

Privatisation □ France □ Pakistan □ Economy □ Scotland

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For the Socialist Federation of Latin America

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The Deadline for Issue 139 is January 13

The Penultimate Nail in Blair's Coffin

Wednesday November 9, 2005, was a red-letter day for British politics. For the first time since Labour's landslide election victory in 1997, Blair lost a vote on the floor of the House of Commons. Unlike the frequently ignored votes of Labour Party conference - where Blair has shown his contempt for democracy on many occasions - this one will be a little harder to dismiss.

The significance of the vote is far wider than failing to put the reactionary policy of holding suspects for 90 days without charge on the statute book. Blair did not just lose, having put his authority on the line and having made this vote a three-line whip (i.e. making it 'compulsory' to toe the leadership's line), he was humiliated. The scale of his embarrassment was compounded further by having to drag Gordon Brown back from a trip to Israel only hours after he had arrived there. Similarly Jack Straw was flown back from Moscow because Blair needed every vote he could get. Ian McCartney had to limp in from his hospital bed despite just having had a triple by-pass heart operation. Yet even these desperate measures were not enough.

Days earlier Blair had convinced himself that he had won over the parliamentary party with a speech appealing for unity. He did not understand the extent to which his authority had been undermined even in these upper echelons of the party. As one former minister explained in *The Guardian*, describing Blair's speech: "It was brilliant. I have never heard him so convincing since he sold us weapons of mass destruction in Iraq."

Blair has long since lost the support of trade unionists and rank and file party members. His policies have already been defeated on the floor of the now ruthlessly stage-managed party conference. He has suffered, but survived, previous close votes with the help of his friends on the Tory benches. Now, for the first time, his authority in Parliament, and the Parliamentary Labour Party, has been shattered.

Only a week earlier in a previous debate on repressive so-called anti-terrorism legislation, he had scraped through with a majority of just one. On the same day he had to wave goodbye to another of his loyal lieutenants, David

Blunkett, mired in sleaze and scandal. 'Things can only get better' he may have been whistling to himself in the shower the next morning. How wrong he was.

Forty nine Labour MPs voted against Blair's reactionary legislation and thirteen more abstained. Together with the votes of the Tories and Liberals the result was a defeat by 322 votes to 291. Blair has had to rely on Tory votes in Parliament before. This time, however, with Howard and co intent on giving the prime minister a bloody nose, the Labour leaders astonishingly appealed to the most hard-line, right-wing Tories for support, goading them that the Tory leaders were not right wing enough! The Tories' spurious principled opposition to this bill, couched in hypocritical verbiage about civil rights, will have fooled no one. This was opportunism, a chance to defeat Blair in parliament and breathe some life back into their long comatose party.

There is a real irony in the complaint of one Tory MP, who interrupted the Prime Minister's speech, shouting out "we aren't in a police state". This from a party which has consistently opposed civil liberties and democratic rights. The irony, however, is that in the current atmosphere, Charles Walker, the Tory MP in question, was lucky not to be arrested for the new terrorist offence of heckling.

Indeed in constantly appealing to the authority of the police - Blair's speech appeared to be an appeal on behalf of the 'Police Party' rather than Labour - the Prime Minister demonstrated just how authoritarian he has become.

Blair can be defeated

This is not the biggest rebellion by backbench Labour MPs that we have seen, more voted against the war in Iraq. On health and education, perhaps even bigger Labour rebellions can be expected in the next period. The difference on this occasion was that the rebels won, Blair was defeated, and if his reactionary plans can be defeated once, they can be again.

This is the biggest defeat in a 'whipped vote' since the Callaghan Labour government of the late 1970s. We explained after the last election

that despite Labour's victory Blair does not necessarily have a majority for his reactionary proposals:

"Labour's majority in the House of Commons has been reduced to 67. This may seem a solid enough foundation for Blair to implement his programme, but remember with a majority of 161 Blair only squeezed through foundation hospitals (a form of backdoor privatisation) by fourteen votes, and student tuition fees by only five in the first vote... Therefore it would seem likely that this smaller majority will prepare new parliamentary rebellions over any further attempts to privatise health and education, or to introduce identity cards, particularly on the basis of pressure from below, of developing events in society, and, above all, in the trade unions. Under pressure from the movement of the working class outside parliament, backbench Labour MPs will be able to defeat Blair, who will have to look to the Tories and Liberals to vote for his anti-working class measures. Labour has a majority of 67, Blair does not." (*General Election of 2005: Results and Prospects*, May 2005)

Does this one defeat in parliament mean the end of Blair? In a sense yes, it is certainly another nail in the coffin, but then his days have been numbered for some time. However, when is a different matter. Major's Tory government continued for two years without a majority. They lost four votes in parliament. The difference here is that Blair is hell bent on confrontation, and not just with the Parliamentary Labour Party. He is intent on carrying through his Tory policies of privatisation in hospitals and schools. This will provoke further rebellions inside parliament and outside.

The arrogance of the man is staggering. In responding to his defeat he made it clear that he was right and those who voted against were wrong. "The country will think parliament will have behaved in a deeply irresponsibly way," he said. 'President' Blair would no doubt like to dissolve this "irresponsible" parliament and elect a new one more loyal to him and the police. We will await with baited breath the demonstrations in favour of shoot-to-kill, and holding suspects for months on end without charge. "I have no doubt" Blair continued "what the right thing was to do in this instance, to



support the police."

Even in the restricted democracy afforded to us by capitalism it is generally understood that Parliament is elected to make laws whilst the police and legal system are supposed to implement them, not the other way around. Of course, ultimately parliament, the judiciary, the police are all parts of the state machine designed to manage and defend capitalism. However, as we have often commented, the needs of that system in a new period are coming into conflict with parts of this establishment as they try to refashion it into something more suitable to the task of defending capitalism in a new era. These splits at the top of society represent divisions in the ruling class over how best to proceed.

Blair's annoyance with parliament, which he would like to disregard in the same way that he does party conference, is clear for all to see. The disappointment in his voice when he commented "Parliament cannot be treated like children, they know what the issues are" was palpable.

This arrogance is another important factor, linked to the Iraq war, which drove many Labour voters into the arms of the Liberals or simply into their armchairs, at the last election. It is a question of trust, of Blair lying, and of the centralised unaccountable clique, the cabal of advisers and cronies, which has increasingly displaced the cabinet and the House of Commons.

Following the election, Blair and co evidently imagined it would be 'busi-

ness as usual'. As we said at the time "if Blair, Brown and co think they can just settle down to another four or five years in office resting on a growing economy, continuing to attack our democratic rights whilst allowing the free-loaders and moneygrabbers to scavenge for profits from the rotting carcass of our public services they will have another thing coming. Labour's third term will prove to be fundamentally different to the previous two episodes of Labour government."

So what will happen now? In reality, despite Labour winning the last election with a majority of 67 Blair now effectively leads a minority government. No doubt if there were a vote of confidence tomorrow morning he would win. However, as for the rest of his modernising agenda, this will now face stern opposition in parliament. The rebels must stand firm. The line of argument advanced by Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* - that MPs must now be careful not to erode support for Labour by voting against the government - is entirely spurious. Indeed, probably the only way to bolster support for a Labour government is for Labour MPs to prevent Blair and co from continuing their attacks on working class people. The maximum number of Labour MPs must vote against each of these attacks.

Struggle outside parliament too

But this is not enough. The struggle against Blairism, against privatisation in health and education, must be extended beyond the walls of the Palace of Westminster. Backbench MPs must unite with trade unions and rank and file party members to organise action, demonstrations and rallies. Opposition in parliament alone will not be enough. For his Tory privatisation policies Blair will now rely on the votes of the Tory party to outnumber Labour rebels. In this sense he will lead a kind of 'national government', with a Labour opposition behind him.

Meanwhile, we must not forget that the amendment passed to the anti-terrorism bill allowing suspects to be held for 28 days is still an affront to civil liberties and democratic rights, and must be opposed. Not just privatisation, but the continued disastrous occupation of Iraq; the introduction of identity cards and other assaults on democracy; and

every repressive or reactionary proposal emerging from Ten Downing Street must be fought against.

This first parliamentary defeat for Blair may prove to be the penultimate nail in his coffin. When will he go? That question cannot be answered with any certainty. Not a day too soon obviously. As Oscar Wilde put it "some spread happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go." Despite his desire to stay on until just before the next election - coincidentally beating Thatcher's record along the way - ultimately the decision is not in his hands. After losing one vote in parliament the question of his resignation is raised everywhere. Further defeats will pile on the pressure from him to move into the millionaire's row retirement home he has already bought himself. To paraphrase the old saying, if it limps like a lame duck, and it squawks like a lame duck, then it is Tony Blair.

More rebellions combined with effective opposition by the labour movement outside parliament would make his decision for him. As we pointed out following the election, only Labour can defeat Blair.

However it is Blairism, that trend of Toryism, of market-obsessed, pro-capitalist policies that needs to be defeated, and not just the man himself. Unlike Toynbee and co we do not demand a smooth transition from Blair to Brown. Remember it was Brown who flew back overnight to vote for this reactionary bill. It will be Brown who will vote for the privatisation policies now being proposed, as he has done consistently since Labour were elected.

This one defeat brings the downfall of Blairism closer and is therefore to be welcomed. However, this is far from the end of the matter, on the contrary, it is only the beginning. A new chapter has been opened in the struggle for the Labour Party. Parliamentary rebellions can play an important role in that process especially if they are linked to the struggle throughout the rest of the labour movement. That struggle cannot have as its aim the puny ambition of replacing Blair with Brown or some other clone, it must set its sights higher. The cause must be to reclaim Labour for the working class, and to fight for socialist policies.

Labour won a general election just six months ago, but Blair won nothing. Blairism is already dead. The pipedream of converting Labour into a

British version of the US Democratic Party, which seduced many of the sectarian groups, as well as the Labour leaders, has evaporated. The triumph of Blairism was a consequence of defeat and demoralisation in the labour movement, leading to a period of inactivity. The right of the movement always rests on such periods. However, that period is over. Blairism reflects yesterday, not today and tomorrow.

The task of Marxists is not to be seduced by the surface of events, not to see things in black and white, isolated and unconnected, but instead to piece together all the available evidence to grasp the process under the surface, the direction in which events are moving.

There is a shift taking place in British politics, and in British society. Conditions determine consciousness and the changing conditions of the working class are at the core of the class polarisation of society, which will be a fundamental feature of the next period.

There is only one force that can defeat Blair - the trade unions and the party rank and file. It is not just in parliamentary voting lobbies, but inside the labour movement that Blair and co must be defeated. What is needed now is a militant trade union defence of jobs and pensions combined with a struggle against the Blairites, in defence of civil liberties, and for socialist policies inside Labour.

However this is only a first step. In the next period the working class will turn their organisations inside out and upside down, transforming them time and again until they are more suited to fighting for their needs, for the needs of society. The Marxist tendency and the ideas we represent have a vital role to play in that struggle inside the labour movement which represents the cleaning and sharpening of tools in readiness for the job in front of us, namely the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a new socialist society. The ideas of Marxism must become a potent weapon in the armoury of the working class in all its day to day battles and in the struggle to transform the planet. Only in that transformation can the problems we face be permanently solved and all the remarkable advances in science and technology be put to use rationally, scientifically and democratically in the interests of all humanity. □

ASBOs: Taking liberties

by Jim Jepps

Many of us see that the introduction of ID cards or new anti-terror laws are about government giving itself powers and undermining liberties, but ASBOs are often opposed in cagey terms with caveats about how terrible working class estates are and mutterings about jobs. But those who hedge their arguments in this way are accepting one of the great lies that surround ASBOs - that they tackle anti-social behaviour.

Part of this lies in the great game of spin's rule number one. Everything must have the right name. When Blair wants to detain old men who heckle at conferences he calls it anti-terror legislation not the "Shut up granddad bill"

If there had been an uncharacteristic fit of honesty the day they proposed ASBOs they would have been called "the law's inconvenient - we'll just do what we like" orders. Everyone has heard of the weird ASBOs that have been awarded - like the boys who weren't allowed to wear hats - but ASBOs are completely unacceptable in the majority of cases.

When receiving the ASBO the recipient often has no chance to defend themselves and put their case as they would in court, despite the fact that breaching an ASBO is a criminal act. Of the young people who received an 'interim' ASBO last year 43% were given no notice that an ASBO was being considered. The first they heard of it was when they were told the ASBO was in place.

Even when ASBOees are able to defend themselves their ability to do so is badly undermined. Council officials give evidence on behalf of witnesses who remain anonymous, which means these witnesses cannot be cross examined - so hearsay evidence suddenly becomes admissible. You could go to jail for breaking an order only imposed due to rumour, malice or mistaken identity.

The cases of ASBOs imposed upon

those with mental health problems or neurological disorders are common and heart breaking. There was the case of the woman who, after a number of suicide attempts, was banned from the multi-storey car park or the canal. A society that criminalises despair instead of offering help is living in a moral vacuum.

When a 15 year old Midlands boy with Tourettes Syndrome was banned from swearing in public it criminalised his condition and imposed house arrest. Without the opportunity to give a defence and explain the condition injustices are inevitable.

How many kids even understand the conditions of their ASBOs? A boy with learning disabilities who broke his conditions over twenty times by, among other things, playing five aside football in the park (he was banned from assembling with more than two people) ended up in severe distress, attempting to hang himself in a police cell.

A woman received an official letter threatening her son with an ASBO because he had been driving a scooter round the estate at all hours and was a general mischief. An unwholesome specimen perhaps. The thing is, her son was not born yet and the woman was victim to malicious rumour.

The police, the council, in fact, no official body could ever have had any dealings with her 'son' on any level whatsoever, and yet were willing to threaten an ASBO on the basis of gossip. Welcome to Asbo-land.

Unjust ASBOs are not down to odd mistakes, they are built into the system. As long as ASBOs exist, they will generate injustice. By deliberately alienating and isolating people we are ensuring their behaviour spirals out of control. These orders give carte blanche to the government to criminalise the vulnerable poor and that really is anti-social behaviour. □

Strike for reinstatement will ground flights from airport

Fire and security workers at Birmingham International Airport have voted by two to one to strike during the Christmas period. The Amicus members will be taking action to demand the reinstatement of two sacked colleagues. Amicus says that covert surveillance techniques used by Birmingham International Airport breached Data Protection and Human Rights legislation and failed to substantiate the airport's claims of unauthorised absence, falsification of records and breaches of trust and security made against the two men. □

Fighting Privatisation

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...

by Steve Brown, Wansbeck and Castle Morpeth Trades Council (personal capacity)

CAST YOUR minds back to Jan/Feb of last year (see issue No119) when three major elderly care homes in Ashington, Blyth and Morpeth in Northumberland were under threat of closure from the Labour controlled County Council. After a concerted campaign by the unions, residents and supporters, the council backed down which was the first victory of its kind for workers in the public sector in over fifteen years. But the warning went out immediately that the council, even though it had been defeated, would come back at our services again with its cost cutting agenda. And lo and behold, just as we predicted, it's Ding! Ding! round two! Northumberland County Council has to find £43.7m in cuts over the next 3-4 years and it's first port of call is... Wait for it... Yes, you guessed it, once again it's the elderly! This time it wants to close two of the three homes it had originally targeted and another new target, Oakland in Prudhoe in the Tyne valley. The Council wants to move the residents into brand new facilities built and run by the private sector for profit. This will virtually be the end of council run elderly care in the county.

Privatisation by the back door

Not content with attacking the elderly they have now come up with proposals to close the county's three existing fire stations, to condense the workforce and units (engines) and re-deploy them into two new "state of the art" stations in new locations. The FBU are furious and have challenged the council to justify these cuts and job losses, but the council claims that streamlining the service will create more efficiencies and that response times will not be affected. The Firefighters won't be deceived by this and can clearly see the councils' real intentions. Brigade FBU secretary Kieran Brennan says, "the FBU is not opposed to having brand new fire stations, but what we are opposed to is the location of the new stations, the cut in the number of stations, the reduction in the number of whole time firefighters and the reduction of whole time pumps. We understand that we need modern fire stations but not in

the locations that are proposed!

"I believe that the county council believe that it's PFI money and to quote the County Council 'It's the only game in town!' and that's the crux of the matter. We believe there are other options that can be looked into."

Once again it is privatisation via the back door. The issue of job losses and unit reductions is bad enough but what has also infuriated the firefighters is the private financing of their/our public services. You build the new facilities with PFI money and the private profiteers get their feet under the table and start creaming it off for themselves. Kieran, who is also a Labour Party member says he is "absolutely astonished at the Labour group's behaviour. We have given information presentations to the Tory group and the Libdem group but we have yet to hear from the ruling Labour group! We want to give all the Labour councillors the information so that they can make an informed decision!" To date the councillors have not been in touch with the FBU and aren't listening to the opinions of the very people who deliver the service. So what do the workers and public of Northumberland do now? It seems the Blairite agenda runs so deep within the ranks of the majority of the Labour councillors that they are now completely divorced from reality and the class who put them where they are. They are failing to listen to working people and have completely capitulated to the wishes and whims of national government. They have no strategy to prevent the collapse of our public services and can see no way forward other than to follow national dictates and carry through an IMF style cost slashing agenda.

Privatisation has now become such an issue among public sector workers in Northumberland that an organised opposition to it would be only a matter of time. Like any disease or infection privatisation has become such a destructive force within the body of society, with its low wages, poor working conditions, poor training and employee rights etc, that it is now coming to the surface as a series of nasty boils in the shape of the closure of the

homes of the elderly and the reduction of fire cover in South East Northumberland's working class areas. The entrepreneur capitalists and their accredited politicians care little if nothing for the rights and wishes of the old and vulnerable and have proved once again that they will have it their way or be damned!

But that's not all

Northumberland has one of the few remaining three tier education systems left in the country. It consists of Primary, Middle and Secondary schools. The council has proposed a change over to the two tier system which now predominates elsewhere and a fierce debate has been taking place in the local press between those parents' groups who oppose the change, and the council and other parents who want to push forward with this major re-organisation. The council claim that it can raise extra money for education only if it is prepared to modernise by building new schools and by embracing the new Academies of Excellence. Even the local Labour movement activists have been in no little quandary over this perceived move sideways but coupled with Blair's announcements last month on the complete overhaul of the education system, the privatisation bell begins to toll big time! All the new buildings are to be built with... that's right, you guessed it, PFI money. Private profit again!! Not only that but our schools will become the experimental playgrounds for the ideas of anyone who can afford to put in big wads of cash by way of investment via the new, non democratic school boards which will be heavily influenced by those self righteous *Daily Mail* influenced parents who only have eyes for the attainment of their own kids! LEA's are to be scrapped and just like the FE colleges schools will be abandoned and left to fend for themselves. Of course teachers are of little or no importance in all this!

An issue which did not seem to be too clear, or even confused, is now revealed in the cold light of day to be nothing more than the privatisation of our state school system and the

Save Our Services!

by Brian Conlon in Ashington

destruction of everything the working class has built over the last fifty years. As Marxists we have consistently explained that if we do not remove the capitalist system from the face of society once and for all its disciples will always continue in their attempt to destroy every gain that working people have ever made.

So here's what happening! Northumberland Unison and GMB, i.e. the members of staff from the care homes, have launched - yet again - the SOS (Save Our Services) campaign. They have been collecting signatures and raising the issues in the press and on the streets of the towns. Once again there is overwhelming support for the elderly and a clear condemnation of the council. The FBU has taken its arguments into all the different corners of the community and found clear support for its position, to maintain the present fire cover with no job losses etc. The only people who are not listening are, of course, the Labour council. At an SOS public meeting on the 26th of October, called to discuss the threat of closure to the homes, the announcement was made by the local Trades Councils that it was time to unite both campaigns in order to lead the fight against all threats of privatisation. A meeting was called for the 10th November to launch that united struggle. □

□ **Take up the Ashington initiative nationally!**

□ **No to Privatisation! No to cuts in services!**

□ **For joint action by the unions to defend our services!**

□ **For public ownership and socialist policies!**

□ **Support the S.O.S campaign!**

On Thursday 10th November around 100 people attended a meeting organised by Wansbeck and Castle Morpeth Trades Council and the S.O.S (Save Our Services) Campaign at the Leisure Centre in Ashington, Northumberland. The aim of the meeting was to unify the local campaigns that at this time are opposing various cuts in services and proposed closures in the county. Most of those attending were women who are active in the campaign against the closure of homes for the elderly. The campaigners were very visible wearing the t-shirt of the campaign. Steve Brown, Secretary of the Trades Council, chaired and introduced the meeting stating that what brought together the GMB, UNISON, FBU and NATFHE was the fight against privatisation. He mentioned the need to have a lead from the trade union and labour movement, not only in Northumberland but nationally. There were FBU, GMB, UNISON and NATFHE officials speaking from the platform on the different disputes. Especially interesting was the contribution of Kieran Brennan, Secretary of Northumberland FBU, who explained how the County Council is putting lives at risk by closing down 3 fire stations.

The mood of the speakers was very enthusiastic, buoyed by the militancy of the rank and file due to the past victory in the community against the closure of the old people's home some 18 months previously.

The best was to come when the chair announced that the Labour leaders of the council had been invited to put their case. This came as a surprise to the 3 councillors who were in the audience who said that they did not know of any such invitation as the Labour Group leaders had not informed them. The audience then started to ask them questions about their behaviour in the Council and why they had abandoned Labour and Socialist principles that they had supposedly stood for only a few years ago.

The councillors walked away from the meeting and organised a quick caucus to discuss what to say as the temperature of the meeting began to heat

up. Then a speaker from the platform mentioned that lobbying MPs and councillors pays off, as the vote in Parliament demonstrated (Labour's defeat over the 90 day arrest law), and one of the councillors (they were all back in the room, having sorted out the party line) gave us a patronising speech about how we could welcome the LP losing such an important vote and made a sarcastic comment about the Tories voting against the Police and MI5. This infuriated those who fear their services are being privatised by a Labour controlled County Council. The audience made sure the councillors got a realistic feel of the true mood of the people of Ashington. Barry Purdie, leading activist of the S.O.S campaign, told the councillors that all the workers are asking them is to take a real political decision about the future of services in the area and stop delegating their duty to unelected council officers who have swallowed the privatisation pill.

Back to socialist principles

SE Northumberland is a Labour heartland and it is a disgrace to see those who claim to be the representatives of the labour movement behave in such a way. Many activists and workers made the point that they would like to see the party go back to its roots, to revisit the traditional socialist principles upon which the movement was founded. The Chair made the point that it is up to the leaders of the labour movement, nationally and locally to not only talk the talk but walk the walk. This was a very good way of making sure that the elected representatives of the people took note about the real mood in society.

The Campaign has organised a series of lobbies and a big demonstration on the 16th of December, meeting at the Mount care home in Morpeth with a march to county hall for the 2.00pm full council meeting. The NUM have assured the campaign of their support and to date they are to provide a colliery band and banner. All are welcome to show support. □

The Poor Die Young

by Elmer Whitefeather

Reading my morning newspaper at breakfast the other day, I nearly choked on my deep-fried Mars bar and can of Coke. A new report from the Office for National Statistics shows a clear link between poverty and early death. Up here in Caledonia, health is a devolved issue, so the gauntlet fell to New Labour robot, Andy Kerr, MSP, to announce to the nation; "People who live in deprived areas have a significantly shorter life expectancy than those who live in affluent areas". As national spokesman for white van man everywhere, Little Richardjohn, might say - You couldn't make it up.

Glasgow, the heart-attack capital of Europe, has the lowest life expectancy in Britain, 69.3 years compared to Kensington and Chelsea whose resolute residents can expect a longevity of more than 85 years. My own area, North Lanarkshire runs Glasgow close. In all, 7 out of 10 of the worst places for premature death are in Scotland. 3 years ago, Lanarkshire Health Board Trust, almost £7 million in debt (the Trust Chairman has since been knighted) announced the closure of the Children's Ward at Monklands Hospital. Paediatric services were to be transferred 10 miles away to the PFI built Wishaw General. An unsuccessful campaign, in which some socialists were involved, was typically ignored by the witless MSP's and other elected officials. Now the Accident and Emergency Unit is to close. It can be safely predicted that Monklands Hospital will be sold at some future date to housing developers. This is a direct result of running the NHS along business lines, applying profit margins and the archaic laws of the market to essential services and the health of working class people. Already the result of PFI is a complete fiasco. The well-established contracting out of cleaning services and the need for companies to make big enough profits to satisfy their shareholders has undoubtedly contributed to the appalling record of MRSA in Monklands Hospital.

But it's not all doom and gloom. While some superbug is munching its way through your body, "clients" as

patients are now called, can hire a telly service "complete with Sky Sports" for only £2.50 per day. "Now you needn't miss an episode of Emmerdale, Coronation Street or Eastenders during your stay..." says the glossy brochure.

The woeful inadequacies of prototype New Labour politicians like Andy Kerr will be exposed for all to see in the coming period. The major issue now unfolding is around the council tax. Professor Arthur Midwinter, the Scottish Parliament's own financial adviser is quoted in *The Herald* newspaper, 12th October, as saying, "Councils are faced with a stark choice between taxes and cuts...(the Scottish Executive) has burdened councils with extra duties and demanded they make efficiency savings". It is a situation which leaves councils needing to save £108 million next year and limit council tax increases to 2.5% at most. Councils are complaining that they have not been given enough financial support by the Executive to balance the books. Without cuts in jobs and services the council tax needs to rise by an average of £82 just to keep things as they are. Ministers have already reduced grants by £58.5 million for 2006/7.

Convention of Local Authorities (COSLA) President, Pat Watters, a proverbial lap-dog of New Labour and all it stands for, has been forced to criticise First Minister Jack McConnell and Finance Minister, "Gorgeous" Tom McCabe - this must have been very difficult for Watters.

After regaining his composure at the shock horror news that poverty equals early death, Kerr told the press, "We will identify those people who are at risk

and try to help them". The problem for Kerr and his equally hapless colleagues in Holyrood is that when you cut services to the bone and run the health service to suit business, closing hospitals so that Health Trusts can sell the land for profits, then you really will find it difficult to help the most vulnerable and deprived people.

The real answer is for local authorities to force the Executive into giving them the cash they need to fund decent services to tackle the social problems faced by the Scottish working class. To do this they need a united campaign, where they explain how the loss of jobs and services will affect the most deprived adding to the social and health problems. The spotlight must be put firmly onto the Lib-Lab coalition who have in their power the means to abolish the council tax and replace it with a system based on ability to pay, and one where the wealthy will be forced to pay their fair share to society. They must place the needs of the poorest at the top of the agenda which would electrify the political situation here and support for such moves would be overwhelming after years of Tory policies which have hurt the majority of Scots workers, pensioners, the sick and unemployed. □



Edinburgh Cleansing Workers Speak Up

by Tam Burke, South West Edinburgh Labour Party (personal capacity)

"Pull outs" are what the refuse collection workers call the extra help they give to elderly and disabled residents by taking their wheelie bins back to the door again.

Usually every householder has to take their bins out to the kerb and back again, as the workers are on a tight schedule to complete their round. No matter the weather, on icy steps or slippery paths, Edinburgh cleansing workers reckon they do perhaps the most "pull outs" of any council. According to a Tory councillor, these workers are "lazy" and by finishing early were stealing four hours each from their working week. Not that Labour has been any less critical, attacking workers in the press, which makes it hard to distinguish between Tory and Labour councillors.

Instead of these insults, Labour should take heed of what the cleansing workers have told *Socialist Appeal*. They told us: "The problems encountered in 2005 actually began in November 2004 when a revamp of refuse collection took place. Three motors were removed from domestic waste and added to an upgraded commercial operation, so domestic waste was already three motors down, with a review promised in February 2005. Later, in June 2005, they decided to save cash by reducing the fleet by five motors - three from domestic waste, one from paladin bins (the motors that empty large flats) and one from the commercial, all done without consultation. At the same time they did ask us to address health and safety at work. This we took on board as it is in everyone's interests to do so.

"By reducing the domestic by three motors and addressing health and safety issues, it had an immediate effect on the domestic waste uplift. At no time did we advocate any type of action, but actively encouraged staff to work overtime to lessen any disruption. After talks, four motors were restored. Addressing the health and safety issues still caused delays, as did the lack of the review in February 2005 to address issues from the November 2004 revamp".

Health and safety is a major concern for the workers. With the extra running about, even in heavy rain, an ageing workforce is being worked into the ground. Less vehicles on the road, but the same amount of work done, gives a saving of £500,000 a year. The workers told us "for workers to complete routes they have to breach health and safety. We as a union condemn this, the Council said this is their stance, but still want the routes completed while reducing costs and not taking into account the amount the housing stock in Edinburgh has risen in the last 10 years. The domestic waste is split into 3 sections and a job and knock system is in place, where staff can finish early if the job is completed quickly enough. This tends to encourage staff to cut corners and causes safety concerns. We ask the management that they ensure that finishing times are combined and no one leaves until everyone is finished, stopping the practice that some crews finish at 12.30pm while others work until 4.30pm. The Council's argument in taking off the five motors was that there was less waste going into the domestic waste with recycling, but they could not grasp the concept that it takes the same time to empty a bin that has less in as one that is full. The Council has now put us out to tender".

Workers are ignored

The T&G and UNISON are preparing their case to save jobs and the service when bids from private companies to run refuse collection are called for next April.

The Labour Council makes a lot of noise about freeing up the traffic choked streets and giving the city back to its people. Millions are spent on useless road works, glossy leaflets and a failed referendum on congestion charges to stem the flow of cars. Incredibly, this same anti-congestion Council will not allow the bucket lorries to disturb the post city areas with early morning collections. They must go at 9am to these quiet areas. This means they collect instead from streets in

which folk are leaving for work, so there's even a congestion cost! Cleansing workers have drawn on their practical experience and suggested zoning areas for collecting at different times to reduce congestion in busy areas, but this advice has been ignored. With intimidation and blame heaped on them, plus an uncertain future with privatisation, it may be that the Council hope the workforce will be frightened into taking what is offered to cover rents or mortgages and save their pensions. However, the Council may have it harder than it anticipates. Opposition is growing in the Council housing schemes to the plan to transfer the houses to an unelected housing association, with only 6 of the 16-strong management board being tenants. The Council staff's T&G branch is affiliated to E.A.S.T (Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer Campaign). Linking up this campaign with opposition to the cleansing services sell off would open up another front to bring more workers together, as both employees and residents, to defeat these Tory plans.

In common with workers everywhere, the cleansing workers have the facts and answers to win their case.

As a shop steward suggested, the unions have to take the initiative, put the facts to the public, take out a half page press advertisement and lobby the councillors at their local meetings held to consult the voters. A difficult winter is ahead, but with preparation of their strong case and an active campaign to gain public support, particularly from other trade unionists, the attacks can be defeated. □

□ **Keep cleansing services in public ownership!**

□ **Labour must listen to the workers!**

□ **A Service run for need, not profit!**

□ **Workers unity and militant action against the cuts!**

Globalisation and empire

by Michael Roberts

AS YOU read this there are two important global events taking place. The first is more regional: the summit meeting of the European Union in London. British PM Tony Blair will be hosting the meeting as the last act of the six months of the UK presidency of EU before handing over to the Austrians.

Usually these meetings are just full of blah blah and little is actually decided, becoming more an expensive, security-surrounded jamboree. But not this time. The meeting will bring to a head a clash of approach on the very role and purpose of the European Union and the economic model that capitalist classes of Europe wish to follow.

On one side of the struggle is Britain. Led by a so-called Labour leader, but in reality by a true representative of multinationals and the growing forces of the Christian right, the British ruling class (especially its huge financial sector) looks to the American model of capitalist progress and also to the 'free market' flow of money, capital and labour across all borders without hindrance to the profits of big business. The latter is called globalisation.

The British, along with the ruling elites of new entrants to the EU in central Europe (Poland, Czech, Hungary etc) plus to some extent Holland and Denmark, want the EU to end all its regulation of the capitalist business, finish off trade union influence in the work place, end subsidies to agriculture and industry and remove tariffs against foreign imports into the EU.

Against these promoters of globalisation are the ruling classes of France, Germany, Belgium and to a lesser extent, Italy and Spain - in other words, what the neo-conservative US defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, called 'Old Europe'. This group has always seen the EU as an entity designed to challenge the hegemony of the US in world trade and industry, and even to preserve its independence on how to police the world (eg. Iraq, etc).

Moreover, this group is still under huge political pressure to maintain some sort of adequate welfare state for

the sick, old and unemployed - objectives long since successfully destroyed by the American and British ruling classes under Reagan and Thatcher. Their European model is antagonistic towards 'globalisation', as they correctly see it as a euphemism for rule of the American empire in opening up the world's economies to US financial and business tentacles.

The clash between these two approaches comes to head again in the EU summit because Britain is again pressing for the French and Germans to agree to dismantling the Common Agricultural Policy that protects Europe's farmers (mostly the bigger ones of course) with subsidies and quotas against imports. The CAP is to be phased out starting in 2012. The British want it done earlier. With the UK's farming sector virtually wiped out, the capitalist class here are very comfortable with the idea of reducing EU budget costs and letting cheaper food in from slave-wage countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Ironically, Blair will offer to dispense with the special UK 'rebate' under which the British receive over £2bn a year back from the EU from their contributions to the budget. This is for no apparent reason whatsoever, apart from keeping Britain from kicking up trouble for the Europeans when they were trying to get the Eurozone and

single currency back in the mid-1990s.

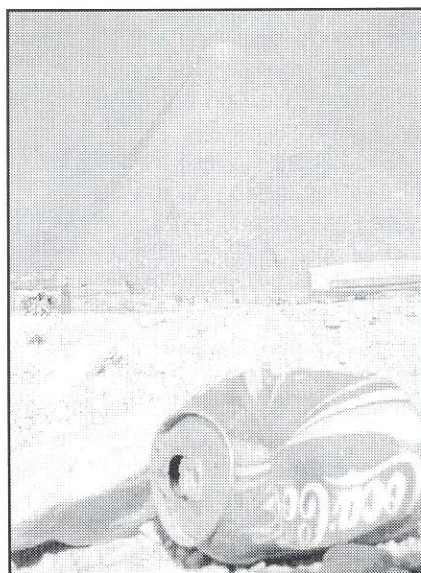
Of course, the French and Germans say that Britain should give up its rebate anyway with no conditions, as they don't deserve it. Moreover, the French, whether led by old European Chirac, and the Germans, led by new rightist German Merkel are not going to concede on CAP, taxation, deregulation or anything else that damages the European economic model, because they know there would be a huge backlash from their own working people. Witness the defeat of the EU constitution referendum last May in France and the failure of the right wing to secure a clear victory in the German elections despite the huge disaffection with the 'new Labour' policies of the social democrats under Gerhard Schroeder.

So it will be stalemate. And it is very likely to be stalemate at the other big global event of December: the meeting of the world's trading nations in Hong Kong to pursue further reductions of tariffs, quotas and other trading restrictions under the so-called Doha round of trade liberalisation.

Again the battle lines are drawn broadly between those who favour 'globalisation' as the way forward for capitalism ("all will benefit and none will lose from ending restrictions on the free movement of goods, capital and labour") and those who fear that the opening up their agriculture or their industries and financial sector to American multinationals or imports from Latin America or Asia (produced by American multinationals) will hurt the interest of their own ruling class.

Those wanting to cut tariffs are first those countries that have huge cost advantages in selling food: namely Brazil in Latin America, New Zealand, Canada, etc (although they would lose from more foreign financial firms taking over their industry and banking). Also the Americans would gain across the board if they can make further inroads into Europe, Asia and above all, China.

Old Europe is opposed to cutting much because it would put EU restrictions under pressure and they would gain less than the Americans. And



then there are just a few so-called 'developing countries' that wish to resist the pressure of global capitalism like Venezuela or Malaysia, each for different reasons.

The reason the stalemate in Hong Kong is inevitable is that globalisation is just not working. It is not working for those economies that are raped by the big multinationals once the doors are opened. But what worries some strategists of capital much more is that, far from globalisation generating steady economic growth that is balanced across the world, it is breeding serious imbalances in capitalism.

One figure alone shows the risk these strategists feel: China's 1.3bn people consume only 42% of their annual output: they save and sell the rest overseas (40% to the US). At the other extreme, Americans consume 71% of their annual output, saving nothing and increasingly importing all their energy and daily consumption needs. The US is borrowing hugely to finance its spending binge and is becoming increasingly dependent on the rest of the world, particularly Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, India, Brazil and Japan to provide these needs on credit. The US is now the world's biggest debtor, while Japan/China is its biggest creditor and the gap is widening.

So far, the US has sustained this imbalance because it controls the purse strings with the dollar as the major international currency; it has a huge banking and financial sector; and, as a last resort, its mighty military machine makes it possible to end any resistance to its imperial control (not always successfully!).

Globalisation really means the rise of the American Empire. That was the capitalist story of the 20th century. The story of the 21st century will probably be the fall of the American empire as these imbalances unravel. It remains an open question whether the world slips back into some form barbarism, as happened with the eventual collapse of the rapacious Roman empire in the 5th century or whether it will be replaced by real globalisation, namely

world socialism.

Indeed, "empire" has become the buzzword for many of the business best sellers in America this Christmas. The one that appeals to those capitalists who reckon that all is fine and dandy is Thomas Friedman's "The world is flat: a brief history of 21st century". In it, Friedman argues that globalisation, along with the hi-tech revolution and the internet, is opening up the world into one great global village where everything will be standardised (McDonalds, Coca Cola, Gucci, etc) and the people of world will gradually equalise their incomes and wealth and develop harmoniously under the 'free market'.

A much more pessimistic, but capitalist view, is expressed in another bestseller, "The Empire of Debt", which sees the US as heading for disaster because its people don't save and just spend and so run up debts that will never be paid back. So US capitalism will slide backwards compared to China and even Europe and possibly bring everybody down with it.

The authors are not Marxists. On the contrary they are free market theorists of the so-called Austrian school, which argues that the way to capitalist success is not to spend Keynesian-style but to save everything you can. Sure, if capitalists never pay their workers much and don't spend themselves, they can boost investment and profitability, for a time. But what happens when nobody has enough income to spend on the goods made? Such is the dilemma for capitalism between excessive spending and excessive saving. Neither seems to preserve profits for long!

A more revealing view of the effect of globalisation is the book, "The Politics of Empire" by Alan Freeman. Here the American empire is seen from its impact on working people and in the inequalities between nations. In one perceptive chapter, Freeman shows that between 1980 and 2000, the population living in the so-called advanced countries (the main capitalist economies) fell from 32% to 19% and yet their share of world income rose

from 80% to 84% - such is the success of globalisation for all! The annual income per person of the advanced economies was 11 times greater than in the so-called developing countries in 1980. By 2000, this ratio had reached 23 times.

And globalisation is not even helping the capitalist system as a whole. Whereas in 1988 the average annual output per person in the whole world was \$4885, in 2002 it had fallen to \$4778! In the 1970s, annual world GDP per head rose at over 4% a year; in the 1980s it slowed to just 0.8% a year; in the 1990s, it was negative. The world under capitalism is going backwards. The result is even worse if you take China, an economy only just entering the control of capitalism, out of the figures.

And, of course, as this column has often pointed out, even in the heart of the American capitalist empire (the US itself), globalisation has done nothing for the average American worker as the big multinationals shift their industry abroad to cheaper locations and the government allows cheaper imports of goods and services to wipe out local industry.

As a result, inequalities of income and wealth within the US have worsened, particularly in the recent heyday of globalisation. Now, if your household income in America is just \$57,000 or £32,000 a year or below, you are in the majority 75% of households. In 1993, the bottom 50% earned 15% of national income; in 2003 that fell to 14%. Meanwhile, the top 25% have increased their share from a massive 62% to an even more humungous 65% by 2003.

So globalisation, the next stage of capitalist development, has not generated a flat world with harmonious development and enrichment for all. It has bred imbalances and contradictions for capitalists that cannot resolve and it has increased the inequalities between nations and within nations. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, but the rich also find it increasingly difficult to make it work. □

Union Mergers, Democracy, and the Power to Fight

by Kris Lawrie

Merger fever has hit the British union movement. This recent spate was started by the merger of MSF and AEEU several years ago to form Amicus. In the past year this process of consolidation has gone further. Steel union ISTC and textile and garment union KFAT merged to form Community in 2004, and mergers of other unions with Amicus have continued, first with finance union UNIFI, followed shortly by the print union GPMU. Most recently two college and university teaching unions NATFHE and the AUT have announced they are merging to create the biggest teaching union in the world. But the latest merger on the cards, if it goes through, will be the biggest in the movement's history. The merger will unite three of the big four unions: Amicus, the GMB and the TGWU. The new union will have a membership of over two million.

The leaders of the unions involved have been full of beans about what the mergers will deliver. Tony Woodley, General Secretary of the TGWU, has described the potential of the new union: "We now have the bold aspiration to create a progressive giant that could dominate the 21st century. The potential is absolutely enormous: with 2.4 million members in total it would be by far the largest union in the country." Some on the left tend to support or oppose mergers in their own interests. Either because they will strengthen or interfere with their little spheres of influence by bringing in new layers of activists. That is because they have no faith in the working class or in its ability to draw socialist conclusions. A Marxist will always prefer to work in an area where they can reach as broad a layer as possible. It is better to be in a minority in a big powerful union than to be in the majority in a small one.

Of course it is a good thing that workers in the same workplace, plant or industry are organised in the same union. From this point of view mergers can play a very valuable role. But this does not mean that all mergers are to be blindly supported.

In principle Marxists support any merger which brings the workers together into logical bargaining units. A

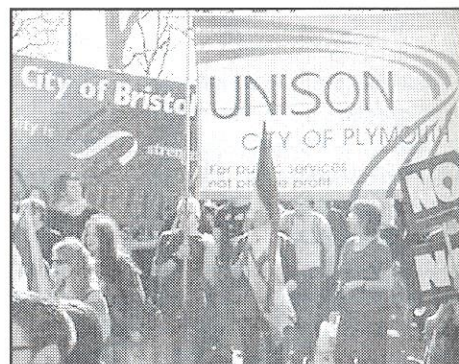
merger like that which formed UNISON in 1993 was progressive because it brought together workers in the same industry or workplace. For example, many nurses who were split into different unions were now joined into one, which also organises hospital cleaners, porters, admin staff etc. For the same reason a future merger between the largest nursing body, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), and UNISON would be a big step forward.

But mergers between some unions have no industrial logic. For example, it would be silly to propose a merger between a manufacturing union and a teaching union. How would that strengthen the hand of the workers? But in the rarefied top floors of union headquarters there are many thoughts that go through the minds of committee members which do not necessarily correspond very closely with the interests of the members.

Fighting Leadership Needed

Because of the absence of a fighting leadership over the past few decades most unions have been losing members hand over fist. This has caused acute cash shortages which have threatened the privileges of the bureaucrats at the top of some of the big unions. But rather than rescue the finances by waging a campaign to improve members' pay and conditions, and thus boost recruitment, they have decided to consolidate by merging willy nilly with other unions. This seemed to be the case for example with the recent merger between ISTC and KFAT to form Community.

But this doesn't exhaust the question either, because even in cases of industrial logic, where it is correct to support a merger in theory, it still depends on the concrete details of the merger. Mergers have often been used in the past as an excuse to revise rulebooks and take away lay member democracy. This was the case in the merger which created the AEEU in 1992 which was effectively a takeover. The democratic AEU rulebook was kicked out and replaced by the EETPU rulebook. This took power out of the



hands of conference and gave it to the Executive Committee which then passed it to the fulltime apparatus. Whether or not we support a given merger will, therefore, also depend on the proposed structure of the new union.

In the case of a merger between the GMB, T&G and Amicus there is undoubtedly a strong industrial logic, and *Socialist Appeal* supporters in these unions support the merger in principle. But a merger will not increase union membership in Britain on its own. The architects of the merger are merely trying to stave off problems by lumping existing membership together rather than bringing in new blood.

What the movement desperately needs is a change of policy. What incentive does a worker have to join a union today? Cheap car insurance! Private health plans! Introductory 0% interest on a union credit card! What we need is a fighting lead. The current Labour government has shown that it is unresponsive to the kind of 'pressure' and 'influence' that Simpson et al want to bring to bear. A fighting programme will show workers the relevance of joining a union, especially young workers in the 'new industries' that the unions have so far failed to organise.

The new super union, if it goes ahead, will be strong provided it adopts such a position. But, if it continues with more of the same, it will change nothing. The new union needs a strong broad left organisation, it needs a fighting leadership and it needs to use its strength politically, too, in the struggle to reclaim Labour. □

Edinburgh Anti War March

by Brian Conlon in Edinburgh

A grim and grey day saluted the Anti-war demonstration organised by the Stop the War Coalition in Edinburgh on Saturday, November 12, while Scotland was about to win (but in the end lost in the last 20 minutes) against Argentina, to the despair of all nationalists and Scottish rugby lovers. Over a thousand people turned up in the centre of Edinburgh to march against the occupation of Iraq, going from Parliament Square to the new Parliament building and then ending up in Princess Street, with the compulsory visit to the American Embassy. It was a colourful demonstration with plenty of activists from the anti-war and socialist movement, as well as loads of new young folk. There were a few political banners, Anti-War, CND as well as a couple from trade unions. Some people came from as far away as Aberdeen. *Socialist Appeal* supporters were present and active trying to raise some money for the journal as well as discussing the ideas of Marxism with those attending the demo. Half a dozen of us sold out of journals, but not ideas, unfortunately we were conservative in our estimate (the only thing we are conservative about, by the way). More than £60 worth of material was sold between books, pamphlets and journals. Just as important were the half a dozen names also collected.

The campaigns that were

active at the demo were CND, the Anti-War coalition as organisers (not giving any decent political material away) and the EAST campaign against Council housing privatisation. So Hands Off Venezuela was the only political non-party stall at the demo, with half a dozen young members collecting signatures, advertising their events and selling pamphlets. They were very prominent in the demonstration. The speeches were, as usual, a bit superficial, especially from the Stop the War Coalition and the SNP (don't ask me what they were doing there). Rose Gentle, whose son Gordon died in Iraq, gave a moving speech about her good work campaigning against the war and building up a network of military families against the war, and Colin Fox SSP MSP was the only one to mention the word Socialism, which he did in an enthusiastic way to his credit, and was well received. It was a better demonstration than some we have had in the past, here in Edinburgh. The Stop the War Coalition had a march during the G8 summit that had more or less the same number of people, and at that time Scotland was politically activated by the arrival of the biggest imperialist mavericks in the world. So a good turnout and a useful place to intervene to raise the ideas of Marxism. □

Storm clouds gather again at the Manchester Evening News

by Rachel Broady, NUJ MoC Manchester Evening News, personal capacity

A magazine bought by Guardian Media Group when it was functioning as a workers' co-operative could close. City Life - Manchester's answer to Time Out - has some of the lowest paid staff in the industry with writers on £16,000.

They recently fought for union recognition - having been told they couldn't have recognition because they were all seen as management. However, they won recognition, and they deserve our support.

But this looks like the beginning of a long battle at Guardian Media Group - and it's important that we let them know they have a fight on their hands. Dramatic changes at the Manchester Evening News saw staff on the brink of strike action last year. Back then staff were angry at producing an early morning edition resulting in a change to working hours and a number of staff leaving. An agreement was met and strike action cancelled.

Now the new GMG regional newspapers chief executive, Mark Dodson, is making his mark, and hackles rise, by "reviewing every area of the business" The "review" - that will reach every daily, weekly newspaper and magazine in the group - could mean job losses. In a memo to staff (10 November), he said: "Together we face a very difficult financial climate in a relentlessly competitive market. Compared to last year we have double digit declines in revenues and profitability."

The company made record profits of over £30 million last year and claim to fear a 50% drop in those profits. Meanwhile, Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger received a £75,000 bonus for introducing the not-quite-tabloid version of the paper and his pay increased to £373,000.

The Manchester Evening News chapel have voted to ballot for industrial action again at the first sign of compulsory redundancies. □

Edinburgh tenants against housing sell-off

by Kenny Cairns, E.A.S.T activists and SW Edinburgh CLP

The fight is being kept up by Edinburgh tenants against the privatisation of the housing stock. With the vote to transfer looming large the campaign is getting moving.

Edinburgh Council wants to sell the houses for £941 each, which just shows how deep the Blairite agenda has filtered to local parties. This will have a huge effect in the future on the poorest layers of society. The council has a statutory responsibility to provide homes for the homeless, Registered Social Landlords (the name of the housing association, RSL) do not. Of course, they are private entities and not charities.

Here in Edinburgh a meeting of 80 people was held, including representatives from Glasgow and London where the privatisation of council housing has taken place. *Socialist*

Appeal supporters reminded the meeting that Blair does not represent the views of the working class. We need the unions to use their industrial muscle inside the Labour Party, not only at Labour Party Conference but also at a constituency level.

Here in Edinburgh they are trying to fool us saying that with we will be represented by tenants, but the councillors are already supposed to be the accountable representatives of the local residents.

Council Housing is a conquest of the Labour and trade union movement. It should be defended tooth and nail. There are already 120 MP's that have signed the Early Day Motion 48 (EDM 48). □

- Hands Off Our Homes!
- Vote No to Privatisation!
- The Trade Unions must take the lead against council housing privatisation!

Hands Off Venezuela Activities Around The World

Solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution is growing on a worldwide scale and the Hands Off Venezuela campaign is playing a key role in this development. Here we have a digest of what campaigners have been doing recently in different parts of the world.

New York: An Evening in Solidarity with Bolivarian Venezuela, by Karin Jaschke, our HOV Correspondent in New York.

On November 8, 2005 a remarkable event took place at New York's Town Hall: An evening in solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution, so far the biggest and most important gathering of this kind. It was organized by the Alberto Lovera Bolivarian Circle of New York and the International Action Center. It was also endorsed by prominent persons like Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky and many groups, the Hands off Venezuela Campaign among them. The importance of the event was underlined by the fact that there was a lot of media present, ranging from the *New York Times* to alternative media and the Latin American TV station Telesur. The aim of the event at the Town Hall was to foster the bonds between the U.S. and Venezuela. Many speakers from different groups showed the broad basis of the solidarity movement in winning support from the Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian and Colombian community and groups in solidarity with Cuba. Among the speakers were former U.S. Attorney General

Ramsey Clark, trade unionists Chris Silvera and Roger Toussaint, Reverend Lucius Walker, who praised the "axis of good", and Padre Luis Barrios who called Chavez the "prophet of socialism of the 21st century" and many representatives of the Bolivarian Movement in Venezuela.

Australia's CFMEU trade union in solidarity with Venezuela, by Hands Off Venezuela, Australia.

The Construction and Energy division of the Australian Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, passed a resolution in solidarity with Venezuela. The resolution is broadly based on the ones passed earlier this year by a number of British trade unions and finally passed unanimously at the British Trades Union Congress. We hope this resolution will spread throughout the Australian union movement. Here we reproduce some extracts.

"The CFMEU Construction and Energy Division congratulates and supports the Venezuelan government for its utilization of the country's wealth and resources for reforms to benefit working people, the poor and the landless...

"We deplore the attempts of the United States administration to intervene in the internal life of Venezuela and agree to raise these concerns with the Australian government...

"We express our solidarity with trade unionists in Venezuela and reject any outside interference in their affairs."

Hands off Venezuela at Swedish international conference, by HOV - Gothenburg.

The Swedish Left Party (ex-communists) organized an international conference on Saturday 29th October where they invited different speakers from a number of solidarity organisations. Martin Lööf attended the conference as a representative of the Hands off Venezuela campaign in Sweden. In his speech, Martin gave a brief introduction to the Venezuelan revolution, its problems and strengths. Chavez's speech was quoted where he explained that the problems of the world cannot be solved within the confines of capitalism. Martin said that he agreed with this, but he also explained that the revolution is now in a kind of stalemate. The revolution needs to take on a socialist character and the current state must be replaced with trustworthy representatives of the masses. At the end of the meeting there was an exchange of e-mail addresses and a promise of an invitation for HOV to speak at a local party branch. □

Excellent Hands Off Venezuela Meeting held in Bristol

by Rob Sewell

Fifty people filled a room in the St Paul's area of Bristol to hear speakers in favour of the Venezuelan Revolution. The meeting was opened by Andy Goodall of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign. Andy presented an outline of the background to the revolution starting with the Caracazo in February 1989 which began the revolutionary process. He described how Hugo Chavez emerged into the limelight after the failed coup in 1992, which led to his arrest and imprisonment. However, this led to his growing popularity which culminated in his election as President in 1998.

This was followed by Karen Bell from Bristol who had been on a visit to Venezuela. She gave a graphic report of what she had witnessed, and was accompanied by a slide show. Karen concentrated her remarks on the reforms of

the revolution in the field of health, education, workers' cooperatives, and land reform. The pictures of the faces of young Venezuelans showed the real images of the Revolution.

Jeremy Dear, the General Secretary of the NUJ, outlined the attempts of counter-revolution to overthrow the Chavez government, beginning with the coup of April 2002. Jeremy showed that the media campaign against the Revolution was conducted by a handful of millionaire media barons. It was the duty of the British labour movement to rally to the cause of the Venezuelan Revolution.

After a lively discussion and questions, the meeting agreed to set up a solidarity committee to co-ordinate activities in the Bristol area. It was a great end to a successful meeting. □

HOV National Conference: Building Internationalist Solidarity

by Ramon Samblas, Hands Off Venezuela, London

Welcome to the National Conference of Hands Off Venezuela, especially if you have bought this magazine for the first time. For the last few weeks our supporters throughout Britain have been working very hard to turn the National Conference into a reality. This event is going to help us to galvanise the support that Hands Off Venezuela has been building over the last two years. After two years of hard work and visits to all corners of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, we can say that the Hands Off Venezuela campaign has managed to create a growing network of trade unionists, students, anti-iwar activists and left wing people in general that not only know about Venezuela, but are also prepared to spread the message amongst their colleagues at work and at college, raise funds and distribute educational and political literature on the Venezuelan revolution. Recently we have been absolutely overwhelmed by all the speaking arrangements and invitations that we have received.

Our website www.handsoff-venezuela.org has become a reference for everybody who wants to find out about the revolutionary events that are shaking Latin American politics starting with Venezuela. The number of journalists, websites, pamphlets and books which quote our site demonstrates that clearly.

The number of visits to Britain by

trade unionists and community activists from Venezuela that Hands Off Venezuela has facilitated throughout 2005 has also played a very important role in the task of raising awareness and spreading the message of revolution and hope of the Venezuelan working people. The last of these visits before the National Conference involved the Education Department of the Communication Workers Union and Victor Mora and Orlando Perez from the Educators Federation of the Venezuelan National Workers' Union. They addressed a crowd of 170 CWU organisers and activists in Liverpool.

Yet, all of this has been done on the basis of scant resources, no full-time staff, no printed publication just loads of sacrifice on the part of committed supporters and the internationalist solidarity we have got from the labour movement.

Our activities to defend and promote the Venezuelan revolution are not going to end with the present year. More projects are in the pipeline. One of them is a delegation to the World Social Forum 2006 in Caracas. Work in universities must be strengthened and more Hands Off Venezuela branches must be built. The trade union work must continue too. You can see that the task we have undertaken is huge, why not get involved and help us to build? □

Successful HOV meeting in Edinburgh University

by Pablo Sanchez

On Thursday, October 27th, more than fifty people gathered in Edinburgh University to watch "The Revolution will not be Televised", that powerful video that has been screened several times here in Edinburgh, but still has the capacity to bring together many people because of the force of events in Revolutionary Venezuela.

The screening was followed by a debate that helped to clarify issues about the current state of affairs in Venezuela and the effects that these events are having on the whole of Latin America.

The meeting was a good mix of workers, university students, and school students, too. Two high schools in Edinburgh were leafleted for the meeting and we also organised various stalls in Edinburgh University. About 30 people signed up for the e-mailing list of the campaign and the committee that meets on a bi-weekly basis has plenty of work to organise.

The meeting was useful to inform people about the Hands Off Venezuela National Conference and build up a decent delegation from the Edinburgh Committee.

We also announced that the coming meetings will be Friday, November 18, in the Students' Association Building, Lomond Room, on Workers' Co-Management, and also the screening on Wednesday, November 23, of Venezuela Bolivariana, in Appleton Tower.

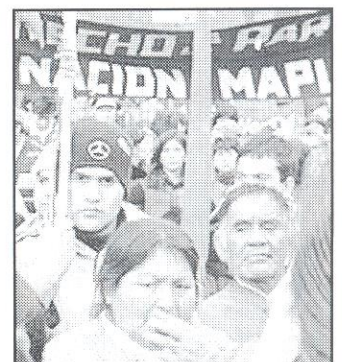
The general mood of the members of HOV here is very good and we believe that we can build a campaign that is going to help in concrete terms the Venezuelan Revolution and the construction of Socialism in the XXI Century. □



For More Information:

- World Social Forum 2006 HOV delegation:
e-mail london@handsoffvenezuela.org
- For general enquiries and to order literature and documentaries:
e-mail britain@handsoffvenezuela.org
- Hands Off Venezuela's financial resources are limited. We rely on our supporters to build the campaign. Please make cheques payable to Hands Off Venezuela. Send to HOV, 100 Armadale Close, N17 9PL

Demonstrators against OEA in Mar de Plata. Workers, peasants and youth from throughout Latin America met in this Argentinian town to reject Bush's project designed to line the already bulging pockets of the bosses at the expense of the impoverished masses.



Latin America - the Balkanised Continent

The Solution lies in a Socialist United States of Latin America

by Rob Sewell

The Venezuelan Revolution, led by Hugo Chávez, has re-awakened the Bolivarian dream of a union of the peoples of Latin America. This has come in the footsteps of the great independence fighters of Bolívar, Hidalgo, Juárez, San Martín, O'Higgins, Sucre, Zamora and Martí. With the victory of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara also invoked the spirit of continental revolution.

According to Hugo Chávez, "the geopolitical concept of Bolívar, envisaging the union of the continent, still has tremendous contemporary force".

"None of his generals at the time of independence", he continued, "at least none of his Venezuelan generals, had this vision of uniting all these Balkanised territories of Latin America in order to confront the imperial power of the north. Now everyone is searching and struggling towards this goal, not just the Venezuelans but all of Latin America." He concluded: "La patria for all of us is America; and union is fundamental. Everyone has shared this aim: Martí, O'Higgins and Artigas - Sandino and Péron said so too. The union of all our peoples."

The Latin American continent, which is potentially a very rich continent, extends from the Río Grande almost to Antarctica, comprising 21 separate countries with diverse Indian cultures and historical legacies, most notably Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British and French.

Given its imperialist heritage, Spanish is the language of the vast majority of people of Latin America, except in Brazil where Portuguese is spoken. The once proud native Indians, dispossessed and exterminated by the conquistadors, still retain their own languages such as Yaqui (Northern Mexico), Nahuatl (Central Mexico), Maya (Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico and Guatemala), Chibcha (Colombia), Quechua (Ecuador and Peru) and Aymara (Southern Peru and Bolivia). In some countries, the indigenous people are the majority of the population.

With its abundance of natural resources, the continent could potentially be a paradise on earth for its peoples. However, this beautiful part of the world has been Balkanised by imperialism and its local oligarchies of feudal landlords and bourgeois upstarts, backed by the church establishment, have bled the land and its people for their own selfish interests and gain. This élite long ago sold out the cause of independence, and became the stooges of imperialism.

From its enslavement by the Spanish conquistadors from around 1500, the continent was to be at the mercy of European, and especially Spanish exploiters, fuelled by the legend of El Dorado. Rival groups fought tooth and nail for economic and political supremacy and advantage, exterminating the native Indians in the process. This despotic rule was to last some 300 years, until the fight for independence.

The struggle for national independence from Spain was essentially a bourgeois-democratic struggle, which received its impetus from the French Revolution of 1789-93 and the Napoleonic Wars. The outstanding figure of this liberation struggle was Simon Bolívar ('El Libertador'). He drew the conclusion that a continent-wide crusade against Spanish rule was necessary, uniting Latin America against the imperial power. Bolívar, who landed at Cartagena, fought his way up the Magdalena valley to Bogotá and on to Cúcuta. From there he pushed on to Caracas, but was unable to hold it. However, Bolívar, together with his most able lieutenant, Sucre, assembled an army of horsemen from the Venezuelan llanos and some 5,000 British ex-Peninsular War veterans at Angostura. With this army he marched across the Andes into Colombia and joined forces with General Santander's liberation fighters. Together they defeated the Royalists, first at the battle of the Vargas in the lowlands and again at the battle of the Boyacá in

August 1819.

He went on from there to complete the liberation of Venezuela and another victory over the Royalist forces at Caraboba in 1821. With these victories under their belts, Bolívar and Sucre went on to liberate Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. This revolutionary liberation struggle unfolded over a ten-year period.

With Colombia free, a revolutionary congress was held at Cúcuta. Opposing factions quickly emerged. Bolívar stood for a centralised and unified republic made up of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama, whereas Santander favoured a looser federal arrangement of sovereign states. Bolívar's ideas prevailed and the Republic of Gran Colombia came into being. Argentina and Chile were also free, conquered by republican forces from Argentina led by General José de San Martín. Only Peru remained under Spanish rule, but was finally taken at the battle of Ayacucho in December 1824. Upper Peru was at last liberated five months later and given the name of Bolivia.

His vision was of a United States of Latin America all the way from the Río Grande to Tierra del Fuego, free from colonialism and offering equality of opportunity to all. In this, he defended the rights of Venezuela's large community of black slaves, who he set free on his estates.

However, the Republic was short-lived, and even before Bolívar died in December 1830, the Republic had split into its three constituent countries and Bolívar's dreams had been betrayed. The Creole bourgeoisie was incapable of rising to the revolutionary tasks of their European counterparts, and proved incapable of uniting the continent. They were terrified of the very shock troops of the liberation struggle - the landless peasants and former slaves. Through their actions, the oligarchy betrayed the independence struggle, resulting in the break-up of the Bolivarian Republic and the carving

up of the living body of Latin America.

The ruling oligarchy, entwined with the slave-owners, the parasitic landlords and foreign imperialists, could not play any progressive role. They were certainly unable to lead a struggle for genuine national sovereignty. They were too weak, too subservient, and too corrupt to lead such a genuine revolutionary struggle. They had arrived too late on the stage of history and were incapable of carrying through the tasks of the national-democratic revolution.

Under modern conditions, how can this belated democratic task be fulfilled? The rotten oligarchy that rules Latin America today is even more reactionary than in the past. They are the local office boys of imperialism, at the beck and call of Washington, which regards Latin America not as an independent entity, but as its own "sphere of influence", under its economic and political domination. The Monroe Doctrine became the diplomatic cover for US expansion and intervention across Latin America. The Doctrine was brought into being to project the United States' sphere of influence and to fill the void left by Spain's departure. In essence, the US imperialists simply saw Latin America as their own "backyard", and the oligarchy became their messenger boys in this regard.

Leon Trotsky explained long ago in his theory of "Permanent Revolution" that in the ex-colonial world, the bourgeois cannot play any progressive role. The tasks of the national-democratic revolution that remain (land reform, national independence, etc), fall upon the shoulders of the working class and poor peasants. Only the working class, drawing behind it all the oppressed layers in society, can play a revolutionary role in the modern epoch. In Latin America, where 85% of the population live in urban areas, the tasks of the national-democratic revolution can only be carried out in the course of the socialist revolution.

In other words, the dream of Simon Bolívar of the unification of the peoples of Latin America can only be accomplished in the modern epoch by the coming to power of the working class. They are the only real revolutionary class capable of uniting the nation and taking society forward. This is the very meaning of the "Permanent Revolution" today.

In practice, the creation of a united

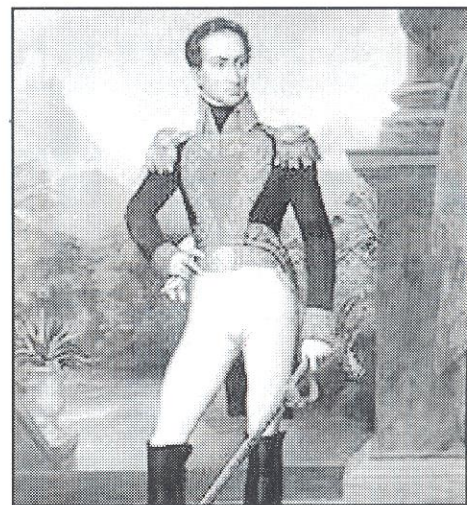
states of Latin America can only be achieved by the overthrow of the reactionary oligarchies that rule the present Balkanised states on the continent. In other words, what is posed is a continental-wide socialist revolution. Already Hugo Chávez has talked in these terms. The collaboration between Cuba and Venezuela is a beginning. It needs to be deepened by the completion of the revolution in Venezuela with the expropriation of the oligarchy. This would allow the resources to be fully utilised in the interests of the masses in a planned and harmonious fashion. If this were carried through in the rest of Latin America, planning would be possible on a continental-wide basis. A continental planned economy under the control of the masses will open up a new vista for the peoples of Latin America and the world.

On a capitalist basis, the "cooperation" proposed include such measures as the School of the Americas, the Organisation of American States, the Inter-American Defence Board, Plan Colombia, the IMF and World Bank, NAFTA, CAFTA, and now the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. Each of these is used to further enslave the peoples of Latin America.

Domination of world market

There can be no planning in the interests of the masses on the basis of capitalism. The economies are tied to the capitalist system, above all the world market, which dominates the continent. No country which remains on the basis of capitalism can escape the laws of the capitalist system. In the adage of the labour movement, "you can plan what you don't control, and you don't control what you don't own."

The only way in which this can be broken and the continent united is on the basis of the socialist revolution. On a capitalist basis, Venezuela has been bled white by the ruling oligarchy, which have looted the country's wealth on an unprecedented scale. The vast majority of the population is permanently poor and hungry. While the top 10 percent of the population of 23 million receives half the national income, 40 percent (on 1996 figures) lives in "critical poverty". The situation has been growing dramatically worse. The country imports more than half its food needs, 64 percent in 1998. Vast areas of Venezuela lie fallow or unused.



Now the US wants to implement a free trade area for the Americas. Chávez and Castro have proposed an alternative: the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. This plans to eliminate trade barriers and tax obstacles, as well as providing increased cooperation between banks. Venezuela provides cheap oil to Cuba and other states.

This is a pointer for the future. However, it can only scratch the surface when faced with the power of the multinationals. Real cooperation can only be undertaken through the coming to power of revolutionary governments that eliminate the power of the oligarchy and take fully into the hands the resources of the country. The working class has no interest in retaining artificial borders created by imperialism and vested interests. It will be in favour of the maximum cooperation in developing the rich resources of Latin America for the peoples of the continent.

In the words of Bolívar: "Government must prove to be formidable and ruthless, without regard to law or constitution, until peace is established. I believe that our enemies will have all the advantages as long as we do not unify our American government. We shall be inextricably caught in the web of civil war, and be shamefully beaten by that little horde of bandits which pollutes our country."

This is sound advice! Today's struggle for a Socialist United States of Latin America is the real programme of Simon Bolívar translated into the realities of the 21st century. It is the only salvation for the oppressed masses and can usher in a genuine paradise on earth for the benefit of all. □

Latin American Conference of Occupied Factories

By Jorge Martin in Caracas

"This is an historical gathering. For the first time workers from occupied factories from across the continent are meeting together" (Serge Goulart, United Workers' Council of Brazilian group of occupied factories)

"We have shown how the workers can run the companies, and this means we can run society as well" (Ricardo Moreira, PIT-CNT, Uruguay)

More than 400 people from 235 worker occupied factories and 20 different national trade union centres participated in the "First Latin American Gathering of Worker Recovered Factories" in Caracas on October 27-29.

This was truly a historical meeting, the first time that workers involved in factory occupations in different countries have met to discuss their problems, share their experiences and draw political conclusions from their struggle. And such a meeting could only take place in revolutionary Venezuela where it had the support of Chávez's Bolivarian government.

In the opening rally, which took place at the Teresa Carreño Theatre, with 3,000 worker activists present, president Chávez explained how it is capitalism that closes down factories and that these "must be recovered by the workers". He compared the struggle of the occupied factories movement to the struggle for independence from Spanish rule in the 19th century and underlined the "potential of the workers in our continent to break their chains and leave capitalism behind". The platform of the rally included a number of Venezuelan ministers, trade union leaders from across the continent and workers from occupied factories (including Edgar Peña, leader of the Invepal workers).

The factory take-overs that are taking place across the conti-

nent are part of the struggle for true sovereignty and liberation from the domination of the US, Chávez stressed. But at the same time he made clear that "the people and the workers of the US also have their part to play in this battle".

Chávez also explained his views regarding the trade union movement and its relationship with the Bolivarian government. He started by greeting the formation of the National Workers' Union, UNT, but added that the new trade union confederation "is not and should never be an appendix of the government, it must be autonomous and free" from it. The old bureaucratic trade union model of "unions which ended up negotiating behind the workers' backs, of leaders like those in Venezuela who ended up enriching themselves while negotiating about workers' lives with the bosses" must be rooted out of the trade union movement.

"This is the way to rule"

Chávez proposed the creation of a network of worker-recovered companies so that they could collaborate and exchange experiences. Finally, he announced the expropriation of two more companies, Sideroca, and the Cumanacoa Sugar Mill. This was received with an enthusiastic standing ovation by the 3,000 workers present who shouted "¡asi, asi, asi es que se

gobierna" ("this is the way to rule"). The Sideroca factory in Zulia makes metal pipes for the oil industry and had been abandoned by its owners six years ago. On September 6, a group of former workers and people from the local community had taken over the plant to prevent the owners from taking away the machinery, and since then had been demanding expropriation under workers' management. The Cumanacoa Sugar Mill in Cumaná, had been running at half its capacity since its privatisation back in 1992, and more recently this situation had worsened to a point where it was operating at 20% capacity. Workers and the local sugar cane producers had demanded expropriation.

Chavez announced that he would sign the expropriation decrees before going to the Mar de Plata summit in Argentina this week. He said others would follow and mentioned the tomato processing plant Caigua in Guarico. This was taken over by the workers on July 7 after a conflict over non-payment of wages, when the workers realised that the owner wanted to sell the raw materials (tomato paste) stored in the plant. Once again, the workers demanded the plant be expropriated and handed over to the workers.

But the president also added that the idea was not to expropriate the companies so that their workers could "become rich overnight", but rather that production should benefit the community as a whole. Along the same lines, during the "Encuentro", workers from Caigua declared that: "We do not want to create 57 capitalists, we are on the path to socialism".

As Serge Goulart said: "this is a president that sides with the workers, not in words, or with statements, but with the concrete facts of these two expropriations".

The Encuentro then broke into a number of separate meetings, one for trade union organisations, another for workers from occupied



factories and one for members of parliament and government representatives.

There was debate on the forms of property that worker-recovered companies should take. The comrades from the Cipla-Interfibra-Flasko-Flaskepet group of worker-managed companies in Brazil insisted on the demand for nationalisation under workers' control.

Serge Goulart, the coordinator of the United Workers' Council, was adamant: "We are against the idea of a 'solidarity economy'. In fact this would mean turning the workers into capitalists, weakening the working class and, in competing in a capitalist market, they would only succeed by making other factories bankrupt. We are for nationalisation, but nationalisation under workers' control in order to prevent a new bureaucracy from emerging". He added that this struggle could only be seen as part of the general struggle for the "nationalisation of the banks and the multinationals in order to plan the economy in the interests of the people". "There cannot be socialism in one country, even less in a single company!" he said emphatically.

Socialism of the 21st century

Encuentro Asked about the debate president Chavez has opened up on "socialism of the 21st century", Serge Goulart replied: "The Venezuelan Revolution is extraordinary in that it confirms what the Marxists had always said. It started as a struggle against imperialism and for national sovereignty. But then we saw the working class entering the scene in the struggle against the sabotage of the oil industry and the revolution went further, as it did with the nationalisation of Venepal on January 19 this year. It started as an anti-imperialist struggle, but it either becomes socialist or it will be crushed. (...) The question will be posed of the nationalisation of the banks and the multinationals and that can only be carried out by the workers".

Orlando Chirino, National Coordinator of the Venezuelan UNT explained the context in which these factory occupations were taking place: "This is a symptom of the degeneration of capitalism which leads to a process of deregulation, flexibilisation and increased exploitation of the workers. Capitalism no longer plays the progressive role it once played." The whole

process is not without contradictions or difficulties. In the case of Venezuela particularly, most of the workers involved in these occupations have no previous experience of trade union organisation or struggle and they will face many problems. But to Orlando, in order to save jobs and livelihoods, the task of the trade unions is to give this instinctive movement of factory occupations "a conscious expression, with the final aim of socialising the means of production."

Both Chirino and the trade union representatives of Venezuela's state-owned electricity company CADAPE, stressed that worker-management was enormously progressive and was "the only way of defeating bureaucracy and corruption which are threatening the Bolivarian Revolution".

As part of the meeting, representatives from different worker-managed companies gathered to discuss and reach mutually beneficial agreements. They insisted however, that these were not merely commercial agreements, but rather that they were based on different principles of mutual cooperation, transfer of technology, etc.

Among the agreements signed was that between Venezuela and the Cipla-Interfibra-Flasko-Flaskepet group of worker-managed companies in Brazil. On the one hand, the Venezuelan state-owned petrochemical company Pequiven will sale raw materials to Cipla at preferential prices and on the other hand PDVSA will buy finished pipes from Cipla. But at the same time, the workers at Cipla-Interfibra will provide the technology and the know-how for Venezuela to set up a number of factories making PVC frames for windows, doors, and other construction materials. All this will allow Venezuela to by-pass the domination of the market for these types of plastic products by a handful of US multinationals.

The importance of this is that in reality the Venezuelan government is giving direct assistance to a group of factories in Brazil that have been occupied and managed by the workers and that have

been threatened on a number of occasions with eviction and jail by the Brazilian judiciary. This cannot but serve as an encouragement for workers in Venezuela and throughout Latin America to take over their own factories.

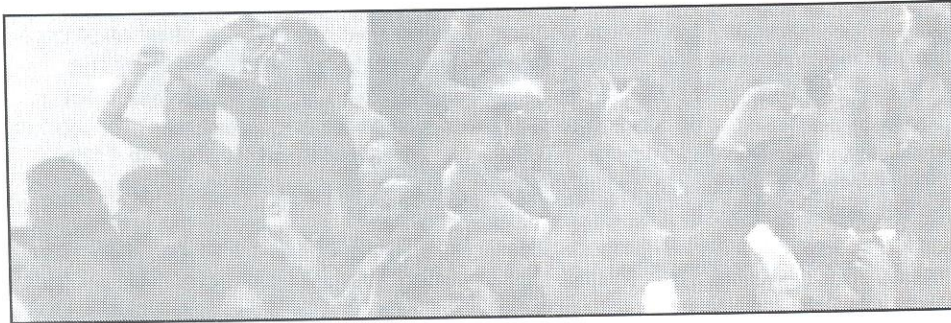
The Encuentro also had a marked internationalist character. The presence of a delegation from the Bolivian COB brought a breath of the revolutionary traditions of the Bolivian miners and workers. Jaime Solares, secretary of the COB, underlined the "key role of the proletariat internationally" and added that "socialism has not died, it is still relevant". He also warned of the threat of international intervention against the Bolivian revolution, particularly the threat posed by the recently created US military base in the Paraguayan Chaco region, on the border with Bolivia.

The situation in Haiti was also discussed. Julio Turra, from the Brazilian CUT said in no uncertain terms "Brazilian troops in Haiti are at the service of the empire". The final declaration of the trade unions present at the meeting called for the "withdrawal of occupying troops from Haiti, Iraq and Afghanistan".

Opposition to the FTAA

There was also strong opposition to the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement, promoted by the US administration. As Ricardo Moreira from the Uruguayan PIT-CNT explained, "the only real integration is not trade integration, but the integration based on the working class, which is the most revolutionary class". Argentinean trade union delegates announced a nationwide work stoppage on November 4 against Bush's presence at the Summit of the Americas in Mar





del Plata.

Finally, after three days of hard work and discussions, of sharing of experiences by different groups of workers who had been forced to take over their factories in order to save their livelihoods, 500 workers, trade union representatives and Venezuelan government officials (including Minister of Labour María Cristina Iglesias and a number of other Ministers) gathered for the closing meeting.

Los obreros sin patron

The mood was one of enthusiasm, and before the meeting could start, all the workers rose to their feet shouting the slogan popularised by the Argentinean factory occupation movement: "aquí están, estos son, los obreros sin patrón" ("here we are, we are the ones, the workers without a boss"). Nearly 200 workers had travelled from Argentina to participate in this event, and the Argentinean National Movement of Recovered Companies (MNER) had played a key role in its organisation.

The conclusions from the different workshops were read out and approved, and then a joint document, called "The commitment of Caracas" was read by a leader of the workers of the Caigua tomato plant and approved by acclamation. The workers from worker-managed companies had also passed their own political statement which explained the importance of the Encuentro. "We are here to push our movement forward, to defend it, to help each other and to strengthen our struggle against the common enemy of the peoples, capitalism, which brings war and plans misery throughout the planet". It also strongly defended the right to occupy factories: "The capitalists, the financial speculators and the multinationals are to blame for the bankruptcy of the companies. Every factory closed is a graveyard of jobs. (...) Therefore the workers in the coun-

tryside and the city have the right to occupy the factories and the land to defend their jobs and the sovereignty of our countries. This is why we occupied the factories and started production."

The statement greeted the announcement of more expropriations by president Chávez: "In Venezuela, which is living through a revolution, the workers have put on the agenda expropriation with workers' control of these companies in different ways. We greet the announcement of comrade president Chavez during the opening of this Encuentro, of two new expropriations of companies and that they should be under workers' control. This is what we all need in our countries."

It also explained the character and final aims of the movement: "We wish to advance to an economy under the total control of the workers so that it can be planned in the interests of the people as a whole. Our movement is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. It is a clarion call and an organised movement of the working class against the regime of private property of the large-scale means of production that is only capable of surviving through war and the exploitation and oppression of the peoples".

The statement warned of the dangers facing the movement: "Our resistance has not gone unnoticed by the bosses, by Capital and their international institutions, which attempt to prosecute and crush us. But they are also seeking ways of destroying our resistance by enmeshing the workers in different forms of class collaboration, tempting them with possibilities of individual integration within the capitalist system". To resist these attempts it was agreed to set up an international network of occupied and worker-managed factories. "From now on, we will rise as one if in any country the governments attack us or threaten to close down the companies we control".

Finally the statement concluded with

an inspiring call: "They steal the land, we occupy it. They make war and destroy nations; we defend peace and the integration of the peoples' with respect for their sovereignty. They divide; we unite. Because we are the working class. Because we are the present and the future of humankind. We call upon all to continue this struggle, to broaden it and to meet again next year to strengthen the unity and the struggle we are carrying out together with the working class as a whole and the peoples against the common enemy of humanity. Venceremos!"

The Encuentro undoubtedly will encourage the struggle of workers across Latin America and beyond. In the opening meeting Julio Turra from the CJT described how "when the Chavez government declares war on the latifundia, this is a source of encouragement for the comrades of the MST [Landless Peasant's Movement]. When it expropriates the bosses who organised the coup it is a source of encouragement for the comrades from Brazil who have been fighting for three years demanding that the government expropriates their abandoned companies".

Workers can run society

In Venezuela the meeting was not closed off within the four walls of the meeting halls, but went beyond. Reports of the meeting and documentaries on the occupied factories in different countries featured prominently on both state TV channels. Workers from the occupied factories were present and spoke on the weekly "Aló Presidente" programme hosted by Chávez. Now it is up to the workers and the trade union movement in Venezuela to take up the call, and get a list of the 700 factories that have been closed by the bosses and start recovering them. Here the workers so far have found a president who is sympathetic to their cause and has even encouraged them.

Without doubt, this was a meeting that will go down in the history of the Latin American trade union movement. In the words of Ricardo Moreira from the PIT-CNT, already quoted above, "we have shown how the workers can run the companies, and this means we can run society as well". □

The Second Congress of the Revolutionary Socialist Youth

by Andreas Bülow in Caracas

On November 5 and 6, around 20 young comrades participated in the 2nd Congress of the JSR (Juventud Socialista Revolucionaria, Revolutionary Socialist Youth). The congress, which took place in Barquisimeto, reflected an optimistic mood and was a big step forward.

The JSR is an organization which was set up in July 2005, the reason being that there are in Venezuela, a number of revolutionary youth groups, mainly based on a local or regional level, but none of them have managed to appear as a point of reference in the youth movement on a national level and gather together the vanguard in the universities, factories, etc., on a Marxist programme. The JSR was thus launched in order to fill this vacuum.

The JSR was founded mainly by two groups, the CMR (Revolutionary Marxist Current) and the FAR (American Rebel Front). The former is the Marxist wing of the Bolivarian movement, organizing within its ranks workers and youth, working to spread socialist ideas and advance the revolutionary process towards the expropriation of the capitalist class and the setting up of a regime of workers' democracy.

The FAR is a group in Barquisimeto which is active in the universities and colleges, etc. These comrades publish a monthly bulletin, the "Alba Estudiantil", which is distributed widely among the student youth in Barquisimeto. The October edition carried an editorial which ended with the words "For a socialist Venezuela – we fight to win!" with a picture of Trotsky on the front page.

The JSR has also attracted to its banner comrades in Merida, Tachira, Ciudad Bolivar and Falcon, but unfortunately they were unable to attend the congress for reasons of transport, lack of finances, etc. The project is open to all groups and individuals that want to fight for defence of the revolution and for a socialist transformation in Venezuela and internationally.

The first session of the congress was opened by comrades Carlos Mogollon and Pedro Jimenez, who

spoke on the international situation. They emphasized that the Bolivarian revolution is not an isolated phenomenon but a product of the general crisis that capitalism is facing on a world scale. The enormous contradictions between rich and poor are accelerating the process. The fact that the government of the richest country in the world, the United States, cannot even make a decent effort to help the victims of the terrible Katrina disaster shows what an impasse the system finds itself in. It shows that they cannot rule even their own country.

Tasks of the revolution

The session that followed was about the perspectives for the Venezuelan revolution itself. In his speech, Juan Marchán, the newly elected general secretary of the JSR, pointed out that the coming elections in December 2005 to the National Assembly will be vitally important. It is the duty of revolutionaries to participate in them and support the Bolivarian movement but at the same time advance the demand that a victory in these elections should be used to take the revolution forward by expropriating the capitalists and nationalizing the economy and transform it under a system of democratic planning.

Furthermore he stressed that the revolution is now struggling internally against bureaucratic tendencies. The bureaucracy is trying to consolidate itself within the movement but is meeting firm resistance from the revolutionary wing. In this context it is crucial to develop and extend a network of assemblies in each factory, university and school, etc., in order to develop an alternative power that can replace the old bourgeois state. For this purpose the vanguard of the movement must be organized in a conscious way in order to struggle against bureaucracy and for rank-and-file-democracy.

A particular important session was the one on the movement of factory occupations. This session was led off by Jorge Martin, the International Secretary of the Hands Off Venezuela



campaign. Jorge gave a report from the first Latin American gathering of worker-recovered factories. He pointed out that it was significant that the Venezuelan government had hosted and actively supported this gathering when all the other governments in Latin America had refused to do so. In this way, the Chavez-government is increasing its popularity in the eyes of workers throughout the continent.

At the end of his speech, Jorge stressed that in general this gathering had shown that the working class in Venezuela is advancing rapidly as an independent force and is giving a new impulse to the revolutionary process that is vital if it is to lead to a decisive victory.

The JSR has actively supported workers in struggle, such as the comrades of the Parmalat factory and it has published leaflets and also articles in *El Topo Obrero* (the paper of the CMR) and in *Alba Estudiantil* (the paper of the FAR). In various schools and colleges, cells of the JSR have been formed and are meeting on a regular basis.

The congress approved – with some amendments – a political programme that stresses that the JSR is an organisation based on the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and is open to all young people that accept its programme and are willing to fight for a socialist revolution in Venezuela and internationally. The second congress of the JSR, which adopted a political platform and with its optimistic mood was clearly a big step forward. The task is now to organise and extend the JSR to all schools and universities and also to the factories and other workplaces. □

PTUDC Earthquake Appeal:

Fourth Solidarity Caravan arrives in Kashmir

by Adam Pal

The PTUDC's fourth revolutionary solidarity caravan entered Pakistan through the Wagah checkpoint from India on November 6. There were four large trucks on this caravan carrying relief goods including 522 large tents, 4000 blankets, 300 quilts, 500 bamboos, flour, tea, sugar and other basic necessities. This is the second caravan to arrive from India in support of the PTUDC's relief campaign. Ms. Nirmla Deshpande MP, and her comrades have been organizing these caravans. The caravan was brought into Pakistan by comrade Ramesh Yadav and comrade Ranjeev Sharma and was received at the border by comrade Manzoor Ahmed, President of the PTUDC and Member of the National Assembly of Pakistan along with several other PTUDC activists.

At the border the goods were loaded onto four Pakistani trucks and the caravan started to move towards the devastated cities of Muzaffarabad, Rawlakot and Bagh in Kashmir and Balakot in Pakhtoonkhawa (the North West Frontier Province). Comrade Ilyas Amin took the caravan from Wagah to these destinations.

YFIS also held a meeting in Kashmir on 3 November (Islamic Christmas Eve) in an area in Muzaffarabad. 36 comrades, all of whom were directly affected by the earthquake, attended the meeting.

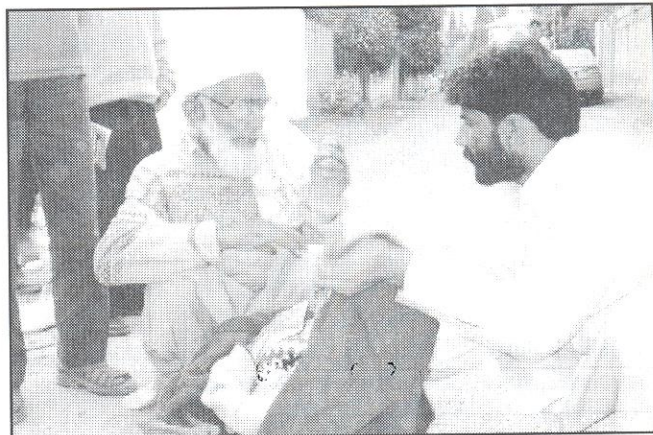
Most of these comrades lost their homes and close friends and family members.

Comrade Lal Khan addressed the meeting and spoke on the calamity and its political and social repercussions. He spoke at length on the economic and political perspectives of the region and the way forward for the Kashmiri masses.

The PTUDC relief committees were also re-organised at this meeting. Eight committees have now been established in each area, i.e. Muzaffarabad, Rawlakot and Bagh. These committees will operate from the three PTUDC/YFIS centers already functioning in these areas and will coordinate the relief camps and the relief effort.

The relief goods will be distributed from these centers and the comrades will personally distribute these items to the camps and to the remotest villages where the state has failed to deliver relief goods to the weak and the injured people in dire need.

The PTUDC/YFIS campaign is gaining momentum when other relief campaigns are dwindling. Another caravan from India will enter from Indian-held Kashmir next week. Ms. Nirmla Deshpande along with other Indian parliamentarians and trade unionists will personally accompany this



YFIS and JKNSF(MARXIST) leader Shujaat Kazmi distributing relief goods in Muzaffarabad

caravan while PTUDC activists in other parts of Pakistan are collecting money and relief items.

The PTUDC has so far distributed goods and relief items worth more than Rs 7 million, with much more planned. Comrade Manzoor Ahmed has expressed his personal gratitude to all those who have contributed to this relief effort. The PTUDC Earthquake appeal has been an absolute success. Today, Dawn and Metropolitan, published articles on the PTUDC's list of demands and caravans (you can see the scanned articles here and here). This shows that the campaign is having a big impact, not only in Pakistan, but across the subcontinent and around the world.

But there is still the urgent necessity to raise more money and goods. With the winter now fast approaching the people of Kashmir face yet another humanitarian crisis. The UN is reporting that if nothing is done immediately to solve this crisis, some 50,000 people will die - possibly more. We need to step up the campaign to ensure that we can continue to shelter the people in our camps and so that we can continue to gather and distribute relief goods to the devastated regions of Kashmir and Pakistan. We appeal to all who can, to please donate any amount they possibly can to our Earthquake Appeal. □

The PTUDC/YFIS rescue and relief committee of Muzaffarabad



Magnificent response to PTUDC Appeal So Far

by Atif Nazar, Secretary PTUDC Britain



Following the earthquake which hit Kashmir in September the PTUDC immediately sprung into action. We launched an immediate appeal for solidarity messages and importantly finance to help the relief work. Every penny we have raised from the movement has gone straight towards this work under the supervision of the unions in Pakistan. So far we have raised over £8,000 to finance the work.

The PTUDC has established medical and relief camps, and have organised five aid convoys, two from Pakistan and three from India, with more planned. But despite all the publicity in the media the stark reality has not yet struck home to the wider public: it is hard to imagine three million people made homeless, many of them children; many of them now amputees as a consequence of their injuries, and many thousands more of them underfed and doomed to die of exposure upon the arrival of the merciless winter. It should not be like this - and in a socialist world it would not be like this. But we live in the harsh world of capitalism, where only ordinary working people have any real compassion for the poor and disaster-stricken. The PTUDC has acted swiftly and effectively in getting food and medical aid to outlying villages and establishing three refugee camps, and medical centres. Their efforts have provided food, shelter, and medical care to several hundred helpless victims, and in so doing they have saved the lives of many who would have otherwise perished.

We would like to thank all the read-

ers of Socialist Appeal who have helped make this work possible. We have had donations big and small with people giving what they can afford in solidarity. We reproduce some of the highlights here.

Thanks to:

NUJ Central London Branch £1499, PCS Leicester Network £64, CWU City West £200, CWU Central London £50, AUT Hull £100, CWU Wolverhampton £100, Harlow Trades Council £25, Ted Crawford £600, Robin Jamieson £500, Alan Butterworth £400, Tam Burke £420, ND Hargreaves £250, Tracey

Warren £200, Jim Brookshaw £150, Darra Murphy £100, Terry McPartlan £100, AJ Bird £100, Dr A Arslan £100, Dr Doris T Doberenz £100.

Thank you to everybody who has contributed. In making this appeal we are well aware that there are many causes deserving your support, but there is no cause which needs it so urgently, and there is no cause for which your help will be put to good use so quickly and effectively. Please contribute what you can. □

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An epoch of profound instability: The revolt of the French estates

by Greg Oxley

As I write this in early November the riots in France have continued to grow and show no sign of abating. And now they have spread to over 200 districts. Thousands of cars have been burned; hundreds of offices and shops have been vandalized. The CRS (compagnie républicaine de sécurité – French riot squad) and the police are overwhelmed, demoralized, and exhausted by the ordeal. The estates of France's large cities have now become battlefields.

The immediate cause of this revolt was the death of two young people, who, fearing that they would be caught in the net of yet another police raid, took refuge in an electrical installation. But beyond this tragic incident, the scope and extraordinary vigour of this movement can only be explained by the effects of unemployment, poverty, and social and racial discrimination, which have accumulated over decades. It is also a reaction to the cynicism of that parasitic and corrupt class which sits at the summit of the "Republican order", which daily pours its scorn on the "scum on the estates", and whose reactionary mentality is perfectly embodied in the provocative, disdainful and aggressive language of Nicolas Sarkozy.

No effort has been spared in stigmatising the revolts and in hiding the real reasons behind their fury. The rioters are all supposed to be hooligans, criminals, and even idiots manipulated by gang leaders. In fact, they are nothing of the kind. What is happening is an uprising of the youth – not of the gilded youth, but of the most oppressed, the most downtrodden, and the most desperate youth. The bourgeois are shocked by their methods? These youth are not "civilised" enough? But

could it be that the explanation for their rude manners (according to the tastes of the bourgeois) is to be found in the fact that they have for the most part grown up in absolute misery, not to mention police brutality!

Is there even one of these youth who has not been the victim of poverty or discrimination? Yes they are full of hatred. However, contrary to what we often hear, hatred is not always a negative thing. Hatred can be a powerful lever of human emancipation when it is directed against the injustice of this evil system.

From the point of view of militant communists and trade unionists, there is much that can be said about the methods used by these youth in revolt. These are not the methods of the workers' movement. They are missing the mark. We cannot approve of the destruction of schools, nurseries, businesses or even vehicles. But such activities are in the nature of this type of mobilisation. Before the emergence of the first trade union organisations in the 19th century, there were many cases of workers in despair who destroyed factories and machines, or attacked property indiscriminately. But the youth we are talking about do not know the world of work – and many of their parents are themselves excluded from it. In many of the districts the employment rate is around 40%. Amongst

the youth themselves, many disapprove of such actions – but different from striking workers, who have organisations and the authority to make collective decisions, they have no means of stopping them.

Be that as it may, the attitude of the government and the media towards such destruction is completely hypocritical. They shed crocodile tears. We understand perfectly the anger of the workers and the families who are suffering as a result of this destruction. These workers and families have nothing to do whatsoever with the social causes of the riots. They are themselves the victims of capitalism. But it is necessary to say one thing: even if these riots were to continue for another twelve months, they would not be able to destroy as many businesses, jobs, or public services as the vandalism of the hooligans – dressed in suits and ties, but hooligans all the same – who sit on MEDEF (Movement of French Enterprises) and the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement).

De Villepin and Chirac have called for a restoration of "order". De Villiers has also called for order, and has recommended sending in the army to put down the rebellion. But what kind of "order" are we talking about? It is the order of a republic that is rotten to the core, based on racketeering and corruption. It is an order where a small number of big capitalists submit the whole of society to their hunger for profits and power. It is an order where the youth are supposed to passively accept their lot in life, where the workers submit meekly to the laws of the market, where the rich grow richer while poverty and precariousness become generalised. The implacable hostility of Sarkozy towards the



"estates", blithely presented as the breeding ground of Muslim fundamentalists, criminals, or even terrorists, is nothing but the other side of his hostility towards the workers of the SNCM (Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée), the RTM or any group of workers that attempts to struggle against privatisations and social regression.

This rebellion ties in with what is brewing within the French working class. It is a challenge to the trade union movement, to the Socialist and Communist parties, who must not ignore such an important movement. If asked to choose between these courageous, combative, defiant, youth in revolt – despite all their faults due to their political inexperience and their lack of organisation – and the hardened representatives of capitalism who have sent the CRS against them, we have no problem in deciding where we stand.

When François Hollande [a leader of the French Socialist Party] refuses to demand the resignation of Sarkozy, under the pretext of not wanting to encourage the riots, he does nothing but encourage Sarkozy himself. Having said that, the resignation of Sarkozy is not enough. We must demand the resignation of the whole government – that is to say the immediate calling of new parliamentary elections.

The youth do not need moralising speeches, but an audacious and revolutionary programme of action, as implacably opposed to capitalism as capitalism is opposed to us. The "blind" riots of the type we are witnessing, are not only the direct result of the impasse of capitalism; they also flow from the failure of the 15 years of Left governments we have had since 1981, in which the representatives of the PS (Socialist Party) and the PCF (Communist Party of France) were content to pass a few minor reforms that did nothing to change the rapacious and reactionary character of capitalism. The last government of the Left even carried out a large-scale programme of privatisations, which Chirac, Raffarin, and de Villepin have simply continued since 2002.

Today, our task as Communists is to patiently explain to each

youth, straight and to the point, to each worker, to every unemployed person and pensioner that capitalism means permanent social regression, and that there is no other means of reversing this tendency as long as the banks and big business remain under the control of the capitalists. We must extend our hands in solidarity to these youth in revolt; explain to them that no riot, no matter how large and widespread, will be able to solve their problems. We must invite them to get organised with us, to consciously prepare and seriously struggle for the overthrow of capitalism.

The representatives of capitalism will supply the truncheons, the teargas, and the handcuffs necessary for the "re-establishment of order". But they cannot resolve any of the problems that crush these youth. Indeed, these riots will inevitably end by fading away. But their deep-seeded causes will remain. Amongst the youth who are braving the brutality of the CRS today, will be found a good number of fighters for the cause of socialism – as long as we address them in a language they understand, a revolutionary language.

In the final analysis what is being prepared is a revolution. The capitalist system is absolutely incapable of meeting the needs of the people. Its existence has become incompatible with the social conquests of the past. Its representatives attack the working class, the unemployed, and the pensioners. Unemployment, uncertainty and misery are on the rise. At the moment when de Villepin speaks of easing the "suffering" of the youth, the government and MEDEF are launching a new attack on unemployment benefits. The revolt on the French estates is a concrete expression of the sharp tensions that have built up within French society. These riots are further proof – together with many other factors – that France has entered an epoch of profound social instability, in the course of which the workers of this country will have to face up to the challenge of putting an end to capitalism. □



**Iranian Workers'
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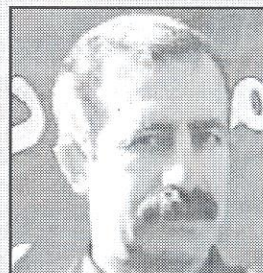
On Saturday 12 November 2005 the Revolutionary Court of the Islamic Republic pronounced its verdict on the three remaining labour activists arrested in Saghez on May Day 2004. According to this verdict of the regime's court Borhan Divargar, Mohsen Hakimi and Mohammad Abdipoor have each been sentenced to two years in prison.

On Wednesday 9 November 2005 the verdict of the court of the 'Islamic Revolution' on four of the activists arrested in Saghez was pronounced to their lawyers. According to the court's verdict Mahmoud Salehi has been sentenced to five years in prison and three years internal exile and Jalal Hosseini to three years in prison. However, Hadi Tanoomand and Esmail Khodkam have been acquitted.

The Workers' Action Committee and Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network, together with their international collaborators, will continue their campaign until the charges against Mahmoud Salehi, Jalal Hosseini, Borhan Divargar, Mohsen Hakimi and Mohammad Abdipoor have all been dropped. We call on all Iranian and other groups and individuals to support us in this task.

We strongly condemn the verdict of the Islamic Republic's court!

We will continue international protests until all charges are dropped!



Mahmoud Salehi
5 years in prison and 3
years internal exile



Jalal Hosseini
3 years in prison

**Workers' Action
Committee (Iran)**

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Israeli Labour Party Elects Trade Union General Secretary As New Leader

by Yossi Schwartz in Israel

Tony Blair was not the only Labour leader to face defeat recently. In Israel Shimon Peres, the veteran Labour leader, lost his position as leader of the Labour Party. In the elections for the Labour leadership Amir Peretz won 42.35 % of the votes, while Shimon Peres only managed 39.96 % and Benjamin Ben Eliezer came in third with 16.82% of the votes.

Where will Amir Peretz take the party? It is too early to be sure in which direction the new leader of the Labour Party will move. However, it is clear that his victory came as a big surprise to many and most likely even to himself. His victory has caused a small earthquake throughout the entire Israeli political system.

As the *Haaretz* (November 11, 2005) pointed out, "The Labor Party woke up yesterday to a complex morning. To say the least. For 40 percent of its members, the morning was the dawn of a new day. A historic, dramatic, earthshaking turnaround. For those who voted for Peretz, the outcome yesterday before dawn breathed life into an expiring body, a moment before its death was certified."

One thing is quiet sure. Had Shimon Peres, Haim Ramon, Dalia Itzik and Ophir Pines-Paz, remained in the leadership of the Labour Party they would have continued to play second fiddle to Ariel Sharon's government. In such a scenario Sharon would have no problem in staying in power not only until November 2006 (when the elections are due), but most likely also through to November 2010 as he would get the backing of the old Labour leadership.

With Peretz at the helm of Labour, the political scenery in Israel is changing. Given his background, for the first time in years, the country will have two major parties that do not look like twins openly serving the capitalist class.

The right wing in the Labour Party led by Peres have been following a policy diametrically opposed to this kind of programme and it has even considered splitting from the party. On Thursday, Peres, who refused to congratulate the

new leader, spread the news that he had decided to take a break and suspend his political activity in the Labour Party. However, his collaborators were not ashamed to say that he is now considering forming a new party with Ariel Sharon, that the latter would lead.

Remember that Sharon also has his own problems inside the Likud. Recently he only narrowly defeated Netanyahu in internal party elections recently, and he too was threatening to split if he had lost control of the party.

However, Shimon Peres' declaring something on the eve of the elections is one thing and doing it is another. Before taking such drastic measures, the right wing of the Labour Party may want to wait and see whether they can't bring Peretz "to his senses".

Shimon Peres took the Labour Party into Sharon's government in January as a junior partner, under the pretext of backing his withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, but in reality Peres wanted to stay in the coalition until the next scheduled elections in November 2006, and even beyond. Amir Peretz on the other hand has declared that Labour would withdraw under his leadership and he is working to secure early elections this coming March or May.

Will Labour now withdraw

Although it is not certain which way he will go, it is already clear that Peretz is not acting as a leader of a genuine



socialist party who wants to lead a fight, but as a compromiser who is giving his enemies the time to recover from the shock his election as the new leader of the Labour party has caused and to reorganize themselves.

Instead of accusing Peres of disloyalty to the party for threatening to split it and thus break with him and instead of announcing a withdrawal from the government, as he was threatening to do, Peretz met with Vice-Premier Shimon Peres on Friday, and after the meeting declared that he would "do everything possible to ensure that the ousted party leader assist him in the decision-making."

Not only this, but according to Israel Radio, in the first party meeting with Peretz as the new leader a decision was made that the party leadership would meet only in three weeks' time to decide whether to quit the government! Consequently on November 16, the Labour Party in the Knesset did not support a motion of no confidence in the government. That is not a good way to start for someone who claims to represent the interests of the workers. Appeasing the right wing of the party will not advance the interests of the workers one millimetre.

The right wing of the Labour Party, mostly middle class Ashkenazis, many of them generals, represent the interests not of the workers and the poor but of the middle class elite who are connected to the capitalist class. On the surface it would appear as a question of Ashkenazis versus Jews of North African origin, but we should not be misled by appearances. It is a class question rather than one of ethnic origin.

Amir Peretz was born as Armand Peretz in the town of Bojar in Morocco. His father was the head of the Jewish community and owned a petrol station. The family emigrated to Israel in 1956. They were settled in the poor underdeveloped town of Sderot, where Peretz was one of the few who graduated from high school. Unlike the usual politicians in Israel who were generals in the army he reached only the rank of

captain, and after being wounded in the war of 1973 became a farmer. In 1983 he became the mayor of Sderot on the Labour Party ticket. In this position he tried to improve the education system in the town.

In 1988 he was elected a member of the Knesset. In 1994, Peretz joined forces with Haim Ramon and Peretz became Ramon's deputy in the leadership of the Histadrut. Ramon took it upon himself to strip the Histadrut of its economic enterprises, but instead of nationalisation under workers' democratic control they were sold for a few pennies to private capitalists.

Peretz became chairman of the Histadrut in December 1995. During his early years at the head of the Histadrut, Peretz was regarded as a militant. At that time there were many strikes. However, in recent years Peretz has moderated his position and has been responsible for putting a stop to many strikes.

During the years of the former finance minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in spite of his left wing rhetoric, he was quite cooperative with the government's further push toward structural and financial "reforms". This in effect meant handing over Israel's economy known in the past for its publicly owned economy under the control of the Histadrut and the state to the few rich families that rule Israel.

In 1999, however, Peretz resigned from the Labour Party to form his own party, Am Ehad ("One Nation"). Am Ehad won two seats in the Knesset in the General Election of 1999, and three seats in 2003. Clearly this could not lead him to his personal ambition of becoming the Prime Minister of Israel!

As many of the past welfare reforms were destroyed by the policies of finance minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Peretz became more popular among Israel's Jewish working-class, as he stood out as an oppositionist. He then decided to use the Labour Party as his vehicle to power and Am Ehad merged with Labour in the summer of 2004.

After the merger, Peretz ran for the leadership of the Labour Party on a platform of ending the coalition with Likud, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and returning to Labour's historical social democratic policies and to the welfare state.

The *Haaretz* has shown some concern at such a figure becoming leader of the Labour Party. In the same article

quoted above, and referring to his programme, it said:

"Perhaps he would not do all of this immediately, but can one doubt that he would implement a large part of these specific commitments and others within a short time if and when he is elected prime minister? This would be an economic earthquake that would make the political earthquake seem negligible."

However it then gave the Israeli ruling class something that may help to calm their nerves. It added that:

"They say that Peretz is a sane politician, stable and practical, and that he will not make changes or upheavals that will likely spiral out of control and cause harm to the economy and society; he will surround himself with veteran politicians and experts who will analyze and present to him the implications of decisions such as those he outlined in the interview."

In other words, they will surround the man with the same people who decide economic policy today and point out to him that any meaningful reform would be "harmful" to the economy and gently push him back to the right.

Contradictions

He recently declared that within two years of taking office he "will have eradicated child poverty in Israel". While he makes such statements, that are clearly popular with workers, he has also stated that he is committed to a market economy. Here we have the underlying contradiction in Peretz. On the one hand he has promised much to the workers, but on the other he says he respects capitalism, for that is what the "market economy" is. If he refuses to go beyond the confines of Israeli capitalism, then he will come under big pressure to fall into line.

Similarly, Peretz, on the question of Arab-Jewish relations holds "dovish" positions. He was an early member of the "Peace Now movement". He was also, in the 1980s, a member of a group of eight Labour Party Knesset members, led by Yossi Beilin, who supported the idea of a two state solution. He is on the record as saying that the unresolved conflict with the Palestinians is the reason for rising inequality. He has opposed the settlements on the West Bank, saying that these use up funds that could have helped to solve these problems.

Having considered all this, if we

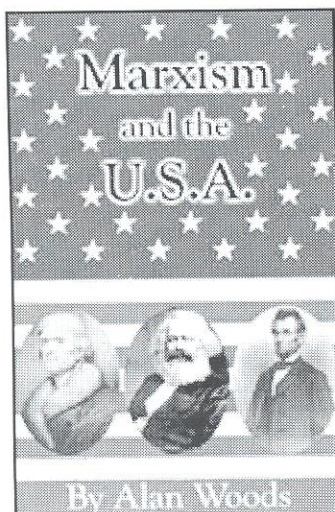
want to make some international comparisons, he is more like Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva than Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

Although we note his record and we see the contradictions in his statements, clearly his victory reflects a growing polarisation within both the Labour Party, where a right wing and a left wing have now emerged, and within Israeli society as a whole, between those who have and those who have not. We can expect that under his leadership the Labour Party will look more like a traditional social democratic party, supported by the workers and poor in Israel. It is not by chance that a man whose power base was and is the Histadrut has replaced the traditional officer caste that dominated the Labour Party. It would not be the first time in history that in a moment of crisis a Labour Party has been saved by a leader of the unions. Peretz has more authority among the workers than the old Labour guard.

Therefore Marxists should not give Peretz a blank cheque, nor present him as a great socialist. But we should give him critical support whenever he takes a step to the left. We should support any real move he may make in support of the workers and the poor. We should demand within the Israeli labour movement that he sticks to his word and organises the struggle against cuts, privatisation and so on. And we should criticise him whenever he fails to advance the cause of the working class. It is in fact possible that many new activists could join the Labour Party under this new leadership. We should be in touch with this layer and have a friendly attitude to the workers who join the party. As there is no real alternative, even this party can reflect the pressures of class struggle in the future.

We say to these new activists who now trust Peretz but not Peres: demand a clear lead from Peretz, remove Peres and the old guard once and for all, leave the government now and fight for a Labour government that would unravel all the anti-working class policies pushed through by successive governments over the recent years. Unless this happens, then in spite of the new leadership's words, the Labour Party will be sucked back into collaboration with the Sharons of this world and those who will suffer are the workers and poor. □

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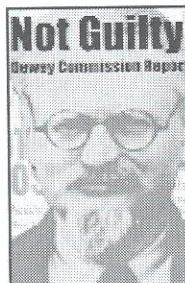
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

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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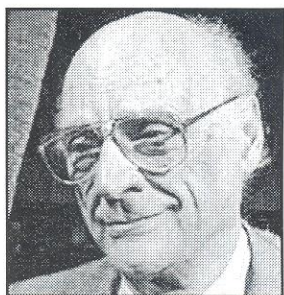
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Remembering Arthur Miller

Edited by Christopher Bigsby
Published by Methuen
Reviewed by Phil Mitchinson
(The full version of this review can be read at www.marxist.com)

Arthur Miller was perhaps best known for his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. This brought him a degree of celebrity not normally associated with playwrights in our age. It would be a shame indeed if this were to be his epitaph. He should be remembered instead as a great writer - perhaps even as America's Shakespeare.

An integral part of that great writing was that Miller was a very political man. The FBI opened its file on Miller as far back as 1938. His most overtly political act was his appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee of Senator Joe McCarthy where he steadfastly refused to name names. This was an act of tremendous courage in itself in an era when even General George Marshall was denounced as a Communist. Many lives were ruined, some even lost. Miller exposed this in his play *The Crucible*. He shed light on the darkest side of the American Dream, a theme looked at from many different angles in his works.

There is, in fact, a link between Miller's appearance at the McCarthy witchhunt and his famous marriage. "I knew perfectly well why they had subpoenaed me, it was because I was engaged to Marilyn Monroe." Richard Eyre remembers him saying. "Once I became famous as her possible husband, this was a great possibility for publicity. When I got to Washington... my lawyer received a message from the chairman saying that if it could be arranged that he could have a picture, a photograph taken with Marilyn, he would cancel the whole hearing. I mean the cynicism of this thing was so total, it was asphyxiating."

"Arthur Miller's political ideas can be understood as the best elements of socialism," David Thacker, a contributor to the book, explained to me, "above all the idea of freedom," that denied by the Stalinist tyrannies as much as by capitalist dictatorships whether open or hidden behind the façade of democracy. This meant a struggle against oppression in general, and in particular [the

book records the time he spent campaigning quietly for individuals under attack]; for the freedom to think, to believe; the freedom to gain control over one's life.

All Miller's plays are intensely political. They are not diatribes, politics and ideology are not rammed down one's throat. They are political because they are concerned with humanity and with society. Roy Hattersley, another contributor to the book, once wrote that Thatcher should see Miller's plays. At the time Thatcher and co were announcing that there was 'no such thing as society', spurring on the individualistic, egotistical morality of the 1980s. This was anathema to a man like Miller, for whom the theatre brought people together to better understand themselves as individuals and as social beings, as the editor of the book, Christopher Bigsby, explains in his introduction.

What concerned Miller was the dialectical interaction between individuals and society. Both the impact of society on the lives of individuals - the oppression of chains or of dreams and illusions - and also the effect an individual's actions can have on the whole of society. This interaction means it must be possible for people to act to change themselves, and also to change the world around them. Such optimism is inherently revolutionary.

The ability of individuals to change things is an important theme in many of Miller's plays. Often they fail, or do not try as they should, but it is our duty to try. We can succeed. This is the purpose of Miller's theatre: to think, to move, to change the world for the better.

Miller was archetypally American, yet his characters are universally recognisable, not least because Miller was the first to place working class characters at the front of the stage. Productions of his plays are always taking place somewhere in the world. His *Death of a Salesman*, perhaps his most powerful treatment of the American Dream, was a great success even in China. The Young Vic theatre in London staged many of his works over the years, to the extent that, in the words of the former artistic director David Thacker, he became their "resident playwright."

David explained to me the close connection between the Young Vic and the American playwright: "Part of the *raison d'être* of the Young Vic was to perform for those not used to the theatre, those who might find it forbidding or alienating. For example young people, and working class people who are led to believe that 'the theatre is not for them', or else is boring, dull, and doesn't connect with their lives.

"If performed well Miller's plays are powerful enough to overcome these prejudices and misapprehensions and reach a broad audience.

"The power of the plays lies in three key factors. Firstly, they are language based, they deal with ideas, they are intellectually stimulating and challenging. At the same time the words are poetry." Miller's precision in writing led Dustin Hoffman, another contributor to the book, to describe his characters' speeches as "arias".

"Secondly they are political, they deal with the interconnections between human beings, the impact of an individual's actions on society and vice versa, and that dialectical interaction means we have the power to change - ourselves, our relationships, our society and the whole world. That optimism, the potential of humanity, of ordinary working people, leads to the notion that it is our responsibility to make those changes, a duty that cannot be ducked.

"Thirdly they are emotionally powerful. The audience doesn't just think, they feel, laugh and cry. They evoke an empathy which is central to the desire to bring about political change. One can empathise because the character can be recognised and the story can be followed. Arthur said to me once, "if you told the story to a guy on a train he'd get it."

Arthur Miller died on February 10, 2005. Those who knew him remember him for more than his marriage to Marilyn.

Remembering Arthur Miller is a fascinating insight into the life and ideas of arguably America's greatest playwright. Appropriately it consists of anecdotes about the interrelationships between people. Stories about opening nights and rehearsals mingle with those about planting trees, and building furniture. His skill as a raconteur, he was above all a storyteller, is combined with his ability to put those he worked with at ease. We see glimpses of his political ideas and his literary skills. Most of all what we see is his humanity. □

fighting fund

LET'S GO FOR IT!

FIRST OF all I would like to wish all our readers and sellers a Very Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year and to thank everybody for their support during 2005. The success or otherwise of our fighting fund appeals is down to you and we are all most appreciative of what has been given, not least by those who can least afford it.

For technical reasons I am having to write these words well before the end of November. So I cannot comment on how much has been raised this month for the fighting fund but the final amount raised by the end of October was an excellent £966, just under £35 shy of the target. Well done, but we cannot rest on our laurels. This is the time when the maximum effort is required to get the maximum result. Every seller should ask themselves: how much can I raise? Who can I approach for a donation? What fundraising ideas can I act on? Every reader should also ask themselves: what can I personally give? The £7,000 target for the winter drive is based on the urgent needs we have to keep going over the next period.

We should be confident that this target can be reached if everybody plays their part. The tremendous response of readers, activists, workers' organisations and so on to the urgent earthquake appeal organised by the PTUDC in October shows what can be done if people are properly motivated. That appeal not only showed that workers are prepared, when it is necessary, to make tremendous personal sacrifices to help people in desperate need - far more so percentage wise than governments and big business - it also showed

what can be done if a proper organised appeal is made, explaining what it is for and why a donation should be made. The defence of socialist ideas is something every reader and seller should care about. All the experts of Capital were more than happy to write those ideas off as irrelevant and out of date - but they have been proved very wrong indeed.

Xmas is supposed to be a time of hope, yet capitalism and imperialism with their ruthless policies of war and exploitation work very hard to deny that hope. Only socialism can provide a real future for humanity. A sacrifice now will be repaid a hundred fold in the future for us and those who come after us. So please donate what you can.

Donations can be made in a number of ways: Send a cheque or PO, made payable to Socialist Appeal, to us at PO Box 50525, London E14 6WG. You can pay cash or cheques, made payable to Socialist Appeal SC, over the counter at any branch of Abbey National, quoting account number K2018479SOC. You can pay cash in at any post office using TransCash quoting sort code 72 00 05, account number 625 286 01 (reference BB Club). You can also donate using your credit card by phone by ringing our offices on 0207 515 7675 and asking to speak to me OR by going online at www.marxist.com and clicking on the special Xmas donation box, which will be up and running from Dec 1st and will link you to a secure donation option within the wellred booksite - you can also order your Xmas book presents at the same time! Thank you in advance!

Steve Jones

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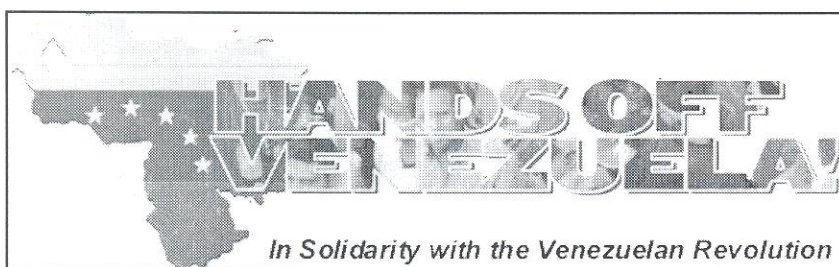
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The editors of *Socialist Appeal* would like to wish all our supporters a very Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year.

2006 will prove to be a very important year in the international struggle for socialism and we look forward to working together to build international solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution, and with workers and youth in struggle everywhere.

In Britain, too, there will be important battles for the labour movement over pensions, jobs, and the non-stop attacks of the bosses on workers and young people. *Socialist Appeal* will be there to report, to analyse, and to fight alongside all those struggling to repel the attacks of Blairism and capitalism. With your help we can build the sales of *Socialist Appeal* and help to spread the ideas of Marxism.



noticeboard

Dec/Jan 2005/6

"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

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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

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Socialist Appeal Stands for:

✎ **No to Blairism! 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

Keep Profiteers out of schools and colleges

'For people in the Labour Party, education is not a policy but a passion. We believe it is the single biggest liberator of human potential; the gateway to equal opportunity; and the driver of future economic prosperity.' With these stirring words Tony Blair started his article about his proposed education reforms in the *Guardian* of November 18th. Then he merrily continued with a rant claiming to defend us against the evils of the "old" education system. He argued that "the greatest myth is that our education reforms are designed to benefit the middle class at the expense of poorer families". For once we must agree with Tony. But for different reasons. The middle classes are being led to believe that they will be OK under these reforms - they can simply 'choose' to shift their kids to nice middle-class compounds away from all those horrible inner city types who can be left to their own devices. But the truth is that even they will not do well - the 'reforms' are really intended to benefit a bunch of millionaires who have enough money to invest in what could be a very lucrative business at the expense of society, or as politicians like to put it, the tax payers. The same applies to the health service - the other promised land of untapped profits being offered up to them. This just shows how detached from the socialist values that inspired the Labour Party these creatures really are.

Now Blair asks us to trust him - again! It seems a bit of a cheek to ask for trust when his own Chancellor has openly said he does not trust a word of what he says.

Blair is trying to convince us that the private and voluntary sector are dynamos of energy willing to help the students and the poor of society without reward, Dickens could have not invented a character more sinister. But, as a Labour MP pointed out, talking about the Parliamentary uprising that is gathering like a storm, "if you think that we are going to hand over our education system to a bunch of second-hand car salesmen and religious fanatics, think again".

The school meals issue which has been in the press over

the last year has rather given the game away about the real methods of the private sector in education.

Something that was highlighted, not by any politician, but by TV cook Jamie Oliver. Lenin once said that a workers' democracy will mean that any cook can be a bureaucrat. It appears that some cooks have much more common sense than most of our bureaucrats. The fact is that this particular cook has proven that the smokescreen thrown up by education officials about the difficulties for schools in providing proper school meals is just that - a smokescreen which has hidden the fact that schools provide rubbish meals which cost them very little, yet make a nice profit for all the various catering companies which infest the education system.

Where the private sector has got its claws into education, be it through outsourcing of services or the much trumpeted city academies, the result has always been the same - less quality for more cost. Opening the doors of our schools and colleges to these profiteers is like giving a blank cheque to money grabbing companies looking for a quick buck with little risk to themselves. We have seen this before and will see it again unless we act. The rebellion on 90 days detention must be repeated on these education counter-reforms - but this time with a bigger margin. Pressure must be put on all Labour MPs to remember who they represent and who voted them in and not allow any more Thatcherite policies to be introduced, on education or anything else. The labour movement and the unions must organise a serious campaign to defend jobs and services and accountable control over our public services including health and education. Schools are being promised more local control, in reality these reforms would mean more power ending up in the hands of central government who in turn will be acting as paid servants for big business. Don't let it happen - fight back now both to defeat these attacks and throw out the Blairites from our party so that we can have real socialist policies that will give us the education service we and our children need.

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