal pinching of pennies in order to divert the funds to the war in Iraq have destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of survivors who have lost their loved ones, their homes, and their hopes. Those who have been displaced have few options. Even the Astrodome, located in America's oil capital of Houston, TX, is full to capacity with New Orleans' refugees. Frustration at the inefficiency and slowness of the authorities is widespread.

And what is the ruling class' reaction? House Speaker Dennis Hastert's callous comments sum it up: "It looks like a lot of that place [New Orleans] could be bulldozed." For his part, President Bush promises to make a donation to the Red Cross, and proposes that former presidents Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton lead fundraising efforts for relief. Fundraising? They can find billions of tax dollars for the occupation and subjugation of Iraq, and yet they call for charity to alleviate the suffering of thousands upon thousands of people right here at home. The grim reality of

life under the pitiless, inhumane system of capitalism is clear to all.

"Restoring Order" and the Media's Spin

Surrounded by a veritable lake of sewage and dead human and animal bodies, tens, if not hundreds of thousands are homeless, without food, or even potable water in a hot, humid climate ripe for water-borne disease. Relief efforts have been even more disastrous than the storm itself, and the death count could rise rapidly in the coming days as thousands languish in despair and filth, abandoned to their fate by the very forces that are allegedly here to "serve and protect" the public good.

Instead of looking for survivors or bringing in food or water for the thousands that remain trapped, the first priority for "the forces of order" was to protect stores like the GAP from looters. In Biloxi, Mississippi, the state declared martial law to protect the casinos from survivors. Sure, there are a few folks taking advantage of the chaos to help themselves to big-screen plasma television sets they will never be able to use, but the vast majority of the "looters" are "stealing" bags of potato chips and bottles of juice from shell-shocked stores already written off as a complete loss by their insurers.

Under capitalism, respect and awe for private property must be upheld at all times.

The media has played a pernicious role in trying to divert attention from the total collapse of the infrastructure and the criminally irresponsible relief effort. They have focused on the "violent gangs of looters" and given the entire coverage a repulsively racist hue in order to gloss over the fact that it is at root a class question. As always, it is the poor of all races who are paying the price for the greedy indifference of the wealthy class that owns this country.

But even these professional liars and hired apologists for the crimes of the capitalist class are deeply affected by the horrors they are witnessing. They cannot help but criticize the relief effort and the lack of advance planning. Many journalists are delivering their reports on the verge of tears, against a backdrop that can only be compared to a war zone. And a war zone it is: a class war waged by the American capitalist class against the working class of this and every country. In a situation reminiscent of the U.S. Marines' pounding of Fallujah into rubble, heavily armed Military Police are roaming some areas in force. Military helicopters, including a Cobra gunship, have been sent to help in the rescue operations, and of course, to restore order (just



AP Associated Press AP Tue Aug 30, 11:31 AM ET

A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it

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AP 3:47 AM ET

Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana (AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen)

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how many marooned Louisianans can be flown out at a time in an attack helicopter?). One New Orleans police officer, who must have temporarily imagined he was in Sadr City, was reported as saying they were "meeting some resistance".

At one point, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) suspended rescue operations because it was "too dangerous". Despite some incidents of violence, most people are helping each other survive without the need for riot-gear-clad police. But they do not have the helicopters and boats required to escape from the islands of dry land they occupy. Buses and ambulances cannot reach them. And yet, the media continues to blame "violence" for the unpardonably slow and inadequate relief effort.

The poorest layers of New Orleans society - those without the resources to flee the city on their own - were the ones herded like cattle into the unsafe Louisiana Superdome without adequate food, water, bedding, or medical personnel. Some 30,000 people ended up in that potential death trap. That the entire building didn't collapse on them under the strain of Katrina's winds is sheer luck. Now the media blames them for not leaving in time. May we ask, precisely how were they supposed to leave if they had no money or transportation out of the city? Although it is the poor of all shapes, sizes, and colors that were abandoned to fend for themselves,

in New Orleans, these people are disproportionately African American. According to the 2000 Census, the white per capita income in Orleans parish was \$31,971, as compared to \$11,332 for blacks. Once again, it is those on the lowest rung of American society that suffer most for the crimes of capitalism.

Missing In Action in Iraq

The National Guard was originally formed in order to put down civil unrest; and that remains its primary function. But from time to time, they are called out to assist disaster relief efforts. So where are they now? Thousands from the Gulf Coast region are stationed in Iraq, watching helplessly as their families and friends struggle for survival in the U.S., while they struggle to stay alive on the streets and highways of Iraq. Were they not thousands of miles away, killing and being killed in a now overwhelmingly unpopular war, they would be at home, helping to find survivors. Perhaps they would have even been able to evacuate everyone before it was too late.

At the beginning of the rescue efforts, just 7 helicopters were available, the rest being stationed elsewhere, primarily in Iraq. It is also the height of history's irony that the state with the highest number of casualties suffered in Iraq is Mississippi, one of the states most affected by this catastrophe.

G.W. Bush and co. are moving might and main to avoid these basic connections between the pur-

suit of the Iraq war and the disastrous response to Katrina. But millions of Americans, including many soldiers, have already made that connection, and will be demanding answers soon.

"Did This Have to Happen?"

This is the question being asked by millions across America and around the world. The simple answer is, "No". To be sure, capitalism's role in accelerating global warming, leading to increasingly violent weather patterns must be kept in mind. And human ingenuity has not yet figured out how to stop hurricanes. But the cost in lives and damage need not have been anywhere near this bad. Had the evacuation blueprint included plans to ensure that all citizens of the New Orleans area were out safely before the storm hit, the loss in lives would have been minimal. A government that can rapidly move hundreds of thousands of troops and millions of tons of equipment to go to war half way around the world could certainly have evacuated those that were left behind - if it wanted to.

It is also a well-documented fact that the shocking scope of this disaster could have been averted for a fraction of the cost it will require to rescue and rebuild after the fact. Initial estimates by insurance companies put the damage at as much as \$30 billion - and that is just on property they will have to pay out on. Billions more in uninsured properties will have been damaged beyond repair.

Long before Katrina hit, much could have been done to prevent a debacle of this magnitude. To start with, the levees and dikes surrounding the city of New Orleans, which is nestled in a bowl-like depression between the Mississippi river and Lake Pontchartrain, could have been fortified. Remember, if it were up to Mother Nature, much of the country of the Netherlands would not exist; it too lies largely below the flood plain. However, it has invested the time and above all money into strengthening the traditional dikes to withstand a flood the likes of which comes just once

every 10,000 years. The dikes around New Orleans were rated to withstand just the 100-year flood level.

The Louisiana authorities had known for decades that a massive storm would inevitably come. They also suspected that the current defenses were not adequate to stop the flood such a storm might bring. In June 23, 2002, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported:

"The New Orleans area's last line of defense against hurricane flooding is a 475-mile-long system of levees, locks, sea walls and floodgates averaging about 16 feet high. The Army Corps of Engineers says the system will protect the city and suburbs from a Category 3 hurricane that pushes in enough seawater to raise Lake Pontchartrain 11.5 feet above sea level -- high over the head of anyone standing on the other side of a levee.

"That margin of error is critical because a storm that pushes the lake any higher can force water over the top of the levees and inundate the city. The water could quickly rise 20 feet or higher. People would drown, possibly in great numbers.

"The corps doesn't know what that safety margin is anymore. Generally speaking, the corps says the powerful, slow-moving storms capable of overwhelming the system are rare and the levees are safe. But corps engineers say their own safety estimates are out of date, and an independent analysis done for *The Times-Picayune* suggests some levees may provide less protection than the corps maintains."

According to engineering consultant Lee Butler, quoted in the same article, "I think everyone familiar with this is sitting on pins and needles because nothing has happened in that lake for 50 to 60 years and you start to think, are we due. And the answer I think is yes, statistically you're due. And that's scary. Based on my knowledge of hurricanes, I'd watch what happens very closely - and I'd get out of Dodge."

Tragically, Katrina surpassed even the worst-case predictions of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Why wasn't money set aside to make these obvious improvements? The fact is, money was set aside for this purpose, and reinforcement of the dikes was underway. That is, until, that money was diverted directly to fund "Homeland Security" and the war in

Iraq. As reported in the *Times-Picayune*, work on the 17th Street levee, which breached on Monday night, came to a halt earlier just a few months ago for the lack of \$2 million. City and state officials and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had requested additional funding to reinforce the levees on numerous occasions. These requests were not only rejected, but the Bush administration slashed this year's funding for the New Orleans Corps of Engineers by \$71.2 million, a stunning 44.2 percent reduction since 2001.

In the words of Walter Maestri, emergency management chief for Jefferson Parish, Louisiana: "It appears that the money has been moved in the President's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay... Nobody locally is happy that the levees can't be finished, and we are doing everything we can to make the case that this is a security issue for us." (Quoted in the *Times-Picayune* in June 2004).

According to the Corps of Engineers: "major hurricane and flood protection projects will not be awarded to local engineering firms... Also, a study to determine ways to protect the region from a Category 5 hurricane has been shelved for now." (Ibid.)

Effect on the Economy

This is a damning condemnation of a system that puts war and profit before human need. This is the end result of billions of dollars spent on "Homeland Security". That reactionary terrorist Osama Bin Laden could not have conceived a more devastating attack, even with the element of surprise; and the likelihood of a category 4 or 5 hurricane hitting New Orleans was known for years in advance. The patriotic, pro-Homeland Security hysteria that followed 9/11 dissipated long ago, and millions of Americans now want to know, how could this happen? The naked truth has been revealed: the capitalist class and its representatives in government simply cannot guarantee us even the most basic level of security.

What a far cry from Cuba, where the nationalized, planned economy allows this impoverished country to do what the world's richest nation cannot do: put people before profit and quickly and efficiently evacuate all those in the

path of the many hurricanes that come through each season. Or Venezuela, which although it is under intense threat from U.S. imperialism, immediately offered \$1 million in aid - which the U.S. government cynically rejected as "unsolicited", and therefore "counterproductive".

We should not underestimate the far-reaching effects Katrina will have on the U.S. and world economies. Oil is quite literally the fuel of the modern world, and the effect of the Gulf Coast devastation has already caused prices to rocket to record levels. A couple of years ago, with oil at \$30 a barrel, we explained that due to geopolitical instability, oil might well reach \$100 or even higher. At the time, this may have seemed a bit over the top. Now, with oil hovering around \$70, it doesn't seem so far-fetched.

Even before the storm, we were getting gouged at the gas pump for nearly \$3 a gallon. Now, according to many commentators, the economy has been delivered a "knock out blow". New Orleans is the most important port of entry for oil supplies coming from outside the U.S., and the Gulf Coast is the biggest source of domestic oil drawn from the ocean. Refining operations in the region are 90 percent out of commission and oilrigs are literally washing ashore along the coast. The worst hit region will be the Midwest, because almost 100 percent of the oil refined there comes from crude shipped up the Mississippi from New Orleans. \$3 a gallon is now the norm; in the coming days and weeks, \$4 and higher will be required to travel just a few miles in the gas-guzzling behemoths the auto industry assured us we just had to own (employee discounts for all!).

As could be expected in the face of such human tragedy, Wall Street traders have cashed in on fears for the future, betting against a rapid recovery of oil refining capacity. Speculation is a big part of it, but there are also infrastructural reasons for the steep rise in the price of black gold. Fears are mounting that with a swathe of refineries out of commission, possibly for months, and inventories rapidly sinking, rationing of America's lifeblood may be introduced. Bush's response was to order the Environmental Protection Agency to temporarily eliminate Clean Air Standards at oil refineries and

New Orleans

power plants, in an alleged effort to increase fuel supplies. This just happens to have been a long-time goal of his pals in Big Oil.

High oil and gasoline prices were already squeezing the life out of consumer spending and the feeble economic recovery. At these new prices, the whole of the economy could quickly come to a grinding halt. We will continue to analyze the economic effects of Katrina in future articles.

End Capitalism before it Ends Humanity

The images on TV are shocking: babies and the elderly dying of dehydration, left to rot in the heat and humidity. Crowds of people who have not eaten for days chanting, "We want help! We want help!" The heart-breaking voices of those asking, "Are they going to leave us here to die?" The enraged, disgusted crowds that can only be compared to the people of revolutionary Venezuela, awakening to the harsh reality that they can only rely on themselves for help. And while most people have worked together to make the best of a desperate situation, others have had to literally fight for survival. Fights over basic foodstuffs and water have been reported. One woman recounted seeing people fight like rabid dogs to secure a spot on a stolen truck in order to flee the hellhole that was once a beautiful city. These frantic efforts to survive are reminiscent of films like *Mad Max* or *Water World*. These post-apocalyptic films paint a bleak picture of humanity's future if we do not replace the decrepit capitalist system. Or in the case of millions around the world and the many thousands still marooned in New Orleans, of humanity's present.

After September 11, Bush was able to manipulate the American people into focusing on an outside enemy, manipulating them into supporting the neo-cons' Project for the New American Century. This time around, after the "shock and awe" at the devastation, the outrage will be increasingly leveled directly at the government and the system it defends. Like the under-funded and under-fortified levees surrounding New Orleans, the superficial lies of the world's most powerful ruling class no longer hold water. They have plainly proven their inability to provide even the most basic necessities of life to the

very people from whose hard labor they extract their profits. All excuses about how Katrina was "an unavoidable 'act of God'" are total rubbish. We repeat: all responsibility for the scale of destruction and loss of life lies with the capitalist class that dominates our world. It was their cost-cutting measures and indifference to the long-term consequences of their inaction that condemned thousands to death and inhuman suffering. Now they must be made to pay the consequences.

To those who lament that "nothing changes, it will always be the same, capitalism will always exist," we point to the mind-boggling situation in New Orleans, formerly home to over half a million people. From one day to the next, the world-renowned city of Cajun and Creole food and the birthplace of Jazz has been reduced to a polluted lake dotted with abandoned ruins. Nothing lasts forever: capitalism has not always existed, and it will not always exist. But what will replace it? The apocalyptic "horror without end" we are seeing on TV, or socialism, a system based on human need?

Hegel explained that in history, necessity often expresses itself in the form of an accident. Katrina's destructive violence was just such an accident. This seemingly "routine" storm, just one of many other hurricanes that have affected the Caribbean and Gulf Coast in recent years, has unleashed forces that will continue to play out for years after its winds die down. Conditions determine consciousness, and under conditions such as these, consciousness can change in a heartbeat. And this is only the beginning. Katrina could well mark the beginning of a profound crisis of confidence in the U.S. government, and of the capitalist system as a whole.

We often discuss what "socialism of the 21st century" will look like. The terrible fate of New Orleans is a brutal wake up call to millions of Americans: this is what capitalism in the 21st century looks like. Never has the ruling class' contempt for human need been more clearly exposed. Now more than ever, we must end this brutal, decaying system once and for all. Only the final overthrow of the rotten profit system can lay the basis for a true flowering of human society. Another world is possible: join us in the struggle for a better world! □

Gas Gouging Galore

by Mark Rahman

MUCH HAS been made lately of the "looters" in New Orleans - people desperately searching for food, water, and clothing. The real looters are the oil executives who charge ridiculous prices for a commodity all working people rely on. The government just happens to be made up of ex-oil execs, and it just gave energy companies the bulk of \$14.5 billion in tax breaks in the new energy bill. Coincidence? Not at all. Big oil and Bush's Big Business government work together to exploit working people.

Millions of Americans own and operate motor vehicles. It is their chief means of transportation to and from work. As a result, millions of working Americans are feeling the heavy burden of rising gas prices. Mass transportation outside of major cities in the United States is virtually non-existent. Where it does exist, it is often terribly inadequate, leaving Americans who live in the vast suburban sprawl absolutely dependant on their vehicles.

Many people believe that the oil industry is struggling, hence the high prices. This is false: in fact oil profits have never been higher. As reported in the *Boston Globe*: "Of the world's seven most profitable corporations, four are ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, BP, and Chevron. ExxonMobil is the world's most profitable company, making \$25.3 billion last year. It and the other three corporations had combined profits last year of \$72.8 billion. ExxonMobil is also the world's most valuable company, with a market value, according to *Forbes* magazine, of \$405 billion. The combined market value of ExxonMobil, BP, Royal Dutch Shell, and Chevron is nearly \$1 trillion.

And that was last year. A month ago, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips announced record second quarter profits of \$7.6 billion, \$3.7 billion, and \$3.1 billion, respectively. Royal Dutch Shell's quarterly profits of \$5.2 billion were up by 34 percent over the same period last year.

In part, it is the general instability in the world which allows these companies to jack up prices. Now the billionaires who live in conditions light years ahead of working people can squeeze even more out of working people. In typical capitalist fashion, they shamelessly took advantage of hurricane Katrina to increase their profits as well. □

Marxists hold Mass Rally and Conference in Kashmir:

Trotskyism echoes across the valley of Kashmir, while a deep political silence haunts the place

Report by Adil Khan, former general secretary of the Jammu Kashmir National Student Federation

The Marxist opposition of the JKNSF (which is now known as JKNSF-Marxist, because this name is being used by the bourgeois press to differentiate the Marxist faction of JKNSF from the official one) held a series of three days of activities from September 1st to 3rd in Rawlakot (Pakistan occupied Kashmir).

On September 1st a motorcycle rally was organised from Rawlakot to Madarpur. On September 2nd a torch lit procession was held in Rawlakot and on September 3rd the Awami Haqooq Conference (People's Rights Conference) was held in Hajera in defence of peoples rights.

The recently initiated peace process between Pakistan and India, which has started due to big pressure on the part of the imperialist institutions, to some extent depends on the Kashmir question. Many solutions and formulas have been put forward by both sides and there has been a lot of lip service on the part of the ruling classes in both countries including their local stooges in Kashmir. In spite of this they have failed to present any solution which can be acceptable to all parties. This failure of the ruling classes of the Subcontinent reveals the inability of their system to solve any of the problems. Therefore, despite all the efforts for peace there is no peace possible under capitalism for the downtrodden masses of the sub-continent in such conditions.

There is no other force in Kashmir which could expose the impotence of the rulers to the masses and could offer a way forward, apart from the JKNSF (Marxist). The JKNSF is actually a student organization but its Marxist wing is gaining the sympathy of the masses because of its correct programme and methods based on scientific socialism (i.e. genuine Trotskyism).

The Marxists of the JKNSF are not



only waging an intense political and ideological war against narrow nationalism, the reactionary Stalinism of the state sponsored leadership of the JKNSF and the religious fundamentalists, racists and the state itself. They have also been facing physical attacks after the huge rally of July 7th. The reactionary and terrorist forces formed an undeclared coalition against the JKNSF (Marxist). They launched a brutal propaganda campaign against the Marxists to sabotage their programme, but they have failed. The Marxists, despite all the difficulties successfully organised a series of activities and this success will prove a base for new and bigger successes. Below we give a detailed report of these activities.

Motor Cycle Rally

On September 1st more than 50 motorcycles, decorated with red flags travelled 36 kilometres from Rawlakot to Madarpur the nearby town close to the line of control. The purpose of the motorcycle rally was to raise the issue of the basic rights of the people that have been violated, and in particular of those victims of regular shootings by both Pakistani and Indian armies. There are many towns located between the army posts of both countries on LOC (Line of Control) in which hundreds of poor people have been forced to live a

miserable life under the bayonets of these armies since the criminal division of the subcontinent and Kashmir in 1947.

The armies of Pakistan and India often used this area as a firing training ground and as a result many people are killed, disabled and many houses are devastated. Nobody knows when a bullet may kill him or her, either fired by the Pakistani army or the Indian. There are tens of army check posts attached right next to people's homes. Hundreds of families are divided and have not been able to meet again. The purpose of the motorcycle rally was on the one hand to express solidarity with these victims and on the other hand a preparatory campaign for the September 3rd conference. The people of these towns warmly welcomed the participants of the rally and they raised the victory sign to them and waved to them as this was the first time ever during the last 58 years that any political force has raised their demands.

On the night of September 2nd more than three hundred youth and students organised a torch lit procession. They carried torches, red flags and chanted revolutionary slogans.



They marched throughout the city and the echo of "socialist revolution" broke the deep silence of the valley and the light of the torches illuminated the darkness of the night.

People's Rights Conference

On September 3rd hundreds of youth and students started a march from the grounds of the Degree College of Rawlakot. When the procession of more than 800 youth entered the city the routine life of the place was paralysed. A poster had been printed and pasted throughout the country and more than 20 thousand leaflets had been distributed in all the main cities of Azad Kashmir. They decorated the city with hundreds of red flags, banners and wall chalking. When the procession with flags and banners passed through the city everything was enveloped in the colour red.

There were two important elements, that were seriously observed and noted by the public: our banners and slogans. Through these slogans and banners the Marxists raised the genuine issues of the working masses and they demanded the unity of the working class and class struggle. This differentiates the Marxists from all other political groups. The comrades carried a huge banner of the "Hands off Venezuela" campaign expressing solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution. This was noted widely and it provoked a new debate on the validity of socialism in the present time and about the Bolivarian revolution. They also launched the Hands off Venezuela campaign in Kashmir under the title "In Defence of the Venezuelan Revolution".

The procession marched throughout the city and after completing a full tour, the rally of more than hundred small and large vehicles decorated with red flags, moved forward to Hajeera,

where, the conference was being organised. When the rally entered the city a huge gathering of working people was present there for the reception. They welcomed the participants of the rally. After passing through the city they reached the grounds of the Degree College of Hajeera and went to the huge conference hall with a seating capacity of more than 1200. Hundreds of working people were listening to the speeches, some sitting on the roofs of houses and buildings, as the conference hall was packed and many people were standing.

Comrade Shujjat Kazmi, the former president of the JKNSF was the chief guest of the conference, while comrade



Shoab Sham

Adil Khan, the former general secretary of the JKNSF was presiding the conference. Among the speakers there were Abbas Kasher, Abid Hussain, Qamer Abbas, Tufiq Kazmi, Azher Shujah, Asad Nawaz, Ajmal Rasheed, Taswer moswi, Yasir Irshad, Sikander Ali Qamer, Wahid nawaz, Rashid Shah, Amjad Shahswar, Sermad Butt, Kamran Baig, Abdul Sattar Advocate from NAP, Sardar Naiz, Ejaz Nisar of JKPP, Mashal, Javed Chaudhary Advocate of the PPP and Qader Naqvi.

Comrade Shoab Sham, the deputy general secretary of the JKNSF, said in his fiery speech that the working class and the youth has been facing endless problems under capitalism including the problems of the people near the LOC (Line of Control). In this



Adil Khan

situation the only way of solving these problems is to change this cannibal system. There is no solution to the problems of the working class under capitalism.

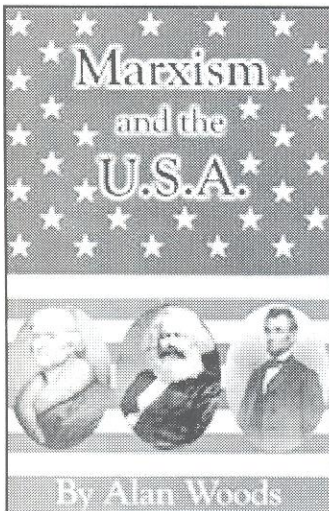
Comrade Shughat Kazmi said that capitalism was based on division. Capitalists divide the working class on the basis of territory, religion, language, nationality, race and colour of skin. The working class of Kashmir and the world is under the direct attack of the capitalists because of these divisions. If we want a durable and long lasting solution to these problems we have to fight against each and every kind of division of the working class of the world and only Marxism can provide such a basis of class solidarity and a way forward out of this hell of capitalism. It started raining when the last speaker, comrade Adil, came to the stage, but despite the rain the comrades and other working people remained seated, keenly listening to his speech.

Comrade Adil said that it was Marxist theory that gave us the insight to be able to address such a sensitive issue. That's why we are spreading our ideas widely and starting a serious campaign and struggle for a solution to these problems. But we can't win this battle without the massive support of the working class.

We demand the withdrawal of the troops of both Pakistani and Indian armies. We also know that without a mass resistance which has the support of the working class of both countries (Pakistan and India) we cannot achieve this. We are fighting for the class solidarity of the working class of the sub-continent and of the world, which is the key to success. This conference is the starting point of future struggles and this conference proves the saying of Lenin that, "He who has youth has the future." So, the future is ours. □



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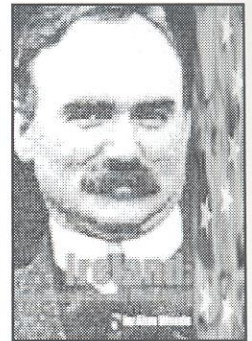
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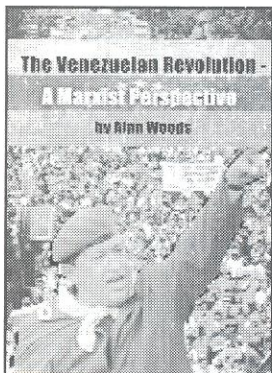
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nesses and strengths, its contradictions and unique characteristics. The book was not written with hindsight. Every chapter, beginning with the coup of April 2002, was written as the events themselves were unfolding, and trace the winding course of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

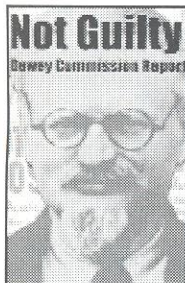
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

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

Autumn Appeal - Raise £7000

EACH MONTH this column raises the importance of readers giving donations towards our fighting fund to help develop the work and the resources of *Socialist Appeal*. But we are not the only ones trying to get donations. According to a recent BBC website news item: 'the UN launched an appeal last month for the more than 4m Malawians who are facing hunger after the worst harvest in a decade. The majority of Malawians live on less than a dollar a day.'

The grand result after all the wealthy nations were approached to chip in was zilch! Not a bean. The UN was trying to raise £88 million, which may seem a lot to you or me but is nothing to some of these countries. Well it is funny how they always manage to come up with the cash for a war say or for a big international gathering of their chums but when it comes to helping out ordinary people then the wallet stays hidden.

We are confident that our financial appeal will be more successful - not least because we are certain that our readers will see the importance of giving generously to help the struggle for socialism. With that in mind we are launching here our autumn and Xmas appeal target to raise £7,000. In many ways this is a modest target but even so it will require a lot of effort to ensure that it is reached by the new year. The fighting fund is an important source of income for us. Without it we cannot develop our resources and that is an essential requirement.

During the last year we have intervened in all the major union and Labour Party conferences, the various national demos against the war, the G8 demo and

the ESF event in London last Autumn. We have also intervened in and reported on a number of strikes both here and internationally. We have raised a number of issues not least that of the Venezuelan revolution, where we were the first to do so long before it became fashionable, and have worked closely with Hands Off Venezuela to continue to analyse and defend the Bolivarian struggle. Together with our book publishing wing we have produced a number of books and documents aimed at developing Marxist theory and education. On October 29th of this year we will be holding a national day school on Latin America.

We have continued to defend the importance of winning the mass organisations of the class over to socialist ideas and the need for a fighting class leadership. We are under no illusions. Our forces and resources are weak but we are confident in the ideas of Marxism. We have achieved much over the last period - punching above our weight they call it - and this is as much down to you as anyone. But it cannot stop there.

Every seller, supporter and reader should ask what they can do to support the drive for the magnificent seven grand we need to get in over the next three and a bit months. Time is against us. Plans should be laid now - who should be approached? What can be organised to raise cash? Most importantly of all - what can I give now?

Send what you can to us at PO Box 50525, London, E14 6WG. Cheques/PO's should be made payable to Socialist Appeal.

Thank you in advance.

Steve Jones


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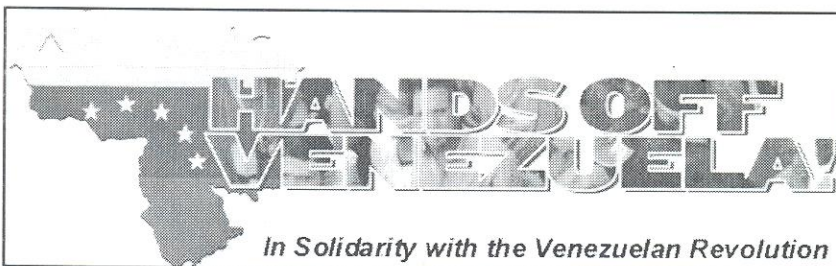
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Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution: Speaker - Alan Woods
(author of *The Venezuelan Revolution*)

Lessons of the Bolivian Revolution: Speaker - Amacay Colque
(Co-ordinator Bolivia Solidarity Campaign)

Defending the Cuban Revolution: Speaker Jorge Martin
(International Secretary Hands Off Venezuela)

Film Show and Social with Latin American food (from 7.30pm)



www.handsoffvenezuela.org / britain@handsoffvenezuela.org

noticeboard

October 2005

"Hands Off Venezuela! Many thanks to all you fighters of the world who are backing this campaign for the freedom not only of Venezuela but the whole of the world."

President Hugo Chavez

Join Hands Off Venezuela!

Send us your details with a cheque payable to "Hands off Venezuela" for £7.50 or £5 unwaged (suggested fee) to HOV, 100 Armadale Close, London, N17 9PL

Socialist Appeal Stands for:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

Union Activists Suspended... ...by Amicus leaders!

THREE AMICUS members of staff have been suspended from their jobs in Amicus without any explanation as to the reason why. The three people are Des Heemskerck, Jimmy Warne and Cathie Willis. They were told that a reason would be given in due course. This was on the 8th September and to date, over three weeks later no explanation for the suspensions has been given. The Amicus GMB staff representative has submitted a formal grievance with Amicus to request an explanation.

All three are leading members of the Amicus Unity Gazette, the broad left organisation that was instrumental in getting its candidate Derek Simpson elected as General Secretary and winning 23 of the seats on the Amicus Executive. Des Heemskerck is the Editor of the Amicus Unity Gazette, a position he has held for many years. Des is a former Deputy Convenor at Fords who gave up his job and took a pay cut at Derek Simpson's request to take a job in the union's campaign department. Jimmy Warne is the

Chair of the Amicus Unity Gazette and is a former shipyard electrician and Shop Steward at Swan Hunter. He was also a prominent member of the Gazette group on the former AEEU Executive that led the walkout that prevented Jackson from declaring Derek's election void. He gave up his position on the old Executive at Derek's request to come and work for Amicus. Cathie Willis has worked for the union for eight years and suffered years of victimisation under the Jackson regime when they discovered her husband Phil was a leading Amicus steward in the Construction industry and a prominent Gazette supporter. She helped in the campaign to get Derek elected and is probably the single most important person that enabled the campaign to succeed. All three played a pivotal role in Derek's election.

The suspensions follow an attack on the Gazette leadership by Derek Simpson at an NEC meeting at which he accused unnamed individuals of being involved in an attempt to

destabilise the Amicus leadership. Nothing could be further from the truth. These people are the ones who got him elected to his job and have steadfastly stood by the principles of the Gazette. He called for an investigation into the publication and circulation of internal union material but never informed the Executive of his intention to suspend the three people the following day.

This political attack must end now. These people are innocent. Amicus must re-instate them to their jobs immediately. Send a message to Derek Simpson now demanding their re-instatement to Derek.Simpson@amicustheunion.org or write to 35 King Street, London WC2E 8JG, with a copy to Phil Willis at reinstatethethree@yahoo.co.uk or 4 Stanton Close, Orpington, BR5 4RN.

For further information or a copy of a model letter or petition please contact Phil Willis at the above address or phone 01689838334

By Phil Willis
(campaign promotor)

Reinstate the three now!

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