

Pakistan □ Middle East □ France □ Economy □ Belgium

SocialistAppeal

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PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE

Crocodile tears
but little aid

Venezuelan Revolution
expropriates land and factories

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War on civil liberties in Britain

"There is no greater civil liberty than to live free from terrorist attack."

Tony Blair, *The Telegraph*,
24/02/2005

If this were true then there would be no greater threat to our civil liberties than Blair's government. Their slavish support of American imperialism's invasion and occupation of Iraq has made Britain a terrorist target with terrible results. In turn this threat, and the climate of fear carefully cultivated around it, is being used precisely to undermine our democratic rights.

The right to demonstrate, to strike, to trial by jury, these are elementary civil liberties, yet most of them have already been whittled away. To live without the danger of being shot dead by the police was a freedom that has now been abolished by the implementation of a shoot-to-kill policy that has already killed an innocent man.

The assault on our democratic rights is not a secondary matter. It is not enough to shrug one's shoulders and announce that we are not really free under capitalism anyway. We do not elect judges or police chiefs, newspaper owners or the bosses of the banks and big companies that dominate every aspect of life. All this is true, the state in capitalist society is an instrument for maintaining the rule of the minority over the majority, and ultimately it is the big monopolies and their interests that decide all important questions. This hardly exhausts the subject though.

It is clearly easier to organise a struggle for jobs and wages, or for that matter for revolutionary change, in conditions of democracy than under a dictatorship. The democracy afforded to us by capitalism is restricted, but we can no more ignore the attacks launched on our political rights than we can attacks on our jobs, wages and conditions.

Both are important symptoms of a lack of confidence in the future on the part of the capitalist class. To maintain their power, privilege and wealth they must attempt to claw back with their right hand every reform wrenched from their left hand by generations of struggle. Hidden behind the barrage of propaganda about the need to fight terrorism are very real attacks on our ability to protest, and to organise to

change society.

Blair complains that "We are trying to fight 21st-century crime... with 19th-century methods, as if we still lived in the time of Dickens." (27/09/2005) Indeed Dickensian era laws are still being used, not to combat 21st century crime, but to stifle protest. In September *The Guardian* reported that a student campaigning against cruelty to animals had his city centre stall in Lancaster confiscated under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Some of the laws being used predate Dickens, and even Shakespeare, being more familiar perhaps in the time of Chaucer. In two recent cases, protesters have been arrested under the 1361 Justices of the Peace Act. So much for Blair's 21st century methods.

The Canterbury Tales do not include the cautionary story of a woman arrested by Kent police for the heinous crime of writing two polite e-mails to an executive at a drugs company begging him not to test his products on animals. Such electronic threats to national security, it seems, warrant undermining freedom of movement, freedom of association, the right to trial by jury, the presumption of innocence, and more in the eyes of Blair and the ruling class. In the new period we have entered more 'modern' laws are required, not to protect us, but to defend the system.

Section 132 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 bans people from demonstrating in an area "designated" by the government. One of these areas is the square kilometre around parliament. The problem is that we do not get to know where is and where is not 'designated'. The Home Office explains the policy: "It's an operational matter for the police force..."

It's up to them to act in the context of a situation so it's not for us to rule out X, Y or Z. Taking a dog for a walk in a dockyard - it's up to the police to decide if they pose a risk or not. There are no circumstances where we could say it can't be used."

Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 (used farcically to hold 82 year old Walter Wolfgang after he shouted "nonsense" during Jack Straw's Labour Party conference speech) allows people to be stopped and searched without the need to show that there is

"reasonable suspicion" that a criminal offence is being committed. This Law has been used repeatedly against anti-war protestors.

In addition to a shoot to kill policy, and the right to arrest people for walking down the street, new laws are now proposed to introduce compulsory identity cards and to give the Home Secretary the right to hold 'suspects' for three months without charge.

Charles Clarke justifies the new powers by arguing that political violence to topple a government is no longer justifiable anywhere in the world, under any circumstance. "I cannot myself think of a situation in the world where violence would be justified to bring about change," The Home Secretary stated. Does this rule out British support for any other US imperialist adventure in the Middle East? What else was their invasion of Iraq than 'political violence to topple a government'?

Giving the Home Secretary the right to hold 'suspects' for three months is a return to the repression of internment. Identity cards will do nothing to protect us from suicide bombers, but it will help the authorities to keep a close eye on trouble-makers, anti-war activists, militant shop stewards, and so on.

There is no greater threat to democratic rights than a capitalist system in fear of its future. We must fight to defend those freedoms that remain.

We must struggle to win back those already taken from us. In the end to achieve real democracy, that is control over our own lives, and over society as a whole, we must take power out of the hands of the privileged few, the capitalist class, and their repressive institutions. Even the limited democracy of the past is no longer safe under capitalism. Today the struggle for political, social and economic freedom is the struggle for socialism.

- **No to Identity Cards! No to repressive 'anti-terror' laws!**
- **Defend Civil Liberties!**
- **Restore the rights of workers to organise. Repeal all the Tories' anti-trade union laws!**
- **End the imperialist occupation of Iraq! Withdraw all the troops!**

Another colliery under threat of closure

by Dave Sullivan

IN 1984, there were 186 deep mines in Britain. Twenty years after the strike there are now only 7. In 1989, Tony Blair, whose future as a New Tory Prime Minister was still ahead of him, made the following moving declaration in Parliament:

"I beg to move that this House believes that the future of a resource as important as coal should not be left to market forces; opposes reliance on imported coal to meet Britain's energy needs; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to intervene in the negotiations between British Coal and the electricity supply industry in order to ensure the long-term contracts for production which are necessary for the coal industry to fulfil its duties to the country, the consumer, the environment and those that work in it."

Britain continues to burn as much coal as it ever did, but now that coal is imported. At the same time mining communities the country over are still trying to recover from the decimation of the industry that has shamefully continued under this Labour Government. Tony Blair may forget his words of yesterday, but the National Union of Mineworkers

do not.

The recent announcements of closure at Rossington and Haworth Colliery prompted the NUM to demand a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the performance, and future role of UK Coal, the company responsible for the disaster still being played out at the few working pits left.

The Coal Industry Aid scheme, which was created to ensure at the very least the maintenance of mining jobs, has continually been abused by UK Coal, which has continued a deliberate policy of colliery closure, and yet scandalously still qualifies for taxpayers money.

At Rossington Colliery in Yorkshire the directors of UK Coal have excelled themselves in making the transition from coal owners to land speculators, maintaining a contemptible attitude to the workforce and the community the colliery served.

- **UK Coal has failed. The grant assistance to the company has been squandered.**
- **Not one job created, not one job maintained!**
- **Hundreds of millions of pounds for complete and utter failure!**
- **The NUM demands that this money be taken back, and that the assets are taken over and the resources utilised in the best interests of Britain and its people.**

Planes, Trains and Taxis

by Gordon Martin, Wishaw & Motherwell RMT branch secretary, (personal capacity)

PLANES, TRAINS, and the abuse of minicabs were high up the agenda of the Scottish media in October. Planes due to the budget airline company, Air Scotland, leaving hundreds of holiday-makers stranded at airports for hours, over the non payment of the company's fuel bill. Trains came under the media spotlight due to control of the rail network passing from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament. This hand over of control was given maximum spin by the PR companies used by the Scottish executive with announcements of major upgrades to some of Scotland's mainline and underground stations on the day power was transferred. Minicabs are making the news like never before due to allegations that David McLetchie MSP, the leader of the Scottish Tories, has run up a taxi bill amounting to £11,500 over the last four years. The media smells blood here and politicians from the other parties in Scotland are trying to force McLetchie to admit he used tax payers money to pay for taxis to Tory party conferences and other events, as well as on personal trips to the offices of an Edinburgh law firm where he is still employed as a solicitor. McLetchie, meanwhile, is on holiday in

New Zealand, he obviously does not need to fly with budget companies or he would be stuck at the airport with the Air Scotland passengers. In my view the real story regarding the transport industry passed the media by without comment. This story concerns millions of pounds of tax payers money being handed over to the profiteers running our railway, to enable them to face down the rail unions during industrial disputes. In the last two and a half years alone, 23 million pounds has been given to train operators who lost revenue during disputes (which they caused) involving the RMT and our sister union ASLEF. Bob Crow was 100% correct when he said: "This shameful abuse of public money actually prolongs disputes as it removes any incentive for employers to negotiate, and it hands a grossly unfair advantage to bosses who already have the law stacked on their side". The RMT General Secretary also pointed out how it was bizarre that when Tommy Sheridan, the Scottish Socialist Party MSP, asked how much public money had been used to protect National Express, the former holder of the Scotrail franchise from any lost revenue

when they were involved in strike action by the rail unions, the Scottish Executive said this information was "commercially sensitive" and refused to release it. This information had already been made available to MPs in Westminster, perhaps the New Labour led executive knew the Scottish people would have been disgusted to learn that the answer to Sheridan's question was £12.65 million. The RMT are demanding the Scottish Executive no longer allow public money to be misused in this way now that they have control of Scotland's rail network. Maybe David Blunkett MP, should investigate this abuse of tax payers money as part of his "war on benefit cheats". Then again this disgusting right wing, New Labour cabinet only see the working class as "benefit cheats", they are mesmerised by the rich and powerful and can't do enough to help these anti-union bosses. The unions who are affiliated to, and bankroll, the Labour party must start demanding representation in return for this money, paid out of the union dues of the members who are forced to strike in defence of jobs and conditions, while this government uses public money to assist their "friends" in the boardrooms of big businesses to maintain and improve profits. □

Reforms signal end of comprehensive education

From our Education Correspondent

THAT TIME of year is with us again. The government has unveiled its latest root to branch shake up of the entire school education system; the twelfth since 1997. But that does not mean that it will be business as usual, on the contrary while previous packages have tinkered and slowly eroded the comprehensive school system this could be a killer blow.

At Labour Party conference Tony Blair told us about his new vision for education. Sermons from Rev. Blair always sound as though the visions they set forth have been passed down directly from god. But this particular vision seemed to have come straight from the pen of JRR Tolkien. The school system, he says, will be 'set free' from the evil clutches of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), using something called 'parent power' and delivered into the safe hands of a number of noted philanthropists who will let children reach their full potential. Clearly this vision was handed down from the City of London.

The governments education plans were unveiled last month in a Parliamentary white paper to cheers from the Tory benches! The plan is to take schools away from LEAs and given them so-called 'Trust' status, that means that they will have almost total control over all aspects of their work. At present the LEA has a responsibility to take a direct role in schools, to make sure they are providing a decent service, meeting the national curriculum and balancing the books. Under the new system there will be no clear authority to regulate standards and protect public assets which fall under private management.

The trusts like those in the City Academies will have no restrictions in their financial dealings and will be essentially run as a private sector organisation including the right to set teachers pay, sell assets or speculate on the stock exchange. They will have a lot of freedom over what they teach and who they allow in.

The natural result of this policy will be a return a 1960s style 11-plus system of selection. This will lead to two tiers of schools, the highest ones only admitting 'bright' pupils and attracting extra funding to improve their curriculum, while the lower schools will become dumping grounds.

A whole range of organisations will be able to run the new schools. This would include religious organisations, universities, charities and private schools. The whole model will be, as in the NHS, to start running these services along business lines and the intention is clear that in future businesses will be able to participate in the running of these schools.

The government is keen to encourage more faith schools. For example they have identified 150 Islamic schools and organisations which would be able to take over the running of the new trusts. All other faiths will also be encouraged to set up schools. On the one hand the government talks about multiculturalism and on the other introduce policies that will segregate children and communities. Furthermore it is impossible to believe that whoever takes over the running of these schools will not introduce their own prejudices into the curriculum so children's education is also bound to suffer. Will Catholic schools for example will be free to teach the creation theory to children in science lessons and present it as fact?

"Modernisation"

The government has promised to deliver 'parent power' in the way the new schools are run. They are giving parents more right to complain about failing teachers and have them removed. They will also be given a direct responsibility in school management with the right to choose what kind of school is set up in their area, or rather which organisation if finally chosen to run the school. The LEAs have been told that if they do not take parents wishes into account the Minister for Education will have the right to intervene directly. This seems to be a way to beat down any opposition to 'modernisation' within the current system.

In order for parents to make an informed choice schools will be required to publish constant records of pupil and staff performance. Schools which are judged to be 'failing schools' will be given one year to improve and if they are still judged to be 'failing' they will face takeover by a new provider. This is the introduction of market forces into education and paves the way for privatisation.

In other services being prepared for privatisation you can see a kind of arti-

cial crisis which is meant to prove that the public sector doesn't work and that privatisation is the only way out. This has been the case both in the NHS and in the Post Office. In schools part of this is the myth of 'failing schools' and 'lazy' or 'incompetent teachers'.

In truth there are a whole series of reasons why the school system is not up to scratch. Most of these problems can be traced back to government, for example lack of money for maintenance, education resources and constant new initiatives and interference. The poorest schools suffer because they need the most backup to deal with problem students and spend a lot of their time on bureaucracy when they have better things to do in other areas for example social services and council housing exacerbate the problems for students from poorer families.

Labour's new policies are the foundations for the privatisation of the education system. The faceless vultures in the City of London have long been greedily eyeing up the billions in the education budget and want to get their hands on it regardless of the consequences.

We must make a stand for a well funded comprehensive system of education. The system must have the resources to develop all pupils; those who need extra help and those who are gifted. If these reforms are allowed to go through they will undermine the education system and lead to an offensive against the wages and conditions of teachers.

The whole trade union movement must oppose these attacks from the Labour government. If the teaching unions call for industrial action to put a stop to this the overwhelming majority of society not to mention the whole union movement will support them. It must also be taken into the Labour Party to drive out the disgusting layer of careerists at its head and return it to working people. □

- No to attacks on the school system.
- For an end to government interference.
- For proper funding and resources.
- The system must be geared towards developing well rounded, cultured human beings - not towards building clones for the needs of business.

Fat Cat Corporate Interests

by a Recruit Event worker

THE COMPANY is called Recruit Event services PLC. They are based in Wembley. This company supply stewards and security staff for sports and music events. They have contracts for wembley arena, several premier league football clubs, cricket at Oval and Lords, horse racing, golf etc. They employ over 3000 staff - of which nearly all are employed on a part time/casual basis (with the exception of a number of management staff). Most members of staff have other jobs, or careers and this is seen as a flexible/back-up job.

The company have a shambolic attitude to staff and no respect for any employment rights. They do not seem to recognise any trade unions, and any staff who query their working practices are marginalised and offered less (or no) work.

Staff are required to "sign in" or "meet" over an hour before the event begins. We are required to book in for events, and we call to confirm to work at events a week before. The day before the event we will receive a confirmation text with details of "meet time", place, etc.

The employer works on a "numbers" basis, (to protect themselves from staff who do not show up or cancel) and they will often overbook. I am aware this is standard practice in this industry, where companies will overbook by a few, however, Recruit Event services often overbook by as many as 20 plus people. At every event I have attended there has always been at least 10 staff sent home, often without any travel expenses reimbursed. When you are asked to turn up at Wembley to work away from London, we may be called as early as 6.30 in the morning. You also do not get paid any travelling time (which other companys do) and you will not get paid for nearly an hour after you arrive at your destination. Often staff will turn up

at least half an hour early to get into the event - in some cases people turn up more than an hour. Despite this, turning up early is no guarantee for work, as the management staff will separate the queue into two lines - one for staff who they do not know or like, and another for staff who they do like, and want to pick. This means that any new staff will have a very high chance of being sent home. Last month, at the Luton Town VS Brentford match, 24 people were sent home - on the basis that our shoes "were not polished enough" - they must think we are stupid. The management will go up and down the line and pick at pathetic reasons for people not to work. People have been sent home for wearing trousers which are "too long", "too short", "have the wrong number of pockets", "have lines in them", "are creased". People who have been wearing the same trousers for the last six months at the company suddenly get told their trousers "are not black". If you ring the office to complain about these practices, they will offer you less or no work at all.

Pay system

The biggest issue of all is their pay system. When you are asked to report at whatever time, you are not paid until an hour later - until the briefing time. Officially we are paid £5 p/h for stewarding duties (higher level security have different rates). However when I calculated taking into account the standing around and sign in time, in some cases we were paid less than the minimum wage of £4.85 per hour. There is no official "sign in" or "sign out" system. If the event runs over, we are not paid any overtime. In another case recently, an event called "TD Jakes" (a large international christian meeting held by an American fundamentalist television preacher) we were asked to report

in two hours early (report time of 2.30 instead of 4.30). Yet when our pay slips arrived a week or so later, we were only paid an extra hour - so in effect we stood around for two hours doing nothing and not getting paid for it. They persistantly forget (or more likely deliberately) to include extra hours due (on the few occasions they have paid this back it has taken a long time). Not only this, but many members of staff have also been charged for uniforms and working accessories (polo shirts, bumbags, torches, ties, etc). Again this seems to be at their discretion and I have been told that this is illegal by the national minimum wage officer, since the company are displaying and advertising their logos. Another colleague of mine queried this during a briefing (and continued to query other issues) and has also been completely shut out.

Types of insurance

Another serious problem is that the employees of this company are possibly not covered by the usual types of insurance in this industry. They have also not paid out compensation to employees who have been injured.

The staff turnover in this company is very high. They employ large numbers of students, but people of all ages and from different backgrounds work at Recruit, and most people, although they will complain (often to other colleagues), very rarely attack the management directly, or if they do, they quit the job, or are released or never heard of again. I am one of these few people who has spoken to the management face to face about these issues, and they simply did not see any other point of view - and their attitude showed they have no regards for workers or human rights, only in their own selfish, fat-cat, corporate capitalist interests. These are the same sort

Tube shut-down

of people who are unbalancing the worlds economic system in favour of the worlds' rich, the same fat cats who will pocket the money and run rather than address the issues of industrial disputes, accidents at work, or any fairness or equality issues.

I find this lack of respect from my employers towards workers absolutely disgraceful. I'm pretty certain there are very few people in this company who are a member of a trade union. The Attitude of Recruit Event Services is the worst I have encountered - and I also know there are other such cowboy companies out there who operate in similar (and in some cases worse) ways.

Labour must be seen to stand for the working people - and not the big businesses and corporations that in reality run this country, and separate, and divide the workers, and (directly or indirectly) as George Orwell put it "keep the working man squabbling between themselves" so that the minority can keep control. □

Repossession

A poem By Stuart Knox

Karen's house is empty
Jay and Jade have left
Criminals of want
Been repossessed

With shitty low wages
High Council Tax too
Criminals of want
Flushed down the loo

So we tighten our belts
Just whisper and cuss
Back to the grindstone
It could have been us.

REGULAR MEMBERS of the travelling public on the Northern Line on London Underground will be well aware of the service disruption during, September and October, which affected them on a daily basis. Some of the more observant may have noticed that the train cab was occupied by not only the driver, but also a second person.

So what was the reason for this ongoing problem lasting 5 weeks which necessitates the double crewing of this tube train? If you choose to believe the continual broadcasts over the public address system, you would be led to understand that all of this is somehow due to a defect with the line side signalling system. Well, surprise, surprise, this is in typical London Underground management fashion, a lie.

The real technical culprit is a device known as a trip cock. This piece of critical safety equipment is mounted on the front of the train and is designed to operate should the train pass a red signal at danger and apply the trains' braking system automatically. However, although this device is officially supposed to be fail safe, back in April 2003 the unprecedented scenario occurred where one of these privately owned and maintained trains, at great cost to tax payers, did not stop after passing a red danger signal. At the time, an ingress of water was blamed for this failure, but no real evidence of this claim was ever made available to the Health and Safety representatives. Well, over a four week period no less than four trains have failed, once a testing system was introduced.

Although London Underground management and their private contractual 'partners' Alstom, the owners and maintainers of the trains now admit that they are currently uncertain of the precise mechanical deficiency which is giving rise to the problem. London Underground themselves have described the regime of maintenance undertaken by Alstom as being poor, shoddy and below standard. In fact, at a meeting with Trade Union Health and Safety representatives, Mike Strezlecki, the Director of London Undergrounds Health and Safety, described Alstoms work as being, 'pretty bloody shit'. This

claim is underlined by the further fact that at this meeting Mr. Strezlecki took the unprecedented act to sign, with a lawyer, a legal document known as an emergency intervention order taking back control of all safety related managerial responsibility from the private sector company Alstom, to the public sector entity, London Underground.

During these trip cock failures, it has been the drivers that have protected the public's safety by insisting that trains have two people in the drivers' cab. Management's main concern is to run a train paying lip service to everyone's safety. This all came to a head when a fifth train's trip cock failed. It was only when drivers refused, despite management pressure, to drive these private trains until the problem is finally resolved. It was a vindication of the drivers' unity by refusing to work on the grades of health and safety that made management withdraw the whole Northern Line fleet. They still do not know what caused some of the failures, but have devised a means for the trip cock to work more affectively.

The dispute between LUL and Alstom will now move on to who will foot the bill for the estimated £10 million lost due to the shut down. There are still a number of other safety issues that are not being resolved quickly enough. In fact another safety notice was issued to Alstom to resolve the problems with the train radio by the end of November.

So, what conclusions can be drawn from this situation? There is no material difference in say, the concept of allowing private companies to run cleaning contracts in the NHS under the scheme of outsourcing, thus resulting in patients dying of MRSA, or that of private companies being allowed to 'maintain' mainline track thereby causing death at Hatfield. As such, our gripe also lies with the leadership of all the trade unions for failing to organise a powerful campaign against linking these issues. Private companies should have no place in the workings of public concerns, particularly in relation to health and safety responsibilities. What we do not own, we cannot effectively control. □

RMT & ASLEF members.

THE SSP: A Crisis of Votes...

by Brian Conlon

AT THE end of September we saw two by elections in Scotland, in Livingston (for a Westminster seat) and in Glasgow (for a Holyrood seat). Usually by-elections go unnoticed and the results are often predictable.

However, these two by-elections in Scotland were significant in that one was the former seat of Robin Cook, who died this summer, and the other seat was held by Lord Watson who is now in jail for his incendiary ideas. Both seats seemed to be fairly safe Labour seats (Cook had a 13,000 majority at the last election).

But the Labour party tactic was to keep the by-elections as low profile as possible.

Indeed, the Labour leadership in Scotland has taken to adopting the Ostrich approach - heads down and wait for things to go away. The problem they face is that things are not going away. In Glasgow Carthart there is a threat of factory closures and neither Government (Westminster or Holyrood) is doing anything about it - so this was not a good place for Labour to be fighting a by election.

Yet despite this, no party was able to gain enough votes to "steal" the seat from Labour on polling day. In Livingston, the Labour Party suffered a severe setback in the vote received - down from 22,000 to 12,000 votes. - but also held the seat. Labour candidate Jim Devine, who was Robin Cook's old election manager, had kept the party line and, for example, did not turn up at the main hustings at a miner's club. In theory this was on purpose, so the SNP could not gain "momentum" - hardly a sign of confidence in your own policies!

In both cases the SNP tried to target the seats, and they were for once quite successful in their opportunist campaign but failed to win either election, which shows the limitations of that organisation and what it represents.

The SSP also had a disappointing day out. Their combined vote was 1263 out of 45,000 total votes

polled, just passing the magic benchmark figure of 2% (2,8 in this case), a sharp step backwards from the expectations of a few years ago.

Not only that, in both seats their total votes went down in a situation that could be described as being the best possible for them.

Given the unpopularity of New Labour and that fact that people knew they could vote SSP as a protest vote without risking electing a Tory government - indeed high protest votes and even freak election victories are a feature of mid-term by elections - the SSP turnout must be seen as a further step backwards for them. So it looks grim for the future as they seem to be now stuck firmly at the 2% barrier.

This is doubly disappointing if you consider the bizarre events that took place in Glasgow Cathart during the selection of the Labour candidate. Party official Mr McConnell summarily appointed one Charan Gill to fight the seat, against the wishes of the local party. When they found out that Mr Gill, a multimillionaire who is trying to become a politician, had less than a year's membership, a revolt was organised and Charlie Gordon was in fact selected, directly challenging McConnell's directive. Such a wrangle, exposing the Labour leaderships ongoing obsession with wealthy men, should have been a vote winner for the SSP, but it was not to be.

So far, so bad for them - but there is more. Mr Gill, also known as Curry King, was one of the people behind "Muslims for Labour" a group set up to create a lobby within the Scottish Labour Party. But now there is talk that some of the sponsors of Muslims for Labour are going to launch RESPECT in Scotland. This will be even more bad news for the SSP, as they will be fighting for the same electorate. This is only speculation, but George Galloway is coming back home for a speaking tour. Maybe he'll help the Curry King to get elected to Parliament after all. Gorgeous George and Curry King, what a duo! □

... and ideas

by Richard Vivian

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Party followed up their G8 alternative summit in June by organising a Make Capitalism History weekend in Glasgow. Against a background of serious financial problems for the SSP, the party have to be commended for staging such a large event which included such speakers as George Galloway of Respect and Aemar Anwar, a left wing human rights lawyer. The event comprised various workshops on international issues. There were also sessions on Marxist philosophy and dialectical materialism. The weekend was well attended and supporters of Socialist Appeal, including myself were made welcome despite our criticism of the SSP drift into petty bourgeois nationalism.

The workshop I attended on Socialism and the Fight for a Socialist Republic turned out to be more in common with the parochial rhetoric of the Scottish National Party than the socialist theme of the weekend. The main speaker, Bill Scott of the SSP demonstrated a total lack of confidence in a world socialist revolution by declaring 'its jist no gonna happen! Although manifesto pledges to scrap the Scottish nuclear sites and to bring the Scottish (!) troops home from Iraq were restated, any transitional programme to achieve socialism beyond these pledges (even if they could be realised) was not up for debate. Never mind the detail just play to the gallery! I was allowed barely three minutes contribution to a totally one sided debate where I attempted to explain the historic lessons of socialism in one country, emphasising that the cure to Scotland's problems was not nationalism, but internationalism. Getting rid of nuclear submarine bases was not enough, it was the system that causes them to be built in the first place that had to be smashed and this could only be done through international solidarity and action. My brief effort to explain basic Marxist theory was greeted like the Belarusian goal against Scotland the day before, with complete silence.

My impression of the SSP is that because they are an open parliamentary party they are now becoming influenced within by elements who are either too lazy to study Marxism or feel that it is not relevant in today's modern society. One member of the SSP executive openly admitted at a Marxist workshop that there had been discussion within the leadership on whether Marxism should be included as part of the weekend. □

Livingston by-election warning

by Tam Burke (Edinburgh West LP personal capacity)

TWO URGENT calls for help prompted me to take a half day off work and travel twenty miles to Livingston. I spent a wet, windy and sunny afternoon (this is Scotland!) leafletting in Pumpherston, a former shale oil refining village. Plenty of leaflets lay in the Election Campaign shop in nearby Broxburn, with no prospect of being delivered. I'd got a friendly welcome from the two LP workers who said that half the paid staff from Scotland were helping out at the Party's National Conference, and the rest of them were divided between the Glasgow Cathcart and Livingston elections.

"I am surprised I was needed. Where is the local Party members?" I asked the Party workers. "That's what we'd like to know" They replied.

I naively had imagined there would have been loads of helpers, what with Robin Cook's reputation, the tragedy felt at his untimely death and the overwhelming vote in the local Party for his successor, Jim Devine, a well-known UNISON negotiator.

It seems that like everywhere else, Livingston LP does not have many members, hence the letter, emails and

phone calls for me to "do us a favour". After over 8 years of claimed advance under a Labour Government we have a near empty party. The turn out of voters was down as usually happens in by-elections, though Labour won with a much reduced majority. This is hardly a vote of confidence in the Blair-Brown Government. Most Livingston voters either did not vote Labour (the Nationalist came second) or did not bother to vote at all.

In the same week as Labour's vote slumped we also had other events to make workers withhold their support. Blair tells the National Conference to "get real" after they reject increased privatisation in the NHS and Andy Kerr (Scotland's Health Minister) declaring the NHS here to be "open for business, for private companies". By contrasts workers see on the telly Walter Wolfgang being physically flung out of the Conference.

In Glasgow, the Vucaj family, after five years in Drumchapel seeking asylum, are also physically taken in the early hours from their council home, "the children screaming and crying with the Scottish accents" (The Scotsman

report) and bundled back to Kosovo.

Blair and Brown's Government panders to the British (and Scots) prejudice in blaming "foreigners" for the economic or social problems. Yes, Scotland's parliamentary leaders spoke out against the expulsion carried by the Blair's Government. But there has been no active public effort by Labour or the Scottish Parliament to encourage support for the campaign run by the neighbours and friends of the Vucaj family (Positive Action in Housing).

The poor of Kosovo, Africa and Asia, can be forcibly deported, the Left literally ejected from Party meetings but even Blair and Brown can not get enough heavies to drag voters into polling stations for their policies. Party Conference showed they also failed to prevent the union influence being exerted in the Party against the Blair project which has failed. Disgust and disillusionment with Labour could mean that this third term of Labour is the last. Housing shortages, health service cuts and low wages can only be eradicated by planning for need not greed, by socialist policies. □

BUS WORKERS SHOW THE WAY

by Gordon Martin, North Lanarkshire Trades Council Chair (personal capacity)

FIRST BUS workers in Central Scotland and the Lothians ended their pay campaign by accepting an hourly rate of £8, up from £7.40, plus a pension protection scheme. The basic will increase to £8.25 in December 2006. An overtime ban, two one-day strikes plus the commitment to a two day strike and the rejection of the company's initial offer prompted the slightly improved deal.

Turmoil in the stock markets have proved a disaster for investments on which the First Bus workers pension scheme depended. To guarantee future payments, drivers will now be able to alter their payments to the pension scheme between three bands, according to what they can afford.

First Bus will pay a matching amount into the scheme. This arrangement was drawn up after advice from the T&G pension experts and the trustees of the pension scheme.

First Bus Borders drivers are now expected to settle for the same deal on pay and their pension. If agreement is made, that will mark end of the summer's action by First Bus workers and Lothian drivers in Edinburgh, who settled for a basic of £8.78 rising to £9.50 in March.

The deals accepted fall short of the £9.60 hourly rate (\$20,000 a year based on a 40 hour working week) as aimed for in the Bus Workers Charter. Transport experts and employers have condemned this reasonable target as impossible. Mind you, sat at a computer in a comfortable, clean

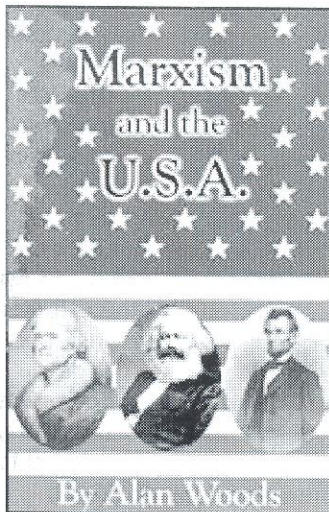
office they would say that.

This summer's action marks the mood for change where members were prepared to sacrifice to fight for improvements. Confidence in having the union behind them, with the election of Tony Woodley as General Secretary, has helped produced this different mind set. Local efforts will continue to establish a joint shop stewards committee in First Bus and a full time convener for all T&G members in the Borders, Central and Lothians First Bus. In addition to the \$12 basic, increased holidays and hours worked are still a problem. For example, a Borders bus driver can currently be out for 14 hours but is unpaid for 5 hours while they wait in the garage between driver duties.

Both First Bus and Lothian will have to make need pay offers in around 18 months and you don't have to be one of those horrified experts to see that the £12 claim is not on. Another round of action by the bus workers is inevitable to win decent pay and conditions, attract more workers and preserve and expand this essential public service.

- **Build the joint shop stewards committee.**
- **Support the bus workers charter.**
- **A service for need not profit.**
- **Labour must support the bus workers.**
- **For workers control and public ownership of bus services.**

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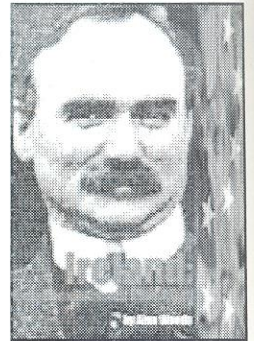
In his new book, Alan Woods examines the broad sweep of American history from a Marxist perspective. Many Americans view the ideas of socialism and Marxism with suspicion and distrust. In *Marxism and the U.S.A.*, the author shows that these ideas are not at all foreign to the history and traditions of the American people. 156 pages.

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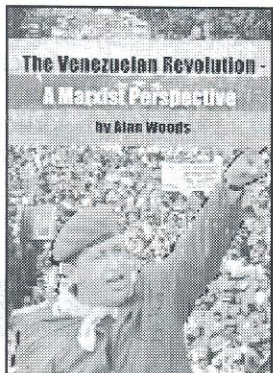
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nesses and strengths, its contradictions and unique characteristics. The book was not written with hindsight. Every chapter, beginning with the coup of April 2002, was written as the events themselves were unfolding, and trace the winding course of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

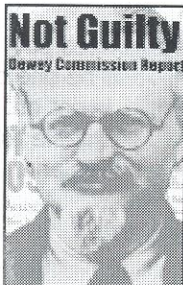
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

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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The Venezuelan revolution hits campus

by Ramon Samblas

AS HAPPENS every autumn the holidays end, lectures restart, exams and essays are back on the agenda and hundreds of thousands of freshers are welcomed into different Students' Union buildings up and down the country by hundreds of university societies from chess loving clubs to friends of the Martial Arts. This year, there were also some Hands Off Venezuela supporters trying to get the message of the Venezuelan revolution in to campus. We have been present at the University of Leeds (see SA, issue 136), University of East Anglia, Cambridge University, Royal Holloway University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University College of London (UCL), Edinburgh University, Glasgow University, Northumberland University and Birmingham University. Unfortunately a lack of resources, human and financial, as well as the bureaucratic barriers raised in some universities, have prevented us, until now anyway, from intervening in other colleges where we had planned to go.

UEA: The response from students and staff alike was generally very encouraging and positive. The university states that any budding society must receive at least 30 signatures in order for it to receive official status and a grant. By the end of the day we had received 35, which was as many as a great deal of established societies and is a very good start at such a small university. Our supporters also organised a very successful video-screening on campus that attracted more than 160 people.

Cambridge University:

This was one of the most encouraging but also the toughest intervention as well. The comrades have a 100 strong e-mail list. So far they have managed to get 18 people to be full members of Cambridge University Campaign. The down side of the intervention was the rejection we from some upper class Mexican and Venezuelan students who were openly hostile and ranted at us. There was a particularly angry one who said that "his father had had his ranch taken away by Chavez". When we heard that we just laughed. Another one was

really horrified and walked away when a supporter told her that he had been to her country and that the Venezuelan workers and peasants are showing a way out of the capitalist nightmare. Film screenings are being organised at the present time.

SOAS:

We literally run out of material and we managed to get quite a lot of names as well as very interesting discussions with the Freshers. People demanded more video-screenings on Venezuela. The activities planned are a Latin American Film Festival where social and political films will be shown and debated.

RHUL:

This is the University where we received the worst treatment on the part of the Students' Union. We were not even allowed to get a table and put it outside. However, the comrades managed very well. They got around 10 names and some material was sold. The supporters there are already planning events that will involve RHUL students in video-screenings, debates and discussions.

UCL:

The UCL Social Forum gave away Hands Off Venezuela leaflets. They were very pleased that we asked them to do that and they talked about us doing more activities together.

Edinburgh University:

We held a public event to explain the Venezuelan Revolution to the students of Edinburgh and to discuss what we can do about it here. The meeting was well attended with 14 people and we had a very constructive discussion. Some material was sold and everyone showed an interest in knowing more about the situation in Venezuela and the Latin American Revolution. In the debate Ecuador, Bolivia as well as Brazil were mentioned and it was clear to all that the campaign must raise awareness about events in the whole continent. After the meeting four people agreed to set up a committee which will meet every two weeks to organise screenings and to organise a panel with those who attended the World Festival of Students and Youth. It was also decided that we try to build a good delegation for the Solidarity National Conference in London this coming December. It was a good start for the campaign in Scotland. Now we will try to set up another committee in Glasgow and also in Fife. We have a mailing list with over 150 students, trade union activists and people who have shown interest in the public stalls we have had in the past.

Write in and tell us about the activities you have organised in your college or workplace. Why not advertise your events in these pages in advance? Send reports and articles to the usual address. □

Financial support needed

We are quite sure that the readers of this magazine as well as the readers of handsoffvenezuela.org have noticed that the supporters of the campaign have not given themselves a break for a long while. All through this year HOV supporters have been on the road aiming to raise awareness about the fascinating struggle of the Venezuelan masses to get rid of capitalism and achieve a fairer society. Trade union conferences as well as universities have been constantly targeted to raise the support that the Venezuelan oppressed so badly need. None of this comes free of charge and we certainly cannot rely on big business nor on the British or US government to keep the ball rolling, but just on workers and students like you. We have recently received some small but very important donations from our supporters like £50 from UNISON branch 01313 (Peterborough), £25 from Edbro Ltd. Amicus Shop stewards committee (Bolton), £10 from Ian (East London) and £6 from Paul (Harrogate) amongst others. To all of them, thank you very much and please carry on with your important support.

Please make cheques payable to Hands Off Venezuela. Send to HOV, 100 Armadale Close, London N17 9PL

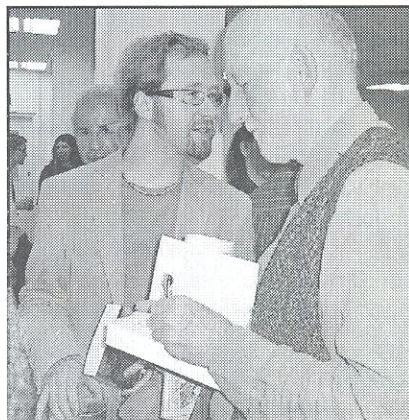
Night for Venezuela a great success



The London Central branch of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) had a full house for its 'Night For Venezuela' held at the NUJ HQ in London on October 12th. A 'standing room only' audience turned up on Columbus Day to hear a number of speakers starting with photo-journalist Jason Harris who introduced a slide show of his visit to the inspirational Alberti School in Venezuela, which will form the basis of an exhibition of his work to be held in London later this year.

Next up was Richard Gott, former Latin America correspondent and features editor for the Guardian newspaper, who introduced some of the themes covered in his new book, 'Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution' (Verso, 2005 £9.99). Copies of the book were on sale at the meeting from the Wellred bookstall and Richard kindly took part in a book signing session after taking questions from the floor.

Speakers from the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and the Columbia Solidarity Campaign spoke from the floor and distributed material about their work, raising the issue of the Dec 3rd HOV conference. At the end of the meeting there was a massive spread of Latin American food and drink laid on as those present stayed on to mark the event in traditional style late into the night!



The Iranian workers are not alone!

Picket outside the Iranian embassy in London

On Tuesday 4 October around 80 activists from various organisations, including the Committee for a Marxist International, OutRage, Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League and the Iranian Civil Rights Committee, took part in a picket outside the Iranian regime's embassy in London. Most of the organisations present at the picket showed their open and public support for Iranian workers and other exploited and oppressed masses with their banners and placards.

A number of different leaflets about the situation in Iran, emphasising the continuing persecution of workers and minorities and the lack of democratic rights for the overwhelming majority of people, were distributed. The leaflet of the 'The workers of Iran are not alone' campaign highlighted the following demands:

- 1- Granting all workers' demands including the right to strike, the right to form independent labour organisations, the right to free speech and assembly, and so on.**
- 2- The ending of all physical attacks, arrests, killings and torture of workers and toilers in the factories and towns of Kurdistan.**
- 3- The unconditional release of all political prisoners.**

The police prevented British trade unionists from delivering 'The workers of Iran are not alone' petition to the embassy. This petition had been signed by numerous trade union leaders and activists, including Bob Crow, General Secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union, and a number of left-wing Labour Party MPs. The British police said that the embassy staff were not prepared to accept any petition and that, as the embassy building is 'private property', they were entitled to this! The picket ended with a number of short speeches about the lack of trade union rights, democratic rights, executions of homosexuals and so on in Iran. These were well received by the journalists and photographers present. □



Defend Council Housing - Homes for the Many Not the Few!

By Steve Jones

ONE OF most decisive defeats suffering by the government at this year's Labour Party conference was on the question of council housing. Virtually unanimously, delegates rejected the (usual) Blairite approach of privatisation as the solution to all things and called on the so-called 'fourth option' to be implemented. This involves a demand that any funding made available to implement the transfer of housing stock into private hands should equally be made available for direct investment by local authorities in council housing.

The grassroots campaign Defend Council Housing (www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk) has reported that: '92 councils that we know of have already decided to keep their homes. Others are delaying a decision. Many proposing transfer or ALMO expect strong resistance from new local campaigns bringing together tenants, unions and often councillors, to take the arguments onto the estates.'

The depth of feeling on this issue is very understandable. This issue of council housing is at the core, along with decent wages, free education for all and the defence of the NHS, of what is often referred to as 'Labour's Values' - usually by ministers who are seeking to undermine those very values with Tory-lite policies.

Since the conference government ministers have been putting out confusing signals. First David Miliband, Communities minister (whatever that means) in a speech at a regeneration conference in East London stated: "In [some] areas, the fundamental viability of the area - the over-supply of social rented accommodation and the under-supply of attractive owner-occupied housing has to be addressed."

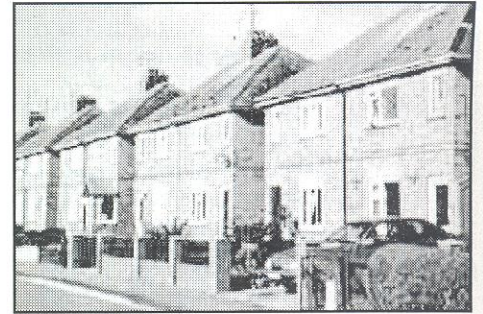
He adds: "The neighbourhood has to find a different place in the housing market with refurbishment and demolition creating more private housing and less social rented accommodation." (Guardian 12 October). In other words forget the need to create and maintain social housing for those on low income, let's gentrify the place and bring in all those nice middle class people who can afford these now far more pricey done up houses. Spot the difference between Mr Miliband and any Tory housing spokesperson of the last 30 years.

Oddly enough a few days later in the *Guardian* of October 18 we find Yvette Cooper, minister for housing and planning, saying the following: 'Social justice and economic prosperity demand more homes. Over the past 30 years we have seen a 30% increase in households and a 50% drop in new homes built. Considering this widening gap between demand and supply, it is little wonder that the long-term trend for house prices is so much higher than in other countries - as the Barker report set out. Demand will go on rising too. We have an ageing and growing population. Today, more than 50% of 30-year-old couples can afford their own homes. At current building rates, in 20 years that will have fallen to nearer 30%.'

In response to a call by the right wing columnist Simon Jenkins to push house prices up to ration housing stock amongst the middle and upper classes and abandon any plan to provide acceptable levels of social housing, Ms Cooper continues: 'But, as he (Jenkins) knows, it won't be today's property owners who face rationing. It will be the first-time buyers who don't have family loans or inheritance; the public sector workers who can't afford to live near their jobs; and the families on low income, waiting on ever-longer social housing lists. It isn't fair if the only people who can afford their own homes are the children and grandchildren of land- and homeowners before them.'

Continuation of Tory Policies

However is not Ms Cooper's comments also an attack on the almost similar line being peddled by Mr Miliband only a week earlier? Talk about one hand not knowing what the other is doing. Mr Miliband's statements that there is too much social housing and not enough home-ownership for those who can afford it, beggars belief. Of course Ms Cooper is quite happy to defend the Planning for Housing consultation paper and the general line of the government over the last few years whereby the private sector takes on more of a role in providing social housing. And we know what that has meant - a continuation of the Tory strategy of breaking up council stock, creating 'opportunities' for devel-



opment spivs to make a mint at the expense of decent housing for the poor and leaving estates up and down the country to be run down in the dead grip of housing associations. At the heart of this is the idea that the working class communities can be broken up and dissolved into speculator hell with the worse off being shunted off into defacto ghettos hidden from view. When Mr Miliband praises a scheme of Liverpool Council by which social housing in one area has been reduced from 80% to 50%, we can see how this idea is being maintained by New Labour.

The fact is that the private housing sector exists to make profit not provide homes for the working class. All the hived off council stock of the last thirty years should be returned to public ownership and adequate funding made available to ensure that these properties are properly maintained and upgraded and that rents are set at an affordable level. In addition a drive should be implemented to build the quantity of housing stock needed to ensure that there are homes for all - if they can afford to fight wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they can afford this. The building and construction companies should be nationalised to ensure that the resources to do this are available. There is plenty of wasted land available, even just in the towns and cities, to do this without destroying the Green Belt. As part of a socialist programme to transform society this should be easy to achieve. This was the dream of many after the war, sixty years later capitalism has produced the reverse. Property kept empty by speculators should be taken over and used for the public good. The decimation of council housing stocks has turned the clock backwards not forward - the time has come to fight back to end decades of neglect and exploitation at public expense. □

The heat is on

by Michael Roberts

IT'S OCTOBER and Hurricane Wilma is roaring across the Caribbean, having roughed up Cuba, the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico and heading straight for weary southern Florida. Already Wilma has killed 13 people and made homeless (yet again) the poorest members of various central American communities.

President George Bush's brother, Jeb, the governor of Florida, has declared a state of emergency as Wilma heads towards him, the 21st tropical storm of this year's hurricane season. There have never been that many storms in any one year for over 60 years.

Something strange is going on. The heat is being turned up on the globe. Global warming is a reality. Not only was the 20th century the warmest century in the last 600 years, the 1990s had more record warm years than any other decade in that century.

According to measurements by NASA satellites, sea levels have been rising twice as quickly in the last ten years as they have at any other time in the 20th century. The earth's glaciers and icecaps are melting and the oceans are expanding as they get warmer.

There is increasingly convincing evidence that heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is stopping heat radiating out into space.

Since the industrial revolution, carbon levels have risen from 280 parts per million, a figure steady for 10,000 years, to 380 parts, a level of emission not experienced for over 400,000 years.

One consequence of this is that tropical storms have become 50% more intense over the past 30 years. While global warming does not increase the number of storms, it makes them stronger to reach hurricane levels, because surface temperatures rise and warmer

water fuels the storms.

When Hurricane Katrina hit south Florida, it was a category 1 storm with speeds of 70 miles an hour. When it moved across the Gulf of Mexico, temperatures rose and Katrina became a Category 5 with winds of 170 miles an hour.

If the deaths in New Orleans, in Guatemala and in south Asia are a result of stronger hurricanes and tides caused by global warming, then these disasters are not "god-given" but man-made. The huge emissions of carbon and other pollutants are a product of uncontrolled expansion of industry and mining by capitalism globally.

The big multinationals want to expand without restriction or regulation. And they fight bitterly any campaign to protect people who work in their factories, mines and refineries, or those who have to live nearby or are affected by their pollutants. These "externalities" beyond their own private production for profit are not their affair and they don't want to take responsibility or to pay for them.

Indeed, there has been a massive campaign by the big global companies to deny that there is any global warming problem. They argue that any increase in global temperatures is really just the normal cycle of cooling and heating seen over thousands of years in the great ice ages. So there is no man-made problem that requires action.

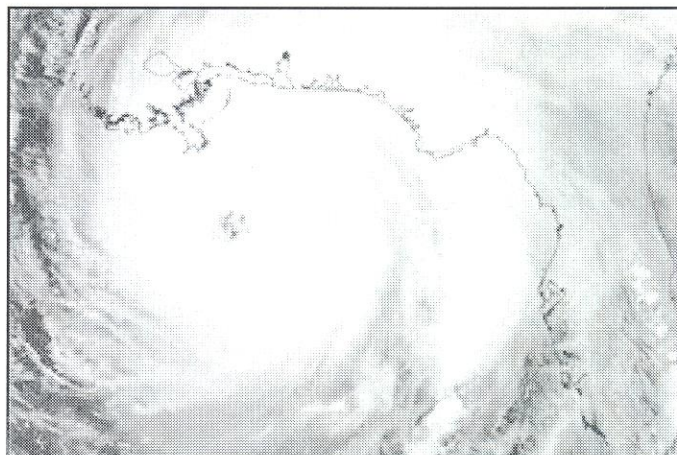
The evidence remains against the sceptics. There is now a mountain of studies showing that the current pattern of warming is distinctively different from 'natural' warming and is very specifically a pattern of 'greenhouse' warming. The National Climatic Data Center in the US recently found that at night time, minimum temperatures, on average, are rising twice as fast as daytime average temperatures. That suggests a carbon emission effect, otherwise daytime and night time averages would rise in parallel. According to a definitive study in 1996, the warming in the last century was 15% due to the sunspot cycle and 85% due to greenhouse gases.

This is bad news for the private owners of the oil, gas and natural gas industries. In the US, they generate \$2trn dollars in revenue. And if global warming became accepted and action was taken to deal with it, their profits would be in trouble. These big monopolies have reacted by setting up a campaign organisation designed to rubbish the global warming theory.

They have employed scientists to refute the arguments. In 1995, a public utility hearing found that the coal industry had paid four scientists \$1m to present evidence against global warming, while Exxon, the world's biggest oil company had spent \$13m on a campaign against it.

In particular, they made a video that argued that global warming was good for people because carbon dioxide would promote plant growth and help feed the world. The problem with this argument is that in hotter climates, higher temperatures kill more plants than carbon dioxide helps.

Just a half a degree rise in temperature in southeast Asia will



reduce rice and wheat yields by 20%.

Nevertheless, this video was very popular in the White House where great brains like George Bush watched it and accepted the arguments. This US administration is so much part of the oil and energy capitalist clique that it has been very ready to dismiss the arguments of global warming and instead reduce what environmental controls there are.

The first acts of Bush when he came into office (after fixing the vote with his pals on the Supreme Court) was to announce that the US would not ratify the Kyoto agreement which set international targets for reducing carbon emissions; and second, to allow oil and gas drilling in the untouched wastes of the Alaskan Arctic and also in America's wildernesses of their national parks.

When the Environmental Protection Agency listed the potential dangers of climate change in its major report, the White House ordered the EPA to remove or alter all references to global warming. The report had taken four years to prepare and covered all the research from 2000 scientists from 100 countries reporting to the UN, but Bush called it a "frivolous product of bureaucracy".

One of the leading neo-conservatives in the Bush administration has been Paul Wolfowitz. He was very keen on 'regime change' and the war against Iraq. Recently, Bush got him the job as head of the World Bank, the organisation that capitalism set up to 'help' poor countries develop and get out of poverty. Wolfowitz declared that the World Bank would take climate change seriously. What was his answer? To expand coal production and technology! Coal mining is not only very dangerous to the workers who mine it in difficult conditions under the whip of unscrupulous companies. It is also one of the biggest contributors to carbon emissions.

No wonder that, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, a government that denies global warming, that is opposed to environmental protection, that is opposed to state spending (except on arms and making war), was totally unprepared for what happened.

We now know that for years the US Army Corp of Engineers (the government body responsible for these matters) had warned that New Orleans could not stand anything more than a relatively weak hurricane. Ten years



ago, an intense rainstorm killed six people in the city. The Corps asked Congress to provide \$430m to shore up the levees (dams) to protect the city. The Corps was ignored.

Last year, the Army Corps reckoned that spending on the levees was 20% below what was needed and yet the now notorious Federal Emergency Management Agency reckoned as early as 2001 that the flooding of New Orleans was one of three most likely disasters. Instead, last year the Bush administration cut funding to New Orleans for flood protection by 80%!

New Orleans

At the same time, the Louisiana state congress asked the federal government for \$14bn over several years to strengthen dikes and levees along the Gulf coast. They were given just \$570m. Damage after Katrina is now estimated conservatively at \$100bn.

We now know how badly the administration handled the New Orleans disaster that killed so many, made thousands permanently homeless and just left the working poor (mainly black) to their fate.

As one observer put it: "the administration just walked away. The police and their guns and nightsticks were out in full force, not arresting criminals but pushing around the innocent and giving mostly bad instructions. The 10,000 people who had been corralled into the Superdome were essentially under house arrest from the police who were keeping them there, preventing them

from even getting fresh air. As the food and water ran out, people were dying and sanitary conditions were becoming disastrous. So somebody had the idea of shipping all these people, Soviet-like, to Houston to live in the Astrodome, as if they were not people, but cattle. After they were gone, the looting began with criminal gangs stealing everything these people owned as the police looked on (when they weren't joining in)!"

Back in Houston at a fundraising event, George Bush's mother-in-law and head of the Bush clan made a speech with the leaders of the other wing of the ruling political class present, Bill and Hilary Clinton.

Barbara Bush blurted out the real thoughts of the ruling class on the poorest people of New Orleans who suffered the most from their horrible negligence: "So many of the people in the arena there were underprivileged anyway, so going to Houston is working very well for them".

What has been the reaction of the American ruling circles to the lessons of New Orleans? Has it been to take global warming more seriously?

Has it been to propose measures to control carbon emissions? Has it been to improve environmental controls and protect potential disaster areas? Has it hell!

No, instead Bush has announced more deregulation and worse conditions for the very people who have suffered from the hurricanes and may suffer from Wilma too. The administration has dropped rules requiring companies to hire black, women and disabled workers. It has dropped pollution controls on higher sulphur fuel to alleviate shortages of petrol. It has allowed federal agencies to award contracts without any bidding procedures.

And most important, it has suspended the minimum wage laws in the four states affected by Katrina, thus cutting incomes to very poorest looking for work. And this is after refusing to raise the minimum wage level throughout the period of the Bush government, making the level the lowest in real terms since it was introduced.

The heat is on. But the ruling class stays air-conditioned in their luxury homes and gas-guzzling limousines. The working people of New Orleans and the homeless of the islands of aribbean remain in an ever hotter abyss as yet another hurricane heads their way. □

Revolution and the Struggle for Workers' Control

by Rob Sewell

VENEZUELA IS in the forefront of world revolution. The mass movement is advancing on all fronts, challenging the constraints of capitalism. Within the working class, the question of workers' control ("co-management" or "cogestion") has become a burning issue, as the Chavez government plans to expropriate over 1,000 idle plants. This is no bureaucratic measure from on high, but is linked to the expropriation of factories under workers' control.

Last month, workers' representatives and trade union activists met in Caracas at the National Gathering of Workers towards the Recovery of Companies. The main aim of this meeting, called by Venezuela's National Workers' Union (UNT), was to bring together workers involved in experiences of factory occupations and different forms of workers' control and management.

The issue of workers' control had been on the agenda in Britain in the 1970s. There was even a body set up - the so-called Institute of Workers Control - to study and promote the question. This was no accident. The 1970s in Britain was a period of intense class battles and factory occupations. It was during this time of militant class struggle and labour movement advance that the idea of workers' control became popular. This was no abstract question. Following the nationalisation of British Leyland, a heated debate arose over what control the workers would have over the state-run industries. The Marxists put forward the demand that management boards of nationalised industries be composed of one third from the workers in the industry, one third from the trade movement as a whole, and one third from the government.

There was, however, much confusion in the movement over the separate questions of workers' control, workers' participation and workers' management.

The right-wing reformists had long been in favour of workers' participation. This idea

reached its height in Germany, where trade unions after the war were drawn into close collaboration with the state and the employers. From instruments of class struggle, the trade unions and factory committees became increasingly organs for class collaboration. Workers' participation drew workers onto the management boards, completely isolated from the shop floor, and embroiled in decisions of how best to squeeze greater unpaid labour from the workers. At a lower level, workers' participation involved matters that had no real importance in the running of the plant. In a famous cartoon, entitled "workers' participation", a bemused worker is asked by a manager: what colour pen do you want to use - red or blue?

As Leon Trotsky explained in the early 1930s, "If the participation of the workers in the management of production is to be lasting, stable, 'normal', it must rest upon class collaboration, and not upon class struggle. Such a collaboration can be realised only through the upper strata of the trade unions and the capitalist associations. There have been not a few such experiments: in Germany ("economic democracy"), in Britain ("Mondism"), etc. Yet in all these instances, it was not a case of workers' control over capital, but of the subserviency of the labour bureaucracy to capital. Such subserviency, as experience shows, can last for a long time, depending on the patience of the proletariat." (Workers' Control of Production,

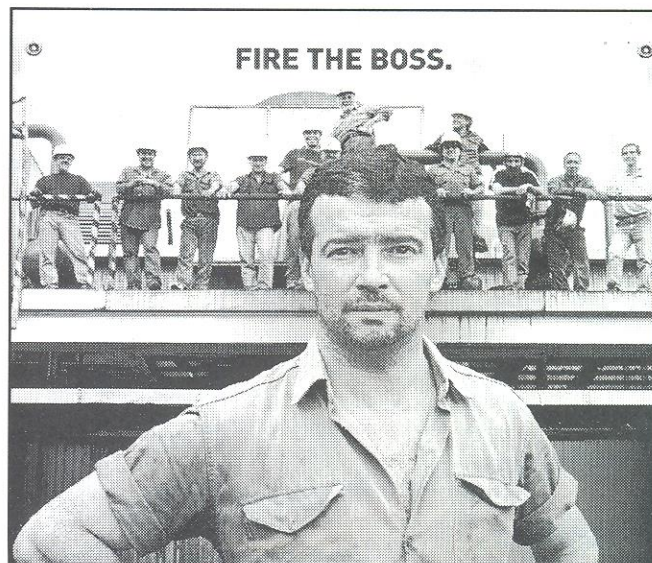
20 August 1931)

This process of class collaboration reached its height in Britain in the decade and half following the defeat of the 1984-85 miners' strike. It took the name of "New Realism". "Partnership for us is about co-operation", stated Bill Morris, the then general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. He was subsequently knighted by the Establishment for his "co-operation" in introducing new (harsher) terms and conditions in the car industry and elsewhere. In the steel industry, "worker directors" collaborated with mass sackings and the destruction of tens of thousands of steelworkers' jobs.

The concept of workers' control is fundamentally different from "participation". As Trotsky explained: "The workers need control not for platonic purposes, but in order to exert practical influence upon the production and commercial operations of the employers... In a developed form, workers' control thus implies a sort of economic dual power in the factory, the bank, commercial enterprise, and so forth."

Within every factory and workplace, the employers impose their own regime. Through their managers, they determine the working conditions, the shift patterns, break times and speed of operations. Through their time and motion experts, they attempt to squeeze every drop of profit from the unpaid labour of the working class.

Over time, the workers organise themselves against these pressures. Depending on the balance of forces, the degree of organisation and resistance, the workers begin to influence the conditions of work. The organisation of shop stewards committees become an important expression of this. Through pressure from the shop floor, the workers can win certain concessions from the bosses on a range of issues. They can win control over hiring and firing ("first in, last out"), safety provision, the pace of work, etc. The degree of concessions won will be determined by the balance of forces within each



industry.

During the 1970s in Britain, the trade union movement was advancing. They had built up a powerful position within industry and society. The shop stewards committees grew in size and importance. Under these circumstances, there were very high levels of workers' control in a whole number of sectors and industries. However, during the 1980s, with the defeat of the miners' strike and the capitulation of the TUC to the Thatcher government, the balance of forces began to change rapidly. The anti-trade union legislation served to bind the trade union leaders to the capitalist state. The employers waged a ruthless offensive that swept away much of the elements of workers' control. The bosses now had the upper hand and were determined to impose their "right to manage" across the board.

Workers' control has however a transitory character. Either it leads to nationalisation and workers' management of industry, or it inevitably falls back and the workers lose control of the limited powers they have won. In the United States, the struggle for control reached its limits in the sit-down strikes between 1935-38. The factories were in the hands of workers, but without their expropriation, the workers were forced to surrender this control at a certain point. In defining the contradictory character of workers' control, Trotsky explained: "Control lies in the hands of the workers. This means: ownership and right of disposition remain in the hands of the capitalists. Thus, the regime has a contradictory character, presenting a sort of economic interregnum." This cannot last indefinitely. Sooner or later, the employers will reimpose their will over the workers as they retain ownership of the enterprise.

Workers' control develops from below. It reflects the yearning of the workers to exercise control and impose limits over their exploitation. How far they succeed will depend upon the balance of forces. However, a high level of workers control also reflects the balance of forces within society itself. The shift towards revolution inevitable reflects itself within the workplaces. The struggle for workers' control represents elements of the new society within the framework of the old.

This is clearly what is happening within Venezuela. Following the failed

coup in April 2002, the capitalists reverted to a bosses' lockout and sabotage of the economy, on the same lines as in Chile prior to the coup of General Pinochet. The bosses, backed by US imperialism, got the support of the corrupt trade union leaders of the CTV. The disruption was concentrated in the giant oil industry, to maximise the damage to the economy as a whole. However, the workers rallied to Chavez and smashed the lockout by their own efforts. They seized the companies and began to run them by themselves. This represented an extremely advanced form of workers' control. "Thus the regime of workers' control", writes Trotsky, "can correspond only to the period of the convulsing of the bourgeois state, the proletarian offensive, and the falling back of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the period of the proletarian revolution in the fullest sense of the word."

October Revolution

Before the October Revolution in Russia, there was an extensive movement towards workers' control. This emerged from the sabotage of the economy by the Russian capitalists. This workers' control continued even after the revolution, when the economy still remained in private hands. The Bolshevik government, given the backwardness and size of the Russian proletariat, wanted the workers to learn through the school of workers' control how to take on the responsibilities of management. It was not until the summer of 1918 that the major industries were nationalised, when it was forced upon the government by the civil war and sabotage.

With the key sectors of the economy nationalised, this raised the question of workers' management of industry. Factory committees were set up which ran the plants. Managers were to be elected and under control of the workers. Specialists were also drawn in to assist but always under the check and control of the shop floor. This was the beginnings of genuine workers' democracy. In other words, workers' control became a bridge to democratic workers' management of the economy.

Obviously, ownership of the factories is posed point blank. Who is going to run society - the workers or the bosses? Workers' control has its limits. Only when the ownership of industry is

taken out of the hands of the capitalists can the workers have genuine control. However, a nationalised planned economy requires not only workers' control in the factories and workplaces, but requires a system of workers' management. You cannot have the old syndicalist idea of the miners running the mines, the rail workers running the railways, etc, without any overall planning of the economy. The integration of different branches of industry into the national planning of the economy is essential. This requires workers' management at a plant, district, regional, and national level.

This means the expropriation of the capitalists and the organisation of a democratic workers' state, where the running of society is in the hands of the working class through democratically elected committees. It means the involvement of the population in the drawing up of a national plan of production, deciding the priorities and measures to be undertaken.

The dangers of bureaucracy must be eliminated from the start. All representatives must be subject to election, with the right of immediate recall. No representative must be on a wage higher than a skilled worker. All functions should be rotated to prevent any permanent bureaucracy. As Lenin put it, "when everyone is a bureaucrat, nobody is a bureaucrat".

The struggle for workers' control in Venezuela today is posing new questions. Chavez has explained that there is no way forward on a capitalist basis. Only on a socialist road can the problems of the masses be solved in Venezuela as elsewhere. This means expropriating the power of the oligarchy and placing power into the hands of the working class and oppressed layers. It means sweeping away the old capitalist state apparatus and establishing a democratic workers' state. Such a revolution cannot remain within the confines of Venezuela, but must be taken throughout the whole of Latin America. Only then can the continent be truly united. However, this will not be the end of the matter. A continental socialist revolution would transform the world and lay the foundations for a socialist world, where hunger, poverty and war would be abolished once and for all.

The struggle for workers' control and workers' management is the necessary prerequisite for this perspective. ■

Earthquake in Pakistan exposes rottenness of regime

by Rob Lyon

Upwards of 40,000 people are thought to have died and hundreds of thousands injured in Pakistan, northern India, and Kashmir as a result of the earthquake that hit the region last months. The devastation caused by the quake has exposed the rottenness of the Musharraf regime and has left millions stranded with no shelter, food or water.

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake, the epicentre of which was in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, was felt across the entire region from central Afghanistan to Bangladesh. The worst affected area was northern Pakistan and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. At midday, Monday October 10, the Pakistani government released an incomplete death count from both Pakistan and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, putting the number of dead at 30,000. Some 17,000 people are expected to have died in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir alone.

Indian-controlled Kashmir seems to have been spared the devastation seen in other areas, though some 800 people have died and the border town of Udi was virtually destroyed. Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province was badly hit. Many villages and roads have been completely destroyed, making transport impossible. Pakistan's military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, told CNN that, "In certain areas, almost entire towns, they have vanished from the scene." CNN also reported that nearly every building in Balakot in the North-West Frontier Province, a tourist city of 250,000, had been destroyed.

The worst hit city was Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, where it is thought that some 11,000 people died. A Turkish search and rescue team has said that 80 percent of the region was destroyed in the

quake. Residents have said that they face food and petrol shortages. There is no water or electricity. People have been forced to get water from a nearby mountain stream and to eat local fruit, of which there is little. Hospitals have been destroyed and there are not enough doctors - it has been reported that surgeries and emergency medical care are being administered on soccer fields.

Scale of the disaster

Sadly, it seems that many of the victims were young children. Maj Gen Shaukat Sultan has declared that, "It is a whole generation that has been lost in the worst affected areas. The maximum number affected was schoolchildren." It is feared that thousands of children died as the schools they were in collapsed upon them. Relief and rescue operations have yet to reach nearly half of the affected areas and the UN has warned that more than 2.5 million people are in need of supplies and shelter after the earthquake.

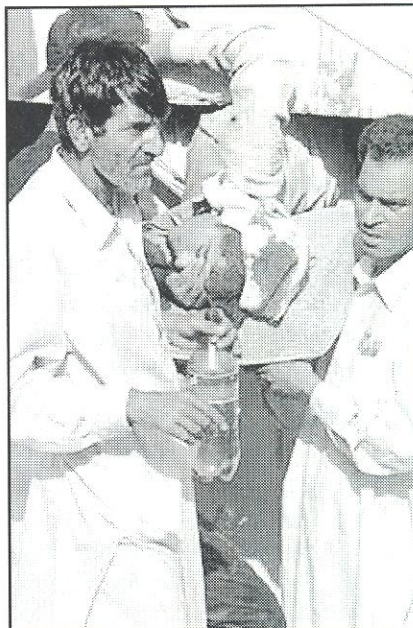
The scale of this disaster is

enormous. Some in Pakistan have said that the devastation caused will be as great, if not greater than that caused by the Asian Tsunami nearly one year ago. Earthquakes cannot be predicted. There is no way of knowing how big an earthquake will be, or when it will strike. However, preparations can be made, and a lot can be done by way of prevention.

Similar to the devastation following the tsunami that struck South East Asia last year, much of the devastation and loss of life could have been prevented. The government of Pakistan has been forced to admit that it has been overwhelmed by the disaster and that it does not have the resources or infrastructure to deal with the humanitarian crisis. General Musharraf announced that the military had been mobilized, but because many roads have been blocked or destroyed in landslides the army was forced to use helicopters to fly in aid. This has put enormous pressure on Pakistan's "limited" transport and helicopter resources.

The reports coming in from the various regions affected reveal the complete destruction and collapse of infrastructure in Pakistan and Kashmir. Across wide areas there is no food, water, or electricity. Unknown numbers of people are sleeping out in the open in freezing temperatures. Frustrated by the lack of aid and assistance, people have begun their own searches for loved ones - which the government is now trying to stop, in order to prevent total chaos. Those who did not lose everything have been camped out on the streets, afraid to return home for fear of aftershocks - one of which registered 6.2 on the Richter scale.

Pakistan will spend Rs 277 billion on its military by the end of 2005. For the same period, Pakistan



will spend Rs 11.7 billion on education and Rs 4.128 billion on health. From this it is easy to tell where the priorities of the Pakistani state lie - with the protection of the interests of the ruling class. The little money that Pakistan spends on social services and infrastructure has left the country with little or no means to deal with the crisis and the massive amount of money spent on the military has not been able to provide enough soldiers, or helicopters to deliver aid.

The rottenness of the regimes of the subcontinent has been exposed for the whole world to see. Rather than spend money on decent roads and buildings that can withstand earthquakes (such as those they have in Japan and California), and rather than provide hospitals and healthcare that could adequately deal with the daily needs of the people let alone a disaster, the rulers of the subcontinent have preferred to sink money into their swelling armies in a dangerous game of brinkmanship and bigotry.

Rotten and corrupt regime

A devastating natural disaster such as this could have revolutionary implications for Pakistan. The backwardness, rottenness and corruption of the regime will be exposed for all to see by the earthquake. The country has been smashed and the Musharraf regime is incapable of doing anything. Bureaucracy and lack of supplies is hindering the relief effort. People will see that the real interests of the ruling class and their cronies in the state are profits - they will be able to see that the rulers of Pakistan would rather spend millions on arms and military hardware, to protect their interests against their bitter rival India and against their own people, than on resources and infrastructure.

Already there are reports of angry protests from those affected by the disaster. The BBC reports that, "anger is mounting in communities where significant outside help has yet to arrive, amid fears time is running out to find survivors." The BBC world service site also reports that "Some rescue efforts are starting to step up here but still far less than what is needed for the scale of the devastation... People have spent two consecutive nights out in the open. There are no tents or blankets. People are getting very angry because the

authorities are unable to help." It is easy to tell that the Musharraf regime is worried about the angry reaction of the people - he has begged for calm and patience. When meeting with emotional victims he begged, "For heaven's sake bear with us. There are certain limitations. We are trying our best"

This angry reaction is not confined to Pakistan. CNN reports that, "Many survivors have been critical of the government's relief operation. They say thousands still need help, and with only a trickle of aid, angry Kashmiris were blocking roads and demanding relief." Kashmiris in Indian-controlled Kashmir have been eating rice mixed with dirt to stay alive. One man in Jabla explained that, "Here, in our village, we are only a few hundred people who need help ... water, tents, blankets... but we have not seen one single soldier." The Indian military has between 500,000 and 700,000 troops in Kashmir. Yet it has been reported that they are not helping in the aid effort, but are caring only for their own. Some 50 soldiers were killed when their barracks collapsed upon them. Military hospitals around Kashmir are giving priority to soldiers and their families over civilians. Angry, some 200 gathered to protest and block roads at the inadequate relief aid effort, which has been called "non-existent".

The relief effort may be non-existent, but one thing is not - security in Kashmir. Time South Asia Bureau Chief Alex Perry has publicly said that despite the widespread damage and humanitarian needs, security was paramount in Indian-controlled Kashmir. He explained that, "There's no doubt at all that it's still a military zone," adding that checkpoints were holding up the passage of aid to the region. The Indian government is officially concerned that militants might use the disaster as an opportunity to start pouring over the border from Pakistan. What they are really worried about is a stream of refugees coming over the border in search of food and shelter that they cannot provide, and the possibility of mass demonstrations against the government's handling of the disaster. Another fear, is that the disastrous handling of the disaster on the part of both the Pakistani and Indian governments, could unite the Pakistani and Indian workers in protest.

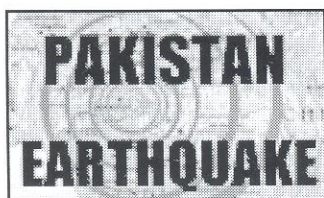
The West has arrived in typical fashion promising helicopters, aid, and

money. As with the earthquake in Iran two years ago and the Asian tsunami last year, very little of this promised money will arrive and next to none will help the people that need it most. Most of the money will be pocketed by corrupt politicians and their associates in the government and in business, the rest will disappear into the black hole of charity and NGO groups. Most of the money will be in soft loans - or linked to the purchase of goods. To add insult to injury, the total amount of money donated will pale in comparison with the money spent by the US and the UK on the wars in neighbouring Afghanistan and in Iraq. The goodwill of millions of workers around the world, moved to donate their hard-earned money to help those in need, will be wasted on bureaucracy and the middleman.

Failure of capitalism

Capitalism has failed the people of Pakistan and Kashmir. The earthquake has fully exposed the rotten nature of the regimes in Pakistan, India, and Kashmir. The interests, well-being, and lives of millions of people mean nothing to rulers of the subcontinent, who are really only concerned with safeguarding their profits, and power. The workers and poor of the subcontinent cannot rely on the rulers of the subcontinent to provide them with the infrastructure and social services they need - in daily life or in times of great crisis such as now. The earthquake could possibly, like no other event, make the people of the subcontinent realize that unless they control the means of production, they will never be able to provide themselves with the necessary resources and infrastructure to deal with natural disasters or to improve their day-to-day life. If millions live in dire poverty on a day to day basis, if capitalism cannot provide the people of the subcontinent even a modicum of health care, education, housing, etc., then how can the system possibly deal with a disaster on this scale? □





An appeal for the Kashmiri workers

AS THE bad weather clears in Kashmir after the earthquake that struck this past weekend the situation on the ground is becoming clearer. Hard rains, hail, and cold temperatures have prevented what little aid there is from getting to the hardest-hit areas and the most remote regions affected. The UN has admitted that the aid coming through is not sufficient, and that they are trying to secure more international commitments. More than 80 percent of the buildings in northern Pakistan, Azad Kashmir and the North-West Frontier Province have been destroyed. Strong aftershocks continue to threaten the buildings that remained standing after the initial earthquake.

Four million people have been affected by the disaster, with 1 million in acute need of humanitarian aid and relief. Two million people have been left homeless. There is massive need for winterized tents, food, and medicine for millions of people left to face the cold. To make matters worse, transporting these goods and supplies has proven to be extraordinarily difficult because many of the transport and trucking companies in Islamabad and in Peshwar (the capital of the North-West Frontier Province) are price gouging and demanding extremely high prices for their services. Charity and Aid groups have revealed that many trucking companies are demanding prices that are three times the normal rate.

We are receiving reports by the hour that reveal that the number of casualties and damage caused by the earthquake are much higher than what was previously declared. There are fears that the death toll may exceed 100,000 and that there will be an even greater number of injured. Of course, those most affected by the earthquake are the people from the oppressed classes whose dwellings were already fragile and unsafe. The people who have suffered the most are the workers and the urban and rural poor who have lost everything, and are being forgotten as the aid begins to arrive.

The main towns of Azad Kashmir that have been devastated are

Muzafferabad, Rawlakot and Bagh. With the mounting death toll and lack of aid and relief the threat of the spread of contagious diseases is increasing. The scale of the disaster is unimaginable, and there is the serious possibility of a massive outbreak of the measles, cholera, and diarrhea amongst the millions of survivors. More than 50 percent of those who perished in this disaster were children. The survivors have been left sitting on the debris of their homes without shelter in the rain and in temperatures between 5 and 7 degrees centigrade.

The roads to Muzafferabad are still blocked after the huge landslides. The bridges have been badly damaged and there is hardly a building in the area that has not been damaged. There are reports of hundreds of people still trapped in the debris three days after the earthquake. People are shelterless and are becoming more and more desperate.

There are also reports of rising crime, looting and arson. Aid is scarce and has been slow to reach the vast majority of the victims, who are mainly from poor backgrounds. What the media calls "looting" is simply a struggle to survive. In the absence of aid, food, and shelter, and with no one to help, people are doing what they can to survive.

Sadly we have received reports that three comrades have died. Because of the state of communications the picture is unclear, and we are not sure of the total number of comrades who are missing or who have lost their lives.

The PTUDC and YFIS are not only playing an important role in the rescue and relief efforts but also are trying to boost the morale of the people affected. The comrades are also trying to maintain social services in order to provide food, and shelter in the areas where the official administration has collapsed.

The PTUDC is sending tents and medical supplies to the affected areas. The PTUDC is also organizing a solidarity caravan of 20 trucks full of supplies that will leave next Monday from

Manzoor Ahmed's constituency in Kasur through northern Punjab to Kashmir. A team of 12 doctors has also gone to the hardest-hit areas of Kashmir on a voluntary basis from the southern city of Multan. This initiative was also organized by the PTUDC and five of the doctors, who are members of the PTUDC.

Our countrywide campaign in Pakistan to help those in need has done an excellent job in extremely difficult conditions. We have launched an international appeal to raise money around the world to help us organize our relief effort. The appeal thus far has been a success, raising several hundred pounds from around the world. We thank everyone who has made a donation.

This is only the beginning. We need to raise more money to get the necessary supplies, such as tents and medicines, to help those who need it most. Any amount of financial assistance you could offer will be directly used to help the workers and poor in Pakistan and Kashmir. We appeal to all our brothers and sisters, the trade unionists, workers, and citizens of Britain, Europe and internationally to help us in our campaign. Anything you can give will help us greatly in our efforts.

Hina Zain, National Coordinator
Earth Quake Relief Committee
PTUDC, Lahore

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The Bolivarian Revolution takes new steps against capitalism expropriating factories and landed estates

by the Revolutionary Marxist Current (Venezuela)

IN THE last few weeks in Venezuela there has been a renewed offensive in the "war against the latifundia" and a number of factory expropriations. This has had the effect of polarising the country, with the private bourgeois media launching a "crusade" in defence of private property.

The expropriations have involved the Heinz tomato processing plant in Monagas, the Fribarasa slaughterhouse in Barinas, the Promabasa (the Alimentos Polar owned silos) in Barinas, the Comanacoa Sugar Mill and the Sidororca pipe factory. In the countryside the La Marquesena estate has been taken over and there have been similar such interventions in a number of other latifundia up and down the country.

The oligarchy is now up in arms trying to mobilise the weak forces of the opposition. They have organised an intense media campaign, whipping up the fear of the petty bourgeoisie that their property is going to be taken over (something which is not at all contemplated by revolutionary Marxists when we talk about expropriating the means of production). In this manner, the ruling class is trying to recover a certain social base of support.

We should remember that the Land Reform law was one of the elements that sparked off the coup in 2002 and it touches on a key aspect of Venezuelan capitalism. If we add to this the expropriation of a number of companies and the announcement of a reform of the very concept of private property in the Bolivarian Constitution once this gets a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, we can see why the ruling class and imperialism are accelerating their plans to counter what they see as a "socialist threat".

On Sunday 25, the news bulletins of the main media interrupted their normal broadcasts to bring live coverage from the streets where, according to them, "the Venezuelan people were protesting against this assault on private property on the part of President Chavez". These were in fact small ral-

lies in the upper-middle class neighbourhoods in the main cities in the north of the country (Caracas, Valencia, Maracaibo, etc). On all of them there were slogans against the expropriations and against Chavez, who at that same moment was talking on his weekly *Alo Presidente* programme, broadcast from the expropriated estate of La Marquesena, so as not to leave any doubts about the fact that it had been taken over and that part of it was already being handed over to 80 peasant families.

The Church, as a loyal servant of the ruling class, has also stepped in to the campaign to attack these recent measures which are hitting Venezuelan capitalism. Among those making statements was the president of the Active Consciousness Foundation, the rabbi and highest representative of the Jewish faith in the country, Pynchas Brenner. According to *El Nacional*, Brenner declared from Maracaibo that respect for private property has existed since ancient times, otherwise the sacred scriptures would not have mentioned respect for this right in one of the main commandments: "you shall not steal". And he added: "this is a commandment of God which implicitly recognises the right of private property as a basic human right which cannot be taken away". As always, this is part of the strategy of the ruling class to try and present this system of oppression we live under, as one that has always

existed and that shall exist forever, like a kind of law of God.

The media campaign has also had support from their masters in the north, as was to be expected. The US ambassador Brownfield stated on Globovision that the expropriations are an "internal and sovereign" affair of the country "if they are in accordance with international law", and added that what is happening in the country will "undoubtedly have an impact on private companies, not only in the US but in all countries of the world".

The Government expropriates La Marquesena and other latifundia

The businessman and president of [the business federation] Conindustria, Eduardo Gomez Sigala, as a representative of the "national" bourgeoisie, also joined in this reactionary chorus, warning that the expropriations are going to "bring confrontation and will affect the investment climate. We call on industrialists to defend their property vehemently, as the case requires. There is no doubt that we cannot act with halfway measures in this matter. The Venezuelans who have built up this country, created industries, companies and houses must defend them for the well being of future generations".

With extreme cynicism, these employers (the same who squeeze every last drop out of us in order to fill their bank accounts with the proceeds of our labour) have expressed their "deepest worries" for the workers of the expropriated companies and landed estates, and for the future of their families. As if they had ever cared for the well being of our class when they destroy jobs to maximise their profits!

The government has organised a census of nearly 2157 landed estates covering 7 million hectares of land, and has determined that 3,658,123 hectares can be classified as latifundia. This means that INTI [National Land Institute] plans to intervene in 317 estates. As Genaro Mendez, president of FEDENAGA, the association of cattle



ranchers and latifundia owners said, "the problem is not just La Marquesena, the land that is threatened is those of the whole of Venezuela, and we will assume the defence of all producers".

The Minister of Agriculture and Land, Antonio Albarran, explained that the time scale for the taking over of land this year includes a further seven landed estates. These are those of Jovito (Apure), Los Cocos (Apure), San Pablo Paeño (Apure), La Bendición, Ramera, La Marqueseña (Barinas), La Vaca (Guárico) and Barrera in Carabobo. They add up to a total of 1,740,000 hectares. They will be followed by estates in Bolivar and Carabobo. The La Vergarena ranch, with more than 180,000 hectares will be the next one to be taken over. It is forecast that a total of half a million hectares will be taken over by the end of 2005.

In response to these advances in the struggle against latifundia in Venezuela, the hired thugs of the landowners attacked the house of Minister Albarran in Sabaneta (Barinas) in the early hours of last Wednesday in a shooting spree. The bullets hit the room of his daughter who fortunately escaped unharmed. "I am not going to retreat in the face of this or any other kind of pressure. I will continue the war against the latifundia", said the Minister.

More than 180 peasant activists have been killed in the last seven years of revolution by the hired thugs of the landowners in an attempt to prevent them from taking over the land that is rightfully theirs. Now they want to apply the same methods to the Minister of Agriculture and Land.

A few days ago, on September

13, the president of FEDECAMARAS, Jose Luis Betancourt, read a document of this, the most important business organisation in the country, which demands, "an immediate stop to arbitrary and illegal actions against private property, the return of the affected properties to their legitimate owners, and the respect to the right to work for workers and employees of the companies affected". "A Venezuela without private property is a Venezuela without freedom, without democracy, without dignity and without a private sector. A Venezuela without a private sector is doomed to hunger and poverty", ended the statement. The problem is that it is precisely the chains of the nation state and private property of the means of production which condemn millions of human beings all over the world to hunger, misery, scourges which could be easily eradicated on the basis of a nationalised and democratically planned economy.

The statements from Betancourt did not seem to cow the president of INTI [National Land Institute], Richard Antonio Vivas, who reaffirmed that the process of land distribution will continue, "the aim of INTI is to eradicate latifundia from the country". According to the national government what is taking place right now is the taking back of the country's land, since in most instances it is not a case of "confiscation, expropriation or intervention, but of taking back".

The National Government's legal base for the expropriation of these estates is that in the majority of cases the landowners have no property titles, or deeds, for the land they occupy. Most of them increased the size of their estates arbitrarily, illegally appropriating land that belonged to the State or to the poor peasants. A large proportion of the country's latifundia falls into this category.

On Wednesday 21, during the ceremony where the State paid its debts to 1049 aerospace technicians, which took place in the Miraflores Palace, Chavez stated that, "we will not expropriate more than what is necessary... the land owners think they own everything, but they are not the owners of any-

thing, because the owners are the Venezuelans as a whole." At the same time he explained that according to his information, "99% of land owners have no current property titles, so that when they are required by the authorities to produce property titles they cannot provide a document that corresponds to the land they occupy".

Referring to corruption he said that there were "remains of the old state infiltrated within the new State that is being born. We must get rid of the arbitrary and elite police state that sequestered the rights of the peoples". Immediately after that he recommended that the authorities keep an eye on the bankers since "it seems that a group of them are acting against the people".

VENEPAL was to be an exception but expropriations continue

On July 17, President Chavez reported that in the country there are 700 non-productive companies and 1149 which operate at 50% capacity and that the government was going to expropriate those that did not work. Since then there had been no concrete measures to implement this promise. However in the last few weeks it would seem that things have started to move in the direction announced by the president two months ago.

On Thursday 22, the Legislative Council of Barinas State asked the governor Hugo de los Reyes Chavez to declare that the Empresas Polar plant in this State was "of public interest" (a prior requirement before expropriation). The regional governor declared that "my hand will not tremble when it comes to signing a decree or any other measure to the benefit of the people". The following Monday the Regional Government expropriated the silos property of Remavenca, a subsidiary of Empresas Polar, and thus put an end to all speculation. In fact, the agreement that had been reached the previous Friday with the executives of Polar (which included no expropriation of the company) was broken and the State took over the plant. The Polar



board of directors issued a statement declaring these actions to be a violation of private property and an abuse.

Along the same lines, on Monday September 26, the National Assembly, in an ordinary session, declared as companies of "public and social interest" the Cumanacoa Sugar Mill and Sidororca (a company that produces pipes for the oil industry), as a step prior to expropriation and that they be handed over to the workers under co-management [cogestión]. Both companies had been left idle for a number of years and the workers were demanding their reopening. The expropriation was announced by deputy Jose Khan, who, together with Assembly president Nicolas Maduro, had previously met with the workers at the end of a demonstration.

On the same day, a group of workers at OXIDOR [a private oil refinery], on the Valencia industrial estate, took over the plant to protest against the paralysis of the refinery and to demand a fair collective bargaining agreement. Jose Romer, the union president, stated, "We have been six months without work, so we decided to take the president up on his word and occupy the factory to demand our rights". This group of workers demanded the expropriation of the company and its reopening under "workers and peoples' control".

A few days earlier the workers of a glove factory in the Amazonas state were threatened with arrest after a few weeks of occupying the Mi Guante installations, which had been closed and abandoned by the bosses. We should also remember the battle of the workers of Snack's America Latina, particularly in Lara and the Aragua plants, in which once again the Venezuelan justice system has shown it is at the service of the capitalist class. What we are witnessing is a recovery of the workers' struggles all over the country. And although so far these have been isolated cases, they highlight the role of the working class in this revolutionary process.

Contradictions of capitalism become more acute

Recently president Chavez warned CANTV, Venezuela's leading telephone



company that, "CANTV must recognise the debts to its workers... because if it does not, regardless of how powerful its bosses think they are, we will have to apply the sword and the acid of the law". He made this statement during a ceremony where the state was paying up its back debts to the former workers of the Maiquetia airport. This was a measure similar to what the Supreme Court of Justice was asking of CANTV. After the news of this statement, CANTV shares in the Caracas stock exchange fell dramatically by 12%. Chavez said that the company owes 279 million dollars to its pensioned workers and that the decision of the high tribunal was aimed at giving back the right to a "decent pension" to the CANTV workers.

On Wednesday 21, president Chavez announced the revocation of all concessions to foreign companies operating in national mines. "I want to tell the country that on the road of recovering Venezuela's economic sovereignty we will continue to advance in a firmer and more precise way. Recently, for instance, we took the decision, after looking carefully into it, to cancel all mining concessions. We will not give the multinationals any more concessions. No, no, no. They are fooling us", said Chavez. The share prices of Cystallex International fell by 44% on the Canadian market, to 1.2 dollars, its lowest level since June 2003, while shares of other mining companies with a presence in the country such as Gold Reserve and Bolivar Gold, fell by 28% and 13% the following day.

Price controls, particularly in the food sector, have not stopped inflation; on the contrary, it has been the regulated products that have suffered the highest price increases. This is despite the concessions made by the govern-

ment in relation to beef and other products that the employers had been hoarding or for which they had imposed higher prices without any government reaction, with the exception of some complaints by the president on one of his Sunday TV programmes. The expropriation of the Promabasa silos, which were being dismantled by Empresas Polar, was used as an excuse to provoke an artificial scarcity of maize products (flower for arepas, etc).

We are witnessing an offensive of the National Government against the landowners and capitalists, although so far this has only been partial, and this is obviously met with sympathy and support on the part of workers and peasants. The oligarchy is conducting a hysterical campaign in the bourgeois media about the sacred right of private property, that according to them is being violated by the National Government. These parasites and speculators who "defend" national wealth by taking their money out of the country or by keeping their factories and land idle, now complain because the Bolivarian government is taking from them what does not belong to them, but belongs to the workers and the people, and that they are incapable of putting to use. The capitalists cannot take the country forward. It is only the working class and the peasants that can do this, and this is being demonstrated by the workers of Invepal, Alcasa and thousands of peasant cooperatives up and down the country.

The only road to Socialism of the XXI century

All these are enormous steps forward, but the government must not stop here. Venezuela cannot advance while the land, factories and banks are in the hands of the capitalists. The solution to the problems of the Venezuelan people can only be found on the basis of state ownership of the means of production and the democratic planning of the economy instead of the chaos and anarchy generated by capitalism. This is the only possible way of having real economic development in the face of economic sabotage on the part of the landowners and capitalists. This is also the only way to build "Socialism of the XXI century." □

Mass demonstrations in France:

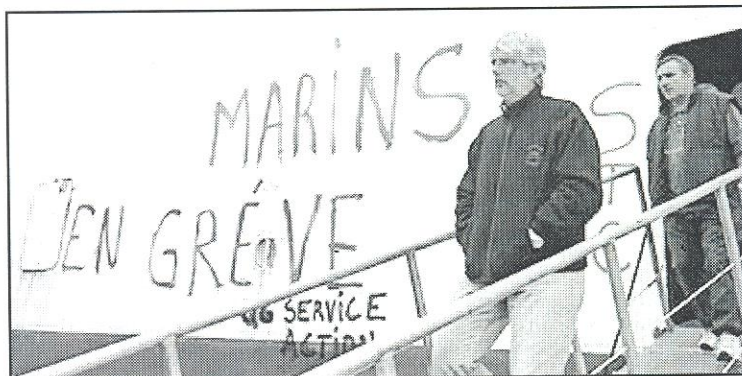
Strike action spreads in Marseille and Corsica

by Greg Oxley

OVER ONE million workers and youth participated in the mass demonstrations during the national day of action in France on October 4, in which some 100 000 marched in Paris. This new high point in the recent history of the workers' movement is a further indication of

the explosive social and political situation that exists in France. The day of action, which included public sector strikes, was supported by all the main trade union organisations. Besides the traditionally militant CGT, the CFDT and FO, even the managerial staff union (CGC) and the catholic CFTC participated. Significantly, the CGC participation was probably higher than at any other time in recent history. Even the police participated in the demonstrations in a number of cities.

The day of action took place as the spectacular strike movement in Marseille and Corsica against the privatisation of SNCM was entering its third week. SNCM runs ferries between mainland France, Corsica and North African ports. On September 19, the government announced the "total privatisation" of the company. The sailors and SNCM dockworkers organised in the CGT launched immediate strike action, as did the minority STC (Syndicat des Travailleurs Corses). Shortly afterwards, dockers in the Port Autonome de Marseille (PAM) also declared strike action against "creeping privatisation" of PAM installations and services, and in protest against redundancy notices served on trade union activists.



Within a few days, more than fifty ships were either unable to leave Marseille or else were forced to remain out at sea, unable to enter the port.

Privatisations have often taken place at "friendly prices", as the French say. Successive governments have sold off public assets to their big business friends and supporters. But the privatisation of SNCM is surely one of the most scandalous operations of its kind. There are various estimations of the value of the company assets, but all of them fall somewhere between 450 and 500 millions euros. And yet the government concluded a deal in which Butler Capital Partners would acquire the company for just 35 million euros. This would be outrageous enough, but the deal also included a donation of 113 million euros to Butler in order to "refloat" the company. In other words, Butler would acquire a company worth anything up to 500 million euros and would be paid 78 million to do so by the government!

'Mutiny' on the Pascal Paoli

The government also undertook to pay the cost of the 400 job losses demanded by Butler - an official adviser and personal friend of Prime

Minister Dominique de Villepin

Faced with the scale of the strike provoked by this operation, the government changed its plans, in an attempt to give a - very short-lived - impression of meeting the strikers half-way. Instead of Butler getting the whole company, the State would keep a 25%

stake, and another company, Connex, which belongs to a friend of president Jacques Chirac, would also get a slice of the privatisation, Butler and Connex sharing the 113 million euros handout between them. The loss of 400 jobs was still part of the deal.

On the September 27, STC unionists took possession of the Pascal Paoli, left Marseille and set course for the Corsican port of Bastia. This was a critical new development in the struggle. The port of Marseille was already in the hands of the dockers. Shipping was completely paralysed, thousands of tourists were marooned on the island, and now the crew of the Pascal Paoli had organised what amounted to a mutiny and set sail for Corsica, where they could count on massive support from the local population, just as dock and SNCM in Marseille workers were being encouraged and supported by the local population there.

The government was extremely concerned that the seizure of this "floating factory" would serve as an example to other sections of the workers. The GIGN - the highly specialised "intervention force" of the Gendarmerie Nationale - usually used against terrorists and dangerous gunmen - was sent in by heli-

copter, took possession of the ship and arrested four STC "ringleaders".

This action led to a virtually complete blockade of Corsica by strike action. Petrol-tanker truck drivers went on strike, closing petrol stocks depots and suspending deliveries to petrol stations. Chronopost postal services stopped work. Air France personnel joined the movement, stopping all flights out of Bastia, and almost all flights out of Ajaccio. In Bastia and elsewhere, crowds clashed with police in the streets. Some 15 000 people needing to leave the island - mainland workers and returning tourists - were unable to do so. Supermarkets ran out of stock as a result of shortages and panic buying.

Tremendous pressure

Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy - a particularly vicious, impulsive and ambitious reactionary - insisted that at least two of the four arrested workers be imprisoned, while awaiting trial. But the judge who dealt with the initial hearing understood the inflammatory character of such a decision, and released all four of the accused, pending trial.

Immediately after their release, STC leader Alain Mosconi adopted a very conciliatory tone. "Now is the time for appeasement", he said. "We must sit down with the government in order to find a solution". However, this moderation was not repaid in kind, for even as he spoke these words, Sarkozy was planning the massive police operation against the strikers which succeeded in opening the ports for the private and rival company to SNCM known as Corsica Ferries.

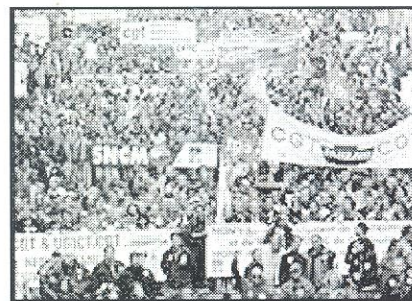
The strike has continued nonetheless, and this in spite of tremendous pressure from the government, defective trade union leadership, and problems related to the national question and terrorism.

The government is holding at knife the throat of company employees. The workers must either accept privatisation and the

loss of 400 jobs, it says, or else the company will be closed down and all 2400 jobs will be lost. In the face of this blackmail, the national leadership of the CGT has failed to adopt a serious fighting stance in relation to this struggle. It accepts partial privatisation as inevitable, but hopes that the government will increase its participation, if possible to 51%. This would solve nothing fundamentally. The job losses would take place anyway, and the problem of unfair private company competition - subsidised by the state - would still persist. A partial privatisation would only be the prelude to new measures against the workers, including further job losses, at some future date.

The position the workers find themselves in is further complicated by terrorist activity. On September 29, a rocket was fired on a regional authority building. There were no casualties, with limited material damage. Explosions were then reported in Marseille, and a "bomb scare" was announced on a ferryboat. These incidents could be the work of Corsican nationalist groups, but could also be that of the French State. The two possibilities are by no means mutually exclusive. The Corsican nationalist groups have a long history of being willing accomplices of the State, in exchange for various favours, such as contracts and building permits, cash payments, dropped charges and shortened prison sentences for "patriots" accused or convicted of terrorist activities.

One thing is certain: these events have been crudely exploited by the state in order to discredit the strikers. The seizure of the Pascal Paoli was associated with "terrorist activity" and bombings, both in the speeches of de Villepin and Sarkozy, and in the press, on TV and radio. The evening news programme on the private TV channel TF1, for example, produced a lengthy "potted history" of Corsican terrorism in the middle of the item dealing with the strike. On the docks, the strikers hoisted huge banners onto railings and



buildings: "We are workers, not terrorists!"

Fighting spirit

The poison of nationalism is another danger. The STC is a nationalist-inspired minority union. It was formed on the basis of demanding priority for Corsican workers over non-Corsicans for jobs on the ferries and in other sectors, and has organised a number of strikes on that basis over recent years. The STC leadership demand, put forward during the strike, for SNCM to become a purely Corsican Company is clearly unacceptable. In a context where hundreds of jobs are under immediate threat, and given the compromising attitude displayed by the STC leadership after the release of the arrested STC members, this attitude can be understood as meaning that if jobs are to be lost, they should be lost on the "French" side of the workforce. The government is clearly trying to play on this source of division. For the time being, the strike remains solid.

Whatever the final outcome, the implacable ferocity of the government, the use of the police as strike-breakers, of subterfuge and divisive tactics, and the magnificent fighting spirit of the workers, is a stark indication of the bitter struggles which lie ahead for French workers. □

First general strike in 12 years against bosses' "work-till-you-drop" plans

by Erik Demeester

THE FIRST nationwide general strike in Belgium for 12 years marks a watershed in the recent social history of the country. With this impressive action Belgium is now rapidly catching up with the level of class struggle in other European countries.

What is provoking this profound backlash on the part of the workers is the plans of the federal Liberal-Socialist government to get rid of early retirement schemes.

"Normally we retire at the age of 59, but the government want to make us work until we are 65" thundered one of the main socialist union leaders at the end of this summer. Now workers all over the country especially in the industrial sector are moving from the initial perplexity to anger and then to action. "How come older workers - above the age of 50 - are going to have to work longer, while there are 600,000 unemployed, 125,000 of them young people?" is a question that many workers are asking.

The big idea behind these plans is to increase the "degree of activity of the older workers" as a way of saving on social security spending. This is a demand of the European Union. In reality this is the plan of the European bosses who wish to increase the rate of exploitation as part of their commercial tug-of-war with other industrial powers in the world and to face up to competition from the United States and Asia.

Older workers will be forced into low paid jobs instead of being able to enjoy early retirement. They also want to reduce their contributions to the social security system, which are biting into their profit margins. But until very recently the coalition government had moved slowly on this question. This slowness on their part was criticised by the bosses, the Liberals and the right wing of the Flemish Socialist Party.

Last year, however, was declared a turning point in the onslaught on workers' rights. In the last analysis the slowness in the process was a reflection of the impasse between the social classes in Belgium and the difficulty the

bosses were finding in involving the union leaders in this project. As one bourgeois newspaper stated, "the union leaders need to take their responsibility, they want to take their responsibility but they cannot because of the rank and file."

Last month the Socialist union ABVV-FGTB, was forced - in the middle of the negotiation period with the government and the bosses - to announce a general strike. The union leaders confessed this was done "under very big pressure" from the ranks. The Christian union ACV-CSC, who before the summer had been the first to threaten a wave of strike action, including a general strike, if the government persisted in its plans to force older workers to work longer also set a date for a national strike but for Monday October 10, i.e. after the end of the negotiations. The excuse they gave was to give the talks a chance.

The socialist union came under severe attack, even from some Socialist Party leaders, for its supposedly "irresponsible" behaviour in declaring a strike while still in negotiations. Apparently the Belgian tradition of "consensus" does not allow for such threats of general strike action while negotiations are still on!

This is not a normal situation

What is developing in Belgium is not a normal situation and it is one that has not been seen for more than a decade. Having said this, one should remember

that it isn't so surprising at all. This kind of strike action had become a common feature in the collective bargaining negotiations in the spring of this year. The metal, food and commercial workers rediscovered this weapon and won some concessions, albeit modest, which they wouldn't otherwise have achieved. They didn't bother with the so-called rules and "traditions". They were writing their own new rules or, to be more precise, they were rediscovering some of the rules of the good old class struggle from their own past.

The Christian union withdrew its call for a general strike for October 10. They will live to regret it, because the Socialist union had not called off its strike. In an almost defensive statement, one of the Socialist trade union leaders explained that "the preparations for the strike have gone too far to cancel it."

Indeed, as soon as the call for a general strike went out, it generated a lot of enthusiasm among the workers, especially in industry and the private sector in general.

An important thing to note is that in many of the big factories the Christian shop stewards established a de facto united front with the their Socialist colleagues to shut down the factory on Friday.

"The Christian union is not divided, it is torn apart" commented the leader of the red metal workers. Indeed, most probably this last minute retreat of the Christian union leaders will not be followed on the shop floor where unity will be maintained between the workers. This is quite an unusual level of defiance on the part of the ranks not seen in the last 10 or 15 years. It is the result of a whole period of attacks by the bosses over the past fifteen years. In this period many workers were grudgingly forced into accepting many setbacks and increases in the intensity of work. It is not so much that they accepted it; rather they did not see a way out, especially when the union leaders went along with all these measures.



It was in the summer of 2004 that all this started to change. In August 2004 the bosses - in a more arrogant mood than ever - confusing the soft and compromising attitude of most of the union leaders with the mood of the workers, launched an unprecedented attack throughout the whole of Europe and also in Belgium on the working week. They organised a venomous campaign in the press against the 38-hour week, calling for it to be increased to 40 hours a week or more.

In Germany they tried -and succeeded in some factories - to increase the working week. In Belgium they tried but came up against some resistance. The average real working week has already reached 48 hours despite the official 38-hour week. Belgian workers are among the most flexible and the most productive in the world. This is not at all a record to be proud of, because it is paid for in higher stress, higher consumption of drugs, more accidents and more mental disorders.

The merely verbal opposition of the union leaders did not scare the bosses. So they continued their attacks during the national all-sector collective bargaining negotiations. But what they succeeded in doing with this was to push the workers and some of the trade unions over the limit. Here again, in the middle of the negotiations both the Christian and the Socialist unions called for a national demonstration against the wage freeze and the increased flexibility being demanded by the bosses.

The response was magnificent: 50,000 workers marched through an ice-cold capital on December 21. In some big factories workers had downed tools. This was contrary to the union leadership's line. Bus drivers in the south also stopped work that day. More important, however, was the nature of the demo. This one was not at all like so many of the ritual and drab marches of the previous, made up of the usual, same old activists. No this was a stormy march, an undisciplined and quite an irreverent march composed of many ordinary workers.

This was a clear signal! That demo was a turning point as it revealed a strong and sharp consciousness deep within the ranks. It was summed up in one of the most popular slogans "Enough is enough," Another slogan graphically expressed the mood that had now developed: "We have give in a

lot over the last few years, now your time has come."

Unfortunately this mood and readiness for action on the part of the ranks was not matched by the union leaders and an opportunity was lost. But for the first time in history no deal could be reached at national level between the bosses and the unions. Interestingly, there was also a revolt within the bosses' camp where in some industries they rejected the deal as not going far enough and they accused the national negotiators of being soft.

These sectors were pushing for a more decisive confrontation with the working class. On both sides of the class divide there is growing desire for bolder action against the class enemy.

The government then unilaterally imposed new wage restraints as a way of breaking the stalemate. But the union leaders did not dare put their signature to these proposals and preferred passive opposition rather than be identified with this deal. The spring negotiations for collective bargaining agreements in the different industries confirmed the beginnings of a new mood of militancy among the workers. The metal workers threatened their first nationwide strike in 46 years. Even more important than this, however was the appearance of sections of the working class not previously noted for their fighting tradition: the workers of the food industry. They organised a series of strikes and succeeded in breaking through the ceiling of the wage restraint. This did not go unnoticed by the other workers. And now we have a general strike.

Increased confrontation

The general level of social confrontation has also increased, following an irregular and at times contradictory process, but it has been slowly increasing in many factory disputes. Social pressure in general is increasing. Incidents where bosses physically attacked workers on the picket lines of some small factories became national news on two occasions this spring.

This will not stop after this general strike. On the contrary! In the North, the Flemish part of the country, we have an interesting development. The dominant national myth is that this part of the country is more inclined to reasoning, negotiation and consensus. But the Flemish bosses have sent a letter to



all the mayors, as they are the heads of the local police, calling on them to take measures tomorrow to stop the workers from blockading the industrial areas where many small companies operate. In the letter they say that if necessary they should do so "manu militari."

These companies have historically been "no go areas" for the unions. Workers there are under very big pressure not to go on strike. This, during the last general strike of 1993, led to a new tactic of flying pickets organised by the workers in the bigger factories to close down the smaller companies, blockading them with barricades of cars, burning tires and other material.

Back in 1993 the bosses were taken by surprise. This time they are preparing. But so are the workers. In the big factories the successful experience of 1993 has not been forgotten and many plans have been drawn up to repeat the same tactic to help their colleagues in the smaller factories. For them it is an expression of elementary class solidarity that is being rediscovered. The bosses will most likely condemn this form of struggle as "social terrorism."

The general strike will bring to the surface and make it evident to all that the Belgian working class has monumental power. The old myth of a "nice and peaceful Belgium" will be shattered tomorrow. It will be seen for what it really was: just a myth. The mere fact that under capitalism the word "progress" has seized to mean working less and now implies working longer hours until you drop is a terrible historical condemnation of the system as a whole. The struggle for a real socialist leadership that can match the combativity and the hopes of the workers will be given a new impetus by this mobilisation. Things are changing rapidly in Belgium, and there is no going back. □

What is behind the Hamas - PA conflict?

by Yossi Schwartz in Israel

40 PEOPLE were injured and two civilians and one policeman, Major Ali Makkawi, were killed on Sunday October 2 in the fiercest clashes ever seen in the Gaza Strip between Hamas fighters and the Palestinian Authority's police. This clash was the direct result of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's campaign - backed by the Sharon government - to control Gaza. Israel wants one army within the Palestinian community, under its direct or indirect control, and its choice for now is the PA. Israel pulled out of Gaza recently, but it obviously wants the PA to police the Strip for it.

While the PA's police were trying to prevent resistance fighters from carrying weapons on the streets, Sharon was bombing Gaza from the air and carrying out the assassination of Hamas and Jihad leaders and activists.

According to Aljazeera, the fighting broke out when the police came to arrest Muhammad Abd al-Aziz al-Rantissi, the son of the late Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz al-Rantissi, who was assassinated by Israel in 2004.

According to reports, the police beat al-Rantissi. Seeing this, people in the neighbourhood gathered to protect him, and the police opened fire indiscriminately to disperse the crowd

As I write these lines the Israeli army has detained another 40 members of Hamas and the Jihad. Nearly 500 of their members have been detained since September 25 when the Sharon government intervened in the elections by arresting hundreds of Hamas activists, including candidates in the elections.

The Israeli rulers do not hide the fact that they want to prevent Hamas from running in the upcoming election in January. The Chief-of-Staff of the Israeli army, General Dan Halutz, repeating the line of Sharon, said that Israel will not allow Hamas, which was behind the majority of anti-Israeli attacks during the five-year Palestinian uprising, to run in January's legislative elections.

However, it seems that Israel's position has had the opposite effect of what Sharon and his advisers were hoping for. "This campaign has given

rise to concern among the Palestinian public that Israel is trying to forcibly undermine Hamas so as to help Abbas and his Fatah organization to defeat it in the upcoming elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council," wrote Danny Rubenstein in Haaretz on October 2.

Now, all of a sudden the Israeli government has decided to end the attack on Gaza. "We have decided to suspend the offensive operations that we launched last week... the decision means the suspension 'for now' of Israeli air raids in the Gaza Strip, of artillery fire towards the north of the territory and of operations aimed at eliminating resistance groups in Gaza and the West Bank."

"This statement is part of the propaganda campaign to blackmail our people and to put pressure on the Palestinian Authority to fight against the factions and resistance groups," said Hamas's spokesman in Gaza.

Hamas is growing

The government does not explain its motivation but clearly understands that its actions only help Hamas. According to official data, in the third round of municipal elections in the Palestinian territories held on Thursday, September 29, Fatah won 53 percent of the seats in the local councils, and Hamas only 26 percent. Yet, these figures are misleading. Hamas actually received more votes in absolute terms. Fatah won in 55 of the 104 communities, while Hamas won 25. However, the figures are distorted because Hamas won by a large margin in 15 of the 32 large communities, and in at least 22 of the small communities with between 1,000 and 3,000 residents.

Hamas is clearly a growing movement among Palestinians. It is a populist movement deeply rooted in Palestinian society. It is not only because of Israeli oppression, the lack of a meaningful opposition within Israeli Jewish society to the occupation, and the widespread poverty, but also the corruption of the PA, which is backed by Israel, that has helped to make Hamas a popular movement.

Like any mass based populist movement its head is conservative and capitalist while its legs - its base - is made of poor people who have been pushed in this direction but who could be won over to a truly revolutionary movement. The motion of this movement can be explained only by the contradiction between the head and the legs, between the right-wing conservative head and the social base that wants to struggle against oppression. A Hamas spokesman explained last week that, "Our enemies are trying to stick us with an image of Al Qaida-type terrorist fanatics, but the truth is that we are a legitimate national resistance movement".

It is well known that many of Hamas's detainees these days are political activists and are not linked to terrorist activity. Many of these detainees actually belong to Hamas' moderate wing. One detainee, Mohammed Ghazal of Nablus, announced a short while ago that Hamas might consider modifying its charter, which currently denies Israel's right to exist. (However, under pressure, he later denied making the statement but Reuters announced that they had a tape recording of what he said).

Hamas translates into English as "zeal" or "courage". It is an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawima al-Islamiyya, which means "Islamic Resistance Movement". It was formed as the armed wing of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) in Gaza, in 1987-88. Prior to this it had been a small branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in Gaza in 1946.

After 1967, the main front organization of the Brotherhood was Ahmad Yassin's Mujamma, which was established in 1973. Mujamma was mainly a welfare/charity organization that helped to establish clinics, kindergartens, and schools in Gaza. One website reports that "After 1967, a great part of the success of the Hamas/Muslim Brotherhood was due to their activities among the refugees of the Gaza Strip. The cornerstone of the Islamic movement's success was an impressive social, religious, educational

and cultural infrastructure, called Da'wah, that worked to ease the hardship of large numbers of Palestinian refugees, confined to camps, and many who were living on the edge".

This activity was encouraged by Israel. In fact, the Israeli state and Ariel Sharon in particular encouraged Mujamma to apply for registered charity status in 1978. This allowed the organisation to widen its base through its religious and social work. Mujamma was indirectly and directly funded by Israel as a means of combating the PLO, which Israel at that time considered to be the more dangerous movement.

According to Tony Cordesman, Middle East analyst for the Center for Strategic Studies, "Israel aided Hamas directly - the Israelis wanted to use it as a counterbalance to the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)."

Throughout the 1980s, as Mujamma's influence began to grow at the Islamic University of Gaza, the organization increasingly began to use violence against cinemas, places selling or serving alcohol, casinos, and other such places it deemed un-Islamic. However, as its social base was growing and many poor had joined the movement, the organization became more and more political, especially in Khan Yunis under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz Rantissi. This led to conflicts with Israel.

Anti-Communist

In 1984, 13 members of the organization, including Yassin, were arrested by Israel. An arms cache was also seized. By 1985, the organisation had roughly 2,000 members, who were mainly employed in the religious, community services, and trade sectors.

Hamas was formed in February 1988 under the pressure of its social base that was demanding to be allowed to participate in the first Intifada. The August 1988 Charter declared that all of Palestine was Islamic trust land that could never be surrendered to non-Muslims. The Charter affirmed that Palestine was an integral part of the Muslim world. Hamas also publicly stated that it was an anti-Communist organization, as the Charter blamed the Zionists for the French and Russian revolutions.

When Hamas was created it had three separate wings. There was the

political wing, composed of Yassin's closest allies, which produced leaflets, raised funds, recruited members and co-opted mosques. The intelligence apparatus, known as al-Majd (Glory), under Yihyah Sanwar and Ruhi Mushtaha, was created for internal policing, especially in Gaza. This wing later merged with the military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades, which at that time was the smallest wing. Hamas operated through a cell system, and was therefore hard for Israeli agents to penetrate.

Initially however, Israel did not interfere in the activities of Hamas. It was seen as a social reformist organization that could be used to marginalise the PLO and to avert a social revolution. At that time there were frequent meetings between leading members of Hamas (including Yassin) and Israeli government officials. This cooperation only ended after the "al-Aqsa massacre" in October 1990. It was after that massacre that Hamas turned its primary opposition towards Israel, declaring that every Israeli soldier and settler was a legitimate target. Military actions in the form of terrorist attacks against ordinary Israelis replaced their former collaboration with the Israeli rulers.

Hamas, unlike Arafat, did not support Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War against the United States. Instead, they called for the withdrawal of both Iraqi and US troops from Kuwait. Consequently, the Gulf States shifted their funding from the PLO to Hamas, and may have donated as much as \$28m per month (from Saudi Arabia primarily). Hamas thus took the PLO's role as provider of welfare and social care away from it, generating considerable public support.

In December 1992, Rabin expelled the leaders of Hamas, leading to a non-aggression agreement with the PLO. Hamas was opposed to the Oslo agreement and joined the wider rejectionist alliance which gained considerable support (over 20% of Palestinians supported Hamas and Islamic Jihad despite PNA pressure). The first Hamas



suicide bombing in opposition to the Oslo accords took place in 1993.

In 1994, there were clashes between Hamas and the PA police in Gaza. Arafat co-opted the leadership in Gaza, which subsequently opted for non-military measures. This caused a split in the Hamas leadership throughout the occupied territories. At the same time, Abu Marzuq, the head of Hamas's political leadership in Jordan, gave de facto acceptance to the existence of Israel "within the 1948 borders", by declaring that a hudna (ceasefire) would be put in place if Israel withdrew from the occupied territories. This was also reiterated by Sheikh Yassin in a letter he wrote in the spring of 1994 in which he offered a ceasefire if Israeli forces were withdrawn from the occupied territories, and if the settlements were dismantled and prisoners were released.

The same is happening in this period and Hamas's political wing is now seeking to participate in the "Pax Americana" and has begun to participate in elections. Hamas has now even declared that the US and Britain, unlike Israel, are not occupying powers. Although Bush has officially declared that Hamas is a terrorist organisation he is also considering using Hamas as a second option. However, the government of Israel is opposed to this and is attempting to block such a possibility by any means possible. The rulers of Israel are well aware that if Hamas were to become a partner of the US, the usefulness of Israel as the main strategic asset for the US in the region would decline.

As we can see, the contradiction between the popular base of Hamas and its conservative leadership is a very real one. This is the historical tragedy of the Palestinian people. □

fighting fund

Time to organise festive fundraising

Readers of last month's Fighting Fund column would have noted that the beginning of October should have marked the grand launch of the £7,000 Xmas appeal to raise urgently needed funds for the development of Socialist Appeal. However the terrible events in Pakistan have rather cut across this. All efforts have been put towards the urgent appeal for funds for the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign to mitigate the awful blow to the organised labour and trade union movement. As reported elsewhere the response both from workers and activists here and internationally has been fantastic and I would like to add my thanks to all those who responded to the call and showed true international solidarity. Donations can still be made and details of how this can be done can be found on page 20 or by going to www.marxist.com and clicking on the relevant link, where credit card donations can also be made.

Faced with the enormous tasks now confronting the PTUDC in Pakistan, our own needs seem trivial in comparison. But they cannot be neglected. We intend, somewhat belatedly, to get the Xmas campaign fully underway on November 1st - following the Latin America day school on Sat 29th October in London where we hope not only to have a good set of discussions but also raise some much needed funds for the Marxists in Venezuela.

So far in October we have raised £367 with some big sums due in before the end of the month - for

which much thanks. So despite the disruption of events elsewhere we are moving forward steadily. But the effort needs to be picked up. Sellers should be targeting all the regular sales for a donation. Fund raising events must be organised for the festive season. Above all, every reader must consider what they can give. A lot has been asked of you over the last period but the prize is a valuable one - a socialist future where oppression and poverty can be truly made history.

Donations can be made by post to us at: PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG, cheques made payable to Socialist Appeal. You can pay cash into our special account at any post office using transcash quoting sort code 72 00 05 and girobank account number 625 286 01 (reference BB Club) or by paying cheques (made payable to Socialist Appeal SC) or cash over the counter at any branch of Abbey quoting account number K2018479SOC.

There will also be a special link on the Marxist.com website up and running from mid-Nov where credit card donations specifically for the Xmas appeal can be made, of which 50% will go towards the maintenance of the In defence of Marxism site. So don't delay - act today. Even a small amount can soon add up. Your help can make a difference!

Thanks in advance

Steve Jones

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HANDS OFF VENEZUELA **NATIONAL CONFERENCE**
 www.handsoffvenezuela.org

**Saturday
 3rd December**

11:30 am to 5:30 pm
NATFHE Headquarters
 27 Britannia Street
 London WC1X 9JP

Speakers include
Tony Benn
Ruth Winters, President FBUI
Jeremy Dear, Gen. Sec. NUJ
John McDonnell, MP
Martin, International Sec. HOV
Paul Mackney, Gen. Sec. NATFHE
Orlando Chazotte, National Sec. UCU
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Conference fees
 (HOV members free, trade union and other delegates £10 each)

I am a current HOV member
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Recommended annual affiliation fees:

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 Regional Bodies £250
 Union Branch/Trades Council £50
 Other

Individual membership:
 waged £7.50
 unwaged £5 (suggested)

Comments and suggestions:

Please make cheques payable to Hands Off Venezuela
 Send to HOV, 100 Armadale Close, London N17 9PL

noticeboard

November 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

To attend the HOV Conference send your details to HOV, 100 Armadale Close, London N17 9PL

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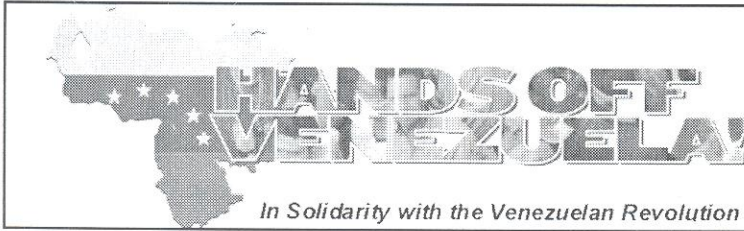
- ✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.
- ✚ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.** £8.00 an hour as a step toward this goal, with no exemptions.
- ✚ **Full employment!** No redundancies. The right to a job or decent benefits. For a 32 hour week without loss of pay. No compulsory overtime. For voluntary retirement at 55 with a decent full pension for all.
- ✚ **No more sell offs.** Reverse the Tories privatisation scandal. Renationalise all the privatised industries and utilities under democratic workers control and management. No compensation for the fat cats, only those in genuine need.
- ✚ **The repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.** Full employment rights for all from day one. For the right to strike, the right to union representation and collective bargaining. Election of all trade union officials with the right of recall. No official to receive more than the wage of a skilled worker.
- ✚ **Action to protect our environment.** Only public ownership of the land, and major industries, petro-chemical enterprises, food companies, energy and transport, can form the basis of a genuine socialist approach to the environment.
- ✚ **A fully funded and fully comprehensive education system under local democratic control.** Keep big business out of our schools and colleges. Free access for all to further and higher education. Scrap tuition fees. No to student loans. For a living grant for all over 16 in education or training.
- ✚ **The outlawing of all forms of discrimination.** Equal pay

- for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.
- ✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.
- ✚ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.
- ✚ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.
- ✚ **No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.
- ✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.
- ✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement



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 reader must make an effort to attend. It is essential we build up awareness of what is taking place in Venezuela and Latin America. Put this event in your diary and get your friends and workmates to come along! Don't stand on the sidelines - get involved! **Contact us for details today!**

I would like to attend the Hands Off Venezuela National Conference

Please send me tickets (number of tickets) For £ waged £ unwaged

Total enclosed:
(cheques payable to Hands Off Venezuela)

Please send my tickets to:

Name _____

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Return to
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