

Local Elections • Trade Unions • NUS • Middle East

# Socialist Appeal

June 2008 issue 163

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## New Labour sinking fast



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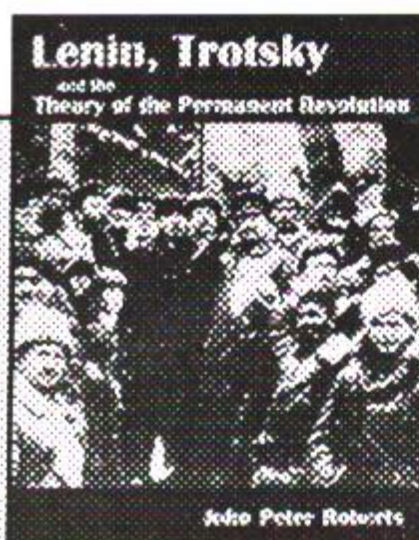
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 by John Peter Roberts

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## Bulletin Board

### Speak Up for Public Services Rally and Lobby

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 The event starts with a rally in Methodist Central Hall at 1pm and concludes with public sector employees lobbying MPs late into the afternoon.

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# New Labour - Running into the Sand

THE CREWE by-election, with an 18% swing to the Tories, confirms that New Labour are dead in the water. Railway workers and other working class people who have voted Labour for generations have finally had enough. The betrayals and disappointments of New Labour have caused these electors to break the habit of a lifetime. Make no mistake about it. Mass working class abstentions have done for Brown and his witless crew.

## Crisis Government

The similarities between the Tory Major Government that took over after Thatcher and the position that Gordon Brown finds himself in is obvious. After defeating Kinnock in 1992, it was clear that Major was presiding over a crisis government - and then the bottom fell out of the ERM. Interest rates went up to 15% and the housing market was choked off. The subsequent recession resulted in a slump in Tory support beginning in the South East that the Tories never recovered from. As we predicted (very much against the accepted wisdom inside the Labour Party) the Tories were reduced to a rump in the South East.

The collapse of Northern Rock reflects problems for Brown on a far bigger scale than in 1992. Britain's financial system is tied by a thousand threads to the US financial system and the globalisation of financial markets and hence the globalisation of risk means that there is no such thing as "a little local difficulty".

New Labour is absolute-

ly responsible for squandering the opportunity provided by 11 years of landslide Labour victories. This is the first Tory by-election victory over Labour for thirty years. As we pointed out before 1997 the programme of New Labour had nothing to offer workers and their families. We also predicted that sooner or later the bosses would line up behind the Tories as the Blair/Brown project failed.

## Lunacy

But there is of course 'no accounting for stupidity' specifically the lunacy of abolishing the 10p tax rate a month before the election. It's like rubbing salt in the wound for thousands of families who are stuck with fuel price hikes and increases in food costs. And debt costs. People just stayed at home rather than vote.

Labour lost a huge amount of ground in the by-election. It's obvious that the New Labour project is running into the sand.

The result could have been a wake-up call for the Labour government. They still have two years to turn the situation round. But they seem to have lost the will to live. Faced with mass working class abstentions in the May 1st local elections, they dithered and stuttered instead of fundamentally changing course before Crewe.

## Squalid

The hurling of £2.7bn at the electorate through a mini-budget in reparation for the 10p tax 'mistake' (described by the Tories as

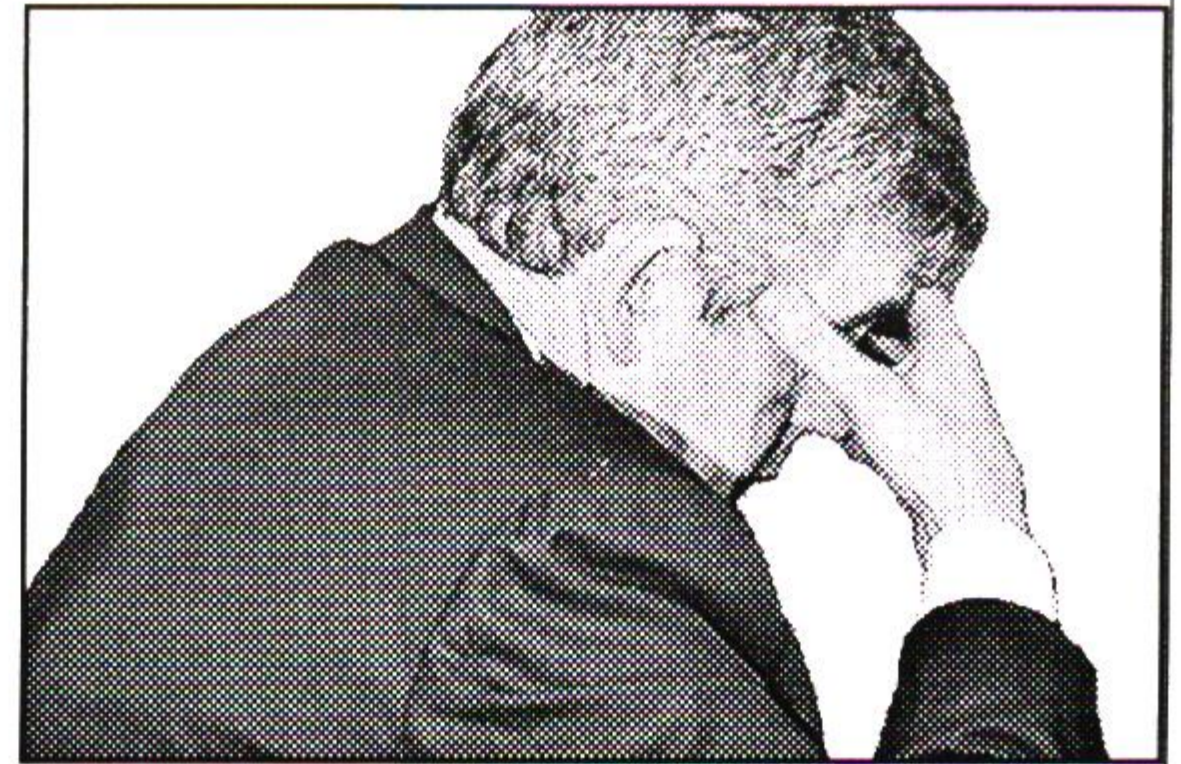
like throwing £20 notes from the back of a lorry), has been treated by the people of Crewe as yet another squalid manoeuvre by New Labour. The present leadership have proved themselves to be hopeless. The Labour Party needs to be fundamentally transformed if it is to win again.

Regardless of the plans of mice, men and Mandelsons the mass of workers ultimately have no choice but to fight for change under capitalism. Decades of experience of the Labour movement in Britain illustrate that when the workers do move to fight back, then they always move through their traditional organisations. That means the unions and the Labour Party, in spite of the grand strategies of the sects.

## Turning of the tide

The tide has begun to turn in the unions with the magnificent action organised by the PCS, NUT and the UCU on April 24th. There is a distinct possibility that UNISON members may be forced into a corner over pay restraint and, in the current economic climate, the threat of government spending cuts to pay for New Labour's self-imposed budget crisis. Certainly there is a head of steam developing in the public sector.

The wretched John Major hung on right to the



last day possible before the electorate booted him out of Number 10. Likewise Gordon Brown could hang on till 2010. Brown has already shown us how New Labour can throw away elections. Instead of just watching New Labour steaming full speed ahead towards the iceberg, and opening the way for a Tory government, it's time to reclaim the Labour Party for the working class.

## Major

Brown wants to get away with more years of below-inflation wage increases for 6 million public sector workers. We can't put up with that! The state sector trade union leaderships need to launch a united battle against wage restraint now and not just sit round hoping something will turn up.

As we have explained before, the mass of workers need to experience a Labour Government before they would begin to draw more radical conclusions. Now's the turning of the tide, the beginning of the beginning of that change.

**For the trade unions to reclaim the Labour Party.  
For a Labour government on a Socialist Programme.**

## New Labour meltdown

### by Socialist Appeal

THE TORY victories in the local elections on May 1st mean that the Conservatives are odds on to win the next general election and form the next government. Theoretically the Labour leadership could turn the situation round, but they seem incapable of changing their disastrous course. New Labour is in meltdown.

The results are as bad as any in forty years, since 1968. In that year, as a result of the disappointments of the right wing Harold Wilson Labour government, Labour was reduced to controlling just 13 boroughs. Accrington went Tory. Hackney went Tory. Of course the Tories won the general election in 1970.

In May 2008 Labour lost another 331 seats, starting from a very low base, since there had been losses in local elections for 11 years past. The Tories picked up 256 seats. New Labour, the governing party, is actually in third place in the polls with just 24% of the popular vote. The LibDems are ahead on 25% and the Tories are in the lead with 44%. These results suggest a Tory landslide victory in the next general election with a majority of over 100 seats. The Conservatives made gains North, South, East and West - winning Bury, Harlow, Maidstone and North Tyne. Labour managed to lose heartlands such as Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Sunderland.

Why has it come to this? Many Labour activists and dissident MPs - and there are a lot more dissidents

now they realise their seats are not safe - blame Gordon Brown. Gordon Brown has been Prime Minister for just ten months. A sure way to reduce him to burbling incoherence is to ask him what his 'vision' is. He can't answer. But if he doesn't know what his government is for, how is the electorate supposed to guess?

This is not just a personal failing on Brown's part. This is the heritage of New Labour, founded by Blair and Brown. They felt that elections were won and lost, not by the votes of millions who have voted Labour all their lives, but by a handful of swing voters in marginal constituencies. So Brown has to guard his tongue. Nobody knows what he stands for because he stands for no principle.

### Blair

It should be remembered that Blair left office as a shop-soiled, despised figure. Brown at first experienced a bounce in the opinion polls since he was seen as uninvolved in the Blair era of lies and spin. The popularity bounce collapsed when he threatened to call an election and then changed his mind because polls revealed he might lose. He too was identified as another devious spinmeister from the New Labour factory. But Brown's dithering and burbling comes because his government is in crisis.

Others see Labour's unpopularity as down to the abolition of the 10p rate of tax. This meant that 5 million low paid workers (natural Labour supporters) would lose out. Darling's mini-budget in May has

thrown money at the public relations disaster, but still leaves 1.1 million of the poorest worse off.

If it really is true that Brown did not realise abolition would hurt the poor, then he is too stupid to be Prime Minister - or Chancellor of the Exchequer. In reality it was all part of the New Labour agenda. Brown gloried in stealing the Tories' clothes on the tax issue, regarding it as a masterpiece of strategy in preparation for the next election (which never came).

### John McDonnell

In any case there were voices that warned of the consequences of the abolition of the 10p rate. Left wing Labour MP John McDonnell explained exactly what would happen. And then? And then, when Blair resigned and the opportunity for John McDonnell to challenge Brown in a leadership contest arose, the unthinking cattle in the Parliamentary Labour Party allowed themselves to be bullied by the thuggish whips into nominating Brown in such numbers that Brown was 'crowned' without a contest. So Brown became Prime Minister without a single person voting for him. Now the backbenchers, fearful for their precious seats, pathetically whine in the lobbies about Brown's alleged psychological flaws and political failings. They have themselves to blame.

Then there's the economy. Voters have become uncomfortably aware that the good times are now at an end. Recession is closing

in. We haven't seen the worst of it yet. That is not why electors are angry with New Labour. They are angry because for eleven years Brown's mantra has been 'no return to boom and bust.' He has lied, claiming responsibility for a boom that was happening anyway and was nothing to do with government policy. Everybody can see he lied.

Now he doesn't want to claim responsibility for the bust. In fact New Labour is powerless against the rhythms of global capitalism, since they are determined to take no action against the system. People know this government will do nothing to protect them from hard times. Quite simply, New Labour has been rumbled by the electorate.

Will there be a leadership contest? One of the symptoms of the crisis in the ranks of the Labour Party is that the PLP is awash with rumour and plotting. The problem is to come up with a credible alternative to Gordon Brown. One of the features of New Labour's rule is that Parliamentary candidates have been ferociously vetted to weed out any signs of independence.

Backbenchers are engaging with their pagers rather than their brains, terrified of being 'off-message.' Unelected enforcers have imposed the will of the Prime Minister's office upon the Parliamentary Party. As a result the PLP and the Cabinet are packed with talentless mediocrities. Who in the Cabinet would really pose a serious alternative to Brown? We would support a contest and support John McDonnell if he stood. But

## odds'n'ends

we remember that the PLP stole our right to elect the leader last year.

In London Ken Livingstone was caught in the slipstream of New Labour's unpopularity. After the second preference votes were counted, he lost by 47% to 53% to the hard right old Etonian Tory, Boris Johnson. Livingstone did not do enough to differentiate himself from the government. In his campaign he stood on his record as an experienced administrator and incumbent against Johnson, who argued for some sort of change.

Ken has always done better when he has stood as his own man. In the 1980s as leader of the Greater London Council he mounted some kind of resistance to Thatcher, and won credit for it. In 2000 he stood up to the bullies in the New Labour machine, stood as an independent against the official Labour candidate, gave him a good thrashing in the polls, and emerged as Mayor. Ken lists his hobbies as breeding newts and socialism. He could have won if he had put the second hobby as part of his job description.

### London

The London elections show how the ruling class is now swinging behind the Tories. After all, what use is New Labour to them now? A wall of money, at least £1½ million stood behind Boris Johnson's campaign.

The Fascist British National Party got a worrying 2.84% in London, and a seat in the London Assembly, though they were marginalised elsewhere. It is possible that their second preference votes turned the trick for Boris in the Mayoral race.

New Labour has abandoned the poor. There seems no let-up in their handouts and concessions to big business. They have learned nothing

from their bloody nose, in which case they will stagger on to defeat at the next elections.

The New Labour 'agenda' was consolidated after 1992, when Labour had lost their fourth successive general election. They created the myth that Labour had lurched so far to the left in the 1980s as to be unelectable. We have unpicked that myth - See 'Blairites re-write history,' issue 152. They claimed that Labour had to 'triangulate' in order to win. Labour had to imitate Tory policies and echo their prejudices in order to win over swing voters in marginal constituencies. Forget the poor, forget the working class! Their vote is in the bag anyway.

### Abstentions

But under New Labour the Labour vote in the polls has sunk lower than the previous low point of 1983. The catastrophic results of 1968 and 2008 have been 'achieved' when the right wing was in complete control of policy and the Party. The message is clear - New Labour loses elections.

The reason for the disaster in the polls is mass working class abstentions in previously solid Labour areas. Workers see no reason why they should walk a few yards to vote for a government that has abandoned them. The middle of the road Labour think tank 'Compass' has declared, "New Labour is dead." We knew it was all based on spin, on denying every principle the Party had originally been set up to defend. But they told us it was the only way to win elections. Now we see New Labour has led us into a dead end. It's time to reverse!

What is needed is to begin the fight to reclaim the Labour Party from the hijackers now.

"RATHER THAN questioning whether huge salaries are morally justified, we should celebrate the fact that people can be enormously successful in this country. Rather than placing a cap on that success, we should be questioning why it is not available to more people...any progressive party worth its name must enthusiastically advocate empowering people to climb without limits, free from any barrier holding them back." John Hutton, 'Labour' minister.

Gordon Brown was delivered a rap on the knuckles by the House of Commons transport committee. As Chancellor he insisted the contract to upgrade London Underground be awarded to private consortium Metronet. Predictably, Metronet went belly up last year amid much scandal leaving us with a £2bn bill. The committee denounced Brown's "spectacular failure." Committee chair, old-style right winger Gwyneth Dunwoody (since deceased), commented on the debacle, "Any reasonable person, looking at the current situation, would find scant evidence to sustain a dogma that the private sector will always provide deliver greater efficiency, innovation and value for money than the public sector." Well, quite.

How have the firms that made up the Metronet consortium been punished? Balfour Beatty and Atkins, as members of the Connect Plus consortium, have been given a £5bn contract to widen the M25. You couldn't make it up!

From the horse's mouth. "I no longer believe in the market's self-healing power." Joseph Ackerman, chief executive of Deutsche Bank.

The shocking statistics -  
 £561bn: what the world spent on arms last year  
 £32bn: the annual amount given in aid  
 £275bn: total debt of developing countries  
 From the London Metro

It has been revealed that billions of pounds of the Private Finance Initiative (projects, which includes ownership of the new Home Office building and (ironically) the Treasury itself, have been moved to tax havens, perhaps on the Channel Islands. The Guardian (5th March) headlines the story, "Scheme to save taxpayers money that became tax avoidance scheme."

90% of the UK registered company in charge of the completion of the Home Office building, running the Private Finance Initiative, transferred the company's accounts to avoid paying tax. This project, and others alike, are all part of Gordon Brown's trust in PFI. □

## Referendum on independence - Where do we stand?

by Ewan Gibbs

WENDY ALEXANDER, leader of the Labour Party in Scotland, has declared that the SNP Government should "bring on" a referendum on independence and has gone as far as to not rule out a bill calling for a poll earlier than the Nationalist administration's proposed date of 2010. This has resulted in the issue of Scottish independence making a large impact on the national media for the first time since the SNP's victory in the Scottish Parliament elections in May of last year. It has also unleashed a potential Pandora's Box that is threatening to divide the Labour leadership in Scotland from the national leadership.

This latest stunt follows another large electoral defeat for the Labour Party, the second in two years. With this U-Turn Wendy Alexander and the Scottish Labour leadership hope to show up a popular SNP government by making them face up to their commitment on independence head on. Alexander also knows that although the SNP is popular, the idea of independence is not, and in highlighting this issue she hopes to give the SNP a bloody nose. This has been done particularly as she know they do not want to hold a referendum until 2010, when the political situation in the rest of the UK is likely to be more favourable to independence.

The SNP government is quite happy to wait until 2010 as, by this point, we could be faced with either the tail end of an increasingly unpopular Labour government or a Tory government that has unleashed a vicious arsenal of attacks on the working class. Under such conditions it is likely that independence would gain a higher vote from disenchanted working class voters. Clearly this game of real politik flows from the historical legacy of Braveheart himself!

The issue of a referendum has become an embarrassment for the Labour Party's national leadership. Under pressure from David Cameron,

Brown was forced to somewhat distance himself from Wendy Alexander. He went as far as to argue that in fact she had not argued in favour of a referendum. This is a potentially divisive issue, particularly at a time when Gordon Brown is desperate to show himself to be committed to "Britishness". To be seen to in any way give into SNP demands or to be contemplating compromising the union could be disastrous for him. This comes at a time when the Labour Party is already suffering from an election defeat and consistent poor showings in the opinion polls.

### Wendy Alexander

As Marxists we support the call for a referendum. In recent years the issue of Scottish independence has become one of importance and it is an issue that should be ultimately decided upon by the people of Scotland. It would be to their detriment to leave this fundamental question unanswered. While supporting such a referendum and fully respecting its outcome, we would be under no illusions with nationalism or independence.

If such a poll were to go ahead we would argue against independence for Scotland, and of the necessity to fight along class lines rather than national lines. An independent Scotland on a capitalist basis would not remove one of the problems of poor public services, privatisation, student debt, unem-

ployment or low pay that we face just now, not to mention the effects of the financial crisis that is now spilling over into the real economy.

### SNP

In power the SNP have shown they provide no solutions to the problems of the Scottish working class. They have systematically failed to deliver on the progressive election promises such as abolishing student debt. The SNP are a party of big business through and through, with a significant portion of their funding coming from the millionaire bus tycoon and infamous homophobic bigot Bryan Souter. They were also publicly supported by the ex-chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland as a party for Scottish business interests. Edinburgh is now one of the biggest finance centres in the

world and companies such as Standard Life and the Royal Bank see the SNP as a useful tool through which to gain greater financial autonomy. If the conditions are correct they will support full independence as this would allow them to dominate Scotland to an even greater degree.

Ultimately the problem of nationalism and the question of a referendum lie squarely at the feet of the right wing Labour leaders. By making compromises

with big businesses and refusing to pose the question of socialism, the Labour Party leadership has only itself to blame for the rise of nationalism in Scotland and the support of the SNP. Support for a referendum in the immediacy can only lead to the long term defeat of nationalism if it is accompanied by the adoption of a bold socialist programme that addresses the fundamental problems of workers and youth. □



# What's going on?

by **Melanie MacDonald**

THERE IS an on-going struggle between the right-wing and the left-wing in student unions up and down the country, which in turn is an indicator of an even larger struggle over democracy taking place in the National Union of Students (NUS).

Because student unions are home to our fledgling politicians, what happens there often mirrors, on a smaller scale, the political ideas and balance of forces outside academia. That's the case now.

## Governance Reviews

For some time there has been a series of campaigns in universities around the country and in the federation of student unions, the NUS, pushing for what are called 'Governance Reviews'. These reviews propose radical changes to union structures that would see elected executives and councils replaced with an unelected board of directors or trustees.

This quote from the website of Students for Democracy UCL says it all: "the Governance Review would take a union run by students for students and turn its assets over to a corporation run by management for profit. To do this, the Governance Review would change the legal form of the union, from an unincorporated association with sovereign policy making general meetings to a company limited run by a board of trustees, accountable to no one but themselves. This would amount to a takeover of the union by its well paid senior management and the end of organised collective student representation at UCL".

## NUS

At the urging of full time, well paid managers affiliated with AMSU (the Association of Managers of Students' Unions) student union leaders have been pushing for these reviews in the NUS. On the local student union level, managers have been spurring on the

sabbatical officers (who get a paid year out on top of a good, professional sounding addition to their CVs if they don't end up landing a full time job there after school) to push these policies through. In turn, the sabbatical officers have solicited the help of a faction of New Labour, organized independents, and the extreme right wing in the student unions. As in any struggle, there are conflicting interests.

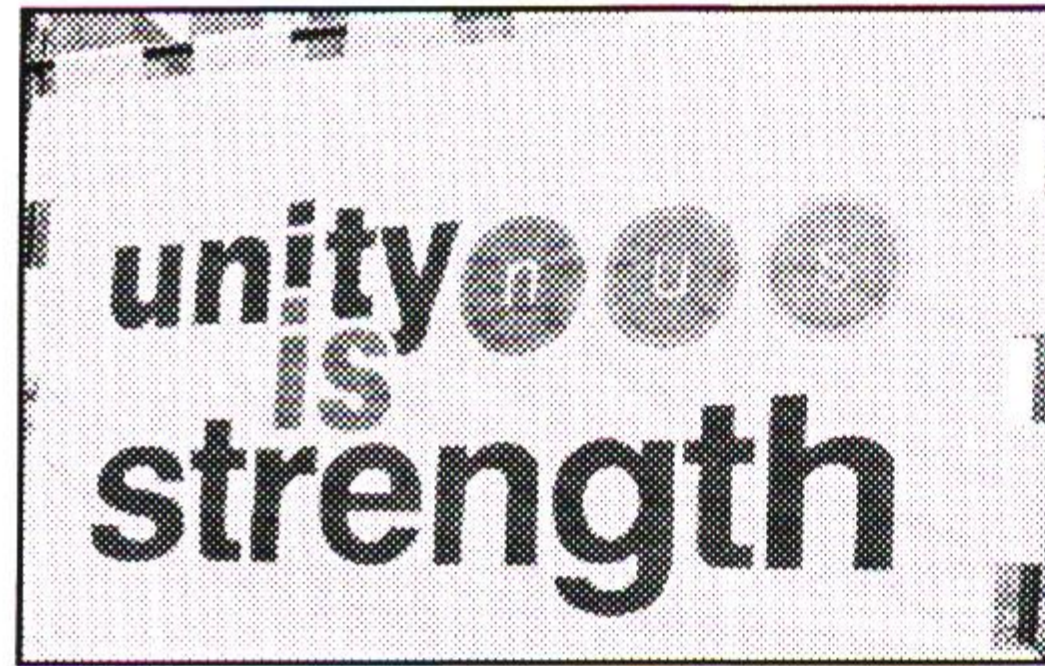
## Management

For management, their interests are mostly financial but, it is also about job security, prestige, and power within the unions. For the right-wing students, it is political conservatism and lack of trust in the broad population of students to run things properly - and personal careerism. For the left-wing, who have been generally weak and unorganized in the past, and who oppose the plan, it is mostly a struggle to keep the last vestige of a political arena open to them.

## Executive officers

One of the big features of the Governance Reviews is abolishing student executive officers, leaving executive power in the hands of full time staff. Samantha Godwin, who helped defeat the Governance Review 'reforms' at UCL said she thinks the real intention behind AMSU wanting to get rid of general meetings, "is primarily to curb the left" and also, "to increase their job security, making them less accountable."

Thus, once Governance Review reforms are established, the right has a permanent bloc of non-students to push through policies that mostly benefit them. But it is not only about job security and careerism. There are real



material interests at stake. Control of the students' union apparatus also means commercial control of student union businesses and services like the gyms, theatres, cafes and student

bars to name a few. For example, UCL SU generates over £3 million in commercial revenue as well as £2 million in grants from the government, so the stakes are high. Unions often have huge infrastructures with hundreds of full time, permanent staff members and non-permanent staff.

The NUS has £5m in revenues. The result of the campaign for changes by Governance Reviews is that most university student unions, with exceptions like UCL, SOAS and LSE, are now run by slim executives and elected student councils and policy-making general meetings are mostly a thing of the past. Referring to those university unions that have been restructured, Sam said "It's no longer a student union, it's a debating society".

Despite these 'reforms' going ahead in universities around the country, there was a recent surprise defeat at the NUS annual conference in Blackpool on April 1 where the motion proposing 'change and modernization' failed to get the two thirds majority needed, missing the mark by 25 votes.

## Red-baiting

Rob Owen, a member of the NUS executive, wrote "Defeat caused the leadership to lose the plot with denunciations of those opposed to the review and abuse directed at left wing speakers...Policy debate for the next two days was marked by red-baiting..."

The right wing remains in the ascendancy. Their aim is to extinguish democracy in the NUS and in student unions. They should be fought every inch of the way. □

## On the brink of revolution

by Terry McPartlan

**IN OUR last issue Terry showed how discontent, starting with student demonstrations, detonated a spontaneous general strike of ten million workers which threatened the existence of capitalism in an advanced capitalist country for a generation. The Socialist Party leaders were all at sea. The Communist Party, the main workers' party at that time, was consciously holding the movement back.**

The Communist Trade Union Federation (CGT) leaders began to realise what was going on. 300,000 extra copies of Communist paper L'Humanite had been printed for the demonstration of May 13th. Now the official leaders tried to impose their own strike committees over the heads of the radicalised workers and youth. On May 17th L'Humanite saluted "the workers who have followed our call." But they had made no call to action. A clear attempt was being made to steer the movement into a 'safe' direction and pour cold water on the strike. Attempts were even made at strike-breaking. The CGT leaders talked of the movement as a "great tranquil force" arguing that "any talk of insurrection would change the character of the strike", which amounted to a recognition of the seismic shifts in society taking place.

Meanwhile the government hung suspended in mid-air. De Gaulle, on a state visit to Romania, was taunted as "leading a gov-

ernment in exile." The virus had even begun to infect the CRS (riot police) whose representatives warned they might not be able to prevent industrial action.

The Communist Party was in turmoil, reflecting the pressure of workers on the party which had traditionally been seen as the main workers' party. 55,000 new members joined in 1968. Paradoxically, at a time when a genuine Marxist tendency could have developed rapidly in the CP and particularly in the Young Communist League, the so-called Trotskyists around Ernest Mandel had recently walked out of the YCL and set up their own little organisations, the PCI and JCR, in competition to the CP.

### Bolshevik Party

The programme of the CP revolved around the call for democracy, harking back to the Popular Front policies of 1936. 'Democracy first, socialism in the far distant future.' Probably the most rigid, most Stalinist CP in Western Europe, the French CP had nothing in common with the Bolshevik Party of 1917. Decades of reformist degeneration stilted the leaders at a time when a decisive revolutionary leadership was vital. The pressure from below was manifested in an uncharacteristic call from CP General Secretary Waldeck Rochet for the "nationalisation of the big banks and monopolies", but no perspective or programme of campaign as to how this might be achieved was presented.

As the workers move-

ment escalated, layers of the middle classes began to follow their lead.

Theology students, magistrates, lawyers, museum curators and many others demonstrated, threatened strikes and began to question their role in society.

The action committees in the factories, offices and neighbourhoods began to link together. In Nantes, the strikers ran the city and introduced price controls and other reforms. Elements of 'dual power' developed. On one side the government and state apparatus, on the other the action committees led by the workers. The defenders of the old system were fighting against the workers struggling to find a way to the new - and forced to begin to reorganise society to meet their needs. Scandalously, the CP and CGT leaders refused to call for national co-ordination of these committees. De Gaulle arrived back from Romania demanding action. In discussion with the police chief he called for the police to take the universities back from the students, but was warned sharply of the dangers of this action. "Blood will flow" was the reply.

French capitalism was looking into the abyss. Three of the four conditions outlined by Lenin for a successful revolution existed.



The ruling class was split, unable to govern by the old methods and divided as to what policy to adopt. The working class was demonstrating a tremendous capacity to struggle. The strike grew day by day drawing in wider and wider layers. Thirdly, the middle classes were beginning to move behind the workers and could not be relied on as a social base for the regime or indeed capitalism. The fourth condition however was lacking - a revolutionary leadership of the working class, capable of explaining the tasks that the workers movement required to transform society.

### De Gaulle's Referendum

The leadership of the workers' movement was hopelessly out of touch. The Wall Street Journal commented that "they were all part of the establishment, faced with a popular tide they had cause to fear." Whilst they sought an "acceptable solution", the Cannes Film Festival was stopped by strike action as were horse and motor rac-



ing and even golf competitions. The news was partly under the control of radio and TV journalists. All that was required in France '68 was a Marxist leadership with a clear understanding of the way forward.

In true Bonapartist fashion De Gaulle called for a referendum on "participation". After narrowly surviving a censure motion in the French parliament two days before, De Gaulle faced a split party, sections of which demanded his resignation.

Then the government gave the order to storm the barricades. The night of May 24th was the most violent yet. 800 were arrested, 1500 injured. With this backdrop the trade union leaders entered tripartite talks with the employers and government. In reality, the trade union leaders were negotiating with ghosts. Power lay in the lap of the workers' leaders, whose hands were shackled to the old society.

The union leaders emerged delighted at their success. All workers would receive a minimum 7% pay rise. The statutory minimum wage was raised 33%. Some shop workers received 72% increases. Strikers were even given 50% of their salary for the periods they were occupying the factories. But when the leaders went to the factories they were booed and jeered. The workers understood the situation far better than their leaders. The CP leaders argued the movement was a struggle for wages, that the workers were not 'ready for socialism.' The movement had gone beyond merely economic demands - the question now was 'who ran society'?

De Gaulle understood the situation. On May 29th,

fleeing Paris he said, "The future depends not on us but on God." The strong man of France sought out the army commanders at Baden-Baden and demanded their support. At the same time half a million workers demonstrated in Paris, many carrying placards calling for a 'people's government'.

On May 30th De Gaulle returned, having been comforted by the army commanders. He called a general election for the 3rd week in June around the slogan, "me or chaos". A demonstration in his support was organized in Paris bringing contingents from all over France, the composition of which was overwhelmingly middle class and elderly, representing all the reactionary elements of French society. A bourgeois commentator wrote however, that, despite this demonstration, the balance of forces lay decisively in favour of the workers' movement.

## Tanks

Tanks and lorry loads of soldiers descended on the outskirts of Paris. De Gaulle had demanded army support for a rival government in the event of a revolution. But the events of the previous period had not left the army untouched. The army was made up of conscripts. A Times editorial asked, "Can De Gaulle use the army?" The answer it gave was yes, "But only once". Even this was not guaranteed since there are many examples of an army crumbling in the face of revolution. De Gaulle had a gamble on his hands. By May 31st even the London Evening Standard was forced to recognise the CP had "all the levers of power

in its hands" but lacked the intention to take power. A revolutionary situation does not last forever and the tide was beginning to turn.

## Election Campaign

De Gaulle entered the election campaign leaving behind him a trail of sacked ministers and using the "red scare". On their part the CP leaders argued workers should return to work and negotiate with management. Their election platform failed to give a socialist position and amid disillusion with their role they lost 605,000 votes, the Left Federation of Mitterand lost 570,000 whilst De Gaulle gained 1,200,000. Despite the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries, which played a role in the defeat of the lefts, the major reason for their defeat was their political position. The CP even claimed the clothes of De Gaulle,

portraying themselves as the 'party of law and order'.

Many workers remained out on strike until the end of June but by then the movement was subsiding. A tremendous opportunity had been missed. Victory in France and the development of a healthy workers' state would have been a shining example to the workers of the Stalinist and capitalist countries. The movement sent ripples internationally. Students throughout the world watched the events in

France, sparking protests in Britain, Argentina and Italy among others.

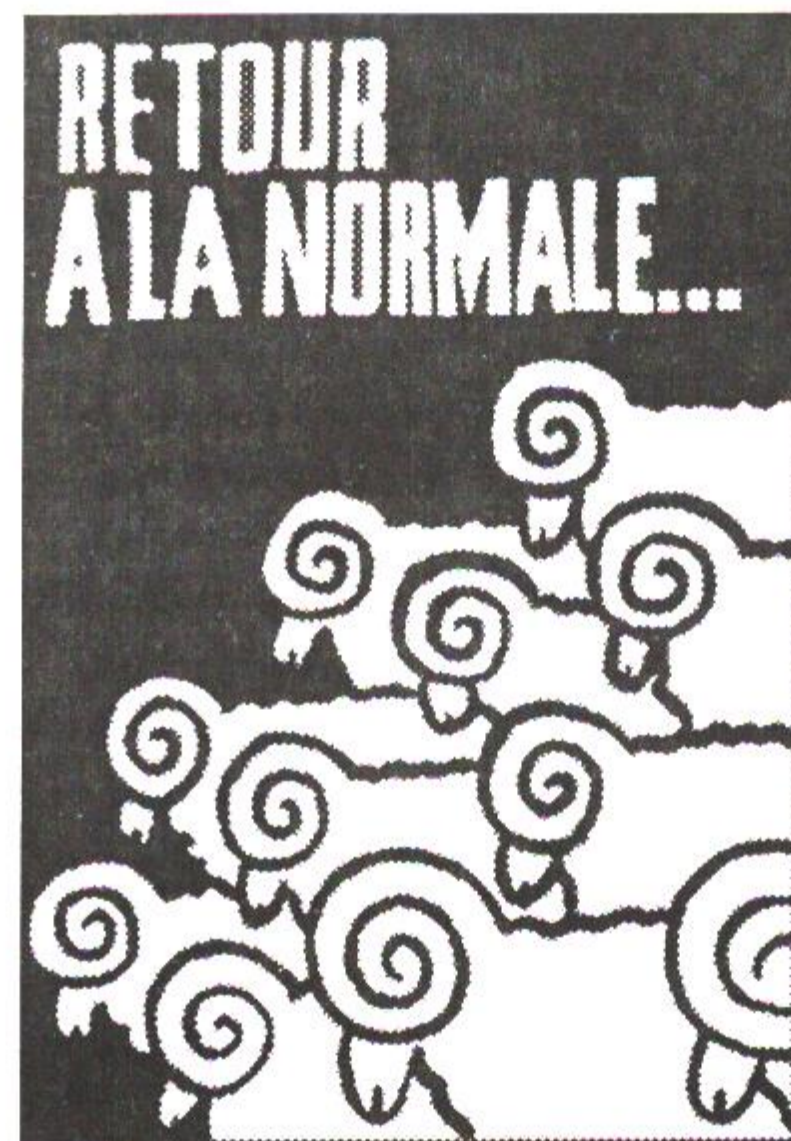
In France, the employers attempted over a period of time to turn the screw back down on the workers. Victimisations and reprisals resulted in thousands of workers being sacked. But for De Gaulle victory was hollow. Wounded by the strike movement, he was eventually defeated in his referendum on 'participation' and regional government and resigned less than a year later.

The defeat of the movement had a marked effect on the French labour movement. Not until 1981 was Mitterand elected as president with a majority socialist

government. The Socialist Party, formed shortly after the great strike, failed to carry through a fundamental change in French society, despite an ostensibly left programme on assuming office.

The events of

May 1968 demonstrated the colossal potential power of the working class and the potential which exists on a world scale for the construction of a society freed from capitalism in which hunger, poverty and inequality could be abolished in France and internationally. As such it is not sufficient to 'celebrate' the events of 1968 but to learn from them in preparation for the movements of workers which will spring forth from the decay of capitalism on a world scale. □



## Defending the Russian Revolution

By Rob Sewell

"PETROGRAD IS in an unprecedented catastrophic condition. There is no bread. The population is given the remaining potato flour and crusts. The Red Capital is on the verge of perishing from famine," stated Lenin. "The political situation has become extremely critical owing to both external and internal causes."

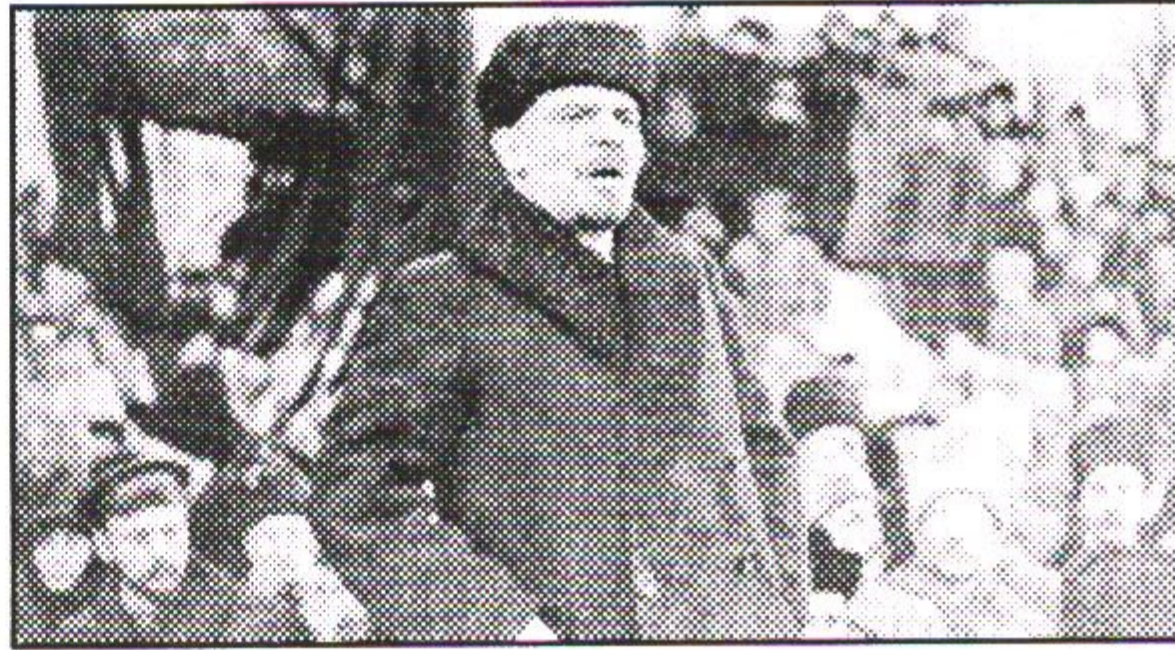
This view of Lenin's summed up the horrendous plight of the Russian Revolution in May 1918, some six months after the successful Bolshevik insurrection and the introduction of Soviet rule. The "external and internal causes" which threatened the Revolution were the aggressive actions of the imperialist powers, foreign blockade, the organisation of internal counter-revolution, and the economic sabotage of the landlords and capitalists.

### October Revolution

"By the end of 1918", wrote the historian E. H. Carr, "the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic was confined within the same boundaries as medieval Muscovy before the conquests of Ivan the Terrible; and very few people - few perhaps even of the Bolsheviks themselves - believed that the regime could survive." The Revolution was hanging by a thread.

The October Revolution was the greatest event in human history. It swept

aside the old ruling class and placed in power the workers and peasants of Russia. It began to translate the theory of socialism into reality. It became as a result



a beacon and inspiration to the downtrodden masses of the world.

However, no ruling class in history has ever given up its powers and privileges without a struggle, and Russia was no exception. Although the revolution was relatively peaceful, with only five deaths in Petrograd, the capitalists internationally were determined to crush the revolution in blood. The first tasks of the Bolsheviks were therefore to implement its programme and above all organise the defence of the revolution.

### War Communism

This defence of the revolution against all the ruthless attacks and sabotage of the capitalists and landlords as well as the intervention of the imperialist powers has been used by bourgeois historians to slander Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Robert Service, for instance, in his three-volume history of Lenin attacks Lenin as a "ruthless terrorist" and "power-crazy". He denounces Lenin for the "horrors which he had perpetrated between 1917 and

1922." While his 'history' purports to be "a balanced, multi-faceted account", his pen is dripping with spite and malice. He continues "nobody can write

detachedly about Lenin. His intolerance and repressiveness continues to appal me."

No doubt, Service and our wise professors, together with the reformist apologists, wanted Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks to capitulate to the forces of the counter-revolution and renounce their socialist 'adventure'. The Civil War is viewed by Service as a game of cricket between gentlemen, rather than a struggle between revolution (which he detests) and counter-revolution of the old order (which in effect he justifies). In this war between the classes, which is a fight to the death, ruthless measures are necessary and inevitable. It is a struggle of living forces. The young Soviet State was faced with the invasion of 21 foreign armies out to topple the regime. The Revolution was faced with internal counter-revolution which wanted to restore the old order of landlord and capitalist over the bones of the socialist republic. It was faced with an external blockade that wanted to starve the revolution to death. Under these circumstances, while waiting for help from revolutions in the west, the Soviet government had no alternative but to resist with everything at their disposal to preserve this outpost of world revolution.

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### Kid-gloves

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the counter-revolutionaries were treated with kid-gloves. The day after the revolution the death penalty was abolished. All those arrested were released as long as they gave a written promise not to engage in sabotage. Victor Serge described these liberal acts as "foolish clemency," as these individual simply gave their promise and went off to organise counter-revolution.

The counter-revolution (the 'Whites') attempted to smash the revolution through the organisation of open civil war as well as economic sabotage. The White Terror began in April 1918 when up to 20,000 workers were murdered in Finland by the Whites. The Civil War was a turning point. Soviet regime was forced to react. Only through resolute action would the first workers' republic in history survive.

### Lenin

As Lenin explained: "The terror was forced on us by the Terror of the Entente, the terror of mighty world imperialism, which has been throttling the workers and peasants, and is condemning them to death by starvation because they are fighting for their country's freedom."

### Blockade

The capitalist blockade had resulted in a crippling economic blow. By 1919 nothing was being imported into or exported out of

Soviet Russia. This resulted in a drastic shortage of raw materials and food, resulting in starvation and collapsing productivity. Workers were struggling to work exhausted and undernourished and often collapsed. It was out of sheer fortitude and heroism towards the revolution that kept things going. The Civil War demanded the creation of a new Red Army by Trotsky. The army needed to be fed and clothed. This was to result in compulsory requisitioning of grain from the peasants as the only way to feed the towns and army. There was no alternative. There were even hunger riots in Smolensk and elsewhere. A decree was issued demanding the compulsory delivery to the state of all excess grain. This measure severely strained relations between the workers and peasants, especially the rich peasants (kulaks), who began to hide their grain.

In the worst period, bread was rationed at 1 ounce (28 grams) a day for workers. Along with famine, disease spread rapidly. Within two years, some five million people fell ill with typhus. The population of Petrograd fell from 2,400,000 in 1917 to 574,000 in August 1920. The number of industrial workers fell from 3 million in 1917 to 1 and a quarter million by 1921. At the same time, at its height the numbers of the Red Army, under Trotsky's command, reached a staggering five million people fighting on 14 different fronts covering some 8,000 kilometres.

The October Revolution

had instituted workers' control in the factories. However, these were left in private hands until the workers had learned sufficiently how to run industry. But this did not last. The capitalists sabotaged industry at every step. The Civil War in May 1918 forced a drastic change, with the nationalisation of major

industries from then onwards. This was the only way that the economic turmoil could be resolved. Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not shirk their responsibilities. Action had to be taken to avoid catastrophe. This was the beginning of what became known as War Communism, a 'workers' state in a besieged fortress', to use Lenin's expression.

### German revolution

The key was to hold on until world revolution came to the assistance of the Russian workers. Lenin was a Marxist and a realist. The Russian Revolution was the beginning of the world socialist revolution. Socialism could not be built in one country, least of all in backward Russia. "It is absolutely true", explained Lenin, "that without the revolution in Germany we shall perish... we shall perish if the German revolution does not come. This in no way diminishes our duty to

face the most critical situations without idle boasting. The [German] revolution will not be coming as rapidly as we expected. History has proved that. We must take it as a fact."

Lenin opposed the waging of a revolutionary war against Germany, demanded by the Lefts. The government on the contrary was forced to sign a humiliating peace treaty with the German imperialists as Russia was exhausted. "We must know how to beat a retreat", stated Lenin. "There it is: the terribly bitter, outrageous, painful and humiliating truth."

### Kulaks

Together with the Cadets, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionary parties went over quite rapidly to the counter-revolution. Clearly, the Bolsheviks had no alternative but to suppress their activities, although these parties continued to operate openly until the summer of 1918 and the beginning of the Civil War. They participated in assassinations and succeeded in wounding Lenin in August 1918.

A few months later Lenin explained, "You are not a serious enemy. Our enemy is the bourgeoisie. But if you join forces with them, we shall be obliged to apply the measures of the proletarian dictatorship to you, too."

Under these concrete circumstances, the Soviet regime had no alternative to ban and suppress those parties that supported the counter-revolution. The Cheka was formed to root

out counter-revolutionaries as a response to the White Terror. This was essential. The revolution was isolated in a backward country besieged by world imperialism. Extra-ordinary measures were required. Under the shadow of the uprising of sailors at Kronstadt, this also led to the banning of factions inside the Russian Communist Party in March 1921 as a temporary measure.

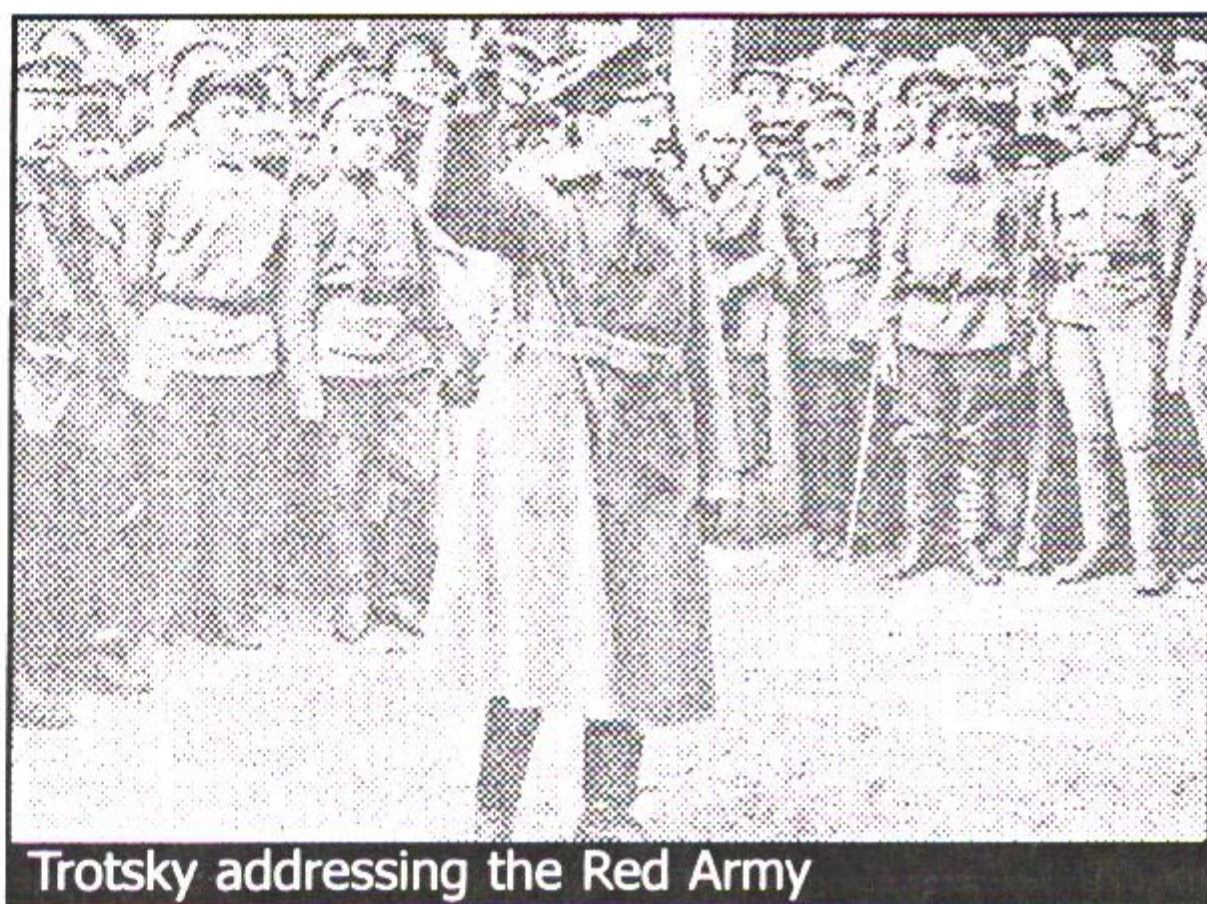
### Kronstadt

The Kronstadt rising signalled a need to change policy. War Communism was abandoned in favour of the New Economic Policy, which gave concessions to the peasantry and provided a new breathing space for the revolution.

Unfortunately, the isolation of the revolution under terrible conditions led to the growth of bureaucratism in the party and state. This was to open the way for Stalinism and the betrayal of the revolution. But that is the subject for another time.

### New Economic Policy

In conclusion, it is appropriate to quote the words of Rosa Luxemburg. "Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. The October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism." ■



Trotsky addressing the Red Army

## What does the quake show?

by Heiko Khoo

Following the massive earthquake, collective shock and grief has gripped China. Premier Wen Jiabao gained authority for his personal command of the rescue and relief effort.

A new mood of mutual solidarity has been born throughout the nation strengthened by the fact that the quake was felt as far away as Beijing. The death toll looks set to rise to over 50,000; millions made homeless are living in government shelters before reconstruction commences. The year of the Olympics is proving to be one full of complex and difficult challenges in China.

Following the riots in Tibet, the Dalai Lama's special envoy Kelsang Gyaltzen held talks with Chinese Government representative Zhu Weigun in Shenzhen. Kelsang threw himself on the ground prostrating as they visited a Buddhist Temple; China's Zhu copied him.

The Lama's envoy said, "I didn't know you're a Buddhist!"

"Yes your holiness, I am a believer but not practising"

The envoy continued, "But I thought you're a communist?"

"Yes I am, practising but not believing"

This story summarises the main contradiction in China. The official adher-

ence to communist doctrine still provides the *raison d'être* for the Party's rule, but capitalist forces are corrupting the heart of much of China's government. The government is under intense pressure to defend the rights and raise the living

standards of the urban workers and rural poor. The quake will greatly intensify this pressure.

Ministers have promised an investigation and severe punishment of offenders, where building collapses were caused by short cuts and corruption.

### Wen Jibao

Within hours of news of the earthquake Premier Wen Jiabao flew to the region and took charge of the operation. He is seen as the public face of a 'government of the people', shedding tears and racing to disaster scenes to help out and raise morale.

Wen makes unexpected stops when traveling the country to talk with peasants and workers who have not been 'prepared' for his visits, the more accurately to assess the popular mood. In 1989 Wen stood alongside the former General Secretary Zhao Ziyang as he warned the students on Tiananmen Square of an impending crackdown. Wen's persona is now being compared to Jou Enlai.

The Chinese government

sent over 100,000 troops into the region to save lives, feed and house people and prepare for reconstruction. Just compare their response with the US administration during Hurricane Katrina!

### Katrina

The disaster relief response of the Communist Party Central Committee was rapid and determined. Mobilisation took place under three concepts, "putting people's interests above everything," the "scientific attitude in response to calamities" and reliance on "the united will of the people".

New regulations on government information disclosure introduced on May 1st appear to signal a more open government, reflected in greater freedom of the Chinese media during the crisis. Also groups of workers have used the new regulations to demand information on the corrupt transfer of assets from state owned enterprises to private companies. Anger concerning (what Chinese call) the 'original sin' of capitalist acquisition is widespread and threatens the power of the new capitalists, who acquired 'their wealth' through deals with, or as, corrupt officials. According to a poll conducted by China Youth Daily 77% of the public want information about the "assets of government officials" and 66% of people said they would apply for such information if they need it. Thus an enquiry into the origin of capitalist accumulation appears inevitable, the consequences of this will be decided by living struggle.

The Financial Times, the world's leading bourgeois newspaper, sees ominous signs:

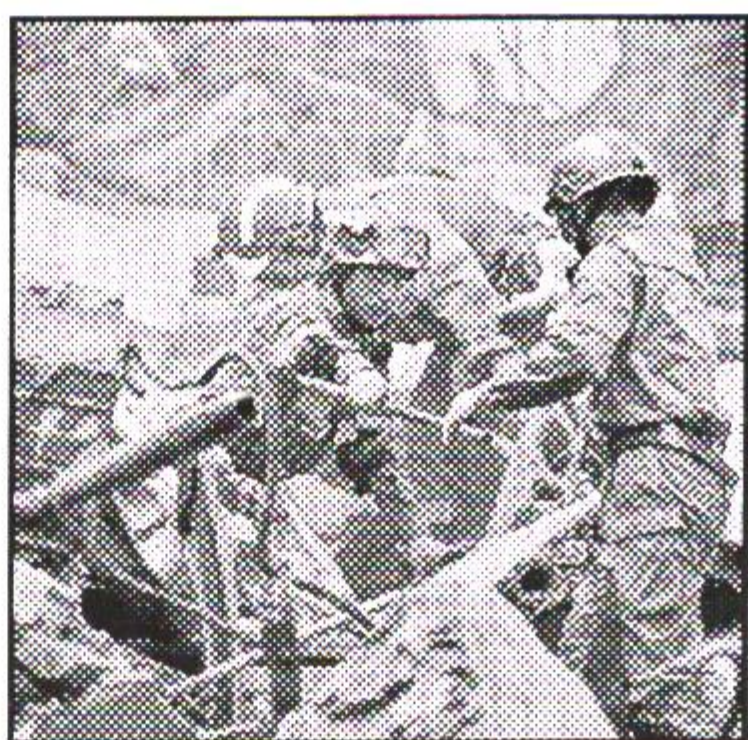
"To the casual observer, the blanket earthquake news coverage served up by China's media over the past few days might suggest the nation's thousands of newspapers and TV stations had been given a free hand to report its biggest natural disaster in decades."

"Nothing could be further from the truth."

We are told it is "a reminder that - in spite of a flourishing market economy, social liberalization and a media revolution - the party still holds to the Maoist tenet that power depends on control of 'two barrels': that of the gun and the pen." (FT May 14th 2008)

The Financial Times continues its horrified tone when quoting the language of the Chinese press, which calls for "broadly mobilizing the lead cadres and the masses to implement the spirit of the central authorities".

What our friends at the Financial Times fear is not the pro-government line advocated by the Chinese media. What the western bourgeois fear is China becoming a powerful force in the coming period, a force that threatens their interests in the region and around the world. The Chinese state is ignoring the "advice" of western capitalists - i.e. to open their economy completely and remove the guiding hand of the state - and they are proceeding according to their own interests, building up a powerful industrial base that is capable of out-competing the western countries. ▣



# What a load of scrap

HAS SOMEONE been pinching your manhole covers? Has your auntie's iron casket disappeared from her graveside? Has someone walked off with that Henry Moore piece from the garden?

Basically any piece of metal that's not screwed down (and much of it that is) is being slurped up for the new Klondike - but this time it's not gold fever but scrap metal madness.

The opening up of the giant Chinese, Russian and Indian markets has pushed scrap metal prices through the roof. Raw materials and new metal production cannot keep pace with the demand, so they are begging, borrowing and stealing anything that can be re-smelted to feed the ravenous beast. In the past two years scrap metal prices have increased by 95 per cent. Copper scrap has increased by 260 per cent. The current world price per tonne of scrap metal is £192 and, says the Times, and will be £250 by next year.

There are some advantages. In the past when I hired a skip for the annual spring clean, I would turn from good communist into Victor Meldrew. I'd put up watch towers and razor wire and keep a gimlet eye on the neighbours, riding shotgun to ensure the buggers didn't put their crap in MY skip. Now the reverse is true. I got a skip the other week, filled it up - and when I came down in the morning, it was half empty! During the night, the scrap metal fairies had descended

and run off with anything that so much as smelt of metal. Brilliant. I now have a bottomless skip that I fill to my heart's content, even inviting the neighbours to join in the fun.

## 'Combined and uneven development'...

It's more of a headache for big business though. The modern day version of nicking lead off the church roof is reaching industrial proportions. British Telecomm complain they are losing £5 million a year

as their lines are stripped for copper. It's not just the thefts but the trail of damage the tea leaves (this means thieves, if you were not born within the sound of Bow bells) leave behind - mobile

phone companies say a typical theft of £100s worth of copper from one of their base stations leaves behind £50,000s worth of damage.

Britain's footpads and ne'er-do-wells however are mere amateurs compared to what's going on in Europe, where large tracts of heavy metal are vanishing. In Germany, railway chiefs in Weimar were left scratching their heads when three miles of railway line disappeared overnight. Czech

police went tearing off to arrest known neo-Nazis when 320 bronze plaques were stolen from the Theresienstadt Holocaust memorial - in the end a local scrap dealer turned out to be the culprit instead.

The market leaders however can be found in the Ukraine - a whole iron bridge disappeared from over the River Svalyavka, while a steam locomotive exhibit went walkies from a museum. They have big pockets in the Ukraine.

The deadliest hauls are coming from Iraq, as India's metal smelters are discovering to their cost. The alloy found in armour plate on the many destroyed tanks that litter the country sells for a very high price. But in their rush to make a quick buck, the tank totters forget to take the live ammunition

out. There have been several deadly incidents, such as the death of ten workers at the Bhushan Steel Company in Ghaziabad near Delhi, when scrap metal imported from Iraq - which included live shells and rockets - was thrown into the smelter.

Most countries ban the import of scrap metal from war zones, but not India. The trade is worth \$730 million every year. Government officials have blustered they

will tighten up import regulations but, with those sorts of millions to be made, no one is holding their breath.

War zone scrap metal enters India through 32 ports. Only one of them has electronic screening equipment that can sniff out live ordnance. The Indian Customs service has told the BBC that the cost of installing such equipment to all ports would be 'prohibitive'. Risking people's lives is much cheaper.

So who is making all the money from this new boom? In the UK the current value of the scrap metal industry is a staggering £1.1 billion. Proof that where's there's muck there's brass.

But it's not the rag and bone men who are making their fortune. The real gangsters are moving in. The Times (7 April 2008) reports that "family owned firms across the country are being inundated with buy-out offers from ambitious rivals and private equity groups."

Of the top five scrap metal businesses in the UK, one is owned by the Australian multi-national Sims Metal Management while another is owned by, er, Barclays Private Equity. Yes, that's right, the 'Steptoe & Son' branch of Barclays Bank. So if you bank with Barclays, the next time they send you a rude letter telling you that you have gone over your overdraft limit and demand the usual exorbitant penalty fee, don't pay up. Instead, invite your local bank manager over for a rummage around your skip. ▣



# The Poverty of Life in Britain

## The social wage

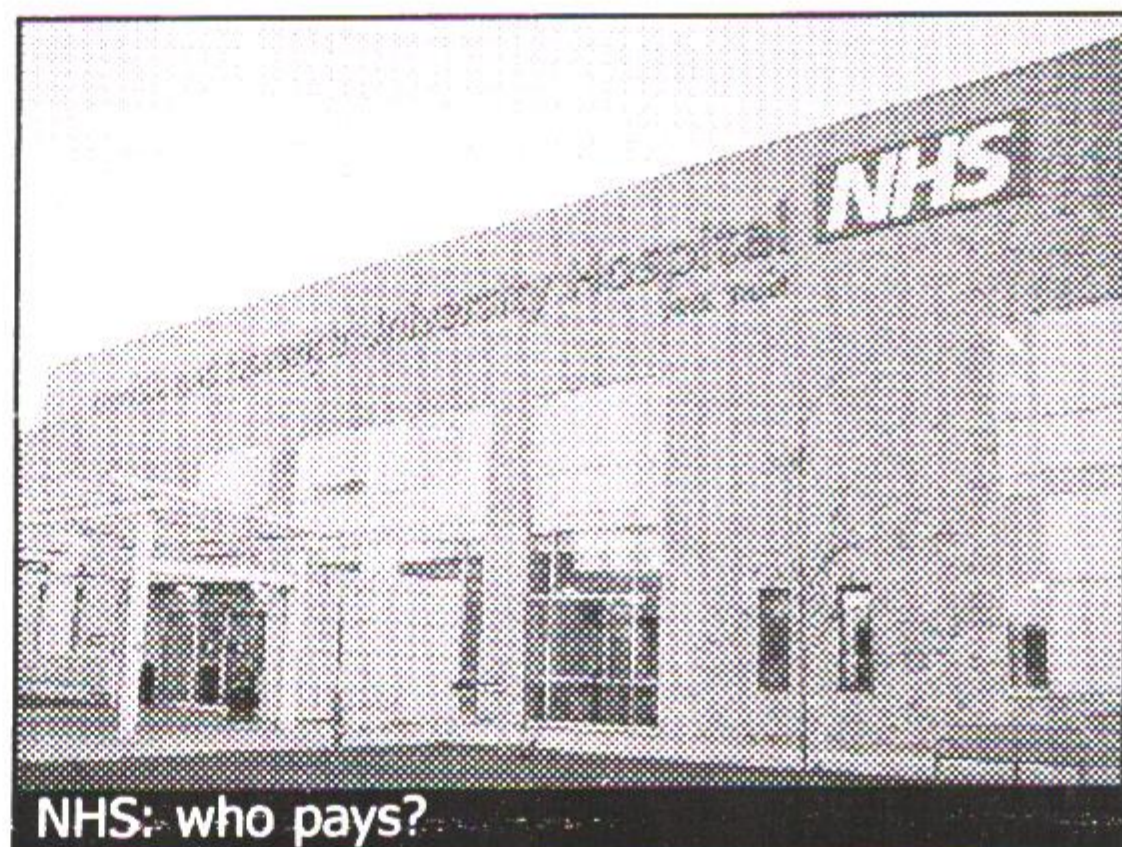
by Ed Doveton

IN THE first part of this article on the poverty of life in Britain we looked at the experience of working people in the workplace. In this section our focus is on what is called the social wage. This is the social provision of goods and services that working people cannot, unlike the rich, provide for themselves individually. It includes such things as health services, education, pensions, support if you become unemployed, and local services such as swimming pools or meals on wheels for the elderly.

If you are wealthy you don't need these things provided by society: you buy them yourself. You can have a swimming pool in the garden of your big house, a housekeeper if you are getting elderly, and, of course, the best private medical care. But such things are not available to working people; rather, we have historically fought to get these provided through the state.

### The NHS

The actual gains made in the social wage in Britain, particularly after 1945, reflected both the strength of the working class movement and the relative ability of capitalism to afford this increase. However, with a crisis of capital over the last three decades, a three-fold process has unravelled. Firstly, there has been a shift in the burden of taxation over the last twenty years, from the rich to placing it on the working class. Secondly, the delivery of the social wage is now being shifted from public ownership and becoming privatised.



Because of this change, the privatised sector is making super profits, creaming off funds from the social wage that would otherwise be spent on better services. The third factor is a result of the first two, because since there is proportionally less available for the social wage, there are cuts and reductions in what we receive at the end of the day.

There is an increasing poverty of health under New Labour, which is reflected in the decline of services available to working people. Since Labour came to power in 1997, a large number of hospitals have been closed, with more planned over the next two years. Where hospitals have remained open, bed numbers have been reduced and departments such as maternity and A&E have been closed. In 2007, the Royal College of Nursing stated that 22,300 NHS posts had been lost in England in just 18 months. The quality of patient experience has also deteriorated, as hospitals are under-staffed, nurses over-worked, patient 'through-put' is speeded up to meet targets, and hospital acquired infections are at an all time high.

These cut-backs in the quality of provision have occurred when there has actually been an increase in the money allocated to the overall NHS budget. The NHS budget was increased by 9% in 2001, and subsequently the annual budget for 1999-2004 had a planned rise from £49.3bn to £78.7bn. The critical point is that this money has not been spent on providing facilities for working people - quite the reverse. It has gone

largely to boost the profits of the private medical, service and pharmaceutical companies. These companies are now, on a year-by-year basis, recording record profits. The pharmaceuticals have a average 18.9% profit-to-revenue ratio. It is by far, the highest of any industry in the United States (where many are based); and Britain's own pharmaceutical industry profit level is second only to the US.

The reality is that money allocated to the NHS is being drained away. The end result is that the availability and quality of health care for working people has been reduced. Charges for health care are increasing, new drugs are not being provided 'on the NHS', and, at a local level, medical support services and local hospitals are closing.

### Education

A poverty of education is reflected in fewer and fewer working class children choosing to go on to university because of high student fees and lack of support grants. In 2006, when fees were first introduced, there were 15,000 less applications to university. In the following year, the government fixed the figures by including students applying for nursing and midwifery degrees, hence increasing the total applications. Incidentally, this pushed up the figure of those applying from working class backgrounds; but this manipulation hid the real situation, because nursing has always drawn large numbers of applicants from the working-class. At the chalkface, teachers in schools and lecturers at Further Education colleges have been reporting the true state of affairs: an increasing number of students from working class backgrounds are openly saying that, while they would like to go to university, they cannot afford it.

Those who do go to university, are straddled with huge debts as they eventually enter the world of work. Many of these students are increasingly studying at universities near their

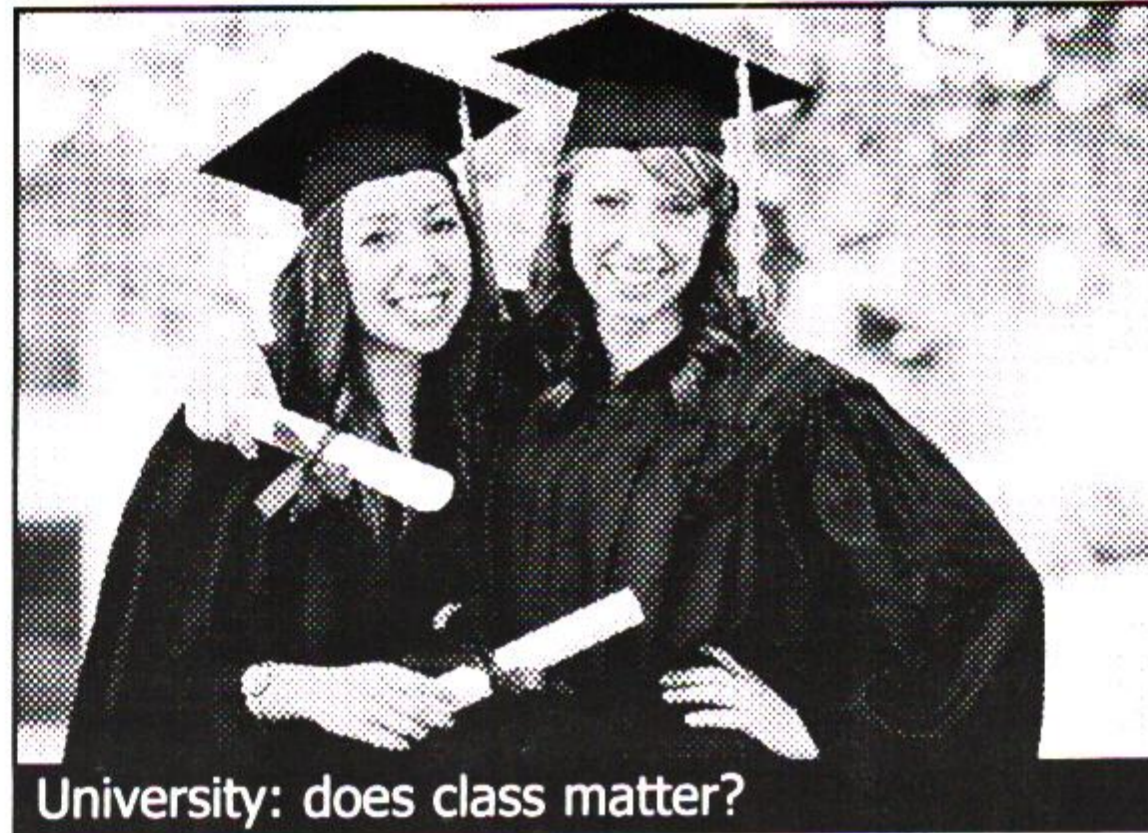
home towns, as it is cheaper to live with parents; the number of "home" students has risen from 18% to 56% over the last ten years. But this puts an increased burden on families as well as limiting choice for students. This contrasts sharply with the experience of well-off middle class students, who, with the backing of parental income, have a wider choice, as living away from home and paying rent is not a financial problem.

At this year's Labour Party Spring Conference in February 2008, Gordon Brown, in a typical piece of empty rhetoric, stated: "We are the first generation to be able to say that there need be no limit on how far your talent can take you." He has clearly not understood the basic socialist premise that opportunity and equality are meaningless in a society of economic and material inequality. Merely having the formal 'right' to education is an empty phrase when poverty and exploitation is built into capitalism. Working class families in previous years thought that they were winning the battle for a decent education system, one with real equal access to all. This was the meaning of free education and support grants for students to live on while at university. Now the education system has been redesigned to favour those who can afford it. The lesson we should all learn is that no reforms can be guaranteed while capitalism, a system built on inequality, remains.

## Local Services and Pensioners

The poverty of life in Britain is also reflected in cuts in services provided by local authorities to individuals and the community, while at the same time council taxes are increasing at a rate higher than wage increases and pensions. Similar to the situation in the NHS, money from local authority budgets is being drained away into the profits of the private sector through compulsory directed privatisation measures.

In 2008, a report, "Your Money or Your Life" by the Leonard Cheshire Disability, highlighted evidence that the situation facing disabled people is one



University: does class matter?

of increasing poverty and social isolation. Although local authorities spent over £14 billion on all social care services between 2006 and 2007, this was needed to support an estimated 1.75 million people, many who are elderly, as well as others coping with stress from work or physical disabilities. Yet, the disabled have been subjected to cuts in care - a direct result of the marketisation of services, where private firms cream off profits from the public sector. Now local authorities are rationing our care services. With recent government announcements, disabled people are facing even harsher eligibility criteria, which will put pressure on hard-pressed families. The result, as support for the disabled is cut, is that an increasing number of family members will need to become full-time carers, thus pushing these families into a spiral of debt and poor health.

For the elderly, the situation does not look much better. In 2004 there were 11.1 million people of pensionable age in the UK, and this will rise to 15.3 million by 2031; within this group there will be a rise from 1.9% to 3.8% of those who will be over 85. Pensioners are one of the key groups of people with disabilities, yet they face a situation of declining social care. The Counsel and Care's "National Survey of Local Authority Care Charging and Eligibility Criteria" from 2006 showed that social care provision has been cut for the elderly. Local authorities are simply applying higher charges and increasing the eligibility



Declining social care for elderly

criteria. In some cases, the report found that older people have had to pay up to £315 per week towards their domiciliary care costs.

Added to these cuts has been the relative reduction in the state pension. A report by Aon Consulting indicated that the UK now has the worst state pension provision, compared to 25 other European countries. On average, the state pension is equal to just 17% of average earnings, compared to an average of 57% in Europe. A report by Age Concern indicated that 2.2 million pensioners are living in poverty. This level of hardship reveals itself in figures that saw 23,200 more deaths in England and Wales in the winter of 2005-2006 amongst people over the age of 65, compared to levels in the non-winter period. Hypothermia, as a result of pensioners worried that they will be unable to pay their heating bills, and declining levels of support are all contributing causes.

## Socialist Policies

It becomes a sick joke when Gordon Brown speaks of 10 years of economic growth under New Labour. Yes, the economy did amass additional wealth as human productivity grew around the globe, because new technology enhanced what humanity could do: but working people have not seen this wealth. Instead, a greater proportion of the national product has gone to the rich and wealthy.

The quality of life for working people in Britain is poorer, in terms of our wages and in terms of the social provision of services. The big things, such as health and education, are being cut, but so also are the small things, which are also important - time with families and friends, time and facilities for leisure, and a reasonable working week. This is all possible with the technology available and the wealth we have created. What is needed are socialist policies, not the madness of the market, where the few live lives of opulence, while the many are faced with the poverty of life. □

# Learning from Trotsky

## 'Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay'

Matt Wells looks at Trotsky's pamphlet

TROTSKY'S PAMPHLET should be read in its entirety. Its central theme can be summarised by the following quotes:

**"There is one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organizations in the entire world: it is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power. This process is equally characteristic of the neutral, the Social-Democratic, the Communist and "anarchist" trade unions. This fact alone shows that the tendency towards "growing together" is intrinsic not in this or that doctrine as such but derives from social conditions common for all unions."... "The neutrality**

**of the trade unions is completely and irretrievably a thing of the past, gone together with the free bourgeois democracy."**

Matt examines how this thesis applies to trade unions today

Marxism is not a moral code and is more than a set of ideas. It is a method that, if applied correctly to the concrete situation, acts as a compass for the movement towards the transformation of society by the working class in the interests of humanity as a whole. Anyone can use a compass but it is still necessary to decide whether to continue heading north or to change direction.

It is only the working class that can overthrow capitalism and reconstitute society on socialist lines.

The trade unions, for Marxists, are an expression of the organised working class. This is why the unions are a key consideration in the perspectives for changing society.

### Trotsky

Trotsky's short article, though unfinished, contains some vital les-

sons for the class conscious workers and youth. It was taken from notes found on Trotsky's desk and was never finished due to his tragic death at the hands of one of Stalin's thugs. The ideas it contains of course were a threat. This was the reason for Stalin's pursuit of Trotsky, as his ideas represent the application of Marxism to the concrete circumstances of the organised working class, rather than the grotesque distortions of Stalinism or the misconceptions of reformism.

Although written in 1940, it is particularly relevant today. This is in spite of the trend identified by Trotsky having not been fully borne out. Trotsky did not have a crystal ball, just the method of Marxism which, when applied to the historical context, led him to draw a conclusion that trade unions were tending towards merging with state power. Major fascist movements and war across Europe shaped this view. Trotsky did not foresee the strengthening of Stalinism or the long post-War boom experienced in the advanced capitalist countries after the Second World War.

### Labour Party

However Trotsky's article sheds light on how, under the immense pressure of bourgeois i.e. capitalist society, the trade unions become obstacles on the road to workers' power. Like the British Labour Party they are used by the ruling class to marshal the working

class, to present their mounting an effective defence of previous gains. Although the unions are primarily defensive organisations, it is only through defending these gains collectively and extending them, that workers become aware of their power.

Well if our own organisations, the unions, can be used against us in this way, how can we defend ourselves, still less change society? It is easy to see why people would turn away in disgust in seeing the results - the corrupt, degenerate bureaucracy selling the members down the river in exchange for the relative wealth and comfort of their positions and the spin-offs, lordships, knighthoods and so on.

But as Trotsky quite rightly puts it, 'we cannot select the arena and the conditions for our activity to suit our own likes and dislikes'. This applies equally well to the Labour Party, and Trotsky goes into more detail in his 'Writings on Britain', which are essential reading and very accessible.

### UNITE

Over the past year, we have seen how the leaders of the large unions, UNISON, GMB and UNITE show how 'reliable and indispensable they are' to the representatives of capital in the New Labour government. While sabre-rattling in the conference hall, they showed their true colours in lining up behind Gordon Brown to ensure a non-con-





test in the Labour leadership campaign when the alternative candidate, John McDonnell, was more in tune with the vast majority of their membership. Opinion polls confirmed this. Of course they hope that some crumbs will be thrown their way, in order that they can justify their position to the members, who after all pay their wages. In the current climate this is increasingly unlikely and they are in effect acting as their own grave-diggers in this sense; they will either have to express the will of the members who want action or be replaced by those who will.

## Analysis

This analysis is to be borne out inevitably as many of the leaders who have moved to the right, if not in words but in deeds, will be swept away by members who, through their own painful experience of working conditions, pay and pensions being eroded, learn that a fighting leadership is required. The strike ballot in UNISON local government over a below inflation pay 'award' last year could not be avoided last year due to the pressure from the rank and file. But when it came to a simple majority in favour, the bureaucracy deemed it insufficient to call action. 2% is a slender margin but it is enough in an election, and as anyone would say - 'that's democracy!'

## UNISON

One might argue that the possibility of a general election and their need to get Labour re-elected for a quiet life was more important to the leadership of UNISON than carrying out

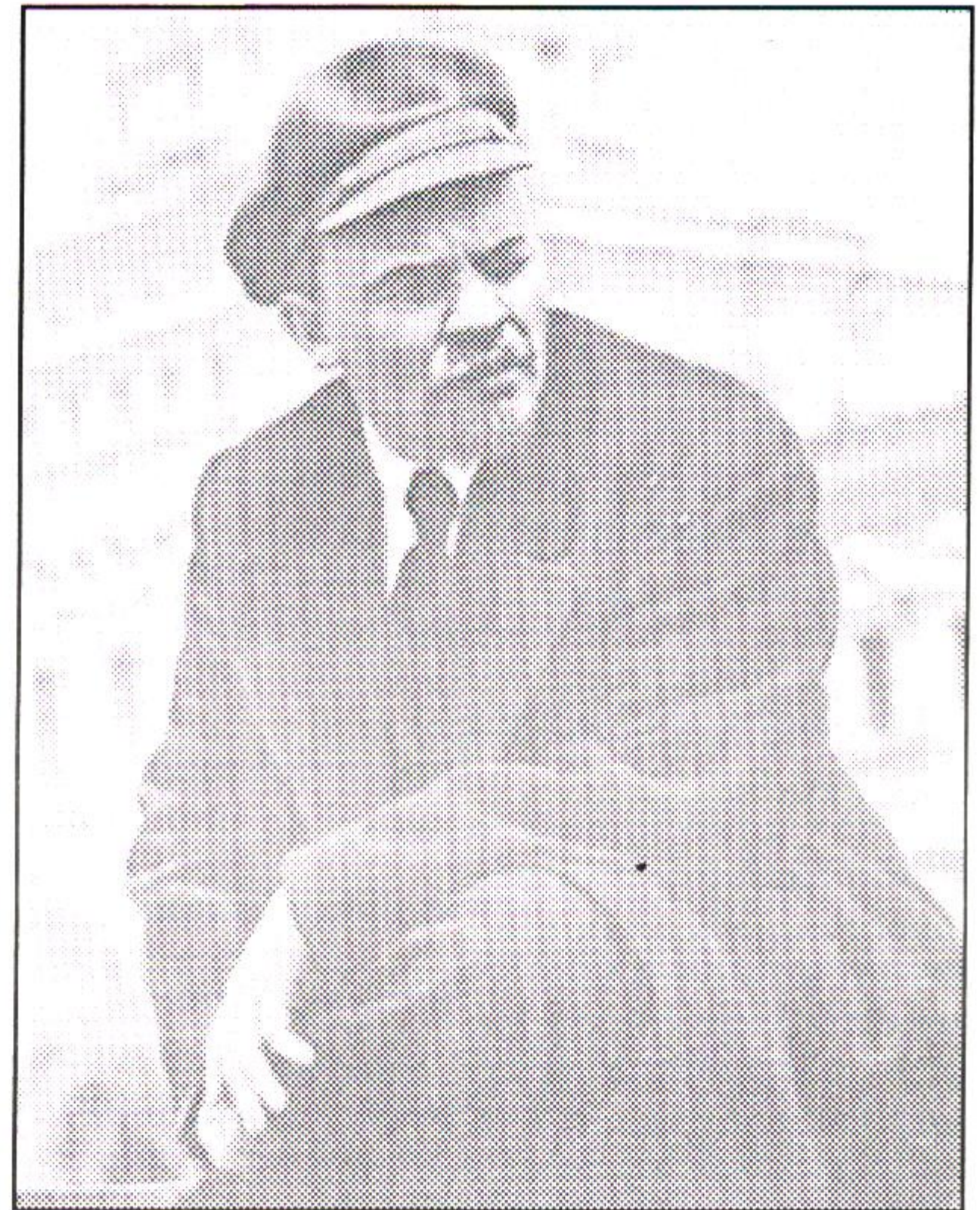
the will of the membership. The bureaucracy was desperate to wriggle off the hook. Next time round, the margin may not be so slender, particularly if the leadership fails in the delaying tactics and bureaucratic subterfuge that arguably reduced the turnout in the ballot.

Trotsky explains that the character of the trade unions depend necessarily on the type of regime in they find themselves in. Western liberal democracies tend to operate in the ways outlined above, whereas in the countries dominated by the advanced capitalist world in which the national ruling class is too weak to assert itself, there is a possibility that Bonapartist regimes could lean on the poorer sections of the population for support. In this situation the trade unions might in fact enjoy the 'patronage' of the state. Where some crumbs may be brushed from the tables of the corrupt ruling bureaucracy to the toilers, the trade unions would act in the interests of the ruling class in the final analysis. For example, trade unions in Egypt are arms of the state and strikes are illegal.

However, this has not stopped the heroic struggles of workers who have recently participated in wave of strikes, which have been covered in Socialist Appeal and on our website. On the other hand, military-police dictatorship is the other possibility, where the state would seek to weaken any resistance by smashing the organisations of the working class.

## Lenin

It was Lenin who called for revolutionary socialists to



work in even the most reactionary organisations, such as the trade unions set up by the tsarist secret police in order to control the masses. Like it or not, this was where large groups of workers could be found. Under the conditions of an autocratic monarchist dictatorship, independent, democratic unions would not have been possible. In his key work 'Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder', Lenin explained that the Marxists should enter these organisations to win the best workers to the ideas of Marxism. There was and is no other way. The Bolsheviks proved the correctness of these methods by eventually winning the masses and coming to power.

## Method

It is this same method, of winning workers to the ideas of socialism, by proving ourselves as the best fighters for our class, that we must employ today. It

would be all too easy to set up unions, untainted by lack of respect for democracy, collaborationism, corruption and so on. Even better let's have pure, left wing unions with a clear socialist programme to overthrow capitalism and change society! But this is not how things work unfortunately. Splitaway 'red unions' in Pilkington's Glass works and on the docks failed miserably. In fact they may even serve the very causes they are set up to work against, by isolating workers who have drawn radical political conclusions from those who still have illusions in their traditional organisations. And that is the key. That is why we urge workers to reclaim these organisations as their own. Workers do not give up on their organisations lightly. They will cling to these organisations for a long time before they split, are transformed or it becomes apparent to the mass of workers that it is necessary to break with them. □

## 125 years since the death of Marx 'We shall not look back upon his like again'

by Steve Higham

**'MANY STRANGE stories have been told about Karl Marx...but to those who knew [him] no legend is funnier than that common one which pictures him a morose, unbending, unapproachable man, a sort of Jupiter, even hurling thunder, never known to smile, sitting aloof and alone in Olympus. This picture of the cheeriest, gayest soul that ever breathed, of a man brimming over with good humour, whose hearty laugh was infectious and irresistible, of the kindest and most sympathetic of companions, is a standing wonder - and amusement - to those who knew him'.**

So wrote Eleanor, Marx's youngest daughter, in *A Few Stray Notes* recalling happier days in the family household. Opponents would no doubt see things differently as Marx usually took no prisoners, and even with acquaintances patience for Marx was not always a virtue.

Eleanor recalls how she wanted to 'run away to join a man-of-war' and how Marx, or Mohr as his intimates called him, assured her that while it was possible she ought to keep it a secret until she could develop her plans. Mohr would read to his children: Homer, the *Nibelungen Lied*, *Don Quijote*, and the *Arabian Nights*, were favourites while Shakespeare - Marx peppered his work with apt quotations from his plays - was part of the family's staple diet.

Born in 1818 into a well-to-do Jewish family in Trier, Germany, Marx attended the University of Bonn ostensibly to read law yet, to the hair-pulling of his father, spent much of his time socialising and debt-ridden before transferring to Berlin. There he met various young radicals such as Moses Hess, and the atheist lecturer, Bruno Bauer, who introduced Marx to the writings of Hegel, the university's pro-

fessor of philosophy until his death in 1831.

During this period he fell for an aristocrat, Jenny von Westphalen, 'the most beautiful girl in Trier'. They were married in 1843: Jenny's white-knuckle ride with Karl, involving exile, bailiffs and pawnbrokers, and a unique contribution to mankind, had begun. She would later write: 'the memory of the days I spent in his little study copying his scrawled articles is among the happiest of my life'.

Marx hoped for a lectureship, but finding university careers closed to radicals he moved into journalism and was appointed editor of the liberal *Rheinische Zeitung* in October 1842, during which he criticised Prussian absolutism and defended the freedom of the press.

After the Prussian authorities banned the paper in January 1843, Marx moved to more liberal pastures, Paris, to join a journal-in-exile, the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher* but only one edition was published before Marx and Ruge, the founder, fell out (many of Marx's acquaintances were brief), but he did befriend the Romantic poet Heine (whose weaknesses, as he saw them, were overlooked), and met Engels. Engels showed Marx what would be his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (he later donated the book's royalties to Marx), and established an historic and lifelong friendship.

### Grundrisse

Marx's economic writings can be considered in the following chronological sequence: *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Grundrisse*, and *Capital*, and it was in Paris that Marx completed the former. However, he was deported at the instigation of the Prussian envoy in 1845 for libel, and later exiled from Belgium by King Leopold I in March 1848 for conspiracy, though not before writing *The*

*German Ideology* and finishing *The Communist Manifesto*.

He returned to Germany during the revolutionary turmoil that was 1848 and in June, leaving himself penniless, launched the daily *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a democratic voice, with money from an inheritance. This newspaper, though embroiled naturally in local events was internationalist from the start, paying close attention to developments in neighbouring France and the Chartists in Britain.

Police arrested workers' leaders, while Marx addressed a mass meeting of workers in Cologne's old market place. Martial law was declared and the newspaper was forced to suspend publication. The final issue was printed in a defiant red ink, the editors calling for the 'emancipation of the working class!' More lawsuits, alleging 'incitement to revolt', were issued against Marx. Unimpressed, Marx stood for president of the Cologne Workers' Association in October 1848 and won.

We know of the 30 fruitful years Marx spent researching *Capital* in the British Library, but it was in agitation that Marx was at his best. He appeared before magistrates in July 1848 charged with 'insulting or libelling the chief public prosecutor' whom he had publicly accused of brutality, and stood trial the following February. Never one to mince words, he addressed the crowded courtroom:

**'I prefer to follow the great events of the world, to analyse the course of history, than to occupy myself with local bosses, with the police and prosecuting magistrates. However great these gentlemen may imagine themselves in their own fancy, they are nothing, absolutely nothing, in the gigantic battles of the present time...it is the duty of the press to come forward on behalf of the oppressed in its immediate neighbourhood...The first duty of the press now is to undermine all the**

## foundations of the existing political state of affairs'.

He was acquitted amid loud applause. However, after another court appearance (the following day), the Prussian authorities (in May) recommended Marx be deported and he left for Paris a month later. By August he was forced to leave France again - and sailed to Dover.

## Prometheus

Many figures inspired Marx, such as Prometheus (in Aeschylus' play) who sought to displace the tyrannical gods by vesting their powers among men. In political economy, the work of Smith, Ricardo, and Mill was instrumental in Marx's forging of Capital. Their shortcomings proceeded from a mistaken recognition that capitalism was natural and here forever. In Marxist philosophy, it was the work of two outstanding individuals, Hegel (1770-1831), the 'mighty thinker' as Marx later called him, and Feuerbach (1804-1872), that Gulliver of materialism, which laid the philosophical foundation stones of what today we call Marxism: Marx mined their riches and revolutionised them. Marx gave a revolutionary voice, using the method of dialectics, which he separated from Hegel's theological content, to those historical and material circumstances, and in this his role is unique. In real terms his contribution to our understanding of society, as one based on material, or economic, class interests has made a universal impact particularly in the field of history. Moreover, the one thread which runs through Marx is that ordinary human beings must struggle for what is rightly theirs, and this philosophy is the starting point for the downtrodden in today's society.

## Highgate cemetery

At Marx's graveside in Highgate, London (on 17th March 1883), Engels paid a glowing tribute to his brother-in-arms when he told the gathered mourners that 'fighting was his element'. Why is this important? In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louise Bonaparte Marx wrote that while **'men make their own history...they do not make it under circumstances**

## chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'

Life is not what you make it. Yet, historical materialism also dismisses the notion that man and society is held in check, throughout the ages, by omnipresent conditions. Such would be a mechanistic interpretation of history, and one which cannot explain how circumstances change from one period to another. Those circumstances which shape and form our consciousness are not independent of human activity. Rather, man is both a product and changer of circumstances.

## 'Circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances' (The German Ideology).

There is, then, a dialectical relationship between those definite conditions into which we are born and which play a role in shaping us on the one hand, and practical activity which changes those conditions on the other and, notwithstanding his recognition of Marx's personal vitality, this is the real significance of Engel's tribute. We all enjoy quoting Marx, but his own favourite was Terence's 'Nothing human is alien to me' and it is a maxim by which he lived. Marx loved a good sing-song, German folk-tales - in one letter Engels asks him to return his copy of Grimm - Greek art and mythology (he read Aeschylus in the original), and thought the world of Shakespeare (nobody, he said, portrayed money better - see Timon of Athens iv. iii).

## Destitution

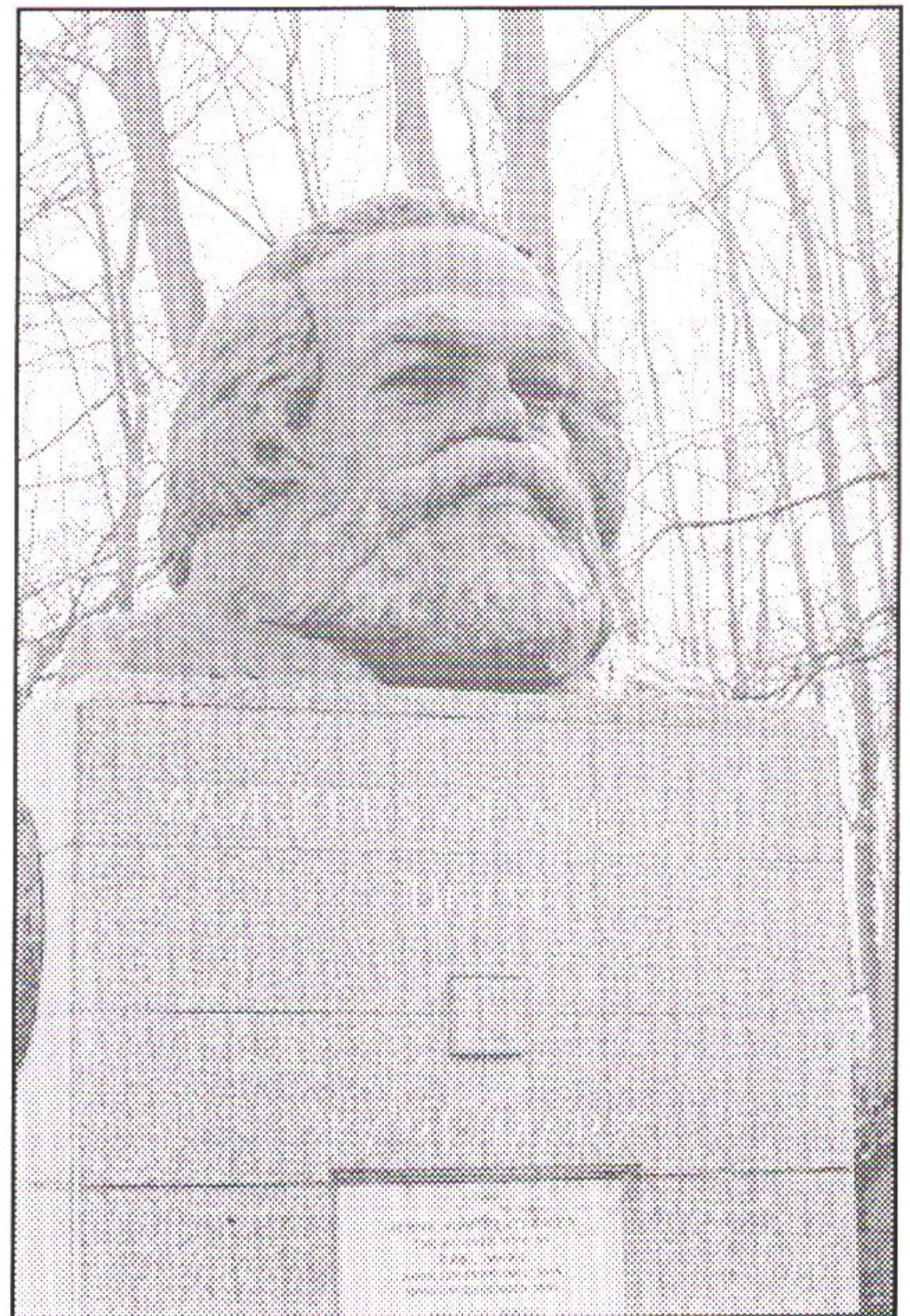
The Marx family, as countless others in Victorian London, was plagued by ill-health and persistent poverty. When Franziska, Marx's third daughter, died of bronchitis in 1852 aged one-year, a neighbour lent the family £2 to pay for a coffin. Destitution was partly relieved by work for the New York Herald Tribune

and by Engels' renowned support, but Marx was not infallible. In April 1855, the fine-spirited Edgar, Marx's 8-year-old son died of tuberculosis. Marx clearly struggled against the tide during his lifetime, but the death of his little jester was different. In a tear-rendering letter to the German socialist, Lassalle, three months after Edgar's death, Marx was still inconsolable: 'The death of my child has shattered me to the very core...My poor wife is almost completely broken down'.

## First International

Marx continued to fight, of course - Capital progressed and he was elected to the General Council of the First International in 1864 - but history will forgive him if a light was dimmed in this affable, cultured man. Eleanor concludes her Few Stray Notes, quoting Macbeth: her parents 'sleep well', after 'life's fitful fever': **'If she was an ideal woman', she says of her mother, 'he - well, he was a man, take him for all in all, we shall not look back upon his like again'.**

Indeed, we shall not. □



# The end of 'the end of history'

by David Brandon

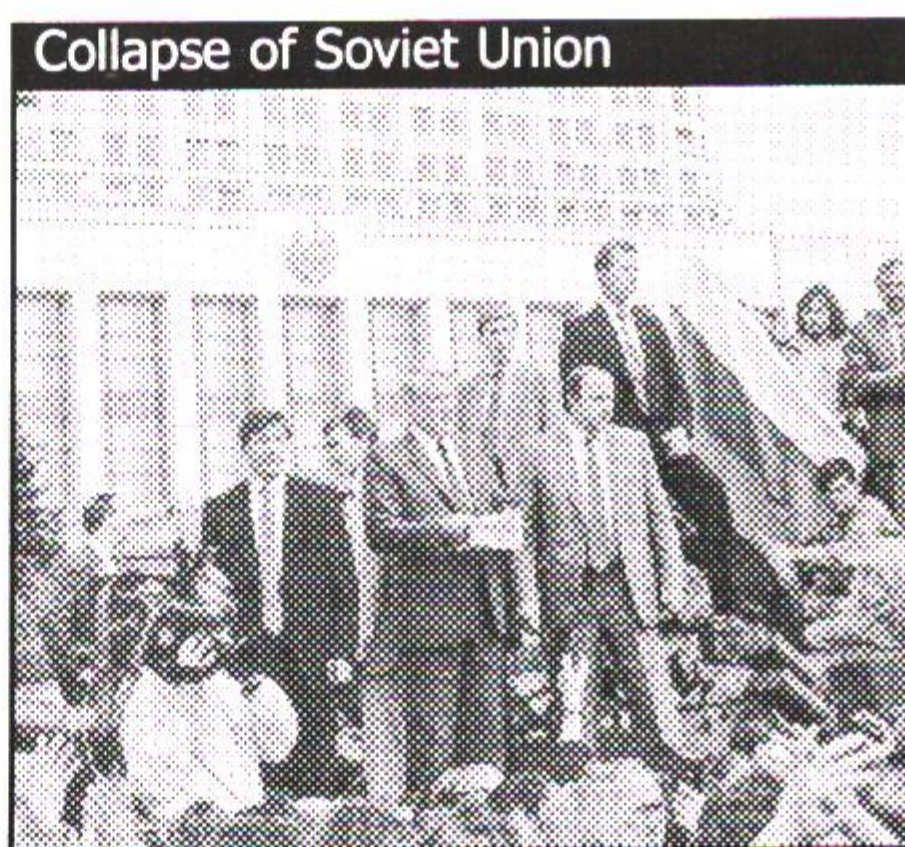
IN ANY historical period, the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class. In 1989 the world was treated to the words of Francis Fukuyama, who published an essay with the title 'The end of history?' His argument was not that historical events had literally stopped happening but that the collapse of so-called 'communism' in the Soviet union meant that western liberal democracy had successfully established itself as the ultimate and ideal form of government. With all the other forms of political rule having been discredited, it was only a matter of time before Western liberal democracy spread to the entire world, he argued. Wars, inequality and injustice, starvation and avoidable death through disease would soon be things of the past. Marxism, with its ideas of the class basis of society, of class conflict and of the need for economic and political revolution to bring about a democratically planned and controlled socialist society lay totally discredited he declared, gloatingly.

Fukuyama's anti-socialist triumphalism was music to the ears of the advocates of capitalism everywhere. The 'captains of industry' pride themselves on being hard-headed practical people who get things done and have little time for fancy talk or fancy theories.

However even they sometimes feel the need to provide some kind of moral, historical or theoretical justification for the consequences of 'free market' economics. That is when their client so-called intellectuals are hauled out of the universities, dusted down and allowed to give the wider world the benefits of their 'wisdom'. Every dog has his day and this was Fukuyama's.

## Fukuyama

Time and reality inevitably have dealt unkindly with Fukuyama's theories. Capitalism, on a global scale and increasingly dominated by multinationals possessing the power to dictate to national governments, has continued to subject the world to civil and international wars that have killed millions; to headlong exploitation of natural resources and environmental pollution that threaten the future exist-



tence of the globe; to untold luxury for tiny minorities and despair and desperation for huge swathes of the population particularly in the so-called 'developing economies'; and

now to growing economic uncertainty and insecurity even in the advanced countries.

Economic ideas and theories are used to serve the material interests of conflicting classes. No matter how flawed or false, if repeated often enough they can develop a power of their own and become the accepted wisdom of the day. Fukuyama's ideas, despite being absurd, served the world of capitalism well at the time.

In the UK the late 1980s, when Fukuyama advanced his ideas, and the subsequent decade and more have been difficult times for the labour and trade union movement. They were still recovering from the severe defeats inflicted by the Tories on organised labour, the miners in particular. Neil Kinnock and other Labour Party leaders had launched an attack against the Marxists in the Labour party with the enthusiastic support of the capitalist press.

## Witchhunt

This action was followed up by various constitutional and organisational changes in the Labour Party, which strangled criticism of the leadership and stifled political discussion, leading to a decline in membership and activity. Many good socialists who were long-term activists dropped out of politics altogether in disgust or simply in disillusionment. Strikes and industrial militancy were at a low level. At the time the economy was

undergoing a boom which may have been built on quicksand but nevertheless spread the 'feel-good' factor, as large numbers of working people experienced improvements in their living standards and expectations.

In these circumstances the general drift of Fukuyama's ideas, which should have been discredited the moment he uttered them, evoked something of an echo with certain elements both on the right and the left of the labour movement. Strikes and even trade unions, it was 'explained', were now outdated and irrelevant. Workers had been 'bought off' with consumerism. Human beings, they argued, are by nature greedy and selfish. Socialist ideas were a thing of the past, they said, because 'we're all middle class now.'

## Strikes

Without any worked-out political theory, it is inevitable that even many genuine socialists will be blown hither and thither, enthused when things go well and confused and disillusioned when they don't. Only Marxism provides a method of objectively analysing economic, social and political processes and identifying the most likely developments among the various possibilities.

So far as the UK is concerned, the next few years could be very different from the past period. We appear to be entering a period of economic instability. The economy is likely to grow only fitfully. Price inflation is

already biting and the collapse of Northern Rock is evidence of the fragility of finance capital. House prices are falling. The capitalists are confused and pessimistic about their own system, but one thing we can be sure of is that they will try to solve the problems of their system by attacking the living standards of the working class. We can be equally certain that the working class will fight back.

Answering Fukuyama on the one hand, and those genuine socialists who have grown pessimistic over the last period on the other, social changes have taken place that are likely to have a bearing on the forthcoming struggles. Far from the working class having disappeared, the reality is that proletarianisation has taken place. Workers are now subject to harsher discipline and ever more demanding work rates as productivity increases. Relative differentials in pay and status have been eroded. No longer can so-called 'professional' workers such as teachers stand aloof because of their relative social and economic privilege. Huge numbers in low-paid and low-status jobs such as those in call centres or massive open-plan offices experience conditions which are an updated version of the industrial employment which Marx and Engels studied in the nineteenth century and out of which class consciousness developed. Advanced technology has given some small groups of skilled workers the potential to bring key areas of the economy to a halt. Far from us all being middle class now, a recent Guardian poll showed that over two-thirds of those interviewed regarded themselves as 'working class and proud of it.'

### Marxists

For Marxists, conditions determine consciousness. However this theory is not applied as though it is simply automatic. Already we have witnessed a rise in industrial militancy among teachers, civil servants and the Scottish oil refinery workers, for example. Workers will not simply stand by and watch the value of their wages being eroded through inflation, nor will they lie down and accept the job losses that are likely to be threatened if the economic stutter turns into a full-scale crisis. There will be setbacks but workers largely develop class consciousness through the experience of shared struggle. Their experiences in a period of what could be real instability are likely to contrast starkly with what they have seen and known in recent times.

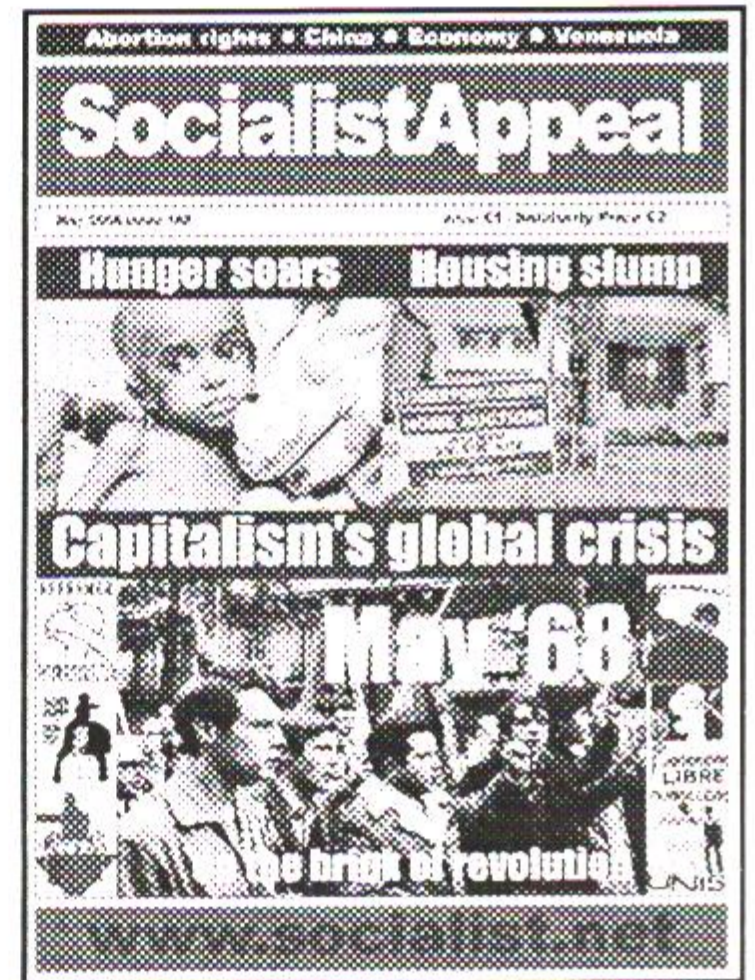
Of course the labour movement has been relatively quiescent over the past decade. As the mood changes however trade union branches kept going by a few stalwarts are likely to be revived, trades councils could become the centre of local struggles and trade union leaders will be forced to reflect and lead an aroused membership or risk being shouldered aside by real class fighters. Even in the Labour Party ward branches that are currently no more than empty husks and even whole constituency parties are likely to undergo a transformation as they are reclaimed by working class people from the real infiltrators, Messrs Kinnock, Blair, Brown and other supporters of the 'New Labour Tendency'. □

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## Israel turns 60 - where next for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples?

By Luke Wilson

ON MAY 14th, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, declared the independence of the State of Israel. Soon afterwards, the constant fighting between Jewish and Arab militias would erupt into a full-scale war, dragging in neighbouring Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and displacing over a million people. Though figures vary, it is estimated that over 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes by the nascent Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Jewish militias. Just as tragically, more than 600,000 Jews fled or were driven from their homes across the Arab world; many would make their homes in the new State of Israel.

60 years on the problems of this troubled region remain, with repercussions for the rest of the world. The Palestinian refugees and their descendants, now believed to number 3-4 million, still live in squalid refugee camps, and face often daily harassment and terror at the hands of the IDF. On the flip-side the creation of Israel, which was supposed to solve the 'Jewish question' and emancipate the Jews from anti-semitism, has manifestly failed to achieve this: Israel's citizens have had to live through several major wars and a consistent threat to their lives, and an undercurrent of anti-semitism exists today even in the West (albeit at relatively low levels).

So where did the movement to found the modern Israeli State come from? What roles did imperialism and the Soviet Union play in bringing this about? And what does the future hold for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples?

### Zionism

The term Zionism refers to the nationalist movement with the aim of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Its origin is attributed to Theodor Herzl, a wealthy Austro-Hungarian journalist, who put forward the idea at the first World Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland.

Initially, Zionism largely involved wealthy Jews buying land in Palestine from absentee Arab landlords (often leading to the eviction of the existing Palestinian tenants), and donating it to Jewish settlers, who would form collectives and work the land.

Zionism was Herzl's answer to the age-old 'Jewish question', that of emancipating the Jewish people from anti-semitic discrimination and raising them to a level of equality with other peoples. The nineteenth century had seen severe anti-semitic reaction across Europe, particularly in Tsarist Russia, where many were butchered in pogroms. However, Zionism was a bourgeois answer to the question, seeking emancipation by separating the Jewish people from the struggles of other peoples for emancipation from the drudgery and enslavement of capitalism.

In the early years, Zionism attracted little interest from European Jews, wealthy or poor, bourgeois or proletarian. My own ancestors, who were of the German petit-bourgeoisie, had little interest, forsaking the harsh desert of Palestine for more hospitable surroundings in England (though many of their descendants have since ended up in Israel, after the Holocaust). For the Jewish proletariat across Germany and Eastern Europe, the class struggle, in the form of the Bund and the Bolsheviks, was more attractive than the isolationism of Zionism. Nonetheless, a steady trickle of Jews, mostly of European origin, entered Palestine throughout the early twentieth century: by 1914, around 60,000 Jews (7% of the total population) called Palestine home, and by 1941 this had risen to just under 475,000 (30% of the total population).

### The Holocaust

The Holocaust changed the dynamics considerably. The butchering of six million Jews created millions of refugees looking for a home. Many of these fled to Palestine. However, despite Zionist propaganda, it should

be noted that the Zionist movement did not play an honourable role regarding saving these poor souls. Whereas the labour movements of the USA, Britain and elsewhere organised campaigns to open the borders of their countries to Jewish refugees, the Zionist movement and the Jewish communal leaderships played little role: their interest was in populating Palestine with Jews, not saving Jews from the gas chambers.

Nor were the British and US imperialists the 'saviours of the Jews'. Consistently refusing to bomb the railway tracks leading to the extermination camps, they also vehemently resisted Jewish immigration into their own countries, and Britain severely restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. The US government famously turned away the S.S. St. Louis, a boat full of refugees fleeing Nazi terror, in 1939 (many of the refugees eventually perished at the hands of the Nazis), and the British similarly refused to allow the Struma to land in Palestine in 1942 (the ship was later sunk by a Soviet submarine).

### Stalinism

Contrary to some views on the left, neither the British nor US imperialists gave unconditional backing to the Zionist movement. Britain promised Palestine first to the Arabs (in 1916), then to the Jews (the famous Balfour Declaration of 1917). Following their historical imperialist policy (replicated, for example, in India), they attempted to maintain control by turning the resident peoples against each other. In fact, Britain was against the emergence of a strong Jewish state: British officers commanded the Jordanian units that attacked Israel in 1948! The Holocaust had caused Jews of all political stripes (including... communists) to emigrate to Palestine, and the British feared a Jewish state might fall under Soviet influence.

Amazingly, some Stalinists believe that Stalin was a consistent fighter against Zionism. This could not be fur-

ther from the truth! Whilst Stalin did indulge in the most obnoxious anti-semitism (including murdering many Jewish Bolsheviks), he in fact supported the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state, believing he could use it as a bulwark against the British-influenced Arab monarchies. Soviet-dominated Czechoslovakia was in fact one of the first states to arm the new Jewish state after the United Nations voted to partition Palestine.

Similarly, the US initially supported the embargo of Israel. It changed its position as a result of its manoeuvring against British imperialism, as Britain's position weakened in the Middle East. Still, Britain and the US would only come to fully support (and dominate) Israel as the Soviet Union extended its influence over Arab states, particularly Egypt and Syria.

### Imperialism

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. Britain agreed to withdraw gradually from Palestine, relinquishing control to the UN. However, as we have seen, it was already manoeuvring to strengthen its own interests. The British occupation of Palestine had seen consistent violence between Jewish and Arab gangs, and between Jewish guerrillas and the British army (in 1946, the Irgun, a Jewish guerrilla group, blew up the King David Hotel, home to the British military command, killing 92 people).

In 1948, this broke out into full-scale war causing over a million Palestinians and Jews to flee as refugees. More than 600,000 Jews fled or were driven from their homes across the Arab world. Whilst these Jews would later become citizens of Israel (admittedly amongst the poorest), the Palestinians to this day remain refugees.

### Aftermath

As the Soviet Union extended its influence over Egypt and Syria, Israel would become an ever-increasingly important bulwark of US imperialism in the region. The Cold War turned the Middle East into a battleground, and Israel's short history has been a bloody

one. Even since the fall of the Soviet Union, Israel has been a key part of US attempts to maintain control over the region. Poverty in Israel is also rising. Capitalism has failed to create a prosperous society for Israel's Jews. Pensioners are reduced to eating rotten fruit thrown out by supermarkets at the end of the day; civil servants go unpaid for over a year; students are crippled with rising fees and debt.

### Palestinians

As for the Palestinians, they continue to live as refugees in the Occupied Territories, Lebanon and Jordan, confined to the margins of society. A decades-long guerrilla-campaign by various petit-bourgeois groups around the Palestinian Liberation Organisation has failed to liberate this people; indeed, the PLO leaders have (as in Ireland with Sinn Fein) transformed themselves into collaborators of the worst sort. Hamas cannot provide an alternative for Palestinians.

It's therefore safe to conclude that Zionism has utterly failed the peoples of Israel and Palestine. What has it done for Jews in the West? Well, despite the relative economic prosperity of Jews in the West (for example, in Britain, nearly 60% of Jewish males and 30% of Jewish females are employed in 'managerial and professional' occupations, much higher than any other religious group), violent attacks against Jews still occur, and are actually increasing. Many of these attacks are by young Muslims, brought up with television images of suffering Palestinians, and encouraged by reactionary religious leaders to attack their Jewish neighbours.

### Anti-semitism

In addition, a section of respectable political discourse centres around disturbing conspiracy theories of Jewish domination, particularly of the US government (Mearsheimer and Walt's 2006 paper, for example, purports to show that a Jewish lobby directs US policy in the Middle East counter to US strategic interests). The fact that anti-semitism still plays a political role is because the 'Jewish question' has transformed itself into a **national question** (something Marx could not

have been expected to predict when he wrote *On the Jewish Question* in 1844). Zionism's gift to the Jewish people is a continuation of anti-semitism.

### Is there a solution?

Capitalism, with its history of pitting different ethnic or religious groups against each other in search of lower wages, clearly offers no solution. Nor can we have any faith in the manoeuvring of the imperialist powers, and their so-called 'peace-plans', which would lead to a hopelessly weak Palestinian Bantustan (like the black 'homelands' in apartheid South Africa, which were actually just labour reserves for South African capitalism) under the economic heel of Israel, and continued exploitation of Jewish and Arab workers.

### Islamic fundamentalism

Some sections of the petit-bourgeois left give support to Islamic fundamentalism, and argue for the destruction of Israel and its replacement by a single Arab (possibly Islamic) Palestine. Obviously we cannot support any such thing. To begin with, it would have catastrophic consequences for Israel's Jews, who would be a persecuted minority in an Arab/Islamic state. Secondly, a capitalist Palestine, even an Arab/Islamic capitalist Palestine, would be incapable of raising the Palestinian people out of poverty. Capitalism drives down wages and living conditions, it does not raise them. Thirdly, Israel has the Middle East's biggest military machine. Whilst guerrilla tactics have had some success in defeating Israeli aggression (Hezbollah's victory in 2006 is one such example), destroying the state is another matter entirely.

In the last analysis, the only allies the Israeli and Arab workers and poor have are each other. The marvellous workers' movements across Egypt show that the power of capitalism and imperialism can be challenged. Only united in revolutionary struggle against their common enemy, the vampiric capitalist class and imperialist overlords, can the workers of Palestine, Israel and the wider Middle East transform society into something better. □

## Privatisation wave stalks Iranian workers

IWSN will be contributing a regular column keeping us up to date on the working class in Iran



NOT SATISFIED with the terrible economic burden and lack of rights that it has imposed on Iranian workers for three decades, Iran's pro-business regime is preparing for the first part of a major wave of privatisation.

With over 70% of industry in state hands there are going to be rich pickings for many a mollah's son. All that the ad hoc privatisation of the past few years achieved was that the families of the elite ended up with bargains undreamt of by the Shah's entourage! Whether it is this or that family that makes a fortune this time, one thing is certain: the workers will definitely pay for it. Already there have been complaints in the press about at least one case where a factory has been priced below the value of the land it is built on!

Ayatollah Khamenei's re-interpretation of Article 44 of the Constitution last year removed all obstacles to privatising the major sectors of the economy (except for the upstream oil industry). The recent intervention of the Expediency Council was aimed at resolving a number of differences between the majles (Parliament) and the Guardian Council on some details of the privatisation plan.

The first tranche of shares that are going to be

"turned over" - as the regime calls it - will be 5.2% of the Islamic Republic Shipping Company on 15 May. This will be followed by 5% of the following: Esfahan's refinery, Iran Communications, Bank-e Mellat, Bank-e Saderat and Iran Copper National.

The percentages of shares for Khorasan steel and Khuzestan Steel have not been finalised.

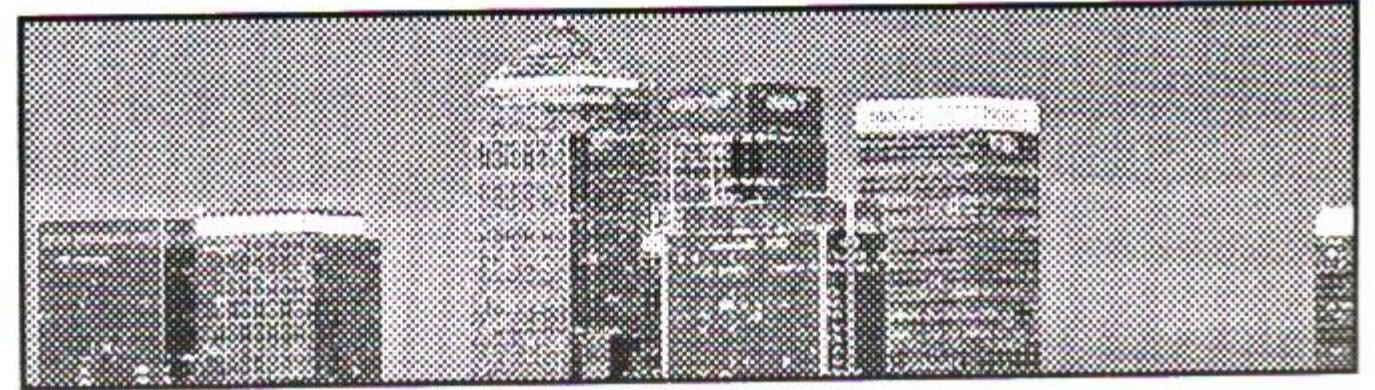
With at least 15 million people below the poverty line, unemployment at 20-30%, inflation over 21%, unpaid wages a part of everyday life for millions of workers, Labour Code amendments (i.e. dilutions) being discussed openly, and the constant negative comments on subsidies in the media, the Iranian workers' movement is heading for a defining year.

Help Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network (IWSN) in its activities aimed at defending the struggles of workers for basic rights like the right to strike, the right to form a trade union and getting paid for their work.

Raise the issue of Iranian workers' struggles and affiliation to IWSN in your trade union or CLP branch and send protest emails and solidarity messages during our campaigns. □

**Iranian Workers'  
Solidarity Network (IWSN)**  
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## Economics:



### STOCK MARKETS

around the world have been rallying. They are up 15% since they hit a low for the year in mid-March and they are now hardly down in value since the credit crunch began last August. Investor optimism is rising that the great global credit crunch is nearly over.

The mood is changing from one of deep pessimism to hope that the credit squeeze, that has seen banks and other investment institutions post up to \$400bn of losses and 'writedowns' on their loans and assets, has been curbed and that any resulting slowdown in the world economy will be small and shortlived.

The reason for the optimism is two-fold. First, no great financial institution has collapsed, bringing down many others like a pack of cards. That was a real worry up to January this year as the losses in the big banks and investment brokers mounted. The French bank Societe Generale had to announce a loss of \$5bn in one week after they discovered that one of their traders had got into seriously large loss-making positions similar to that achieved by 'rogue trader' Nick Leeson in the famous Barings Bank disaster back in 1995.

The rumours abounded that one of the top five Wall Street investment houses, Bear Stearns, was in trouble. And so it seemed. However, over a weekend, the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, organised a bailout of Bear Stearns, by arranging for JP Morgan, another big five house, to take it over for \$1 a share with the help of \$30bn of taxpayers' money.

Once that happened and JP Morgan mopped up Bear Stearns assets and commitments and began sacking its staff, investor confidence rocketed. Then they knew that whatever the cost, the Federal Reserve would come to the rescue.

### Credit

The other factor that has renewed confidence in capitalism, at least for a while, is the huge amount of credit that the central banks of the world are pumping into the financial sector. Since the crunch started, the Federal Reserve has put in over \$200bn in new money. Other government institutions like the Federal Home Loans Banks and state mortgage agencies have put in another \$300bn surreptitiously. At the same time the European



# Capitalists' wishful thinking

by Michael Roberts

CENTRAL BANK and the Bank of England have added another \$250bn through various credit 'facilities'. **Altogether, the world's banks and investment houses have been 'given' around \$1trn to help them get through their 'difficulties'.**

No wonder investors feel better! The taxpayer (that's us) stands by to help the banks avoid the consequences of their disastrous policies. It is socialism for the few in order to preserve capitalism for the many.

## Optimism

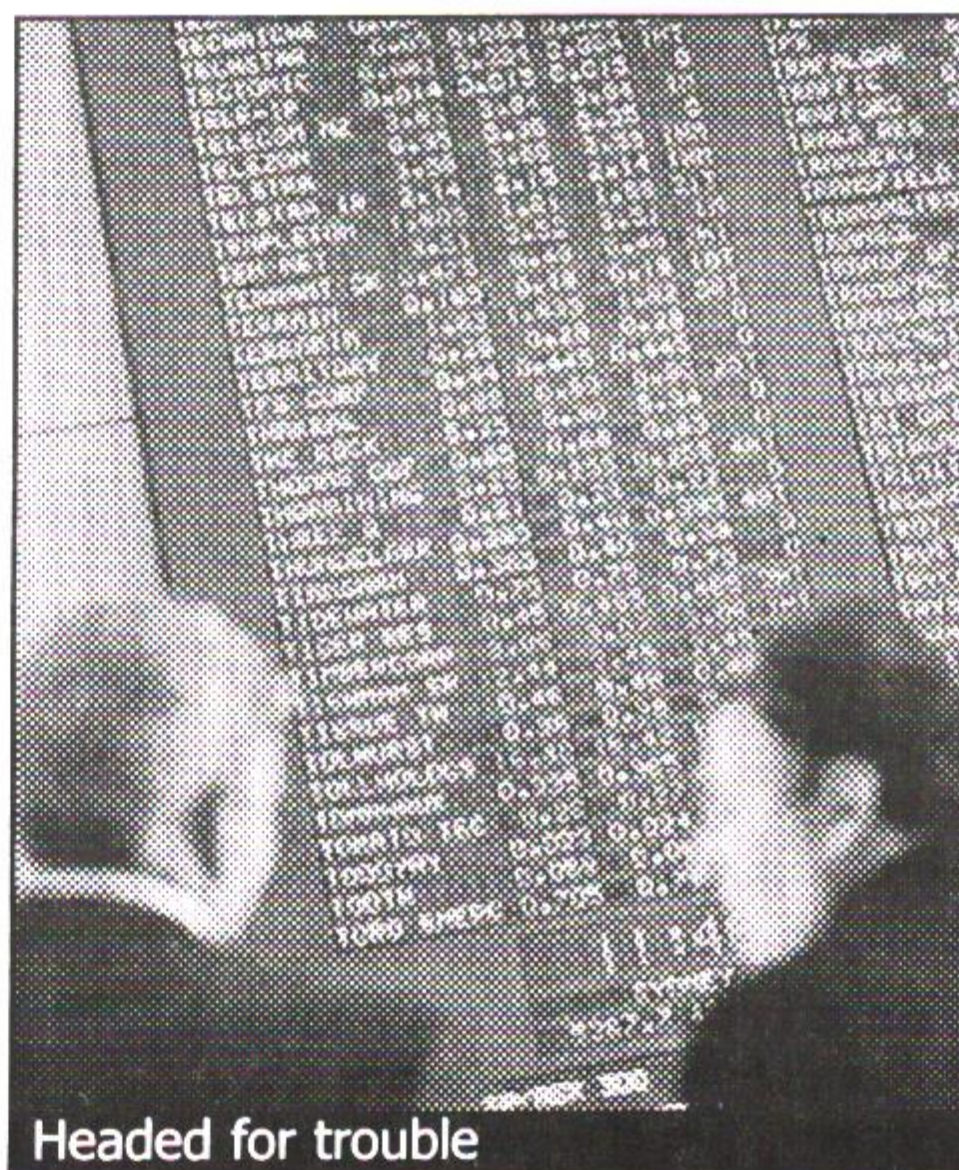
But this optimism by investors is just a great piece of wishful thinking. All this rushing about to help the banks will not avoid the economic slump that is heading capitalism's way. Every economic indicator is glowing red. GDP growth has slowed to nearly zero in the US. It is beginning to slow in Europe and Japan too. And the forecasts for the next few quarters are dire.

Take the United Nations among many others. It has just reported that the world economy is "teetering on the brink" of a severe downturn and will grow only 1.8% percent in 2008. That's down from a global growth rate of 3.8% in 2007, and the downturn is expected to continue with only a slightly higher growth of 2.1% in 2009.

And the UN is not refer-

ring to just the US or Europe. It is talking about the world, including fast-growing China and India. The UN said developing countries will suffer as badly as the mature capitalist economies: They should grow by 5% this year compared to a robust 7.3% in 2007. The UN even argued that global growth this year could fall to 0.8%. At the same time, global inflation is expected to accelerate this year to 3.7%, while world trade growth slid back from 7.2% in 2007 to 4.7%, largely due to weak U.S. demand for imported goods.

Any way you look at it, this is a dire forecast. This pessimism among economists about the future



Headed for trouble

stands in contrast to the optimism of the speculators in stock markets. Even the notoriously optimistic Association of Business Economists in the US has

now come out as a majority in expecting the US economy to go into recession by the end of the year. The Bank of England in its quarterly inflation report was just as black. It now expects the UK economy to grow by less than 1% this year while inflation rises to 4%!

The truth is that the credit crunch has still some way to play out in the damage it will cause to world capitalism. The overall losses from the credit crunch are likely to reach \$1.5trn or about 3% of global GDP before it is over, while it could take 5% points off growth in the US and 3% points off Europe.

## Liquidity boom

Why is that? It's because the great liquidity boom of the 2000s since the stock market bust of year 2000 had created such a huge mound of excess liquidity that it has finally toppled over.

**By 2007 the global credit mountain made up of money, bonds and exotic forms of liquidity called derivatives had reached \$600trn in**

**value compared to just \$50trn of annual world GDP.** That's 12 times the real values created each year in the world capitalist

economy. That had helped fuel a stock market boom from 2002 and above all a property bubble that infected the US, Europe, parts of Asia - indeed everywhere.

This expansion of what Marx called fictitious capital was not matched by real production of things or even services. Eventually, the price of houses reached such a level that nobody but the very rich could afford to get onto the property ladder in the US or the UK. Suddenly, purchasers stopped buying and soon prices were falling. Once prices fell, the mortgages that the banks had loaned and then passed on in the form of 'safe, securitised debt' to investors all round the globe began to look dodgy. The credit crunch began.

Now the whole ball of wool is unravelling and with it the so-called prosperity of the last few years. Capitalist profits in the last few years had risen mainly on the back of this financial boom. It was the financial sector that made the huge profits and paid the big money to its owners. The companies in the 'real economy' did less well. Indeed, their profitability was falling and has been since 1997.

Now that the financial sector is in trouble, the weakness of capitalism in its downphase of profitability is being exposed. It is paving the way for a serious worldwide economic recession, despite the current optimism of the stock markets. □

# The Union Busters

By William Roche

UNION BUSTING is as old as trade unions themselves. Ever since workers started to form their own organisations back in the 18th century to fight for decent working conditions, employers have tried to break them. In the old days workers would be beaten, imprisoned, and sometimes killed for participating in trade union activities. This still goes on in many countries. Better working conditions meant less profits for the boss, and a harsh hand was dealt to keep the rich ruling minority firmly in charge.

Nowadays, in developed countries like Britain and the USA, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this kind of oppression towards working people had become a thing of the past. After all, we live in a democracy. But the case studies below show quite the contrary. Although techniques have changed, far from becoming a thing of the past, union busting has swelled to become a multi-million dollar industry.

After the 1935 US National Labor Relations Act established the right to join a union and bargain collectively, companies seeking to operate union free could no longer use the bare-knuckle tactics of old. They needed more subtle and sophisticated tactics to fight the trade unions. What they needed were private expert companies that they could hire to do their dirty work for them, companies specialising in union avoidance services. Until the 1970s, however, professional union avoidance consultants were small in number and were not yet part of mainstream industrial relations. Most employers kept quiet about the idea of hiring consultants. One consultant stated that employers "used to sneak to seminars about keeping your plant non-union. They were as nervous as whores in a church! The posture of major company managers was, 'Let's not make the union mad at us during their organising drive or they'll take it out at the bargaining table.'"

That mindset changed dramatically

in the 1970s and '80s, a period of significant expansion for the union avoidance industry, when most employers shed their inhibitions about recruiting union busting consultants. The size of the consultant industry increased ten-fold during the 1970s, as employers sought out firms that could help them defeat trade union formation and expansion. Union busting consultants organised thousands of anti-union campaigns, targeting areas of growing importance to unions like healthcare,



and white-collar employees. Today, the monopolisation of big business has led to giant companies accumulating enormous profits, and with them, the resource for union busting has grown to unprecedented proportions.

## Genesis of Union Busting

The Logan Report, produced earlier this year by the British Trade Union

Congress (TUC), reveals some startling statistics. It is estimated that companies in the USA alone are spending a whopping \$4 billion each year on union busting! If you take into account that this money is directed mainly at a small number of workers actively engaged in struggle at any one time, that works out at thousands of dollars per worker. Add to that a staggering 25,000 lawyers that are apparently committed to preventing trade unions developing across the USA, and you have what has been described as a genesis for union busting policy.

The Burke Group (TBG), based in California, is one of the world's biggest union busting consultants. It advertises itself as a 'management consulting firm specialising in union avoidance'. TBG has conducted over 800 union busting campaigns since its establishment in 1981, with clients such as Coca-Cola, Mazda, General Electric, Heinz, DuPont, and Lockheed Martin, with whom they boast a 95% success rate!

The tactic used by union busters like TBG is to get into the workplace and convince the workforce against voting in favour of union representation, or recognition. As trade unions benefit workers' interests, the only way to achieve this is to lie. Workers are given company leaflets warning that if they join the union they are likely to be permanently on strike. They mislead workers into believing that the union will start harassing them in their homes, risk their job security, and cause them a loss of earnings and benefits. In other words they convince workers into believing exactly the opposite of what trade unions actually offer.

## Chinese Daily News

One textbook example of TBG's union busting campaigns was for the Chinese Daily News (CDN), the largest Chinese language newspaper in North America. In October 2000, 152 mostly Taiwanese workers started a trade

union organising campaign after management announced plans to cut pay, and force employees to sign a statement that they could be fired at any time. Within a month, 95 percent of the employees had signed union authorisation cards. In response, CDN hired TBG who immediately started an aggressive anti-union campaign. In March 2001, the workers stood solid and voted again for union recognition. The CDN management told the workers that it was prepared to spend \$1 million on defeating the union. True to its word, by September 2005, after an intense five-year anti-union campaign, the union lost a rerun ballot. The head of the Newspapers Guild subsequently described the events as the "fiercest anti-union campaign I have ever been involved in."

But isn't this against the law I hear you ask? The simple answer is yes! The trouble is that legislation is so weak that it's cheaper for the company to pay out damages to individual workers in court, than to give in to the trade unions. In 2007, the US Court of Appeals awarded CDN employees \$2.5 million for numerous labour law violations committed by the company, but they will probably never gain union recognition.

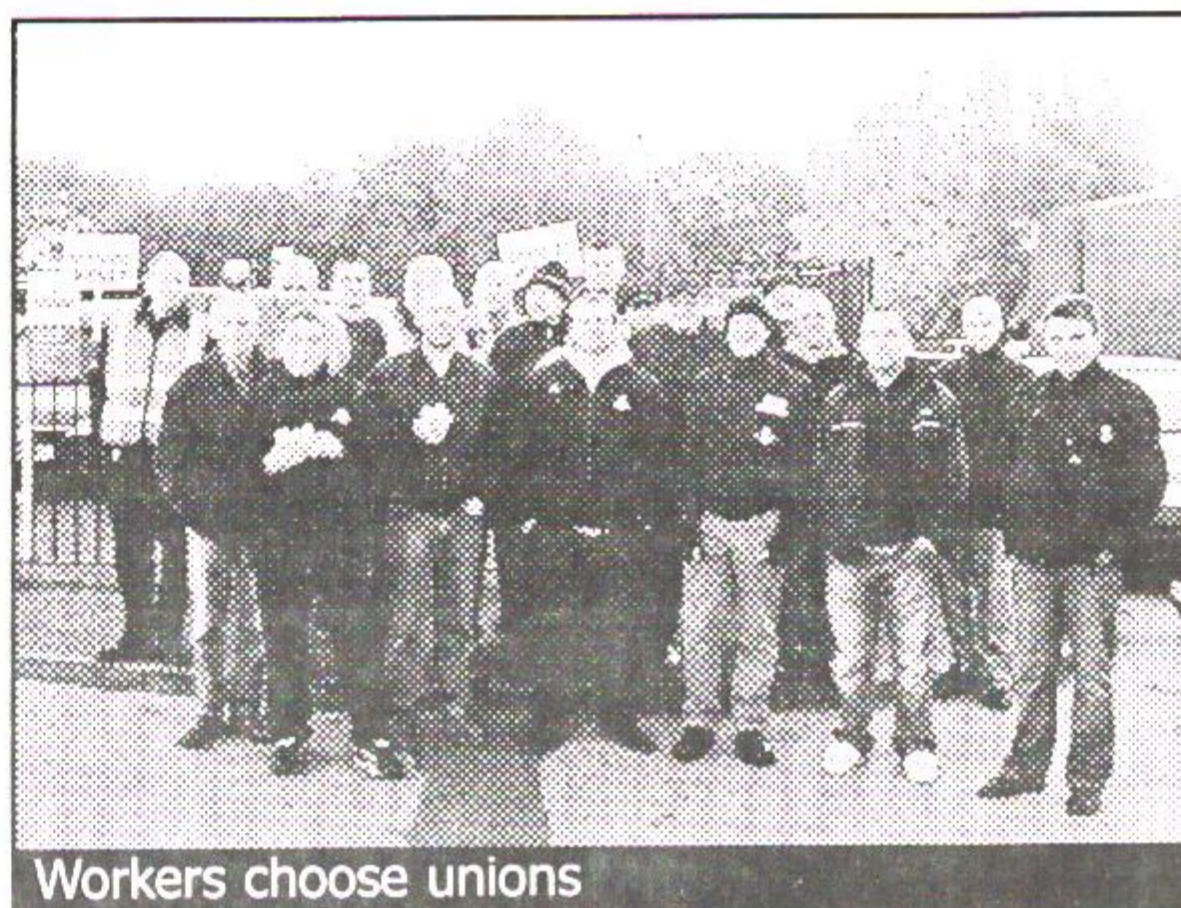
Organisations like TBG have been so successful that, despite some 60 million Americans saying that they would like to join a trade union, national membership currently stands at only 7.5 percent of the US private sector workforce.

## Bringing It Back Home

And if you thought this kind of thing could never happen here, think again! The Burke Group has been accused of bringing union busting tactics to Britain. In fact, a 2008 survey of trade union organising campaigns in Britain found that employers used anti-union consultants in about one fifth of the cases. TBG has attracted large companies operating here in Britain to its sinister services, including T-Mobile, Amazon.co.uk, Virgin Atlantic, Calor Gas, FlyBe, Cable & Wireless, and Kettle Chips. Many of TBG's anti-union campaigns have had a devastating impact.

In the case of T-Mobile, George

Rankin, an organising officer from the Communication Workers Union (CWU), has described some of the tactics that were used. He said that TBG sent a 7-minute video to the homes of five hundred and fifty T-Mobile workers in order to convince them against voting in favour of recognition of the CWU. TBG used scare tactics like those listed above. Workers were moved away from trade union influence by outsourcing their jobs to private companies. Trade union members were also intimidated and harassed. The union lost the vote for recognition by two to one. It's a similar story with Cable & Wireless, and with Kettle Chips. The Graphical Print and Media Union involved in the Amazon case stated that "we had never faced this level of



serious professional resistance before", after the union also lost the vote for recognition.

But the FlyBe case is most revealing. In 2006, Europe's largest regional low-cost carrier hired TBG when 400 cabin crew tried to join the Transport & General Union. However, midway through TBG's union busting campaign, the union (now called Unite) persuaded FlyBe to drop TBG, and subsequently a huge shift by the workers in favour of union representation led to an election landslide, with 94% of the workers voting in favor of unionisation in an 89% turnout.

## Fight Back

What does all this show? It shows that if the workers are left to organise they choose the trade unions. It shows that the only way for companies to avoid trade unions is to lie, to cheat, to manipulate, and to attack. It shows that the argument about capi-

talist society being governed by the natural forces of market trading is utter nonsense. Capitalist society is, in part, maintained by employers who squander billions of dollars to ensure that the rich stay rich, and the poor stay poor. These battles between trade unions and employers effectively mark out the boundary between the workers, and the business owners in society. It is a boundary between two classes. One side is fighting for decent working and living conditions, and the other side fighting to preserve exploitation and maintain its profits. For one side to gain the other must lose. True we live in a democracy, but it's a parliamentary democracy, where legislation favours the interests of big business owners, not working people. The enormous resources currently being poured into blocking the unions in the workplace serves to exacerbate this problem. It means the discontent of the exploited workforce is trapped beneath the surface of society and will fester until it can find an avenue of expression.

## AFL-CIO and TUC

The two trade union federations in the USA and Britain, the AFL-CIO and the TUC, have signed a joint agreement to work together to eliminate the intimidation of workers who want to improve the quality of their families' lives by joining or forming a trade union. The two union federations agreed to share information about the activity of union busting firms, to develop a shared database of union busting activity, and create "Busting the Union Busters" training materials. Both will jointly lobby governments and relevant international bodies to restrict the activities of the union busters. But, the only way to beat union busting once and for all is to unite the workforce, and join and organise in our trade unions, our own class organisations. A collective problem requires a collective solution. Ultimately we must build a new society based on the needs of the majority, not the needs of the rich minority. These are the foundations of a workers' democracy, of a socialist society. □

# ASLEF Conference

by Andy Viner, ASLEF Trains Functional Committee on LUL (personal capacity)

## the way forward

CONFERENCE TIME always highlights the key issues that have arisen in the last 12 months and the issues activists need to address in the coming 12 months. This year's ASLEF conference is no different.

The victories of Silver Link and Midland Main Line workers in defending their pensions shows the determination of members to strike for justice.

### Squash

The Squash campaign to improve our cab working environment has made rail companies take action and improve or plan to improve the noisy, hot and badly designed cabs. We should not rest, and make sure the

rail companies carry out their promises to improve cab environments.

### St Pancras

The nationalisation of Chiltern Rail Company, not by our government but by the German government, who now owns the company, highlights the fiasco that still exists on Britain railways. The St Pancras International Train crew branch call for international links with the French and Belgium rail unions is a practical necessity of international co-operation.

The biggest issue that could divide us is harmonisation of wages and conditions. The basic principle should be that the hard

fought-for conditions that have been gained should not be given up. If harmonisation is to be agreed to, it can only be on the basis that we harmonise up, that we raise the worst working conditions to the best. One driver should not pay to bring another driver up to a better standard of conditions. This is just another way for the railway companies to avoid paying and to improve their profits.

### Venezuela

There may have been a tendency for members to leave issues up to the union representatives to resolve things. Now is a good time for the whole membership

to get involved in union activities

### Cuba

Aslef has always had a tradition of supporting international campaigns like Cuba Solidarity, Justice for Colombia, action for imprisoned trade unionists in Iran and Venezuela solidarity campaigns. The last two years the conference have passed motions to affiliate to all Venezuela solidarity campaigns, but the Union has only affiliated to VIC and not HOV. The executive committee must be once again instructed to affiliate to all Venezuela solidarity campaigns. □

## Londoners: watch out for

# Boris the menace

By Steve Tree

THE ELECTION of Boris Johnson as London Mayor in May should be met with foreboding. This is not good for train operators or working people in and around London. Boris appears to be born not only with a silver spoon in his mouth (having been educated in Eton), but also a foot. We should not be taken in by the appearance of barmy Boris.

Boris is no friend of the trade union movement. One of his election campaign policies was to ban strikes on London Underground. The right to strike is a fundamental right that we can not allow to be taken away or sold. If this were to happen, the upper hand would be given to management. Nobody wants to strike, but the fact that we can means management can not just impose detrimental wages and conditions on us.

We have to remember that it was the Tories that set us on the route of these

over-expensive Private Public Partnership (PPP) and Private Finance Initiative (PFI), and the Labour Party are now paying in electoral terms for not reversing these policies. The cost to us the taxpayer is higher, while big business gains huge profits. If they collapse like Metronet, we end up footing the bill. It's worth remembering in Metronet's case it cost us over £2 billion pounds.

### Affordable housing

Boris is also committed to dropping Ken Livingstone's target of 50% of all new homes in London to be affordable and letting the market decide the price.

The coming years with a Tory Mayor are not going to be peaceful. Those old Tory policies of the 1980s and '90s will be back on the agenda again. The Tories wanted to privatise London Underground

wholesale.

Transport workers in particular need to be more politically aware of the consequences of the election of a Tory Mayor. He's got them in his sights.

All of a sudden he's discovered a funding crisis for London transport. The Crossrail project is to cost £16bn. As Londoners know full well, large chunks of the underground are closed at weekends and in the evenings for repair. Upgrading costs £1bn a year. The word is Boris is £5bn short. It's the first sign he's shaping up to put up fares, attack London transport workers. or both. He's already cancelled the deal with Chavez where 1/4 million Londoners on benefits get free public transport.

Don't let him get away with it. □

# RMT ballot 17,000 Network Rail workers

by Rick Grogan

THE RMT is balloting more than 17,000 workers in a dispute with Network Rail. The Union has been negotiating for months for the harmonisation of terms and conditions for maintenance staff.

The talks have broken down because Network Rail have failed to come up with a serious offer to address the needs of 12,000 infrastructure workers, many of whom were transferred to Network Rail from the private sector. The RMT demands for infrastructure workers are for:

1) Working week: a 35 hour week with no loss of pay, moving toward a 34 hour week with where possible a maximum 4 day rostered week over a 13 week cycle.

2) Annual leave: 28 days annual leave on entry plus bank holidays. 30 days after ten years service plus bank holidays. No compulsory working on Christmas, Boxing and New Year's Days and agreed enhancements for

working those days.

3) 39 weeks full sick pay.

4) Pay issues: one grading system, one set of job descriptions, highest basic rates of pay with allowances, recognition that allowances can be reduced to increase basic pay and 100% pensionable pay.

The company have been trying to use the negotiations to drive down conditions instead of answering the Union's requests.

It became inevitable that a ballot would have to take place and the workers threw out the companies' offer by more than one hundred to one against.

The balloting of the 5,000 signal grades and other operational staff follows the rejection of a pay and conditions offer that would in real terms mean cuts in living standards.

The offer of 4.8 percent this year and RPI plus 0.5 per for next year cent was rejected as it would not protect staff against rising costs of fuel and other commodities that are rising

rapidly above inflation levels.

This offer was rejected by a margin of two to one.

The company then insultingly offered another tenth of one percent on condition that we did not go to ballot.

With no sign of serious negotiations from the company, a strike that could close down the entire network rail seems inevitable.

This would be one of the biggest actions that the country has seen since the late 1980s. The Union must get the message out to the general public and bring them on board. The media are going to go into overdrive to run down the union's leadership and portray railworkers as lazy and overpaid. We must do all that we can to counter these lies and put the truth out on a consistent basis.

The left should rally around this dispute and, putting aside their differences, give as much support as possible. □

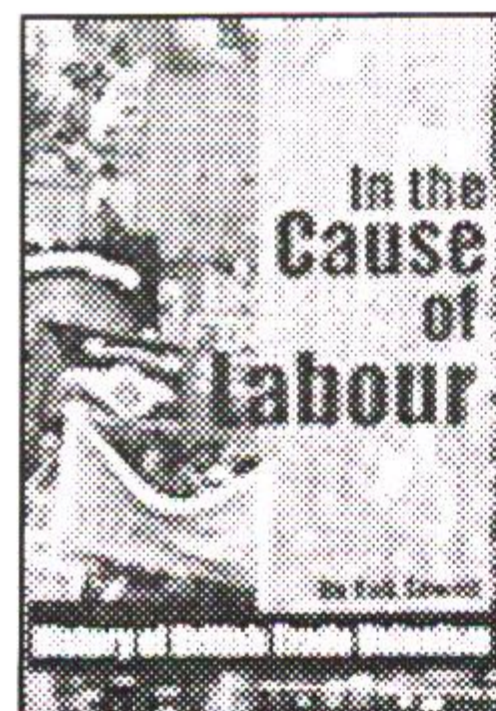
## Police get angry with New Labour.

by our Industrial Correspondent

LAST YEAR'S 2.5 % pay rise for the police, agreed by the independent arbitration panel, was unilaterally slashed by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, to 1.9%, a real wage cut. This interference caused enormous resentment among the police. Since the 1918 strike, it has been illegal for the police to strike. So they are totally dependent on arbitration doing right by them. For the past 24 years the arbitration award has been nodded through. Last year Smith used her veto. Police Federation Chair Jan Berry said members felt 'betrayed.'

The Police Federation has conducted a ballot on how to respond. Of 140,000 coppers, 60,000 returned ballot papers (43%). 93% of respondents wanted the arbitration award made binding. What if the government won't play ball? Then 86% think the Police Federation should have full independence. They want the right to strike. They are right.

A BBC commentator said, "The vote seems to be a deliberate shot across the bows of a government which many Police Federation members have come to regard as hostile." When New Labour manages to alienate a traditionally conservative police force, an arm of the state, and makes them contemplate strike action, then that is a measure of the support they have blown.



► In the Cause of Labour -

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By Rob Sewell

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# Workers show power

**" Britain has been hit by what trade unions have called the biggest wave of work stoppages since the Labour government came to power 10 years ago, with up to 400,000 public sector employees going on strike."**

(Reuters report Friday, 25 April 2008)

ON THURSDAY April 24th teachers, lecturers and public sector workers staged a one-day strike. Teachers were out on official strike for the first time for 21 years. They were joined by Further Education lecturers organised in UCU and public sector workers from the PCS union who are faced with a government imposed 2% pay rise limit.

At last workers in the public sector were taking organised, coordinated and

united strike action against pay offers that represent a cut in their standard of living.

## Mass demonstrations

From the mass demonstrations the length and breadth of the country the message was loud and clear - the abuse and exploitation of public sector workers must cease and the government must change course or face the consequences.

Laura, a teacher in Norwich turned up to the local rally. She told Socialist Appeal, "I am here today to support our union (NUT). We have 345 pupils in our school and we know many of the parents. I have not received one negative comment by parents about what we are doing. I have friends in other unions who have

gone into work today but everyone supports our action. It has taken 21 years for this to happen but there comes a point when you have to say 'enough is enough'. We have got to try, we have got to fight!" If the teachers were not militant before today, they are now! For united action of all public sector workers!

## Strike together!

Thousands joined the Unison rally on April 24 outside Birmingham town hall as the fight against Birmingham City Council's attempts to impose Single Status (which means big wage cuts for thousands of workers) continues.

The mood soared as they were joined by the civil service union PCS and the National Union of Teachers

on 24 April. The huge demonstration saw united defiance by council workers, teachers and civil servants in what was a noisy but well tempered protest that engulfed the city.

At the same time as this inspiring united public sector action, workers at the refinery at Grangemouth in Scotland showed how the concentration of capital gives quite small groups of workers enormous economic muscle. Their action threatened to bring the whole country to a halt. Their employer Ineos is owned by Jim Ratcliffe, the 25th richest man in Britain with £2,300m to his name, and a notorious asset stripper. He wanted to walk off with their pension pot. Solid action by 1,200 workers stopped him right in his tracks. □

# Left Victory in PCS Elections

by Mike Docherty

THE BROAD left Democracy Alliance has won a resounding victory in the recent elections for the PCS National Executive Committee (NEC). A coalition of Left Unity, the socialist group in PCS, and the centre-left PCS Democrats, the Democracy Alliance was first elected with a majority on the NEC in 2002. It has since launched a national campaign in defence of civil service jobs, terms and conditions and pay, transforming a union that was in decline under the leadership of the right-wing 'Moderates' into the sixth largest union in the UK.

There was concerted opposition from the right in the elections under the guise of the "4th members" coalition who pledged to "put trade union issues before politics" and end

"political extremism" when in reality they represent little more than stooges for senior management.

The Democracy Alliance also faced opposition from 'Independent Left,' an ultra-left breakaway from Left Unity. There were fears that the left vote could split and hand positions on the NEC to the right.

These fears proved unfounded as Janice Godrich, Democracy Alliance candidate and Left Unity member, was re-elected as PCS National President with a vote which exceeded the votes of both the right and ultra-left candidates combined. Left Unity now forms an overall majority on the NEC.

The vote represents a clear endorsement from PCS members of the left leadership of the union and their campaigning agenda in defence of jobs and public services. However, the central issue confronting the lead-



ership is pay, with a quarter of civil servants now earning less than £15,400 a year and thousands on the minimum wage. As Socialist Appeal goes to press, delegates at this year's PCS National Conference have given a green light for a strike ballot of all members over pay. Members will be balloted on a rolling programme of industrial action, including a one day strike across the entire civil service. The PCS executive now has a mandate to step up its opposition to the government and break the 2% pay cap through effective strike action orchestrated on a national scale. □

# Fighting fund - summer offensive!

WE HOPE that what you have read in the *Socialist Appeal* this month will help inspire you to stand up to the capitalist system and join *Socialist Appeal* in the fight to change it. The bosses have access to the mass

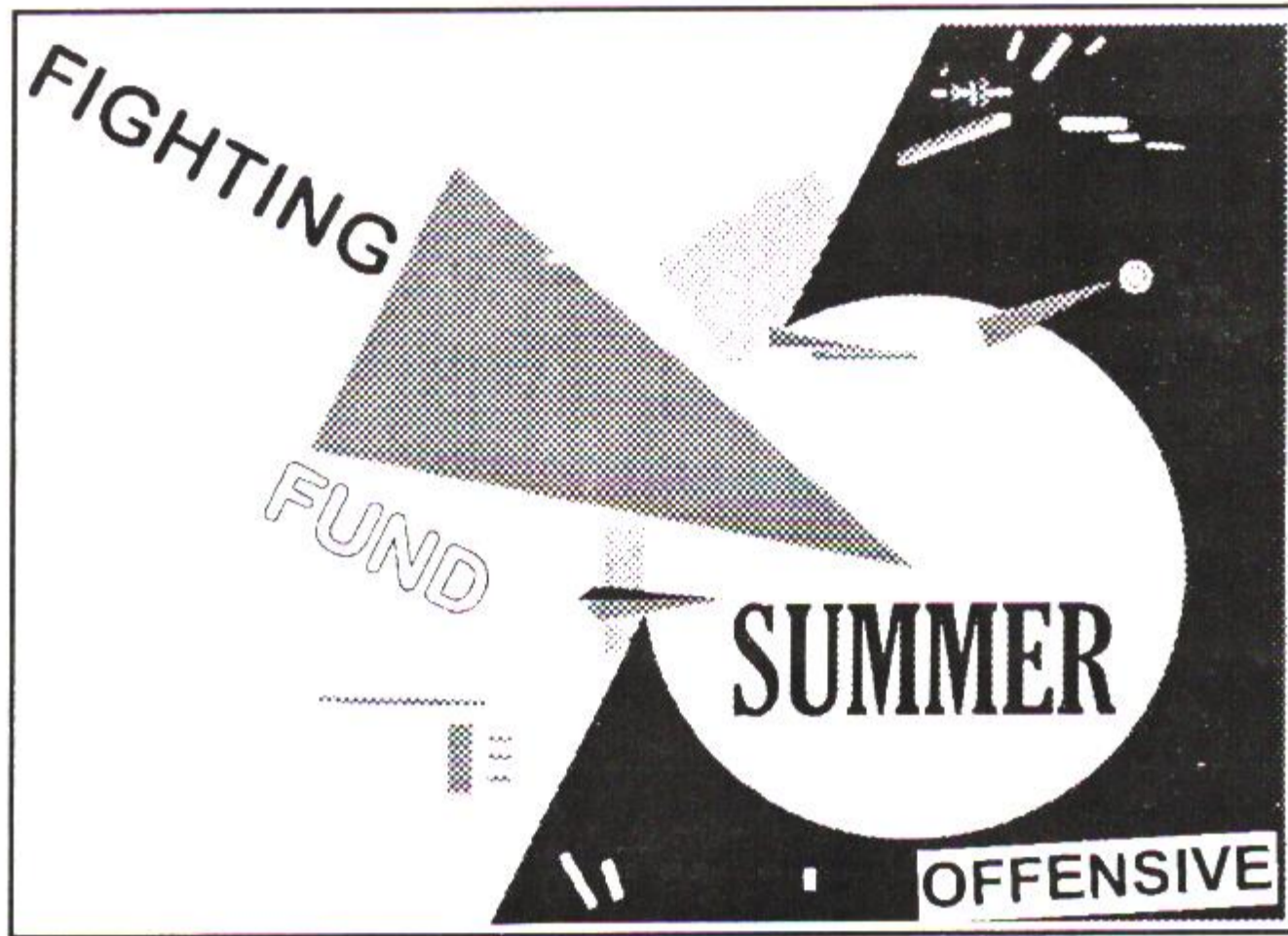
media, the press and television to peddle their lies. Opposition to all this is rarely allowed to be shown, except in a twisted and distorted form. So we have to do the job ourselves. The task of *Socialist Appeal* is to explain and

fight for Marxist ideas and demands in the Labour movement and amongst the youth. But our resources are weak. Big business provides millions for their papers; we have to rely on the honest support of ordinary working people to keep going. We rely on the financial contributions of our readers and supporters to keep the red

flag flying. Donations to the Fighting Fund are a vital part of this. The *Socialist Appeal* editorial board have set the target of **£2,000** to be raised this quarter; before the end of July.

We are confident that every reader and seller - and that means you - will respond to this appeal. Remember you are the only source of finance we have or want. So let's get that cash in!

You can donate online, by visiting the Wellred website at [wellred.marxist.com](http://wellred.marxist.com) and use your credit/debit card. Cash payments can be made over the counter at any branch of Abbey (National) by paying into account K2018479SOC. Cheques can also be paid into this account using this method. Alternatively you can send a cheque (UK banks only please) to us at SA, PO Box 50525, Poplar, London, E14 6WG □



## Socialist Appeal Stands for:

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

for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.

- ✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.

- ✚ **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

## No to racism!

## No to the BNP!

THE ELECTION of Richard Barnbrook of the British National Party to the Greater London Authority is a warning to us all. The BNP is an openly racist and anti-Muslim party. But they should not just be opposed by black people and Muslims. Just as an injury to one is an injury to all, so a threat to one of us is a threat to working class unity and a threat to all of us.

It is true that the BNP didn't make a real breakthrough in the May local elections. They have only 50 councillors nationally. That's still 50 too many.

Why are the BNP, and racist ideas generally, making some gains now? The reason is the inability of capitalism to guarantee a decent standard of living to working class people. Normally we would expect the organised labour movement to channel workers' discontent and frustrations against the root cause of their problems - the capitalist system. But the New

Labour clique has hijacked the political leadership of the movement. So far from pointing to a solution, they are part of the problem. And the BNP is picking up on the anti-Labour mood that has developed.

Is it any wonder that people lash out blindly and vote for the BNP when the local Labour council has failed to do anything for them for donkey's years? When the Labour government deliberately betrays its commitment to the poor, as they did over the 10p tax issue, the closure of post offices and so many other policies?

It's worse than that. New Labour is feeding the flames of racism. Brown goes on about 'British jobs for British workers.' In the Crewe by-election Labour's propaganda has been vile - aimed at making racism respectable. We all recognise the dog whistles they blow and the code they speak in. They have positioned themselves to the right of the Conservatives



with slogans like 'Tories soft on jobs' and questions like "Do you oppose making foreign nationals carry an ID card?"

The BNP has tried to present itself as a 'respectable,' 'post-fascist' electoral party like Haider's Austrian FPÖ, the Belgian Vlaams Belang and the French Front National. Unfortunately for them the wheels have fallen off that ploy. That was shown in the recent split. Amidst mutual recriminations, arguments about where they get their money from and why they are so late in lodging their financial accounts, dissident Susie Graham's home was invaded by Griffin 'loyalists',

who seized her computer. The BNP showed itself to be the same bunch of thugish idiots the far right has always been in this country. Leader Nick Griffin can trace his lineage right back through generations of post-War fuhrers, and ultimately to Oswald Moseley and his blackshirts in the 1930s. Their councillors are at best useless. And their policies are overtly right wing and anti-working class. For instance their website denounced April 24th public sector strikers as 'greedy.'

The BNP represents a threat to all workers. Keep them in the gutter where they belong. □

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