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SocialistAppeal

June 2006 issue 143

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



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Chavez Comes to London
 A full report of the activities and meetings surrounding the visit of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to London, and of the 5000 strong mass rally organised by Hands Off Venezuela in Vienna.

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Trade Union News

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The Deadline for Issue 144 is June 16

Blair Goes Nuclear

"Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.."

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Despite the almost incessant rainfall we are officially in a drought. There can be no doubt that climate change is contributing to changing weather patterns to adversely affect our water supply. This is a foretaste of what conditions will be like here in the not too distant future if something is not done to halt and reverse the destruction of our environment on a global scale.

However, the biggest single contributor to the present water shortage in Britain is privatisation. Thames Water, for example, is currently leaking 200 million gallons of water per week into the ground through broken pipes. Like every other privatisation scheme, the selling off of water provided private companies with a licence to print money at the expense of our services. There is just no profit to be made from repairing leaking pipes. On the contrary that investment would come from their profits eating into the dividends paid to shareholders and bonuses paid to executives. The privatisation of our water must be reversed and a massive programme of investment planned to repair the damaged and neglected infrastructure.

Britain is a windblown island, sitting on top of huge coal reserves, surrounded by seawater. There are many alternative forms of energy supply that can play a part in producing the power we need. Yet we are on the verge of an unnecessary energy crisis, to match the unnecessary drought. The fact that gas and oil were running out has been known for decades. This is not some startling revelation, except to the get rich today and hang tomorrow brigade.

Capitalism applies the same narrow, short-term outlook to all of its endeavours. To produce energy (or cars, or steel, etc) cleanly and safely would cost money that capitalist firms are not willing to 'waste'. The future of the planet does not enter into their profit and loss columns. So capitalism is even to blame for the weather! Leaving the production of energy - and, for that matter, large scale industry in general - in private hands is a finished recipe for environmental tragedy.

Blair's solution to the looming ener-

gy crisis is to announce, from the depths of his bunker, the construction of more nuclear power stations. If this plan is allowed to proceed then we will feel the fallout for years to come.

Elliot Morley, the minister for climate change, was sacked because of his opposition to building new fission reactors. As well as the dangers associated with these reactors (there have been 57 'incidents' at Britain's nuclear plants since 1997), huge amounts of deadly waste are produced.

Even if nuclear fission were somehow made safe, could we really have any faith in privateers and contractors to build and run nuclear power stations? They are already calling for the removal of red tape to allow them to cash in. The French firm Areva (favourites to win the construction contracts) claims it can have new reactors built and running by 2017, 'provided the planning process is streamlined'. They want to cut corners even before they start!

Blair claims that building new nuclear plants will cut carbon emissions. Leaving aside the significant contribution to those emissions made by the construction of new reactors, uranium mining, and transport, there remains the decisive question of nuclear waste. They would like to sweep this under the carpet - quite literally by burying it under our feet - but it would leave behind a truly deadly legacy.

Big business in pursuit of profit is already raping the planet's resources and polluting the Earth at an alarming rate. Five companies in Britain produce more carbon dioxide pollution together than all the cars on the roads combined. The biggest polluter EON UK, which owns Powergen, produced 26.4 million tons of carbon dioxide last year, slightly more than Croatia.

According to Blair 'nothing should be ruled out' when considering the solution to the looming energy crisis. Yet his obsession with the market means he has already ruled out the only viable, safe and efficient option - the public ownership, integration and planning of the entire energy sector.

There are plenty of ways to produce energy without destroying the environment. Wind, wave, and solar power all have a part to play. So does the cleaner use of fossil fuels, in par-

ticular, fluidised bed combustion technology for burning coal. Research is desperately needed into clean nuclear technology, notably nuclear fusion, generating power by extracting heavy hydrogen isotopes from water without waste or the risk of new Chernobyls. Unlike nuclear fission, which tears atomic nuclei apart to release energy, fusion involves squeezing the nuclei of two hydrogen atoms together. The hydrogen fuel is part heavy hydrogen or deuterium, which can be easily extracted from water, and part super-heavy hydrogen or tritium, which can be made from lithium, a reasonably abundant metal. The energy produced is truly colossal.

The private sector will not provide the necessary investment or planning. Electricity, gas, oil and coal must be taken back into public ownership and an integrated energy plan drawn up concerned with the safe long term production of our energy needs without harming the health of the workforce or the future of the planet.

Within the chaos of the market system nuclear power can never be safe. The reactors currently contributing to the electricity network need to be safely decommissioned, the private sector cannot be trusted to do that either. The workforce must be provided with guaranteed jobs. They, and thousands more besides, could be employed to research and produce our energy needs once safety, efficiency, and the protection of the environment were to replace profit as the motor force of industry.

The private sector is a disaster on our railways. It is incapable of supplying water. The idea of private companies building and operating nuclear power stations is a living nightmare.

The future offered to us by capitalism is air we cannot breathe, a land polluted by nuclear waste, standpipes in the street for our water, and power cuts. Britain is supposedly the fourth richest economy in the world, yet capitalism is busily transforming it into a third world country.

- No new nuclear plants!
- Nationalise water, electricity, oil, coal and gas!
- For a Socialist Integrated Energy Policy as part of a democratic socialist plan of production!

Tube Workers Treated as Irrelevant by bosses

by Andy Viner, Aslef member (personal capacity)

April saw the end of a three year pay deal for staff on London Underground. It is management's wish that this time we have a five year deal. They have made it no secret that their reasoning is to prevent strikes, especially with train operators. If that is the case why offer less than other Transport for London (TFL) staff, whom have been given 4% this year and 3% or retail price index (RPI) + 0.5% for the next two years. Also, TFL have been given a three year deal. We do not want a five year deal. 3% or (RPI) +0.5% does not reflect real price increases in fuel bills, petrol, community charge and other items.

From this year Underground management pay will be fully determined by performance related pay (PRP). Over the last five years where part of lower management's pay has been determined by PRP. No real advancement of wages has been made. Management now want staff to be given cash payments for meeting performance targets based on the train service. The last time all these targets and satisfactory surveys were met was in 1998. Such is the scale of investment

needed on the underground, shown by the daily signal failures and closure on weekends of vast amounts of the network, these targets will not be met for years to come. Any payments would not be pensionable or added to the basic rate of pay.

London Underground has not made any positive response to our claim for an end to remote booking on and off (where we start and finish work at another location saving the company travelling time) and paid meal relief, which was taken from us years ago.

Another two issues that have arisen are that the East London Line is to close in December 2007 for the lines extension to be completed. When it reopens it will be privatised and another train operating company will be completely mismanaging it. All back door privatisations must be stopped.

Also, it has been announced that from May 2007 tube trains will be running 30 minutes later than now on Fridays and Saturdays. No discussion has taken place with the unions on the effects on workers' conditions as if we are not relevant. □

Jeremy Dear Re-elected Unopposed as NUJ General Secretary



by an NUJ Member

NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear has been re-elected unopposed to serve a further five year term at the head of the union. It is believed to be the first time in the union's 100-year history that the General Secretary has been re-elected unopposed and means Jeremy Dear will remain in post until at least January 2012. The appointment was confirmed today by the union's National Executive Committee after Jeremy Dear was the only nomination from among the union's 40,000 members.

Jeremy Dear said today: "I was very proud to be elected the first time in 2001 but to be re-elected unopposed is a tremendous honour and is a testament to the massive progress the union has made in recent years. That progress has seen the union grow substantially, rediscover its confidence, clear its debts and show it is prepared to stand up for journalists and journalism.

"Hundreds of people have played a key role in that - our staff, our officials, our lay reps and above all our workplace reps who are the public face of the union day in, day out. I and all our members are indebted to them.

"I now look forward to working with them to build on our recent progress and make the NUJ ever stronger, ever more effective - an active, campaigning union for all journalists." □

GMB Ballots For Strike At ASDA

by Our Industrial Correspondent

GMB shop stewards at a meeting in Manchester voted unanimously to hold a ballot for a national strike in Asda Wal-Mart to secure collective bargaining at 20 distribution depots and to secure payment of the 2005 bonus and safe work rates.

GMB members to be included in the ballot work at Asda Wal-Mart warehouse depots.

On 11th April 2006, at a meeting in the House of Commons, GMB and Asda Wal-Mart arrived at an agreement covering recognition, bargaining rights and access for the union in the 20 distribution depots and access in the 302 stores. GMB suspended the plans for an official strike ballot in the depots pending the drawing up of official written agreements. Events in the depots and stores following that meeting cast doubt on the reality of the agreement. Two meetings between the company and GMB on 28th April and 2nd May 2006 confirmed that the company was no longer prepared to deliver.

GMB members in Asda Wal-Mart's distribution depots want to secure proper

national bargaining with the company on pay, conditions and union facilities in all 20 distribution depots. The members employed in the depots want to see Asda Wal-Mart paying a bonus after the company made £775 million profit in 2005. GMB members in the depots are also unhappy with the unilateral introduction of new technology leading to higher work rates in the depots which health and safety experts say will seriously injure GMB members over a long period of time.

Jude Brimble, GMB National Officer for GMB members working in Asda Wal-Mart said, "GMB have spent over 20 hours in talks with the company to try to find a satisfactory resolution of the items in dispute. We thought we had made progress but in the end we are back to square one.

"Asda Wal-Mart is not prepared to accept that pay and condition agreements need to be fair and fairly arrived at. The unanimous vote by the Shop Stewards to re-instate the strike ballot demonstrates that the members will not settle for less. We need a big vote for strike action to secure these reasonable objectives." □

“You cannot manage healthcare like a business”

by Pablo Sanchez

Socialist Appeal spoke recently to Michael Swinbourne, Joint branch secretary North Tees and Hartlepool Branch of Unison.

SA: Could you tell us a little about what you do?

MS: I have been 25 years in the Trust in the operational department, mine is a clinical role. I am the joint branch secretary of the North Tees and Hartlepool branch of UNISON.

SA: I believe that you are in a dispute over redundancies, could you give us some background?

MS: There is a hospital with a deficit of £13.5 million and we have been told to start off with 70 redundancies. This should never have happened. It is not a local issue, it is an NHS issue. There has been a steady decline in the morale of the workforce and a deterioration of the services. In recent times there was a proposal to merge the two hospitals (North Tees and Hartlepool) and the Save Our Hospital Campaign stopped the possibility of a PFI Hospital. So that is what they have come up with. There was an evaluation about 4 months ago and then a job freeze. With the increased capacity in an important working class area with huge needs this means a dire threat to essential services.

SA: Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was here at the UNISON conference yesterday, what did you make of her speech?

MS: Patricia Hewitt's speech appalled me. I was shocked and scared. They are trying to manage health like a business and it cannot be done. You cannot manage the health system like a business. There are too many pressures.

As soon as it is privatised we all lose, staff and public. When the service is private they will only care about making profits. The private system works with a programme of cost/effect. Who is going to train good doctors? A pri-

vate hospital has to be cheap and maximise profit. In public hands research chooses the best option, in the private sector money decides, they choose the cheapest option, regardless of the lives of people, that is why private health cannot be cost-effective. Why don't we have politicians that can accept when they are wrong? It is all spin. I am not a political steward, I am for the workers I want to represent the members, I want them to be treated fairly.

There has been a substantial increase in investment in the NHS, it is true. The problem is that this money is not going where it should. Everything that is given is 'filtered' before it gets to the shop floor where the money is really needed. The money is wasted in red tape and bureaucracy. Hence, the workforce has to work harder. For instance, we are told that it is necessary to make seventy workers redundant, but the managers are employing someone to coordinate the task!

SA: Do you think that *Agenda for Change* has solved, or is going to solve, the problem?

MS: People have had minor improvements, but nowhere near meeting their expectations. Because we were told that *Agenda for Change* would solve equal pay deficits and disparity with public sector employees and that just has not happened.

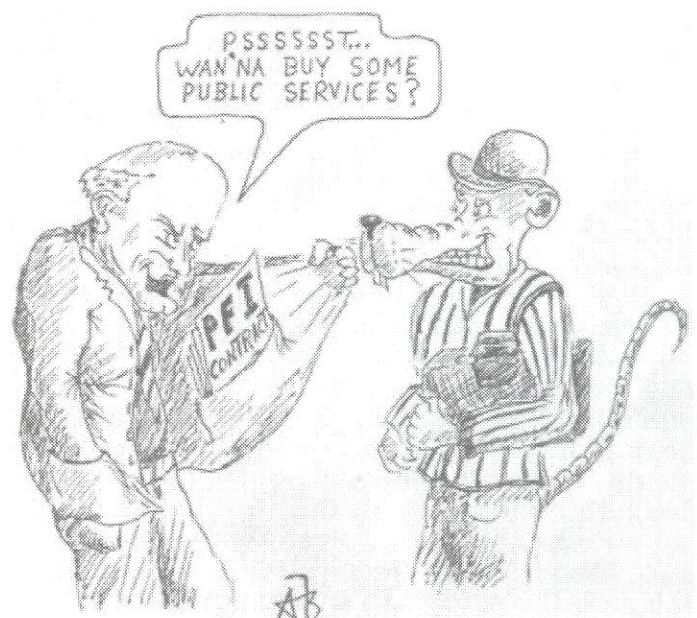
There is a lack of vision in this situation, they have to save money because of the huge debt that the hospital has amassed, but, at the same time, money is being skimmed from the public (via car park fees at our hospital, for example) and the workers. These may seem to be two separate issues, but

they are closely linked. They did not negotiate the implementation of *Agenda for Change* and now financial pressures are mounting. PFI means that you throw money into a capitalist company. There is no forward thinking, instead of investing thinking about the future, they have resorted to a quick fix. In the long run PFI will be more expensive and less efficient. They do not have any vision for the future.

SA: The Government has announced 13,000 will go, do you believe that there is overstaffing in the NHS?

MS: The workforce say we are not overstaffed. The National Evaluation system says that we are (at least in our hospital). The problem is that that evaluation system is based on information fed to it by precisely those people who are proposing the cuts. It is very easy to feed manipulated information into this system.

The evaluation system itself lacks clarity and transparency. In any case, if there were overstaffing it is not the workers fault. This is supposed to be the managers' responsibility, yet it will be the public's services and the workforce who will be made to pay the price. It is always the lowest paid sector that pays the price. □



“We Waited Years For Labour To Be Elected : Nine Years Later, We Cannot Wait Any Longer”

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

THIS YEAR'S Unison conference will be the tenth since the election of the Labour Government.

Who can forget the morning of May 2nd 1997? At last, the hated Tory government had been brought down. We had watched in despair as they wreaked havoc on British manufacturing industry, pauperised the valleys of South Wales and the towns and villages of Scotland and the north of England, turned inner city council estates into slums, set about dismantling the welfare state, and destroyed the greatest trade union in British history - the National Union of Mineworkers.

At last, we had our revenge. How we rejoiced as we sat up through the night watching one, and then another, constituency swing to Labour. On an uncharacteristically sunny, warm spring morning we reflected that even the weather seemed to be on our side.

Of course, few of us had any illusions in Tony Blair. He was not one of us. He was an ex-public schoolboy, the son of a Tory, and had expressed his admiration for the odious Thatcher.

But we had a Labour government, and surely now things would change. This is what the union leaders had been telling us for years. Nothing could be done, we were told, about privatisation, the Tory anti-union laws, the lack of public housing, the crisis in the NHS. We would have to wait for a Labour government. And so we waited. And so they did nothing.

In the last months of the Tory government, another brainwave loomed on the horizon: the Private Finance Initiative. In our department of Islington Council, the refuse collection and street sweeping department, we were told that we were to be the first to experience PFI - although this time it would be a new form of privatisation: a 'joint venture'. Joint in the sense that both parties, public and private, would co-operate in a partnership - that is, the public sector would hand over its assets free of charge, and the private sector would gratefully accept them.

Islington was then a Labour council, run in the main by Blair supporters serving their apprenticeships in local government in preparation for better careers ahead, and Labour had just won the general election. Call off the privatisation plans, we argued, surely now PFI will be ditched. How wrong we were.

The dustmen and road sweepers were members of GMB, whose national leadership, anxious not to rock the boat and embarrass the government, tried to undermine the strike at every turn. The full-time official begged members for more time to negotiate on terms and conditions in a mass meeting on the morning of the strike. The members were unmoved and we walked out. GMB officials continued to negotiate with the private contractor while we stood on the picket line. They called off the strike after five days, and the pri-

vatation went ahead.

This is not what workers expect from the relationship between the unions and the Labour Party: union leaders selling out members' interests to avoid embarrassing the government as they carry through pro-business policies.

And, of course, Labour soon lost control of Islington Council, it almost goes without saying. Isn't that always the case when Labour acts against workers' interests?

The media are full of stories of a 'handover' from Blair to Brown. Since when, precisely, has the Labour Party been the private property of any individual, to be 'handed over' as and when they see fit? Blair must go, that is clear. But we all know Brown offers no alternative. He has supported all Blair's loathsome measures: the brutal and rapacious bombing and occupation of Iraq, PFI, tuition fees, NHS 'reforms' and so on.

Yes, Blair must go, and the sooner the better. But his departure must be the beginning of a serious and vigorous policy discussion at all levels of the Party. It must also signal the start of a democratic leadership election. The unions must encourage and support the emergence of a left contender prepared to lead the Party in a reversal of the Tory/Blairite policies we have endured for the past 27 years and act in favour of working people and for socialist policies. □

Save Lanarkshire Casualty Units!

by Kenny McGuigan

Comrades will know from previous articles, Lanarkshire Health Board Trust propose to close the Accident and Emergency unit at either Monklands Hospital, Airdrie, or Hairmyres, East Kilbride. Locals are furious. The 12 "consultation meetings" (all packed) saw angry condemnation of the plans. With the consultations over, local campaigners, led by North Lanarkshire Trades Council (Lanarkshire Health United) arranged a march from Coatbridge centre to Airdrie for Saturday, 22nd April. They demanded the 3 casualty units in the area remain open, services be expanded and an independent investigation into the Trust who were savaged in last year's audit for financial mismanagement. The Trust are over £20million in debt, spending £50,000 of public money hiring a PR firm during the 6 week consultation period.

At the 11th hour, the Labour politicians for the constituencies, MP's John Reid and Tom Clarke, and MSP's Karen Whitfield and Elaine Smith organised an alternative demonstration for the same day. Their campaign was heavily backed by the media while LHU were ignored. On the day reports put New Labour's figures at 1,000 in attendance, while LHU drew around 350.

The Trust were wilting early in the process with condemnation from all sides. Monklands is one of the busiest casualty departments in Scotland. Then, at the Airdrie meeting, John Reid told the Trust, "If one of the hospitals closes, it must not be Monklands". Thus the lead was given to his colleagues who instigated and ran a parochial campaign to save Monklands and their political hides, with indifference to the plight of Hairmyres. The Trust will report to Lewis MacDonald, Deputy Health Minister in June. *Socialist Appeal* supporters handed out hundreds of leaflets and sold 30 journals on the day. □

UNISON Conference 2006

by Gray Allan, Secretary,
Falkirk Council Branch 07340 (personal capacity)

THE FINAL agenda for UNISON Annual Conference and for the Annual Local Government, Water, Energy and Transport service group conferences is the usual glossy broadsheet containing some 147 motions, not to mention all the amendments. Many of these motions and amendments will not be debated due to lack of time. Even more will be swallowed up in the compositing process.

It is difficult for delegates and members to identify the motions that will be debated but it is easier to get a feel for the issues that Conference will focus on.

In Local Government it is clear that a debate on pensions and on the current dispute will take place. With strike action knocked into the long grass by the national committee it is obvious that they will try to avoid any criticism. Two motions are, however, on the agenda, and are certain to be debated, not least because the national local government committee has not put a motion in its own name on the agenda. The conduct of the dispute aside, a key issue to be resolved is the two-tier pension scheme. At the moment it looks as though the Union leadership are prepared to concede a much poorer pension scheme for new, young employees as long as existing pension scheme members are protected. There are powerful arguments against this line, not least of which is the basic unfairness of it.

From a Scottish standpoint it is interesting to see motions on the agenda calling for a national campaign to win decent pay for nursery nurses. A strike battle was fought for nursery nurses in Scotland 2 years ago. While not a conclusive victory important increases in pay levels were won.

The Turner Report on Pensions features on the main

agenda. Motions point out the implications of forcing people to work longer before retiring. None, however, say that this is a class question. Poor working class people have a much shorter life expectancy. The Turner proposals are a death sentence for many workers - work till you drop will be the brutal reality for many.

A motion from Cymru/Wales deals with the scandal of ill-health dismissals where Council employees with decades of service are sacked without access to their pension because they are too ill to work but not sick enough for the bosses' medical "advisers" to certify them permanently unfit. You need that certificate before you can get your pension early.

14 motions and amendments on global warming, the energy crisis, and the environment make it certain that this issue will be debated. Most deal with the issue from a liberal-environmentalist standpoint and do not address the needs of workers presently employed in the nuclear industry. As a result we see amendments from the Nuclear Generation Branch calling for a mixed solution to the energy gap that includes nuclear power.

The most dramatic change in the agenda this year is the increase in number of motions on Venezuela. It is clear that events in that country have electrified layers of the Union. 13 motions and amendments make it certain that Venezuela will be debated. This will allow not only support for Hands off Venezuela to be decided but also the lessons the Bolivarian Revolution has for workers in Britain.

Perhaps this is the source of the Glasgow City motion 77 calling for an end to capitalism and the building of democratic socialism! Unfortunately not likely to be debated. □

The Labour Link ... A Vital Weapon

Terry McPartlan, Sunderland Local
Government Branch (personal capacity)

AFTER THREE years of war, attacks on local government pensions, the continuing financial crisis in the health service, and the threats to its long term future, it is no surprise that some UNISON members question the current relationship between the union and the Labour Party.

Following the local election results the crisis and divisions within the Blair Project are plain to see. It is understandable why some members might feel that New Labour offers them very little or nothing at all.

The question of disaffiliation from the party or the use of the affiliated section of the political fund to fund other organisations has been raised in the past. *Socialist Appeal* supporters in UNISON have consistently argued against these positions.

Disaffiliation from the party is essentially a short cut to nowhere. The APF Labour link structure within UNISON potentially represents a very important weapon in the hands of the union, in the fight to defend workers pay and conditions. On a local basis it allows UNISON members to put pressure on local councillors and elected mayors, and also to campaign through the local general committees and local government committees. At the same time the Labour Link operates through national campaigns and the party conference where UNISON commands a large proportion of the Trade Union Block Vote. The importance of this was illustrated last year where the platform was defeated on a number of issues.

Outside of the Party UNISON would have far less influence, and could easily be bypassed. This would no doubt please Tony Blair as well as the Tories (who of course have been trying to break the Trade Union Link for decades).

And to which groups would the union affiliate? Even at the high point of Blair's unpopularity the various sects and alliances, phantom mass parties and coalitions on the fringes of the labour movement are little more than shadows. A shift to the left in the Labour Party would see them vanish.

At present the national bureaucracy of the union has an extremely cosy relationship with the Labour leadership. This has certainly had a negative effect in terms of issues around Agenda for Change, Pay and most recently the Cumbria Equal Pay victory. However, any serious left tendency in the union must regard the struggle to democratise the UNISON labour link and to deliver UNISON's programme within the party as a vital part of the struggle for a Democratic Fighting Union. □

- Reclaim the Party
- Don't Break the Links
- For a Labour Government with a Socialist Programme

"We have to show that Peugeot cannot walk over its workforce"

by Darrall Cozens, NATFHE, Coventry (personal capacity)

A FEW weeks ago the BBC's *Question Time* programme came from Coventry, so it was inevitable that the issue of the threatened closure of Peugeot at Ryton would be discussed. The panel of "experts" were united in their opinions that closure was inevitable, that nothing could be done, that it was the law of the market. In this last opinion they were correct – under capitalism if shareholders deem that greater profits can be made elsewhere, they will force through plant closures despite the consequences for families and communities.

A joint leaflet from the T&G and Amicus points out that the plant is efficient, profitable and worth saving. The leaflet shows that Peugeot made profits last year in excess of one billion Euros and that the Ryton workforce is the most flexible in Europe and has done everything the company had asked it to do. It is also pointed out that the Peugeot group achieved record sales of 3.9million vehicles in 2005 and that the UK remains Peugeot's third biggest market.

Quite correctly the leaflet also states that, "closing the plant at Ryton is about sacrificing UK workers to appease shareholders and increase profit by exporting jobs to Eastern Europe". Finally the leaflet calls upon trade unions and other organisations in Coventry to support the fight back and "the trade union alternative".

At this moment in time however the trade union alternative is not spelled out. I spoke to John Cummins, Deputy Convenor from Amicus, about the trade union plans to keep the plant open. John said:

"In the beginning people were shocked at the news and even more so when the impact on jobs, families and the community was realised. At this moment the important thing is to ensure the workers remain calm, that the rumours from management are



scotched so that workers are not frightened or cowed into making irrational decisions. We have to show that Peugeot cannot walk over its workforce. Given the lack of consultation by management, we do not have information that we can use to draw up other viable options. At this moment we are gathering information and when we know more, the convenor and the national officials will be able to present options to the workers so that educated decisions can be made".

I asked whether the issue of opening the company books had been raised and John replied that all information that is available is being looked at. I also asked whether the issue of nationalisation had been discussed and again John replied that viable options would be presented by the trade unions once enough information had been gathered and analysed.

So at this moment there are no concrete plans to be presented to the workforce, but what the trade unions believe is that it is important that confidence in an alternative is maintained.

Time Is Running Out

Coincidentally, a study was published in *The Guardian* on Wednesday 26th April on what had happened to the workers from Rover at Longbridge who had lost their jobs a year ago. The study found that by December 2005 more than two thirds of the ex-Rover workers had found jobs but that on average they were earning £3,523 per year less than they earned at Rover. Almost half of

them believed they had worse jobs. In addition the researcher, Kathy Armstrong, said that "lower wages, lower-graded jobs and less job satisfaction may cause depression and illness among workers in the future." She also found that while most employees are back at work, most are also much worse off. This report ties in with one in *The Guardian* (Friday April

28th), that "depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness have taken over from unemployment as the greatest social problem in the UK." The report states that 15% of the population suffers from depression and the economic cost in terms of lost productivity is huge – about £17 billion or 1.5% of UK GDP.

Is this the future for many of the workers from Ryton? If they and we are not successful in keeping the plant open, the future would seem to be one of low wages, falling living standards, unemployment and depression with all of the attendant social costs to deal with these problems. This is the price that is to be paid on the altar of profit, the altar of capitalism. It is no accident that the present generation is the first since the war that sees the future as bleaker, more uncertain, and less secure than now.

Time is running out. Plans have to be drawn up quickly to present to the workforce so that they believe they have a chance of winning and keeping the plant open. Once disbelief sets in, it will be very difficult to re galvanise support for a fight that can be won. All options have to be examined, including occupation to prevent asset stripping and nationalisation without compensation. The Ryton plant does not belong to Peugeot. It belongs to past and present workers who have created value through their labour, value that has been siphoned off to the shareholders. The workers should therefore decide what happens to their factory, the one that they have built and financed through their work. □

VAUXHALL SACK 879 WORKERS - Fight Jobs Auction Across Europe

by Ray McHale, Chair of Ellesmere Port & Neston Trades Council, (personal capacity)

Ray McHale spoke to Paul Donovan, Vauxhall worker, and local councillor.

The decision to axe the night shift at Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant comes as no surprise to the workforce. For months rumours of job cuts and plant closure have sapped the morale of the workforce. An international trade union bid to save the jobs by offering an hour and a half longer working week, across all European plants, for no extra pay, was rejected by GM management as saving only 50 million Euros, not the 80 million required. So the redundancies will go ahead between now and September.

Low morale means there will be many volunteers if a reasonable redundancy package is negotiated. Though probably not enough to avoid compulsory redundancies. But more importantly, those that want to stay have their eye on the survival of the factory, and the 2,000 remaining jobs. General Motors currently makes the Astra at 5 plants across Europe, but management say they will only need 4 factories for the "Delta 2" Astra replacement. Thus the bosses clearly think they have the workforce and the

unions over a barrel.

Despite massive increases in productivity over recent years the most Ellesmere Port workers can hope for under the globalised capitalist economy is a chance to join the Dutch Auction / Beauty Contest between the competing plants. Just to be considered for this each plant is being required to maximise the outsourcing of work to lower paid suppliers, and to agree the outsourcing of facilities management and central maintenance. Beyond this management has drawn up a wish-list of around 3 dozens cuts and changes to working practices that they want to see the plants offering up if they are to remain open.

Removal of all overtime, shift and premium payments heads the list. Followed by a 5-year pay freeze, an increase to a 40 hour working week, and massively greater 'flexibility'. That means only 2 grades of hourly paid workers, compulsory overtime at short notice, salaried staff to work on the line if required, etc. etc.. Temporary staff would be paid lower rates for up to 4 years, and no new staff would be allowed to join the pension scheme.

Existing staff would see their pensions change to an "average salary" rather than "final salary" scheme, contributions increase by 2%, the accrual rate reduce from 55ths to 60ths, and retirement age rise from 60 to 65. In fact the only thing missing from the wish-list is the requirement for brooms up the back-side to enable staff to sweep the floor while working!

The government supposedly shows solidarity by sending Gordon Brown to visit the plant. However it clearly believes that the best way to retain jobs is to bow to demands for flexibility and to offer government subsidies to meet the demands of big business. Trade unionist however must know that the way forward lies in a united front of workers across all plants. Through the European Works Council they must say no to the cuts in working conditions, and no to the loss of a European plant. Rather than longer working hours they must demand a shorter working week, to share the work. They must now make a united commitment to industrial action across all GMs European plants if the company tries to go ahead with its Dutch Auction of jobs. □

AMICUS EXECUTIVE VOTES TO IGNORE ELECTION OF OFFICERS RULE

by an Amicus member

The May meeting of the NEC of trade union Amicus has agreed the appointment of a new Deputy General Secretary as well as a further two Assistant General Secretaries. The vote went through with the support of the NEC caucus of the 'left organisation' Amicus Unity Gazette after it was addressed by the General Secretary Derek Simpson the night before, although some Gazette supporters voted against. The newly appointed Deputy General Secretary is Simpson loyalist and Yorkshire Regional Secretary Graham Goddard. The two new appointments to Assistant General Secretary are National Health Officer Gail Cartmail and London Regional Secretary Jenny Bremner, who were both formerly members of the Roger Lyons right wing organisation 'MSF for Labour.' The NEC decision to appoint flies in the face of the rule change at last year's conference which agreed to the election of all future full time officials. The principle of election of officials was a key policy commitment on which Derek Simpson fought his election campaign. It was also a major part of the election programme of candidates who stood for the Executive in 2003 as part of the Gazette slate. The abandonment of this policy represents the latest development in the turn away from the original programme of the Gazette. In January last year there was a failed attempt by Simpson

to split the Gazette by setting up a rival organisation called 'ATU network' which aimed to appeal 'to the centre ground'. There then followed a failed attempt by Simpson supporters at the July 2005 Gazette meeting to agree to remove the election of officers rule through the NEC. The Chair and Editor of the Gazette Jimmy Warne and Des Heemskerk were then suspended from their jobs in Amicus alongside a leading Gazette supporter Cathie Willis. Supporters of Derek Simpson packed the AGM of the Gazette in Preston in February in order to remove them from the leadership of the Gazette and to replace Jimmy and Des with supporters of Simpson. Staff from David Blunkett's office were even brought in from the nearby Labour Party Spring conference to help narrowly vote them out! The following month the three were sacked from their jobs in Amicus and are now campaigning for their re-instatement. Scandalously the NEC meeting also voted not to allow Jimmy Warne, who relies on Amicus for his representation, legal advice for his tribunal. But the campaign is rapidly gaining support and has already raised over £5000 in donations including substantial donations from both Wembley and Heathrow Construction workers. □

The campaign can be contacted at
www.campaign-democracy-amicus.org

Asbestos - The Deadly Legacy

by John Kelly

Asbestos was known to the ancients. The Romans mined it from the Ural Mountains and the Italian Alps and they called it amianthus, meaning without miasma, undefiled or incorruptible. Strabo (30 B.C.) and Plutarch (A.D. 70) refer to the wicks of the vestal virgins as asbesta, the unquenchable, inextinguishable or inconsumable. However, it was only from the late 19th century onward that asbestos became a widespread material for industrial use. In 1880 annual world production of asbestos amounted to 500 tons but by the end of the 20th century the cumulative world production of asbestos had reached a staggering 174,000,000 metric tons. It became known as the 'magic mineral' for its unique insulation and fire resistant properties and because it could be spun into yarn, woven into cloth and mixed with cement, rubber, plastics or graphite, it provided the shipbuilding, construction, electrical, chemical, car and engineering industries with many useful products. As 'magic' as this mineral is, it has proven to be the greatest health disaster and biggest industrial killer as yet known to man. Asbestos was banned in the UK in November 1999 and in the European Union from January 2000, but its legacy lingers on, and it will continue to do so for some considerable time to come.

Asbestos kills, that's the bottom line. Ignore those wisecracks who tell you that 'white' is less dangerous than 'blue' or 'brown' asbestos. White asbestos or chrysotile, has the longest and strongest fibres and can be spun. Blue and brown asbestos consists of fibres too short for spinning but are more stable chemically and more resistant to heat and acids. The effect on the human body however, is all the same: if these fibres are inhaled they can all result in a series of asbestos-related diseases. Once in the lung, the fibres get lodged or pierce the lining and cannot be ejected. This results in lung-scarring and in the case of mesothelioma, it leads to the development of a tumour. Although asbestos-related diseases are none discriminatory, their main 'beneficiary' has been the industrial working class, shipyard and construction workers especially. The prob-

lem with asbestos is the long latency period between initial exposure and the onset of the disease, often between 20 to 40 years. There are four main types of asbestos-related disease: pleural plaques, diffuse pleural thickening, asbestosis and mesothelioma.

Mesothelioma is the cancer caused by exposure to asbestos and as yet there is no cure. Once diagnosed, the life expectancy of the sufferer is usually between 3 and 18 months. Official statistics will tell you that around 3,500 people die from mesothelioma per year in the UK. Asbestos victim support groups and trade unions believe this figure to be an underestimate.

Laws Changed to Favour Bosses

The increasing number of asbestos cases that will arise over the next decade or so has mobilised the insurance industry into action. They have used their financial muscle to change the law. In January this year, the Court of Appeal overturned 20 years of judicial precedent regarding pleural plaques (the least worst of the asbestos-related diseases) and decreed that this was no longer a compensatable condition. More recently on 3 May, the Law Lords ruled in favour of the insurance industry again, this time with regard to those suffering from mesothelioma (the worst of the asbestos conditions). From now on, where more than one employer was responsible for the asbestos exposure, and where it is not possible to bring a claim against all of them, because one of the former employers may not be trading or was not insured for example, then the amount of compensation may be reduced.

So what should you do if you have been diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease? Firstly, it is imperative that you understand from your GP or consultant exactly which asbestos disease you have. Secondly, you need to find out how you may have been exposed to asbestos. Here your trade union, work colleagues or asbestos support group can help. Thirdly, you then need to arrange an interview with a solicitor who specialises in asbestos-related diseases. This is important. Do not respond to press or television adver-

tisements. Your trade union and support group will help here too. Asbestos victim support groups hold lists of specialist law firms, usually trade union ones and referral through such a group usually means free legal advice for the sufferer.

As mentioned, the import and use of asbestos has been banned in the UK since 1999, but the legacy remains. It is estimated that there is some 6,000,000 tons of asbestos in both public and private dwellings. The once fashionable Artex material used as a wall and ceiling covering during the 1970s contained around 15% asbestos. If you have Artex in your home do not try to remove it yourself by any means.

You may have read recently of the appalling stories concerning asbestos in schools and the death of teachers through asbestos exposure due, for example, to pinning up their pupils drawings on the classroom walls. The walls turned out to be made up of Asbestos Insulation Board (AIB). Between 1991 and 2000, 73 primary and secondary school teachers died from asbestos poisoning according to the HSE's own statistics. But when teaching assistants, nursery nurses and lecturers are included the figure leaps to 145. And what of their pupils who many will be adults by now? Later in life some of them will be reporting an asbestos-related disease and they will declare that they had never worked with, or ever been in contact with, asbestos. The probability is that they will have been exposed at school.

There is no easy solution to the asbestos problem. By nationalising the construction industry and placing it under workers' control with input from the victims and families of asbestos-related diseases, we can begin to make a start in eradicating the health risks posed by 'legacy asbestos'. Capitalism cannot do this, it simply costs the capitalists too much and, as we saw, they find a way of clawing back their money. In the meantime the struggle for a global ban on asbestos continues. □

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Fight Privatisation of Royal Mail

by A Postal Worker

Royal Mail has announced profits this year of £609 million, up 13 percent on last year. Yet, when starting this year's pay negotiations, management offered an insulting 1%. What contempt do they hold us in. While profits have increased on the backs of productivity and job losses they offer us a pay cut. After months of negotiations all that they can come up with is 2.9%. To add insult management decided to impose the wage offer on us. In fact because scheduled overtime and shift allowances will not go up this imposition is only worth 2.4%. For years postal grades' pay has been below average. Any one off payments is not in the long term good for us. They do not improve our basic rate of pay or our pensionable pay. Efficiency savings are 100% made by us, yet we only benefit by 40%. How is that fair or equal?

Backdoor Privatisation

The idea that 20% of the post office will be handed to us is a back door method of privatisation. How can they give us something that is already ours? Being a nationalised industry it already belongs to us. The free shares they plan to give us can only be sold to other employees. In other words, work colleagues will pay for this year's pay increase in the hope that sometime in the future, if they don't end up being pieces of paper, they may be able to make money out of the shares. Mr. Leighton is hoping his letter about offering shares will generate support and demand for them.

The blocking of the union's consultative ballot by manage-

ment is an attempt to get the upper hand. Pay is not the only issue we must address. The plans to introduce walk/sort machines with the loss of tens of thousands of operational postal grades is a threat to our livelihoods.

Management are also seeking to convert thousands of jobs from full time to part time. This can not be allowed to happen. The introduction of new technology must be linked to a shorter working week. The consequences otherwise would be disastrous for all, with colleagues either losing their jobs, those staying being forced on to part time, or forced to cover bigger walks, making the job even more physical than it is now with all the health issues this raises.

The government is going to give £2 billion to Royal Mail following a request from management of a cash injection to update equipment. After all these years of under-investment in the post office, why has the government decided to stomp up some money? Are they making the post office more desirable to sell to potential buyers, who would not need to invest for years to come as all the machinery has been updated? We do not see the same commitment to plugging our £5.6 billion pension deficit. We must remember that a pension is the unpaid wages we have accrued throughout the years we have worked for Royal Mail.

We cannot let the imposition of pay go unanswered; lose thousands of jobs; allow converting of full time jobs into part time; leave the pension deficit to grow; or let the post office slide into becoming a privatised company. □

PCS Conference - Defend Public Services

by Rachel Heemskerck, PCS DWP Essex Branch Secretary (personal capacity), and Phil Sharpe

A YEAR ago the Government announced its intention to cut the number of Civil Servants by over 100,000. The main areas targeted were the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Revenue and Customs (HMRC) that between them had 200,000 staff.

They were also the departments that provide services for the public, almost from the cradle to the grave. They administer services such as Pensions, Sickness and Unemployment Benefit and Tax Credits. Over the last year disputes have arisen over both staffing levels and pay.

There is a continuing overtime ban in DWP where it is showing the madness of cutting staff when the demand for services is rising.

In Revenue and Customs the management continues on its course to cut staff and lose front line services. They are replacing skilled Tax trained staff by "touch screens" and telephones. An appointment system has replaced open access leading to a reduced service to customers.

Many of these changes have been driven by the vast investment in Information Technology. Back in the 1980s "New Technology" was to replace the routine paperwork by machines that would lead to "better, more technical jobs and a reduced working week" this has not happened! Today the computer controls the work but cannot replace the "personal touch" when dealing with people with urgent financial needs.

The total number of strike days last year was at an historic low; however the Civil Service disputes provided the major part of the days lost. The tactic of the departmental, one day strike, however, needs reviewing as mentioned by the PCS General Secretary recently. The Union must consider an all out strike should its demands on issues, especially Pensions, not be met. The morale in the Civil Service is at an all time low and the vital work of PCS members should be recognised.

The Conference agenda reflects the growing discontent amongst the membership but it has not lost sight of International Issues. The second motion in the affiliation section (A27) calls for affiliation to the Hands off Venezuela campaign. In the middle of May the Venezuelan President visited Britain and spoke at Congress House (fuller details can be found elsewhere in this issue) where he laid out his vision of what working people can achieve when they move to change the system. The PCS can join other Unions in supporting the campaign and to keep the question of the solidarity campaign alive at the TUC. □

CWU CONFERENCE STOP PRESS! AFFILIATION TO HOV!

This year's Communication Workers Union conference passed a motion which "congratulates the HOV Campaign in its excellent work to popularise and build support for Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution and calls upon the union to affiliate to HOV and help promote its solidarity work."

May Day in London

Rally needs to be followed by action to defend jobs and the NHS

by Phil Mitchinson

AROUND 10,000 workers, youth, and activists gathered at the start of the London demo, though its ranks swelled significantly along the route to Trafalgar Square. The march was led from the Green by a joint London May Day Organising Committee/TUC Banner that read "Campaigning for Workplace Justice".

The slogan was weak but nevertheless it reflected the presence of many workers on the march who had fallen foul of Britain's 'flexible labour laws' – the envy of bosses across Europe – notably the Gate Gourmet workers, and representatives of the 2,300 Peugeot workers from the Ryton plant in Coventry currently facing the axe. The TUC is keen to promote its trade union freedom bill as a means of regaining those rights taken from workers by the Tories' anti-union laws which Blair's government has scandalously kept on the statute books. Overturning those repressive Tory laws and gaining new rights would be a great step forward, but on their own legal rights cannot be a substitute for militant trade unionism. The workers who took solidarity action to support their brothers and sisters at Gate Gourmet were breaking the law, in the same way that the founders of the trade unions had to break anti-union laws. With Labour in office for nine years the TUC leaders have done precious little to take the fight to repeal the hated anti-union legislation into the Labour Party. Nor have many of them been willing to struggle against those laws, instead choosing all too often to hide behind them as an excuse not to take action for fear of the threat to 'union assets'. In the meantime one million manufacturing workers have heard the TUC leaders words of support since Blair was elected, but their lack of deeds means they still ended up with their P45s.

This year's march included an impressive array of union banners and flags. The chair gleefully read out the slogans of many of the banners as they arrived at the rally, but seemed oblivious to the large hand-painted one reading "Simpson Sacks His Own" being carried by supporters of the campaign for democracy in Amicus, fighting against the witch-hunt in that union. Three

leading activists have been sacked by the union on trumped up charges, as Simpson and his supporters attempt to jettison the left-wing programme that was responsible for him being elected as General Secretary.

The banner certainly had an impact on Simpson, however. Several Amicus full time officials were ordered to stand in front of the banner waving flags to obscure its message from the television cameras.

Most Powerful Force in Britain

In his speech to the rally TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber called for strong laws to tackle poverty pay, the gender wage gap and discrimination against ethnic minorities. He told the rally: "No longer should British workers like the Peugeot workers find that they are the cheapest and easiest in Europe to get rid of – and we send them a message of solidarity today... That's why we called for a Trade Union Freedom Bill to allow unions to properly protect their members." On the eightieth anniversary of the General Strike it is woe-ful that the leader of the most powerful force in British society does not understand the potential might of the working class: "The trade union movement was never "allowed" to protect its members, those members fought against employers and governments for generations to demand their rights. If the millions of workers in the TUC were given a fighting lead they could tear up the anti-union legislation like the worthless paper that it is. They could prevent the break-up and selling off of the NHS in a day.

We are not opposed to demanding legal rights, but they will not be granted without a fight. Capitalism is busily undermining our rights, our welfare system, our pensions and our jobs for a reason, because their decrepit system cannot afford those reforms anymore. Those reforms that were conquered in the past were never given out of the kindness of the capitalists' hearts, they were wrenched from them by heroic struggles. It is precisely those struggles in Britain and around the world that we were celebrating on May Day, and it is precisely those kinds of struggles that are needed again today. □

Hands Off Venezuela

by Espe Espigares

HANDS OFF Venezuela made a very good intervention in May Day. At the beginning of the march in Clerkenwell, a large stall was set up behind a massive HOV banner selling literature and t-shirts. The new HOV magazine was on sale throughout the demonstration.

Activists were keen to sell the magazine and trade unionists took orders for their branches. At the rally in Trafalgar Square, the stall was again set up and attracted a lot of interest.

The HOV meeting following the May Day march and rally was very successful. Over 100 people filled a church hall to hear Jorge Martin, the international secretary of HOV, speak about the Bolivarian Revolution and the struggle for workers' control. Rob Sewell of the national steering committee introduced the meeting and welcomed everyone on international labour day. In his speech, Jorge Martin explained how the working class had become involved in the Revolution after the April 2002 coup and the bosses' lockout. In particular, the sabotage of the oil industry, the biggest industry in Venezuela, had forced the workers to take over PDVSA and run it for themselves. For some 67 days the oil industry was run without bosses, under workers' control.

A lively discussion took place with questions and contributions from the floor. Dozens of people signed to get involved in the HOV campaign and many were keen to participate in the welcoming rallies for President Chavez. The collection raised £80 towards the costs of the meeting. □

May Day in Edinburgh...

by Tam Burke

AN EYE witness account by Raphael Gironimi about the French resistance by students and young and older workers to the hated youth employment scheme heartened the 350 or so marchers attending the May Day Rally in the Meadows. Colin Fox, Scottish Socialist party leader also roused enthusiasm for a fairer society and Rose Gentle (Military Families Against the War - www.mfaw.org.uk) spoke from personal experience of the cruel effects of big business' Iraq war, condemning Blair and Bush and calling for an end to the suffering. Thirteen banners were raised for Unison, EIS (Teachers), T&GWU, the Posties, the Trades Council plus the Greens, James Connolly Society, Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer and three for the SSP, which is the backbone of the May Day organising committee. There were a few LP stalwarts, including Gavin Strang MP, but the current leadership long ago turned its back on this solidarity meeting of the workers' movement, and are busy selling off the city to property developers, demolishing part of the Old Town and vainly hoping they will not be too severely punished at the polls next year. The sunshine, the bouncy castle, the ice cream and the prospect of a pint in the

park, all helped raise the attendance to nearly 500. We had comics and bands and great singing from *Protest in Harmony*. There were stalls aplenty including Socialist Appeal, Hands off Venezuela, Edinburgh Chiapas Solidarity, No to Nuclear Power, Stop the War, Palestine Solidarity Campaign and as many again. Only 20 journals sold, but a good number of names and e-mails given to Craig on The Hands off Venezuela stall.



A wee turn out, but 60% of those attending were in the 20 to 40 age range and everyone keen to keep the red flag flying, staying realistically optimistic for the future success of socialism. □

...and in Glasgow

Why the demonstration did not happen during the weekend of May 1st is beyond anyone's understanding, no doubt some big shot for the labour movement in Glasgow could tell us, but the fact that they did not organise a demonstration the same day as the rest of the globe does not really reinforce the sense of solidarity and internationalism.

The march went as usual from George Square to Glasgow Green and, as usual as well, was raining. More than 1,000 people attended the march and a few hundred turned up at the beer tent. Many banners from different unions were present, about twenty, plus a couple of banners from local Labour Party branches, the organised left and the SSP. In a way there were too many banners for just a handful of people during the wrong weekend. We wonder if the unions actually built for the demo. Socialist Appeal supporters were present selling the journal and distributing a few hundred leaflets reminding the marchers of the role of the working class in the struggles of Pakistan and the Venezuelan revolution. The labour and trade union movement needs to start building for this kind of event properly. It is our history and we must ensure that we do not forget our roots. □

May 7 saw the May Day demo in Glasgow organised by one of the oldest trades councils in the country.

NF Kept Out of Newcastle City Centre

by Russell Dawson

ON SUNDAY, 30 April the National Front tried to march through Newcastle. Despite it being a national mobilisation only about fifty fascists turned up - compared to about four hundred at the anti-fascist counter demonstration organised by North East Unites Against the BNP and NF.

Demonstrators met in the heart of Newcastle at Grey's Monument and made their way to the Bigg Market on the edge of the city centre, just yards from where the NF were due to hold their rally. There were a lot of young people there - in contrast to the previous day's May Day demo. The mood, as would be expected, was determined and noisy - the attitude of demonstrators was, even if the NF are allowed to march through the city then at least nobody will hear them.

As it turned out, the NF never

turned up. They met in Carloli Square, which is out of town and deserted on a Sunday, marched through a few side streets and then dispersed - a success for the counter-demonstration! The NF were kept out of Newcastle city centre.

One noteworthy aspect of the day was the policing. Not only did they allow the march to go ahead against the wish of the local council but their conduct was provocative. They banned flags from the counter-demo (did they stop the fascist waving their union flags?). They threatened one or two demonstrators who had their heads covered with arrest, only prevented by the intervention of stewards. And there were several policemen videoing and photographing individual protestors - they must have got just about everybody present on film.

All this strengthens the argument of *Socialist Appeal* that you cannot use

the law to stop the fascists. The repressive arsenal of laws possessed by the state will be used against the labour movement first and foremost. Relatively modest actions against reactionaries like the NF and the BNP act more to legitimise the more serious attacks on us. The labour movement can rely only on its own strength.

Another lesson is the organising role played by the trade unions, particularly UNISON. A section of the labour movement raising its little finger sent the NF scurrying around back streets. If the labour movement as a whole got onto its feet then no power on earth could stop it. But to do that would require a genuine socialist programme and leadership, a programme that can provide an answer to unemployment, to the undermining of the NHS and of education, even to the destruction of the planet on which we live. Such a programme would cut across the support that the fascist parties are beginning to get in some areas. □

The Statistics That Shock

by Michael Roberts

I WAS going to continue my series of articles on the Marxist profit cycle in this issue of the journal. But I was so shocked by the statistics and studies that have been recently been released on the incomes and wealth of the ordinary Americans that I had to tell you about them

I'm not talking about the slave labour wages that new immigrants in America get for working 'illegally' to clean, tidy and maintain the homes of the super-rich in their 'gated communities' across the nicest parts of the real estate. Or the below poverty wages that the likes of the mega supermarket chain of Wal-Mart pays its checkout and warehouse staff. Have you seen the recent film documentary, *Wal-Mart*, the high cost of low price? There isn't one aspect that this film doesn't show Wal-Mart as vicious and oppressive in: employee welfare, customer welfare, the environment, even racism and sexism.

No, I'm not talking about the poorest sections of the community but the average household where there are one or two 'good' jobs and apparently good lifestyle. I'm talking about middle America, the so-called middle class in white-collar professional and service sector jobs.

The median wage is that wage or salary which is the most common. It is not the average salary. That is the wage that divided all the incomes of the super rich by those of the poor. That average is not what most people in the US earn. The median income is. And according to the latest statistical survey of Americans, in a period since 1998 when the US economy has expanded by 25%, the median wage, that earned by middle fifth of Americans has fallen by 3.8% and in fact, since 1973 has stagnated.

At the beginning of May, the US economy was in its fifth year of economic growth, stock markets were nearly back to the levels last seen in the great hi-tech boom of 2000 and profit margins were at record levels after five consecutive quarters of double-digit growth.

But the 'prosperity' has not 'trickled down to the ranks of middle America, let alone the industrial working-class and poor and dispossessed. At the same time, stagnating incomes for middle America have been accompanied by soaring inequality. Again, according to the new study, since 1973 annual income growth for the top 1% of Americans was 3.4% and for the top 0.1% it was 5.2% each year. But for the 90% below them, it grew just 0.3% a year since 1973! So much for the American dream.

So if the economy has been growing well, where has all product of the work of the Americans gone? Just consider this. Chief executives of the big companies used to earn 26 times more each year than their average employees. Now they earn a staggering 300 times as much!

You should go and see another documentary film just out called *Enron*: the smartest guys in the room where the disgusting hubris and sleaze is exposed of much-feted executives earning millions of dollars, faking their results and when found out leaving the company to collapse with thousands of middle Americans losing their livelihoods and their pensions.

The American Dream

The sad irony is that most Americans still believe in the American dream, namely that if "you are poor and work hard, you have chance of becoming rich". According to a recent poll, 80% of Americans believe that, up from 60% in the 1980s.

But the chances of the average American achieving the status and wealth of the super-rich through hard-work, education etc is not much better than the chances of winning the national lottery. There is another report out that concludes that children from low-income families in America have only a 1% chance of reaching the top 5% of income earners while children of the rich have a 22% chance. The chances of children of middle income Americans getting into the top

5% was just 1.8%, hardly better than the poorest.

Of course, it's even worse for African-Americans, whose children born in the bottom 25% of income households have twice as much chance of staying there as white children of the same income group.

And don't think this is just America. The same forces of capitalism that keep the rich richer and the poor poorer apply to the rest of the capitalist world. The US is not the worst for the chances of escaping from the bottom. The worst country for that is Britain! Only the UK has a lower rate of income mobility than the US. Good luck in the lottery!

Just as worrying is the risk that an average American household could be thrown into poverty. The volatility of household income rose throughout the 1990s. The share of households that saw their incomes decline by more than \$20,000 rose from 13% in 1990 to 17% now.

And it's a myth that hard work will get you to the top. People who work longer hours at work to get on got no further up the income scale than those that did not. And yet in another survey, 61% of Americans thought it would make a difference, 58% of Australians did, but only 33% of Brits and the most sceptical were the French (23%).

Capitalism is not only unfair, it is unjust and unstable. Yet another devastating survey found that long-term unemployment in the US has risen to its highest level in more than 20 years. The average length of unemployment was now 18 weeks. The current 'boom' has the highest share of people out of job for five weeks or more and when people do get a job, it was more likely to be for less money than the old job.

Those in work and owning their own home (about 70% of Americans) had to dedicate nearly 11% of their incomes after taxes to paying their mortgage. There is now a one in sixty chance that people will default on their payments (much lower than making it to the top).



Bill Gates' \$140 million home. The gap between rich and poor in the US has widened into a chasm.

It now takes the average American two-earner family 32 weeks to pay for taxes, health care, housing, education and transportation. That's up from 28 weeks in 1979. After paying for all these items of basic living, the average family had less left to pay for food, clothing, utilities, saving for retirement, leisure etc than they had in 1980. In that real sense, middle America is worse off than they were 25 years ago.

Middle America is working harder to make ends meet. And they are borrowing more – household debt is now 120% of family disposable income. Not only do Americans save less, they receive less support from their employers to do so. Employer-sponsored pension plans have declined and there has been a big shift from final salary, defined benefit plans that pay out a guaranteed pension to defined contribution plans that pay out only on the returns from the money put in.

In this 'rich' society, 45% of all Americans do not have a pension plan! And of those that do, now only 20% had a guaranteed pension. It's the same story in health insurance – a big issue in a country without a national health service. The share of people without any health cover has risen to 16%, while employers offering any scheme fell to 60%. There are now 45m Americans with no way of getting better if they get ill.

And, just in case there's any delusion that only Americans suffer from this sort of inequality and injustice, the UK's Inland Revenue released its latest analysis of income inequality in Britain. The IR reported that the level of inequality measured by what is called the Gini coefficient (the amount of income going to the top 10% over the rest) remains near historic highs despite over nine years of a Labour

government.

Furthermore it is not just inequality of income that is shocking in Britain. Inequalities of wealth (what people own) is even greater.

According to the UK's Inland Revenue, the richest 5% of the population owned 40% of all the personal wealth in 2003. That's higher than it was 30 years ago and is unchanged from when the Labour government took office in 1997. Most shocking of all is that the bottom 50% of the population own only 7% of the nation's wealth.

Rich are Richer and Poor are Poorer Under Blair

Moreover, what middle England owns are their homes. If you strip out the value of the house that you have to live in, then the wealthiest 5% of Britons own 58% of financial wealth. That compares with 49% when Labour came to office. So under Labour, the rich have got richer. The bottom 50% of the population own only 1% of all financial wealth compared with 6% when Labour came in! So the poor have got even poorer!

As my study of the profit cycle in the US shows, since 1982, the profitability of US capitalism has risen significantly. That was partly achieved by squeezing the wages and employment of the mass of American workers, while making them work even harder. Thus the rate of surplus value appropriated from the workforce rose while investment in new equipment was kept to a minimum. The profit rate rose.

And yet throughout the last 25 years, the average American household is no better off than they were at the beginning of the 1980s. Meanwhile the

rich have become super rich. Those who are dedicated to football prepare for the World Cup will soon turn on their television screens to watch football matches played by millionaires and commented on by millionaires interviewing other millionaires.

These celebrities may be visible and rich, but they are still pygmies to the hidden rich who don't appear on TV singing songs, doing soaps, making movies or kicking footballs. The super, super rich remain in the boardrooms of the big multinationals and glide past quietly out of sight in their private jets, yachts and limousines.

What these recent studies show is that the chances of joining them are basically zero for nearly all of us. So if you can't join them, then let's beat 'em, or the system that keeps them! □

Boom for Bosses, Bust for us

BRITAIN'S LEADING boardroom bosses took home pay packages worth an average of £3.3m last year, with performance-related bonuses, share options and incentive schemes typically accounting for 60% of their remuneration deals, according to a report published by pay consultancy firm Independent Remuneration Solutions (IRS). Corporate governance campaign group Manifest showed basic salary contributed on average £716,000, or 21%, to pay of FTSE 100 chief executives last year.

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics showed that in 2004/05, the average gross income of the richest 20% of families in Britain, at £66,300, was 16 times that of the poorest 20% who earned £4,300 on average. □

Hands Off Venezuela



Hugo Chavez in Historic Visit to London

by Hands Off Venezuela - www.handsoffvenezuela.org

THE VISIT of President Hugo Chavez to London was one of enormous enthusiasm. Thousands of supporters turned out to see the President over his two-day visit, which was hosted by Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London.

Five welcoming rallies were organised by Hands Off Venezuela in different locations over the two days with the full support of the Bolivarian Circles and the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign. These began with a lively rally outside the President's hotel in Central London. People brought flags, banners and placards, dressed in red T-shirts and painted faces. Singing and chanting took place for three hours before the President finally arrived and "Uh! Ah! Chavez no se va!" continually echoed in the entrance of the Savoy Hotel.

On behalf of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign, Rob Sewell of the HOV steering committee welcomed everybody, explaining that this visit by Hugo Chavez was an historic occasion that served to highlight the Venezuelan Revolution. "Two nights ago, Hands Off Venezuela in Austria organised a 5,000-strong meeting to greet the President. We must continue the welcome in Britain, which must be used to build support for the Revolution."

By the time the President arrived, the crowd had swollen to some 200 people, many with their own banners and placards. As the President stepped out of his car, the crowd surged forward and he was greeted with a storm of support. It was like a rugby scrum. Throwing aside all protocol, the President mixed with the crowd, shaking hands and greeting as many people as he possibly could, in particular the representatives of Hands Off Venezuela

Espe Espigares, a member of the HOV Steering Committee, greeted President Chavez on behalf of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign and extended a very warm welcome on behalf of everybody present. After this brief conversation he thanked the HOV campaign for the tremendous work we were doing to support the Venezuelan Revolution. President Chavez said: "I thank you for the work you are doing and I would encourage you to continue because this is very important for us and the Revolution".

Given the delay in the President's arrival, the scheduled visit to Miranda House was cancelled and the crowd made its way to the Camden Centre. Hundreds of people were queuing right

round the building, as hundreds mingled outside, shouting slogans and waving banners.

It is a shame that the organisers had not listened to the solidarity organisations who were pressing for a much larger venue. When HOV first heard of the visit, we immediately contacted the Venezuelan Ambassador in London and then tried to secure the Royal Albert Hall for a mass rally for Chavez. Unfortunately, despite our representations, our efforts were turned down. We were later informed that the organisation of the visit had been put exclusively in the hands of Ken Livingstone's Greater London Authority. HOV had prepared posters and leaflets for the meeting, but were informed that no publicity was allowed. And although we had insisted on an open meeting, the mayor's office unilaterally decided that it was to be by invitation only.

The capacity of the Camden Centre was 800, but more than 5,000 people had applied to attend via the Great London Authority website. It seems strange that the Mayor of London could not find a bigger venue than this. In the event, hundreds of people were turned away. Hands Off Venezuela was allocated only 100 tickets for the event, which were snapped up within one hour. Hundreds more applied for tickets through HOV but, given the scandalous shortage of tickets, we were unable to provide them.

The hall itself was packed with an enthusiastic, placard-carrying, banner-waving audience. HOV had been told that no banners were allowed in the meeting, but this was clearly not the case, so our large banner was hastily brought in and draped over the balcony facing the platform.

Ken Livingstone, who chaired the

COME AND WELCOME HUGO CHAVEZ TO LONDON!

Hands Off Venezuela Campaign
invites you to come and hear

The President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

HUGO CHAVEZ

Speak about the achievements
of the Venezuelan Revolution

**SUNDAY 14th
May 2006**

4pm (doors open at 3pm)

The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, London
opposite Westminster Abbey
(nearest tube: Westminster, St James Park)

**HANDS OFF
Venezuela**

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Hands Off Venezuela

proceedings, called on two speakers to introduce the meeting. The first was Keith Sonnet, assistant general secretary of Unison, representing the Venezuela Information Centre, who wanted those who threatened Venezuela to know that they faced huge opposition. The second was Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, representing the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign.

Jeremy stated that President Chavez's visit was having an electrifying effect. He praised Ken Livingstone's efforts as the host, but felt that a far larger venue would have been more appropriate given the thousands of people keen to hear Chavez. "There are thousands of people out there desperate to hear President Chavez", he said. He called on the President to return to London in the future where a far larger reception will be organised.

When President Chavez was introduced, there was an enthusiastic response from the crowd. Chavez thanked the people of Britain for their hospitality and launched into a three hour speech, outlining the background and successes of the Bolivarian Revolution. In the first words of his speech, Chavez mentioned the gathering in Vienna, attended by 5,000 young people. He explicitly thanked Alan Woods and Hands Off Venezuela for organising this marvellous meeting.

Hugo Chavez went on to deal with the Bolivarian Revolution and contributions of Simon Bolivar and Francisco de Miranda, who had visited and lived in London. He explained how the great Industrial Revolution in Britain and the great French Revolution had attracted the greatest thinkers of the age. Bolivar's struggle was inspired by these



Hugo Chavez embracing HoV member Espe Espigares

events in Europe. Chavez also praised the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, although these must not be treated as a dogma. He went on to attack capitalism and imperialism for the destruction they were bringing to the planet. He referred to Rosa Luxemburg and her great contribution and repeated the phrase: "Socialism or Barbarism".

Chavez emphasised his commitment to socialism. "I am a socialist. We are all socialists", he declared. Socialism, he said, was the only way to save the world, the future of which was threatened by capitalism. He went on to say that the idea that History had ended was completely false. Referring to the power of great ideas, Chavez explained that Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin and Che Guevara were not dead. They are alive today in their ideas.

Hugo Chavez made an unexpected offer to supply cheap fuel from two PDVSA refineries in Britain to poor neighbourhoods in London, which the Mayor accepted. This is similar to the schemes already implemented in the United States. As the meeting came to an end, Chavez came to the front of

the platform to shake the hands of supporters. Despite all the problems it had been a most enthusiastic meeting.

Chavez at the TUC

The next day, Hands Off Venezuela had called a reception rally outside the headquarters of the Trades Union Congress in Central London. Hands Off Venezuela magazines and leaflets were distributed as members entered the building. As the meeting was about to start, representatives of the Chavez delegation invited supporters of Hands Off Venezuela to come into to the TUC meeting, together with those of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign. As we entered the building, TUC stewards tried to prevent us, but were over-ruled by Venezuelan security. About 100 people gathered at the TUC, members of the General Council and other trade union general secretaries. Hands Off Venezuela sat as a block in the meeting.

The chairperson of the TUC, Gloria Mills, introduced the meeting by explaining that "the TUC General Council has met in this building for 50 years. I must say, for me this is the most interesting meeting this year." At this point, Hugo Chavez corrected her: "for 50 years!" which was met with laughter. The next speaker was Brendan Barber, general secretary of the TUC, who welcomed President Chavez for coming to address the TUC. Barber called for "a new kind of globalisation, with social justice and workers' rights." He then called on Chavez to speak.

But Chavez did not speak about globalisation. Instead, he proceeded to give the General Council a history lesson, starting with the French Revolution. He pointed out that the great Venezuelan revolutionary Miranda had lived as a political exile in London. He had been impressed by Britain's industrial revolution and the new ideas associated with it. Even then, he said, the seed of ideas which went beyond the framework of capitalism were present. This was the starting point for Bolivar.

This was essentially pre-socialist thought, stated Chavez. Maybe the members of the General Council had never heard of Miranda, but they had certainly heard of the next political exile mentioned by Chavez: "Karl Marx lived and was buried here. He was one



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of the greatest ideologists of scientific socialism. Bolivar was only aware of utopian socialism. But some people want to bury socialism. But this is not the case.

Representatives of capitalism and neo-liberalism talked of the failure of socialism. But their theory has failed", Chavez continued.

Chavez then went on to talk about pre-Columbian society in Latin America and how before the Conquest, people lived under a socialistic system of society where there was no private property. He returned again to the theme of socialism, particularly scientific socialism (that is, Marxism). While pointing to the defects of the Soviet Union, he said it was important to bring together the experiences of the past. We needed new strengths, new alternatives, to bring about socialism.

"The workers of the world including Britain have a key role to play in this", he said. "We want 21st century socialism." There is a threat to the world from ecological disaster. We have the war in Iraq and the threats against Iran. "We cannot guarantee jobs, houses, or lives under capitalism. This is absolutely impossible under capitalism. Just look at the problems of youth unemployment in Europe, the crisis in pensions, and so on. We are anti-imperialists. But we are not against the ordinary people of the United States. They are our friends," he said.

In a reply to a question, Chavez stated that his government was "a workers' government, with a commitment to the workers." He concluded his speak with the statement: "There is a dramatic shift to the left in Latin America. This will happen in Europe



and I hope throughout the world. This is the only hope for the world today." As a token of friendship, the General Council presented Chavez with a Spanish translation of the classic English socialist book, "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist" by Robert Tressell.

This was certainly the most radical speech given to the TUC General Council in 50 years. It should be printed and circulated to all unions as part of the support for the Venezuelan Revolution. After the meeting at the TUC, HOV members went to City Hall where Chavez was holding a press conference and to Parliament to assist with the welcoming rally. When we arrived at the press conference we were greeted by part of the Venezuelan delegation that had also come from the TUC, which included Nicolas Maduro, the President of the National Assembly.

There were around 200 people at the press conference, including guests. The first question addressed to Chavez came from a CNN reporter, who asked why Chavez had "snubbed" Tony Blair. Chavez, who was very sharp, replied that this was a stupid question and that the reporter should know better. The visit was a private one and he objected

to the way that the press was trying to twist things. After making short work of that question, he took others, equally provocative, which included one implying that Venezuela was acting in an imperialist fashion, using oil as a political weapon to get its way: "We have no plans to monopolise the oil and gas. We are just creating integration plans, like in Europe", stated the President.

When Chavez was compared by one Venezuelan reporter to

George Bush, Chavez replied indignantly "Don't ever compare me with him. Have I ever attacked or invaded another country? Have I killed people? George Bush is a criminal, an assassin. He should be tried for these offences and placed in prison", he said. This was greeted by a storm of applause from the guests and even certain of the journalists, although this enthusiasm was not shared by the escualidos journalists who had prepared the usual provocative questions.

Later that afternoon, a 150-strong meeting was organised for Chavez in the House of Commons, hosted by Colin Burgon MP and the Labour Friends of Venezuela. Together with John McDonnell MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP, HOV was represented by Alan Woods, Rob Sewell and Jeremy Dear.

"We must take power"

Watched over by a scowling bust of Winston Churchill, Chavez gave the most militant speech ever heard in the august surroundings of the Palace of Westminster. In general lines it was similar to the one he had given at the TUC, dealing with the history of the liberation struggle in Venezuela, the evils of capitalism and the socialist road that needed to be taken. But he addressed himself specifically to the Labour Party and its socialist and working class traditions:

"We know where the Labour Party has come from and its traditions", said Chavez, "and we fully identify with these traditions." He continued: "I do



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not wish to refer to the internal politics of Britain, but you have all heard something called the 'Third Way', he said, in a clear reference to the ideas of Tony Blair. "My experience has convinced me that there is no third way between capitalism and socialism. The only way forward for humanity is socialism.

Chavez then went on to explain that "they try to frighten us with the power of the Empire, but we are not frightened. There is a bigger power than imperialism and that is world public opinion, and by that I mean the power of the people of the world. We must not restrict our activity to the streets. We must take power."

This is the first time for generations that a person has given a speech in the Mother of Parliaments stressing socialism and world revolution. It was very warmly received and it clearly made a profound impact on those present, especially when President Chavez described the events of the coup in April 2002. "I thought I was going to die that day. In fact, they tried to kill me three times but were stopped by the soldiers guarding me. Finally, we were rescued by the people", he said.

Afterwards he was introduced to John McDonnell of HOV and warmly shook his hand: "Thank you John MacDonnell for everything you have done. Thank you. Thank you", the President said in English.

The final meeting

After this, we proceeded to the welcoming rally outside the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall, where a large group had congregated to meet the President. This was the last meeting of the visit, aimed primarily at the business community and the need to encourage

investment in the Venezuelan economy. This time, the welcoming rally was met with a small opposition gathering of some 10 people, made up of middle class types. They were completely outnumbered and looked a pathetic bunch.

When Chavez arrived, the crowd surged forward and swamped the President. Again he took time to thank everyone and shake hands and embrace his supporters.

As he went in to the entrance, the crowd simply followed him. After a pause, the President's team urged us to come in and join the meeting. Dozens of HOV supporters were allowed in. To the astonishment of the staff of Canning House, young people in jeans and denim jackets joined the likes of Norman Lamont and other doyens of the bourgeoisie, who were clearly curious to hear what this man was going to say.

Many of us took seats at the front next to the Venezuelan delegation. Chavez again greeted us with handshakes and salutes, especially Alan Woods and his partner Ana Muñoz. The hall was packed with around 600 present. Chavez mounted the podium with the defiant air of Daniel in the lion's den. He handled himself very skilfully, treating his audience to a barrage of carefully mobilised statistics to rebut, one after another, the lies and slanders against the Bolivarian Revolution. As usual, he spoke without notes, only occasionally reading some statistics from voluminous sheets of paper. He began by enumerating the successes of the Bolivarian Revolution. He pointed out that for the first time Unicef had declared Venezuela free of illiteracy. 60% used to attend school, but now the figure is over 75%. Education spending is up to 8% of the GDP, the same as healthcare:

"We are promoting health, employment and education, said Chavez. "We have diagnostic centres and people can go there free, thanks to Cuba. We have 20,000 Cuban doctors and assistants in Venezuela ensuring primary health-care." In the last three years there have been 117 million visits to the surgeries and 16.8 million to the dentists. Thousands of people have had their

lives saved due to these measures. We have had 200,000 operations for cataracts, a 15 minute operation that allows people to see properly. I have had people cry in front of me because they thought that they would never see a dawn or the moon again". Health is a right for the poor as much as the rich, said Chavez. Why should it not be? You must not privatise health. Health is a right for everyone!"

The country's international reserves had grown from \$10bn three years ago to \$30.4bn today. Unemployment has been halved and will soon be in single figures. Inflation has fallen from 100% plus to around 10%. The GDP has grown over nine consecutive quarters, demonstrating vigorous growth, and not only in the oil sector. There were major projects being planned in regard to infrastructure which needed international investment, he said.

We do not know whether this speech will lead to greater investments by the British capitalists in Venezuela. This depends on what is stronger: their greed for profits or their fear of the Revolution. On the way out, one man dressed in a posh suit was heard to say that his money would be safer elsewhere. In any case, President Chavez can be under no illusion that the real friends of the Bolivarian Revolution are not the smart audience in the banqueting hall but the workers, trade unionists and youth of Britain.

After the meeting, Chavez made his way out of the building, making his way slowly through the ranks of cheering supporters. Thus ended a very successful visit, which has undoubtedly served to consolidate the solidarity movement, especially Hands off Venezuela, and strengthen the forces of the Left in the British labour and trade union movement. It has put the question of socialism and revolution back on the agenda of the British labour movement in a way that could not have been foreseen even a few years ago. History is not finished, it has only just begun. □

More reports and more photos can be found online at www.marxist.com and at the Hands Off Venezuela website at www.handsoffvenezuela.org

Hands Off Venezuela

Hugo Chávez addresses mass rally of 5000 organised by Hands off Venezuela in Vienna

by Hands Off Venezuela - www.handsoffvenezuela.org

AT THE Arena cultural centre in Vienna, President Chavez spoke to an audience of 5,000 enthusiastic young people in a mass meeting organised by Hands off Venezuela and Cuba, the Austrian section of the HOV international solidarity campaign that is now active in more than 30 countries. The meeting was a spectacular success. It was the biggest public meeting held by the Left in Vienna for as long as most people can remember. Peter Kreisky, the son of the former Chancellor of Austria, Bruno Kreisky, said he could not remember anything like this for 30 years.

The rally, which was called to coincide with the EU Summit on Latin America, was set to start at 6.30pm. But because of unforeseen difficulties, the President was delayed for several hours and the rally finally began at 10 pm. Since many people had already started queuing at 5pm, this meant a very long wait! Nevertheless, the mood was vibrant and good humoured throughout, and the crowd passed the time chanting, singing and waving a sea of red banners.

The capacity of the meeting hall in the Arena is about 800, but at the last moment the management decided to impose a maximum of 400 on grounds of safety. The organisers, with the help of the Casa Militar (the Presidential security team) had already fixed up a big screen outside in the spacious courtyard, so that many more people could watch the proceedings outside.

In the event, everything had to be changed. As time passed, more and more people kept arriving. The hall was filled before the doors were opened and hundreds of people - overwhelmingly youth - poured into the courtyard. The organisers began to calculate numbers - a thousand, two thousand, three thousand. Soon the place was full, literally to the rooftops. Even the police estimated 3,000. In fact there were at least 5,000 in the precinct, and several hundreds more who could not get in and had to stay on

the street.

It was fortunate that the start of the meeting was delayed because all the arrangements had to be scrapped. The tribune was moved outside on a balcony facing the courtyard and a sound system was hastily rigged up by the staff of the Arena, who were very helpful.

There was a nervous moment at the start because the word was put out that the President would not attend the meeting. It was true that, because of a very hectic agenda at the Summit, it was extremely difficult for him to come to the meeting, but the day before he had told the organisers; "I know about this meeting and will do everything in my power to be there." And he kept his word. At about a quarter to ten the presidential car swept into the precinct and Chavez stepped onto the platform amidst a storm of applause.

On the platform there were many prominent figures in the Bolivarian Movement. Nicolas Maduro, the President of the National Assembly, Juan Barreto, the mayor of Caracas, as well as the Minister of Planning, Jorge Giordani and Eva Gollinger, the author of *The Chavez Code*. Ruben Linares, one of the national co-ordinators of the UNT, was also present, as was the Cuban ambassador and a group of 20 Cubans from the embassy and the Instituto Cubano de Amistad de los Pueblos.

"You Are Making History"

A number of high-ranking officials of the Austrian Trade Union Federation

(ÖGB) were also present. The meeting was chaired by a young shop steward and member of HOV, Axel Magnus.

Apart from Chavez, there were only two speakers: Aleida Guevara, the daughter of Che Guevara, and Alan Woods, founder of the international Hands Off Venezuela campaign, who sat on either side of the President. Aleida opened the meeting with an impassioned speech, in which she recalled the heroic struggle of her father which she urged the youth to continue. She laid particular emphasis on the campaign to free the 5 Cubans illegally being held in US prisons.

For the benefit of the many Latin Americans in the audience, Alan Woods addressed the meeting in Spanish. He started his speech, which was interrupted by frequent and enthusiastic applause, by remarking: "And they say there is apathy among the youth! Welcome, apathetic youngsters! (laughter and applause). The youth are not apathetic! The youth need a cause that is worthy of them, a banner, a vision and a dream!" He went on to quote the (in)famous statement by Francis Fukuyama that history has ended: "History has not ended. This is history. They are making history in Venezuela. And you are making history."

Alan continued: "There are many meetings in Vienna right now. But there is no meeting like this one. We have not come here just to talk and then go home and forget about things. This meeting must be the launching pad for organising a great movement of solidarity in every country in Europe." He appealed to all present to join HOV. To judge from the response of those present, this appeal did not fall on deaf ears.

Alan was followed by Emanuel Tomaselli, the national organiser of HOV (Austria) who briefly introduced President Chavez. He said: "Life is a struggle and today we have won a battle. On the one hand, it was very difficult to assure the presence of President Chavez at



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this meeting. On the other hand, it was very easy, because we always knew that he would prefer to be here with the revolutionary youth than to dine with the Presidents who are fooling their own peoples."

When President Chavez approached the podium he was greeted with deafening applause and a sea of waving red flags and chanting. He spoke for about two hours, and his main theme was the need to fight against imperialism and capitalism that are destroying the planet and placing the human race in danger. He quoted the words of Rosa Luxemburg: "The choice before humanity is socialism or barbarism." And he added; "When Rosa Luxemburg made this statement, she was speaking of a relatively distant future. But now the situation of the world is so bad that the threat to the human race is not in the future, but now."

He went on: "When I was a kid of 15 we had May 1968, the Beatles, John Lennon and the war in Vietnam. We looked to the future and we thought that by the year 2000, the world would be a different place, a better place. But the years have passed and instead of improving things have got much worse. What has happened? They have stolen my future. Imperialism and capitalism have stolen my future. And now that I am in my fifties, I am convinced that people of my generation must spend every day, every hour, every minute of our lives fighting for a better world - a world free from poverty, inequality and injustice. That world is called socialism! I believe that only the youth have the necessary enthusiasm, the passion, the fire, to make the revolution. Let us unite to save the world. Together we can succeed!"

The President's speech was received with wild applause and the cheering and chanting went on for a long time, as he took a red flag from one of the audience and waved it in the air. Then, quite spontaneously, the crowd started to sing the Internationale. It was an emotional end to an emotional occasion. It was past midnight and for hours later groups of people were still standing in the precinct, discussing the ideas of socialism and revolution in a way that has not been seen here for many years.

A huge amount of effort was put into organising this meeting.

A total of 7,000 posters were put up by HOV activists all over Austria. A very active role was also played by the Austrian Young Socialists and the Alternative students, who, in contrast to others in the Alternative movement, actively backed this meeting and participated with energy and enthusiasm.

There are many people we would like to thank for their help and assistance in organising this meeting. Unfortunately there are too many to name them all. We would like to thank comrade Harold from the Casa Militar, Veronica from the Venezuelan embassy in Vienna and Alejandro Fleming, the Venezuelan ambassador in Belgium and to the European Union. We would also like to thank comrade Fernando Bossi in Caracas for his invaluable assistance in arranging this activity.

The Curse of Disunity

Unfortunately, not everyone shared the enthusiasm for this meeting. Some of the organisers of the so-called Alternative Summit clearly wanted to impose a monopoly on the visit of President Chavez. Despite repeated attempts of HOV to achieve unity, every approach was met with a rebuff. Once again, unfortunately, the Left suffered from the traditional disease of sectarianism and disunity.

The conduct of some of the opponents of HOV can only be described as sabotage. All kind of irresponsible rumours about HOV were put in circulation and a malicious campaign of misinformation was launched. Matters came to an extreme when the former head of the Austrian CP, Walter Beier, on the eve of our meeting, stated in the pages of *The Standard*, one of the main papers, that the idea that President Chavez would speak at this meeting was "nonsense". In fact, the rumour

was widely circulated that the president would not come. As late as 11 pm the television was reporting that President Chavez had returned to his hotel. At that time he was half way through his speech at the Arena!

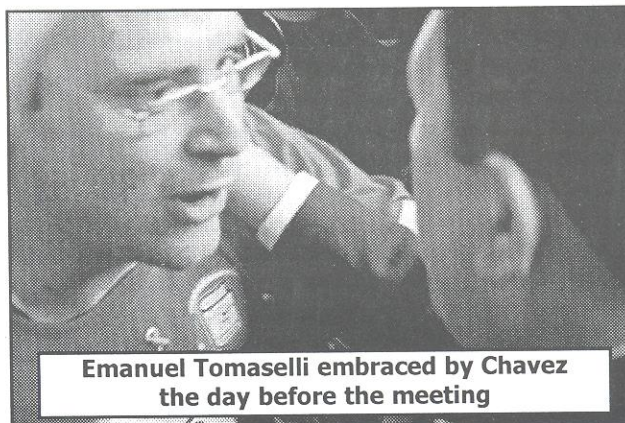
The meeting was an outstanding success. At the end of his speech, President Chavez publicly thanked Alan Woods and Hands off Venezuela for having organised such an outstanding meeting.

The message is plain; it is time to put an end to the disunity, to stop trying to marginalise HOV - the oldest and by far the most successful campaign of solidarity with Venezuela, and the only solidarity campaign of an international nature. It is necessary to put aside secondary differences and unite in action to defend the Venezuelan Revolution against its external and internal enemies. That was, and still is, the position of HOV and we invite all those who sincerely value the cause of the Revolution to join with us in common struggle from now on.

The rally of May 12 will be of enormous international significance. Media from all over the world were present: over 60 newspapers, press agencies and TV companies were there. In Venezuela the meeting received the widest coverage imaginable. Here in Vienna the press reported that Chavez had made an extremely radical speech calling for revolution and socialism. The ruling class and their hired press are most unhappy, but the workers and youth of Austria and the rest of Europe are delighted.

Imperialism is not just the USA. The EU has been pursuing an increasingly hostile foreign policy towards Cuba and has condemned last week's measures by Evo Morales to take control of Bolivia's hydrocarbon resources. It is no secret that Europe's strategists of capital share Washington's "concerns" about the swing to the left in one Latin American country after another. Because of this it was important to show that there is a different Europe as well - that ordinary working people and students support the cause of the Bolivarian Revolution and of socialism in Europe and the whole world.

This historic meeting was a giant step forward for international socialism. □



Emanuel Tomaselli embraced by Chavez the day before the meeting

Globalisation and Imperialism

by Mick Brooks

From the point of view of Marxism it is vital that we know exactly what we are fighting against, how the system operates, in order to understand how to defeat it, how to change society.

In part one of a three part series on Globalisation and Imperialism, Mick Brooks examines globalisation as the ideology of triumphant capitalism, and outlines the specific features of Imperialism.

Contrary to popular usage by the media and various political and economic commentators, 'Globalisation' is not an objective or neutral term which simply describes the contemporary world economy.

In many ways it is the 'big idea' of modern apologists of capitalism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union we are being encouraged to believe that capitalism has won. And if capitalism won, then that must be because of its own inherent superiority as an economic system. It's now the only game in town. So goodbye Soviet Union means goodbye to a viable socialist alternative.

Socialist Appeal and Marxist.com have argued against that position at length elsewhere. (See, for instance, Ted Grant's book *Russia: From Revolution to Counter-revolution*, Wellred Publications, 1997.) Here, we concentrate first on globalisation as the ideology of triumphant capitalism.

Globalisation is closely linked to the ideology of neo-liberalism. The two concepts share a sort of division of labour. While globalisation asserts the inevitable victory of market forces over everything that stands in their way, neo-liberalism tells us this is all to the good.

As we shall see, globalisation is quite a slippery notion - more of a buzzword than an explanatory concept. Tony Blair's Third Way theoretician, Professor Anthony Giddens, has written an entire book on it without defining the term globalisation (Runaway World, Profile Books, 2002).

Bob Sutcliffe and Andrew Glyn, in their article Measures of Globalisation and their Misinterpretation carefully assess the two main alternative meanings that have been attached to the word:

"We do not question that globalisation in one of its meanings - the world wide spread of capitalist relations in production and distribution - has been a major feature of the last 50 years... The globalisation debate, however, is mainly couched in terms of another concept: the increasing international integration of economic activity... It is our opinion that the degree of globalisation in this sense, as well as its novelty, has been greatly exaggerated." (The Handbook of Globalisation Ed. J. Michie, Pub. Edward Elgar 2003)

Theory of Globalisation

John Ralston Saul makes a decent fist of outlining the main interlinked trends predicted from the theory of globalisation:

"The power of the nation state is waning.

"Such states, as we know them may even be dying. In the future, power will lie with global markets.

"Thus economics, not politics and armies, will shape human events.

"These global markets, freed of narrow national interests and inhibiting regulations, will gradually establish international economic balances...

"Such markets will unleash waves of trade. And these waves will in turn unleash a broad economic tide of growth.

"That tide will in turn raise all ships, including those of the poor, whether in the West or in the developing world.

"The resulting prosperity will allow put-upon individuals to convert dictatorships into democracies..." etc, etc. (*The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, Viking, Canada, 2005, p. 15)

'Increasing international integration of economic activity' is the central tenet

of what we shall call the Globalisers, whatever else they believe. It is our contention that capitalism cannot achieve an integrated, balanced development that can eventually lift everyone out of poverty and deliver prosperity for all. In that sense the globalisation prospectus is a fraud.

In addition, all manner of seers, pundits and outright charlatans have attached extra baggage to the concept. Globalisers foresee capital flows opening up to poor countries their first chance to become rich through the transfer of advanced country technology. As the late billionaire James Goldsmith put it, 'During the past few years four billion people have suddenly entered the world economy.' We have to ask - where were they before, then?

Some commentators even see national cultural differences being homogenised as in a giant blender by global brands nurtured by these capital flows. With characteristic intellectual laziness Tony Blair joins the club and asserts, "Complaining about globalisation is as pointless as trying to turn back the tide." He and other reformist leaders have welcomed the buzzword as an excuse not to fight for better wages and conditions for working people and as an ideology justifying their capitulation to capitalism.

Some of this analysis sounds real enough. The trouble is, workers can and do lose their jobs as firms relocate to find cheaper labour. Multinationals do prefer to pollute the environment if that costs them less, and they can play countries off against each other as a destination for investment by demanding lower taxes or scrapping of labour protection laws. The rhetoric of globalisation seems realistic to workers under threat.

But, as the quote from the *Communist Manifesto* below shows, these attacks have been going on for a long time. The enemy is not 'globalisation' - it is capitalism. The idea that capitalism has a global reach is not the exclusive property of the globalisation theorists. To our knowledge it was first

put forward by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, published in 1848:

"The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are destroyed by new industries whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised countries, by industries that work up raw materials drawn from the remotest zones, industries whose products are consumed in every quarter of the globe... The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarous, nations into civilisation."

At the time this was by no means a statement of the obvious. Only one country, Britain, could be regarded as seriously industrialised in 1848. Britain was then responsible for 40% to 50% of all the world's industrial production. Even so, an aerial survey of Britain would have shown industry concentrated in a few counties, with vast swathes of the landscape apparently unaffected by the transformative power of capitalism. In its time the Manifesto was a prophetic document.

Concepts of Imperialism

It was left to a later generation of Marxists to assess how the global reach of capital had impacted on the world economy and relations between the classes. In the years before the First World War they came up with the concept of 'Imperialism, the latest stage of capitalism', the original title of Lenin's 1916 pamphlet.

Lenin argued that the competitive capitalism of Marx's time had been replaced by an economy dominated by monopolies. Likewise the era of free trade described by Marx had been replaced by the erection of tariff walls. One way to vault over tariff walls was to invest in other countries to produce goods there rather than exporting the commodities into that country. So the export of capital supplemented the export of goods. Those tariff walls were erected to defend hostile national capital blocs arrayed against each other. The imperialist powers divided the rest of the world among themselves as

colonies and spheres of influence. All these trends were rooted in the changing ways in which surplus value was produced in the heartlands of capitalism:

"(W)e must give a definition of imperialism that will include the following five of its basic features:

1. The concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life;
2. The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation on the basis of this 'finance capital' of a 'financial oligarchy';
3. The export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance;
4. The formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and;
5. The territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed."

(*Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, p. 82, Progress Publishers, 1966)

Karl Kautsky, a leader of the mass German Social-Democratic Party and the Second International, widely considered the "Pope of Marxism" in his time, had agreed with and helped formulate the concept of imperialism. But he developed a difference in his 1914 pamphlet 'Ultra-imperialism' and in other writings.

In *Ultra-imperialism* he wrote, "Imperialism is thus digging its own grave. From a means to develop capital, it is becoming a hindrance to it." The next subhead shows where his thought was going:

"The next phase: ultra-imperialism

"From a purely economic standpoint, however, there is nothing further to prevent this violent explosion" (the outbreak of the First World War) "finally replacing imperialism by a holy alliance of imperialists. The longer the War lasts, the more it exhausts all the participants and makes them recoil from an early repetition of armed conflict, the nearer we come to this last solution, however unlikely it may seem at



the moment." (*Ultra-imperialism*, September 1914, on the Kautsky archive on www.marxists.org, the Marxist Internet Archive)

Notice the difference between Kautsky's approach and that of Lenin and co-thinkers, such as fellow Bolshevik theoretician, Nicolai Bukharin. Kautsky sees imperialism as a 'policy' adopted by the big powers, in effect as a form of dress adopted by the capitalist nations that could be changed when the weather changed. Lenin and his co-thinkers saw imperialism as a necessity for capitalism at its latest stage of development. They didn't start with colonial policy, but saw it arising out of capitalist economic development.

Kautsky was not a direct intellectual forerunner of the advocates of globalisation. The latter have always been apologists for capitalism and regard globalisation as 'the highest stage of capitalism'. Yet his thought shares some of their approaches and attitudes. He believes the capitalist system to be rational, presumably because individual capitalists aren't usually daft.

As we see from the quote above, he believed that when capitalists looked into the abyss in 1914, they would find a way to shrink back. In fact they plunged right on in. It is probable that all the warring powers, with the exception of the USA, saw themselves as losers after the cessation of hostilities in 1918. Yet they did exactly the same thing again twenty years later. □

...to be continued.

□ (Alternatively, if you cannot wait until next month, the entire article can be read online at www.marxist.com)

Bolivian Government Takes Control of Oil and Gas

by Jorge Martin - www.marxist.com

THE DECISION of the Bolivian government on May 1st to take over the gas resources of the country, and its high profile implementation by sending troops to occupy the fields and installations has shaken the multinational companies.

Speaking at a May Day rally at Plaza Murillo, vice president Garcia Linera, announced the nationalisation with the following words: "the government of the people, the government of the workers, has taken the most important decision of this century: this is the first nationalisation of the 21st century".

The measure, implemented through Supreme Decree 28701, clearly states that, "as a measure of national sovereignty, and following the mandate of the Bolivian people... The natural hydrocarbon resources of the country are nationalized... The State recovers absolute and total control, property and possession of these resources". From May 1st the different oil companies that operate in the country are forced to give ownership of their whole production to the state owned company YPFB, which "in the name and in representation of the state, exercising in full its ownership of all hydrocarbons produced in the country, takes over its commercialisation, defining conditions, volumes and prices both for the internal market as well as for export and industrialisation".

To reinforce the measure, the government ordered the army into all the oilfields and installations. Evo Morales himself, wearing a hard hat, personally supervised the operations in an oilfield operated by the Brazilian Petrobras, one of the largest multinational companies in the gas market in Bolivia. "The time has come, the awaited day, a historic day in which Bolivia retakes absolute control of its natural resources," he said, as soldiers erected banners saying

"Nationalised, property of the Bolivians".

The move certainly took the oil companies by surprise, since they expected the Evo Morales government to renegotiate the contracts under which they are operating, but they thought he would do it through talks and negotiations, rather than by imposition. The oil companies have really no reason to complain. They have been operating in Bolivia under an extremely favourable tax and royalty regime set up under the hated government of Gomez de Lozada. Many of the contracts are actually considered to be illegal and void since they were never ratified by parliament.

The decision comes after Evo Morales' visit to Cuba, where he signed a number of agreements with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. This is clearly part of a concerted effort against the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement, proposed by Washington, which in effect would mean a free ride for US multinationals in the whole of the continent. Due to opposition by Venezuela, the FTAA, which was supposed to have been signed on January 2005, has completely failed, and the US has moved towards the signing of bilateral free trade agreements with Central American and Andean countries. This led, just over a week ago, to the with-

drawal of Venezuela from the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), since it correctly argued that if Colombia and Peru, which are part of CAN, sign FTA with the US, then this amounts to backdoor FTAs with the whole of the CAN nations.

The move will particularly hit Brazilian multinational Petrobras and Spanish multinational Repsol, which are the main players in Bolivia's lucrative gas business. This is however, not a full nationalisation, and therefore, less radical than the nationalisations of the mines in 1937 and 1969. The state takes over controlling stakes in all companies (51% of the shares), but does not actually fully nationalise them. The argument is that the Bolivian state does not have the necessary technology and know-how to exploit these resources. In the new contracts proposed, the Bolivian state will receive 82% of all revenue through taxes and royalties, decisively shaking the balance in favour of Bolivia. There are many legal aspects of the decree that need to be studied more in detail. But even in the worst possible scenario that at the end of the day this would only amount to a change in the contracts under which foreign multinationals operate in the country, this would still be a progressive step forward.

Outcry by Oligarchy

The move has been received with an outcry by the Bolivian oligarchy and by the multinationals concerned. The usual threats have been made that this will damage foreign investment and that the multinationals might just leave the country altogether. Thus, even this halfway nationalisation is too much for the interests of the multinationals and sets the Bolivian government on a collision course with them.

As we said at the time of the election victory of the MAS in December 2005, the Evo Morales



Bolivian President Evo Morales

government cannot serve two masters at the same time, and it is subject to enormous pressures on the one hand from the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants (which is what finally catapulted Morales to power, though he played no decisive role in it), and from the oligarchy and the multinationals on the other. Every step he takes to shift the balance of power in favour of the workers will be seen as a provocation on the part of the oligarchy, no matter how many speeches he makes to reassure foreign investors.

This move, which shows boldness and confidence on the part of the Bolivian government, cannot be understood outside of the framework of the revolutionary wave that is sweeping across Latin America. Without the existence of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela which in turn has broken the blockade on Cuba, a government like that of Evo Morales would have never dared to take measures of this kind.

Step Forward for Workers and Peasants

Regardless of the legal details and the scope of this semi-nationalisation, this is clearly a step forward for the movement of workers and peasants in Bolivia and throughout the continent, and has been seen as such. This is a move that will increase the confidence of the poor masses in Bolivia and will push them towards putting even more pressure on the Evo Morales government to nationalise not only gas, but also the mines, the land, the bankrupt national airline LAB, etc.

In fact, Evo Morales himself declared: "This is only the beginning. At the end of May we will nationalise other energy resources... we are starting with hydrocarbons, tomorrow we will move to mining, forestry and all of the natural resources."

These steps are taken in the logic of developing national "Andean capitalism", to use the turn of phrase coined by Morales' vice president Garcia Linera. But the problem is that the main contradiction in Bolivia is precisely that there is no national capitalist class separate

and independent from the landowners and the multinationals. Any attempt to create such a national capitalist development on the basis of the state will inevitably lead to a head on clash with the real capitalists, the owners of the banks, industries, mines and the land, which form an inseparable block with imperialist interests. The choice is a stark one: either socialism or imperialist domination.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the mass movement of the workers in Bolivia do not seem to have learnt any of the lessons from the election of Evo Morales. First, the leaders of the Bolivian Workers Union (COB) did not take advantage of two revolutionary opportunities, in October 2003 and in May June 2005. They even admitted themselves that if on those occasions the workers did not take power this was only because of the lack of a revolutionary leadership. Then, inevitably, the movement was derailed onto the electoral plane. Instead of putting forward workers candidates and at the same time giving critical support to Evo Morales, the leaders of the COB took the unfortunate decision of arguing for a boycott of the elections. They went as far as to say that neither Morales nor the candidate of the oligarchy would solve the problems of the workers and that therefore there was nothing to choose between them.

The masses of workers and peasants had a clearer class instinct and voted massively for Evo Morales. In the epicentre of the revolutionary uprisings, the working class city of El Alto, nearly 80% voted for Morales and the MAS. This was treated as if it were an irrelevant detail by the leaders of the COB, particularly Jaime Solares, who continued with an ultra-left line which was completely out of touch with the masses of workers and peasants. This was clearly demonstrated on April 21 when they could only gather a couple of hundred people at a demonstration they had called in La Paz as part of a so-called "general strike" against the Morales government. Instead of having a policy of organizing the workers to struggle for their demands to put pressure on the Morales government (which they



consider as their own) to deliver on its promises and even go further, they pursued a policy of ultimatums which cut them off even from even most of the advanced sections.

As a result, the May Day demonstration called by the COB was noticeably smaller than the one called by the MAS where the announcement of nationalization was made. The forthcoming congress of the COB (which had to be delayed after the fracas of the April 21 "general strike") will be the setting for a strong clash between the current leadership and the supporters of the MAS.

Patiently Explain

In revolutionary periods, mistakes in tactics and strategy can prove to be fatal. A genuine revolutionary Marxist leadership can only be built in Bolivia by understanding the real mood of the masses and their relationship with the Morales government. Marxists must maintain their own political programme and be clear on the main point: genuine sovereignty and control over the natural resources to the benefit of the majority of Bolivians can only be achieved through the nationalisation and democratic planning by the workers themselves of the basic pillars of the economy, that is, through the struggle for socialism. But before this can be realized, they need to win over to their side the majority of the workers and peasants who at the present time have put their trust in Evo Morales. This can only be done by patiently explaining and accompanying them in their struggle, by supporting every progressive step taken by the government, while at the same time pushing the movement forward. □

Basra - Another Crack in the Dam

by Maarten Vanheeuverswyn

After being labelled a "butcher" by the British press following last week's bad election results for the Labour Party and the subsequent Cabinet reshuffle, Tony Blair suffered another blow. As if the recent scandals at home were not enough, attention was drawn to that other hotbed of controversy, Iraq. In Basra the British army lost five soldiers, including the first female casualty, as their helicopter crashed and British soldiers came under attack.

Helicopters have become the main means of transport for British troops in Basra. More than ever the Lynx helicopter is the loyal workhorse of the British army in Basra, where they are based, as it is simply too dangerous to walk or drive through the streets of the city without being threatened by lethal roadside bombs. This fact in itself shows the volatility of the whole situation in Iraq, expressed in the numerous bombings, killings and explosions taking place on a daily basis all over the country. Now not even helicopters are safe for the occupation forces. In the *Daily Mirror* an intelligence official commented: "British troops are now in a terrible position in the city as it is clear the public mood is swinging towards wanting them to leave. Whereas troops were once able to go out and take part in reconstruction schemes and meet locals it is now extremely difficult for them to do so." (*Daily Mirror*, May 8)

When the helicopter went down on Saturday - the official reason is not known yet, though police claim it was taken down by a rocket fired from the ground - within minutes British troops arrived on foot, accompanied by armoured vehicles. They were not received as heroes, to say the least: the welcoming present consisted of stones thrown from the crowd along with petrol bombs. No less than 600 troops were needed to maintain a cordon around the wreckage of the helicopter.

British forces attacked in Basra - another crack in the dam Sergeant Stuart Lansdowne testified to the Reuters news agency how his men came under a hail of rocks, Molotov cocktails, grenades and home-made bombs: "It was a constant stream of about eight hours of folks being pummeled," he said. "We couldn't clearly identify where the bombs were coming from, so we just stood and took it." And take it they did indeed, but they were giving it too as army commanders had to admit they fired into the crowd with both plastic and live bullets. At least four Iraqis died during the event and more than forty were wounded. Basra residents said the euphoric scenes following the helicopter crash are a direct result of the city's descent into misery and that such a confrontation was likely to recur. "The miserable situation in Basra and the south definitely had a role in the build-up of events," said Abu Ali, a Basra resident. "Electricity is absent for most of the day and gasoline is very expensive. Ordinary people can never get a job at the state security forces because it is entirely controlled by the militias. People think those who used to live abroad came and controlled everything while the common citizens still cannot get basic life needs." (*Guardian*, May 8, 2006)

Deteriorating Social Conditions

Despite the idle hope of Britain's new

Defence Secretary, Des Browne, who tried to reassure parliament that Basra was not "rising up", it does not take much intelligence to see that it is precisely the deteriorating social conditions and constant insecurity on all levels that are causing so much distress amongst ordinary Basra citizens. Electricity is considered a luxury, unemployment is at high levels, education is in shambles and access to health care is scarce too. The Iraqi people may have suffered under Saddam Hussein, but it is undeniable that they are worse off now than before the invasion of their country - and that, at the end of the day, is what determines their attitude towards a foreign occupation force that, despite all the rhetoric, only aggravates the situation.

The pompous words about "establishing democracy" must sound very hollow to people who have seen very little of this much trumpeted "democracy". Yes, the people of Basra, just like their fellow Iraqis, now have a President who wrote an official letter to Tony Blair expressing his condolences, not for his fellow countrymen who died in the skirmish, but for the British soldiers in the helicopter - describing their deaths as a "vile crime". Surely this does not help the Iraqi people in their day-to-day struggle for a normal life. Reuters quoted 23-year-old university student Saeed Salman, who said, "The violence is unacceptable, whether the downing of the helicopter or the reaction of the British forces. We all want our city to be calm and free from violence." Others, like Batul Abid al-Amir, 33, show a clearer understanding of the real state of affairs: "What happened (on Saturday), though we are against it, is predictable and natural, because these forces are occupiers and they have to know that the people are fed up with their presence in their country."

The recent clash comes after a year in which the security situation in Basra





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All prison sentences against Saghez activists quashed!

by the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network

gradually worsened. Once considered one of the safest areas in Iraq, Basra is now just another area of serious concern. Last September, British forces clashed with Basra police who had detained two British secret service agents dressed in Arab clothes and carrying explosives. To this day the British government has not come up with any explanation of this significant event, which can only be seen as a conscious provocation coming from the murky world of the British intelligence services.

The Dam Will Break

In February of this year things came to a head as Britain started arresting police they accused of having links to gangs and militias, after which the local authorities in Basra broke off all relations with the British forces. That same month footage of British soldiers beating an Iraqi teenager was made public, which only alienated the British forces even more from the local population.

As we wrote last year:

"If there ever was any "love" on the part of the local population towards their occupiers, by their own actions the British troops are quickly destroying any credibility they might have had before. The myth of peaceful British soldiers who are supposedly champions of "peace-keeping" is gradually being destroyed. Insofar as this myth had not already gone down the drain with their divide and rule policy in Northern Ireland - and in fact in the whole history of British imperialism, with its brutal colonial wars in Africa and the Indian subcontinent - the real nature of the whole operation cannot remain covered up." (*From Tal Afar to Basra: fanning the flames of discontent in Iraq*, September 27, 2005)

The recent helicopter crash and the violent protests are just another crack in the dam. It might take a few more cracks, but it is inevitable that at one point the dam will break. □

We have received news from Iran that the authorities have quashed the prison sentences and dropped all charges against the seven Saghez activists. Although initially the Iranian regime had a long list of charges levelled against Mohammad Abdipoor, Borhand Divargar, Mohsen Hakimi, Jalal Hosseini, Esmail Khodkam, Mahmoud Salehi and Hadi Tanoomand, their only real 'crime' was to try to organise a May Day rally in Saghez (in Iranian Kurdistan).

The arrests on May Day 2004 were the start of two years of sustained pressure by the regime on these activists and their families. But all the intimidation and threats met with the activists' resistance, the support of the Kurdish masses and sections of the resurgent Iranian labour movement, and last, but

not least, the broad and consistent international solidarity of trade unionists and socialists across three continents. Given such a united force a rotten and crumbling regime could only back down and admit defeat.

We thank all the trade unionists, labour activists, socialists and youth who helped in bringing about this great victory. We would like to thank particularly all the members and supporters of the Committee for a Marxist International who picketed the Iranian embassies in many countries on 20 September 2004 and provided us all with a great lesson and experience for future struggles.

**Long live international
 workers' solidarity!**

Iran Khodro sacks over 50 workers

by the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network

ACCORDING TO reports received from Iran Khodro activists, during the past few weeks the management of Iran Khodro has sacked over 50 of the workers who had struck on 8 March 2006 over bonuses. The workers had gone on strike because in a year of record-breaking production the bonuses were going to be lower than the previous year's.

The strike demanding bigger bonuses, which had mainly included the 'shuttle' and 'RD' body-shop halls, was beginning to spread to the whole factory when the company's top management became involved and tried to end it. They promised the workers that there had been a mistake and the problem would be resolved soon. So the workers returned to work.

In return the management took absolutely no steps whatsoever and even started saying that any news published about a strike were completely

false and gave Kar-o Kargar daily (Labour and Labourer) an ultimatum. It announced that Kar-o Kargar must retract its report otherwise Iran Khodro's management will lodge a complaint against the paper for publishing falsehoods.

Now the management has regained the initiative and has begun to identify the dissident workers and during the past few weeks, under various pretexts, it has sacked protesting workers. It wants to purge the dissident workers in order to cut all workers' bonuses.

Note: 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. □

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WHO'S CASHING IN?

by Steve Jones

WHEN ANY new country comes into existence, they always have two immediate ambitions: to become members of the UN and to affiliate to football's governing body FIFA - and not always in that order! Football remains the dominant global game, played by millions and watched by billions. As a source of revenue it far surpasses any other sports-related source of income, a fact not unnoticed by the major sports companies.

Global firms such as Nike, Puma, Adidas and the rest produce stuff that costs them pennies to make and then sell them worldwide at a massive mark-up. No wonder they call football the beautiful game.

The last few decades have seen a staggering advance in the commercialisation of football as capitalism has rushed - with the willing compliance of football's authorities - to fulfil the massive potential for profits.

TV companies, taking advantage of the huge expansion in channels made possible by satellite technology, have bought up the rights to show games left, right and centre. In return for their millions, football has made these games available at times and places to suit TV requirements, irrespective of the wishes of individual fans. Supporters have therefore found their seasons being shaped by the whims of TV programming schedulers.

The rich, powerful clubs - in league with the sportswear multinationals and TV companies - have ripped the game apart and reshaped it in their image. The old European competitions have been restructured into more profitable entities such as the Champions (and their rich chums) League, complete with seeding to avoid any early departures by the top clubs. A wholly unofficial clique of European clubs called the G14 has increasingly exerted an unhealthy influence on national and international footballing bodies. This has included our own Premier League, which was itself created to benefit the rich at the expense of the poor and which seems

more than happy to dance to the Highbury/Old Trafford marketing department tune.

Not unsurprisingly with great wealth comes great corruption. First Germany was hit by a refereeing scandal involving bribes, now the whole of Italian football is being convulsed by a major scandal involving the top clubs who have been accused of fixing matches and nobbling referees in their interests - a fact long suspected by most Italian football fans. This is only the start, but the footballing authorities will, as usual, fall to the occasion in not tackling this problem.

This is hardly the desired backdrop to football's highest competition, the World Cup, which this time is taking place in Germany over the summer. Yet somehow it seems appropriate. Anyone visiting the FIFA website and going to the marketing section will see how much care and attention is being spent on all the various commercial sponsors. For them it is not about sport but about how much publicity they can get. The global game has become the global market and the World Cup a glorified shop window for clubs, agents and companies.

Fans are Marginalized

And what about the fans who are the source of all this income? Dispossessed and derided their voice has been marginalized. They are treated exactly the same as an employer treats its work-

force - the rules are the same - and therefore the response must also be the same. The movement against the Glazer takeover of Manchester Utd shows that the fans can organise when the mood takes them. Over the years fans have made efforts to organise, through various independent supporters groups etc, although these have often failed to stay the course. When Thatcher attempted to introduce football ID cards in the late 1980s, a major campaign involving supporters from all clubs was launched with some success. So it can be done.

However, efforts to organise have often been hindered by the exploitation of club rivalries, the 'we are not political' syndrome and attempts to absorb movements into the status quo. If football is to be saved as an important part of working class culture and community rather than just another source of capitalist exploitation and diversion from reality (please note there is no such place as Planet Football) then a new mood of mobilisation needs to develop. The Football Supporters Federation needs to be revitalised and linked into the various independent and genuine supporters groups. More importantly the nettle must be grasped on who owns and therefore runs football. The current bunch will never act in our interests - remember where (and from whom) the likes of Glazer, Abramovich and the rest got their money from - and cannot be expected ever to do so. Clubs must be taken into

public ownership and run in the interests of ordinary people as sporting not commercial operations. The various footballing governing bodies should also then be purged of the 'hangers-on in blazers' and replaced by people who have more than just an interest in the next freebie but who rather intend to defend and develop the game with supporters being fully represented at all levels. If this is not done then the relentless exploitation of the so-called peoples' game will continue until there is nothing left worth saving. □



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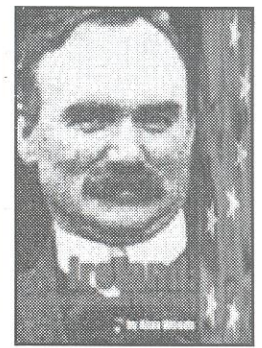
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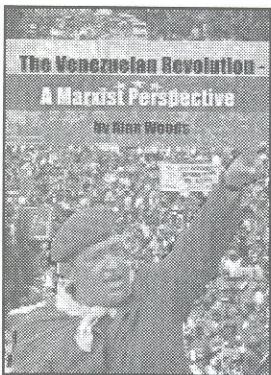
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nesses and strengths, its contradictions and unique characteristics. The book was not written with hindsight. Every chapter, beginning with the coup of April 2002, was written as the events themselves were unfolding, and trace the winding course of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

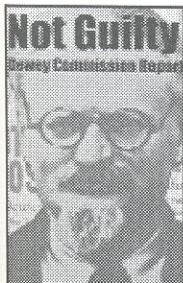
Today Latin America is in the vanguard of world revolutionary developments and, within the Latin American continent, Venezuela stands out sharply as the country most affected by this process. It would be no exaggeration to say

that Venezuela is now the key to the international situation. It therefore follows that the class-conscious workers and youth in Britain and elsewhere must closely follow the events in Venezuela and assist the revolution with every means possible.

Alan Woods has been a consistent champion of the Venezuelan Revolution since its inception. He helped initiate the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign. He has held personal discussions with President Hugo Chávez, which are recounted in this book.

The author concludes that the Venezuelan Revolution cannot stop half-way and holds up the perspective of a victorious socialist transformation. Only by expropriating the power of the oligarchy can it succeed and spread to the rest of the Continent. This is no foreign idea, but in essence is the vision of Simon Bolivar in the context of the 21st century, of the creation of a democratic Socialist Federation of Latin America.

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Well it's a funny old world. The papers ramble on about a drought even though it seems to be always raining. The fact that companies like Thames Water manage to 'lose' a third of the water they pass into the system may be a telling factor here. Looks like water privatisation has turned out to be a washout - but should we be surprised? No, because privatisation has only one outcome, more profits for some, less services for everybody else. This is in the nature of capitalism - that is why we are fighting for socialism. But it is a fight we cannot maintain without your help.

It's always a good sign when half way through the month we are already close to hitting the £1000 mark on the fighting fund. As usual not enough room to thank everybody but at random this months income includes contributions from Kenny B, Glasgow (£100), Bob and Maureen (£17), Sean in Cambridge (£30), Sarah from Dundee (£25), Newcastle readers (£100), Steve in Soton (£10) and Darral from Coventry (£100), who have all helped towards the figure of £971 received so far in May. But let's not stop here - there is much to be done. Complacency is the enemy of class struggle and as we approach the summer period there is always a danger that we will take our eye off the ball. So keep the cash coming.

The reaction to the colour cover has been most positive with sellers on the May Day demos, the support events for the visit of President Chavez and at the trade union conferences all saying how much they liked it. But to produce this cover increases the production

cost of the journal by at least £150 per issue. This is extra money we need to raise through additional sales, new subscriptions and fighting fund donations. So, if you want the colour cover to become a permanent fixture then please do something about it - starting with our fighting fund. Remember we have no big business backers or wealthy chums to bail us out. We are 100% reliant on the support of ordinary people - people like you.

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.**

If you wish you can also ask your bank to pay a regular amount by standing order each month into our accounts. Simply use the information above when instructing your bank or contact us and we will send you a special form you can just fill out and send in. After that everything is automatic and you can change or cancel the SO at any time, it remains under your control and no-one else, ourselves included. Your support is appreciated - thank you in advance. □

Steve Jones

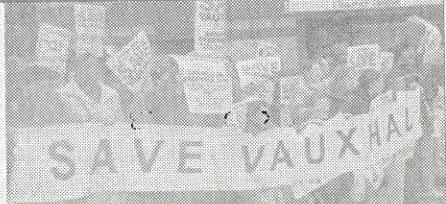
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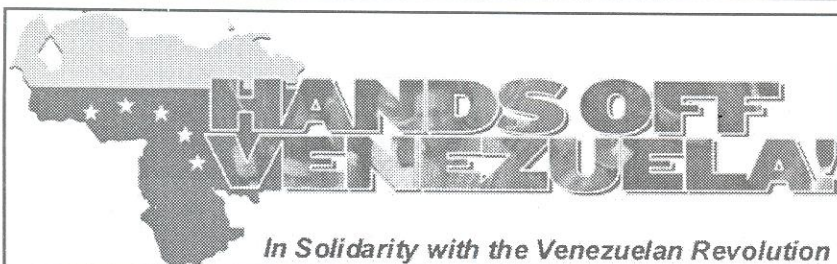
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Public Services NOT Private Profit

A joint union campaign against privatisation

Rally and Mass Lobby of Parliament
Central Hall, Westminster
Tuesday 27 June
12pm -5pm

LRC Conference: Challenging for Labour's Future
Saturday 22 July at TUC Congress House, London



noticeboard

June 2006

"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

UNISON Conference 2006

This year's conference meets at a very important time for the Labour and trade union movement. The year has seen the union take to the streets in the biggest action since the General Strike 80 years ago.

The most pressing concerns for members are pensions and the NHS. Unison leaders must fight for the terms of the present pension scheme to apply to all workers, including new starters.

They must also continue the struggle for equal pay following the success in Cumbria last year. Many of the awards made to women workers would not now be available under the hated Agenda for Change policy implemented by the employers with the support of the union leadership.

UNISON members are paying for the crisis in the NHS. Nurses are being sacked and replaced by teams of managers to better implement the cuts! In a crazy Alice in Wonderland service hospitals are being treated as businesses where profit and loss decides the fate of sick people and workers' jobs. Many hospitals that have suffered PFI projects are seeing contractors make huge profits for their shareholders while services are run down. The privatisation of cleaning and maintenance has had a drastic effect on the quality of those services.

Members are angry that these policies are being continued and, indeed, intensified by a Labour Government. The

reaction of some has been to threaten to leave the Party. This is an understandable reaction and shows members' disgust, but it is no solution to the real issues. We need to ensure that Unison members on Labour's NEC are accountable to the membership and argue for policies in their favour, and for a socialist programme. It is not surprising that many members are disillusioned with the Labour Link, which acts as a kind of secret society outside the scrutiny of the union membership as a whole.

There are five motions - from Cardiff County, Cymry/Wales Region, Islington, Wolverhampton General and Falkirk - calling for support for the Venezuelan revolution and for affiliation to Hands off Venezuela. We appeal to delegates to support these. President Hugo Chavez, speaking recently at a meeting of the TUC, called for socialist policies and for resistance to the pressures of international big business. The measures taken by the Venezuelan government to eradicate illiteracy, provide free health care and education to all its citizens and build thousands of new homes will have caught the imagination of many workers. What a contrast to the situation here, where all the gains we made in the past are rapidly being eroded. We need the kind of courageous, bold measures being implemented in Venezuela from the leaders of our movement.

affiliate to



HANDS OFF VENEZUELA

enezuela

www.handsoffvenezuela.org

To get your trade union or other organisation affiliated, here are the recommended annual affiliation fees:

- National trade union £500
- Regional bodies £250
- Branches/trades councils £50
- Others £25

You can also join HOV has an individual member. Annual individual membership:

- waged £7.50 - unwaged £5.00

Send us your name, address, phone and email with a cheque payable to Hands Off Venezuela to: **HOV, 100 Armadale Close, London N17 9PL**

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