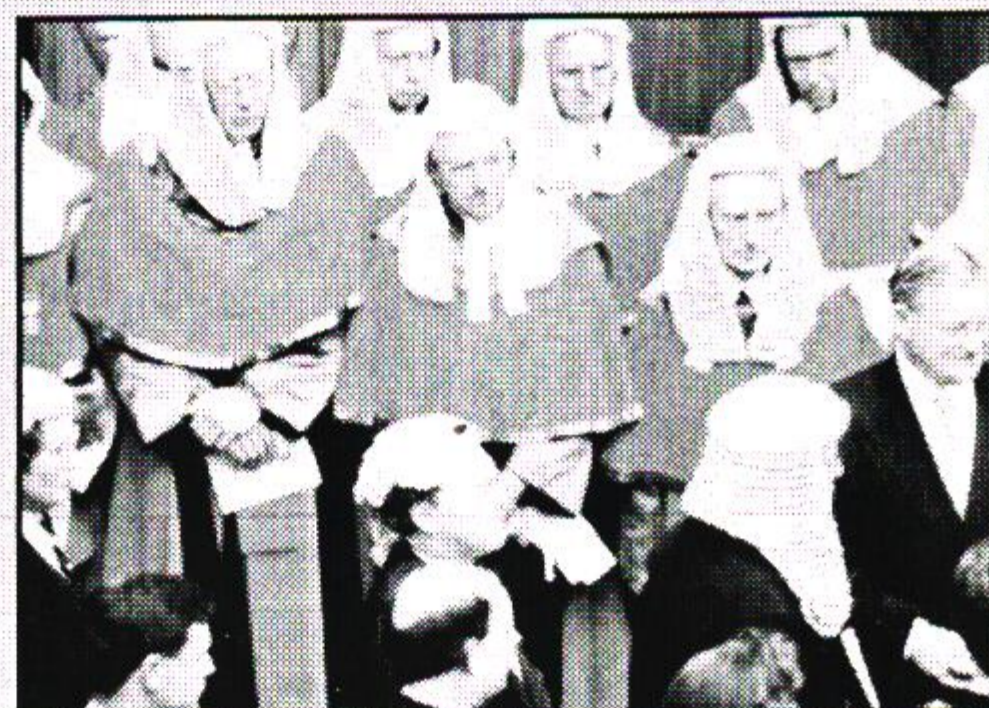


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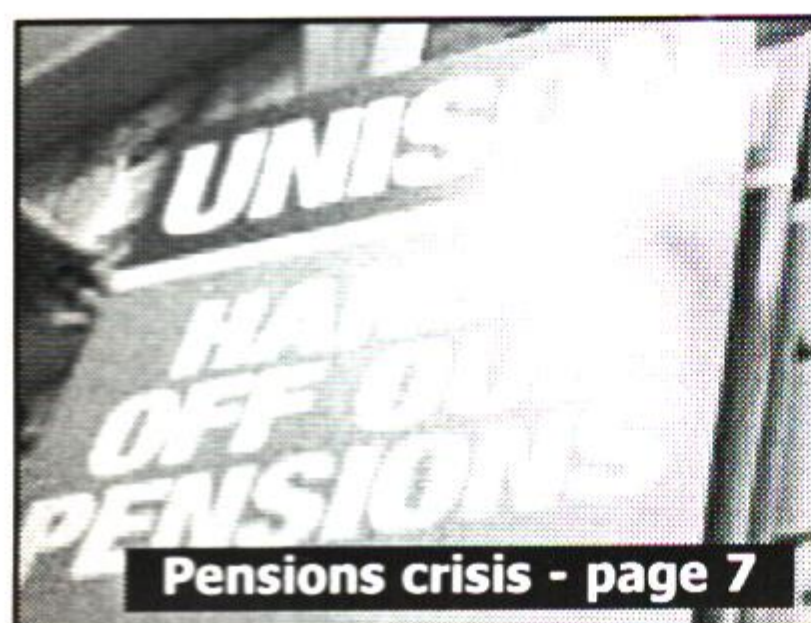
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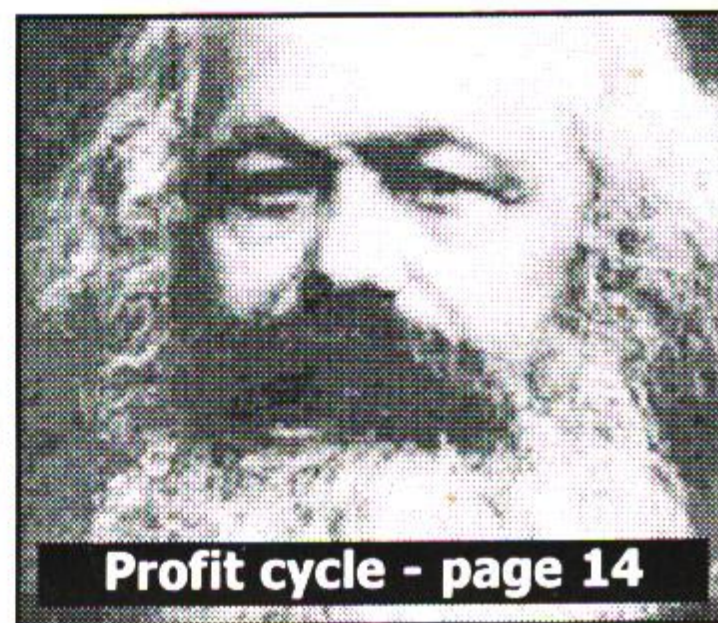
Lies, deceit, corruption...



Blair must GO!



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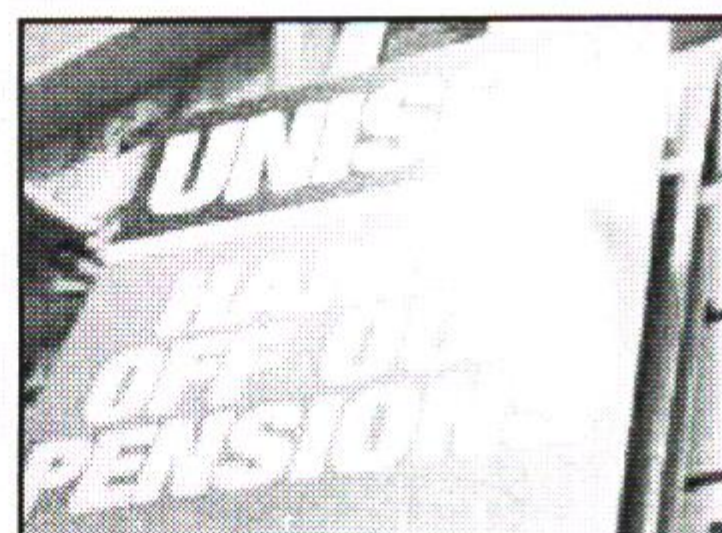
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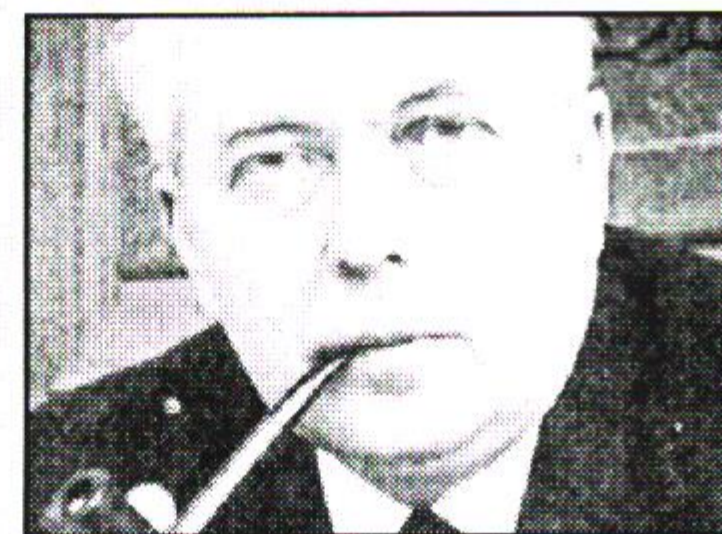
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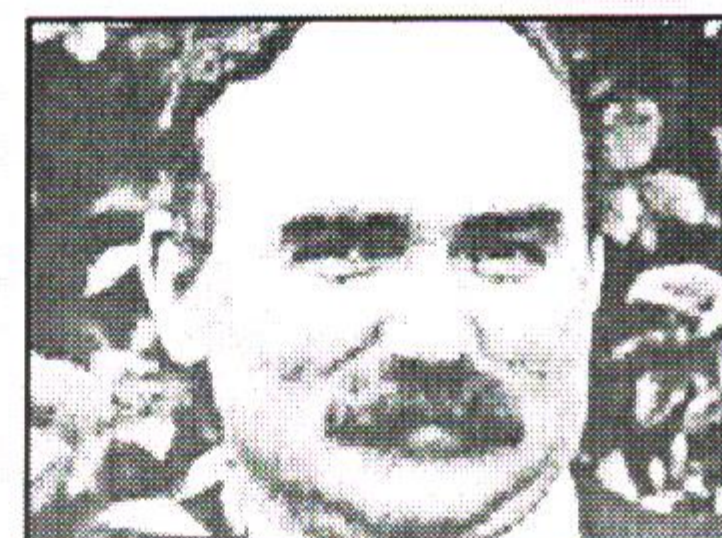
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The Deadline for Issue 142 is April 17

Blair's Legacy: Lies, debt, and the dead of Iraq

"Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive"

Sir Walter Scott

BLAIR HAS spun many a tangled web during his reign. It is precisely the term spin with which he has become synonymous. As for deceit, Blair and co have certainly had plenty of practice, from the non-existent weapons of mass destruction, and the supposed threat of Britain being attacked by Iraq in just 45 minutes, to secretly borrowing millions of pounds behind the back of Labour's treasurer. As he ponders his 'legacy' he can rest assured that it will be lies, debt and the war in Iraq for which he will be remembered.

Yet when Blair was first elected he promised his government would be 'whiter than white', a phrase meant to distance himself from the sleaze of the Major years. The political hue of New Labour's policies on every front has been true blue. Now, for the first time, the Labour leaders have discovered the colour red. Unfortunately, it features not in their policies but in the party's accounts. Blair and co have landed the Labour Party in the red to the tune of £14 million.

Some of the dozen millionaire lenders to whom this money is owed offered to give the money to Labour, out of an altruism that, they insist, should not be linked to any promise of personal gain. So why were Blair's big business backers told to convert their pledged donations into loans? There is no other conceivable answer than to hide the identity of those giving, and the amounts, in order to obscure the link that would inevitably be made once they were awarded the peerages for which they were paying.

Why were these big business backers giving Blair money, anyway? Well, he who pays the piper calls the tune. In today's rotten borough of Westminster, it seems, they also decide the policy, win the contract, and get a title into the bargain. Now they are not getting those titles they want their money back, with interest.

One such millionaire was Ron Aldridge, the boss of a company called Capita, which provides a wide range of contracted-out public services, includ-

ing call centres for the BBC and the NHS. Coincidentally, Capita has made millions from the government contracts it has been awarded.

Blair has recently claimed that his religious beliefs convinced him it was right to go to war in Iraq. Exactly how this moral piety (that is, sending thousands off to their deaths) squares with the underhand spivvory of 'loans for lordships' is hard to say. His sanctimonious sermonising about crime and respect now jars heavily with a Metropolitan police investigation into the selling of titles to pay for his re-election.

SNP MP Angus MacNeil told the prime minister: "Even before the loans scandal, before the Metropolitan police investigation, 80p in every pound of individual donations to the Labour Party came from people who were subsequently ennobled by you."

Selling influence

The business of selling influence and titles has gone on for many years. The cash-for-questions controversy undermined Major's Tory government. There is something rotten at the core of British politics. The corridors of power stink of degeneration and decay. Labour now has a majority in the House of Lords for the first time in its history - hardly surprising given the numbers that are evidently buying their titles from the government. The real scandal is that these feudal anachronisms still exist in the 21st century.

This loans for lordships scandal is not just a squalid mess, it illustrates the decline of British capitalism and its institutions. It also has important repercussions.

Blair and co, in alliance with their friends the Tories (past masters of sleaze, who even now will not reveal the source of their own million pound loans) will argue that the only solution is state funding of political parties. In reality this is just a cover for an attempt to break the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party. This is what Blair and the ruling class have wanted all along, but the Blair project failed, and it must not now be allowed to sneak in the back door.

The pressure is mounting on Blair to resign. He now leads what is effectively a minority government, forced to rely on Tory votes to defeat the Labour opposition behind him, as we saw over the education bill. This is not the Labour government of 1997-2005 with a big majority and little effective opposition.

However, this is more than just an attempt to install Brown into Number Ten. It is also preparing the way, later on, for the return of a Tory government. Capitalism is becoming nervous at the militancy developing in the trade unions, and the opposition on Labour's backbenches. New Labour no longer represents a solid enough base to carry through the measures they require. Blair has served them well. Brown prostrates himself daily before the City, Murdoch and co to demonstrate that he is worthy of their support. They are convinced of his good intentions, but not of his ability to deliver in the new situation that is developing. At some point they will want to reinstall their first eleven.

In Blair's final days he is apparently concerned about his 'legacy'. The list is very long. The countless dead of Iraq. The NHS billions in debt - while PFI corporations rake in the profits, beds and wards are closed and staff sacked. Civil Rights torn to tatters. An education system increasingly based on ability to pay. The Labour Party half the size it was when he was elected, and millions of pounds in debt.

Blairism will be remembered as a low point in the history of the labour movement in Britain. Even as it draws its last breaths, a new period is being prepared, not in the leadership of Gordon Brown - which represents the most minor cosmetic change - but in the public sector wide strike over pensions. The conditions are being prepared for almighty battles in Britain, economically, socially and politically. Through the course of those struggles the working class will transform and retransform all their organisations. The trade unions have the power to clear out the cliques of Blair and Brown from the Labour Party. The end of Blair must be the beginning of the struggle to reclaim Labour, as part of the struggle for socialism. □



MAY DAY GREETINGS

An appeal to all Labour and trade union organisations.

It is our intention to once again carry May Day greetings from organisations and individuals from the movement in our May 2006 edition.

Our struggle is the struggle of the international working class. May Day is an important date in the calendar of the Labour and trade union movement and we are therefore asking all readers to consider sending us greetings and messages of solidarity for

inclusion in this edition. Our rates are very reasonable and different sized designs are available. In addition, and at no extra cost, all greetings will be placed on our websites to be viewed by people in struggle from all around the world.

Sizes available are:

12cm/20cm - cost £60	8cm/14cm - cost £30
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GMB recall conference

by a GMB member

OVER 500 delegates attended the recall congress of the GMB to discuss the findings of the inquiry into allegations of corruption and fraud during the 2003 general secretary election.

The report detailed allegations against campaigns run for Kevin Curran, the former general secretary, and the current deputy general secretary, Debbie Coulter, involving Labour MPs and employers that helped in the campaign. The report accuses a Newcastle firm of solicitors of mounting a "phone bank" operation to cold call members, stuffing thousands of envelopes and paying for election addresses.

Delegates expressed anger and shock at the report and the congress accepted its findings unanimously.

A series of rule changes were passed. These included allowing those holding temporary positions to stand in elections, thus enabling Paul Kenny, the current 'acting' general secretary, to stand in the election.

Candidates for the general secretary's position will now require nominations from 30 branches in order to stand.

Nominations for election of GMB general secretary and treasurer will close on Wednesday 26 April and voting will begin on Monday 8 May. □

Finsbury tenants say SAY: BIN IT!

Council tenants in Finsbury, London, have launched a 'Bin It' campaign to oppose plans to build blocks of luxury private flats on their estates.

The plans were commissioned by Islington Council in conjunction with the government-funded New Deal for Communities. NDC's remit is, ostensibly, to improve the quality of life of people living in inner-city areas. Tenants in Finsbury are under no illusions.

Finsbury lies on the fringes of the City of London, within walking distance of London's financial centre. The prospect of owning and renting out luxury flats to well-paid City workers must be enough to make any property developer salivate. What's in it for council tenants? Well, for a start, our estates would be turned into one huge building site for the foreseeable future, with the consequent noise, dust and traffic. The award-winning children's play centre and adventure playground, which provide free care and activities for children during school holidays, would be demolished to make way for a block of private flats. Likewise the youth centre and a community centre. Radnor Street gardens, one of the prettiest and most natural green spaces in London, a mini Hampstead Heath, with hundred-years-old trees and a natu-

ral, hilly topography, would be 'landscaped'.

On the plus side, Finsbury leisure centre will undergo a multi-million pound refurbishment from the proceeds of selling off land. There will be a multi-storey state-of-the-art football complex. That's great news indeed for council tenants. As one tenant forcefully pointed out at a recent 'consultation' meeting, the present football pitches cost £50 an hour to rent. Not surprisingly, local kids and local schools don't seem to use them that much. The kids on the estates have to make do with a patch of concrete, and the dads organise cricket matches for them on the grass outside the flats. Good news for City corporations who want to keep their workforce fit, though.

Needless to say, tenants aren't going to take all this lying down. 'Bin It' signs have appeared on lamp posts. Tenants have occupied meetings of the NDC. Telephone networks have been set up. At a tenants' association meeting on my estate, one elderly lady said she would chain herself to the railings if anyone tried to 'landscape' Radnor Street gardens.

Watch this space ...

NUJ Conference backs Venezuela

by Steve Jones, London Central, NUJ

THE ANNUAL delegate conference of the National Union of Journalists, meeting in Liverpool, once again pledged 'its solidarity with all those in Venezuela who are resisting American imperialism and building a society orientated towards socialism'.

The 45,000-strong union gave its support to the solidarity work of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign and agreed to the '1) building of links with the UNT trade unions, 2) promoting the gains made by the Venezuela workers, 3) publicizing the union's opposition to any interference by the USA in Venezuelan internal affairs'.

The motion which came from the Book branch of the union was moved by Sylvia Courtnage and seconded by Steve Jones, both of whom outlined the successes of the Chavez government and the need for the union to maintain its position of solidarity with Venezuela.

The annual conference also welcomed the launching of Vive TV and Telesur 'in an effort by the Venezuelan people to counteract US sponsored misinformation across Latin America and as a vehicle to extend education, culture, arts and progressive ideas throughout the continent.'

This resolution, submitted by the London Central branch, was seconded by journalist Ian Bruce from the BBC. He praised the new media in Venezuela in its efforts to provide an alternative viewpoint to the opposition-dominated media.

The resolution went on to instruct the National Executive to build solidarity with and send messages of support to these new broadcasting bodies. Both resolutions

were passed without opposition.

Once again, journalists have sided with the revolution in Venezuela. Hopefully this growing support will become increasingly reflected in the media.

HOV again held a fringe meeting at the conference and a number of books, DVDs and pamphlets were sold to interested delegates and visitors. □



Unison in Wales calls on National Conference to back Hands Off Venezuela

by Mark Turner, Branch Secretary, Cardiff County Unison (personal capacity)

CARDIFF COUNTY Unison branch, one of the biggest union branches in Wales, recently passed a motion in support of Hands Off Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution. The intention was (and still is) to send this resolution from the branch to the union's national delegate conference. All such resolutions are then submitted to the union's regional council which can choose to back one of them as its own, or submit a different resolution in addition to the branch motions. The campaign to build support for the revolution in Venezuela, and for the solidarity work being organised by Hands Off Venezuela received a massive boost when the Cymru/Wales Regional council decided to back Cardiff's motion. This is encouraging for two reasons. First of all it is quite rare for the Regional Council to submit a resolution on an international matter.

Secondly, the support of the region should ensure that this becomes a priority motion. This is very important because a similar motion from a different branch last year - without the backing of a region - was not prioritised, and therefore, despite the best efforts of many delegates, the motion fell off the end of the agenda and was never discussed. It seems the NEC of the union were not too keen to discuss building support for Venezuela and HOV. This year they may have little choice. The resolution has still been submitted by the branch to conference. In the event that there is any attempt to put pressure on the region to withdraw its support we will fight to ensure that the wishes of the Regional council and the Cardiff branch to discuss the Venezuelan Revolution and support Hands Off Venezuela is not brushed under the carpet again. □

Three Amicus workers sacked in political witch-hunt against the left

by Kris Lowrie, Secretary 'Campaign for Democracy in Amicus'

THREE FULL time workers employed by the trade union Amicus have been sacked amidst allegations of undermining the General Secretary Derek Simpson. Two of the workers, Jimmy Warne and Des Heemskerck, helped lead the successful election campaign against Sir Ken Jackson in 2002 and were employed by Derek Simpson following his victory. The third person Cathie Willis was employed in the Amicus head office at that time and played a pivotal role in the election campaign. A fourth person Marian Stopes, is also facing disciplinary charges but has yet to have her disciplinary hearing.

The sackings follow a six-month suspension from September last year during which for the first two months the staff were not even told the reasons for their suspension. The notices of dismissal were delivered from Amicus by motorbike courier on a Friday evening, with one of the suspended receiving his letter at 11.20pm at night, a deliberate act designed to cause maximum upset and distress to him and members of his family.

Part of the allegations against the three are that internal union documents were leaked last year to an independent website called 'Amicus CC', which used them to support various allegations against union officials, which many feel have not been properly investigated, even though they have appeared in widely circulated journals such as Private Eye.

The union leadership went to extreme lengths to back up their spurious claims (including full independent forensic examination of computers, etc). These revealed nothing.

The three who have been sacked deny all of the allegations that they leaked this information but no investigation has been held into other possible sources of the leak.

Other charges being levied are farcical. One charge accuses the three of distributing a leaflet at the TUC when they were not even present, with one of them on holiday in Turkey totally unaware of his suspension until he arrived home! A charge of undermining the management of the union has been made purely on the evidence that the three made a number of phone call's to each other! There is no actual evidence to back any of the charges against them only false witness statements and supposition.

None of the accusations are true. What is clear is that the charges have been trumped up as part of a political attack by Simpson to lean on left supporting officers in the union and to isolate and discredit the three.

Last year Derek Simpson gave a free hand to Les Baylis together with other right wingers to attempt to set up a rival organisation to the Gazette, called ATU network, that aimed to 'abolish the past' and set up as a 'centre left' organisation. After this attempt failed pro-Simpson supporters mobilised for a 'packed' Annual General Meeting of the broad left organisation, Amicus Unity Gazette and very narrow-

ly defeated two of the sacked, Jimmy Warne and Des Heemskerck, as Chair and Editor of the Gazette. Derek Simpson is now the driving force behind an attempt to split the left to create the conditions which could allow him to abandon his commitments to lay democracy and control (on which he was elected) without serious challenge.

The sacked three all support the principle of election of officials, an election commitment that Simpson now wants to drop in the merger talks with the TGWU and GMB unions.

An important message of support to the sacked workers has been sent by the T&G Broad Left, who have expressed their concern at this development in Amicus and it's implications for the proposed merger.

A support organisation called 'Campaign for Democracy in Amicus' has been set up to defend the three. This was launched at a lobby of the Amicus National Executive committee held last month. The protesters were calling for the sacked workers' internal disciplinary appeal hearing to be heard by ACAS as a way of trying to prevent a kangaroo court from pushing the dismissals through.

The campaign organisers are appealing for donations to finance the fight against the attack and to assist in legal costs to defend the three. There

will be a national tour of conferences, branches and shop steward committees and a leaflet will be distributed to shop stewards and branches to defend their position. □



● The campaign can be contacted at

www.campaign-democracy-Amicus.org

Local Government workers strike to defend pensions

by Pam Woods, shop steward, Islington UNISON, personal capacity

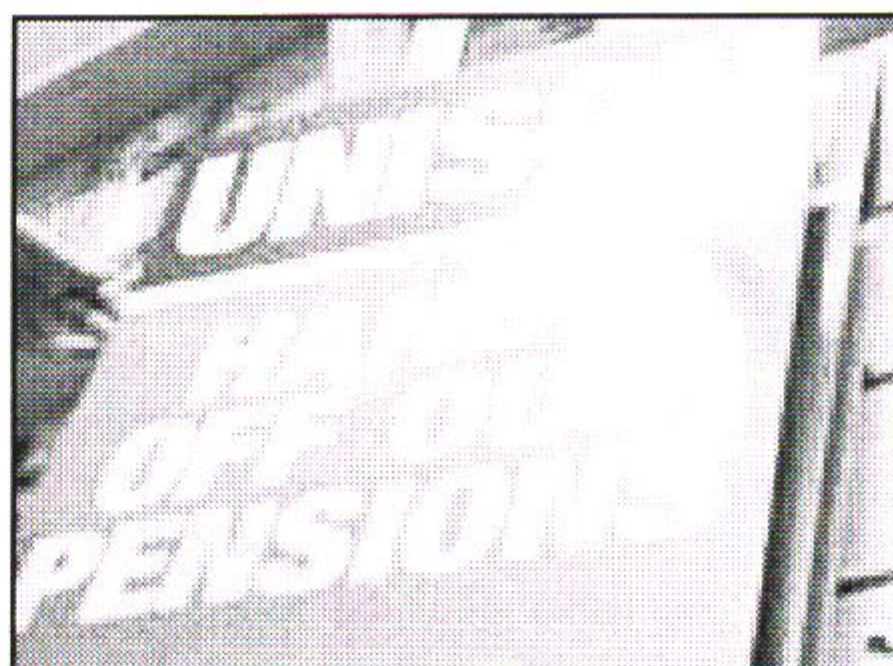
IN THE biggest strike since the historic general strike of 1926, nearly a million and a half local government workers have struck in defence of their pensions.

Town halls, schools, colleges, police authorities, fire stations, toll bridges and airports were among the services affected as workers sent a message to the government: leave our pensions alone! In all, workers from nine trade unions took part in the co-ordinated action on March 28th. The mood of the strikers was bolstered by the knowledge that their brothers and sisters in France were, on the very same day, engaged in a general strike to protect their contracts of employment.

For the first time, those workers whose jobs have been hived off to private companies also took part in the strike. This is a huge step forward. In the past the unions have refused to ballot these workers. Under Tory anti-union legislation, left in place by the 'New' Labour government, any strike action by workers that is not directly against their actual employer - in this case the private contractors - is deemed to be 'not a legitimate trade dispute' and, therefore, illegal. This has been an enormous barrier to solid and effective strikes in the past.

The government plans to abolish the so-called 85-year-rule. This is the rule whereby workers whose combined age and number of years in the pension scheme total 85 are able to retire on full pension at the age of 60. It is worth noting that 75% of all workers in the Local Government Pension Scheme receive a pension of less than £96 a week. This is after many years of paying a proportion of their wages each month into the scheme. The average retired woman worker receives only around £31 a week from the scheme.

It is significant that one of the reasons the LGPS is in financial diffi-



culty is that councils now employ a significantly fewer number of workers than they did 20 or so years ago - yet the workload has remained the same! There are therefore fewer workers still working and paying into the scheme and supporting those workers already retired. In addition, many councils took so-called pension holidays, the shortfall from which many have never made up.

Last year, a national strike involving all public sector workers was called off at the last minute when union leaders cut a deal with the government. This allowed the government to make concessions to teachers, firefighters and NHS staff, leaving local government workers to stand alone. Therefore, while teachers' pensions are, for the time being, untouched, not so classroom assistants'. Firefighters' pensions are also currently not under threat, but those of administrative staff in fire stations are.

Union leaders had been heavily involved in negotiations with the government in the run-up to the strike on the 28th, and it would appear they were confident a deal could be brokered. But it is clear that the government has dug its heels in. More strikes are now planned, including one on the day of the local elections in May.

It is vital that the utmost unity between all the unions involved be preserved. Workers from the different unions participated in joint pick-

ets and rallies. We must ensure the union leaders also continue to work together to achieve maximum unity and maximum effect.

The union leaders must ensure that workers whose jobs have been privatised but whose terms and conditions still rely on local government collective bargaining agreements be allowed to participate in any future strikes on other issues, even if this means breaking the law. The present government has no intention whatsoever of repealing the anti-union laws and the unions must therefore be prepared to challenge them, even at the risk of sequestration of assets. The miners' union found ways around the threat to sequester their funds and assets during their strike of 1984-85, including a mass occupation of the regional offices in South Wales. It can be done again.

We must also be vigilant that the union leaders make no concessions on other fronts, such as a possible increase in employee contributions, in order to preserve the 85-year-rule. Workers entered a contract with the employers when we joined the LGPS. That contract is not negotiable. Workers have paid into the scheme in good faith, making significant financial sacrifices to do so. We have a right to receive what we were promised, and at the age we were promised. □

- **Our pensions are not negotiable - no concessions!**
- **Maximum unity! Force the government to back off!**
- **Dignity for retired workers!**

Scottish Labour: Urgently Needs a Transfusion of Socialist Ideas

By Gray Allan, Falkirk CLP delegate (personal capacity)

THE SCOTTISH Labour Party Conference was held in the Highland winter sports capital Aviemore from 24th to 26th February 2006, a small town filled with outdoor clothing shops and hotels surrounded in February by snow covered hills.

Party delegates were cocooned against the biting wind inside the plush MacDonald Highland Resort Conference Centre surrounded by police, security fences and watched by circling helicopters.

All this added to the sense of unreality. There were however some signs of hope. There were some limited gains for the Left. Gone are the days when all policy documents appeared from the bowels of the party's Partnership & Power process - an enigma wrapped in a mystery. Now contemporary motions are allowed on to the agenda. These can even cover issues that are matters for the UK government unrelated to Scotland. Composites are forged and the trade union voice is again to be heard from the rostrum. These developments allowed local government pensions to be debated and carried. CIA torture flights through Scottish airports were also condemned in composite 5 which called on the Scottish executive to ensure that no facilities are used to aid "rendition" In her reply to this debate Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson agreed that the CIA allegations were serious, torture was illegal and its detection and prevention is a police matter. She pledged that the Executive would co-operate with any enquiry but she did not announce any proactive measures over the allegations by the

Executive.

The energy debate saw two resolutions being supported by delegates. One, moved by Amicus and the NUM, called for the replacement or renewal of coal and nuclear power plant and the lifetime extension of Hunterston B nuclear power station. The second motion which was from SERA called for increased Government funding of renewable energy source research and development as well as energy efficiency measures. Scottish Labour is again facing in 2 directions at the same time in the energy debate.

During the Pensions debate Scottish Minister Tom McCabe conceded that the Executive would have their legal opinion on early retirement tested and that the Executive would work to avoid industrial action in local government over the pensions crisis.

There were sound bites aplenty in the Health debate. Andy Kerr the Health Minister repeated the principle of an NHS "free at the point of use" heavy emphasis was placed by platform speakers on the importance of the ban on smoking in enclosed public places as the most progressive public health measure for decades.

On local government reform McCabe slammed fat-cat Council bosses "duplication and demarcation" that lead to inefficiencies in Councils. Steven Purcell, New Labour leader of Glasgow City Council called for the pace of local government reform to be speeded up! Together these comments will fill local government employees with alarm.

Following the debacle of the Dunfermline by-election the Liberal Democrats were firmly in the sights of the Labour leadership with Tony Blair attacking their local income tax plans as being bad news for those earning more than £40,000 a year. Blair himself literally dropped in to Conference

on the Saturday afternoon, delivered by a military helicopter! All that was missing was the flak jacket!

In his speech, watched by some delegates from the TV monitors in the coffee area, to the annoyance of the Party apparatchiks, Tony Blair laid out his future plans.

Declaring that Labour was "the Party of economic stability - on the side of business and the work force" he declared that the Government was on the side of the people and that the status quo was never the answer to problems. To underline his point he announced a new Cabinet post of Minister for Social Exclusion.

There was no sympathy for opponents of Council Housing stock transfer from Minister Malcolm Chisholm. He declared that the Edinburgh vote against the transfer of stock to third party landlords was a tragedy! Opponents were quite wrong to portray stock transfer as privatisation, claimed Chisholm. Try telling that one to tenants struggling to exercise democratic control over a "community" housing association!

The Conference saw the pantomime spectacle of soft armchairs and a coffee table being wheeled on to the platform each session for a question and answer session with Executive ministers - seen by many delegates as a time wasted that could have better been used for debate on resolutions. An example of the stage management of Conference. Less than 30% of the time was given to speakers from the floor intervening in debates. The same amount of time was given to set piece speeches from the leadership.

The fringe meeting organized by the Campaign for Socialism on the publication of the new 'Red Paper for Scotland' was well attended as was the meeting held by UNISON on the Revitalising Scottish Labour, with Michael Meacher speaking about the Labour Commission investigating the state of democracy within the Party.

And the report on Labour in Scotland following the Conference? Not dead yet but in urgent need of a transfusion of socialist ideas and activists. □



Opposition Mood Growing in Eastern Labour Party

by Phil Sharpe, Eastern Region Labour Party Conference Delegate (personal capacity)

A RECORD number of delegates and visitors attended a very lively Annual Conference in Clacton. The friendly atmosphere hid a determined mood of opposition to the policies of the Government.

220 Delegates and visitors discussed documents on Transport, the Economy and Housing. A large number of young union delegates, representing unions such as the CWU, UNISON and the GMB were present. Unusually, there was an election needed for a place on the Regional Executive for Youth. Young people from Constituencies and the University of Essex Labour Club were present.

Discussion took place in workshops, with a general discussion only at the short report back session. This meant that there was little time for general discussion and debate.

On Housing there was agreement on the need for homes for "Key workers", but a recognition that the main way to achieve this was through Council Housing. It was pointed out the private sector would not build the mod-

est target of 5 million homes in the next 20 years.

One motion was taken, supported unanimously, on support for the London Mayday demonstration.

Lunch times and evenings were taken up with Fringe meetings. An interesting discussion took place at a meeting organised by the Socialist Campaign Group, where the speakers were Kelvin Hopkins MP (Luton) and Barry Camfield (Assistant General Secretary of the TGWU). The Trade Unions had placed great store on the so-called Warwick agreement, made between them and the Government, to improve their members' conditions. Nothing had been achieved so the unions have launched a campaign to get a Trade Union Rights Bill passed allowing secondary action by members in the light of the experience of the Gate Gourmet dispute last year.

During this meeting, and at conference itself, delegates expressed frustration at the policies of the Labour Government. Further opposition was expressed against the way the confer-

ence was organised.

Guest speaker was Northern Ireland and Wales Secretary of State Peter Hain. He started his speech by referring to the ejection of Walter Woolfgang from last year's National Conference and mentioned that he should not be heckled as he had two Northern Ireland armed police with him!

However, Hain did try to address some of the concerns of members over Party membership levels and the result of the recent by-election in Scotland. He did not accept that there was a need to change policies but there was a need to inspire the membership!

The Eastern Region of the Labour Party has a proud tradition of opposition to the leadership and this year's mood may well reflect the early joy at the end of Blair's term. The conference needs the opportunity for more discussion of both Regional and National issues rather than being confined to the straight jacket of centrally produced documents. □

It's the SSP Double Act!

by Richard Vivian

IN THE aftermath of their recent dreadful Dunfermline by-election showing the SSP brought out their big guns for a public meeting held in Dalkeith, Midlothian. Tommy Sheridan celebrated his election to the Vice Chair of the SSP by pairing up with convenor Colin Fox in what is being described by the SSP as 'a re-engagement with the people of Scotland'. With a series of meetings entitled "People before Profit" The double act brought an attendance of 80 making it one of the biggest political meetings held in Midlothian since the miners' strike in the 1980's. Tommy Sheridan did not disappoint his supporters with a rousing and blunt condemnation of New Labour flavoured with his usual biting Glasgow humour and a declaration that the SSP is now the party of public ownership. Tommy told the audience, that any thoughts of changing New Labour into a socialist

party was like 'raindrops dropping on a wall' and that the Labour Party had lost its usefulness to working people and was now a vehicle of the establishment. Colin Fox complimented this knock-about performance with his own brand of humour ending up by claiming that the SSP had now replaced 'old Labour' as the party of the working class and urging people to join the SSP to build a socialist Scotland.

The meeting was high on rhetoric and low on any basic detail of how the SSP would achieve a Scottish Socialist Republic. No explanation was given on how a future independent SSP government would deal with the thousands of defence workers made redundant by the closure of Rosyth and other military bases. Questions from the floor related to the SSP apparent u-turn on the nationalisation of North Sea oil were brushed aside. It was only when pressed by other *Socialist Appeal* supporters asking, why, if the SSP was an alternative to Labour, was there such a

poor showing in Dunfermline that any analysis was offered. Tommy Sheridan explained that their party was, at present, in a similar stage to the Labour and Trade Union Representation Council before the Labour Party was formed early in the 20th century, and had not had time to build up the same amount of support that the Labour Party had with their long history. Managing to keep a straight face, Tommy explained that whilst canvassing in Dunfermline many people had approached him to state that the only reason that they would not vote for the SSP was that they wanted to give Labour a bloody nose! This begged the obvious question as to why the protest vote went to the Liberal Democrats and not to the SSP! However, this was a successful meeting for the SSP and it appeared that they gained a few members. *Socialist Appeal* supporters sold 19 journals and were made welcome by the many genuine socialists in the SSP. □

Public turn up the heat on health board & MSP's over hospital proposals

by Kenny McGuigan

THE "PUBLIC consultation" by Lanarkshire Health Board Trust's proposal to close the Casualty at Monkland's Hospital drew 500 people to Airdrie Town Hall - with hundreds locked out! Public anger is at fever pitch following the Trust's announcement that Monklands is "their preferred option for closure". The other 2 hospitals in the area are PFI built; Wishaw, in First Minister Jack McConnell's constituency, and Hairmyres in Andy Kerr, Health Secretary's.

Monklands is one of the busiest Accident and Emergency departments in the country, but the Trust contend that to improve services they must shut one of the 3 casualty's and centralise services. Public resistance is at boiling point. In 20 odd years of political activism, I have never known people so enraged about a single issue. Public feeling was not lost on John Reid, the Defence Secretary, who flew by helicopter from the Budget to be at the meeting. This is one political hot potato for local Labour MSP's, Karen Whitfield and Elaine Smith, who have both campaigned to save Monklands but are not bothered if Hairmyres unit shuts.

The Trust hired a PR company at £35,000 to produce a film outlining the case for closure. The restless audience remained unimpressed. The Trust Board then outlined their need to close one of the departments. First to speak from the floor was John Reid, who appealed for a "nice civil discussion...but if one of the hospitals has to close it must not be Monklands", he said. You could almost see him reaching

for the white flag. If only this warmonger would be so nice and civil about Iraq! Reid set the tone for Karen Whitfield who refused to endorse the strong local campaign to retain all 3 units. However, as the meeting progressed, the contributions, especially from trade unionists, addressed the real issues of PFI, the affect on the vulnerable and the strain on the ambulance service.

It has become clear that the Labour MSP's, local party officials and Reid himself are worried about their positions. Calls to save all 3 departments were met with loudest applause. There are 2 campaigns evident - one from the MSP's and their supporters to save Monklands and so their political skins, the other, Lanarkshire Health United, backed by North Lanarkshire Trades Council, the SNP and SSP. It is this campaign that has captured the imagination and high ground at this time and is fighting to save all 3 units.

- Kick the profiteers out of the NHS. End internal markets in our hospitals. No to the privatisation of services.
- Sack the Health Board Trusts whose financial mismanagement is at the root of the NHS troubles.
- For a free universal publicly funded health service free at the point of need and based on the needs of patients, not the convenience and profit of the market.
- Labour MSP's throughout Lanarkshire must defend the NHS, opposing any closures.
- Nationalise the drug companies who leech off the health of working people. Compensation on the basis of proven need.

Militant Student Action in France - We Should Follow Their Lead

by Evan Gibbs, Edinburgh School Students Union

ECHOES OF May 1968 have been sweeping round France this last month as the country has been rocked and much of its education system brought to a standstill by militant action from high school and university students. This all came in response to France's Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin outlining a proposal called the CPE or 'first job contract'. This would make it a lot easier for employers to sack young workers and students have correctly seen this as a counter reform: an opportunist attack on the gains that the French labour movement has made in the past.

On 11th March one of the first stages of the resistance came under fierce attack as police marched into the Sorbonne, a university in Paris last occupied in 1968. On 16th March there were mass demonstrations in most cities. In 16 provincial cities, the demonstrations numbered at least 50,000 according to the police figures, more than 100,000 according to those of the organizers. Notably there were 25,000 people demonstrating in Bordeaux according to the organizers (6,800 according to the police); 15,000 in Marseilles (7,000); 15,000 also in Reindeers (5,000); 7,000 in Dismiss (5,000); and 5,000 in Grenoble, Orléans, Brest and Strasburg, according to the organizers. These protests caused the closure of hundreds of high schools nationwide and over 70% of France's Universities were blockaded, according to France's Student Union.

Action in Nantes spread further than just the university when 2000 to 3000 school students blockaded the train sta-

tion on the 14th. In Nantes all university buildings except the school of medicine were blockaded. Student meetings are getting huge attendances.

On Tuesday 14th in Paris students clashed with police in a day of 1968esque struggles that involved at its height, in and around the College de France, students armed with rocks and metal barricades fighting against police armed with tear gas.

This clearly shows that the polarisation of French society is reacting to form a cocktail of resistance. There is clearly a crisis of confidence in French society. There were riots that affected the entire country in late 2005, and now the students or France are in rebellion. This also follows from the rejection of the E.U. constitution earlier on in 2005. The question is will this just add to the catalogue of events or will the French youth be joined by the working class as a whole in this rebellion? If not, will any lasting impact be left? This is part of a process of change and polarisation affecting all classes in French society.

Now, the task of socialists in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, has to be to galvanise support for the French students, but not only this it is our task to build a youth movement and spread our message to the wider movement, so that we can build youth consciousness and hopefully emulate what is happening in France. The mistreatment of young workers is a worldwide issue. There is no future on offer anywhere for young people under capitalism. □

The Wilson plot: More fact than fantasy?

by Steve Jones

THE 30th anniversary of Harold Wilson's resignation as Labour Prime Minister in March 1976 has been marked by a whole series of articles and TV programmes, mainly concentrating on Wilson's career and the events of the 64-70 Labour government and the period which followed it. This was the cue for endless stuff about the Beatles, short skirts, werewolf haircuts and people marching on various demonstrations. Some discussion went beyond these exercises in nostalgia and considered the possible reasons for Wilson's sudden departure. There had been no pressure for him to quit; certainly no warning - yet suddenly he was gone and Sunny Jim was in Number 10.

Conspiracy theorists have spent the last 30 years speculating on this. Most observers now agree that the main reason for Wilson's departure was medical, based around the very early signs of Alzheimers, which were starting to hinder his fabled sharp memory.

Yet evidence has leaked out over the decades that Wilson was in fact the target of a series of plots initiated by sections of the establishment, which must have had some effect on him, even if it was not central to his resignation. Wilson certainly thought so as he later briefed journalists off the record.

Although rumours would circulate for years, the first clear evidence of a 'dirty tricks' campaign came with the publication in 1987 of 'Spycatcher' by a former MI5 agent, Peter Wright. The reactionary maverick had been at the heart of the secret service campaign against the Labour movement, operating 'at the state's behest, while pompous bowler-hatted civil servants pretended to look the other way.' All this would have remained secret had Wright not been shafted over his pension and decided to get his revenge by publishing his memoirs. This book was, in a blaze of publicity, initially banned from being published in the UK - which resulted in a flood of copies being imported from abroad. Wright's book confirmed that an MI5 campaign, backed up by the CIA, had been carried out against Wilson based on the belief of some sections of the intelligence

community that Wilson was some sort of KGB mole.

Most serious representatives of the ruling class rejected this as idiocy, knowing how supine Labour leaders always tended to be towards the forces of Capital, but some Colonel Blimp clones went along with it. The late 60s and early 70s was a period of capitalist crisis and revolt on the part of both youth and the Labour movement. The old order with its deeply ingrained belief in deference and social order was crumbling. It did not take much to whip the most backward sections of the ruling class up into a wild frenzy of 'something-must-be-done-itis.' This took the form of a series of smear stories, leaked to friendly journalists by MI5/CIA agents, and may well have been extended to the bugging of Wilson's office at the House of Commons as well as Number 10.

More seriously, plans were hatched in backrooms, involving retired generals and others, to carry out some sort of coup d'etat involving sections of the army and state machine. There had been several previous attempts to get such a scheme off the ground - indeed it had been considered when the minority Labour administration came into office in 1974. The plotters plan was to seize the machinery of state and great institutions, and using the authority of the Queen, bring in some form of national government under the token leadership of a member of the Royal Family - Lord Mountbatten being the name most favoured, replacing Prince



Philip as the usual choice for this job.

In passing, it should be noted that the intention to have a Royal as nominal head of state reflected the great trust these people had in the reactionary feudal relics they regularly consorted with. We should not forget that, although many liberal types tend to talk about the classless society, the end-of-class, and so on, this is not a view shared by the ruling class. They passionately believe in the importance of class and their 'god-given' right to be at the top. This is most ingrained in the ranks of the old landed aristocracy who then, as now, dominate the tops of the state machine, the armed forces and the church.

None of this plotting and scheming came to anything - wiser heads moved in to ensure that these plans never left the drawing board - but warning shots were certainly fired. Troop manoeuvres were organised around Heathrow airport without Wilson being told, clearly to show who potentially was in control. Wilson, himself, would tell journalists that 'I am not certain that for the last 18 months when I was PM I knew what was happening, fully, in Security.'

Wilson later pulled back from supporting any investigation of all this and an official review in 1987 rejected the allegations as fancy on the part of Wilson. MI5 and the CIA returned to their more usual methods of infiltrating various Left wing and campaigning groups, bugging and burgling offices and seeking to undermine these groups. As in the past, they continued their tactic of financing right wing movements in the Labour Party and the trade unions - a method which went way back to the funding of the Socialist Commentary journal and the Campaign for Democratic Socialism in the late 1950s, formed by those who would later become the backbone of the SDP and then the New Labour project. They also continued to covertly interfere in strikes and disputes, including work for the bosses during the Miners Strike of 84/5.

Those who naively believe the state to be neutral should be warned - it knows what side it is on. So should we. □

Venezuela Debated On Floor of British Parliament

by Jorge Martín - www.handsoffvenezuela.org

ON MARCH 8, the British Parliament held a debate on Venezuela, proposed by Labour MP for Elmet, Colin Burgon. In opening the debate Burgon said he was disappointed with the response from Tony Blair to his question on Venezuela a few days before: "My desire to highlight the changes in Latin America and to seek a positive response recently motivated me to ask the Prime Minister for his perspective on events in Latin America, but my diplomatic response to his answer is that I found it somewhat disappointing. Indeed, some people in Latin America found it more than disappointing, and it created a minor political tsunami." He also referred to "given what can only be described as the excruciatingly embarrassing remarks by a junior Foreign Office Minister in the columns of *The Times* on 13 April 2002. He welcomed the overthrow of Chavez in a coup but, unfortunately for him and fortunately for the people of Venezuela, the coup collapsed one day later, when Chavez was restored to his presidency thanks to popular support," and went on to ask the question to the government as to "what efforts have been made since April 2002 to repair the damage that that comment would obviously have caused?"

Colin Burgon also pointed out that "a Labour Government's foreign policy should be driven not just by considerations of economic self-interest, but by a shared system of political values" and that in this respect "Venezuela was the first country in Latin America to begin the process of rejecting the domination of what we call neo-liberal ideas and the Washington consensus and to experiment with ideas of anti-globalisation."

He also stressed the democratic nature of the government of Hugo Chavez: "Given Opposition and US claims about Chavez's democratic legitimacy, it is interesting to note that he had faced the electorate eight times in six years by the end of 2004—a record that has been matched nowhere else in Latin America". Burgon explained the impact of the social programmes of the Venezuelan government in detail: "A series of social investment programmes

called missions cover such matters as pre-school education, primary education and literacy, secondary education, vocational worker training, primary health care in the most deprived neighbourhoods and a food distribution programme that covers 60 per cent of the population. It is estimated that just over 1 million people have acquired literacy skills as a result of those programmes. The poorest in that country have access to medical assistance for the first time ever, thanks partly to the 17,000 medics provided by Cuba." And he added that Venezuela "has even been able to fund regional social programmes such as mission miracle, which enables poor Latin Americans to receive free eye treatment in Venezuela and Cuba."

Hostility of US Regime

But Burgon also warned that: "Venezuela's increasingly active role has met with outright hostility on the part of the right-wing Republican Administration in Washington. As recently as 16 February, Condoleezza Rice called for an 'international united front' against Venezuela." "There is great danger in the American attempt to isolate Venezuela" Burgon explained. "Can the Minister reassure me that our policy is not being subcontracted out to right-wing elements in the US, and will he show me evidence of how our policy is clearly different in this respect? Does he share my view and that of almost 100 of my parliamentary colleagues—I refer to early-day motion 1644—that all elected Governments in the region should be treated with equal respect and that the US right-wing fundamentalists should desist from efforts to destabilise the democratically elected Chavez Government?"

Next to speak in the debate was Daniel Kawczynski, a Conservative MP. Although he started by saying that Hugo Chavez had been democratically elected (he could hardly have contested that), and that "we should work with him", the reason he said this became clear when he mentioned that "there are many British oil companies in Venezuela, and they generate a great

deal of revenue for this country. I am talking about oil and gas production. I am sure that a company such as BP will be grateful that the debate has been secured and that we have an opportunity to discuss the issues. Venezuela is the third largest economy in Latin America, so it provides the United Kingdom with a tremendous opportunity for direct foreign investment."

He added a poisonous subject to the debate when he said that "Venezuela has an important role to play in dealing with the narcotics trade across the Caribbean. I hope that we can work closely with the Venezuelan Government on narcotics issues to deal with the growing problem that they present". The unfounded allegation that Venezuela is somehow "soft" on narcotics has been used repeatedly by Washington to try to justify its campaign against Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution.

The next MP to participate in the debate was Jon Trickett from the Labour Party who said clearly that "there are extreme right-wing forces in the American Administration that will not tolerate the direction of travel of the Venezuelan Government and the international linkages that they are bringing about." He also strongly denounced the Washington consensus as being one that "produces the most divided societies imaginable". It was then the turn of Conservative MP Mark Pritchard to launch an open attack on Chavez and his government. He accused Chavez of not doing enough to fight poverty, saying that Chavez was instead spending money "on mobilising 2 million civilians and training them in the basic techniques of how to handle an AK47" to fight against what he considered to be "some bogus threat". Considering the US have been openly talking about the need for regime change in Venezuela and their past record of organising coups and invasions against governments they do not like in Latin America, the Bolivarian revolution is well advised to take defensive measures, including arming the population against the very real threat from imperialist intervention. □

Hands Off Venezuela at the London Anti-War Demonstration

by Hands Off Venezuela

VENEZUELA'S BOLIVARIAN Revolution was on the minds of many at the large anti-war demonstration this weekend in London. Although the police estimate that only 15,000 people participated in the march and the rally at Trafalgar Square, the organizers put the figure at approximately 100,000.

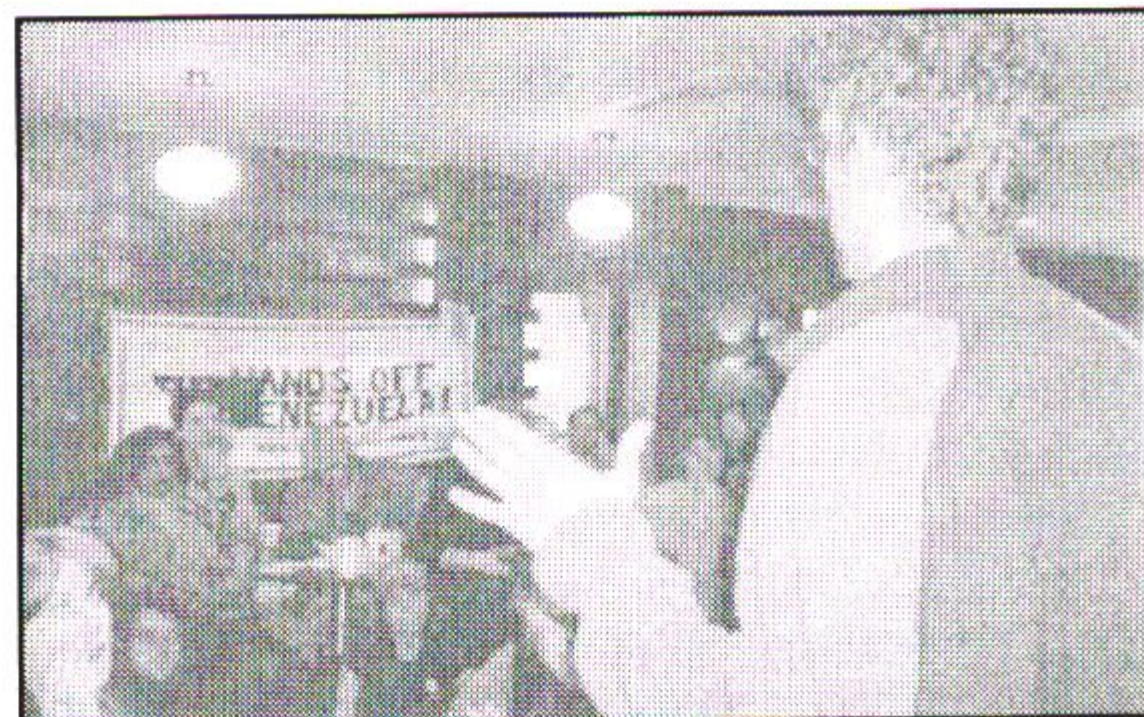
Hands off Venezuela supporters had a stall with a large banner. At the stall we sold books, pamphlets, DVDs and distributed leaflets advertising a meeting which was held in a pub near Trafalgar Square after the rally. The stall was very busy and in the end we sold out of all our material. HoV members also distributed thousands of small Venezuelan flags, which could be seen throughout the march and rally.

It was clear from the interest in Venezuela that the Bolivarian Revolution has become a well-known issue amongst activists and youth and many people who came to the stall already knew about the history and the events of the Revolution, such as the coup in 2002, the bosses' lockout of 2002/2003, as well as Chavez's referendum victory in 2004. Many were familiar with the issues as well as the various documentaries and books on the subject. The Venezuelan revolution is clearly a growing issue and was raised on the speakers' platform in Trafalgar Square by London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

Many had heard about the Revolution through the comments of arch-reactionary Pat Robertson (who recommended that the US government simply assassinate Chavez) and Tony Blair, who just a few weeks ago, apparently forgetting the military adventure in Iraq that he launched, told Chavez that the Venezuelan government should "abide by the rules of the international community." These comments have driven people to investigate the issues for themselves. What most people can see is that the Venezuelan Revolution needs to be defended against the imperialists, and also that the achievements of the Revolution in Venezuela, such as the "missions" and the reforms in education,

health care, and other social programmes are needed here in the UK and elsewhere. Since coming to office the Blair government has done nothing but attack living standards, working conditions, and made drastic cuts to education, health care, and other social programmes. Venezuela is a shining example of what can and should be done here - an example of what people want to see in their own countries around the world. From the point of view of the imperialists, this is the real danger of the Venezuela Revolution.

The HoV meeting after the demonstration was also a great success. Some 100 people turned up to the pub just off Trafalgar Square to hear Jorge Martin speak on the Venezuelan Revolution. Speaking to the crowded room Jorge gave a brief outline of the history of the Bolivarian Revolution (the 1989 Caracazo uprising, the February 1992 military uprising led by Chavez, the 1998 election victory etc.). He explained how the "owners of the banks, industry and the land in an alliance with US imperialism organised an armed insurrection against the Chavez government" in April 2002, and how this was defeated by the direct mass action of the people in the streets. It was also the "oil workers, the organised communities and sections of the national guard that defeated the December 2002 oil sabotage and bosses' lock out", he explained, in an example of how "workers can run industry without bosses or managers". Martin explained the experiences of workers' control and management that



are taking place in Venezuela and how president Chavez has opened the debate about Socialism of the 21st Century.

Finally Jorge Martin reminded the audience that the dangers threatening the Venezuelan revolution are very real. In the last few days, he explained "there has been an attempt to use so-called autonomist demands in the oil-rich state of Zulia on the border with Colombia, as a way of creating chaos which would justify a military intervention". Also the recently published National Security Strategy Report of the United States says that "in Venezuela, a demagogue awash in oil money is undermining democracy and seeking to destabilize the region", which Jorge considered to be not only an outright lie, but something more dangerous, a direct threat from Washington against the Bolivarian Revolution. For all these reasons Jorge Martin appealed to all those present to join Hands off Venezuela and become active in the defence of the Revolution.

The HoV intervention was a great success. Interest in the Venezuelan Revolution is growing, and the issue has clearly penetrated the consciousness of many activists and youth. We are steadily building the movement in solidarity with the Revolution - by trying to break the news black-out, by spreading information and awareness and in holding meetings and discussing the ideas and the achievements of the Revolution. If you want to get involved and help to actively defend the Bolivarian Revolution, please contact us and join the HoV Campaign! □



Marx and the profit cycle

by Michael Roberts

NOBODY ARGUES that the world capitalist economy moves in a straight upward path. Everybody recognises that it is subject to 'turbulence', booms and slumps, even crises. In these periods of slump or crises, people's lives are disrupted, jobs are lost, businesses go bust, families are made homeless etc.

Can we say why these crises come about? The orthodox bourgeois economists say they are the result of interference in the market economy by the state, by monopoly power (mainly trade unions) or as the result of 'bad' policies that do not allow capitalists the freedom to make profits (too high taxes or interest rates etc). There is no inherent fault in the capitalist mode of production that generates periodic crises in the economy.

Followers of the Marxist economic tradition would disagree. For us, the capitalist system is not only unjust, unequal and barbarous. It is also shot through with periodic failure.

The primary reason is that the productive forces that provide prosperity and a better life are only unleashed under capitalism if there is a profit for the owners of capital. In other words, the productive forces are privately owned and turned into 'capital', so society only benefits if that capital is invested in production. If the profit is not there, things and services that people need are not produced. So profits and the profitability of capital are key to the health of the capitalist mode of production.

Marx argued that capitalism will suffer periodic crises precisely because the owners of capital will not be able to generate sufficient profits indefinitely to sustain an untrammelled growth in production and living standards. For that reason, capitalism may be the most expansive mode of production seen on the earth so far, but it is also most wasteful, unequal and crisis-ridden. Human beings can do better.

Why cannot capitalists generate sufficient profits indefinitely so that the world's productive forces can expand smoothly forever? Marx argued that the most important law of the motion

of capitalism that explained periodic crises was the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

Of course, each capitalist business, large or small, earns a different amount of profits. And each earns a different rate of profit, as measured by the amount of profits produced in, say a year, against the amount of money capital that the capitalist owner had to put into the business.

Average rate of profit

Marx argued that the only way to understand the forces at work in a whole economy was to aggregate all the profits and capital in all the businesses and come up with an average rate of profit. He then said that, if this average rate of profit dropped so low as to cause the capitalists to stop investing further in production, the economy would go into crisis. There would be what modern economists call a 'recession' or 'slump', with all that entails for jobs and living standards for the mass of working people and their dependents.

What could make the average rate of profit in a capitalist economy fall to such a low level, and for that matter what would make it rise? Marx starts from the fundamental fact that nothing is created without human beings spending time making or delivering it. Under capitalism, however, that labour time has been appropriated by the owners of capital (namely those that own and control the plant and equipment, raw materials and the money to buy them). Production depends on workers, but production does not happen without the say-so of the owners of capital. They own the means of production.

Thus, the labour time of the workers is turned into a certain value that the owners of capital measure against the costs of employing their workers and the cost of setting up the businesses and supplying the necessary raw materials and services.

Only if the workers expend labour time is there any production and any profit. The workers get paid a certain

amount for their time. The capitalists own and control the product of their labour and sell it in the market. The difference between the revenues of those sales and cost of employing the workforce is the profit. Marx called this the surplus-value that the owners of capital had appropriated over and above the value of the production paid to the workers for their time.

From the capitalists' point of view, the capital invested in paying the workers is variable, in that the workers add more value. Marx called that variable capital. But the capitalists also have the costs of setting up and running the businesses. Factories, offices and supplies cannot add any production value in themselves. But they still have to be paid for. From the capitalist viewpoint, this is constant capital.

In any one period, the capitalists put up money for variable capital (workforce) and constant capital (plant and machinery etc). At the end of the production period, they sell the production in the market and receive revenues to cover their original money capital and more. The rate of profit is thus the surplus value created by the workers divided by the sum of the cost of variable and constant capital ($s/c+v$).

Marx argued that over a whole economy, there was tendency for the rate of profit to fall. And indeed after a period of time, the rate of profit would fall, eventually causing an economic crisis.

Why is there a tendency for the rate of profit to fall? The reason is inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism is a system of production where individual owners of capital (or limited companies with lots of small owners or shareholders) compete in the market place to sell their goods at a profit. So there is an inherent drive to keep costs down relative to likely sales revenues.

Assuming, for the moment, that the revenues that a business is going to get for its product or service are fixed by the market, then each business can raise (or just maintain) profits either by lowering the costs of employing the workforce or by lowering the costs of

raw materials and offices etc. The latter costs are usually fixed or out of the control of the capitalist, so the big drive is to lower labour costs.

Capitalists can do this by reducing the workforce to the minimum required to make the business function. Or they can make an existing workforce work harder or longer. These measures will either raise the absolute size of surplus value created by the workforce or its relative value compared to the costs of employing the workforce (the rate of surplus value), or both.

In the modern capitalist world, the most effective way of raising the rate of surplus value is to introduce new technology that can either reduce the number of workers needed or increase how much they produce in the same period of time, or both. The rate of surplus value will rise and, other things being equal, so will profits and the rate of profit.

But other things are not equal. New technology means more money capital must be invested in machinery. Most important, Marx said, the amount of capital devoted to machinery and technology will rise relative to the amount of capital invested in the workforce. So there will be a tendency for the value of constant capital (c) to rise relative to variable capital (v). Marx called this ratio: the organic composition of capital.

If the organic composition of capital (c/v) rises, then, unless the rate of surplus value (s/v) rises as fast or faster, then the rate of profit ($s/c+v$) will fall. Marx argued that under capitalism, the forces of competition and the drive for profit will mean that the organic composition of capital will rise. If it is rising, it is because capitalists are cutting back on labour and substituting machinery. More technology may well raise the productivity of the workforce, but a smaller workforce will reduce the amount of value produced, as only workers expending labour time can add value. Thus relatively more spent on technology and relatively less on labour will tend to reduce the amount of value produced for each unit of money capital invested. Thus, there is a tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

However, Marx identified a whole number of 'countervailing tendencies' that could mean either the organic composition of capital would not rise or the rate of profit would still rise even if it did - for a while. And that last point

is key. The countervailing tendencies were just that. Eventually, the tendency for the organic composition of capital would exert itself and so would the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Eventually, such would be the effect on the average rate of profit and the mass of profits in the economy, that it would push many capitalists into bankruptcy and others to stop producing (as much). There would be an economic crisis.

Was Marx right?

Of course, this is where it all gets controversial, especially among Marxist economists themselves! The first big argument is that many economists who consider themselves Marxists reckon that Marx made such important theoretical errors in his explanation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall that it just does not hold up.

The second big argument is that Marx's rate of profit theory is just not empirically correct. The average rate of profit has not fallen over time and, even more significant, the organic composition of capital has not risen to explain it. Marx is just plain wrong, they say.

So with Marx wrong both theoretically and empirically, his explanation of economic crisis falls to the ground. The critics say we should look elsewhere for an explanation of economic crisis. Many fall back on the inadequate theories of the orthodox bourgeois economists or alternatively try to work out a bastardised Marxist version that does not rely on Marx's rate of profit theory.

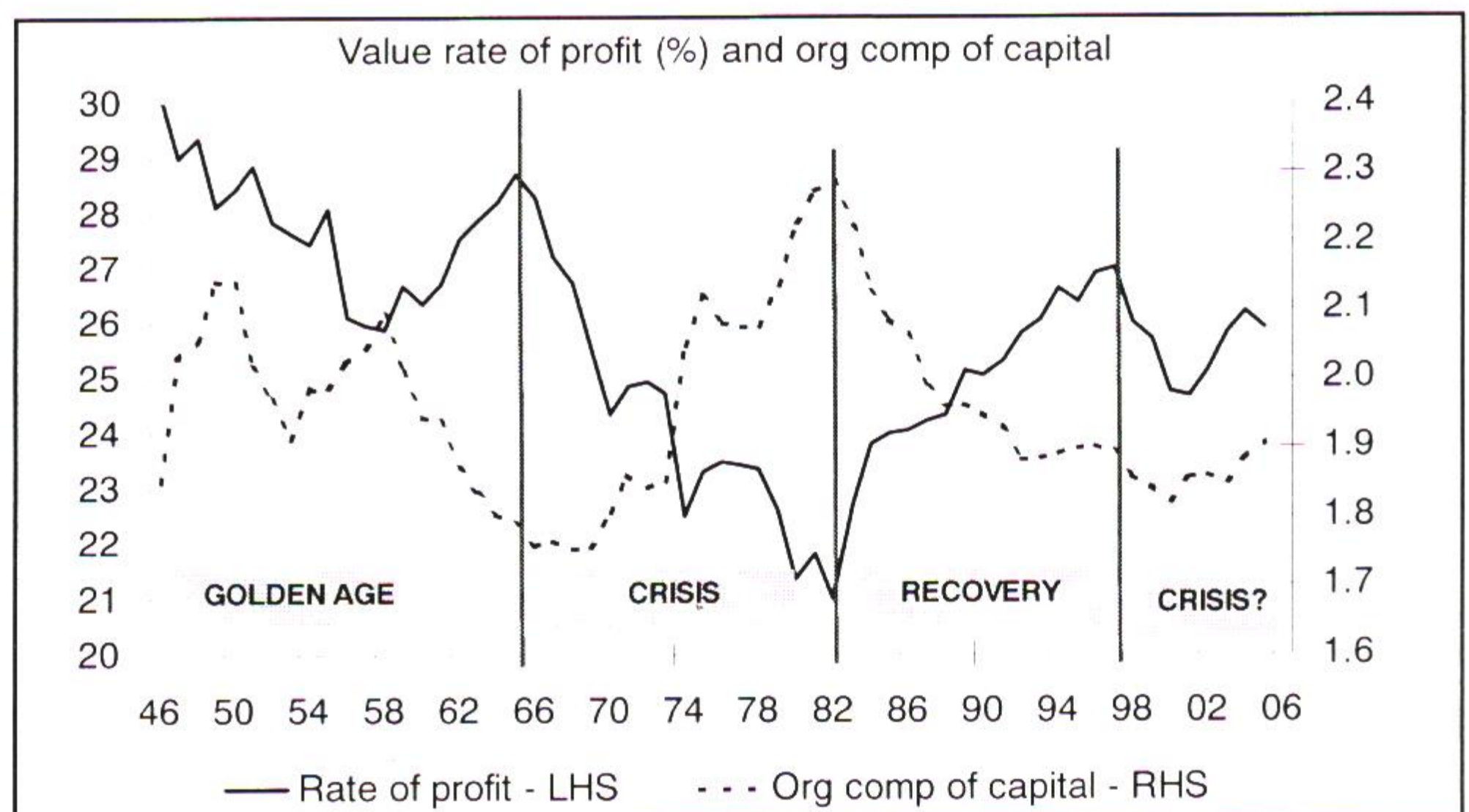
In this column, over the next few issues, I hope to try and answer these

critics and defend Marx's theory of profitability and crisis both theoretically and empirically, with the help of the works of many other Marxist economists and with my own research. The aim is not just to defend Marx, but also to show that his profit theory is both relevant and crucial to understanding through what stage world capitalism is currently passing.

But let me leave you this time with a taster. The graph below shows the movement in the average rate of profit and the organic composition of capital in the US since 1945. The US is the biggest and most important capitalist economy. As such, it provides the best indicator of the laws of motion of capitalism, just as Marx found Britain was in the 19th century.

I shall explain the graphic in more detail next time. But consider this for the moment. The graphic shows several interesting things. First, the average rate of profit does fall under capitalism. Second, when it falls, the organic composition of capital rises, as Marx argued. Third, the average rate of profit was generally much higher in the period (the golden age) 1948-66 than it is now. Fourth, it appears that the rate of profit moves in cycles, with up and downwaves of about 16 years each. Fifth, if that is right, we are now in a downwave, where the average rate of profit will fall. By around 2012-15 the rate of profit will be as low, if not lower, than it was in 1982. Sixth, that means capitalism is now in an era where economic crisis will be more frequent and more severe and the political repercussions much greater.

To be continued.



The 90th Anniversary of 1916: Connolly and the 1916 Easter Uprising

by Ted Grant

To mark the ninetieth anniversary of the heroic Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland we are republishing here an article written by Ted Grant in 1966. The Easter rising was crushed in the most brutal fashion by the forces of British imperialism. Yet never again could they simply rule Ireland in the old way. They took the path of partition, carving up the living body of Ireland, creating as Connolly had predicted 'a carnival of reaction'. For this, and their many other crimes in Ireland, British imperialism stands tried and convicted. Amongst their most heinous acts was the murder of James Connolly. When they tied the injured Connolly to a chair and shot him, British imperialism beheaded the Irish working class and its struggle for socialist revolution.

There are many monuments to Connolly in Ireland, beneath such statues his ideas lie hidden by those nationalists, north and south, who are happy to settle for the status quo. Today

Ireland has reached a new impasse, with the nationalist leaders prepared to accept not just capitalism, but also the continuation of partition and the occupation of British troops. What is required now is not dead concrete statues, but a living monument to the life and struggles of James Connolly: the construction of a workers' republic, a Socialist United Ireland.

To achieve that goal it is vital to uncover the ideas and tradition of Connolly from beneath the street signs and bronze sculptures, for a new generation to discover Connolly's class analysis, his Marxist explanation, that the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism are inseparable, they are bound one to the other, and while the capitalist class is capable of advancing neither the working class can succeed in both.

On 17th April 1916 the Irish Citizen Army, together with the Irish Volunteers, rose up in arms against the might of the British Empire to strike a blow for Irish freedom and for the setting up of an Irish Republic. Their blow for freedom was to reverberate round the world, and preceded the first Russian Revolution by almost a year.

The background to the rebellion was the centuries of national oppression suffered by the Irish people in the interests of British landlordism and capitalism. In this they had the support of the Irish landlords and capitalists, of the Catholic hierarchy, who were linked by ties of interest to the Imperialists, and joined with them in fear of the Irish workers and peasants.

It is impossible to understand the Easter Rising without understanding the ideas of its leader, James Connolly, who considered himself a Marxist and based himself on the ideas of Internationalism and the class struggle. Like MacLean in Britain, Lenin and Trotsky, Liebknecht and Luxemburg and other Internationalists, Connolly regarded with horror the betrayal by the leaders of the Labour movement in all countries in supporting the Imperialist War. Dealing with the betrayal of the Second International, Connolly declared in his paper *The Workers Republic*: "If these men must die, would it not be better to die in their own country fighting for freedom for their class, and for the abolition of war, than to go forth to

strange countries and die slaughtering and slaughtered by their brothers that tyrants and profiteers might live?" Protesting against the support by the British TUC of the war, Connolly wrote: "Time was when the unanimous voice of that Congress declared that the working class had no enemy except the capitalist class - that of its own country at the head of the list!"

Connolly stood for national freedom as a step towards the Irish Socialist Republic. But while the Stalinists and reformists today - 50 years after 1916 still mumble in politically incoherent terms about the need for the "national revolution against imperialism", Connolly was particularly clear about the class question that was at the basis of the Irish question. Without being in direct contact with Lenin and Trotsky he had a similar position. "The cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland, and the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour", he wrote. "They cannot be dis severed. Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil".

No Illusions in Capitalists

Connolly had no illusions in the capitalists of any country, least of all Ireland. On International capitalism he wrote: "If, then, we see a small section of the possessing class prepared to launch

into war, to shed oceans of blood and spend millions of treasure, in order to maintain intact a small portion of their privileges, how can we expect the entire propertied class to abstain from using the same weapons, and to submit peacefully when called upon to yield up forever all their privileges?"

And on the Irish capitalists, "Therefore the stronger I am in my affection for national tradition, literature, language, and sympathies, the more firmly rooted I am in my opposition to that capitalist class which in its soulless lust for power and gold would bray the nations as in a mortar". And again, "We are out for Ireland for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord; not the sweating, profit grinding capitalist; not the sleek and oily lawyer; not the prostitute pressmen - the hired liars of the enemy. Not these are the Irish upon whom the future depends. Not these, but the Irish working class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared."

Writing on the need for an Irish insurrection to expel British imperialism he wrote in relation to the World War: "Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last War lord."

As an answer to the demand for conscription which had been imposed

in Britain and which was supported by the Irish capitalists for Ireland too, where the employers were exerting pressure to force Irish workers to volunteer, Connolly wrote: "We want and must have economic conscription in Ireland for Ireland. Not the conscription of men by hunger to compel them to fight for the power that denies them the right to govern their own country, but the conscription by an Irish nation of all the resources of the nation - its land, its railways, its canals, its workshops, its docks, its mines, its mountains, its rivers and streams, its factories and machinery, its horses, its cattle, and its men and women, all cooperating together under one common direction that gather under one common direction that Ireland may live and bear upon her fruitful bosom the greatest number of the freest people she has ever known."

He looked at the employers who were opposing conscription too from a critical class point of view: "if here and there we find an occasional employer who fought us in 1913 (the Great Dublin lock-out in which the employers tried to break union organisation, but were defeated in this object by the solidarity of the Irish workers and their British comrades too) agreeing with our national policy in 1915 it is not because he has become converted, or is ashamed of the unjust use of his powers, but simply that he does not see in economic conscription the profit he fancied he saw in denying to his followers the right to organise in their own way in 1913."

Answering objections to the firm working class point of view which he expounded he declared: "Do we find fault with the employer for following his own interests? We do not. But neither are we under any illusion as to his motives. In the same manner we take our stand with our own class, nakedly upon our class interests, but believing that these interests are the highest interests of the race."

It is in this light that the uprising of 1916 must be viewed. As a consequence of the struggles of the past Connolly who was the General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union had organised the Citizens Army for the purpose of defence against capitalist and police attack and for preparing for struggle against British imperialism. The Citizens Army was almost purely working class



in composition: dockers, transport workers, building workers, printers and other sections of the Dublin workers being its rank and file.

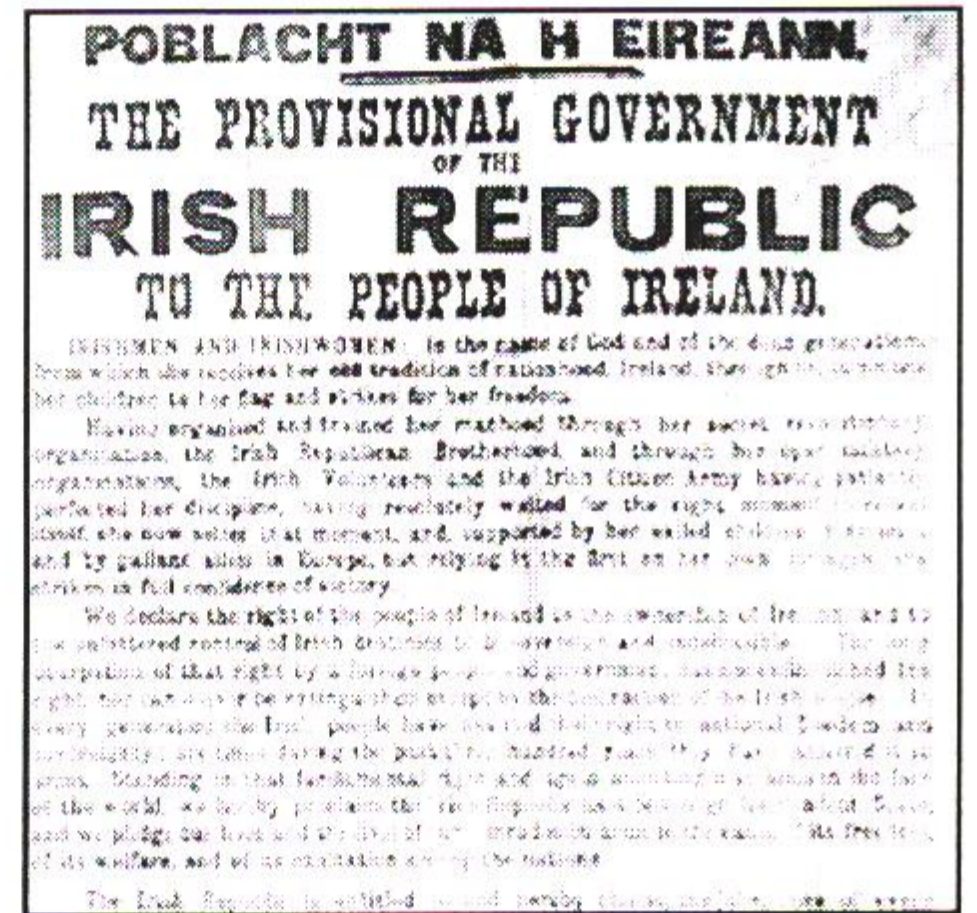
It was with this force and in alliance with the more middle class Irish volunteers that Connolly prepared for the uprising. He had no illusions about its immediate success. According to William O'Brien, on the day of the insurrection Connolly said to him: "We are going out to be slaughtered." He said "Is there no chance of success?" and Connolly replied "None whatsoever."

For An Irish Socialist Republic

Connolly understood that the tradition and the example created would be immortal and would lay the basis for future freedom and a future Irish Socialist Republic. In that lay his greatness. What a difference from the craven traitors of the German Socialist and Communist and Trade Union leaders who despite having three million armed workers supporting them, and with the sympathy and support of the overwhelming majority of the German working class (ready to fight and die, capitulated to Hitler without firing a shot.

Having said this, it is necessary to see not only the greatness of Connolly, sprung from the Irish workers, one of the greatest sons of the English speaking working class, and the effect of the uprising in preparing for the expulsion, at least in the Southern part of Ireland of the direct domination of British imperialism, but also the faults of both.

There was no attempt to call a general strike and thus paralyse the British Army. There was no real organisation or preparation of the armed struggle. No propaganda was conducted among the British troops to gain their sympa-



thy and support. The leaders of the middle class Irish Volunteers were split. One of the leaders Eoin MacNeill countermanding orders for "mobilisation" and for "manoeuvres" and in the confusion only part of the Volunteers, joined with the Irish Citizens Army in the insurrection. Thus at the last minute the insurrection was betrayed by the vacillation of the middle class leaders, as they have betrayed many times in Irish history and in the history of other countries.

The British occupying troops suppressed the insurrection and then savagely executed its leaders, including the leader of the insurrection James Connolly, who was already badly wounded.

Connolly was murdered, but in the last analysis, British imperialism really suffered defeat.

Nowadays all sections of Irish society in the 26 counties hypocritically give support to the "brave and undying heroism of Connolly." The Irish capitalists pretend to honour him. Connolly would have split contemptuously in their faces. He fought them, ever since he attained manhood, in the interests of the Irish workers and of International Socialism. But his most withered contempt would have been reserved for those in the Labour movement, including the leaders of the Labour Party and of the so-called Communist Parties, and of the various sects claiming to speak in the name of Irish Labour, who fifty years after Easter 1916, have not understood that unity of the Irish workers North and South can only be obtained by conducting the struggle on a class basis for an Irish Socialist Republic, in indissoluble unity with the British workers in their struggle for a British democratic Socialist Republic. □

Venezuela

Workers, Youth and the Popular Struggles in Bolivar

An Interview with the Leaders of the Local Student Movement

by Patrick Larsen

In February the Venezuelan province of Ciudad Bolivar was the setting for a number of remarkable struggles on the part of the youth, the working class and the organised communities. In one of them, a fight against a rise in the prices of bus tickets, masses of youth went so far as to seize the buildings of the local parliament. Ronny Pante and Carlos Rondón, leaders of the local student movement, recount what happened.

PL: First of all, I think it is necessary that you tell the readers a bit about yourselves, your political background, the Integrationist Movement of Students (MEI), etc.

RP: My name is Ronny Pante. I am a student at the University of Simon Rodriguez, the UNESR, located in the Proceres, a working class and popular neighbourhood of Ciudad Bolivar. I started studying here in the year 2001. Before that, I was mainly involved in ecological and cultural work in my neighbourhood. But when I began studying at the University I realized that it was necessary to begin work in the student movement. This was the reason we set up the MEI, the Integrationist Movement of Students in 2002.

At the beginning, the MEI was mainly a tool that we used to fight for better conditions in our everyday life, for free access to the University, for decent student transport, etc. In short, we began as a group of rebellious youngsters fighting for bread-and-butter demands, the daily needs of the student youth. We did not have any worked-out ideology or a scientific starting point. But slowly we learned through the struggle, we began to generalize and we studied the works of Bolivar, Simon Rodriguez and especially Che Guevara, and this led us to adopt a more profound revolutionary standpoint.

CR: My name is Carlos Rondón and I am a student at the UNESR as well. When I began here in 2002, I immediately joined the MEI movement, where we got involved in the fight against the

bosses' lockout in December/January 2002-03. At the University there are a number of teachers and functionaries that actively support the opposition. At that time they also tried to shut down classes. The MEI responded by calling student assemblies and distributed propaganda against the lockout. We succeeded and classes remained functioning, despite the sabotage of the opposition.

In 2003, many of us comrades in the MEI began to develop ourselves politically when we went to Cuba on a long trip with the Frente Francisco Miranda [a national youth organization in Venezuela]. Here we were able to discuss political perspectives in an internationalist fashion, and we began to see that the struggle is not just about daily demands, but a united struggle against imperialism and its capitalist policies.

PL: Recently there was a huge struggle in Ciudad Bolivar against rises in the price of bus tickets. What was that all about?

RP: In Ciudad Bolivar it is the custom that the owners of transportation raise the prices in December with the excuse of the festive season, saying that it is a "special, extraordinary" fee. Thus they managed to raise the price from 500 bolivares to 800 - a lot of money for people living in the poor neighbourhoods.

However, this year, when we entered January, the price was still at 800, and people started to get bitterly enraged. In the city, most of the buses are owned by private enterprises and there is one capitalist who is known as the "caballero de hierro" ("iron man") who owns a great part of them and makes big profits out of it.

The population of the city has grown tremendously, but the infrastructure has remained the same as many years ago, without being renewed to fit the new needs of the inhabitants. The rise in the price of tickets had not been approved by the local authorities, but



rumours were going on about the mayor being on the point of giving his signature of approval.

On February 6th, representatives of the student movements in the four different universities in the city met to discuss the situation. We decided to call for a demonstration the very next day. Despite the short notice, more than 200 students went along the march. Our purpose was to protest, but at the same time send a delegation into the local parliament to negotiate. But when we showed up at the doorstep of the local parliament, the mayor had decreed the police to form a picket line, rejecting all entrance to the buildings. The students tried to enter the hall anyway, and this resulted in armed clashes between the police and the students. The police repressed the demonstration and threw teargas at us. Two students were wounded and driven to hospital.

Finally the demonstration managed to make its way into the city hall and effectively take it over, until they would listen to us. At this, the politicians made concessions and approved that the price rise be taken off the agenda.

CR: But this was not the end of the story. The owners of transportation did not take this easily. They began to stop all the buses in Bolivar, following the call of US foreign minister Condoleezza Rice. The local mayor and councillors had a secret meeting with the owners of transportation where they conspired to go against the agreements that we had won. We called a new student demonstration with around 150 pres-

ent. Without buses, the situation in the city was so chaotic that the military had to insert public buses to meet the daily needs while the private ones were not running.

In the end the owners of transportation and the local politicians had to back off and agree - at least for the moment - to follow the common agreement that hinders any rises in ticket prices.

PL: Another important struggle here has been the one taking place in the nearby factory CVG Cabelum. Could you tell us about that?

RP: Cabelum is a factory on the outskirts of Ciudad Bolivar, that employs around 300 workers. It produces electricity cables. Though it is owned by the state, there have been a number of cases of corruption, mismanagement, etc.

In December last year, the Venezuelan government decided to put a new president in place, Manuel Arsienieger, a former functionary in the CVG [cooperation of state firms in Guayana] and well-known for his stand on the left. This was in order to promote a new state policy, the so-called cogestión [co-management], where the workers and community are supposed to control production together.

Manuel began to help the local community with various reforms. He gave certain parts of the surplus in the company budget to finance social projects. For example, to help the Barrio Adentro, a programme where thousands of poor Venezuelans for the first time can go to the doctor and get free medicine, etc. Manuel also gave finances for repairs to a local secondary school. Inside the very factory he was also beginning to re-structure the way in which production was run. He wanted a model of cogestión like the one in ALCASA. The people felt for the first time that Cabelum was serving their needs.

But the right wing in the region began a vicious campaign against Manuel, accusing him of all sorts of things in the media. Finally he was removed from office on February 26th. This created enormous discontent among the popular sectors in the nearby neighbourhoods and also among the workers in the factory. There were protests at the factory gate two days in a row. It was composed of representatives of the communities, students and workers.

The workforce at Cabelum threatened to go on strike.

All this obviously exercised enormous pressure on the newly appointed president. He has now committed himself to enter into a dialogue with us. The students in the struggle proposed that assemblies be held every week, where the main decisions should be taken by elected representatives of the workers and the leaders of the community organisations. On March 9th, the first meeting was celebrated with the new president and some agreements have been made, but it is still an open struggle where we need to fight for the complete running of the plant by the workers and the community.

PL: The ongoing struggle at your university (UNESR), what is it about?

CR: The experimental university of Simon Rodriguez, UNESR, is a national University with 20 nuclei in 16 regions. In the past it was dominated heavily by the corrupt functionaries and bureaucrats of AD, Democratic Action, one of the old discredited parties in Venezuelan politics. But when the Bolivarian government of Hugo Chavez began to reform our society it initiated a process of re-organization of the UNESR. The man elected to do this was Emil Calles, a known member of the Communist Party. He was appointed principal and started to approach the student movement and actually listen to the petitions of the students. This made him very popular among the students as well as the teachers. But last Saturday he was removed from office by sectors within the state apparatus that denounced him as corrupt. The students have responded massively, and immediately afterwards there was a national mobilization in Caracas with people coming from all the provinces. Some agreements have been made with the new principal, but we need to step up our effort so that he will follow the progress made from 2000 onwards.

PL: All in all,

what do these three examples tell us about the revolutionary process and the changes taking place and the level of consciousness in Venezuela?

CR and RP: Basically it shows that we still have a long way to go in Venezuela. The bourgeois state is still in place and is acting against the revolutionary measures adopted by Hugo Chavez. Time and again, it is becoming clear for the masses that they cannot trust most of the people in the state machinery. There exist reformist sectors hiding behind the Bolivarian colours that do not really want the revolution to continue but would rather make concessions to imperialism. They are sabotaging the revolutionary process from within, and this forces them to confront the most conscious sector of the movement time and again.

Many people are also drawing the conclusion that we need to govern the very means of production ourselves. The struggle against the price rise is quite a good example; it showed us that it is the organised people that need to control and direct the transportation system.

This is also the analysis of the International Marxist Tendency, which we would like to thank a lot. This organization has really understood our Revolution very well and made the effort to actively intervene in it and help out the most militant layers, like ourselves, with a theoretical guidance. We are entering a new critical phase in the revolutionary process where these ideas are beginning to pick up more support, exactly because more and more activists day by day are learning that the daily struggles are part of a big battle against capitalism. A battle that we need to win decisively. □



The role of Slobodan Milosevic in the break-up of Yugoslavia

by Goran M. in Belgrade

In the morning hours of Saturday, March 11, the former president of the Republic of Serbia and Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, was found dead in his prison cell at the Hague. Apparently, high blood pressure caused the heart attack that killed Milosevic during the night and left the Hague tribunal without its most prominent court case. With his death, the bourgeois media began once again to dig through the recent history of the Balkans an attempt to make sense of the break-up of former Yugoslavia.

Labelled as an evil mastermind who single-handedly broke up the country, orchestrated the war, and created a sort of metaphysical relationship between himself and the Serbian nation, Milosevic was simply the most visible symbol of the counter-revolutionary wave that swept across the Balkans after the fall of the Stalinist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, leaving the region soaked in blood. Milosevic was probably the most complex and powerful player to emerge out of the new breed of bureaucrats that appeared in all the Yugoslav republics in the late 1980s.

"Freedom"

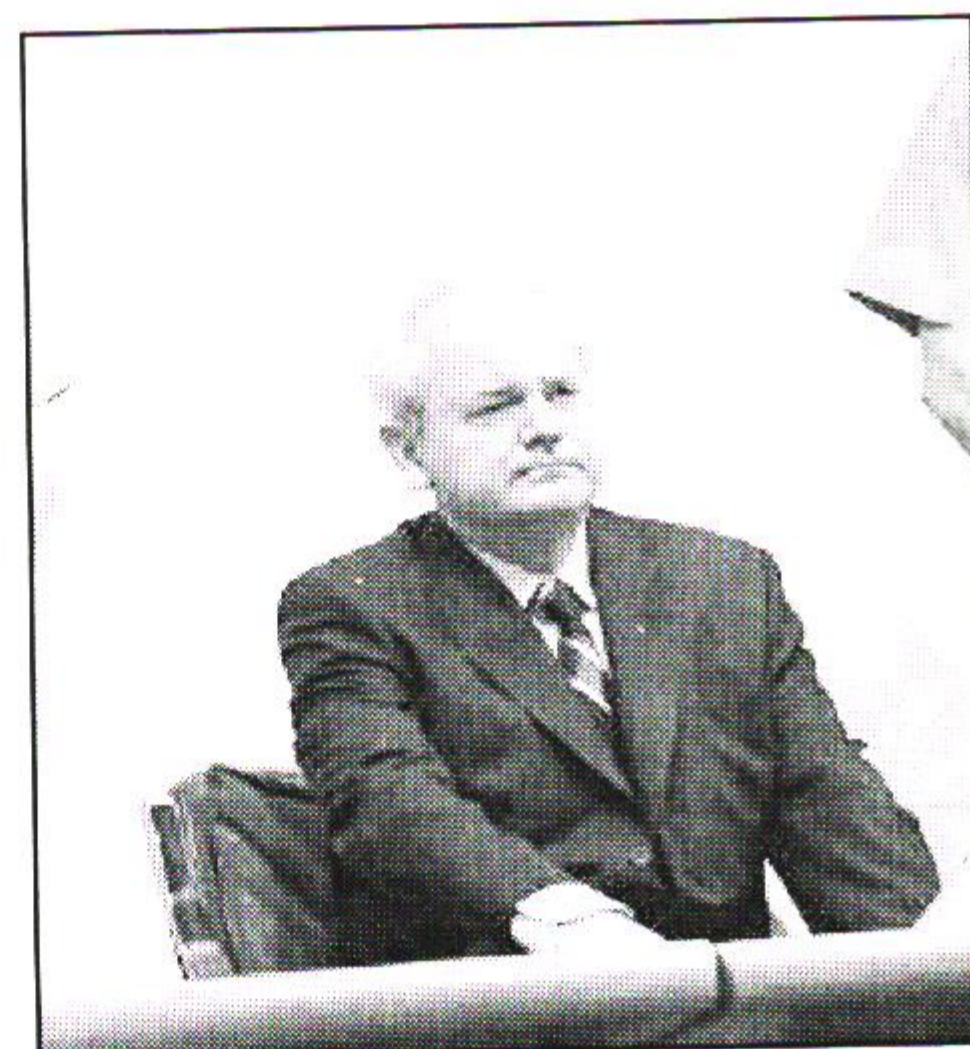
Born in 1941 in the Serbian city of Pozarevac during the Nazi occupation, Milosevic was just a baby at the time that the heroic Partisan movement attracted the most progressive youth of all the Balkan nations and carried out a socialist revolution. Slobodan, whose name in Serbo-Croatian is derived from the word "Freedom", belonged to the first generation in the history of the Balkans that had open access to higher education and enjoyed all the benefits of the socialised economy. Milosevic joined the Yugoslav Communist party in his high school days and started his career right after he graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law faculty in 1964 - the time of the "economic liberalisation" policy in Yugoslavia. This was a decade in which the Titoist bureaucracy looked towards the intro-

duction of more open market forces as a potential solution to the growing contradictions within the economy.

Milosevic an average student, was described by his school peers as a closed, unimpressive person who was not into having fun and always sat in the first row of the classroom dressed in an old-fashioned white shirt and black tie. Milosevic seemed to possess the perfect psychological traits for a successful bureaucratic career. And successful it was indeed. He held a managerial position in the company Tehnogas, and slowly moved towards the top. By the early 1980s he was sent to New York as a representative of the Belgrade Bank. Milosevic was the embodiment of a new generation of Yugoslav "communists" - the so-called "technocracy" - a layer which entered the party from top positions in increasingly self-sufficient worker-managed companies. The lack of genuine workers' democracy in the workplace gave these "experts" great power.

They differentiated themselves from the old Titoist cadres who joined the party in the hardest days before the Second World war, who defeated the Nazis and carried the revolution on their shoulders. This new layer had frequent contact with foreign companies, spoke foreign languages and was not burdened much by "ideology". For most of them, a party membership card was seen only as an entry ticket into the realm of career opportunities.

In 1983, Milosevic left his managerial positions and devoted all his energy to climbing the ladder of the party hierarchy. Only three years later, under the patronage of the more experienced Serbian politician, Ivan Stambolic, he became the General Secretary of the Serbian Communist Party. In those days Milosevic was just another unrecognisable grey suit within the party apparatus, a cautious bureaucrat who repeated the official Titoist line of "brotherhood and unity" like a parrot and was even seen as a fighter against the growing nationalism within the Serbian party. Stambolic recognised the crude



nature of his comrade and used him to carry out his dirty work in the party and in faction fights. By this time the economic crisis had already hit broad layers of the Yugoslav population hard. The poorest regions like the autonomous province of Kosovo were especially hit hard by the cuts in social spending imposed by the IMF on the indebted country. A wave of strikes hit the country in this period in what was the greatest turmoil since the student uprising in 1968. A part of the bureaucracy in all republics was already planning to abandon the sinking ship and began to wrap themselves in nationalist flags. The blame for the economic hardship was systematically transferred by the local leaderships from the cabinets onto the neighbouring republics.

In 1987, Milosevic was sent, unwillingly, to Kosovo as an anti-nationalist functionary to try and ease the growing ethnic tensions there. According to Stambolic, Milosevic, as a Belgrade bureaucrat, had no particular interest in Kosovo and was completely caught off guard by events. During a meeting with local community officials in a small city in Kosovo, a group of Serbian workers tried to enter the building and present their grievances to the representative from Belgrade. In their attempt to enter the building they clashed with the local police force, which was mostly made up of Albanians. A shaking, nerv-

ous Milosevic attempted to calm down the crowd gathered in front of the building from the balcony by using empty rhetoric. The crowd was relentless. With no other way out, Milosevic gave in and went outside to talk to the workers face to face. The police line was broken. Followed by TV cameras, Milosevic crossed the line and sided with the workers. "No one has the right to beat you," he proclaimed. This event was cunningly exploited by the nationalist wing of the bureaucracy back in Belgrade. The footage was shown continuously on national television and given a nationalist spin. Upon his return, Milosevic suddenly sided with the nationalist wing of the Serbian party and became its leader. The more moderate wing headed by Stambolic was defeated and ridiculed in public. The section of bureaucracy that wanted to move to capitalism as soon as possible, regardless of consequences, won. Nationalism was simply a convenient cover that gave them the excuse they needed to move to capitalism.

Nationalism

In the days that followed, the same Kosovo scenario was repeated at rally after rally, from factory to factory. Milosevic was seen as a rebel within the system, someone who was finally standing up to the bureaucracy. After a mass protest of workers in the Rakovica industrial complex on the outskirts of Belgrade, one observer noted that the people had come to the rally as workers and left as Serbs after hearing Milosevic speak. The triumph of the nationalist wing in Serbia helped the nationalist forces in the other republics. Neighbouring chauvinist bureaucracies fed off each other. Workers in every republic were shown the boogymen across the road and encouraged to close ranks in national unity for protection. Milosevic dared to ride on the wave of mass dissatisfaction and channelled the movement into the bind alley of nationalism and "reform". The so-called "anti-bureaucratic revolution" was taking place. The Milosevic clique began purging the state apparatus from top to bottom and began centralising power in Belgrade. Preparations were begun to give the bureaucrats in Belgrade a better position before the final collapse of the country. A new Serbian constitution was adopted which cancelled the autonomous status of

Kosovo and Vojvodina and took back all minority rights won during the revolutionary years. The People's Army of Yugoslavia was also put under the control of Belgrade.

The nationalist bureaucracies in the other republics acted predictably. They used the actions of Milosevic as the final proof that Yugoslavia was finished and they openly advocated secession. However, the Serbian bureaucracy seemed to hold all the cards in its hands. Serbia was the largest and most populous republic, and it had already taken control of the army. The Serbian bureaucracy could potentially use sizeable Serbian minorities in the other republics as a lever. The Serbian nationalists had good contact with many imperialist powers which initially opposed the break-up of the country, but openly praised Milosevic for the pro-market "reforms" he advocated. The Serbian bureaucracy had no problem supporting the survival of a joint-state within which it would have a dominant position. The weaker bureaucracies from the smaller republics had no choice but to be looking for other foreign backers and to push for independence in order to avoid the domination of the Serbian bureaucracy. Therefore, while simultaneously strengthening Serbia's position within the federation, Milosevic was also hypocritically calling for a united Yugoslavia, presenting himself to the Serbian working class as the genuine keeper of "socialist values" in contrast to the secessionist leadership of the other republics as well as the openly reactionary pro-capitalist opposition within Serbia. Milosevic was seen by the average Serbian worker as a moderate who was trying to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia and the basic achievements of the planned economy intact. The majority of the Yugoslav working class was still against the total restoration of capitalism. Unlike the ex-communists in the other republics who founded new, openly right-wing parties, Milosevic named his party the Socialist Party of Serbia and presented it openly as a successor to the Communist Party. This schizophrenic image was a deathblow to genuine left-wing ideas in Yugoslavia, the consequences of which are felt even today. The masses in the other republics, though sympathetic to Tito legacy, just like their Serbian brothers, started to connect the idea of communism and the idea of a united

Yugoslavia with greater Serbia. The overall confusion inside Serbia was not helped by the fact that the opposition also labelled Milosevic a "communist" - the public image he would keep until his final days.

As time progressed the imperialists became increasingly dissatisfied with Milosevic's rule. He was becoming too ambitious and unreliable. Furthermore, he got caught up in a series of bloody conflicts in ethnically mixed territories in other republics. Unlike other Eastern Europe "ex-communists" whose dreams of becoming the new ruling class evaporated very quickly with the influx of foreign capital, Milosevic and his clique were much more cunning. They genuinely wanted to transform themselves into the new bourgeoisie and attempted to keep all the levers of power under their control. The process of privatisation was cautious and slow, with the plunder going to Milosevic and his cronies, as well as foreign capitalists. Milosevic also never cut his ties with the hardliners in the Kremlin. His brother held a key position as Yugoslavia's ambassador in Moscow. Milosevic was becoming too independent, trying to play the power game on an equal footing with the big imperialists who simply could not tolerate potential independent and competing power in the Balkans.

Imperialism

The imperialists were even prepared to give their friend a second chance. After they cut Milosevic off from all territorial gains in Croatia and Bosnia by providing military support to the rival bureaucracies and after establishing a set of small dependent states with clear borders, it was time for business. The sanctions on Serbia were lifted and Milosevic was hailed as a force of "peace and stability" in the Balkans. By 1995, however, it had become clear that Milosevic and his regime were organically incapable of changing. Their power rested on a shady new layer of gangsters and capitalists who had been granted concessions during the war. The selling off of the Serbian economy to the imperialists was taking place, but not nearly as quickly as to satisfy the hunger of the imperialist vultures. Milosevic had to be removed.

Despite receiving millions of dollars from the imperialists, the aggressive, pro-capitalist buffoons in the Serbian

Pakistan

opposition never managed to win the support of the Serbian working class. They were even more corrupt than the Milosevic clique. In the end, the imperialists didn't have to wait very long before they found another excuse to go after Milosevic. The conflict in Kosovo, where the Serbian regime of apartheid had been established with the abolition of Kosovo's autonomous status, was used as a pretext for a NATO attack against Yugoslavia in an attempt to topple Milosevic. However, after 78 days of bombing and the complete devastation of the Serbian economy, the imperialists managed to do little besides making Milosevic even stronger. It took a mass movement of workers and youth within Serbia in October 2000 to finally overthrow the dictator.

Class Struggle

The present over-simplified explanations for the rise and fall of Milosevic are actually very dangerous. Putting all the blame on this ambitious nationalist bureaucrat and granting him supernatural powers completely ignores the role played by imperialism. It was the imperialists who gave their support to various local gangsters in the former-Yugoslavia until they succeeded in creating a series of weak, dependent, submissive national states completely open to imperialist exploitation.

There is also a tendency in the bourgeois media in other ex-Yugoslav republics, who felt Milosevic's long bloody hand during the war, to emphasise the strong bond between Milosevic and the Serbian masses. There is an effort to show that there is a wave of mourning for Milosevic all across Serbia. The ruling classes of these states have an interest in using scare tactics in order to discourage future contact between the workers of the former-Yugoslav Republic. Not negating the strong support that Milosevic enjoyed for a period of time for the reasons briefly sketched above, it is important to point out that Milosevic's main ally was not the Serbian working class but his class brothers and sisters in the other republics. During the days of the worst clashes between Serbia and Croatia, Milosevic and Tudjman had no problem meeting in luxurious villas and drawing maps together over meals. Tudjman himself was a great admirer of Milosevic and his work. The people of the Balkans also cannot forget how Western diplomats used to love the marathon negotiation sessions with Milosevic, drinking whiskey in his Belgrade villa until all hours of the night. Now we see these spineless creatures, the Holbrucks and Zimmermans on BBC and CNN talking about Milosevic's "dark mind". Our contempt for these messengers of death unites us as much as our hatred towards the local gangsters who pushed us into the carnage of war with our brothers and sisters.

Few have bothered to spill tears over Milosevic in Serbia today. His death marks the end of a tragic era in which the poison of nationalism numbed our class senses. The Balkans cannot remain immune to the changing world situation. Today, former dictators are in their graves and the class struggle is on the order of the day. □

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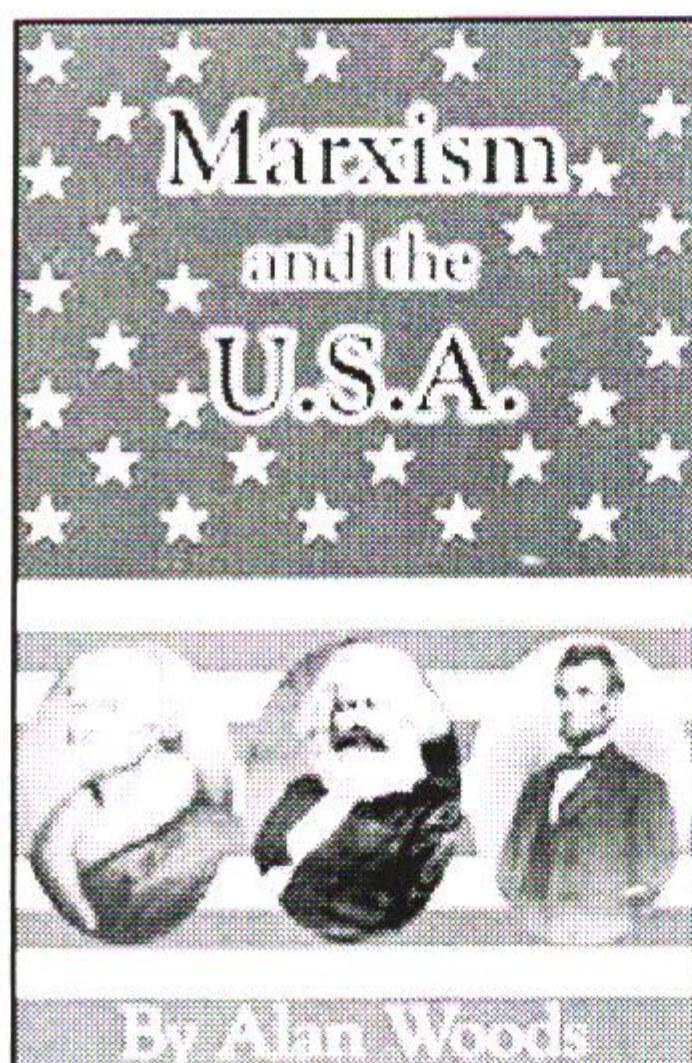
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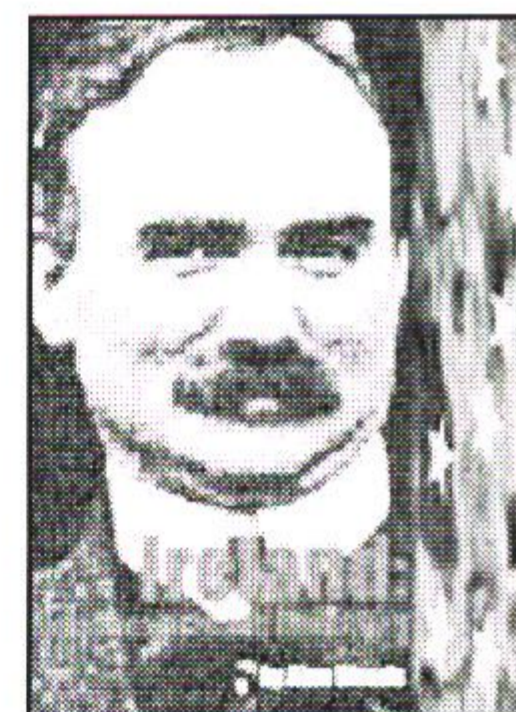
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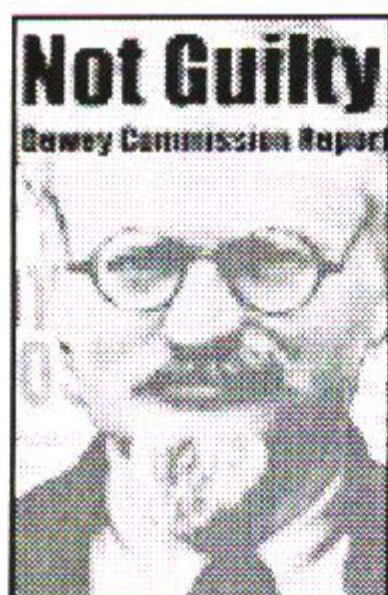
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

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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Mass Protests and Strikes in France: The Dawning of a New Era

by Greg Oxley - www.lariposte.com

A NEW and particularly vicious attack on the basic rights of young workers has led to a spectacular upsurge of protest and struggle in France. Once again, millions of students and workers have taken to the streets to defend their interests against the most reactionary government ever seen in France since the Vichy regime at the time of the Second World War.

The present wave of protest comes in the wake of the mass riots of desperate and poverty-stricken youth that flared up in the working class suburbs of over 200 towns in the latter months of 2005. At the time, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that these had been the work of "organised criminal gangs". This was immediately contradicted by his own intelligence services, which officially defined the events as "a spontaneous form of popular insurrection" resulting from "the accumulated effects of social and racial discrimination". President Chirac was also forced to recognise the existence of a "profound malaise" in society.

However, in a typically treacherous and cynical fashion, Chirac and the right-wing De Villepin government have tried to exploit the *révolte des banlieues* in order to carry out further attacks against the rights and living conditions of workers in general, and of young workers in particular. Presented as a means of reducing unemployment, a new law introducing a special labour contract for workers under 26 years old relegates them to nothing more than raw material for exploitation, and places them completely at the mercy of employers. The so-called "First Employment Contract" (*Contrat première embauche*, or CPE) gives employers the right to sack workers immediately and without any justification over a period of two years. In spite of the name given to this contract, it has nothing to do with "first employment", but can apply to all young workers. Under this law, any youth

that complains about working conditions, joins a union, or displeases his employer in any other way - even if only by falling sick - can be simply sacked on the spot. The employer does not have to give any explanation for his decision. There can be no doubt that if this new law is allowed to stand, it will only be a matter of time before it is extended to cover many other categories of workers.

The scale of the reaction to this attack - which comes in the wake of many others over the last few years - has given us a new example of the magnificent fighting traditions of workers and youth in France. Not for nothing has this country been called the "mother of revolutions".

Over the last month, mass demonstrations have taken place throughout the country. Even the most conservative labour unions have been forced to take a firm stand on this issue, on account of the pressure and burning anger of the workers. On Saturday 18th March - which was also the anniversary of the Paris Commune - some 1.5 million people took to the streets. In Paris, 350,000 workers and youth demonstrated. In Marseille, where a number of very bitter and determined strikes to defend jobs and prevent privatisation (Corsica Ferries, public transport and dock workers) have been cruelly defeated, 130,000 people were on the march.

One noticeable feature of these marches is the scarcity, compared to

the huge numbers of demonstrators, of the banners and flags of the traditional workers' and students' organisations. These are not demonstrations of regular activists, but of the hitherto unorganised mass. The students have moved on a gigantic scale through the organisation of democratic assemblies, which decide on the course of action to be taken. At least 65 universities are involved in the struggle. School students too are in revolt. Even according to the figures of the Ministry of Education, the movement has affected 313 schools. According to student organisations, the real figure is at least twice as high.

Further mass demonstrations and strikes, in the public sector and the private sector, are now planned for March 28th. The crisis is having profound repercussions at all levels of society. Spontaneous marches and protest actions are taking place every day in different parts of the country. The management boards of universities and a whole series of prestigious institutions and personalities have spoken out against the CPE, insisting that the government should back down and withdraw the measure immediately. A poll published on the 20th March indicates that only 22% of the population consider the present situation to be a "temporary protest", whereas 71% consider that France has entered into a "profound and lasting social crisis." Other polls indicate that between 60% and 75% of the population - and over 90%

of the youth - agree with the aims of the anti-CPE movement.

The leaders of the Socialist Party, not usually inclined to rash declarations and gestures, have announced that they will immediately repeal the hated law if the left wins the parliamentary elections, due to take place in the spring of 2007. The victory of the left in the



next elections can be considered as a certainty, such is the hostility of the mass of the electorate to the present government. But many things can happen between now and then. The Socialist leaders are desperately trying to channel the opposition to the government into purely parliamentary and electoral lines, but they do not and cannot control the present movement.



Given the tension in society and the bitterness of the struggle underway, events could develop into a revolutionary situation similar to that of 1968. All the ingredients for such a turn are present. If the government does not back down, the movement is likely to grow in scale. Any incident could lead to a further escalation. At the time of the student protests which took place under the Chirac government of 1986-1988, a young man was beaten to death by police, provoking a demonstration of no less than one million people in the streets of the capital. Under present conditions, an incident of that kind would have an even greater effect, after so many years of repeated attacks on the rights and living standards of working people, leaving between 5 and 7 million people living below the poverty line.

The government is in a state of panic. To back down now would amount to a serious defeat. De Villepin would lose all credibility just 9 months after his discredited predecessor, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, was sacked following the defeat of European Constitution in the referendum of 29th May. On the other hand, to maintain the CPE in the present context will mean fuelling the protest movement and the risk of provoking a revolutionary crisis. As Napoleon Bonaparte once said: "There are situations, in politics and in war, in which whatever you do is a mistake". De Villepin is in just such a situation.

The present deadlock and the widening gulf between the classes

are yet another sign of growing social and political instability in France, against a background of economic stagnation, massive state debt - the accumulated deficit of the French State is now more than 1,100 billion Euros! - and sharply declining living standards. In all fields, whether it be employment, wages, working conditions, housing, pensions, social security, health, education or social services, society is being driven backwards.

This cannot continue indefinitely. The mass demonstrations in defence of pensions in 2003, the long and bitter strikes over recent years, the rejection of the pro-capitalist European Constitution, the riots of last year, and now the present movement, are but so many unmistakable signs, like the first tremors of a pending earthquake, of the dawning of a new era in the history of France. This will be a revolutionary era, in the course of which the necessity of moving in the direction of socialism will be placed on the order of the day. We can say this for the simple reason that no way out will be found on the basis of capitalism. It must be understood that workers and youth will only come to this conclusion with some difficulty, feeling their way forward, and suffering setbacks as they go. But when, on the strength of their own experience, they finally decide that a fundamental change is necessary, no force on earth will be able to stop them. □

Strike at Iran Khodro Car Plant in Tehran

by the Workers'
Action Committee (Iran)

THE ANNOUNCEMENT that the bonus for a year of record-breaking production was going to be lower than last year's had an explosive effect on the workers of Iran Khodro. At 4pm on Wednesday 4 March they began protesting against this management decision.

The Iran Khodro workers, who were already dissatisfied with next year's wage levels announced by the Labour Ministry, ran out of patience after hearing the news about the bonuses and strongly resisted this decision. This protest, which continued as a go-slow until the third shift came on, spread to the 'shuttle hall' when this shift came on. Since this is the biggest hall in the plant the protest by its workers brought the production line to a standstill. The strike began at this point.

This action by the 'shuttle hall' workers came to a head, and when the workers of the third shift left the hall and asked the number one assembly hall to join them, the workers of this hall also joined the strike. Once the workers of the paint hall had joined this wave, there was unity among the workers of all the halls and the strike became widespread. In this way the production line in most halls came to a halt and, with the slogan "Going on strike is the only way to act", the strike took over the whole plant.

At this point the factory's security force became involved and the management made some promises to the workers. But the workers did not pay any attention to them and did not believe their promises; they demanded to see Mr Manteghi. This situation continued until 9pm when Dehnadi, Manteghi's deputy, entered the halls.

Dehnadi, while facing the workers, promised them that this year's bonus will not be less than last year's and asked the workers to calm the situation. With this promise the workers gradually returned to work. □

Translated by: Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network

(Iran Khodro is the largest vehicle manufacturer in the Middle East, producing over 110,000 units a year. It produces passenger cars, minibuses and buses, vans and trucks. It was formed in 1962 and currently employs around 30,000 workers.)

Jericho and beyond

by Yossi Schwartz in Israel

ON TUESDAY March 14, the Israeli Army shelled and occupied a prison in Jericho and after it had demolished parts of the prison walls "victoriously" kidnapped a group of prisoners, including Ahmed Saadat, the accused mastermind of the killing of a far right Israeli Cabinet minister, by the name of Rehabam Zeevi.

Ahamd Saadat is the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) a left wing guerrilla group. Zeevi was known for his close relations with the Israeli Mafia and he was the leader of Moledet (Country) party calling for the "transfer" of the Arabs citizens of Israel, i.e. their expulsion, adding them to the millions of Palestinian refugees who have languished in camps ever since the partition of Palestine and the subsequent occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Among other things Rehbam Zeevi was one of the masterminds who transferred 120,000 Arabs from the Golan Heights after the occupation in 1967.

We Marxists oppose the methods of individual terror as they only help the most reactionary wing of the ruling class. Instead of weakening the Zionist right they strengthen it. Instead of raising class consciousness among the Israeli workers they lower it. However, we do not condemn the killing of Zeevi on moralist grounds. We do not share one tear for him.

The hypocrites who condemn this killing on "moral" grounds should be reminded of the case of Hershel Grynszpan (pronounced "greenspan"). He was the young Jewish student who killed a German diplomat in Paris in November 1938, after his parents were deported to Poland with another 17,000 Jews. The Nazis used this act to justify their launching of the Kristallnacht atrocities. All the hyp-

ocrites in the world united to condemn the killing, but not Trotsky who wrote the following:

"It is clear to anyone even slightly acquainted with political history that the policy of the fascist gangsters directly and sometimes deliberately provokes terrorist acts. What is most astonishing is that so far there has been only one Grynszpan. Undoubtedly the number of such acts will increase.

"We Marxists consider the tactic of individual terror inexpedient in the tasks of the liberating struggle of the proletariat as well as oppressed nationalities. A single isolated hero cannot replace the masses. But we understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance. All our emotions, all our sympathies are with the self-sacrificing avengers even though they have been unable to discover the correct road. Our sympathy becomes intensified because Grynszpan is not a political militant but an inexperienced youth, almost a boy, whose only counsellor was a feeling of indignation. To tear Grynszpan out of the hands of capitalist justice, which is capable of chopping off his head to further serve capitalist diplomacy, is the elementary, immediate task of the international working class!

"All the more revolting in its police stupidity and inexpressible violence is

the campaign now being conducted against Grynszpan by command of the Kremlin in the international Stalinist press. They attempt to depict him as an agent of the Nazis or an agent of Trotskyists in alliance with the Nazis. Lumping into one heap the provocateur and his victim, the Stalinists ascribe to Grynszpan the intention of creating a favourable pretext for Hitler's pogrom measures. What can one say of these venal "journalists" who no longer have any vestiges of shame? Since the beginning of the socialist movement the bourgeoisie has at all times attributed all violent demonstrations of indignation, particularly terrorist acts, to the degenerating influence of Marxism. The Stalinists have inherited, here as elsewhere, the filthiest tradition of reaction...

"It was so, similarly, with the International of Marx in its time. We are bound, naturally, by ties of open moral solidarity to Grynszpan and not to his "democratic" jailers...

"The Stalinists shriek in the ears of the police that Grynszpan attended 'meetings of Trotskyites.' That, unfortunately, is not true. For had he walked into the milieu of the Fourth International he would have discovered a different and more effective outlet for his revolutionary energy. People come cheap who are capable only of fulminating against injustice and bestiality.

But those who, like Grynszpan, are able to act as well as conceive, sacrificing their own lives if need be, are the precious leaven of mankind.

"In the moral sense, although not for his mode of action, Grynszpan may serve as an example for every young revolutionist. Our open moral solidarity with Grynszpan gives us an added right to say to all the other would-be Grynszpans, to all



those capable of self-sacrifice in the struggle against despotism and bestiality: Seek another road! Not the lone avenger but only a great revolutionary mass movement can free the oppressed, a movement that will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression, and racial persecution." (Leon Trotsky, 14 February, 1939)

In answer to this some people, whose solidarity is with the Zeevis of this world and not with the Gynszpans, would say that Israel is not a Nazi regime. Yes, it is true that Israel is not a Nazi regime and the year is not 1942 (the "final solution") but Rehabam Zeevi was a fascist and his actions were no better than that of the Nazi transfer of 17,000 Jews in 1938. We have to be able to distinguish between the desperate act of the oppressed and the terrible repression carried out by the oppressor, even though we do not agree with the method of individual assassinations.

In Jericho what we saw was the action of the oppressor, a powerful army far better equipped than the people of Palestine. According to Al Jazeera, reporting the words of Akram Rajoub, the local security commander, the "Israeli army entered Jericho on Tuesday morning [of last week] and surrounded the prison, calling over loudspeakers for the prisoners to give themselves up. The troops then broke in through the front gate of the jail with a bulldozer, drove inside in armored personnel carriers, and engaged in a shootout with the Palestinian police."

US and British observers who had been monitoring the jail for the past four years withdrew early on Tuesday morning - just before the raid - because of "security concerns". The Israeli government ordered the raid because the monitors were withdrawn, the army said. The truth, however, is evidently the opposite: the British and American monitors withdrew to allow the Israeli army to raid the prison.

This is a known pattern. Before the mass killing of the Palestinians refugees in Sabra and Shatila the American government promised to the Palestinian fighters that it would guarantee the safety of the refugees. Later, after the PLO fighters had left Beirut, the Phalange carried out the massacre in the camps, while the Israeli army made sure that no one would escape.

"Friends" indeed help each other in such cases. Unfortunately for them, friends some time change friends.

Before the mass murder by Baruch Goldstein in Hebron, for some mysterious reason the guards were missing and the cameras in the cave were not loaded with film. Another miracle happened there. Goldstein supposedly used only one weapon but they found bullet shells of two weapons. "God's ways are mysterious," Pat Robertson, the Christian fundamentalist, would say, while Bush, Blair and Olmert would say "Hallelujah praise the Lord".

During the shootout with a small Palestinian police force, three Palestinians were killed and 35 were injured. This attack on the prison also came conveniently just two weeks before the national elections in Israel. This of course has boosted the ratings of the Acting Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert and his party Kadima in the opinion polls, but at the same time it has increased the instability in the Occupied Territories and has added to the growing instability in the entire region.

This has all happened while Sharon is being kept artificially alive until the end of the election campaign. The Palestinian group that must feel the absence of Sharon the most is Hamas. His repressive policies were a major contributing factor to the electoral victory of this group this January. But now it seems that Olmert is following faithfully in the footsteps of the dying leader and may help them as much as Sharon.

Hamas Election Victory

The victory of Hamas has been used by Olmert and his party Kadima to gain votes in the electoral campaign. "We will never negotiate with terrorists," they have declared. Olmert has even used the victory of Hamas to de facto steal money, the VAT his government collects for the Palestinian Authority, in violation of the agreements between Israel and the PA, while announcing that Hamas must respect the agreements the PA signed with Israel.

However, since the Israeli public yearns for peace both parties, Kadima and the Labour Party, have announced they will support the so called "moderate" (i.e. collaborationist) wing of Fatah led by president Mahmoud Abbas, also known as "Abu Mazen", and will never

recognize the Hamas government.

Only just over a week ago a Labour Party team met with Abu Mazen to get his blessing and support, praising him for his courage and wisdom. On the same day during an Israeli TV political show Ephraim Sneh, a leading member of the right wing in the Labour Party, was very open and explained that the Labour Party wants Abu Mazen, who still has control of the Palestinian army, to organize a military coup against the elected government of Hamas.

Perhaps because of this "exposure", Abu Mazen in return has announced that he prefers Kadima. This of course made the Labour Party right wing leadership furious. Not only have they showed no respect for any democratic norms but they were not even paid for it.

For weeks Kadima's strategy in the elections was to put every one to sleep. The Labour Party instead of organizing the working class and the poor in massive actions against the government played along with this Kadima strategy.

It worked very well for Kadima as the Labour Party ratings have been steadily declining. But then many reports of Olmert's corruption appeared in the mass media. And Kadima's popularity went down while the parties to the right of the Labour Party and Kadima have been gaining support.

This of course did not make Olmert, the acting Prime Minister, very happy with the polls. Like an old magician he has used the old trick of creating an extreme nationalist atmosphere in the country and with himself as the great hero in the style of the Western movies of the 1950s. Thus he sent the Israeli army to attack Jericho's prison. If Reagan could become the President of the US even though he was known for his B movies, why should Olmert not be the Prime Minister of Israel?

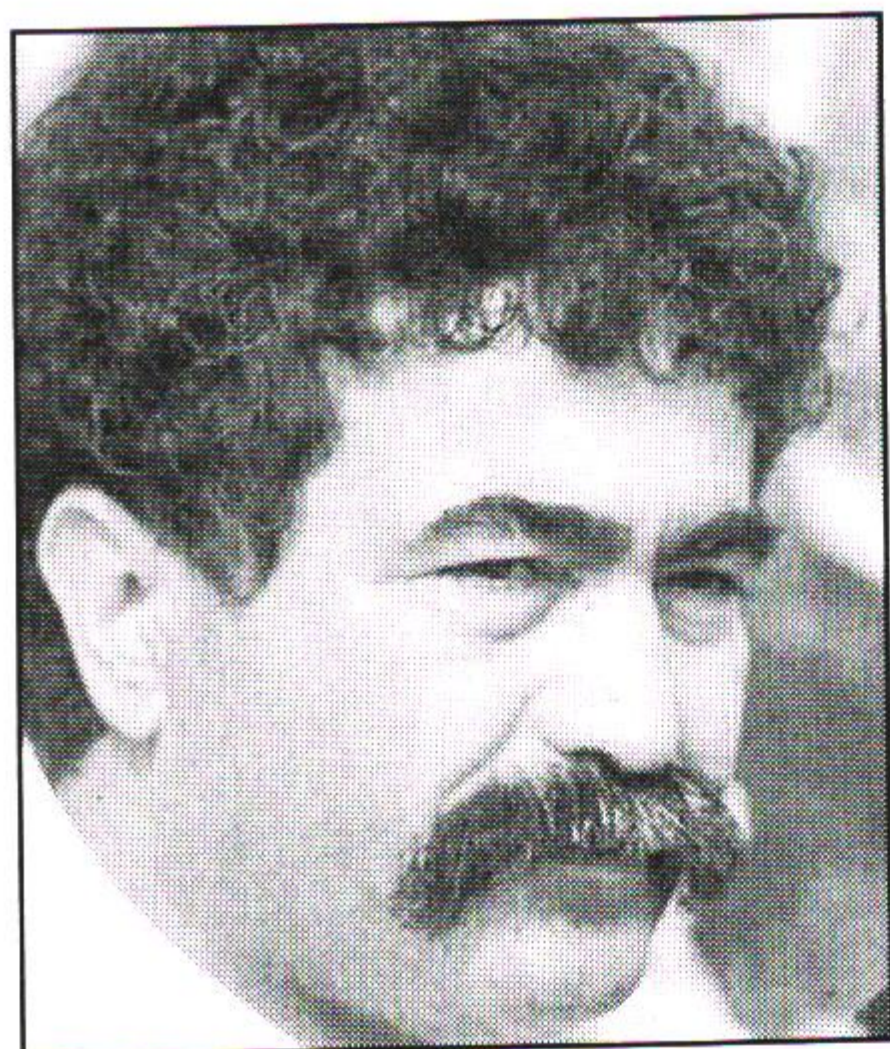
This trick has worked. It was applauded by most Israeli politicians including even Amir Peretz, the new leader of the Labour Party partly. Peretz has in fact been caving in to the nationalist pressure, but it may also be possibly to take revenge. After all, did Abu Mazen not betray him first? Thus Olmert and his Kadima party have gained approval ratings in the wake of the raid, and 12 days before a general election it now seems they are likely to win. With the existing leadership of the Labour Party even Mickey Mouse could win. After having raised the hopes of

win. With the existing leadership of the Labour Party even Mickey Mouse could win. After having raised the hopes of many workers on the left Peretz has swung back to the "centre", disappointing many of his supporters

This successful pirate act by Olmert indeed was almost like a military coup, not against Hamas however, but against Mahmoud Abbas, the great President, the darling of the US and the Israeli ruling class. So what if they have betrayed him? Isn't this normal among thieves - sorry, among "democrats"?

This operation is likely to open a new round of terrorist actions inside Israel that will kill innocent workers and poor, among them foreign workers, and will give the Israeli government the chance to retaliate with state terrorism. This is a great result for the capitalists whom Olmert serves. Since the beginning of the Intifada more than five years ago the rich have grown richer and the number of people living below the poverty line in Israel has grown from less than one million to close to 1.6 million.

The Israeli establishment would like to boycott the Hamas government, carry out an air strike against Iran, topple Bashar Assad in Syria and so on. However, the big boss is American imperialism that is considering the option of dealing with Hamas. After all, the US and the fundamentalists have a long history of collaboration. They worked together in Indonesia and after the CIA backed coup against the elected government of Sukarno they murdered between half a million and one million workers and peasants suspected of supporting Sukarano and the Communist Party. They worked together



er in Afghanistan to topple the left wing government. They are working together in occupied Iraq.

In other words, the Israeli army that acted to destroy the influence of Abu Mazen in the raid on the West Bank prison in order to boost acting premier Ehud Olmert's prospects of re-election, is actually ensuring that it will negotiate with Hamas.

The Fatah leadership is very aware of the fact that Olmert, whom they supported until a few days ago, is destroying them. "What happened in Jericho and the crimes against the Palestinian people... is a pre-planned scheme to destroy the Palestinian Authority. This is the basis of Israeli policy," Saeb Erikat, chief Palestinian negotiator, told reporters on Thursday.

Masses are decisive

Most Palestinians are aware that the raid on the prison was supported by Bush and Blair, who removed the British and the American observers prior to the attack. The Palestinian masses are furious with the American gangster and his poodle. But Erakat, who spoke after the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization had discussed Saadat's capture, put the rope round his neck when he held Britain and the United States responsible and... called on them to work with Israel to return the fighters. "We decided to call the United States and United Kingdom to put pressure on Israel to return the people who were kidnapped from the Palestinian Authority," PLO committee member Saleh Rafat said.

If Olmert is the old drunk magician, the Abu Mazen group is the scared rabbit in the magician's hat. Olmert of course wants to use the kidnapping as the cream on his cake, and have a show trial of Saadat and four PFLP colleagues for the Zeevi killing. The chief prosecutor has already ruled that there is no legal impediment for such a trial to go ahead, even though one has already been convicted by an Israeli court and all but Saadat were convicted by the Palestinians. "Taking into account past agreements with the Palestinian Authority and the circumstances, they can be tried in Israel," a justice ministry spokesman said.

To get real media coverage they would like a civilian rather than a military court. The Romans used this old

trick of bread and circuses by throwing the Christians before the lions long before today's leaders of Israel. It did not help them...

Last week the security services began interrogating Saadat and his comrades. However, according to his lawyer Hassan Mahmud, after visiting him Saadat told the Israeli officials in the prison: "I refuse to have any dealings with you as I consider that you have kidnapped me."

A show trial of Saadat may prove to be a boomerang as it will give the PFLP a chance to focus on the crimes of the Israeli state and the US and British imperialism that back Israel against the Palestinians. Already in a letter to the Palestinian People from his cell in Jerusalem, through the Adameer Society, Saadat said that the Mid-East Peace "Quartet" [the US, European Union, Russia and the United Nations] is providing a cover for Israel, and that what happened in Jericho means that the US and UK are now openly part of this conflict. Saadat has put the burden for responsibility on both America and Britain and has accused them of collusion with the Israelis. He has also blamed the Palestinian Authority for not releasing the prisoners in Jericho Jail before the attack.

However, if all this continues we cannot exclude the possibility that the "only democracy in the Middle East" may help Saadat leave this world while in the Israeli prison and then present it as a death from natural causes.

The masses are on the move in the Middle East but Saadat in his letter reveals quite clearly that he does not count on the workers and the poor in the Arab countries but on the Arab ruling classes and the "Moslem nations". In other words he still has not learnt any lessons from the past.

We, the Marxists in Israel who work in the Labour Party struggling for the socialist transformation of the rotten capitalist order, demand the immediate release of Ahmad Saadat. The Israeli ruling class is the last one to have any moral authority to bring to trial the PFLP for killing an Israeli war criminal, an enemy of the working class.

At the same time we oppose individual terrorism, as it is a method that only serves reaction in Israel. The only way forward is through the revolutionary struggle of the working class. □

Support the Soldiers of Solidarity!

This generation is the first in the USA since the war whose living standards will be lower than their parents. The majority of the population is against the occupation of Iraq. The developing class struggle and political crises in the US gain scant coverage in our media. The struggle for socialism in the US is self-evidently vital for the rest of the world. For our readers information we are publishing below the text of a leaflet (pictured right) published by our American comrades in the Workers' International League.

The bosses and their representatives in government are hell-bent on turning the clock back 75 years or more. Wages, conditions, pensions, and benefits are all on the chopping block. And remember: pensions are deferred wages - workers have earned every penny that goes into their retirement funds, and to take that away is theft, pure and simple.

Major corporations like Delphi are declaring "bankruptcy" as a battering ram against organized labor. Never mind that they are sheltering billions in assets in offshore accounts and companies. The government has intervened openly on the side of the bosses, agreeing to bonuses for the incompetent CEOs, and in favor of gutting the pensions of the workers. The same goes for the airlines. This blows the illusion of the "impartiality of the courts" out of the water.

Then there's the blatant disregard for workers' safety that was so tragically apparent in the case of the West Virginia coal miners. That's just par for the course in a profit-driven system: in some industries we see the tremendous incompetence, callousness, and deception of the CEOs, while in others we see corporate profits skyrocketing at the expense of the vast majority of the population.

For decades, U.S. workers had illusions in the "American Dream" - that by working hard, we could gradually and continually improve our conditions of life and those of our children and grandchildren. We hoped that capitalism could be reformed, that over time we would get an ever-larger slice of the pie. Now, even the crumbs are being taken away, and we're learning the

hard way that this is "as good as it gets". Yet it is precisely now that the union leadership wants us to make concessions in order to continue the one-sided "partnership with the bosses".

It's clear now that all bets are off: the social contract is over. The bosses, with the connivance of the bi-partisan government, are waging a one-sided war against the working class.

The Soldiers of Solidarity (SoS) have had enough and are showing working Americans the way forward. After a long string of betrayals and sellouts, a group of rank and file United Auto Workers have launched a campaign of genuine class-wide solidarity against the attacks faced by us all. With nothing left to lose and their backs

against the wall, they understand fully that if the bosses succeed in breaking the resistance of Delphi's workers, then they can do the same to workers across the board. This is the Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill of the U.S. Labor Movement.

The bottom line is, the bosses are unable to efficiently and safely run the vital industries we all rely on. Instead of running them in the interests of the vast majority of working Americans who actually do all the work and create all the wealth, they pocket record profits while we are thrown out on our ears. On top of that, they use their lawyers and the courts to get their way, and then demand billions in handouts of public money to keep things running while they lay off tens of thousands of workers. If they want public money, then we demand public control.

Working people internationally can rely only on our own strength and organizations to combat the combined attacks of the bosses, the government, and the pro-boss trade union leadership. This affects every last one of us: All Support to the Soldiers of Solidarity!

The American labour movement can also learn from the experience of the

Support the Soldiers of Solidarity!

The bosses and their representatives in government are hell-bent on turning the clock back 75 years or more. Wages, conditions, pensions, and benefits are all on the chopping block. And remember: pensions are deferred wages - workers have earned every penny that goes into their retirement funds, and to take that away is theft, pure and simple.

Major corporations like Delphi are declaring "bankruptcy" as a battering ram against organized labor. Never mind that they are sheltering billions in assets in offshore accounts and companies. The government has intervened openly on the side of the bosses, agreeing to bonuses for the incompetent CEOs, and in favor of gutting the pensions of the workers. The same goes for the airlines. This blows the illusion of the "impartiality of the courts" out of the water.

Then there's the blatant disregard for workers' safety that was so tragically apparent in the case of the West Virginia coal miners. That's just par for the course in a profit-driven system: in some industries we see the tremendous incompetence, callousness, and deception of the CEOs, while in others we see corporate profits skyrocketing at the expense of the vast majority of the population.

For decades, U.S. workers had illusions in the "American Dream" - that by working hard, we could gradually and continually improve our conditions of life and those of our children and grandchildren. We hoped that capitalism could be reformed, that over time we would get an ever-larger slice of the pie. Now, even the crumbs are being taken away, and we're learning the hard way that this is "as good as it gets". Yet it is precisely now that the union leadership wants us to make concessions in order to continue the one-sided "partnership with the bosses".

It's clear now that all bets are off: the social contract is over. The bosses, with the connivance of the bi-partisan government, are waging a one-sided war against the working class.

The Soldiers of Solidarity (SoS) have had enough and are showing working Americans the way forward. After a long string of betrayals and sellouts, a group of rank and file United Auto Workers have launched a campaign of genuine class-wide solidarity against the attacks faced by us all. With nothing left to lose and their backs against the wall, they understand fully that if the bosses succeed in breaking the resistance of Delphi's workers, then they can do the same to workers across the board. This is the Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill of the U.S. Labor Movement.

The bottom line is, the bosses are unable to efficiently and safely run the vital industries we all rely on. Instead of running them in the interests of the vast majority of working Americans who actually do all the work and create all the wealth, they pocket record profits while we



are thrown out on our ears. On top of that, they use their lawyers and the courts to get their way, and then demand billions in handouts of public money to keep things running while they lay off tens of thousands of workers. If they want public money, then we demand public control.

Working people internationally can rely only on our own strength and organizations to combat the combined attacks of the bosses, the government, and the pro-boss trade union leadership. This affects every last one of us: All Support to the Soldiers of Solidarity!

The American labour movement can also learn from the experience of the Venezuelan workers. After decades of attacks and sellouts, they took things into their own hands: they threw out the corrupt and incompetent trade union leaders and voted out the bosses' political parties. They also occupied several major factories, some of which have subsequently been nationalized, and began running them under democratic workers' control. This shows that another world is possible - but they can't do it alone. They need our international solidarity: once again, the struggle of these workers affects us all.

Brothers and Sisters: it's the 1930s all over again, and only by returning to the militant methods we used back then, the methods of the Flint sit-down strikers and the formation of the CIO, can we hope to stop these attacks once and for all. American workers need to follow in the footsteps of our Venezuelan compatriots: if the bosses can't run things anymore, then we need to.

- Concessions Don't Save Jobs!
- Every Worker a Soldier of Solidarity!
- Nationalize the Auto Industry Under Democratic Workers' Control!

Contact the Workers' International League for more information: www.socialistappeal.org



www.soldiersofsolidarity.com www.futureoftheunion.com www.socialistappeal.org

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fighting fund

Let's Keep It Coming!

First of all I wish to make an important announcement. Please note that any donations made towards our Fighting Fund appeal will not count towards any Lordship (or similar ranked title) which you might have been expecting in return. I was considering contacting the appropriate authorities to ask if we could be allocated a couple of titles to raffle or give away as prizes to generous donors but was advised that my chances were slim and in any case the market had already been cornered

This is a pity as the House of Lords seems like a nice place to go and have a kip in the afternoon – well that is what most people seem to be doing when I turn on the Parliament Channel – and you only need to put on the Father Xmas gear once a year. Evidently you also get to have a say in the Body Politic which just goes to show what an odd million or two will get you nowadays.

Now, of course, I'm just joshing you all – anyone who is now sensing pangs of disappointment should perhaps see a doctor. Mind you there must be quite a few wannabe toffs who are now more than a little put out by the poor return on all the millions they have been loaning to New Labour. But should we not all be equally annoyed at the way these people are able to buy power and influence at the point of a cheque book. The only people who should be financing the Labour Party are ordinary party members and the trade unions – and it is to them that the party should, in return, be listening to.

We have the same attitude to our own finances. We don't want to be beholden to any rich concerns but rather be accountable to our own class. This is central to the aim of fighting for socialism and the ideas of Marxism. But this places a duty on every reader, seller and supporter not to let us down. We need the regular and not-so-regular donations to keep going and expand our resources.

This month we enjoyed getting over £230 from a London Day school, £60 from Mike Hogan, £10 from Ben, £10 from Peterborough and a number of other donations, including quite a few 'extras' from journal sales... but we need to up the tempo. Let's make April a bumper month.

Donations can be made in a number of ways. By cheque to us at PO Box 2626, London E14 6WG (made payable to Socialist Appeal SC). Cheques and cash can also be paid in over the counter at any branch of Abbey National quoting account number K2018479SOC. TransCash payments can also be made at any Post Office into Alliance and Leicester account number 562 528 601, sort code 72 00 00, reference BBC.

Help us fight for a better future – and let's consign the House of Lords to the dustbin of history once and for all!

Thanks in advance

Steve Jones

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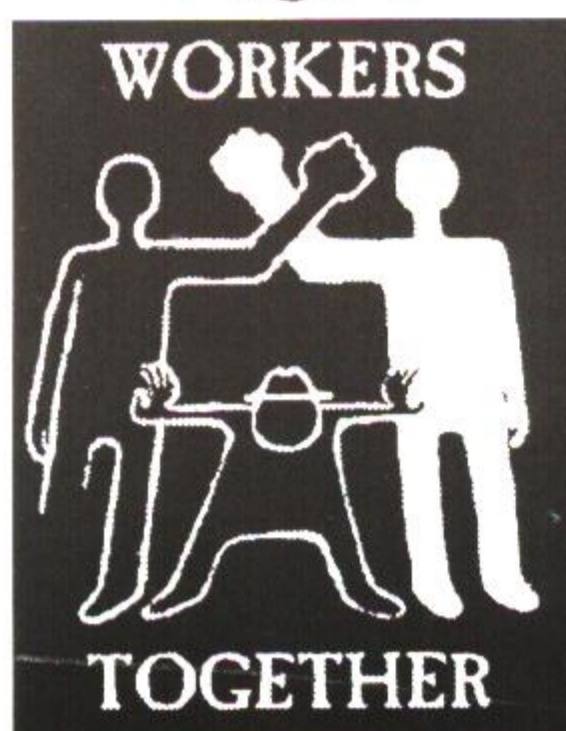
**May Day March and Rally:
Trade Union Freedom Bill
Monday 1st May 2006**

Join London's traditional May Day march which will assemble at Clerkenwell Green at 12 noon (near Farringdon tube) and march to a rally with major speakers including Tony Benn at Trafalgar Square.

☐ Hands Off Venezuela meeting will take place following the rally. Details at HOV stall

**Send Us Your
May Day
Greetings!**

See details at
Page 3



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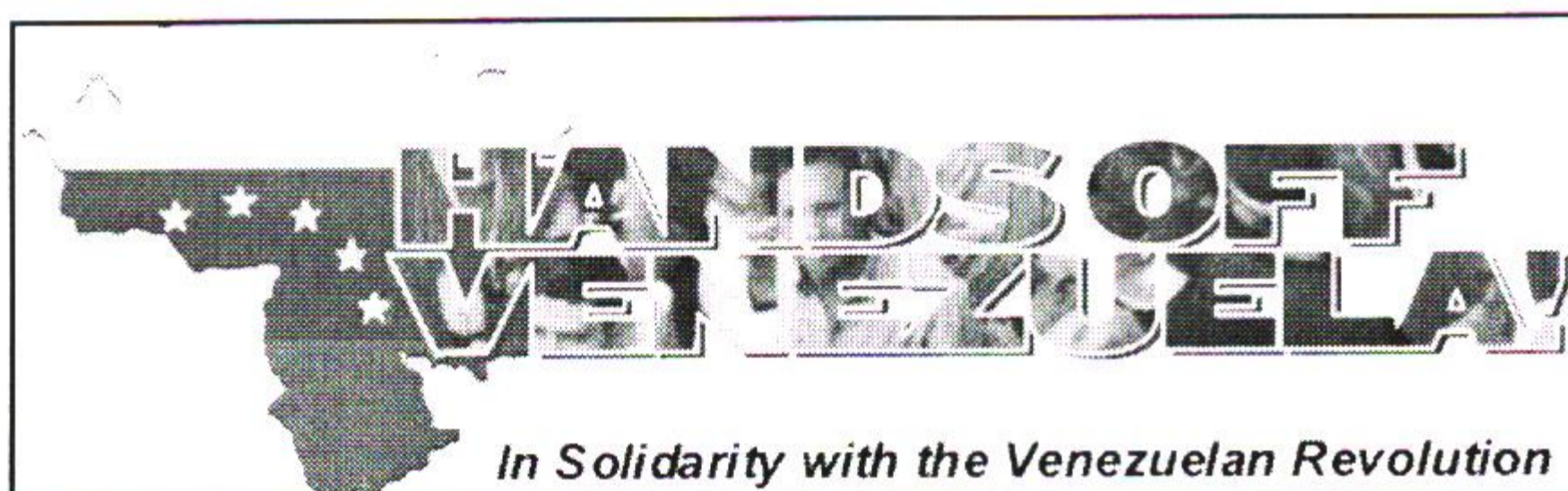
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"Hands Off Venezuela! Many thanks to all you fighters of the world who are backing this campaign for the freedom not only of Venezuela but the whole of the world."

President Hugo Chavez

Join Hands Off Venezuela!

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



www.handsoffvenezuela.org / britain@handsoffvenezuela.org

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

France: workers and youth take to the streets



by Greg Oxley in Paris

The strikes and demonstrations that took place on March 28th represent one of the most powerful expressions of mass action in the entire history of the French working class. Over three million workers took to the streets all over France, with 700,000 marchers in Paris, in the fourth and by far the most successful day of action. This movement has only been equalled, in the last 60 years, by the revolutionary events of May and June 1968.

Under the terms of the "*Contrat premiere embauche*" (CPE) employers no longer need to give any reason or explanation for sacking employees

under 26 years old. This outrageous provocation has unleashed a storm of popular protest, strike action, university occupations, school student demonstrations and from the youth of the poorest districts a new wave of rioting.

Clearly, the ruling class is losing its hold on society. It is difficult to say whether this movement will reach the scale of 1968, but it is moving in that direction. We are standing before a pre-revolutionary situation as an immediate possibility.

The clearest sign of a split within the ruling class is the behaviour of reactionary Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy who has attacked Prime Minister De Villepin as being too dog-

matic! There is more to this division than the personal rivalry for the Presidential candidacy for the Right in 2007. Sarkozy is giving voice to the real fears of the Ruling Class that the situation is spiralling out of control. The MEDEF, which represents big business, has also tried to distance itself from the government. Such divisions are a classical symptom of a pre-revolutionary crisis.

The "moderate" Socialist leaders have no alternative but to take a clear stand against the CPE. They have promised to repeal the Law should they, as expected, win the elections in 2007. The CGT, the CFDT, FO, and all the political and trade union organisations are being pushed to the left.

Over the next few days the ruling class and the workers and youth will be drawing a balance sheet of events of the last month. March 28th will have served to strengthen the morale and fighting spirit of the workers and youth. In any case, whatever the immediate outcome of the present struggle, France is heading towards a new and gigantic revolutionary upheaval that will shake the whole of Europe and, indeed, the entire world.

□ See full version of this article at www.marxist.com

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