

inside: latest news from Venezuelan Revolution

Socialist Appeal

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Credit crunch looms as

PANIC

hits banking system

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AND FINANCE COMPANIES!**

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The Deadline for Issue 157 is October 17th

Brown: Sitting on a Credit Crunch

SPECULATION HAS reached fever pitch in the press over whether or not Brown will call a snap General Election after only three months as prime minister. With the Tories languishing in the polls, one giving Labour an eleven percentage lead, and the government surviving the different crises of foot and mouth, floods and the run on Northern Rock, the young Turks of New Labour's front bench are keen to launch an election.

But Brown has generated little enthusiasm amongst traditional Labour supporters, desperately hoping for a break with a decade of Blair. But Brown is simply continuing where Blair left off: more "reform", which is double-speak for counter-reforms. It is no accident that Brown invited, as did Blair before him, Margaret Thatcher to Downing Street. It is someone Prime Minister Brown very much admires (a "conviction politician"). True, she had plenty of "conviction" during her period in office - in attacking the old, the sick and the infirm and destroying the lives of millions of ordinary working class people. For them, she is a hated figure who ruthlessly butchered working class communities. She represented capitalism "in the raw". So it is fitting that Gordon, who worships at the altar of the market economy, also bends the knee to its arch political representative, Baroness Thatcher. For loyal ordinary Labour voters the scene outside Number Ten was enough to make them ill.

Brown's speech at this year's Labour Party conference could have been made by a centre-left Conservative. There was no mention of the chasm between rich and poor. No

mention of the City tycoons and their millionaire bonuses. No mention of the millions in debt. And, of course, there was not a single word about socialism. This is because the speech is aimed not at Labour voters but at the most rich and powerful in the land, whose trust he craves. He is keen, as over the last ten years, to do their bidding.

Brown sees himself as standing above "narrow" class interest, although he sides with Big Business, and brings together his so-called "government of all the talents", the nearest thing to a National Government. The ex-director general of the CBI, Lord Digby Jones, is brought in as a minister and given a life peerage. In reality, a veritable rouges gallery: Tories, Liberals, ex-Labour renegades, Lords and Ladies, and millionaire Tory tycoons are all included; much easier to bury the ideas of socialism, as Ramsay MacDonald attempted to do in 1931.

The ruling class are hoping that Brown can hold the line as Blair did. The Tories are still too tarnished. They have the mark of Cain on them. Cameron's attempt to portray himself as another Blair has no appeal. Only when Brown cannot hold the unions in check will they turn to the Tories, their traditional political representatives. For the time being, Brown can do their dirty work. After all, for Big Business, is this not the role of Labour Governments?

When the discontent of the working class breaks through - and that doesn't appear too far off given the indus-

trial climate - the ruling class and their kept press will turn on Brown with a vengeance. When the time is ripe they will throw aside the New Labour government like some used rag. For now, a Brown government has its purposes. In regard to policies, there is little difference in essence between New Labour and the Tories, both of which bow down before Big Business.

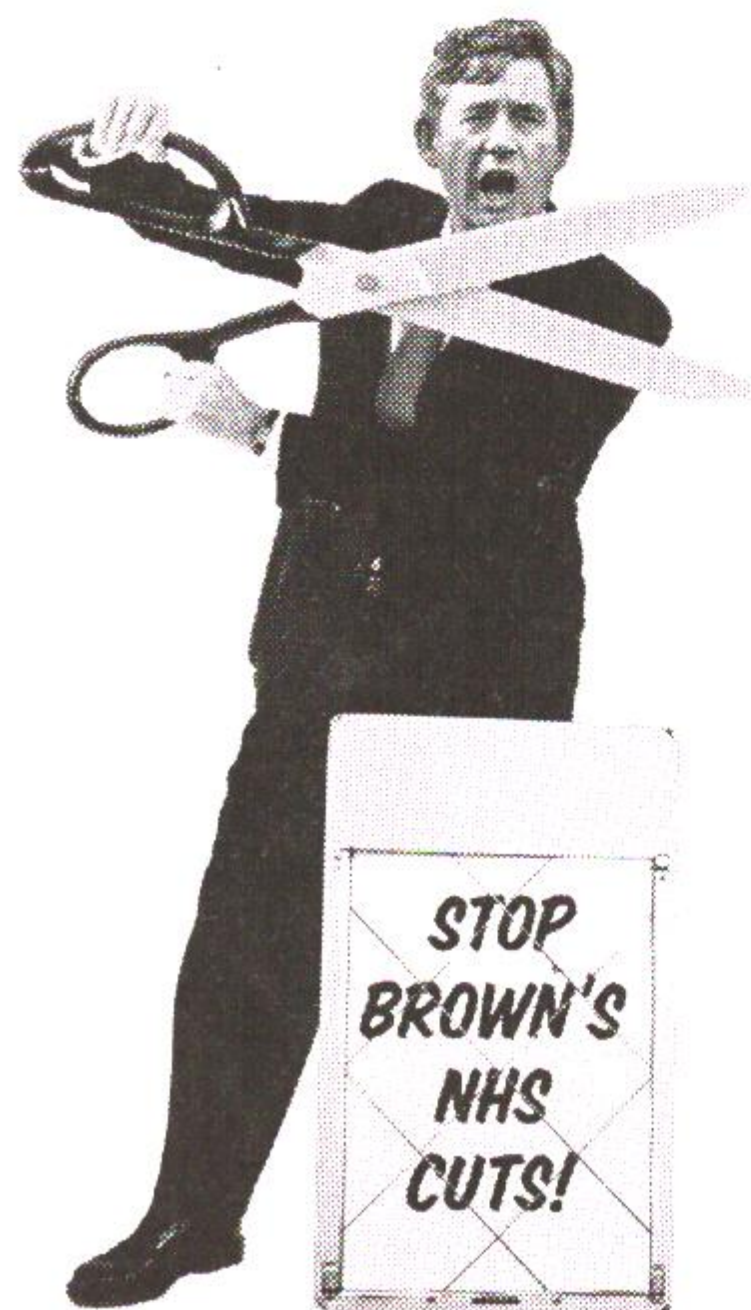
At the moment the Brown entourage are all smiles. They have weathered the storms. Or so they think. Like a blind man, they stumble from day to day. Not long ago, didn't they praise Northern Rock as Britain's fastest-growing mortgage lender? The storm clouds are now gathering. There is deep hostility to Brown's wage restraint throughout the public sector. This winter will certainly be a winter of Discontent for many, and this discontent could take the form of widespread strikes.

The economic climate is extremely volatile. Northern Rock will not be the last banking collapse. "How, if

everything else was fine, could a bank like Northern Rock be brought to its knees by some careless lending 3,000 miles away on the other side of the Atlantic?" asks the *Financial Times*. Globalisation, as this shock has proved, also means global crisis. The lines of desperate people queuing outside Northern Rock - the first British bank crash in 144 years - are a harbinger of what is to come.

The booming housing market is about to collapse. There was a 2.6% drop in house prices in September. Even Alan Greenspan, the former chairman of the Federal Reserve, stated that Britain faces the prospect of falling house prices and rising inflation within a few years. He added that the UK market is more susceptible to the credit crunch than America, because variable-rate mortgages are more popular here. With a mountain of personal debt, some £1.4 trillion, such a "credit crunch" would have an enormous impact on the real economy.

Whether the election is called or not, there can be no solution to the fundamental problems of the working class on the basis of capitalism. It is the market economy which is the root cause of these problems. While the economy trundles forward Brown may hold the line, but as the capitalist crisis deepens, at a certain point, the whole New Labour edifice will come crashing down. Only on the basis of socialist policies, which means taking over the commanding heights of the economy, can society be rationally planned in the interests of the majority. Only then can the problems of working people be eradicated once and for all. ■



What is a university degree worth?

by Gunnar Thiemann

EXACTLY 10 years ago I started my university career. I remember how nervous I was to enter the university for the first time. University was something big and scary to me, an institution full of knowledge and wisdom.

Now, 10 years down the line after my first step into the introductory lectures of a psychology degree, I find myself on the other side of the fence. Now I am a post-doc or a so-called Researcher B involved in research and teaching duties.

I was very nervous and excited before teaching my first class. It was basic statistics for first year psychology students. As well as teaching, I had some marking to do. The course coordinator explained to me that I get paid the normal teaching hour as well as for every feedback on the corrected and marked lab report and that it was estimated that it would take the a maximum of 20 minutes to correct, to give feedback and a mark for each report according to the percentage-mark guidelines.

But basically, the only thing, which was demanded of me, was to fill in the feedback sheet for each student. The feedback sheet consisted out of series of bullet points (such as title, introduction, result section etc.). These points were followed by a 1-4 rating scale, ranging from very good, to good, to satisfactory, to not so good. That was it.

In other words a student is asked to learn from the feedback given by his teacher when the only feedback is your title was 'good' or your introduction was 'satisfactory'. Any kind of

educational psychologist will tell you that this is by far not the best way to improve learning in students. Since I did not agree with the way of feedback I decided to ignore the feedback sheets and gave every student an individual written feedback plus the mark I thought was appropriate.

Feedback

Logically it took me much longer than initially anticipated to mark a lab report, but I thought the students would benefit and hence it would be worth it. Based on the feedback and according to the percentage-mark guidelines I awarded marks to the individual reports. In the normal world one would always expect that marks similar to IQs, reaction times and so on to be distributed in a specific way, namely a few very good or high ones, a few very bad or low one, but the vast majority varying in the middle (in statistical terms this is called a normal distribution).

But the course coordinator did not want to wait until nature took its course and changed the percentage-mark allocation to such an extent until he had a few very good, a few very bad students and that the majority was in the middle. And then I was told that I had to use the new percentage-mark guideline from then onwards.

I rebelled and continued to give useful and accurate marks. The module leader decided to change the mark allocations guidelines again. I continued to mark the reports 'properly,' in the same manner as I did for the first one. Every time I

did, the module leader created a new mark allocations sheet, which showed an artificially created normal distribution of marks for each lab report. At the end of the year he showed this to the department as evidence for successful teaching.

I was completely flabbergasted by all this and talked to other teachers and lectures and I was told that this was pretty common practice. And that no one really takes more than 20 minutes to give feedback on a lab report or essay, since the marking is more or less arbitrary anyway.

I was thinking very hard who could benefit from such a ludicrous way of marking? Certainly not me, because I spent a lot of time marking these reports but the actual marks did not reflect my opinion.

Feedback

Certainly not the students, because the feedbacks did not correspond with the marks. But how could they? I said that someone improved and should continue to take advice from the feedback when the actual percentages increased from lab report to lab report but the actual marks decreased as the result of making the reports fit the normal distribution. Certainly not the module leader, because he had to deal with the student's dissatisfaction. Certainly not society, because it will be confronted with a lot of psychologist who haven't been properly trained.

But what about the department and the university as such? Just recently I heard a speech of our vice-

chancellor in which he said that he doesn't call all the departments academic schools anymore but rather business units, that students are not students anymore, but customers. And then it dawned on me. Each student has to pay the university fee. Therefore, they expect a good service and, in terms of a university, this service should be an education.

Unfortunately, we have nowadays a slight misconception of a good education and think that a high mark in an exams or the degree is an index for a good education. But experiencing how marks are actually made up, only for the university to look good and therefore acquire more students for the next year, this seems to me not the best indication if someone learnt something or not.

The sinister thing is that students are still made to believe that a good mark increases their employability which is, strictly speaking, not necessarily true. An average student with a 2.1 degree will find himself/herself at the end of the three years of studying with £20,000 debts but the average graduate job only pays less than £16,000 p.a. This would mean a long struggle until the first mortgage can be paid.

Altogether, universities became more and more private enterprises, which are driven by the profit-motive and on the costs of the students and therefore ultimately at the cost of society.

So much for the good old institution of knowledge and wisdom. ■

Civil servants take further action

By Rachel Heemskerk, DWP East of England Chair (personal capacity)

ON 28TH September 270,000 members of the Public and Commercial Service Union (PCS) working in over 200 different government departments, agencies and non-department bodies will be balloted over further strike action. The aim is to build on the previous action which held back the government's job cuts programme, defended pension rights and the attacks members face over sick absences, where if you are sick for more than 8 days you can face the sack. Overwhelming support was given during the two days of strike action taken earlier this year.

Many civil servants are facing a bleak future with pay offers that are being held at less than 2% whilst inflation is running at 3.8%. In the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) the three-year offer gives 0% in 2008! DWP members have voted 3 to 1 to refuse this offer that would see over 40% of its members getting no pay rise this year and an effective pay cut over the next two years. But at least senior civil servants are not suffering, with an increase in the basic salary to £232,250 and a minimum bonus of £3000!

The civil service wide action should aim to cause maximum political pressure and should be coordinated to impact on the Queen's speech and the Financial Statement given by the Chancellor. The demands of the members are fair, but the government has so far refused to meet the reasonable demands:

- Guarantees of no compulsory redundancies or relocations
- A pay increase which at least keeps pace with the cost of living
- National pay bargaining across all civil service departments so we can see an end to unfair pay which sees members doing the same job paid vastly different salaries
- No more privatisation and outsourcing

The campaign needs to be escalated and so more action needs to be taken by the members. But are odd days here and there the way to make a maximum impact on the government and management with the non-departmental bodies? Serious and urgent consideration needs to be given to an all members strike over a longer period. We should also be considering long-term selective strikes in areas where PCS members can make the biggest impact on the government and where publicity will bring the dispute to the attention of the public. The centralisation of various areas of work to large call centres means these are an obvious area for any such action. Members not called on to strike should pay a levy to help support all out action by those colleagues that would benefit us all in the end. □

Punch workers take it on the chin

by Mick Brooks

YOU'VE PROBABLY never heard of Punch Taverns. But you may well have had a drink in one of their pubs, perhaps after a meeting. After all they're a pubco, owning over 9,000 British pubs.

But if you like the pub, that's because the staff have worked hard to make it a friendly, sociable place, not because of the Punch brand name. Despite their lack of public recognition, chief executive Giles Thorley awarded himself £11.3 million last year - because he's worth it! Punch Taverns has the biggest gap between executive and workers' pay in Britain.

Thorley's payout would pay the wages of 1,148 Punch workers (average wage around £10,000 a year).

Most of Thorley's wonga is from stock options. Since he joined the outfit in 2002 he's driven up Punch share prices four times over, so the owners obviously think he's worth it. But how does he do it?

Thorley's business plan was to mortgage income from beer drinkers in the pubs next year to buy more pubs this year. And so on... Easy as falling off a log!

If you've noticed a small flaw in Punch's plans for world domination, well yes it is basically the same as the business plan at Northern Rock. It relies on taking over rivals, not making the pubs pleasant places for Punch customers.

But it's certainly delivered for the bosses. The Federation of Small Businesses reckons that Punch takes 70p of every £ in profits from the pubs. In the meantime the debt on the real estate acts as a ratchet screwing down the wages of the tenants and the workers. For many couples running a pub is a dream job. Thorley turns it into a nightmare, screwing them on rent, the price of beer and anything else he can use against them. Tenants are usually in and out within three years in Punch Taverns. They survive in the meantime by paying some of the lowest wages in Britain.

Thorley doesn't actually know anything about running pubs. He reckons he doesn't have to know anything. He came from Nomura Bank. He's basically a master of financial shenanigans. His magic with money really consists of turning everyone else into galley slaves so fat cats like him can benefit. Here's to Giles Thorley. What a lovely man! □



Anger over the 2% pay limit: Our Winter of Discontent?

by Fred Weston

THE TRADE union movement set itself on a collision course with Gordon Brown on public sector pay by backing strike action by millions of public sector workers, foreshadowing a new "winter of discontent".

Civil servants, local government workers, teachers, transport workers, prison officers and postal workers agreed unanimously at this year's TUC conference to back coordinated strike action against the government's 2% pay limit and privatisation of services.

This followed successful strike action by workers on London Underground and the Prison Officers Association which has provided confidence to other workers seeking to defend their terms and conditions.

London Underground maintenance staff took action to defend their jobs and pensions after Metronet, which is responsible for running nine London Tube lines, went into administration in July. The strike, which had a major impact on the economic life of London, forced Metronet to give written undertakings that terms and conditions were safe.

Metronet was set up under London Underground's public-private partnership (PPP) initiative. Its failure is a failure of PPP. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "Our members have said with a single, united voice that they are not prepared to be made to pay for the failure of the PPP with their jobs, conditions or pensions." He added that, "What our members want is to be transferred to a public-sector organisation, and that is the

only way in which their jobs and pensions can be protected."

At the end of August the first national strike by prison officers in England and Wales came to an end after their union agreed to reopen talks with the government over pay. The action of the prison officers was solid as all 129 non-private prisons were disrupted after the sudden walkout by about 20,000 staff. A High Court injunction was issued against the Prison Officers' Association (POA) but so militant was the mood that many members initially refused to go back to work. The POA had pulled out of a no-strike agreement with government prior to taking action. The union said it had decided to call the strike without giving any prior warning precisely to avoid attracting a court order!

An independent pay review body for prisons recommended a 2.5% increase. But the prison officers' union, with its 28,000 members, said its value is reduced to below inflation levels because the government's proposal is to introduce it in two stages.

This was followed at the

beginning of September by rank and file police officers demanding that they be given back their right to strike as relations with the government fell to a 30-year low.

Now The Police Federation, with its 140,000 members, the Fire Brigades Union and the prison officers' union are planning to meet to discuss a joint campaign over below-inflation rises.

Right to strike

In particular, the prospect of the police making public demands over the right to strike would be hugely embarrassing to the Prime Minister as he tries to hold back the pressure for higher wages increases. The government is offering a rise of 2.3 per cent but police officers have put in a counterclaim for 3.94 per cent, in line with the private sector.

Police officers are banned not only from taking strike action but even from discussing it. But earlier this year in a ballot of the rank and file there was an overwhelming vote to study the option of lobbying for the full right to strike if their pay

claim is not met.

Meanwhile mental health workers in Manchester have been in dispute over suspension of a union official. Karen Reissmann, a psychiatric nurse and union shop steward, who was suspended back in June accused of bringing the trust into dispute. In reality she has been targeted by NHS bosses for speaking out against service cuts. A 3-day strike has already taken place and another is planned.

Meanwhile three unions representing nuclear scientists and technicians in charge of major decommissioning programmes at atomic plants recently threatened strike action for the first time in 25 years. This time strike action proved unnecessary. The mere threat of action by this key sector led to the government giving in and conceding a 3.99% increase, well above the 2% maximum set by the government for public sector workers. The deal has been hailed by union leaders as "the best public-sector pay settlement this year". This year there have also been two days of strike action by 113,000 civil servants.

All this reveals a growing mood of militancy in the public sector and it looks more and more likely that Gordon Brown is on a collision course with this section of the working class. Gordon Brown has insisted that he will not budge on public-sector pay. His position is: "We have succeeded in tackling inflation and having a stable economy because of discipline in pay over these last 10 years. That discipline will



have to continue."

There are now growing signs that this militant mood may also spill over into the private sector. An example is the strike at the Coca Cola bottling plant in Milton Keynes where over 140 trade union members came out on strike, the third day of strike action at the plant this year. Again the dispute is over wage levels. The company has offered an increase of 2.5% which is the same increase that the company has proposed for the last four years. But the workers are not satisfied as this is below the rate of inflation and basically means a wage cut in real terms. They are seeking an offer in line with inflation of no less than 3.8%.

With the intention of

Remploy workers taking industrial action over a threat to their jobs, an issue that was going to be raised at the Labour Party conference by the GMB, the government was forced to make a quick retreat and announce a review. In the compromise Peter Hain agreed to remove the right of the factories' management board to approve any closures. This will strip Bob Warner, head of Remploy, of any power to close factories and means none of the 42 factories that face closure can be closed at the moment.

The few examples given above indicate that the mood among British workers is changing. It is becoming more militant. They are reaching the limit of what

they can take and now this is beginning to express itself in militant strike action. Steve Cox, of the POA stated: "None of us want a repeat of the winter of 1978. However, if the government continues like this, we have to be ready for action."

This rise in militancy will have important ramifications for the overall political scenario of Britain. For the ruling class the usefulness of a Labour government is to be found fundamentally in its ability to hold back the working class from struggle. Because of its relationship with the unions the Labour Party has always had an advantage over the Tories in this sense. The trade union leaders, and the working class as a whole, see the Labour government as

"their" government, and are prepared to accept from it what they would not accept from the direct representatives of the bosses, the Tories.

However, there is a limit to how long this can last. The workers can take a lot but their patience has a limit. In Britain that patience is being tried beyond the limit. If the present wave of trade union disputes continues then the ruling class of this country will start to rethink their relationship with the Labour leadership and with Gordon Brown in particular. What is in question is not Gordon Brown's loyalty to capitalism. What is in question is his ability to deliver! A new period is beginning to open up in Britain. □

The myth of a classless Britain

by Nathan Morrison

In an independent report by Doctor Betham Thomas, UK Social Atlas, it states that British society is becoming more and more segregated into classes, and British people are becoming more and more conscious of the class society in which we live. The report 'finds' that Britain is becoming increasingly segregated along the lines of class, education, income, occupation, health status and family type.

This report unsurprisingly found that rich kids stay away from the poorer ones, they live in their mansions and visit each other rather than associating with those from poorer classes. The upper classes in British society are likely to inherit at least 40 times the amount the poorer elements of society will inherit, confirming that class privilege remains something that passes from one generation to the next.

16 to 24 year olds in Britain in some areas are much more likely to go to an elite college than those living in poorer areas, In many areas of Britain poorer young adults are almost 20 times less likely to be in employ-

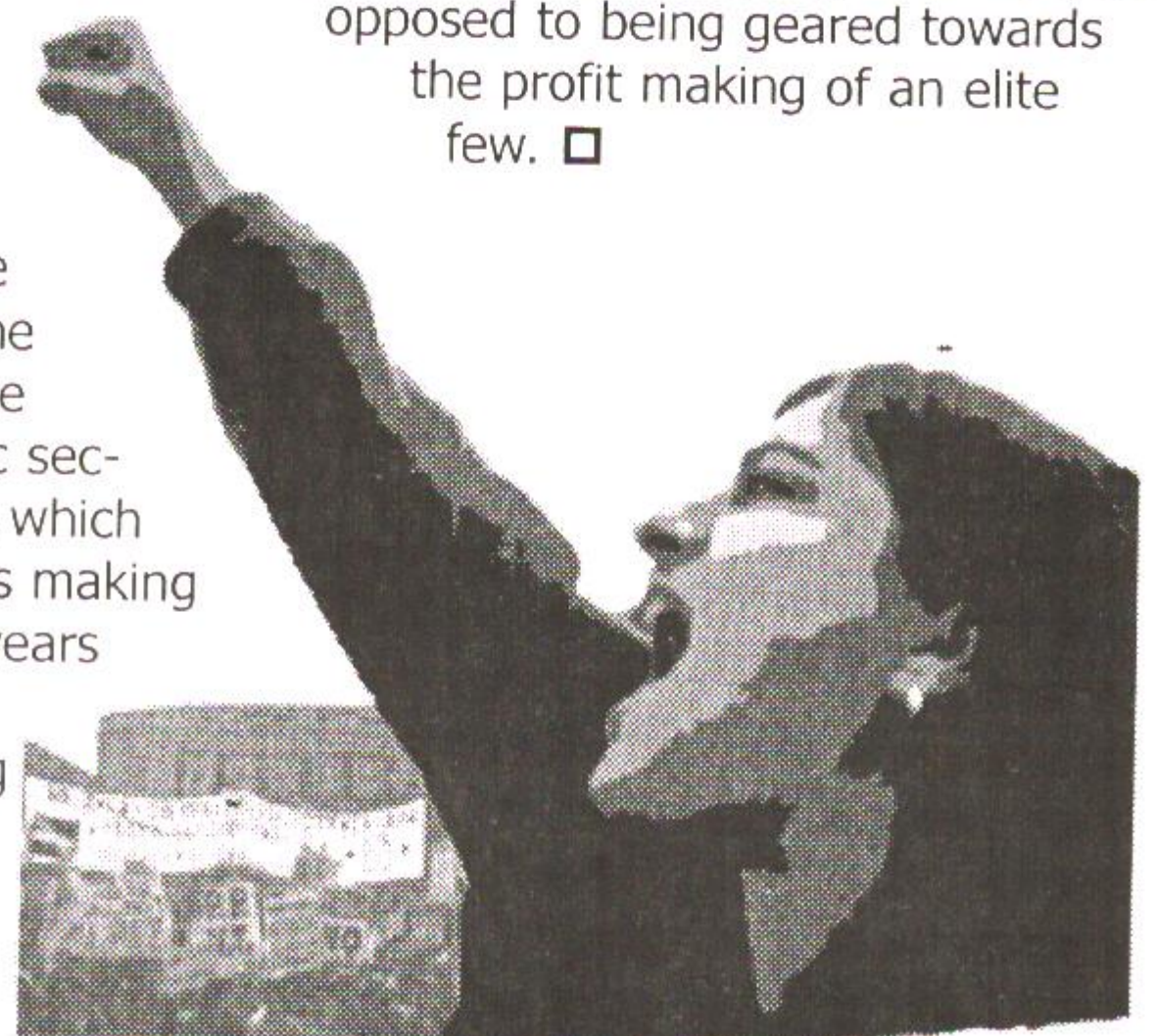
ment, education or training than those in the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Britain. This puts pay to the idea of a society of equal opportunities.

So as we can see, this report reaffirms what we have known all the time that Britain is a class society. The myth of the end of class in Britain remains nothing more than a lie sprouted up by the ruling class and their media outlets.

Workers and youth in general have begun to see that the interests of the bosses and the interests of the workers are not the same and are in fact opposed to one another. Take for example, the upcoming strikes in the public sector due to the 2% "pay rise", which is, in fact below inflation, thus making it actually a pay cut. Recent years have seen time and time again a rise in annual working days lost to strikes as the working class becomes more conscious of its own inter-

ests. The NUS has also seen a mood of militancy piercing through its bureaucracy, such as movements against top up fees.

We must fight for a radical transformation of society, for it to be run on a socialist basis; by the working class in the interests of the working class. This is the only way we can get rid of the huge divide in society between the rich and poor. In a socialist society the vast wealth of society would be spent in the interests of the vast majority of society as opposed to being geared towards the profit making of an elite few. □



Hands off Venezuela

Oxford Brookes: From the acorn of small beginnings...

by Manuela Sylwia Rosochaka

ON THE 18 and 19 September comrades from the Socialist Appeal attended the Oxford Brookes University freshers fair, with the aim of attracting people to the ideas of socialism.

The fair was well attended, and over the two days pages of names and e-mail addresses were collected in order to form the Oxford Brookes Socialist Society. Many people were interested to find a reference for socialist ideas, and throughout the two days we discussed with many students about the ideas of revolutionary socialism.

Students were particularly keen to learn more about what is going on in Venezuela, and there was a strong interest from overseas students. Those who

are now socialist society members also include students from Bulgaria, Poland, the USA, Iran and Portugal.

Throughout the freshers fair we leafleted for a meeting on 'The Life and Ideas of Che Guevara', in the lead up to the anniversary of his death on 9 October. Pablo Roldan from the Hands Off Venezuela campaign addressed this inaugural meeting of the socialist society, talking on the experiences of Che's youth and travels, and his direct experience of the overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala which shaped his revolutionary outlook. He explained that he was an ordinary young man who drew socialist conclusions based on his experience of the extreme contrasts

between rich and poor that he witnessed throughout Latin America.

In reference to Che's collaboration with Fidel Castro, Pablo drew parallels with the attempt by Hugo Chavez in recent times to advance the plight of Venezuelans within the framework of capitalism, and how Castro too was left with no alternative but to discard the straightjacket of "doing business" with US imperialism.

At that meeting more students officially joined the socialist society, and since then more joined after the screening of 'No Volveran - the Venezuelan Revolution now!' on September 27th.

The film had a tremendous effect on students who had not realised the extent

of the process developing in Venezuela, due to the poor press coverage in the British media. What followed was a good discussion on the concept of revolution, what it means in regard to the mass movement and how socialism in the 21st century can differ to that of the past.

People left enthused with what they had seen and provided an excellent start to the socialist society in providing a political alternative on campus. The group has caught the attention of students at Oxford Brookes. Shortly, we intend to hold an organisational meeting on campus to properly decide what the aims of this new socialist presence at the university should be, and what the next steps are. □



the revolution.

We sold copies of Socialist Appeal and a few of the new HoV magazines, plus some more pamphlets. A number of us went to the pub afterwards for a further chat and discussion.

Members of the society put in a lot of hard work throughout the day, which really made the difference. We have a good bunch of people involved.

Also, another piece of good news is that someone from Norwich suddenly emailed me last night saying he was a regular follower of www.marxist.com and wanted to meet up! This is in addition to the other person in Norwich who subscribed to the journal over the summer.

A lot of work to be done, but it is looking very good! □

Taking our ideas to youth in Norwich

by Dan Morley

WE SET up our stall with lots of material to sell and information about what the University of East Anglia Socialist Society stands for from about 10.30 in the morning.

Throughout the day we had a lot of interest, and ended with 85 signatures and emails! There were several 1st years who seemed very keen - 3 Norwegian girls came up, one of them was very insistent about joining and was a member of the 'Socialist Left' in Norway. There were several other people who came up and chatted who seemed quite serious about it, and all were very genuine. We sold several copies of the Che Guevara and James Connolly pamphlets.

In the evening we had a meeting, showing 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised'. We worked hard to bring music and buy food, and when people arrived to make them feel welcome, and the meeting was markedly relaxed than any last year. Between 40 and 50 people came to watch the film, and after it was over there was a big round of applause. I led off on what has happened since the film's events, and also tried to link the film to the theory of the 'Permanent Revolution' and the socialist perspectives of

Leeds University Freshers Fair Success

by Matt Wheatley

THE 17TH to the 21st (September 2007) was a hectic week for many students as they continue preparing for university. The week-long freshers fair at Leeds University was a hive of activity and not wishing to miss a great opportunity the Leeds comrades of Socialist Appeal and Hands off Venezuela set up some stalls.

The focus of our action was the showing of the documentary 'The Revolution will not be Televised' that was to be shown at Leeds University student Union on the 20th. The stall was a huge success with perhaps 15 or more people signing up to Hands Off Venezuela and many more showing interest in the documentary and events in Venezuela and Latin America in general.

Numerous supporters were made, including a number interested in attending Socialist Appeal meetings and developing our support within the area.

The success of our activities could be attributed to many things. Our stall was set to the backdrop of an occupied factory (a bed sheet suspended between ladders painted to resemble a factory). This eye-catching display and the hilari-

ty of the numerous head injuries I myself received as a consequence of it falling over I have no doubt made us stand out.

Despite strong protests comrade Luke Wilson donned a boiler suit in order to play the part of an occupied factory worker, although all this did was attract the affections of a male student on the Israel stall opposite, who mimed 'call me' and blew a kiss!

In all seriousness, the success of our stalls can mainly be attributed to the Hands off Venezuela campaign, the strong solidarity workers and youth feel with the Latin American situation, the lack of media attention on these issues, and finally the strength and logic of Marxist ideas where capitalism has failed.

It is my conclusion that we should expect to see interesting things in Yorkshire in the near future and that work with Hands off Venezuela is of vital importance both to the Latin American revolution and the future European revolutions. □

Hands off Venezuela

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2007

**Saturday
24th November**

**University London Union (ULU),
Malet Street,
London WC1E 7HY
9.45am to 5.30pm**

Ever since the re-election of Hugo Chavez in December, there has been a growing shift to the left in the Venezuelan Revolution. President Chavez saw his victory as a victory for socialism. For the first time, free health care has been introduced and illiteracy abolished. Now there is a widespread discussion of how to take the revolution forward with 5.7 million people registering to join the new United Socialist Party.

However the attempts by US imperialism and their friends to isolate and subvert the Revolution have been stepped up. We call on all youth, trade unionists and progressive people to rally in support of the Venezuelan Revolution.

Entrance is free for HOV members but donations are welcome; £10 per trade union delegate. Space is limited, so pre-registration will be important to guarantee a place.

For further information contact us at britain@handsoffvenezuela.org. If you are not a HOV member yet, then send us your details with a £7.50 cheque (£5 unwaged) payable to Hands Off Venezuela using the form below.

Come and play your part! Help defend the Venezuelan Revolution!



**Please enroll as a delegate to
the Hands Off Venezuela Conference.**

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Labour Conference: Toothless event won't cushion Brown leadership

by Steve Jones

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party conference in Bournemouth may well be the last such event not to fall foul of the Trades Description Act for calling itself a conference.

With the decision, pushed by Brown on becoming leader, to stop local Labour Parties and affiliates from being able to move policy motions at Annual Conference, the last meagre vestiges of decision making will have been taken away from delegates. From now on resolutions on policy will be referred to the totally toothless National Policy Forum. The right to move 8 emergency resolutions - 4 from the unions and 4 from CLPs - has also been removed.

Even this year under the old system, 96 of the 120 contemporary resolutions were ruled out of order by the supposedly independent Conference Arrangements Committee. Delegates have therefore been left to sit through a week of keynote speeches (usually dull), presentations (even duller) and question and answer sessions involving weak questions and weaker answers.

Needless to say the result has been an often half full conference hall (at best) as delegates and visitors have voted with their feet to stay in bed or enjoy the many pleasures of the south coast. Conference managers have had to resort to subdued lighting in order to hide the empty rows of seats from the TV cameras, especially in the upper tiers of the conference centre.

Why was the right to move resolutions taken away? To claim that this is in

order to widen democracy is nothing short of a joke. We have had endless policy forums, reviews and consultations both under Blair and now Brown and the result has nearly always been the same - if the leadership don't like what it hears then they ignore it. Naturally if the CBI or the City of London speaks then it is always a different matter. The reality is that this is just another step to deprive the rank and file of their voice.

"Promises"

Questions must be asked as to why the main trade union leaders went along with Brown's "democracy" plans. Some have talked about the need to preserve unity in what is being spun as a pre-election conference. Derek Simpson, joint leader of the UK's biggest union Unite, said they had wanted to avoid "a bloodbath" - what ever that meant. Most have gone on about having secured "promises" and "assurances" - classic code for "we have caved in and got nothing in return."

In truth they are probably quite relieved that they will no longer have to move critical resolutions on party policy in response from pressure from below.

However, they should be aware that removing even the illusion ("safety-valve") that party members and trade unionists can decide party policy will have an effect on many activists. Those who have argued that the party direction can be shifted through debate and discussion with the existing leadership now need to face

reality. Not only do the party policies need changing but so does the party leadership. This will require the full force of the organised labour movement and the fight back needs to start now - in the unions, as well as the party.

Brown may think that he has everything sown up. But Brown, like Blair, is incapable of solving the real problems facing society. All the measures being "announced" by various ministers are either meaningless or minor, presented just for show. Sooner or later, pressure will inevitably be brought to bear both inside the party ranks but more immediately inside the unions. Public sector unions are already feeling the heat of the government's attacks on its members, the industrial sector - what is left of it - will soon follow.

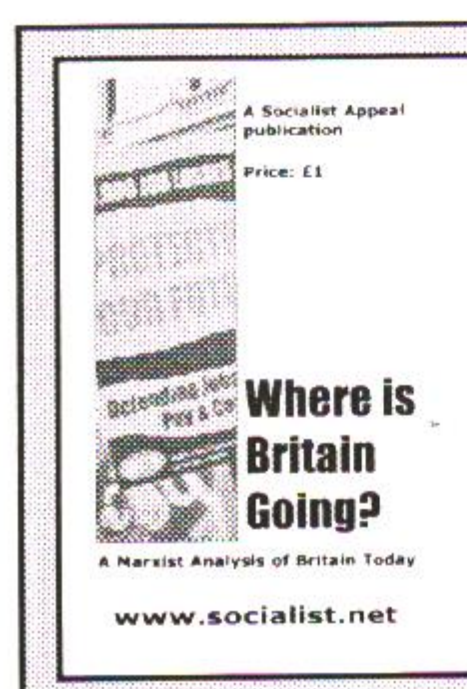
Rank and file

Without the pressure valve of being able to move resolutions and spout off on the conference floor, the rank and file will demand more effective forms of action. Layers, who have remained politically dormant up to now, will start to show their faces. They will not seek to form new parties or groups - in the real world these pass unnoticed - but will move to

transform their organisations.

Far from entering a period of calm from below where a supine rank and file cheer on the great leader who is saving the nation, Brown will find himself facing renewed pressure from below and also intrigue from those around him. The Blairites are biding their time, encouraged by Brown's uninspiring speech to conference, and will keep plotting to be in place should Brown's position become untenable - which it will be under conditions of crisis. Even the question of a possible autumn election may come back to haunt Brown - get it wrong and he will be taking the hit.

The decision to remove any real debate and voting at Party conference shows that Brown already has an inkling of what is to come. After all, if he thought that local Labour Parties and affiliates would all be moving resolutions praising the government then he would have left things the way they were! But the truth is that for the Labour right wing, the best days are already behind them. They only question now to be resolved is: how does the fight back get organised and develop to take them on? ■



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Cato Street Conspiracy

Part 2

by David Brandon

IN THE period of intense and bitter struggles described in Part 1, the massacre at Peterloo in August 1819 was just the most extreme example. Arthur Thistlewood was able to gather around him a mixed collection of other individuals equally impatient to bring matters to a head and have it out with the country's political leaders. They believed that violent direct action was the answer.

Arguing that this would save the pointless slaughter of innocent people it was agreed that they would assassinate each and every member of the Cabinet, then parade through the streets with the heads of the most hated ministers.

The ordinary people of London would be overjoyed to witness the fate of their enemies and would flock to support them as they seized important public buildings such as the Houses of Parliament and the Bank of England. They would also capture the Mansion House and use it as the base for their Committee of Public Safety or Provisional Government. The Prince Regent would have fled, taking many of the soldiers from the London garrisons with him. Power would be theirs.

Getting carried away with their own rhetoric, they believed that they could call upon the support of 40,000 armed London working men, particularly among building workers, dockers, the Spitalfields silk-weavers and the navvies building what became the Regents Canal. The figure was almost certainly an exaggeration but even with half that number they might well have been a match for the limited forces of law and order in the capital.

The conspirators learned that on 23 February 1820, the Cabinet was due to meet at the home of Lord Harrowby, 39 Grosvenor Square. This was precisely the opportunity they had been waiting for. They decided to gather a collection of arms and to make their base in a garret in Cato Street, not far away. However, one or more spies had infiltrated the ranks of the conspirators and the proposed attack on the Cabinet was almost an open secret. A force of Bow Street Runners supported by

Coldstream Guards surrounded the Cato Street premises, broke in and arrested several of the conspirators. Thistlewood and some others escaped only to be captured soon afterwards.

The man suspected of being the government spy, Edwards, had been at Cato Street and then disappeared. It is thought that the government spirited him overseas and away from the possibility of having to answer embarrassing questions. While popular opinion was not in favour of terrorist activity it found the practice of the government in using spies, provocative agents and stool pigeons to penetrate radical movements, totally repugnant.

Trial

In 1820 a biography of Edwards was published. It was extremely hostile and in the authors words: "Edwards was not merely an informer, who appeared to accede to the plots of others for the purpose of revealing and defeating them: he was a diabolical wretch who created the treason he disclosed, who went about - a fiend in human form - inflaming distressed and desperate wretches into crimes, in order that he might betray them and make a profit of their blood".

Being charged with treason, Thistlewood and his associates were taken to the Tower of London and placed in solitary confinement. The government used the subsequent trial to justify and reinforce its policy of oppression and the outcome was virtually a foregone conclusion.

The cause that Thistlewood was prepared to give his life up for was a justified one. If it is accepted that political change was needed, the issue was how to provide leadership for the movement that could actually bring that about. The fact is that isolated, idealistic individuals, no matter how committed, were not enough, and without mass support the Cato Street Conspiracy was nothing more than a terrorist adventure.

At his trial he justified his role. He invoked an example from Roman history when he said: "Brutus and Cassius

were lauded to the very skies for slaying Caesar; indeed, when any man, or set of men, place themselves above the laws of the country, there is no other means of bringing them to justice than through the arm of a private individual.

With the execution of the Cato Street conspirators, the small extremist wing of the British radical movement effectively withered away, although the debate about the use of violence as a means of securing political change has continued to rear its head from time to time. The movement for political reform continued and grew and the years between 1830 and the early 1850s saw greater popular involvement in action for political reform and social justice than during any other period in British history.

The reforms that were won in the nineteenth century were the result not of the actions of brave but mistaken individuals like Thistlewood and his companions. They were brought about at first by the collective pressure of progressive middle-class elements and sections of the working class. Later a major contribution was made by the self-help organisations that working people established to fight for their own specific interests. These, especially the trade unions, were forged in struggle. They were not always successful, but those who took part gained a sense of their shared identity as 'working class'. This collective strength made them actors in history, changing the world rather than simply finding themselves the victims of forces over which they had no control.

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of Marxism, an analysis and critique of capitalism and a revolutionary programme for workers everywhere to embrace in their struggles for social, economic and political justice. Marx made it clear that this was a class struggle involving collective mass action for change rather than violent action by individuals. Though it occurred some years before Marx's writings appeared, this is also an important lesson of the Cato Street Conspiracy. ■

The rocky road to ruin

by Michael Roberts

THEY STARTED queuing first thing in the morning. They wanted to get their hard-earned savings out as soon as possible. Northern Rock, Britain's fifth-largest mortgage bank was going bust. It had announced that it could not raise enough funds in the interbank market to finance its mortgage lending or meet its obligations any more. Disaster!

Tens of thousands of savers who had put their money in Northern Rock faced huge losses. "We are elderly and this is our life saving," said Sheila Smith, who came with her husband, Arthur, to withdraw all their money from the bank's Moorgate branch in central London. "We can't afford to lose it."

It was no good the government, the Bank of England or so-called experts announcing on the radio and TV that there was no need to panic - deposits were safe. David Clark, a 61-year-old builder, said he did not believe official assurances about anything financial: "It's just like football managers. Their jobs are guaranteed - then they are sacked the next day." Many in the queues just did not believe the government. "Tony Blair lied to us about Iraq and many other things. Gordon Brown went along with him - why should we believe these people now?"

The collapse of Northern Rock sums up the mushrooming financial crisis that is spreading across the capitalist world. The last 15 years since the last major economic recession of the early 1990s has seen an expansion of capitalism built on an unprecedented growth in financial credit globally. While annual real production

has risen at about 3% a year in the OECD countries, money supply, mortgage and company debt, personal borrowing and the massive so-called derivatives market based on this credit has increased at over 25% a year!

The boom of the 1990s and of the last four years or so has not been mainly based on expansion of real production (at least not in the OECD advanced capitalist countries). No, it has been based on huge spending by American and British households financed by a vast increase in debt. Households no longer save anything, they just borrow.

Cheap credit

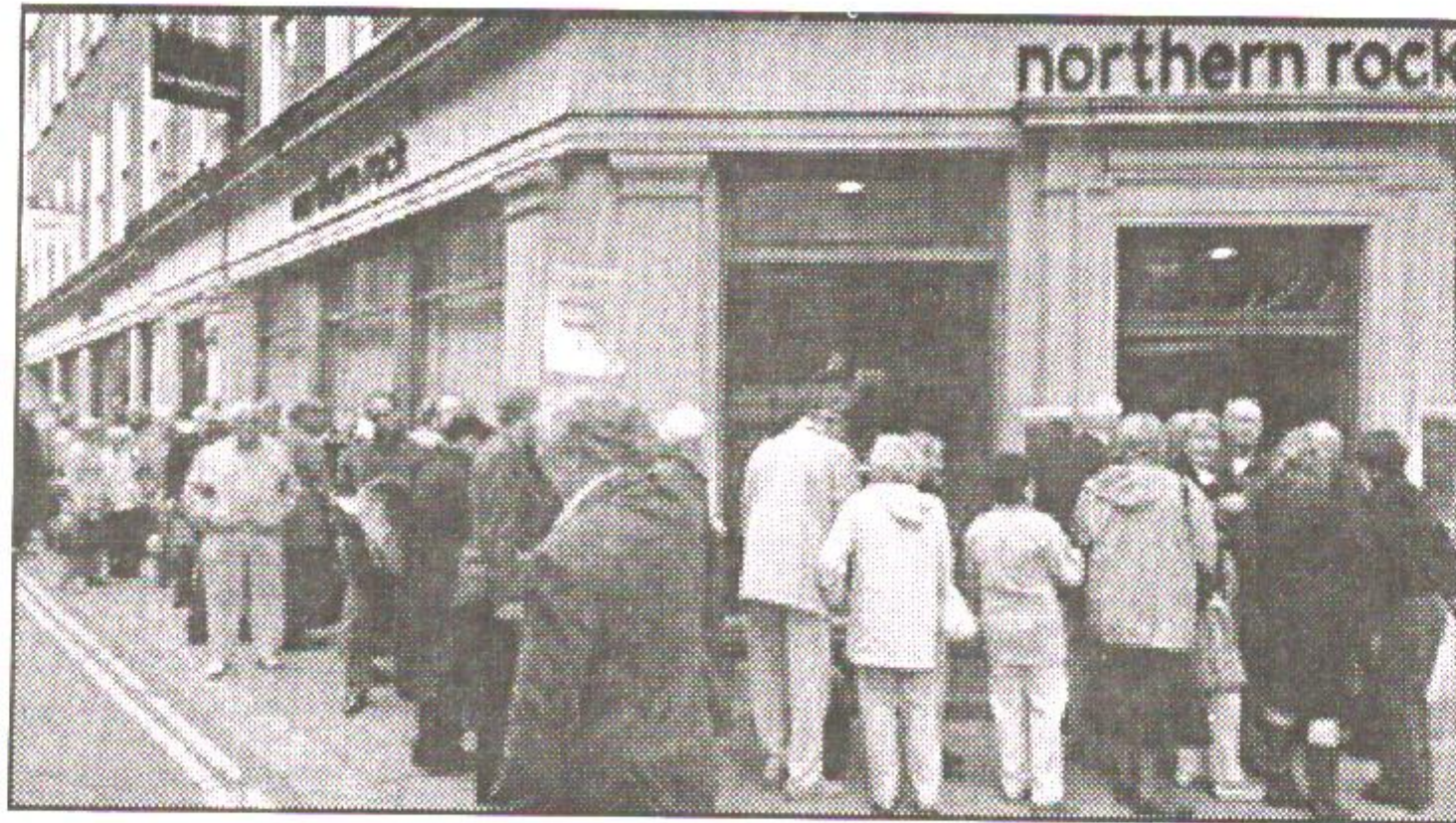
How can they do that? Well, it's because there has been a boom in the paper prices of stocks and shares (which bust in 2000) and above all in housing. Across most of the advanced capitalist world, cheap credit and wild mortgage lending by banks has inspired a massive increase in the price of real estate. Much of the world's value-creating production has been siphoned off by the banking system (mainly

based in New York and London) into a pyramid of credit that fuels an unproductive sector of land and bricks. China and Asia's massive export surpluses have been 'recycled' through the banking system into buying mortgage debt, bonds and shares of American households and companies.

This has been possible because American and British banks have developed 'clever' new ways of spreading the risk of lending. If they lend billions in cheap mortgages, they then take the mortgages and 'batch' them up into debt packages that they sell onto other banks, hedge funds and other financial institutions around the world. So risk is spread around and everybody is happy.

Well, not any more. What kicked off the crisis was the collapse of the US homes market. From mid-2005, prices stopped rising at astronomical rates, then slowed sharply and finally by the end of 2006 started to fall. This was particularly bad news for those borrowers who had lied about what they earned or were offered mortgages with no attempt by the banks to check on whether the borrowers had incomes to justify repayments. These were called 'sub-prime' loans (not the best prime one). Only 10% of the US mortgage market was in subprime loans but the problem was that the banks had 'batched' all these loans in packages with prime loans and sold them on around the world. So nearly every bank in the world had bought part of these 'junk' loans or asset-backed securities. The trouble was that the asset part disappeared in





a puff of smoke. So all the banks were all liable, as sub-prime borrowers started to default on their payments. The world credit crisis began.

The irony is that Northern Rock never lent to American homeowners, never mind the high-risk ones who are now defaulting in droves, and bad debts on its British mortgages are close to record lows. Yet it is the first bank to need bailing out since new rules allowing rescues were introduced in 1988.

The reason is that Northern Rock was only in the mortgage business because it could borrow money from other banks at very cheap rates to finance mortgage lending. In January this year, the management were being feted by their shareholders for boosting profits and taking the biggest share of new mortgages in Britain - they got awards for being so clever!

Then came the credit crunch. Northern depended on borrowing from other banks as its savers in Newcastle and around Britain were not enough to finance its very breakneck pace of lending. Now it could not raise money. After a few weeks of struggle as the interbank loan markets stayed dry and interest rates rocketed, Northern Rock gave up the ghost and asked the Bank of England to bail them out.

The banks may be in the line of fire but the chances are that it will be ordinary working people who will feel the pain: the savers, the home owners as home prices plummet in the UK and of course, the workers

in the banks and mortgage lenders who will soon lose their jobs.

Mortgage rates are now rising. The cost of owning a home in Britain will become even more nightmarish. Already, mortgage interest payments are taking up a bigger share of our income - the average is 17.4% - than at any time since the early 1990s housing crash. And the average rate has risen from 4.67% in July 2005 to 6.1%. Any additional rise will further stretch borrowers.

Housing boom

The long-forecast end to Britain's 12-year housing boom is drawing closer. In September, there was a 2.6% drop in prices. A survey by Rightmove, the property website, showed the average asking price in the UK was £235,176; down from £241,474 in August.

The reaction of the institutions of capitalism and the New Labour government has been nothing short of a joke, if it wasn't so painful for ordinary people. Only two days before the Northern Rock crisis broke, the governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, had told a parliamentary committee that there was no way that the Bank would 'bail out' banks and investors who got into trouble because they had invested speculatively and unwisely in subprime loans and other risky ventures.

And yet King had to do a somersault when it was clear that Northern Rock was going under and announce it would after all fund Northern.

Taxpayer

Late on Monday evening, 17 September, Darling announced that all the deposits of Northern Rock savers would be honoured by the government. In effect, the government had nationalised the bank. Also, he opening up the condition that if other banks go under, their depositors would also be repaid in full. So the whole banking system in Britain was now backed by the taxpayer.

Quite right that hard earned money saved by British people should not be lost because of the casino gambling of the global banking system going wrong. But if deposits are to be saved at the taxpayer's expense, should not ownership of the banks also pass to the people? What could be a more conclusive condemnation of capitalism than the boom and bust cycle in global financial markets? People's money is not safe with capitalists - only a democratically accountable state system can make it so.

And this financial crisis

and credit crunch is just the beginning. From here, tightening credit markets and rising interest rates will mean falling profitability for capitalist companies and slowing production, possibly even economic slump, as American, British and European householders have to tighten their belts. First watch out for serious falls in the profits of the big banks around the world. That will be followed by job cuts throughout the financial sector. And job cuts will mean less income to finance property purchases and mortgages. House prices could plummet.

Never in the history of capitalism has the financial sector been so important to the health of capitalism. In its maturity, capitalism is increasingly no longer a system that raises the productive forces. It is more and more a financial parasite unproductively resting on top of the productive sectors of the global economy (mainly in China, India etc). That is especially so in Britain, the financial parasite extraordinaire - a giant Switzerland, that sucks in the earnings of other countries (oil-producers in the Middle East and the manufacturers of Asia) and recycles it. British capitalism now makes little itself. Instead it is just giant banker of the world. As such, the British capitalist economy is the most vulnerable to a global financial crisis and any ensuing economic slump. And British workers and their families will suffer more than most. □

For a further analysis of the economic crisis, see Alan Woods' "A financial September 11" - Lessons of the banking crisis" at www.marxist.com

The Tragedy of Michael Collins

by Julian Sharpe

MICHAEL COLLINS was a great Irish revolutionary and nationalist who more than any one person may be considered to have created modern Ireland. On 22 August 1922, 85 years ago, he was killed in an ambush during the Irish civil war - he was 31 years of age.

When he was fifteen, Collins left his birthplace in west County Cork to work in the Post Office in London. While he was there he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), an oath-bound revolutionary secret society dedicated to achieving Ireland's independence by physical force. He returned to Dublin in 1916 to participate in the heroic Easter Rising. The Rising was defeated after six days and its leaders, including the great Marxist James Connolly, were summarily executed by the British Army.

Most of the surviving captured rebels were interred. Collins, with the help of his IRB colleagues, organised the prisoners. After his release Collins returned to Ireland to run a relief fund for victims of the Rising. He used his position to advance the cause of Irish republicanism and began to put together a formidable intelligence network.

On the military side the IRB reorganised the leadership of the Irish Volunteers which had participated in the Rising. It also deposed the founder leader of Sinn Fein, a petty-bourgeois nationalist political party founded in 1905, Arthur Griffith. Sinn Fein played no role in the Rising, and Griffith himself wanted independence for Ireland under a joint Monarch with England rather than a republic. In November 1917 Eamon de Valera, was elected President of both the Volunteers and Sinn Fein. De Valera was one of the most senior surviving officers from the Rising and seen by Collins and the IRB as a more hard-line

republican than Griffith. Collins was elected as Director of Organisation of the Volunteers and around this time became Secretary of the IRB.

Executions

During 1917 and 1918, Collins, in addition to his other activities, helped to organise a number of successful Parliamentary by-election campaigns for Sinn Fein. The Irish people had enthusiastically supported the British Army at the start of the Great War, but their mood started to change firstly with the brutal executions following the Rising (the Rising itself did not attract much popular support), the threat of conscription in Ireland, and the continuing failure of the British Government to implement Home Rule. In addition, the revolutionary wave that swept across Europe in 1917 and 1918 began to have an effect in Ireland.

The Irish Labour Party, founded by James Connolly, should have been well placed to take advantage of these developments, but its leadership failed to take an independent class position. They allowed the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists, including Collins, to become the leaders of the struggle for Irish independence.

Connolly had always emphasised the need to fight for Irish freedom, alongside the best nationalists, while maintaining working class political independence. When Connolly died there was no leadership of his calibre, armed with a theoretical understanding of Marxism, to replace him. This failure of leadership meant that the Irish Labour Party did not stand any candidates in the December 1918 General Election following the end of the First World War. Instead they abdicated the leading role to Sinn Fein who won 73 of

Ireland's 106 seats on the platform of an All-Ireland Republic. Michael Collins was elected in Cork South.

The Sinn Fein MPs refused to take their seats at Westminster and instead organised a parliament or Dail for Ireland. This first met in January 1919 and reaffirmed the declaration of the Irish Republic originally made at the start of the Easter Rising. The only nation to recognise the Irish Republic was Soviet Russia. In April, after Collins had personally arranged for his escape from Lincoln Prison, Eamon de Valera was elected President of the Dail. He appointed a Cabinet which included Michael Collins as Minister of Finance. During this time, the meetings of the Dail and of the Cabinet were opposed by the British authorities who tried to arrest the participants.

Arms and funds

Collins sought to disrupt the operation of British rule in Ireland by every possible means. He became the IRA's Director of Intelligence in 1919 and also IRB President around the same time. The IRA sought to attack British government property, carry out raids for arms and funds, and killed prominent members of the British administration. The operation of British courts were disrupted and quickly lost legitimacy in the eyes of the Irish population. Income tax went uncollected.

Collins was at this time the most wanted man in Ireland. He would travel quite openly, cycling around Dublin travelling from meeting to meeting, working at his various offices throughout the city, and still the British authorities were unable to capture him.

The British ruling class responded by imposing martial law using brutal repression. In 1920, faced with the imminent collapse of their demoralised

police force in Ireland, they recruited British Army soldiers demobilised from the First World War into new para-military forces called the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans. These forces committed the worst atrocities during the Irish War of Independence. They routinely pillaged and burned towns and villages. The British, fearing social revolution, also sought to play its Orange card and partitioned Ireland with the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 thus ceding control of the north-east of Ireland, "Ulster", a reactionary sectarian statelet, to the Orangemen.

Discrimination

Vicious pogroms against Catholics took place in Ulster over the next two years and afterwards as discrimination was institutionalised. The War intensified and on 21 November 1920, "Bloody Sunday", Collins ordered the assassination of 18 British intelligence agents. The Auxiliaries responded that same day by driving armed vehicles into Croke Park in Dublin where an Irish football match was taking place. The Auxiliaries fired into the crowd and at the players, killing 14 and wounding hundreds.

A truce was declared on 11 July 1921 and a team from the Irish Republic, led by Griffith and Collins, went to London to negotiate with the British Government. The result in December 1921 was the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty gave a form of independence to Ireland, but the new state was to be a dominion remaining in the British Empire; hence Ministers and elected officials would swear allegiance to the British Crown. The Treaty also accepted the partition of Ireland and gave a number of other concessions to Britain.

Collins, ever taking the "practical" approach, sought to persuade his colleagues to accept the Treaty. He saw it as a "stepping-stone" to a united Irish republic, not as a final settlement. He did not believe that the IRA could restart the War against the British if the Treaty was rejected. But if the Treaty was accepted, once the British forces and authorities withdrew, the Irish Government could then take stock and reassess the situation. However, Collins had no real answer to the de facto partition that already existed. During the last year of his life, he sought to use the IRA in Ulster to defend Catholics against the pogroms and to undermine the sectarian government of Northern Ireland but with little success.

At the time of his death, his "Northern" policy was being criticised by other members of the Cabinet and IRA activity in the North ended shortly afterwards. Despite Collins's best efforts, he could not solve this problem. He was a petty-bourgeois nationalist, not even a socialist let alone a Marxist. The national question in Ireland could not be solved simply on the basis of the Irish bourgeoisie taking power, which is what had happened during 1919-1922.

Only Connolly's policy of the working class taking power to form an Irish Workers Republic, uniting both Catholic and Protestant, could do this. That was true in 1922 and it remains true today. Connolly's brilliant conception in essence prefigured Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution. However, the path taken by the nationalists together with the failure of the Irish Labour Party leadership in the years after the Rising, despite the heroism of the Irish people, precluded this solution. In reality the Treaty

was a betrayal of their heroism.

The Treaty split the republican movement. The majority of the IRB, influenced by Collins, supported the Treaty and this was just enough to ensure that the Dail narrowly voted on 7 January 1922 to support the Treaty. The rank and file of the IRA were estimated to be against the Treaty by a proportion of 2:1, the most active workers and small farmers had been fighting in the IRA for a better society but it was clear to all that the Treaty would not bring this new society about. De Valera opposed the Treaty, seemingly on opportunist grounds, and withdrew from the Cabinet which left Collins in effective control of the Government, given the illness of Griffith. Collins tried to reach agreement between the pro and anti-Treaty forces to prevent a civil war but failed.

Pressure

The British administration and troops withdrew and the Irish General Election of 18 June 1922 resulted in a majority for the pro-Treaty parties. Anti-Treaty forces, keeping the name of the IRA, had occupied the Four Courts Government buildings in Dublin two months earlier. Collins had been under pressure from the rest of his Cabinet and the British, who regarded the occupation as a breach of the Treaty, to suppress the IRA. Once the election was over, Collins, now Commander-in-Chief of the National Army (formed from the pro-Treaty IRA

forces) moved against them and using guns and ammunition supplied by the British, he razed the Four Courts to the ground. Civil War broke out, with the fiercest fighting in the south and west of the country, however the National Army soon captured the major towns. In August Michael Collins was on a military tour of his native County Cork when he was killed by an IRA ambush.

After Collins's death the Civil War grew ever more bloody. The Irish Government, representing the Irish bourgeoisie, brutally repressed their opponents in the IRA, especially those who advocated a socialist solution to Ireland's problems. The Civil War ended on 24 May 1923 when the IRA surrendered, although there continued to be an element which did not recognise the surrender.

Michael Collins was a dedicated young man with a talent for organisation and a great deal of energy. He was renowned for his attention to details and what would now be called a "hands on" approach. His political tragedy, like other well-meaning, even heroic, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists in the age of imperialism was to attempt the impossible; to try to achieve meaningful national independence, in Ireland's case uniting both Catholics and Protestants, without breaking free from the binds of capitalism. We should salute his struggle against the British empire's imperialist occupation - but also try to learn from his mistakes. □



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by Alan Woods

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The Meaning of October

by Alan Woods

"The October Revolution laid the foundation of a new culture, taking everybody into consideration, and for that very reason immediately acquiring international significance. Even supposing for a moment that owing to unfavourable circumstances and hostile blows the Soviet regime should be temporarily overthrown, the inexpungable imprint of the October revolution would nevertheless remain upon the whole future development of mankind."

Trotsky - *The History of the Russian Revolution*

Ninety years ago this month, an event took place which altered the entire course of human history. For the first time - if we exclude the brief but glorious episode of the Paris Commune - the working people took power into their own hands and began the gigantic task of the socialist re-construction of society.

Revolutions happen, and not by accident. A revolution becomes inevitable when a particular form of society enters into conflict with the development of the productive forces, which form the basis of all human progress.

In an effort to discredit the October Revolution, the ruling class, through the agency of its hired hacks in the universities, has assiduously cultivated the myth that the Bolshevik Revolution was only a "coup d'état" pulled off by Lenin and a handful of conspirators.

In reality, as Trotsky explains, the essence of a revolution is the direct intervention of the masses in the life of society and politics. In a marvellously graphic phrase, Trotsky refers to the "molecular process of revolution", which goes on in uninterrupted fashion in the minds of the workers. However, since this process is a gradual one which does not affect the general political physiognomy of society, it goes unnoticed by everyone - except the Marxists.

In just the same way, the

ground appears to be solid and firm under our feet ("as steady as a rock," as the saying goes). But geology teaches that rocks are by no means steady, and that the ground is constantly shifting beneath our feet. The continents are on the march, and in a state of perpetual "warfare," one colliding with another. Since geological change is not measured by years or even centuries, but aeons, the continental shifts remain unnoticed except for specialists. But fault-lines build up, subject to unimaginable pressures, which eventually erupt in earthquakes.

The October Revolution was the product of the entire preceding period. Before finally opting for the Bolsheviks, the Russian workers and peasants had already passed through the experience of two revolutions (1905 and February 1917) and two wars (1904-5 and 1914-17).

Events

Despite its numerical smallness, the Russian working class set its stamp on events very early on. In the stormy strike wave of the 1890s, it announced its existence to the world. From that moment, the "labour question" was to occupy a central position in Russian politics.

In 1917, after the February Revolution that overthrew the tsar, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionary leaders had no intention of breaking with the bourgeois Provisional Government. In reality, they were terrified of taking power, and were more afraid of the workers and peasants than the counter-revolutionary general staff.

The truth was that the Provisional Government was an empty shell. There were only two real powers in the land, and one or the other had to be overthrown. On the one hand, the

Soviets of workers and peasants' deputies; on the other, the remnants of the old state apparatus, grouped around the monarchy and the general staff, which, under the protective shadow of the Provisional Government, was preparing for a showdown with the Soviets.

One of the most blatant lies about October is that the Bolsheviks were "undemocratic" because they based themselves on Soviet democracy rather than a parliament. The truth is very different. The Soviet system in 1917 and the years immediately following the revolution was the most democratic system of representation of the people ever known. Even the most democratic models of bourgeois parliamentarianism cannot compare with the simple and direct democracy of the Soviets. Incidentally, the Russian word "soviet" merely means a "council" or "committee." The Soviets were born in 1905 as extended "strike committees." In 1917, the workers' soviets were broadened to include representation by the soldiers, who were overwhelmingly peasants in uniform. Representatives to the Soviets were elected directly by their workmates and instantly recallable.



Russian revolution

The right wing socialists tried by all means to prevent the Soviets from taking power. The endless intrigues and combinations of the politicians contrasted with the desperate position on the front that cold and wet autumn. The mood in the villages was increasingly impatient. The right wing socialists argued that the peasants should wait for the election of the "Constituent Assembly." The Bolsheviks demanded the immediate transference of the land to the peasants' committees. The slogans of "peace, bread and land" won the mass of the peasants over to the side of the Soviets. By October, the stage was set for the last act in the revolutionary drama.

Contrary to a widespread prejudice, revolution is not the same as insurrection. Nine-tenths of the work of the revolution consisted in winning over the decisive majority of the workers and soldiers by patient political work, summed up by Lenin's slogan: "patiently explain."

By October, the Bolsheviks had a clear majority in the Soviets. Trotsky insisted that the date of the insurrection should be timed to coincide with the opening of the Congress of Soviets, where the Bolsheviks would win the majority of the Executive

Committee, and could therefore act with the full authority of the Soviets, which comprised the decisive majority of society.

A point is reached in every revolution where the question of power is posed point-blank. At this stage, either the revolutionary class goes over to a decisive offensive, or the opportunity is lost, and may not return for a long time. The masses cannot be kept forever in a state of agitation. If the chance is lost, and the initiative passes to the counter-revolution, then bloodshed, civil war and reaction will inevitably follow.

Leadership

Such is the importance of leadership that, ultimately, the fate of the Russian Revolution was determined by two men - Lenin and Trotsky. The other leaders of the Bolsheviks - Stalin, Kamenev, Zinoviev - repeatedly vacillated under the pressure of middle-class "public opinion" - in reality the prejudices of the upper layers of the middle class, the intelligentsia and educated liberal leaders masquerading as socialists.

Thanks mainly to the work of Trotsky, the Petrograd garrison was won over to the Bolshevik cause. Trotsky made use of the Military Revolutionary Committee, set up by the reformist-led Executive of the Soviet, to arm the workers in defence against the reactionaries. The workers in the arms factories distributed rifles to the Red Guard. Mass meetings, demonstrations and even military parades were held openly on the streets of Petrograd.

Far from being the work of a tiny, secret group of conspirators, the preparations for the insurrection involved a massive participation by workers and soldiers.

John Reed, in his celebrated book *Ten Days that Shook the World* gives a graphic eye-witness account of these mass meetings, which were held at all hours of the day and night, addressed by Bolsheviks, left SRs, soldiers recently arrived from the front, and even anarchists. Even in the February Revolution, there had been few meetings such as this. And all spoke with one voice: "Down with Kerensky's Government!" "Down with the war!" "All power to the Soviets!"

The power base of the Provisional Government had shrunk practically to nothing. Even those conservative regiments drafted in from the front became infected by the mood of revolutionary Petrograd. The support for the Provisional Government in the capital collapsed immediately the workers began to move. The insurrection in Petrograd was a virtually bloodless affair.

Some years later, the celebrated Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein made a film called *October*, which contains a famous scene of the storming of the Winter Palace, during which there were a few acci-

dents. More people were killed and injured than in the actual event! The propaganda of the bourgeois against the October Revolution is a crude falsification of history. The actual seizure of power took place smoothly, and with very little resistance. The workers, soldiers and sailors occupied one government building after another, without firing a shot. How was this possible? Only a few months earlier, the position of Kerensky and the Provisional Government appeared to be unassailable. But in the moment of truth, it found no defenders. Its authority had collapsed. The masses deserted it and moved over to the Bolsheviks.

On the basis of their experience, the workers of the former USSR will come to re-discover the old ideas, programme and traditions. The basis will be laid for a new edition of the October Revolution, on a qualitatively higher basis, not only in the former Soviet Union, but on a worldwide scale. □

Adapted from an article written in November, 1992

Want to know more...?

There have been a number of books published recently on the Russian Revolution and its aftermath - most of them are rubbish designed to belittle and attack the events of 1917. Instead we would recommend these alternatives:

-The History Of The Russian Revolution Leon Trotsky (Wellred)

After all these years, still the best book ever written on the subject and now available, once again, in a more convenient 3 volume edition from Wellred Books

-Ten Days That Shook The World John Reed (Penguin)

A marvellous introduction to the events themselves - you feel as though you are actually there.

-Bolshevism Alan Woods (Wellred)

The last part of the book superbly covers the events of 1917 - what precedes it shows how the Bolsheviks came to play such a critical role.

All these books can be ordered online from
www.wellred.marxist.com



Depleted Uranium: WMDs in Iraq

by Joe Boustead

IN THE ten years between 1961 and 1971, during the Vietnam War, the defoliant known as Agent Orange was used to reduce the Vietnamese fighters cover by the United States. The effects of Agent Orange and of several of the other 'Agents' developed has been public knowledge for many years. Yet, despite the plethora of evidence, it took Veterans of the war twenty years to receive compensation and thus recognition of the dangers Agent Orange poses. Vietnam veterans have still not received any compensation however. This demonstrates the extreme stubbornness of companies involved in weapon production to fully test and report their findings. Most likely their contract paid too well for such discrepancies to be duly noted. It also demonstrates their sheer arrogance when accused of wrongdoing.

However, the lessons of Vietnam and Agent Orange were learnt and committed to the books of history to appear as a brief note in a school history class. But were the lessons really learnt or just acknowledged in an attempt to make the mistakes go away?

Since 1991, in the first Gulf War, the United States and the United Kingdom (at least) have been using Depleted Uranium weaponry and the story has the potential to follow the same path as

that of Agent Orange.

Depleted Uranium (DU) is the by-product of processing Uranium ore for use in nuclear reactors (and weapons) and from re-processing spent reactor rods. It is 60 percent as radioactive as natural uranium and it is estimated that America has stockpiles of between 480 million to 680.4 million kilograms (1.058 billion - 1.5 billion pounds) in hazardous waste storage sites. Like all nuclear waste it is very expensive to dispose of. However, it has unique properties that make it ideal for bullet tips and tank armour at a cheap price and in high quantity.

Warheads

DU is a very heavy, dense metal. It is 2.4 times as heavy as Iron. If a warhead made of steel (an Iron based alloy) was replaced with the same weight of DU it would be half its cross-section area and being that much thinner doubles the warheads penetrative effect. It also has a similar densi-

ty to Tungsten, a metal used in many "kinetic energy weapons", that is, a weapon that does not contain an explosive for penetration purposes, i.e. a bullet. DU is also the second hardest common metal to Tungsten. All these qualities make it almost as useful as Tungsten for use in weapon systems and when you consider that there is a lot of it lying in storage its is easy to imagine why it might be used over its rival metal. However, DU has one property that elevates it way above other possible metals. It is pyrophoric. This means that it ignites (at 500°C, generated when it hit its target) and burns (at some 2000°C) in ordinary everyday conditions. This not only adds massively to its penetration power but also means it is likely to ignite fuel or shells in a tank or storage depot for example.

So far then, if you must wage wars, DU has all the properties to get weapon manufacturers, traders and government officials drooling. Except it is still radioactive and, as you

might imagine, firing your nuclear waste at your enemies has its downsides.

When a DU tipped shell or bullet hits a target and ignites it produces a fine black cloud of dust; a radioactive cloud of dust. The larger particles in this dust can settle and give the appearance of soot but more than 60% of the



dust is invisible to the human eye and can be easily carried by the wind and be absorbed by rain clouds, etc. In the United States DU contamination was recorded up to 25 miles from one manufacturing site. The main form of radiation emitted from Depleted Uranium is alpha radiation, high energy but with a range of only a few millimeters. As a result it is largely harmless if slight precautions are taken, i.e. wearing gloves while carrying shells and bullets. However, if inhaled into the lungs the dangers are catastrophically greater, and as a dust cloud it is not hard to comprehend how this could occur. Inhaled particles get into the lymph and blood systems, bones and reproductive organs.

The alpha radiation will then permanently damage nearby tissue. While research on the effects on humans is worryingly low (or at least unreleased) research involving mice and rats has shown that DU can result in cancerous tumors and genetic mutations, and pass from mother to unborn child, resulting in birth defects.

Information collected in Basra hospital from 1991 to 2000 shows massive increases in leukemia's and other malignancies among children, some having increased as much as 600%. There are other theories as to these sudden rises but none can provide satisfactory evidence for such great rises in illnesses. The British government has even suggested these statistics can be entirely blamed on Saddam Hussein's mistreatment of his people, yet there are no claims of such a nature in Iraq.

However, there is other evidence that DU is not as harmless as is claimed. Many U.S. soldiers who have served in the various wars involving the United States since the first Gulf War have been left needing constant medical attention for a wide array of grim illnesses and many claim it was due to exposure to Depleted Uranium without prior warning when search-



ing old battle sites for "trophies" and "souvenirs". Their claims are still unrecognized by the U.S. government. In fact, the U.S. government has carried out tests on a pathetic 32 soldiers in its answer to the questions they faced. In the test they used outdated and obsolete testing methods and as a result concluded that there was no danger. The effort on behalf of the U.S. and U.K. governments to either question or acknowledge complaints has been nothing short of farcical. There have been numerous well supported motions in the U.N. to ban DU weapons but the U.K., U.S. and France, three of the permanent members of the Security Council, have constantly rejected these calls.

Dangers

The soldier's plight in turn highlights the dangers to the population of Iraq. Children are at risk from simply playing in areas where a tank or truck has been destroyed, the same goes for anyone else who may be in the area. DU has also been used in varying amounts in the Balkans and Afghanistan. It is estimated that the U.S. alone fired 118 tonnes of DU munitions in the latest Iraq war and 259 tonnes in Iraq and Kuwait in 1991. Additionally, while the U.S. and

U.K. deny any ill effects of Depleted Uranium, the United Nations Environment Program identified 311 polluted sites in Iraq in 2005. The cleaning of these sites cannot commence until the fighting has ended which seems to very a long, long way off yet. And in case you were wondering, DU has a half-life of almost 4.5 billion years, that is 4.5 billion years until it is half as radioactive as it is today, so it isn't going anywhere soon.

The official reason for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (or at least one of them) was to topple the régime of Saddam Hussein and install order, democracy and freedom to the people of Iraq. All that has been brought is chaos and destruction, crisis after crisis and the ever increasing possibility of all-out civil war and the shattering of the country. Added to this they are polluting areas of Iraq in the most serious way.

This does not constitute even the most distorted definition of the word freedom. While Depleted Uranium is not considered as a form of nuclear weaponry its has many of the hall marks on a smaller scale and its blasé use by governments of the world only underlines their complete disregard for the "ordinary people", workers of the world and even the soldiers who are doing their bidding.

There is the very real prospect that we are facing an almost carbon copy of the Agent Orange events, it may take years for the truth to surface but eventually the isolated voices will grow to such volume that governments will have to take note and research their actions. By then it will be too late. Cancers and birth defects don't vanish with government apologies and compensation. More people need to be made aware of the untold crimes of the imperialists in their self-righteous wars to save humanity because, in the end, their may not be much of humanity left to save. ■



Benazir and the Pakistan People's Party

by Lal Khan

THE BRITISH MEDIA has been giving enormous coverage to the manoeuvres of Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party and former Prime Minister, in seeking to negotiate a return to Pakistan from her comfortable exile in London. In this extract from a wider analysis (see *Whither Pakistan* on Marxist.com), Lal Khan, leading figure of the Marxist tendency, *The Struggle*, explains what is going on.

The PPP was formed in the late 1960's as the result of a revolutionary upheaval of the workers and peasants of this country. Now it has been dragged into the market economy of capitalism where every ideology has a price. An interesting historical incident that should go down in the history books has happened during this crisis: a dictator has met an exiled leader whom he has exiled himself. This incident not only highlights the impotency of this peculiar dictatorship but the hypocrisy and deception of "resistance" and "struggle" of the political leaders.

However, this is not the first time that Benazir Bhutto has struck a deal with a military dictator. In 1984 she left Pakistan through a deal with General Zia ul Haq that was negotiated by her friend and important associate of the US administration, Peter Galbraith. Similarly, her return in 1986 and subsequent assumption of power in 1988 were brokered through "deals" with the Military establishment conducted under the auspices of US imperialism. With every deal she has dragged the PPP away from its founding socialist principles and tried to present herself as a statesperson more capable of diverting the mass movements and protecting the interest of imperialism than others.

However, with the pres-

ent "deal" there is too much at stake for both Benazir and Musharraf. Benazir is aware of the resentment she is provoking amongst her supporters with such actions. Musharraf on the other hand faces the dilemma of how to dismantle the political structures he has built comprising feudal, capitalist and other right-wing politicians. The only god these people worship is power. In the event of losing state power their whole edifice for plundering and self-enrichment would collapse. So although their electoral base is mainly state-sponsored, they are still trying to dissuade Musharraf from striking this deal with Benazir.

Pressure

Hence the deal is facing multiple obstacles. But the Americans are putting enormous pressure on both sides to go ahead with the deal. Fighting "extremism and promoting moderation" are the buzzwords that Benazir repeatedly uses as the rationale for having a secret dialogue with Musharraf. This stance is clearly geared towards winning the support of the White House.

In an interview with the *Washington Post* on August 26, she said, "The international community and the armed forces have confidence in Musharraf."

"International community" is Ms. Bhutto's euphe-

mism for the US administration. It means mainly the White House, whose financial, military and public support for Musharraf is viewed with a mix of awe and jealousy by Benazir.

Message

Her assessment, which is also probably quite accurate, is that the White House is unlikely to ditch Musharraf. Thus, Ms. Bhutto's message to the American audience is that by supporting Benazir along with Musharraf, Washington can have the best of both worlds, and stem the tide of "extremism" in Pakistan and in the region.

When it comes to acknowledging the role of the US in influencing power politics in Pakistan, Ms Bhutto in an interview with a US TV channel, PBS aired on August 21, had no qualms in saying that, "We keep them [Americans] briefed, and they are certainly engaged with all the political parties in Pakistan." In the *Washington Post* interview she came out openly, "We want stability in Pakistan, fair elections and General Musharraf is our ally." She claims to have fought extremists more effectively than Musharraf, and if she gets back in power in the near future she wants Musharraf to be on her side because she doesn't want the security forces to dis-

agree with her in an attack on internal subversion.

At the same time she is worried about the decline in her mass support due to this rotten compromise she is trying to broker with the Military dictatorship. In an interview with *The Observer* 9 September, Benazir Bhutto said her campaign would be inspired by the old slogan of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) "Food, Clothing and Shelter". She added that, "We represent the underprivileged, the peasants, women, young people, the minorities, all those who have been neglected by elite governments."

The words "working class" are, however, conspicuously absent from the sections of society she claims to represent. Similarly, she has never condoned the founding principles of the party. The founding document of the PPP clearly states, "The ultimate policy of the party is the attainment of a classless society which is only possible through Socialism in our times." Benazir would shudder at such a prospect.

Incidentally, just a week before this interview she declared "full support" for NATO in Afghanistan and that "Pakistan would remain a firm ally of the USA" under her next expected term in office.

Such contradictory policy statements show her desperation when her support amongst the masses is rap-

idly dwindling and there is a seething resentment amongst the PPP rank and file due to her desired deal with the Musharraf dictatorship.

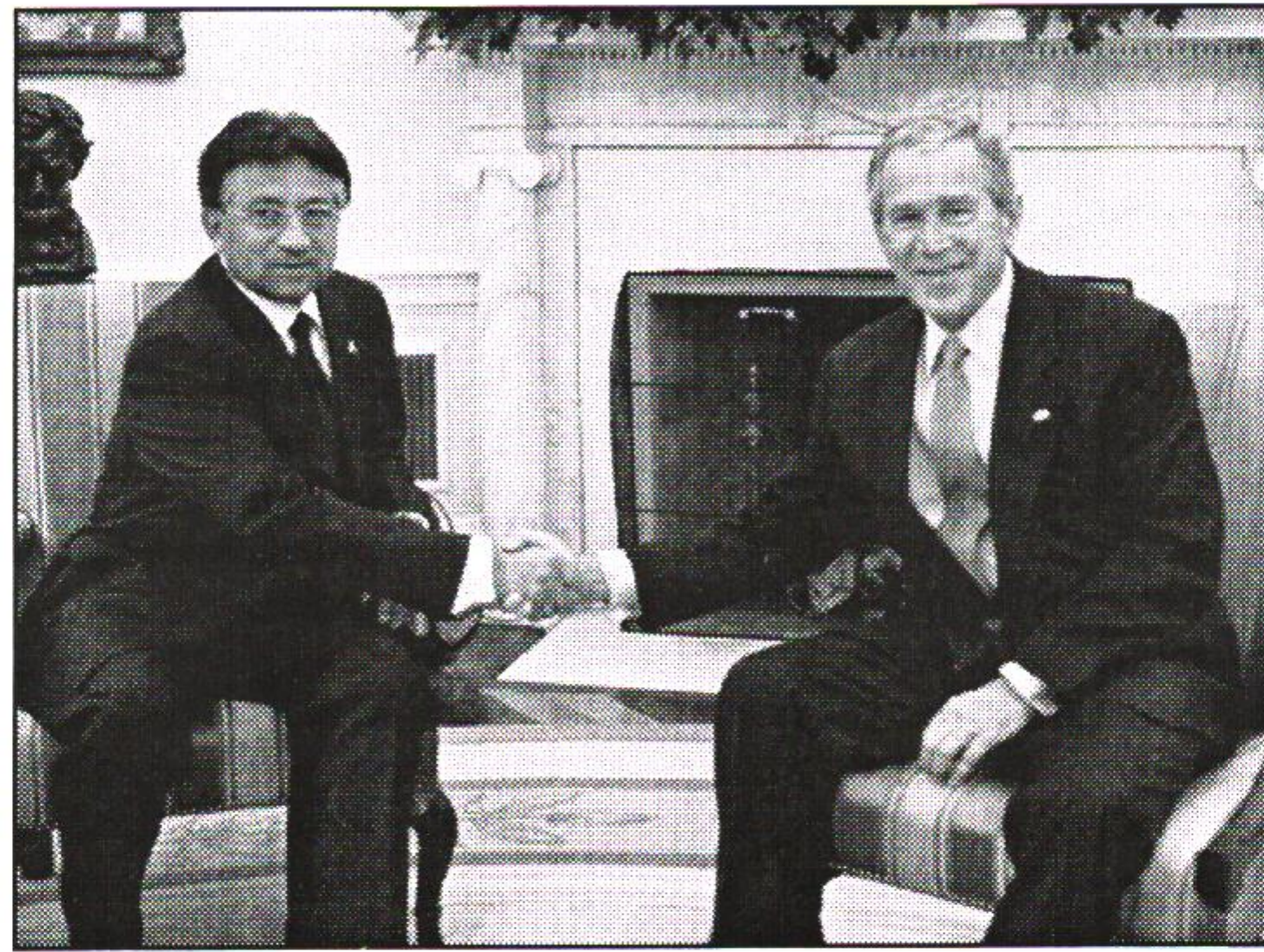
The situation within the PPP is at a low ebb. The little internal political life left has shrunk. Most activists and leaders have been indoctrinated with the need for personal gain, financial benefits and other perks and privileges by the Party coming to power. It matters little at what cost and with what shameful compromise. But with Nawaz Sharif deported by the state, a smooth homecoming of Benazir, facilitated by the same state apparatus, would not build up any political fortune for the Party. Benazir would be further discredited in such a scenario. Therefore she could probably further delay her return.

It is true that the PPP has been the traditional party of the toiling masses of Pakistan since the 1968-69 revolution. But sometimes the traditions of the workers in the words of Marx, "weighs like an Alp" on the consciousness of the proletariat. The traditions have somewhat decayed and rotted but due to the lack of a revolutionary force on the country's political horizon. And although Benazir's compromises and conciliations with capitalism and its military state establishment have created political retrogression and some confusion, nevertheless the PPP remains the only mass expression of the Pakistani workers and peasants.

US agenda

That is why once the PPP comes to power it would find it extremely difficult to carry through the agenda which the Americans want Benazir to implement. It is not that the Americans want a

Musharraf-Benazir deal to curb "Islamist extremism" or to install a "democratic regime". What they are frightened of is a workers' movement developing against this disastrous capitalist policy being aggressively carried out in Pakistan. They have seen the potential for such a movement in the Telecommunication workers'



strike of 2005 and the steelworkers' struggle in 2006.

That is why this intended imperialist pre-emptive strike through the Benazir/Musharraf deal would not work. It could actually achieve the opposite and provoke an outburst of anger and revulsion that has been accumulating for several years now. After the Sharif fiasco in Islamabad on September 10, Benazir will be more worried about her "deal". To be seen returning to Pakistan, with military consent, when Sharif has just been expelled would do little for her reputation and would weaken her ability to influence the masses. With the passage of time and frustration at her failure to reach a deal with Musharraf, she can resort more towards an antagonistic stance and take on an anti-regime posture against Musharraf. And although it might have the effect of pleasing the mass-

es, such a move would become more complicated and hazardous in the face of the pressures of US imperialism.

In such difficult circumstances the tasks of Marxists are clear. It is vital the revolutionaries stand shoulder to shoulder with the workers and the toiling masses in the most difficult and nauseating

conditions into which they are being forced. The role of the PPP leadership is no different from that of the Social Democratic leaders of Europe and elsewhere. They are called on to use their authority to moderate the struggles of the oppressed, to hold back their revolutionary aspirations. It is only by standing with the masses in such painful conditions, that the Marxists can lead them when the tide turns and the working class moves in a revolutionary direction.

Vanguard

Lenin was very clear in this relationship between the revolutionary vanguard and the working class. In "Left wing Communism", Lenin writes:

"If you want to help 'the masses' and to win the sympathy and support of 'the masses', you must not fear difficulties, you must not

fear the pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution on the part of the 'leaders' (who being opportunists and social chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must imperatively work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of every sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently, precisely in those institutions, societies and associations - even the most ultra-reactionary - in which proletarian or semi proletarian masses are to be found."

A mass revolutionary upheaval in the next period in Pakistan will outshine even the 1968-69 revolution, which created and gave stature to the tradition of the PPP. Such movements are iconoclastic in character, can create new revolutionary traditions that change societies, reshape destiny and transform history. A revolutionary tendency can play a decisive role in such events.

Even with the relatively small forces of revolutionary Marxism in Pakistan, a subjective factor can give organisation and direction to such a movement. Such a revolutionary upheaval can overthrow capitalism, destroy the roots of religious fundamentalism and obscurantism, smash the shackles of feudalism and remove the yoke of imperialist stranglehold and exploitation. Such a feat can only be accomplished through a Socialist Revolution. A socialist victory in Pakistan would open the floodgates of revolutionary upheavals across the South Asian subcontinent from Afghanistan to Burma where the masses are seething with revolt and yearning for a socialist transformation. ■

Revolutionary organisation and leadership

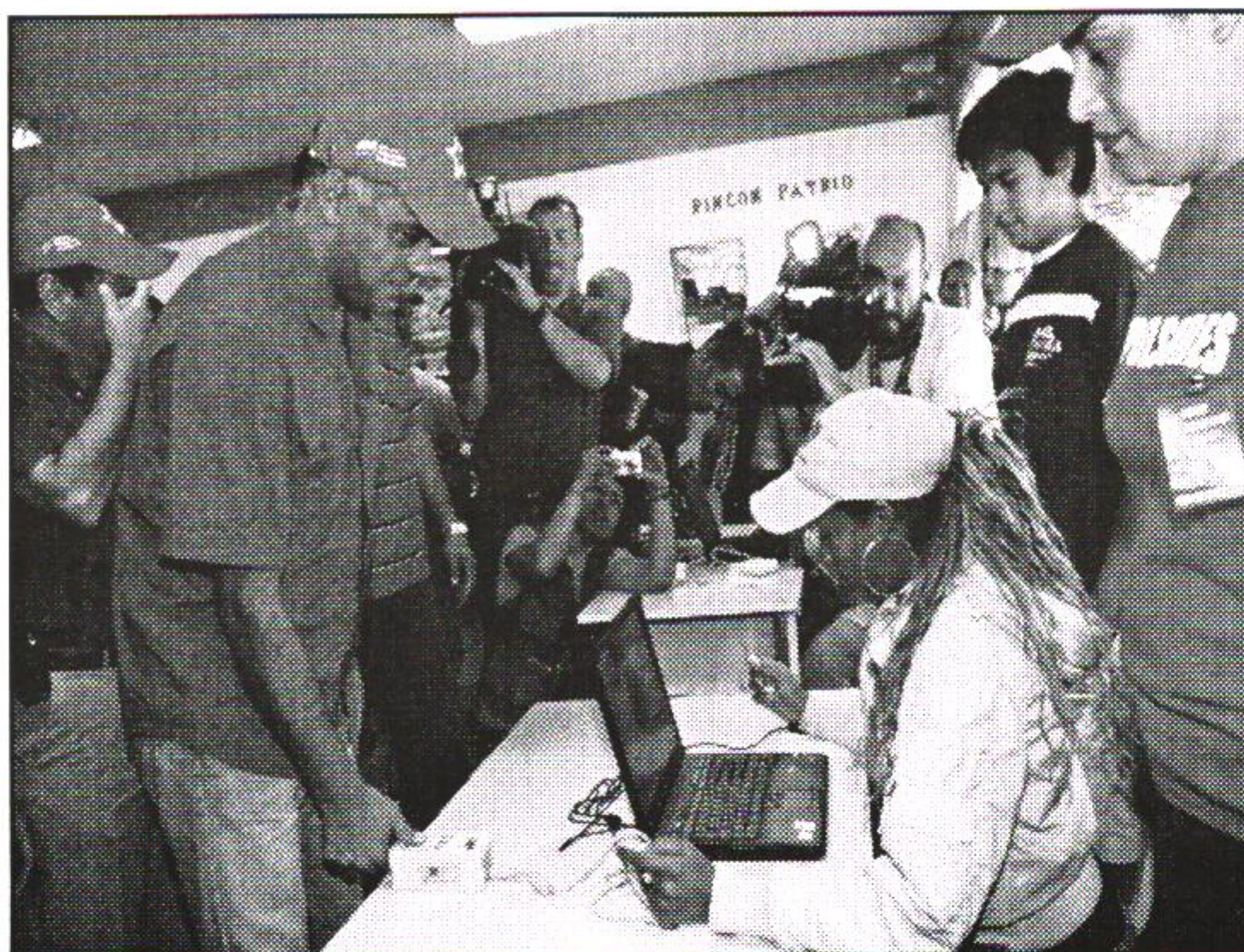
by Jorge Martin

THE DECEMBER 2006 re-election of Chávez marked a new shift to the left in the Bolivarian revolution. One of the key features of this was the initiative to launch a United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

One of the main weaknesses of the revolutionary movement in Venezuela so far has been the weakness of the revolutionary organisation, in two different ways. One is the absence of a Marxist leadership of the workers' movement, but also the absence of a national democratic structure through which the revolutionary movement can express itself and within which a Marxist tendency can fight for the leadership. This is one of the reasons why the figure of Chávez has acquired such a prominent role.

In this respect, the discussion around the setting up of the United Socialist Party could prove to be crucial. For a long time there has been a widespread feeling on the part of the Bolivarian revolutionary masses that the different parties that compose Chávez's government are mainly bureaucratic electoral machines, full of careerists which exclude ordinary rank and file supporters and activists from all important decisions.

Criticism of the method of appointing election candidates from above was very widespread, during the local council, regional governor and parliamentary elections in recent years. A number of candidates for governor were people who had actually sided with the coup in



2002 (only to swiftly change sides again after the coup collapsed). Many local councillors and mayors were corrupt careerists. These people were only elected because they stood on pro-Chávez slates.

Candidates

The problem however goes beyond the question of candidates. If there is no democratic nation-wide revolutionary organisation or structure, then the rank and file activists have no way of participating in debates about policy, no way to share and generalise their experiences in struggle. A bureaucratic layer at the top hijacks the revolutionary movement.

When Chávez announced the setting up of the PSUV, he made it clear that this was to be a tool of struggle against bureaucracy and a genuine revolutionary democratic organisation. This is precisely what the revolutionary masses wanted. The look on the faces of the

leaders of the different Bolivarian parties at the meeting when Chávez made the proposal was one of shock and disbelief. Many of them know that if a party with those characteristics is set up they would have no place in it. There is no guarantee that this will be the case. It will be the result of a ferocious struggle between the rank and file revolutionary activists and the "Bolivarian" bureaucracy.

What is important is the enormous enthusiasm that this proposal has generated amongst the revolutionary masses. In 2001/02 when the Bolivarian Circles were first organised, they managed to gather around 1.5 million people. In August 2004, at the time of the presidential recall referendum, when the Electoral Battle Units (UBE) and Platoons were created, 2 million people joined them. At that time we saw a massive clash between the revolutionary rank and file and the bureaucracy, which tried

to impose itself on these organisations. Eventually the bureaucracy won, and at the higher levels of the organisation of the UBEs they imposed their people. And after the referendum these organisations were disbanded.

When Chavez proposed the setting up of the PSUV, he said that the aim was to organise 3 million people, which in itself would be more than in any of the previous organisations. During an 8-week period people queued to register for the new party and the final result was that more than 5.6 million registered to join! This represents more than two thirds of the actual number who voted for Chavez in the presidential elections. What this shows is the enormous reserve of support and enthusiasm for the revolution among the masses.

In some areas, such as the Alto Apure, a peasant region organised by the FNCEZ, more people registered to join the party than had actually voted for Chávez in December! The reason for this was a conscious campaign on the part of the FNCEZ appealing to every man, woman and child in the area to join the PSUV. The leaders of the FNCEZ commented: "in 1998 we also joined the MVR, but we were not organised and the bureaucracy took control, now we are joining the PSUV and we are organised to prevent that".

The national organising committee gave a detailed breakdown of the composition of the party. There are

1.4 million unskilled workers, 500,000 skilled workers, 750,000 service sector workers, 180,000 administrative and office workers, adding up to a total of 3 million workers who have registered for the PSUV. Also registered are 1.2 million housewives, which makes the PSUV the largest women's organisation in Venezuela and probably the largest in the world, reflecting the enormous role played by working class women in the Bolivarian revolution. This is unprecedented. Nowhere else in the world have we seen such a massive party openly calling itself socialist being created in such a short space of time.

Lessons

Parallels can be drawn (with all the necessary caveats) with the process that led to the formation of the PT in Brazil, a period of enormous revolutionary ferment and mass activity and political discussion. However, there are also lessons to be learned from that. The revolutionary opportunities at that time were wasted and the PT ended up controlled by a pro-capitalist leadership.

Now the PSUV is to have a 3-month long congress period which began in September. The first meetings of the Battalions (there are about 18,000 of them) took place with the participation of about 1.5 million people. This is normal. One cannot expect 5.6 million people to become *active* members of the party; that figure reflects the *organised* support for the PSUV; the figure of 1.5 million represents the *activist* layer.

What is the class nature of the PSUV? The class character of any party or movement is determined by a number of different factors: its class composition,

its relationship with the organisations of different classes, the composition and politics of its leadership, its programme, etc. In the case of the PSUV, most of these issues are not yet decided.

The creation of the PSUV has led to a sharp split with a section of the right wing of the Bolivarian movement. PODEMOS, which is the most right wing social democratic party of the government coalition, has decided not to join the PSUV. They said, "we are in favour of socialism, but we want democratic socialism", to which Chavez replied, "the problem is that you are social democrats and social-traitors, and we are revolutionary socialists". PODEMOS has now replaced the old Acción Democrática party as the Venezuelan affiliate to the Socialist International¹. (Incidentally, the Communist Party of Venezuela also split on this question of the PSUV, with 17 members of the Central Committee being excluded from the party for joining the PSUV).

But it is clear that another, more intelligent, section of the bureaucracy and reformists have rushed to join the new party, trying from the very beginning to establish themselves in positions of power and influence. We have even seen the creation of an organisation of "Socialist Businessmen" who

have joined the PSUV.

It is clear that in the next few months the PSUV will be the battleground in which the bureaucracy will try to impose its hold over the party, while the revolutionary rank and file will try to keep it a democratic organisation under their control. The outcome of this struggle is not decided yet. What you could see at the mass rallies of the *promotores* (the first organisers of the party) was the profoundly working class and plebeian character of the masses that are joining the party. The expression on their faces when they were taking an oath to struggle for socialism was an indication of their unbreakable will to struggle to transform society. After the experience of 8 years of revolution they will fight tooth and nail to prevent the right wing of the movement from taking over *their* new party.

Isolation

The task of revolutionary Marxists is to throw themselves completely into this fight and participate alongside the masses in the creation of the PSUV. Any other policy would be utter sectarianism and would only contribute to isolating them from the *real existing* revolutionary movement. In this respect, the policy adopted by a section of C-CURA (the

left wing current within the UNT) around Orlando Chirino, of refusing to join the PSUV and attempting to set up a so-called "Independent Workers' Party" is a criminal mistake which can only lead to the isolation of some advanced worker activists from the mass revolutionary movement.

"Autonomy"

Under the pretence of fighting for the "autonomy" of the trade unions, they are in fact refusing to get involved in a mass political debate about what socialism is in which literally millions of ordinary working people are involved. In fact, the trade unions should not be "autonomous", but rather independent from the state and the capitalists. Revolutionary trade unionists should be at the forefront of the struggle for socialism within the PSUV, which is where it is taking place.

Once again the Bolivarian masses have thrown themselves enthusiastically into the battleground. This shows the enormous reserve of revolutionary enthusiasm they still have and their willingness to carry the revolution to its socialist conclusion.

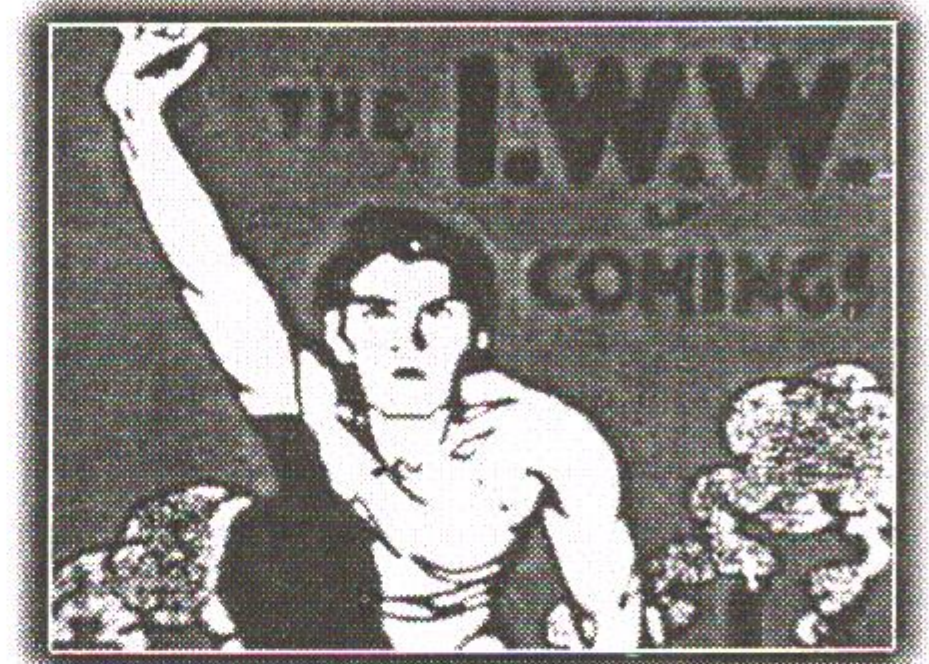
But enthusiasm and determination are not enough to carry out a revolution. These need to be channelled into organisation and directed in a clear and bold manner to carry out the socialist transformation of society. □



¹ It is interesting to note that it was Didalco Bolivar, the PODEMOS governor of Aragua who sent the police against the Sanitarios Maracay workers who were on their way to a Freteco demonstration in Caracas.

"Soldier of Discontent"

by Jim Brookshaw



IN THE autumn of 1916 the Industrial Workers of the World, better known as the Wobblies, were trying to organise lumber workers near Everett, Washington in the USA. A series of attempts to organise by the workers had led to a murderous response from the employers. IWW organisers were picked up, beaten and deported but kept coming back and trying again. One of their number, Wesley Everest was dragged out of jail by a mob, battered, castrated and hung from a bridge.

The Wobblies decided to stage a meeting in Everett on 5th of November and to avoid being picked off one by one, arrived together by boat. They arrived singing the well-known Wobbly songs and in particular 'Hold the Fort'. They were met by an army of armed police and deputised thugs. These gunmen opened fire when the Wobblies attempted to land. Five men were killed plus seven others whose bodies were never found and many more wounded. When the *Verona* returned to Seattle the survivors were arrested and they were charged with murder.

The IWW set up a defence campaign and appointed Charles Ashleigh to run it. Charles, whom I knew personally in my YCL days in Brighton, was a poet of the IWW. He gave the oration at the funeral of the Everett martyrs and penned the poem, 'Everett, November Fifth'.

The poem goes as follows:

Song on his lips, he came;
Song on his lips, he went;
This be the token we bear of him,
Soldier of Discontent!

Out of the dark they came; out of the night
Of poverty and injury and woe,
With flaming hope, their vision thrilled to light,
Song on their lips, and every heart aglow;

They came, that none should trample Labor's right
To speak, and voice her centuries of pain.
Bare hands against the masters armoured might!
A dream to match the tools of sordid gain!

And then the decks went red; and the grey sea
Was written crimsonly with ebbing life.
The barricade spewed shots and mockery
And curses, and the drunken lust of strife.

Yet, the mad chorus from that devil's host,-
Yes, all the tumult of that butcher throng,
Compound of bullets, booze and coward boast,
Could not out-shriek one dying worker's song!

Song on his lips, he came;
Song on his lips, he went;
This be the token we bear of him,
Soldier of Discontent!

Charles was born in Britain and lived in London and Brighton where he went to the Grammar School. He joined the Independent Labour Party when only fifteen years old. He worked with the Clarion Scouts and in 1908 was sent to South Wales as an agitator for the Labour Party. According to Steve Kellerman's introduction to Charles book (see below) "During Ashleigh's stay in Wales he became one of the leading figures in a land occupation..."

At a time of high unemployment, a group of out-of-work agricultural labourers seized a parcel of land called Leckwith Common near Cardiff, which had once been common land but had been enclosed by the noble Bute family and was then lying idle.

Squatters... erected housing for themselves and began to work the land... Eventually the settlers were driven off by the police but the incident had garnered widespread publicity for the plight of the unemployed... It also appealed strongly to Ashleigh's predisposition towards direct action."

He certainly very soon became involved in direct action when he arrived in the USA in 1912. He had jumped ship in Oregon, crossed into Canada and then back into Washington State to officially enter the USA. Charles initially joined the Socialist Party of America but soon left it to join the IWW. He believed that the IWW idea of replacing capitalism with workers ownership and control of society through 'one big union' was the way ahead.

Charles became a full-time agitator with the IWW. As Kellerman says, the pay of such an agitator covered, 'little more than food and tobacco expenses. The organisers lived at a stan-

dard similar to that of the hobos they sought to influence.....and dining in the same skid row cafes.'

The IWW took up a position in opposition to the 1914-1918 World War. They were, in 1917 made the scapegoats for the government's attacks on the anti-war movement. In September of that year 184 wobbly activists were rounded up and arraigned in 1918 in trials in Chicago and other cities. Charles Ashleigh was put on trial with 100 other men in Chicago. It was during this trial that the black wobbly Ben Fletcher said, "Judge Landis has been using bad English today- his sentences are too long." Brutal sentences were handed down at the end of a farce of a trial. The IWW won the argument but the state had the power and put them away.

Bolsheviks

There had been many debates in the IWW over the years about how to beat capitalism. Many still thought if you could get all the workers in one big union the fight would be won. This still didn't answer the question of how to bring the workers to power and how to take over. The victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 had a huge impact on large sections of the Wobblies. Ashleigh, like many leading Wobblies such as Bill Haywood and James Cannon took the lesson from the October Revolution, that to win power for the workers a revolutionary party was needed and they became Communists.

On his release from prison Charles was deported to Britain where he became active in the Communist Party of Great Britain. He worked for many years in Berlin and Moscow for the

Profintern (The Red International of Trade Unions). Kellermans review says Charles remained a member of the CPGB for the rest of his life. Well, by Charles account that is only just true! In the thirties in Moscow he ran into difficulties with the apparatchiks. He was too much of a free spirit for them. Apparently he was openly homosexual although I was blissfully unaware of that when I knew him.

They kicked him out of Moscow and according to Charles demanded his expulsion from the CPGB. It seems that Harry Pollit, then leader of the CPGB 'took care' of Charles' Party Card until 'better times' post 1956? Charles was interviewed for the Sussex Society for the Study of Labour History in 1973 and it would be interesting to know what he told them!

In 1930 Charles wrote 'The Rambling Kid', A Novel about the IWW. It has been republished by the Charles H Kerr Publishing Company of Chicago with an introduction by Steve Kellerman.

Some people have said it is an autobiography. I think not, although the character of the heroes close friend Elsie is interesting from that view. "Elsie was a tall, handsome youth, the son of middle-class parents in St. Paul... His somewhat languid unhurried air, and his refined pronunciation, had earned him the feminine nickname."

I lost touch with Charles when I left Brighton. Kellerman says he died in isolation in Brighton in 1974. I am sorry for that.

I started out here meaning to write a review of 'Rambling Kid' but have rambled on about the author. The book is an adventure story, a damn good read. Get it and read it for yourself. □



Che Guevara: Martyr and Revolutionary

by Jon Avis

FORTY YEARS ago this month, in a small school hut in La Higuera, Bolivia, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was brutally executed by the Bolivian army.

Since Che's death, the popular media have tried to assimilate his image and turn it into a harmless symbol. They have, however, not succeeded in burying the memory of Che, just as they have not managed to solve the problems of poverty and destitution in the third world.

Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born in Rosario, Argentina in 1928. His parents were relatively well off and were able to pay for a good education. In 1948 he went to study medicine at the University of Buenos Aires. As a break from his studies, Alberto Granado and Che embarked on a motorbike journey across South America. It would be during this trip that Che would witness the grinding poverty that is endemic to the continent.

Returning to Argentina, in 1953 he graduated from university, and soon set out on another trip. Following the west coast, he arrived in Guatemala City. The experience of Guatemala in 1954 had a strong influence on his thinking. Jacobo Arbenz had attempted to carry out a modest agrarian reform and nationalising the 3 million acres of the United Fruit Company. This was a reform that the US could not stomach, and the CIA set about organising a military overthrow of Arbenz.

At that time Che commented that "Without a doubt Colonel Arbenz is a guy with guts, and is ready to die in his post if necessary". The CIA backed-paramilitaries led by Castillo Armas, together with the reactionary media and Catholic Church, stepped up their assault. Che described the atmosphere as a "terrible shower of cold water" falling over the people. Arbenz relied on the old state apparatus to crush the rebellion. Sections of the army demanded the President's resignation.

In Guatemala, Che saw the limits of parliamentarism, which left a strong impression on his thinking. Any peaceful attempt at meaningful reforms would be met with armed hostility from the USA. He was now sure that only armed revolutionary struggle could guarantee against US intervention and provide the means to success.

Like thousands of other leftists fleeing Guatemala, Che went to Mexico. There he was introduced to Fidel Castro. Fidel was a leader of the July 26 Movement - so named after a failed attack on the Moncada barracks in Cuba, as part of an attempt to oust the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Coming from the left-wing of the anti-imperialist democratic Partido Ortodoxo, Fidel Castro was already a well-known revolutionary leader. After a nightlong discussion, Che agreed to join Fidel's planned invasion and guerrilla war against Batista. For Che, this undertaking would prove the viability of guerrilla warfare in the underdeveloped third world.

Guerrilla war

The Communist Party in Cuba, the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) initially did not support the July 26 Movement, but only jumped on the bandwagon at the last moment.

Unfortunately, the beginnings of the guerrilla war did not go well. Out of 82 guerrillas in the initial attack, only 15 survived and sought refuge in the mountains of Sierra Maestra. After a period, a number of successful raids allowed the rebels to establish a liberated zone. While massively outnumbered by Batista's standing army, what

was remarkable was its ineffectiveness; numbering around 35,000 in strength it was unable to defeat the guerrillas who at times numbered less than 200 men. This was a reflection of the decay of the Batista dictatorship. The last serious attempt to crush the rebel army was "la Ofensiva", where some 12,000 demoralised soldiers failed to defeat the guerrillas.

During the struggle Che had been promoted from medic to Commandante, in command of his own column. Within the liberated zone he established *Radio Rebelde* - a lesson learnt from Guatemala where the media had been in the hands of the ruling class. He had gained the respect of the rebel fighters, and was known for his tight discipline. As the tide turned in Castro's favour, Che led his column to the city of Santa Clara, the last outpost on the road to Havana. The rebels were greeted on their way by cheering peasants, and military outposts were surrendered without incident.

With the collapse of the regime, the power vacuum in Cuba was not filled with any urban movement, a weakness of the tactic of guerrillaism. On December 31, 1958 Batista fled the country, but the guerrillas were still outside of Havana. The ruling class attempted to prop up the regime with

a new president. But Fidel made an appeal for a general strike, and the response was solid - Havana was paralysed for a week. This allowed the victorious rebel army to enter Havana and for Cuba to determine its own future.

Reforms

Che Guevara, a key leader of the revolution, took on at different times a number of ministries within the new government. The government introduced a number of measures, such as a land reform which limited the size of holdings and outlawed foreign ownership of land. These reforms were seen by Washington with alarm. Throughout 1959 the USA became more hostile to the new Cuban government. Fidel reacted by replacing more liberals in the government with communists. Washington placed an embargo on Cuba in an attempt to bring Castro to his knees. However, this provoked the Cuban government which proceeded to nationalise US companies. By the end of 1961 Cuba abolished capitalism and declared itself a socialist republic.

On the basis of his experience and the victory of the Cuban Revolution, Che generalised the idea of guerrilla struggle as a means of carrying out the socialist revolution. This theory became known as Focalism. The idea was that a small *foco*, a vanguard group of guerrilla fighters could kick-start the revolution. This would be a focal point for the population as a whole, bolstering their morale for a popular uprising, while beginning the revolutionary struggle in the countryside themselves.

Using this strategy, Che attempted to export this Cuban model abroad, participating personally in the Congo and Bolivia.

Despite the relationship now between Cuba and the Moscow bureaucracy, the Communist Parties of Latin America, ever loyal to Moscow, were wedded to the policy of "peaceful co-existence" and did not want to upset their alliance with "progressive" bourgeois parties. "Peaceful co-existence" was a policy devised by the Russian bureaucracy during the Cold war to come to an accommodation with imperialism. Such a policy was aimed at preserving a status quo between the two social systems. Clearly any policy aimed at spreading socialist revolution was an anathema to them. Che completely rejected "peaceful co-existence". "The

socialist countries have the moral duty of liquidating their tacit complicity with the exploiting countries of the West", he wrote. Che was an internationalist, who could see the limits of "socialism in one country", and so used his influence to organise guerrilla warfare in Latin America and elsewhere.

With the prestige of October 1917 behind them, internationally the Communist Parties were a pole of attraction for many workers and peasants. They had come to the aid of the Cuban Revolution. Nevertheless, Che had witnessed the weaknesses of the Communist Party in Guatemala and was deeply opposed to the conservative stance of the Russian Stalinists.

The Stalinists internationally were wedded to the "two-stage" theory, whereby the working class and other "progressive forces" would concentrate on the first national-democratic stage and only much later would the struggle open up for socialism. The first stage would mean an alliance of the workers with the local capitalist class. The problem being that in the third world there was no independent revolutionary national bourgeoisie. In fact, the bourgeoisie was linked to the landowners, subservient to imperialism, and played a counter-revolutionary role. The "two-stage" policy would lead to disaster in one country after another.

Alliance

A serious revolutionary programme would have looked towards the alliance of workers and peasants, and sought to link the tasks of the "national-democratic" revolution with the socialist transformation of society. This, in fact, was the very lesson of the successful Russian Revolution in 1917.

In the preface to his *Diary* from his time in the Congo, Che opens with the words: "This is the history of a failure." He went to the Congo to try and instil in the revolutionary fighters his idea of the *foco* and socialist revolution. However, the army was able to monitor his communications, and at every attempted offensive they crushed the guerrillas. This, combined with the incompetence of the guerrilla forces, led to the withdrawal of the Cuban expedition after seven months, disillusioned with their experience.

Che's next attempt to promote guerrilla warfare was in Bolivia. Once again, this proved to be disastrous. He set out

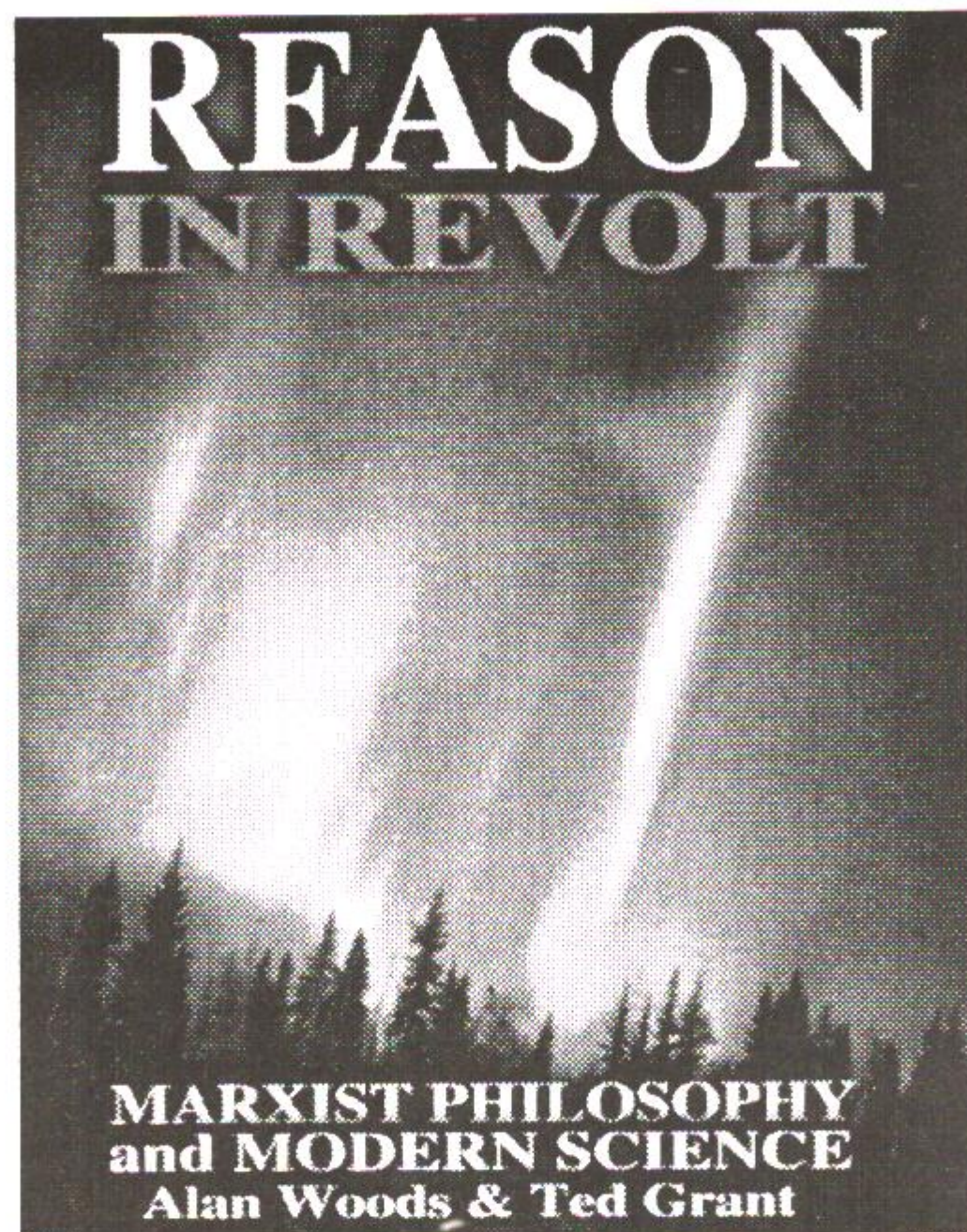
with a small band of guerrillas with no support from the Bolivian Communist Party, loyal as ever to Moscow. Bolivia, as the poorest country in South America, and with a powerful working class employed in its mining industry, certainly had potential for revolution. Land had been purchased for the setting up of a guerrilla base to train and acclimatise recruits. After a number of small initial successes in the area, Che's group began to run into severe problems. The guerrillas had failed to establish any roots amongst the peasants. Isolated and exhausted, Che was flanked by the Bolivian army, trained by US Army Special Forces, and under the direction of the CIA. Eventually Che was captured by the Bolivian army, and taken to a schoolhouse. He was shot repeatedly below the neck to make it appear his death was from combat wounds, not an execution.

Class fighter

Che should be remembered as a heroic class fighter, someone completely dedicated to the cause of international socialist revolution. His dream today still goes unrealised. However, we must learn the lessons of the failures of guerrillaism. While the peasantry can play an important role, the leading role of the socialist revolution falls to the working class as in the Russian Revolution. Only they can develop a socialist consciousness and bring about a real workers' democracy.

The prospect of socialist revolution is stronger today. The Venezuelan revolution stands out as a beacon to the whole of Latin America, with its mass support amongst the workers and urban and rural poor. This mass movement stands on firmer ground than any guerrilla expedition. Cuba, under the merciless pressure of US imperialism, has weathered the collapse of the Soviet Union, now looks to the Venezuelan Revolution to break its isolation.

Che grew steadily disillusioned with Stalinism and sharply criticised the conservative role of the Russian bureaucracy. Increasingly he searched for new ideas and a new way forward. It was not for nothing that when he was killed he had in his nap sack a copy of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. □



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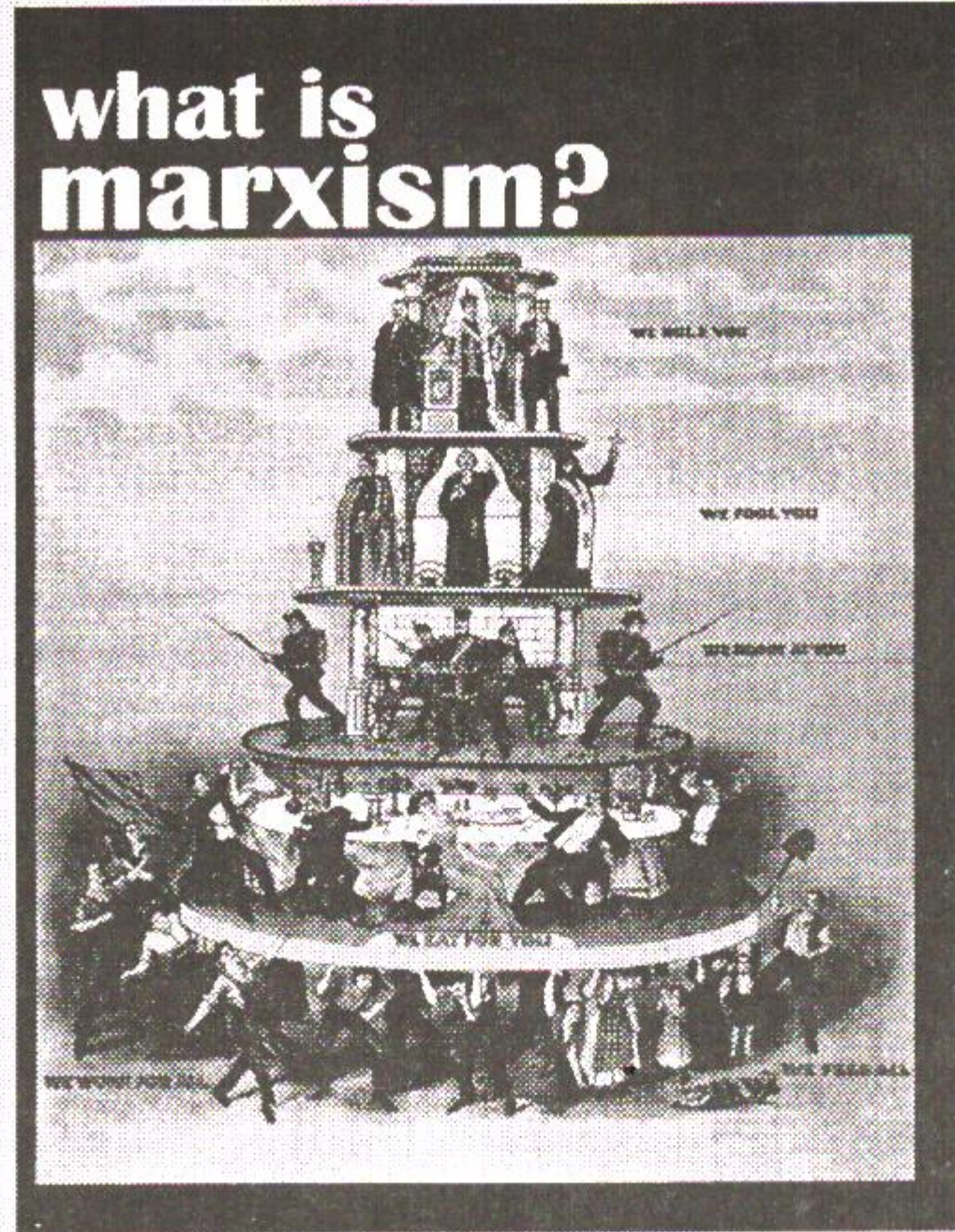
The second edition of *Reason in Revolt* is now out after being unavailable for a number of months. This book is considered a "best seller" by Wellred, and has now been published in several languages.

The question of Marxism and science demonstrates the validity of Dialectical Materialism. Many of the scientific discoveries over the last decade, since the first appearance of this book, have confirmed the positions of dialectical materialism defended in *Reason in Revolt*.

The genetic mapping of the Human Genome Project is a case in point and has been a colossal advance for science and the Marxist method. The human genome holds important philosophical and political implications. The biological determinists insisted that in some way genes are responsible for things, like homosexuality and criminality. "They attempted to reduce all social problems to the level of genetics", stated Alan Woods in the new preface. "We criticised these false theories in *Reason in Revolt*, but at the time we had no means of knowing that in a few years their unscientific character would be so clearly demonstrated."

Reason in Revolt remains a classic of Marxist philosophy in the same way as the *Dialectics of Nature* by Frederick Engels. It is essential reading for all those looking for a deeper understanding of the new sciences. □

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What is Marxism?

By Rob Sewell, Mick Brooks, Alan Woods

A new book from Wellred Publications

Publication date: September 2007. Pages: 148.

List Price £4.99

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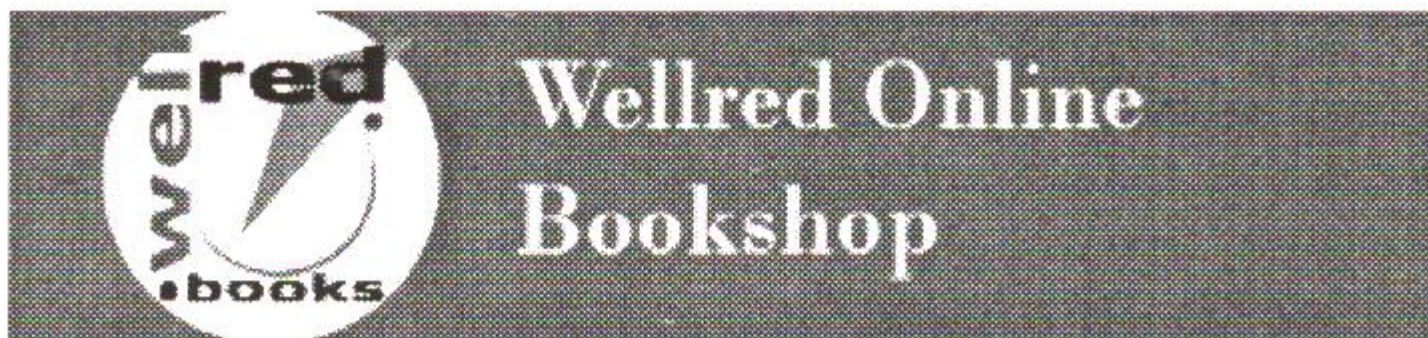
We are repeatedly told, like some old gramophone record stuck in a groove, that Marxism is either irrelevant, or out-dated, or even dead. Yet, if that were true, why are so many books and articles churned out year on year attacking Marxism?

As an answer to these lies and distortions, as well as providing a basic introduction to Marxism, Wellred Publications has done an excellent job in bringing together different articles and material. This is mainly based on the popular *Education for Socialists* series on dialectics, historical materialism and Marxist economics. These study guides were originally intended to assist the student of Marxism by providing a basic introduction, with suitable Marxist texts, that would whet their appetite for further reading and study. The book is aimed at the first-time reader and is suitable for individual study or as the basis for Marxist discussion groups.

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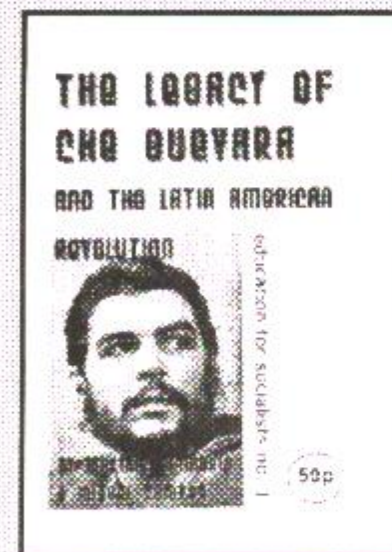
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Education for socialists pamphlet no.1

The Legacy of Che Guevara and the Latin American Revolution

By William Snabria and
Miguel Campos By James Connolly



Price: 50p + 20p for p&p

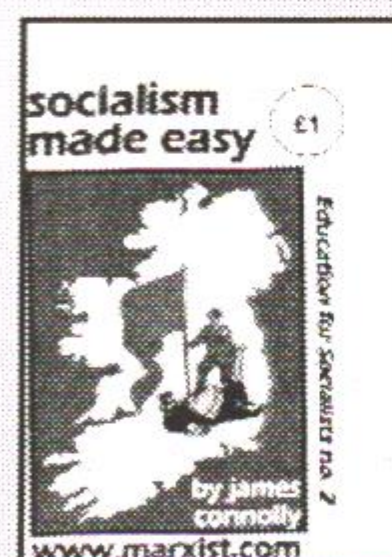
It is no surprise that this pamphlet on Che Guevara was written by two contemporary Venezuelan revolutionaries, William Sanabria and Miguel Campos, for Venezuela is leading the current Latin American revolution, just as Che did in his day. Che's legacy in Latin America is alive and well and attracting new generations across the world!

The purpose of producing this pamphlet is to educate on one of the most important figures in revolutionary history - a man whose name and image are so ever present and familiar, and yet his life, the history he took part in making and what he stood for remain enigmatic to most.

Education for socialists pamphlet no.2

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By James Connolly



Price: £1 + 20p for p&p

Socialism made easy is two essays written by James Connolly to answer basic arguments against socialism, showing their erroneous logic and reactionary basis.

The pamphlet was first produced in Chicago in 1909. Shortly after Connolly's execution by British troops in 1916 an edition was produced in Glasgow. This edition is based on that one, and has been produced by Socialist Appeal for the purpose of educating, particularly the youth. It remains vivid, informative, inspiring, readable and most of all more relevant than ever. Connolly, like us, lived in a time of imperialist oppression, but also, crucially, imperialist decay.

Help Us Fight For Socialism

NOW THAT the nights are drawing in, it is time to start acting on the traditional pre-Xmas Fighting Fund drive. Of course, we all appreciate that Christmas seems months away - and, indeed, it is. But like all campaigns, the quicker we all get moving, the better it will be.

The point has been made before - many times in fact - but it is worth making again so we are all clear: our only source of finance is you. The national press relies on funding from big business and therefore reflects their interests. We rely on funding from ordinary people, trade unions and the Labour movement and therefore reflect your interests. It is almost a law of nature.

Needless to say given that we are a Marxist publication with a socialist message, there are very few - well none in fact - big business backers interested in dropping us a few bob along the way.

So your support is not only needed, it is absolutely essential. Every reader and seller should ask themselves three questions; how much can I give? Who else can I approach to give a donation? And finally, what can myself and others do to raise cash in an organised fashion. We are asking all our local sellers groups to ensure that the question of the Fighting Fund drive is raised at every discussion meeting between now and the end of the year.

Thanks to a splendid donation from some sellers in Essex, we are still on

course to hit our 2007 target but now comes the most important period - let's see if we can raise £5000 between now and the New Year. I am confident that, given the strength of our ideas, we can do it.

Donations can be made in a number of ways:

- By cheque to us at PO box 50525, Poplar, London E14 6WG (made payable to Socialist Appeal SC)

- Cheques and cash can also be paid over the counter at any Abbey branch, quoting account number K2018479SOC.

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Steve Jones



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The Next Steps for the Left

Saturday 17th November

While the Labour Party leadership increasingly closes down and centralises control of political debate within the party, new social movements are forming to address the key issues facing the world. This conference will focus on how the left within the Labour Party and trade unions can build a bridge between these new forces and our movement, both within this country and internationally. This conference is about the left turning outward to open up the debate, creating a manifesto for 21st Century Socialism in the era of corporate globalisation.

**10am-4:30pm,
Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square,
London
(nearest tube: Holborn)**

Speakers include: Tony Benn, Katy Clark MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Kate Hudson (CND), Joe Marino (BFAWU), John McDonnell MP, Mark Serwotka (PCS), Elaine Smith MSP, Jon Trickett MP, Matt Wrack (FBU)

noticeboard

October 2007

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✚ **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.

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

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✚ **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.

✚ **Trade unions must reclaim the Labour Party!** 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 for labour and youth

Postal Workers: All-out Action Needed!

POSTAL WORKERS are to take industrial action this month over a bitter row about pay and conditions. Walk-outs will take place on 5/6 October and 8/9 October followed by a rolling programme of strikes until the dispute is resolved.

Union leaders warned that the Royal Mail was about to implement changes to the conditions of postal workers as it announced provocative executive action over pensions, terms and conditions, ending Sunday collections, closures and job cuts. Oxford and Reading Mail Centres are to close.

Royal Mail had improved its original 2.5% pay offer, which was heavily rejected by postal workers and led to a series of national walk-outs over the summer. The company is now offering a two-year deal worth 6.7%.

However, Royal Mail was sticking to its pension proposals which would see an increase in the retirement age and increased contributions. The final salary scheme would be closed to all new entrants. The union's postal executive has therefore announced a ballot for strike action in all other sectors such as Parcel Force. This comes at a time when the government is attempting to impose a 2% limit on the public sector. Brown warned unions in his keynote address to TUC delegates there would be "no loss of discipline" over public sector pay in the future. Royal Mail is now saying that any deal with the union must include "total flexibility", which means the declaration of all-out war with postal workers. Local manage-

ment has refused to talk with union reps. Royal Mail bosses have thrown down the gauntlet! We have no alternative but to fight.

If the management refuses to budge over these attacks following this month's programme of action, the union has no alternative but to go for all-out industrial action. This should be linked up with the other public sector unions who are also in the firing line. A national public sector strike would soon bring management to its senses and also force the Brown government to retreat.

**By Andy Blake, secretary,
London 7 CWU (personal capacity)**



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