

Socialist *appeal*

Student fees, benefit cuts, privatisation...

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No to Blairism

Fight for Socialism

Industrial Conference
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Northern Ireland's impasse

Last month, Northern Ireland exploded into violence again. Petrol bombs, blazing buildings, and RUC brutality against protesters were all in evidence in the wake of the Apprentice Boys parade in Derry.

This reflects a deteriorating situation, where the suspension of the Northern Ireland assembly and the impasse over decommissioning has threatened renewed violence across the province.

Tony Blair, who was desperate to get an agreement over the Assembly, was determined after a "cooling off" period over the summer to end the logjam come September. Both Dublin and London are doing everything possible to get the "peace process" back on track.

However, the Good Friday Agreement was "all things to all men". For a temporary period, given the capitulation of the IRA, the deal could be made to work. Despite repeated delays, the Assembly was set up with the participation of Unionist and Nationalist parties. However, given the ambiguity of the agreement, a single issue could derail the whole process. Decommissioning proved to be the sticking point. Both the Unionist parties and Sinn Fein are sticking to their interpretations. Trimble is forced to harden his position on decommissioning given the opposition within his ranks and the threat from Paisley's Democratic Unionists. While Adams says the agreement allows him to take up the Executive seats before decommissioning takes place.

Unionism has fought a rear guard struggle to maintain its privileged position against the discriminated Catholic minority. It was and remains a bastion of bigoted reaction. However, under the pressure of the British government, it has been forced, kicking and screaming, to make concessions.

Nevertheless, greater concessions were squeezed from the IRA. After 25 years of "armed struggle" to bring about a united Ireland, they finally declared the war to be over. Their campaign of individual terrorism, as we explained, was utterly counter-productive and served to widen the sectarian divide. It was a dead-end. The idea of a united Ireland has never been further away. The whole IRA campaign was a disaster from start to finish. It

was this eventual realisation by Adams and the Sinn Fein leadership that produced the IRA cease-fire in 1994.

After 25 years, and nowhere near their goals, the struggle gave rise to exhaustion. After years of violence and repression, there was a feeling of war weariness. There was a desire for peace within the two communities.

Both Adams and McGuinness were eager to abandon the military struggle for a political settlement that would bring Sinn Fein to "official" politics, and all the trap-pings that went with it. In seeking a deal, they opened up secret discussions with the Major government and let it be known "the war is over".

So after 25 years, and three thousand dead, what has the IRA achieved? In reality, they have abandoned everything for two seats in the Executive, which they are now forced to haggle over. They have promises of links with the Irish Republic and reform of the RUC. After all that sacrifice, they have been handed scraps from the table.

The methods of individual terrorism employed by the IRA lead to the strengthening of the state and a greater division between ordinary Catholics and Protestants. In fact all the divisions have been reinforced. Last year's tragedy at Omagh illustrated the point. The segregation of the different communities has reached new levels, with families still being driven out of their homes under the threat of sectarian violence.

The promise that the IRA will decommission by next May is an open question. However, as the Economist stated: "Like the governments and most nationalists, Mr Chastelain (the head of the decommissioning process) believes there has been a major republican shift." (10th July).

Nevertheless, given the opposition, this will lead to further splits within its ranks, possibly towards the Real or Continuity IRA. Adams and the Sinn Fein leadership are eager to assume respectable parliamentary careers within the Assembly. There is no way they want to return to the position of the past.

However, despite their rhetoric of "a new type of politics", even if they are to take up their Executive seats, it will not lead to a New Ireland. Despite some concessions over cross-border bodies and the like, this is a far cry from a united Ireland. It is certainly no stepping stone to Irish



unity. The Protestant majority, fearing discrimination, would never allow it

Even if they manage to cobble together shaky agreements at the top, sectarian divisions will still remain. Distrust and insecurity not only remain but have even been heightened. While sectarianism was originally fostered by British imperialism as part of its divide and rule policy in Ireland, it has evolved into an uncontrollable monster. The role of the sectarian parties, both Orange and Green, in order to gain greater leverage, has been to deliberately stoke up sectarian feelings. Sectarian shootings and beatings still continue.

The whole rotten political structure in Northern Ireland is based upon sectarianism. They all accept the divisions and serve to reinforce them for their own ends.

Sinn Fein's perspective of a united Ireland is in ruins. Under present conditions, a capitalist united Ireland is ruled out. A million armed Protestants is a guarantee against it. The unity of Ireland can only be brought about by the socialist revolution in the North and South, as well as in Britain. Despite all the cheering of the sects, the strategy of the IRA as the Marxists explained in advance has been a disaster. It has pushed back the goal of Irish unity for years.

Only the working class can resolve the national question. Only class unity can cut across the sectarian divide. The only organisations in the North that comprise Catholics and Protestants are the trade unions. If they were to take up the struggle on class issues, they could unite the working class in the North in action. Linked to this must be the establishment of a Party of Labour, to represent the interests of the working class as a whole. This can be the spring board for a socialist programme.

The great Irish Marxist James Connolly saw the national question as a class question. He explained:

"We are out for Ireland for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord; not the sweating, profit-grinding capitalist; not the sleek and oily lawyer; not the prostitute pressman - hired liars of the enemy. Not these are the Irish upon whom the future depends. Not these, but the Irish working class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared.

The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour." ■

No to single union deals

For ten years the NUJ at the Western Mail and Echo in Cardiff has, despite derecognition, maintained the fight for the rights of its members. Sometimes conditions have been very difficult but union members have supported each other, built the membership and resisted the worst excesses of management in a sometimes hostile and intimidating anti-union atmosphere.

by an NUJ member

Despite its many flaws the Employment Relations Bill has given us the prospect of some light at the end of the tunnel. Across the country new members have been flocking to join the union on the back of an active campaign. The NUJ has seen its biggest rise in membership for over 20 years, new Chapels are being formed every week and recognition claims are being prepared.

However, it is not only the employers who are putting obstacles in the way of the NUJ gaining re-recognition. In early February the NUJ discovered that the Western Mail and Echo Limited in Cardiff had invited three unions to make a presentation for recognition on the basis of a single union deal, the AEEU, MSF and GMB - an obvious attempt by the company to bypass the relevant industry unions, the NUJ and GPMU. This was all the more incredible since the NUJ is the largest organised union in the company.

The NUJ Chapel at the company made its position clear - it could only be represented by the union of its choice - the NUJ. Finally the company relented and the NUJ and GPMU were invited to participate. The GMB and MSF made it clear they would have no part in trying to force out another union and withdrew from the 'beauty contest'.

Both the NUJ and GPMU agreed to make a presentation to the Company Forum but made it clear that they could only do so on the basis of representing their own individual constituencies and that while we were happy to discuss single table bargaining there would be no offer of a single union deal.

The NUJ and GPMU consequently decided a joint approach to their presentations. The GPMU met the AEEU and agreed a tripartite approach.

On March 4 the three unions made their presentations. The NUJ and GPMU stuck

to the agreement but NUJ representatives on the Company Forum reported that the AEEU said they could represent all staff in a single union, no strike deal. This is despite the fact that when they were readmitted to the TUC they gave a written undertaking not to recruit, organise or represent journalists.

On Friday 16 April the Company Forum was told they had agreed a single union, no strike deal with the AEEU to take effect from 19 April. Yet the AEEU have only 12 members at the company compared to 100 NUJ members.

Our members are extremely angry and expect the TUC to take an active and determined stand to combat such activities and to protect the basis on which trade unions were formed - solidarity.

The NUJ was at the forefront of the wave of derecognition in the late '80s. We fought hard for our members' rights under some of the worst industrial relations conditions imaginable. Newspaper employers from Wapping to Cardiff are trying to keep out the NUJ and GPMU. They are looking for ways to use the Employment Relations Bill to deny employees fairness at work. Now the AEEU leaders are assisting them.

A leaked document from the employers' organisation, the Newspaper Society, shows the rest of the industry are watching events in Cardiff. If they can achieve the marginalisation of what the document calls "militant unions" like the NUJ and GPMU there, the pattern will be repeated in other titles and possibly other industries.

Instead of offering such deals the three unions should be launching a joint recruitment campaign and making a joint approach for recognition. We should be building a solid base and demonstrating the practical benefits of union membership and of a union organisation prepared to fight for its members.

The NUJ will defend its members' democratic right to belong to and be represented by the union of their choice. We will challenge the deal imposed on our members politically, industrially and legally. We have already put the issue to the TUC disputes procedure and we will call on the TUC to take the strongest action possible against the AEEU. We are also calling on the Labour government to ensure that the Employment Relations Bill does not allow such sham deals to deny workers' even the limited fairness at work offered by the legislation. ■

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Whose Cup Of Woes?

There is no more exciting time for a football fan than the start of a new season. No one has lost a game, been relegated or knocked out of the Cup yet. Except so it appears for Manchester United. In what is undoubtedly the most controversial act taken by a football club for many years, they have decided not to enter this years-FA Cup competition. All this despite being the holders. Fans and players alike have reacted with dismay. Why has this happened and what does it mean?

by Steve Jones

The official excuse being given is that they do not have the time to both enter the FA Cup and participate in the World Club Championships being held at the start of year 2000 in Brazil. The original hope which the club expressed was that they would be allowed to enter both, getting a bye to the FA Cup 5th round. When it became clear that this was not on—a case of having their cake and eating it—they decided to drop the FA Cup from their schedule. This was backed up with some sort of support from the then Sports Minister Tony Banks, presumably relieved at not having to see Chelsea lose to Man Utd in the Cup again!

Since then the row has simmered on. The barely concealed suspicion is that this is a decision which has more to do with money than football. Man Utd is not a football club—officially it is a plc whose stated aims include making money for the shareholders. This they have done by moving heaven and earth to get as much cash from the supporters as they can. New strips have been introduced at every opportunity, mega-stores opened to sell endless merchandising and all manner of commercial arrangements established. Central to this has been the move to establish so-called new markets for the club. Hence the somewhat dubious pre-season tour to the Far East—an arduous trip attended by the chief executive but not the manager! Very profitable but hardly ideal preparation for a new season.

Now we come to this new tournament being held in Brazil. A competition established by FIFA as part of their ongoing battle with UEFA for the domination of

European football (and the money which goes with it), it is a competition which few care about. It does however provide an opportunity to establish new commercial markets for the likes of Man Utd. Hence the decision, cloaked in some sort of twaddle about it being needed to enhance England's bid for the World Cup 2006, to go to Brazil.

The danger here is that a precedent is being set. More and more it will become the case that commercial pressures will take precedent over footballing ones, irrespective of traditions and rules. The FA have, as usual, been gutless. Clubs like Man Utd and the rest (who, in truth, are no different) are looking ahead to making even more cash at the expense of ordinary supporters. One of the rules of big business is that, unlike in football, you cannot be allowed to have a poor season. Profits must rise and rise come what may.

The defeat of the OFT case on TV rights won't deter them from trying to get even more income out of TV but at a terrible price. Media companies are already plotting to buy stakes of 9.9% in top clubs in order to give themselves an edge when the current BSkyB deal ends. Digital TV will be used to introduce Pay Per View which will generate even more cash for clubs but in turn will transform the game but not for the better.

Cash has already flooded into the game since the establishment of the Premier League but this has mainly been all to the tops at the expense of the rest. The lower division clubs have seen their income decline and many are on the breadline. Non-league and school level football is even worse off. Those sponsors and TV companies who have forked out will be demanding more and more from the clubs. The ordinary fans who have watched admission prices rocket will be getting less and less. The case for ending the private ownership of football is becoming stronger and stronger. Football is a part of our culture and should not be used as a marketing tool for assorted plcs who are more concerned with the fans in the City of London than the fans on the terraces. The mood of opposition to Man Utd's withdrawal from the Cup shows that there is a basis for a campaign to fight back. ■

Capital Idea



The stinking rich

The rich are getting richer according to the latest listing from Forbes magazine.

The spectacular rise in the combined wealth of the top 10 billionaires equals some \$266bn - eight times the figure of a decade ago. Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, is said to be worth \$90bn - equal to the combined wealth of the 47 richest people in the US in 1989. The average billionaire in the States is worth \$6.9bn, about two-and-three-quarter times the average three years ago.

The world's three richest billionaires - Bill Gates, Robson Walton and the Sultan of Brunei - have assets worth more than the combined gross domestic product of all the least-developed countries and the hundreds of millions who live in them.

The sinking poor

Today, in 1999, 75% of the world's children are living in poverty. This is the same percentage as 1,000 years ago. What more can you say about this scandal? The facts speak for themselves.

Bleeding them dry

In 1996, sub-Saharan Africa paid \$14bn in debt servicing; it received \$10bn in new loans and \$11bn in grants. That means that \$4bn of the aid (more than one third) and all the new loans were immediately used to repay old loans.

Only part of the aid (\$7bn) was left for health, education and other social needs.

However, the real prices that Africa has been paid for its exports have fallen dramatically - 1996 real prices were only 56% of 1980 prices. Africa's exports in 1996 were \$102bn, but at 1980 prices that would have been \$182bn. Taking away the \$7bn in aid, that means sub-Saharan Africa gave \$73bn to the rich countries in 1996.

Bloody nose for bosses



Three hundred building workers on a picket line in London. A barricade thrown across the road and the old bill completely powerless to do anything and having to negotiate with the pickets to get vehicles unconnected with the dispute down the street. 1926? No 1999.

**by Jack Munday,
Joint Sites Committee**

One hundred fitters and sparks working for the Danish M&E subbie Dahl Jenson got the bullet when all the cheques started bouncing. They were working on the new Kings College PFI teaching hospital at Waterloo, being built by the French construction giant Bouygues. Some of the workers had been knocked for 3 weeks wages amounting to nearly £2,000. Some of the workers were from Portugal and had been staying in digs paid for by the subbie. They hadn't been paid for 3 weeks, were evicted from their flat because Dahl Jenson hadn't paid the rent and started having to sleep on the streets.

The Joint Sites Committee turned up after a couple of days and organised the lads into throwing up a picket line. The site was absolutely solid. All 300 out the gate, delivery wagons parked up outside the job along the main road. A London building site is now a very cosmopolitan place, the speeches from up on a pallet of bricks had to be translated into French, Russian, Danish, Portuguese, Latvian and Kosovan. The support from the other workers on the site and the international solidarity won the day. Stewards from the Jubilee Line (across the road) turned up

on the picket line to show support.

Bouygues gave in virtually straight away but dragged out negotiations with UCATT for nearly the whole day. By 3.30pm there was still no money. The pickets held a meeting outside whilst the UCATT full time officials were inside talking with management. The pickets sent in a delegation to the meeting to tell them to finish the talking because we were all going home and the next day we would be at their other sites including Guys hospital. Five minutes later the talking was over and Bouygues agreed to pay all the men 2 weeks money straight away (a payout of over £100,000). The union was still free to chase Dahl Jenson through the courts to get the rest of the cash. A deal was agreed for the Portuguese lads who were paid up before everyone else and Bouygues agreed to pay for their return air fares home.

All in all, the union ran out of recruitment forms on the day, they signed up Latvian shop stewards and proved that international workers solidarity can give Global Capital a bloody nose every now and again.

PS.

Bit of a resurrection of trade unionism in the construction industry at the moment, especially following the example of the JLE sparks, Tower crane drivers and many smaller JSC disputes. Recent action on building sites include, Royal Opera House - sparks/plumbers/fitters - safety; Dome / Merrill Lynch - holiday pay; Schal - safety; Norwich hospital - pay; St. Pauls - steel erectors - bonus; Swift brickwork (various London sites) - holiday pay.

Victory for locked-out Sefton Workers!

In July's edition of *Socialist Appeal* a brief report appeared outlining a dispute that was taking place in Sefton. Twenty three housing benefits workers (members of Unison) had been locked out by the Labour controlled council since 12th May. This action had been taken by the council following a successful ballot by the workforce, and subsequent industrial action short of strike action in relation to a grading dispute.

After ten weeks of being locked out and a marvellous campaign inside Unison, and the labour movement in general, highlighting the outrageous behaviour of the council and pointing out the dangerous precedent that would have been set if the employer had won, the Sefton housing benefits workers have won a marvellous victory.

The speaking tour of branches, trades councils and union conferences played a tremendous role in raising over £25,000 for the defence funds and highlighted the dispute. A big march in Sefton of over 500 trade unionists, the publicity that this created, along with other campaigning activities, all played a part in achieving the victory. However it was the fact that Unison had started to ballot other members in the council's finance department for industrial action, and the clear indications that the ballot was going to be successful that finally caused the management to cave in.

This is an example of how proper campaigning trade union activity can win battles to defend and enhance services, jobs, wages and conditions.

What would the outcome have been if the social partnership model had been pursued?

Future of the trade unions

The TUC represents the combined force of Britain's organised workers. Teachers, engineers, civil servants, railway workers, bankworkers, coal miners, without our labour nothing would move, nothing would work.

by Stuart McGee,
conference organiser

The organised working class is potentially the most powerful force in society. Yet even with this power in their hands, our leaders have retreated time and again in the face of two decades of counter revolution on the shopfloor. Jobs have been destroyed, wages held down, conditions wrecked by privatisation, downsizing, flexibility and the free market.

Today it is well nigh impossible to take effective strike action and stay within the law. Sooner or later we all have to say enough is enough. Why don't our leaders lead? The unions weren't created to provide us with car insurance and pensions, but to fight to defend and improve our jobs, wages and conditions. In order to do that some unions, at least at a local level, have repeatedly broken the draconian anti-union laws. Is this the only way they can be defeated? What lessons can we learn from the postal workers illegal strikes, or the marvellous victory of the Jubilee Line electricians? John Ireland of the CWU NEC and Jeremy Dear National Officer for Newspapers at the NUJ will lead a discussion on the anti-union laws and building a fightback against the bosses offensive.

For trade unionists across the country the day to day struggle to defend members is a time consuming business. As vital as this nitty-gritty work is, on its own it

is not enough. Just fighting in you own plant or office, even your own industry can't solve all your problems. To try to do that it is necessary to move into the field of politics. That's why the unions created and built the Labour Party. But after two years of Blair, some activists will be asking whether there's any point being in the party any more. Why haven't they repealed the anti-union laws? Why do they persist with Tory economic policies, even privatisation? How can we reclaim the Labour Party, how can we fight privatisation and the policies of the Labour government? Nigel Pearce a member of the National Executive of the NUM will look at how trade unionists and Marxists should treat the Labour Party.

Marxism has a long and proud tradition in the history of the British trade unions. But it has a present and a future role to play as well as a past.

The struggle for workers rights, for jobs, wages and conditions is inextricably linked today more than ever to the struggle for socialism. That struggle cannot be confined to the shores of Britain, in the world of globalisation, so strikingly similar to the one foreseen by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* 150 years ago, the struggle for socialism must be an international struggle. Alan Woods, editor of *Socialist Appeal*, will introduce a discussion linking together the struggle for reforms, the struggle to reclaim the Labour Party and the struggle to transform our unions into militant organisations once again, with the international struggle for socialism.

All in all one day no union activist can afford to miss. So raise this event in your next meeting. Get delegated to attend, and spread the word. ■

The class divide

FALSE CONSULTATION



REAL CONSULTATION



All Those in Favour?

The RMT recently conducted a referendum of its Tube members asking them whether they supported the privatisation policy and its effects on their working conditions. The result was: NO: 2,184 (96%) YES: 70

Fire Fighting

A leaked letter from a government minister threatens "further measures" against the Fire Brigades Union if it carries out its decision to call industrial action over the employer's unilateral attempt to water down firefighters' conditions. George Howarth, the minister concerned, who "fully supports the employers", regards firefighters' conditions as "out-moded and unjustified" and believes strike action to be a "relic of an old and discredited confrontational approach." Threats to ban strikes in the public sector are nothing new. They were made by Margaret Thatcher, but dropped after fearing a massive backlash. Any attempt by the Blairites to go down this same road would be met by a hurricane of opposition from the Labour movement.

LIVE FUTURE UNITE & FIGHT

Socialist Appeal
Industrial Conference,
Saturday
6 November 11am-5pm
The Imperial Hotel,
Southampton Row,
London WC1

speakers include:
Nigel Pearce (NUM executive committee)
John Ireland (CWU executive committee)
Jeremy Dear (NUJ newspapers national organiser)
Alan Woods (editor, Socialist Appeal)
all in personal capacity

TUC: fighting lead needed

For the first time in two decades, this years TUC takes place against the backdrop of increasing membership. The 20-year fall in trade union membership has been reversed, although modestly, with figures now standing at 7 million.

by Stuart McGee

Strike figures, however, have remained historically low, with ballots for industrial action also at a low ebb. But this does not reflect the underlying bitterness that exists against the employers' offensive that has ridden rough-shod over long-standing terms and conditions.

With capitalist commentators telling us that the British economy is climbing out of the recent downturn, are we to believe the right wing trade union leaders who say we are entering a period of upturn and social partnership?

The everyday reality is completely different for working people. Growing concerns at New Labour's failure to deliver on the main issues affecting trade unionists, expressed by delegates at nearly every trade union conference this spring, is a clear expression of this. Many of these concerns are reflected in the resolutions that individual unions have submitted which appear on the preliminary agenda for this year's congress.

On the question of employment law the GPMU have submitted a resolution pointing out that the legislation only represents a "first step towards the restoration of a fair and balanced framework of individual and collective employment rights".

Reinstatement

The resolution goes on to call for the TUC to campaign for improvements that would ensure that employment rights apply to everyone, that there is a right of reinstatement for anyone found to have been unfairly dismissed and the right for "workers to take solidarity action where employers transfer work to other plants or companies in order to circumvent lawful disputes".

The GPMU resolution and a resolution from KFAT are both strongly critical of the caveat in the government's legislation that exempts firms who employ under 21 people. This will continue to deprive over 5 million workers in Britain the right of trade

union representation.

In another resolution related to this subject the NUJ warns of employers who will attempt to circumvent the legislation and even of those who will actively use the legislation to prevent re-recognition.

This resolution is closely related to the partnership deal that the AEEU have done with the Western Mail who are anxious to ensure that they do not have to recognise either the NUJ or GPMU.

On the question of privatisation, the CWU has submitted a resolution categorically opposing privatisation of the post office and calling on the TUC to campaign to ensure that there is an explicit commitment in the next Labour manifesto to retaining the post office in full public ownership.

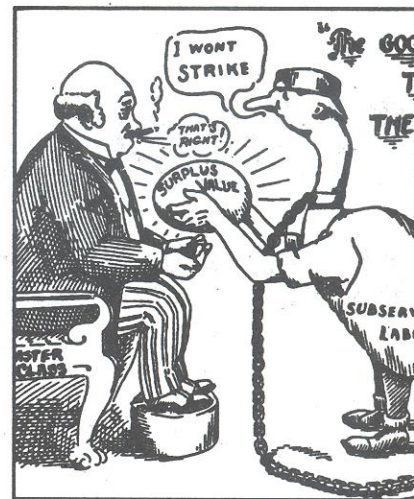
Public sector

Unison has submitted a resolution calling on Congress to strongly oppose the use of the PFI to fund investment in public sector infrastructure. The resolution also calls for an increase in public spending of £3 billion a year to boost jobs and growth and calls for this to be funded by "redistributive taxation".

The three transport unions RMT, TSSA and ASLEF have submitted resolutions critical of privatisation, making calls ranging from tighter regulation in the short term to renationalisation of the railways, calls of total opposition to the privatisation of the London underground and criticism of the deregulation of the buses.

A resolution from the FBU calling for support from Congress for the continuing fight to defend and improve the fire service at first glance could appear innocuous enough. However, taken in the context of the recent attacks on the jobs, wages and conditions of firefighters and cuts in levels of service, the resolution takes on a new significance. The recent scandalous threats of outgoing Ministers in relation to the possibility of outlawing strikes in the fire service, raise the stakes in this simmering dispute.

The TGWU has also submitted two progressive resolutions, the first is on the minimum wage calling for the Congress to support the call for a new rate of £5 an hour. Along with the resolution that was unanimously passed at Unison conference to organise a national demonstration on the question of the minimum wage, the resolution being put to the Congress by



the TGWU could prove to be very significant.

The TGWU has also submitted a resolution on the welfare state that is clearly a warning shot across the bows of the New Labour leadership. The resolution points out that the "welfare system must be to prevent, rather than merely relieve poverty".

It points out that "The U.K spends much less on welfare than most E.U states".

It calls for the welfare system to be "funded by a contribution system based on the ability to pay" i.e. progressive taxation. Finally it makes the point that the welfare state should be based on "the fundamental principles of social insurance, inclusiveness, redistribution and the promotion of equality".

The reality for millions of workers is of continuing cuts and privatisation. These resolutions, which go against the grain of the right wing's social partnership, reflect the growing concerns of the rank and file. They are critical of New Labour's continuation of Tory policies and call upon the TUC to take a more militant stand.

Utopian

Under capitalism, partnership is a utopian myth; in the context of industrial relations, at best it can only be the partnership of the horse and rider, with the right wing trade union leaders busily trying to hitch a lift with the employers.

Unfortunately for those on the right looking for an easy ride reality always intervenes.

More and more trade unionists continue to suffer the effects of Tory policies. After two years, their patience is wearing thin and increasingly people are saying enough is enough. In this situation the TUC should be offering workers a lead. So-called partnership (in reality class collaboration) should be treated with the contempt it deserves. One hundred years ago new unionism stood for the organisation of the unorganised. It stood up for worker's rights. It is about time original new unionism was put back on the agenda. ■

Sick of capitalism

Marxists have always understood that illness is linked with poverty and now the first ever academic medical report on this in Britain confirms this is the case.

by Kenny McGuigan

On Monday 5 July Greater Glasgow Health Board published their comprehensive findings into mental illness and its connection with poverty and environment. This report shows quite clearly that politics should be about moral and social arguments above economic considerations. The authors conclude that people from the poorest backgrounds are three times more likely to attempt suicide and six times more likely to be admitted to hospital for schizophrenia. It also states that those living in poverty are far more likely to succumb to anxiety, depression and psychotic disorders than those who live in more affluent areas. GPs are now prescribing twice the amount of anti-depressant drugs that they were 4 years ago.

Unemployment is identified as a definite source of mental illness as working class people are denied their right to a fulfilled and useful life. The report also criticises the lack of mental health provision.

This report comes at a time when substantially more people are living in poverty than 20 years ago. The poorest 20% of the population now get a smaller share of welfare than in 1979. 11 million people in Britain now claim some form of

benefit and 4 million children have been identified as living in absolute poverty.

Against this background there has been an ongoing campaign by the media and some politicians claiming that there is a considerable layer of "skivers" living it up on the welfare state. A succession of Tories, then Labour Ministers Frank Field, Harriet Harman and now Alistair Darling and Blair himself have helped perpetrate the myth that the unemployed and the sick should pull themselves up by the bootstraps and get to work! The only problem is that there are no jobs! Even in bourgeois academic circles, not to mention John Prescott circles, the real unemployment level is held to be three times higher than the official figures.

Incapacity Benefit

In a recent "clampdown" on Incapacity Benefit, designed to flush out the frauds and chancers, out of 1200 tested only 18 were found fit to work—this under the current regime of the All-Work Test which decrees that if you can answer the phone or use the remote control for the telly then you are fit to work!

We are continually being told that benefit costs are spiralling out of control. The current bill is around £95 billion and rising. Welfare spending has always been a nuisance to the bosses, quite simply, they begrudge every last penny of benefit to everyone, just as they begrudge every last penny of wages. Capitalism has

always created mass poverty and unemployment, but since the 1970s when global capitalism reverted to its natural state of mass unemployment following a boom period, the cost of provision for welfare has increased. Welfare spending goes up—poverty increases! At the same time, Britain is now three times richer than when social welfare was introduced after World War Two.

The capitalists now feel that they can no longer sustain the welfare state in its present form. In this age we see the obscenity of PFI being used to create profits for bankers and financial institutions on the backs of the working class. PFI has been thoroughly discredited and condemned. It is sufficient for the purposes of this article to highlight as an example the nauseating state of affairs in Guy's hospital, London, where MacDonalds provide the catering. Right in the middle of the hospital is a burger joint, while the administration block is called—wait for it—Ronald MacDonald House!

The capitalists argue that we can no longer afford the welfare state. The truth is that we can no longer afford capitalism.

Imagine the massive profits being made by the drug companies being ploughed back into the health service. Instead of the shareholders having a windfall, the service could be improved drastically giving working class men and women the health care they deserve. Recently the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that profits were running at £2 million a day. What are we supposed to say about this? Are we supposed to congratulate the bank? What did they do to earn or deserve this money? They have produced nothing. Imagine if this and the rest of the debauched profits of the capitalists were used to eradicate the health problems caused by capitalism in the first place.

All society's problems could be addressed and overcome by the nationalisation of the big monopolies, the banks and the financial institutions, who are currently bleeding the workers dry for the benefit of an elite few.

While Blair and Darling talk of welfare reform, the welfare reform that would work is for working class people to take control of the economy and use it to eradicate the miseries of capitalism and provide a decent life for all. ■



Health emergency



The 'Agenda for Change', is definitely a change for the worse.

"Professional bodies give unanimous support for Blair's nursing strategy" (*Lipley & Scott, 14/7/99*). Is the NHS safe in the hands of these middle class careerists? The answer is almost certainly in the negative. The document the professional bodies were so enthralled with was entitled 'Making a Difference' and appropriately unveiled by Tony Blair at the hospital in Dewsbury whose other claim to fame is that it was officially opened by the heroine of new Labour, Margaret Thatcher. Blair promised reforms that would result in the production of the 'Supernurse'. To use the proper title, the consultant practitioner will earn "around £40,000" (*D. Brindle, Guardian 10/7/99*). Once again a little vigorous rubbing by the enthusiastic socialist and the new Labour veneer disappears.

by Mick Lomax
(RCN Student steward
- in personal capacity)

A document given very little publicity earlier in the year was entitled 'Agenda for Change' and considering that the government would like a response in September very few nurses are aware of the damage that it could do to their employment rights.

Left to stand alone the document may appear a rather ambiguous piece of literature, but this is a typical new Labour ploy. If it is actually viewed in conjunction with the government's love for the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) then "Britain is witnessing the largest hospital building programme since the birth of the NHS 50 years ago. It should be cause for celebration but the cost in jobs, beds, poorer service and public money may be higher than politicians have imagined" (*Hutton, Observer 13/12/98*).

If I may have the opportunity for a moment to explain the principle of the PFI system. Instead of the government using public money to build new hospitals, private companies are now invited to bid for the privilege of building a new hospital. Of course, no one should be misled and assume that these businessmen are in anyway philanthropic. "The whole purpose

of the PFI is to off load government borrowing and risk, onto the private sector, but the private sector regards itself as accepting very little risk" (*Hutton, 13/12/98*). Therefore the private sector takes little risk, but is required to ensure a profit of up to 20% for its shareholders. "Some analysts call it the de facto privatisation of the NHS" (*Hutton, 13/12/98*).

Where will this profit come from? Are we to expect greater efficiency from already over-stretched resources? To provide a small crumb of comfort to the trade unions, the government has ruled out cutting jobs and worsening working conditions. "The Government's recent ruling that employees would continue to enjoy their old rights and wages even if they worked for a PFI consortium has made that route more difficult; profits can now only be made by boosting private beds, reducing staff numbers - if not wages, increasing patient throughputs" (*Hutton, Observer 11/7/99*).

More expense is also created "due to lengthy negotiations between lawyers, accountants, management consultants and other expensive advisers" (UNISON). The National Audit Office (NAO) found that the consultancy costs of the PFI project proposed for the Dartford and Gravesend NHS Trust had spiralled unchecked from the estimated £300,000 to more than £2 million (*Private Eye, 25/6/99*). And that bastion of socialism, the *British Medical Journal* notes "the generous scope for corruption" (*N. Cohen, Observer 11/7/99*).

NHS Trusts

The cost of this 'Private Finance Initiative' will not be met by the government, but local NHS Trusts who will face paying rent for anything up to 60 years, even after this, the state would still not own the property. "Who exactly is supposed to be endeared by private finance initiatives, apart from property developers?" (*J. Hardy, Guardian 19/12/98*).

If we now view this fundamental restructuring of the NHS and the 'Agenda for Change' together, the full threat facing employees and users of the NHS will become apparent.

Flexibility, satisfactory performance and productivity, these words litter the

'Agenda for Change' document, and these will be used to batter down the conditions of all those working in the NHS. Under the Conservative government, the trade unions opposed all forms of local pay bargaining, yet New Labour intends to do the same. The talk of a national framework for conditions of service is all very well, but will there be any guarantee that this too will not be the lowest denominator?

The government also proposes to allow individual Trusts to use local market forces to decide where to place a nurse's pay on a national pay spine. Why should a nurse earn more in one part of the country in comparison to another (London excepted)? The shortage of nurses in the UK is a problem created by the politicians and no further inequality should be created to cover for their inadequacies.

Last year's pay award was the first attempt at creating unrest between the different nursing grades, the 'Agenda for Change' intends to go further. The talk of individual performance related pay for senior staff and bonus schemes will turn nurse against nurse. Imagine a nurse with a legitimate health or personal problem which results in the occasional day away from work. How would this affect performance and morale if the bonus was to drop? That nurse will not be the first worker to become a scapegoat due to the evils of a bonus system, after all, we only ever hear about the winners in such schemes. Are we also likely to see nurses move away from the areas of nursing which are less glamorous or where their skills are not so easy to measure? This will, in effect, magnify the problem of nurse shortages in certain areas of the country or certain specialist roles. Why work in a hospital surrounded by poverty if your

patients are going to take longer to recover and therefore affect your pay?

If I may remind readers, currently 30 new PFI hospital schemes are planned. To quote Will Hutton again, "PFI hospitals have meant fewer beds, fewer staff, fewer operating theatres and higher overall costs" (*Observer* 13/12/98). But, you may ask, didn't Mr. Dobson promise us extra beds last year?—we now realise why he doesn't work in the Treasury. A paper produced by Declan Gaffney and Professor Allyson Pollock (*How big money is stitching up NHS*) examined the plans for seven new hospitals being built under PFI schemes and identified bed numbers falling from 5,185 to 3,795, or on average 28%. Yet we have a government allegedly determined to cut waiting lists?

'Productivity'

This may be the reason for the sudden need for the introduction of Performance Related Pay. In 1988 the number of patients treated in one hospital bed, one at a time of course, was 40 a year. This is now 55. This was achieved by a sharp increase in nurse "productivity". Any hospitals built under the PFI system will be expected to operate on an even greater throughput: Calderdale is aiming for 95 patients per hospital bed, whilst making a 26% cut in bed numbers, Bromley would like a throughput of between 84-93 with bed reductions of 20% and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary wants a throughput of 86 whilst cutting bed numbers by 33% (Data from *Observer* 10/1/99).

Britain already has less beds per 1,000 people than most of Western Europe and only Turkey has fewer doctors. This highlights the core of New Labour's plans for the NHS: consultant nurses to take more of the doctors' responsibilities at a lower cost and qualified nurses to develop a production line mentality. Nurses must decide—do they want to become the medical version of 'Kwik Fit Fitters' and allow their patients to become inanimate objects? Or do we want to move the NHS and the nursing profession towards a truly democratic organisation with egalitarian values and be at the forefront of changing society for the better. After all, inequality and poverty do continue to be a problem in this so-called civilised country of ours.

"Deprivation, chronic unemployment and poor levels of literacy have turned the UK into one of the most poverty-stricken countries in the developed West" stated

the UN as quoted in the *Guardian* of 9/9/98. More recently the UN Human Development Report described Britain as having "the third worst poverty in the developed world" (*Observer* 11/7/99) Is it really acceptable when Will Hutton again can refer to the Acheson report and cite that income-support rates meet only between 67 and 90% of the minimum needs of children (*Observer* 29/11/98) or that the *Guardian* can report (25/6/97) that women in unskilled manual households are twice as likely to die before the age of 60?

"For the NHS is no longer governed principally by considerations of public health, clinical need and patient care. Its overriding values are cost reduction, operational efficiency and the need to produce the managerial culture of a privately owned PLC" (Will Hutton, *Observer* 10/1/99). If an NHS Trust has to be concerned with cutting costs so that it can pay rent, will patient care suffer? "The implications for local residents are very serious. Most affected will be the elderly and vulnerable groups" states Gaffney and Pollock.

How far in the future is the proposition that patients will be expected to pay for their food or accommodation? I can already hear apologists for the government claiming that this will be inevitable but we must stop this threat if we want to be considered as a civilised society. The PFI project is no answer to the health inequalities that exist as the 21st Century approaches, nurses must become politically proactive and engage in what the 1996 document by D. Seedhouse (*Health promotion, Philosophy, Prejudice and Practice*) called 'Social Health Promotion' and "acknowledging that people are essentially equal, and can be understood not only as individuals, but also as communities."

The UKCC code of Professional Conduct states that "each registered nurse, midwife and health visitor shall act to: serve the interests of society and justify public trust and confidence." Are we truly serving the interests of all society?

Let us reject the 'Agenda For Change' and fight PFI. All nurses should be in the forefront of this battle for the redistribution of wealth and a publicly-funded health service, this is the only way that the interests of all in society can be served. ■

Trading in Sickness

...as Marx and Engels put it, "modern state power is merely the executive committee charged with managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie".

This "bourgeoisie", now embodied in transnational industrial and financial corporations, makes itself heard by "state power" via multiple lobbies. Among these the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has a special place, claiming to be "the only representative body that speaks with authority on behalf of enterprises from all sectors in every part of the world"...

Sir Leon [Brittan] is after the same thing as the ICC - a world ruled by free trade. Their views on the WTO [World Trade Organisation] ministerial meeting in Seattle in November are interchangeable. For now our "sovereign" European governments have fallen behind them with gusto, making it look suspiciously like Marx and Engels' perfect executive committee...

But do governments have any idea of the huge losses of sovereignty they will suffer? Not all the service sectors have managed to extract maximum concessions via the WTO. Nor are all the sectors objects of US aggression - at least not yet. The European health sector has, however, been targeted for liberalisation...The coalition is sure that it "can make much progress in the negotiations to allow the opportunity for US business to expand into foreign health care markets".

Health care services in many countries have largely been the responsibility of the public sector, making it difficult for US private-sector health care providers to market themselves. The WTO offers a way out. Among the barriers Barshevsky [US special trade representative] will help demolish are "restricting licensing of health care professionals" and "excessive privacy and confidentiality regulations". She aims to encourage more privatisation and to promote pro-competitive regulative reform...

To sew up the deal, health care should also be included in the WTO public procurement rules so that foreign firms can bid on all government contracts. If an agreement on health services including these provisions is signed at the WTO, we can kiss goodbye to our public health care systems in Europe... until now the tribunals of the WTO have decided all disputes, including on environmental or public health matters, with no regard for either...

And as we all know, the requirements of business supersede those of citizens..."

Le Monde Diplomatique, July 1999

Wall Street: a total eclipse in sight

"Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad."

On 29 July in Atlanta, Georgia, American Mark Barton went into an office block owned by All-Tech Investment group. He went up to the manager and said: "Sorry to spoil your day." And then promptly shot him and his secretary. He proceeded to shoot five others. Later his wife and family were found dead at their home. As the police closed in on Barton, he shot himself dead.

by Michael Roberts

Barton had been a day trader. This is the new breed of stock market speculators that has sprung up all across the US. In the great stock market boom of the 1990s, many Americans have given up their jobs and started trading on the stock market full time trying to make their fortune. Drawn by the huge gains apparently to be made on the stock market, these speculators set themselves up at their homes or in shared offices and start trading on the internet.

The key to day trading is to buy stocks and sell them by the end of the day. You own no stocks when you start and when you finish. You just try to make money on

the hugely volatile movements of share prices in one day.

This is short-term speculation at its extreme. Forget analysis of economics or politics, forget analysis of the prices and movement of prices that all the pundits in the big banks or on the business TV channels talk about. Just bet on one day's movement. After a little training, you can start up as a day trader with a little nest egg of money. And you can share offices with others doing the same. That was the service provided by All-Tech Investment in Atlanta.

But the pot of gold did not come for Barton. Everything went horribly wrong with his bets during July. His life was in ruins. He was unstable and now he went mad. The ultimate speculator turned to the ultimate solution.

New heights

It's a portent of what is to come. The US stock market has reached new highs. By any definition it is fantastically valued. The Dow Jones Industrial index, which measures the prices of the top stocks, was twice the level of the hourly wage earnings index in 1990. Now it is 7 times larger. In 1990, the Dow index was 2% of the US house price index. Now it is 7%. What that means is that the price of shares has risen nearly four times faster than average wages and three times

faster than house prices during the 1990s.

The annual gross product of the entire world is \$32trn. Yet the value of the US stock market is now \$13.5trn, or around 40% of world GDP. The US stock market is 150% of US annual GDP. That's nearly twice as high as in 1929, the previous all-time high - and the date of the start of the biggest crash in the history of capitalism. In the last two years alone, the US stock market has increased by \$5trn. But this has not been matched by a similar increase in profits for US companies. Since the end of 1996, the stock market index has risen 77%, but profits are up only 2%!

But here is the real story. This stock market boom is almost entirely due to the rise in prices of just a few companies - the high-tech companies and in particular, the internet companies. The US internet sector now has a value of \$470bn. It has risen 250% in one year!

The stock market value of just the five largest US companies, Microsoft, General Electric, Wal-Mart, Intel and IBM, is \$1.4trn, which is larger than all the debt owed by all US corporations. Microsoft alone is worth \$500bn, making Bill Gates who holds 20% of the shares, the first \$100 billionaire!

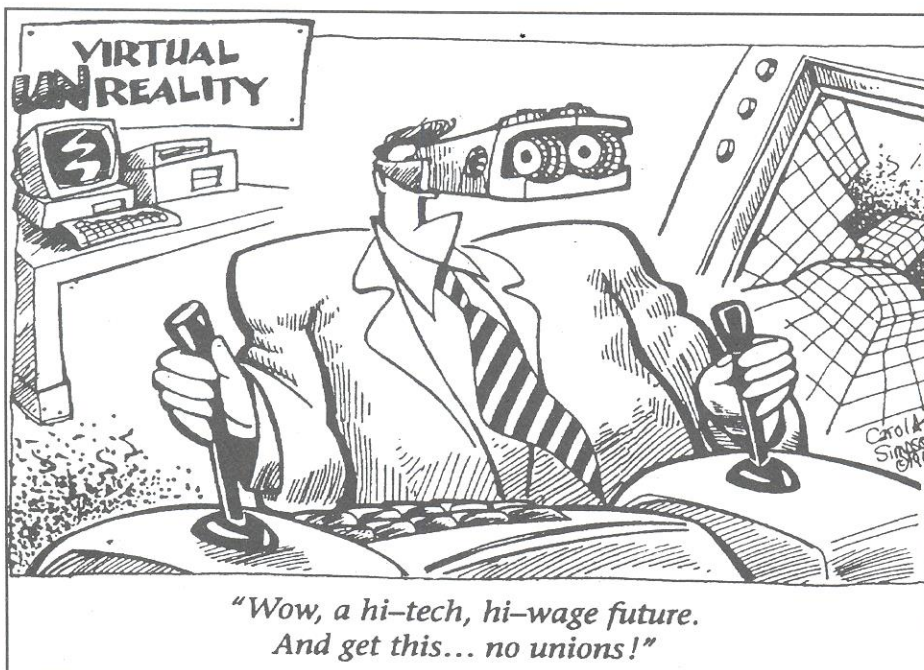
This is all a recipe for disaster. As former US Federal Reserve Bank chairman, Paul Volcker, commented: "The fate of the world economy is now totally dependent on about 50 stocks, half of which have never reported any earnings".

Market mania

The internet stock mania has been a wonder to behold. Apparently the average punter in the stock market can see no wrong with the internet revolution and its companies. As soon as a new company is launched, its share price rockets. And yet none of these companies have made a profit: Amazon.com, Yahoo.com, etc - not one!

The bulls (as the optimists of the stock market are called) say that doesn't matter. They eventually will. And anyway, the great internet revolution is driving up the productivity of US industry so much that the US economy can continue growing at 4%-plus without inflation rising and without a break. That will keep the stock market up. It's a new 'productivity paradigm'.

But is it so different? In the 1920s, output per worker in US industry rose



Is the economic crisis in South Asia over?

The following is an extract from the weekly analysis of *Stratfor's Global Intelligence Update* of 26th July:

"In the last few weeks, major media have announced the end of the Asian economic meltdown. On the whole, this is not at all the case. Only two senses exist in which this view is correct. First, Asia has already melted down. Therefore, the meltdown is over. That is far from saying there is a real recovery in Asia. Put differently, the Asian crisis is over, in the sense that it is no longer a crisis, but a long-term, intractable malaise. Second, there is recovery in some countries, but not in Asia as a whole. In fact, our view continues that the two largest economies in Asia, Japan and China, are heading more deeply into unrecoverable depressions.

"Japan reports preliminary figures showing its economy contracted once again last quarter, ending what appeared to be a recovery. As we have argued, Japan has been experiencing a mid-term bounce in a long-term decline. The essential problem is the low rate of return on capital. In other words, its profits are too low to fully capitalise on its economy; it cannot attract outside investment, nor does it have the structural means for integrating large-scale investment. The only way out of this dilemma would be an agonising restructuring of Japan's economy, including massive bankruptcies, unemployment and misery. This would last for a generation...

"China is in an even weaker situation... Like Japan, it is suffering from substantial deflation, as Asian and domestic demand both contract. Unable to close factories for fear of social and political consequences, the contraction in demand has been met with an expansion of supply. China's proud boast that its economic output continues to grow by 7 or 8 percent is the rope that is hanging the Chinese economy. China, like Japan, is maintaining social stability by a crisis of over production and under consumption. The result: falling prices, defaulting loans and a financial system in a state of collapse."

43% while capital investment jumped at an annual average rate of 6.4%. In the seven years up to 1929, US GDP rose 4.7% annually (much faster than in the 1990s) and unemployment fell to 4% (as now). As now, all this extra wealth was concentrated in the top portion of the population - income from profits, interest and rent compared to wages was twice as high as later in 1945. Everybody was engaged in stock market speculation (margin trading then). And stocks were selling at 50 times profits. Now they are selling at 50 times sales (not even profits!).

And take productivity. In the golden era of capitalism between 1950-73, real GDP per working person rose 2.4% a year in the US. In the great internet revolution of the 1990s, it's been rising just 1.7% a year. Real costs (after taking into account inflation) per unit of production for US capitalists did not rise at all during the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the new productivity paradigm, they've been rising at about 0.5% a year in the 1990s - not much, but more than in the golden era.

Huge bubble

The reality is that the stock market is a huge bubble, not based on the reality of fast rising productivity (or profits) for capitalism (although it's much faster than in the 1970s and 1980s) but on the expansion of cheap credit. The central banks of the world have cut interest rates right down and they have boosted the printing of money to new levels to save the capitalist world from deflation and slump.

But in doing so, they are breeding a new crisis. When it becomes clear that this bubble is based on thin air, it will all come down with a bang. And that time is near. Already in the last month or so, the US stock market has been falling back and the internet stocks in particular. It was that 'correction' that burned mad Mark Barton out and led to the terrible tragedy in Atlanta. In 1929, people who lost money in the stock market apparently threw themselves off skyscrapers in Wall St, New York (although JK Galbraith in his book, *The Great Crash*,

said there were no reported cases of this actually happening). In 1999, instead, they get a gun and shoot everybody else.

How will the 'correction' come? First, US economic growth is unsustainable. Industry has benefited from cheap imports from abroad and low oil prices. And investment has been financed by very low interest rates and huge borrowing by US companies. They have borrowed much more than they have made in profits. And they've used this money not only to invest in internet and high-tech, but also in buying their own shares to keep the price up and maintain the stock market boom.

Falling dollar

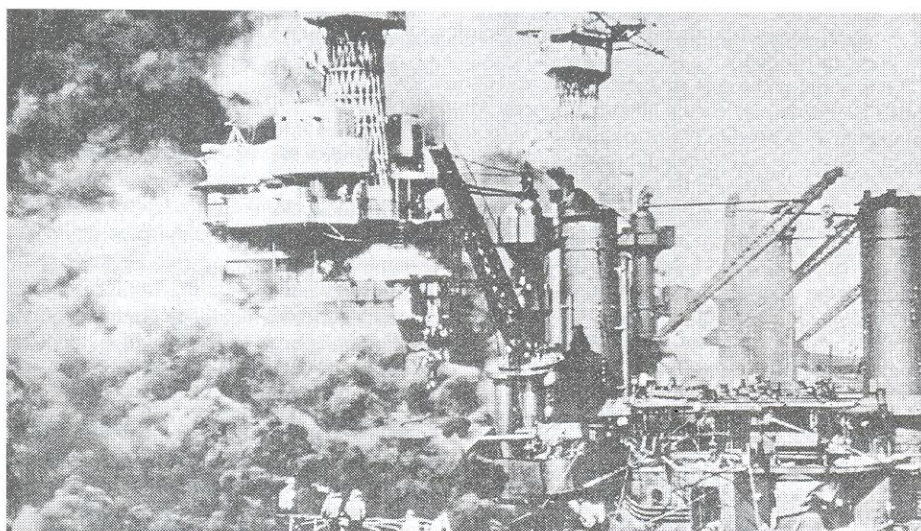
But now the dollar is falling and with it import prices are rising and the US trade account is widening sharply. Costs are going up. And world interest rates are now on the rise. In June, the US Fed raised rates. The Bank of England has stopped lowering them. So has the European Central Bank.

Wage costs are on the rise in the US because productivity growth cannot match rising pay increases demanded by workers who are in a stronger bargaining position with unemployment so low. Above all, productivity returns from increased investment are not coming through at the same rate any more. US profits have bounced in the first half of 1999 because of the continued consumer boom and improved economies in some parts of Asia. But from now on, profit growth is going to be hard to come by. Higher borrowing costs and less profit growth - that's a formula for a credit squeeze and economic slowdown.

The stock market is already fearful. Worry could soon turn into panic. And if Wall St crashes, it will hit millions of Americans with much of their savings invested in speculative shares, like Mark Barton. First madness, then destruction. If the US economy spirals downwards, it will take the rest of the world with it.

It will be a total eclipse. ■

Marxism and war



60 years ago on September 3rd 1939 World War broke out for the second time in 25 years. The horrors of the trenches of Flanders and Mons were never supposed to be repeated again, The Great War of 1914-18 was meant to be the war to end all wars. 9 million had died. Yet only 21 years later a second and still more terrifying conflict erupted. Between 1939 and 1945 55 million were slaughtered and civilisation itself was brought to the very brink of extinction. Karl Marx's prediction that the future of humanity would be either "socialism or barbarism" appeared to be approaching a terrible conclusion.

by Phil Mitchinson

In the second half of this century however, war appeared to be an aberration rather than the norm, at least if you lived in the advanced west. The majority of humanity, living in the gutter conditions of the third world, experienced hardly a day of peace throughout these years. But at least for us war appeared to have become a thing of the past. Surely today civilised men and women sit around a table and negotiate themselves out of a conflict?

In short, workers in the west have grown used to peace. Yet a brief study of our own history reveals that it was this temporary peace which was the aberration. In fact as the Russian anarchist Kropotkin put it a century ago, "war is the normal condition of Europe." In recent months that has been underlined in blood

by the war in Kosovo, the first war in Europe since 1945. The relatively short period of uncertain peace in international relations has dramatically ended. The cold war stand off between Stalinist Russia and US imperialism has been replaced not by a New World Order but by No World Order. On a world scale we have entered a new epoch of wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions, an epoch in which ultimately the fate of humanity will be decided. The crisis of capitalism is a two-sided coin, not only private ownership of the economy, but also the division of the world into competing nation states has outlived itself. As a consequence there will be mighty battles between the classes in society and also between nation states. Such great events put every tendency, and every theory to the test. They shake society from top to bottom, they make history. In a dramatic and explosive period such as this it is necessary to go back to basics on every question if we are not to be blown off course. What attitude do Marxists take towards war?

"War is the continuation of policy by other means." Every first year student will be familiar with this celebrated aphorism of General von Clausewitz. But what exactly does it mean? In reality it is an extremely profound expression which more accurately divulges the inner meaning of war than the million and one potted histories and psychological profiles which litter the bookshelves of every library.

War as we all know refers to military conflict, between nations, or within nations. The "means" are obviously vio-

lent. But what "policy" is being continued? If war is merely the continuation of a policy adopted in peace time then why should we have a different attitude toward that policy in time of war?

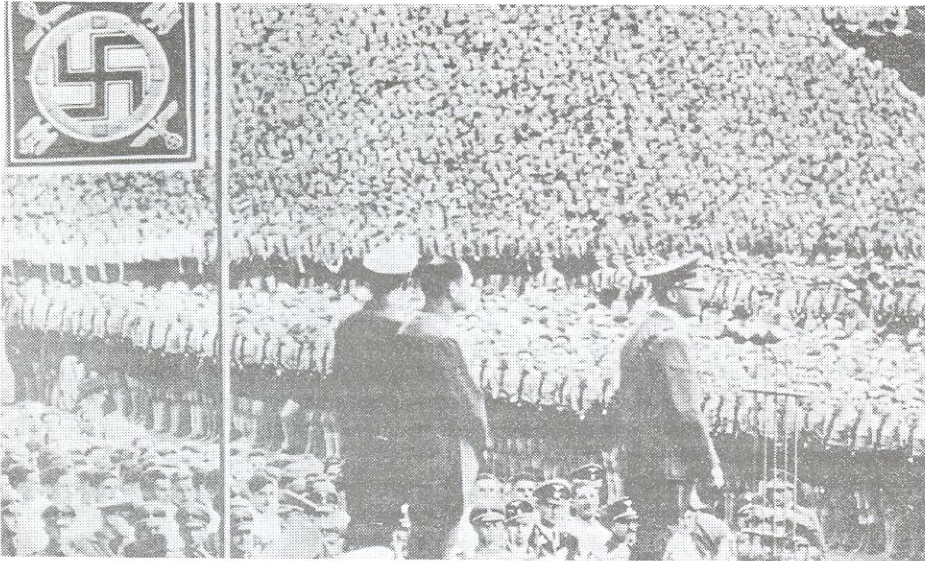
In the same vein Leon Trotsky explained that "foreign policy is an extension of home policy." The home policy of the capitalists is a capitalist policy and so is their foreign policy. The peacetime policy of capitalism is determined by their class interests, profit, privilege and prestige. This policy is continued in war, which simply carries the horrors of capitalism to their limits. We can have no confidence in the capitalist system in war any more than we can in peace.

For some, even those who call themselves Marxists, the minute war breaks out, all sense flies out of the window. "Whose side are you on?" they yell. Apparently acknowledging the class division of society in time of peace, suddenly they rush to find one side in any conflict more progressive than another, they then wave their banners and scarves like fans at a football match, supporting their team. While thousands, or even millions die. Everything is either black or white, good or evil, and it is this empirical outlook which condemns them to sit in the camp of one reaction or another, rather than maintaining a position based on the interests of the working class.

'rrrevolutionary'

Of course Marxists are not pacifists, but it is necessary to distance ourselves from the bloodthirsty ravings of those who claim to be 'rrrevolutionary.' We are not pacifists, but only madmen are in favour of violence, and positively lust after it as though the more blood in the streets the more revolutionary the events. Yet we all know that these individuals, the first to clamour for a fight would run a mile at the first sight of any real conflict.

On the other hand the most pacifist of Labour leaders can become the crudest of warmongers once conflict breaks out as Labour Lefts like Ken Livingstone and Michael Foot demonstrated during the recent conflict in Kosovo. It should come as no surprise meanwhile that the Blairites, whose policy is no different to the Tories in peace time, whose home policy is based on the interests of capitalism, should maintain that same policy in war. The reformists of all shades refuse to



see the class division of society and it is this that blinds them to the realities of war.

Surely though the war against Hitler was a just war? We could not sit idly by and allow Hitler to slaughter his way across Europe. Indeed not. There can be no question that socialists could be anything other than 100% opposed to Hitler, the question however was how best to defeat him, whose forces could be trusted to carry the job through to a conclusion, and what kind of society should be built out of the ashes of Europe. British and later US imperialism did not fight the Second World War because they were horrified by the ghoulish regime of the fascist madmen, any more than they had fought the First World War to save "poor little Belgium." In both cases it was first and foremost a question of markets. In reality the Second World War was a continuation of the first, Germany required a redivision of the world.

Fight Hitler

Marxists were entirely in favour of fighting a war against Hitler, however we pointed out that workers could have no faith in the British capitalists who had helped Hitler to rearm and allowed him to occupy Austria and Czechoslovakia. It was clearly in the interests of all workers to defeat Hitler, but not to prop up Churchill or the rotten system which had allowed fascism to gain power in the first place. In response to Churchill's appeal for the nation to appear united Aneurin Bevan replied, "The fear of Hitler is to be used to frighten the workers of Britain into silence. In short Hitler is to rule Britain by proxy. If we accept that the common enemy is Hitler and not the British capitalist class, then certainly Churchill's right. But it means the abandonment of the class struggle and the subservience of British workers to their own employers." (Quoted in Nye Bevan by John Campbell, p.77) Although Bevan supported the war he was the most outspoken critic of Churchill and

of British capital in the leadership of the Labour Party. In fact we would go further than Bevan. The attempt to unite British workers behind their own ruling class in war could only have succeeded in rallying German workers behind Hitler.

British workers understandably and correctly wanted to fight the fascists. The Marxists too wanted to fight Hitler, the question was which class can be trusted to lead that fight. In *American Problems*, Trotsky explained that American workers (and the same applies to British workers) "do not want to be conquered by Hitler, and to those who say 'let us have a peace programme' the workers will reply 'but Hitler does not want a peace programme.' Therefore we say that we will defend the US with a workers' army, workers' officers and with a workers government." We can have no faith in the capitalist class, if it were in their interest they would sign secret treaties as they have done many times in their history. In order to carry the war to its conclusion, to defeat Hitler, and the rotten system which had propelled him to power in the first place, it would be necessary to change the class in power. In the same way in Britain Marxists demanded that Labour break with the Tories and introduce a socialist programme. The only forces the working class can depend upon in war or peace are their own.

In the war between British and German imperialism we were opposed to Hitler but we did not support any imperialist power. The position of the Soviet Union however is somewhat different. Despite the filthy lies of the Stalinists depicting him as a fascist agent, Trotsky maintained a class position in relation to the war and stood for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union in the face of an imperialist threat, while at the same time arguing for a political revolution to overthrow the monstrous Stalinist bureaucracy. The position of Russian workers, Trotsky argued, should be 'we will not cede to Hitler the task of overthrowing Stalin, that is our job.'

Even and despite the horrific crimes of Stalinism, and remember it was the policies of Stalin which had allowed Hitler to come to power in the first place, in spite of the monstrous totalitarian dictatorship they had built over the bones of the Russian revolution, Trotsky's attitude was determined by the class nature of the Russian state, and the need to defend what remained of the gains made by the October revolution.

Initially, Stalin signed a pact with Hitler, once again betraying the interests of the international working class, demonstrating just how far their national and reformist degeneration had gone, a process concluded in 1943 with the dissolution of the Communist International. Soviet foreign policy had become an extension of their home policy, the defence of the position of the bureaucracy. This had nothing in common with the spotless tradition of internationalism of Lenin and Trotsky.

Soviet Union

When the Soviet Union entered the war in 1941, its military firepower was actually superior to that of the Wehrmacht. Thanks to Stalin's purges which had wiped out the bulk of the general staff, this supremacy did not last. To begin with Stalin paralysed his own troops by ordering them not to resist during the first 48 hours. As a result their advantage dissolved and thousands of Red Army soldiers were captured. Contrary to the myths about Stalin 'the Great War Leader' this despot endangered all the gains of the 1917 revolution. These were what Trotsky insisted must be defended. In the end it was these gains, principally the nationalised planned economy, which saved the Soviet Union. Very rapidly, once its attention was focussed on the war effort, the Soviet economy was able to build tanks and guns not only in greater quantity but also of superior quality to those of both Germany and the allies. Even in terms of planes the Soviet economy was at least able to match Germany who, remember, had the combined resources of Europe behind them. In the Second World War the superiority of planning was demonstrated not in the pages of Capital but in the language of production, even capitalist nations like Britain were forced to introduce large elements of planning into their economies.

In the end the Second World War became a giant confrontation between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, in

which the superiority of economic planning, at root the class nature of the state, (and Trotsky explained that in the end this was the only feature which distinguished Stalin's regime from Hitler's), was victorious. The Red Army drove the Wehrmacht all the way back to Berlin.

The Second World War turned out to be a giant miscalculation by all the imperialist powers, the victory of the Soviet Union leading to the loss of half of Europe for capitalism. Were it not for the role once again of the Stalinist and reformist workers leaders following the war it would have led to the end of capitalism across the globe, but that question will have to be dealt with elsewhere.

For Marxists, the defence of the gains of the Russian revolution was in the interests of the working class. However, to quote Nye Bevan again, "It is not enough to offer to the people of Belgium, France, and this country merely the defence of the institutions of democracy against the threat of Nazi dictatorship, because they recognise that, after all, it is that sort of democracy that brought Europe to war." (ibid, P.98) In any case the defence of democracy by the allies was rank hypocrisy. They were defending nothing more profound than their material interests. Writing in 1938 Leon Trotsky pointed out that "Truly one must have an empty head to reduce antagonism and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners and robbers."

Wars are not fought for the sake of killing but in order to conquer resources, raw materials, and markets. In other words for profit. That is the "policy" being continued. However left like this we would have a pretty vulgar view of war. In many cases it may be difficult to perceive the immediate economic gains to be made in a conflict. What can be seen however are the class interests which lie at the heart of all conflicts, in peace time and in war.

It is these class interests with which we must concern ourselves. In wars between capitalist nations to capture markets, raw materials or spheres of influence, whether fought by major powers or, as so often today, by smaller powers acting as the proxies of greater nations, there is nothing progressive to be found. Such wars are reactionary on all sides.

Our attitude to war cannot be determined simply by the undoubted horror of

suffering and death it entails for both the civilian population and the ranks of the troops, but only by the class interests of those waging war. Marxists are irreconcilably opposed to any war waged by the capitalist ruling class. The working class has nothing to gain from capitalism in peacetime or war.

Oppressed

Where an oppressed nation fights against imperialism it is of course rational to support the defeat of imperialism, that is in the interests of the international workers movement.

Would this not also have been the case in relation to the Falklands war? There were so-called revolutionary groups who believed the defeat of Britain would be the best outcome, and in their usual black and white style therefore supported the Argentine junta's claim on the Malvinas.

The "which side are you on" gang invariably supported Argentina on the grounds that it was a colonial country facing imperialist aggression. These people never allow reality to interfere with their clever schema. Argentina is a highly developed economy. The landowners are bourgeois not feudal barons, the vast majority live in the cities where there is a powerful centre of finance capital, and in Buenos Aires a famous stock exchange. The junta's motives were the defence of Argentina's big business interests. Above all it was the social crisis in Argentina which prompted the invasion of the Falklands in an attempt to divert the anger of Argentinean workers against British imperialism rather than their own regime.

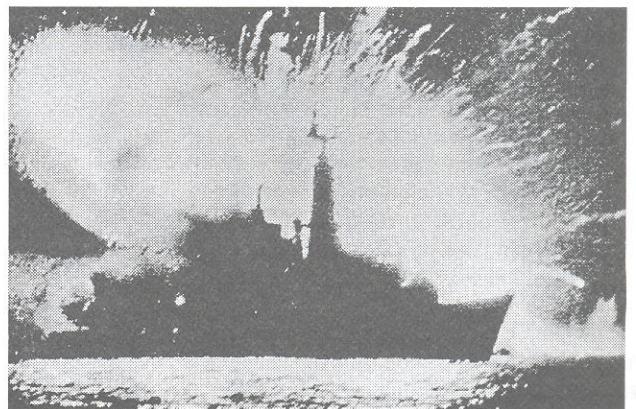
The Labour leaders in Britain simply tail-ended the Tories, painting Galtieri as the aggressor and posing as the defenders of the Islanders.

Indeed Galtieri was a dictator, but certainly no worse than Maggie's big pal Pinochet in neighbouring Chile. This conflict had nothing to do with ousting a dictatorial regime, still less with defending the Islanders, and everything to do with Britain's prestige as a 'world power'. This was not a question of 'who started it,' or of democracy versus fascism, but the class inter-

ests of the Argentinean ruling class and the class interests of the British ruling class.

Although there are only around 1800 of them, the rights and interests of the Islanders have to be taken seriously. The Islands had been in British possession for 150 years, the population was entirely English speaking and of British descent. Galtieri's claim to the Islands was purely imperialist - to loot and to prevent revolution on the streets of Buenos Aires. The interests of the Islanders were the last thing on the Tories' minds too. Galtieri would probably have been unable to invade in the first place were it not for the incompetence of Thatcher and Foreign Secretary Carrington. They would probably have been willing to reach a compromise with Galtieri even after the seizure of the Islands in order to help prop up his regime. But they had forgotten the importance of prestige in international relations. If it had been in the interests of British imperialism the Islanders would have been sold out as blatantly as the people of Kosovo. Like the Kosovars the Islanders were merely pawns in the power games of imperialism. To have allowed Argentina to keep possession of the Falklands, however would have meant the end of British imperialism on the world stage. This was the class interest they were defending not the rights of the Islanders. In reality the war was not in the interests of the Argentine workers, British workers or the Islanders. It was waged in the class interests of the British capitalists and the Argentine capitalists and therefore we opposed the capitalist war of Argentina against Britain and the capitalist war of Britain against Argentina.

Marxists in Argentina would have exposed the inconsistencies of the junta, which in reality was tied to American and





British imperialism, and the mess they'd made of the economy. They would have argued skillfully that a victory over powerful British imperialism would have been impossible by military means alone, especially under the totalitarian junta. The official caste were quite incapable of waging a revolutionary war, which would have been the only way Argentina could have defeated Britain. For that it would have been necessary to change the class in power, to hand Argentina back to the Argentines by expropriating foreign capital, and taking over industry and agriculture in order to enable the economy to be planned and its resources to be used efficiently. The workers of Argentina could then have appealed to the workers and soldiers of Britain, proposing a socialist federation of Argentina, the Falklands and a socialist Britain, and also to the workers of Latin America to boot out imperialism and capitalism and establish a socialist federation of Latin America.

In this war between two imperialist powers we were against both sides. Of course we were in favour of defending the rights of the Islanders, but we could have no faith in the Tories or their system to defend them. Instead we demanded a general election, and for a Labour government to introduce a socialist programme.

Socialist Britain

Such a socialist Britain could, if it had still been necessary, have waged a war alongside our Argentinean brothers and sisters to overthrow the military regime and establish a socialist Argentina. Then on the basis of a socialist federation full autonomy could be guaranteed to the Falkland Islanders. As explained earlier if you want to change the character of the war then you have to change the class in power, the class waging war.

War cannot be reduced to a question of 'who started it' like some school playground scrap. Many on the left in an effort to justify their support for one side or another in a war seek an excuse in the act of aggression. We must oppose the aggressor. This pacifist starting point inevitably leads you onto the path of supporting one or another ruling class in a war rather than consistently defending the interests of the working class in all circumstances.

It is ironic indeed that in their headlong rush to oppose Milosevic many of these same people found themselves in bed not

only with the KLA but also with US imperialism, the most counter revolutionary force on the planet.

Trotsky predicted that the US would gain this position of preeminence, but at the same time explained that they would have dynamite built into their foundations. This was never more clearly revealed than in the case of the Vietnam war.

US imperialism

Marxists always support the poor, oppressed and enslaved in their struggle against the rich and powerful imperialist states. Therefore we gave wholehearted support to the struggle of Ho Chi Minh's 'Communist' Party in their peasant guerrilla war against US and world imperialism, because this was a colonial war for liberation. We would have supported such a war even under bourgeois leadership. However in the modern epoch the national bourgeoisie are incapable of leading such a struggle. Despite occasional bouts of anti-imperialist rhetoric, they are tied by a million and one threads to imperialism and the giant monopolies and banks. Therefore the struggle for national emancipation becomes a struggle too for social liberation, ie, for the elimination of capitalism and landlordism as well as the expulsion of imperialism.

Such a guerrilla war on its own however, could not lead to the establishment of socialism. In the absence of healthy workers' states in the advanced west to provide the necessary material and technological assistance, such a war inevitably leads in the direction of a deformed workers state in the image of Stalinist Russia. That is why we not only supported the struggle of the workers and peasants for social and national liberation but we also warned them that under a Stalinist leadership, although their victory would mark a big step forward, it would be followed by further enslavement under a totalitarian Stalinist dictatorship. We appealed to workers in the west to support their struggle. Their victory would mean the weakening of imperialism. Yet we never deceived ourselves or the workers that such a victory would lead to socialism.

How could such a mighty military machine as US imperialism be defeated by the barefoot Vietnamese? If war were purely an arithmetic equation based on numbers of troops and quantities of explosives then clearly such an outcome would not have been possible. However there is

also the vital question of morale, and even more importantly, the home front. The Vietnam war was lost in America not in South East Asia. The repercussions of that defeat are still felt today. This explains the reluctance of the US to dispatch ground troops, they try instead to bomb nations into submission as we've witnessed to devastating effect in Iraq and Yugoslavia. Had there been a powerful Marxist force in the US at the time of the Vietnam war, the issue of the war itself would have been enough to spark a revolution.

The new period of antagonisms on a world scale will result in more military conflict and wanton destruction. The survival of capitalism makes new wars inevitable. Military expenditure becomes an increasing burden on the shoulders of the state. Just one B2 stealth bomber for example, cost more to build than the GDP of Albania. While spending on health and education is cut back, the annual military expenditure of 6 of the richest nations per head of population is staggering -

US	\$804
France	\$642
Germany	\$355
UK	\$484
Italy	\$356
Canada	\$253

With a dialectical approach, basing ourselves on the interests of our class, we would be able to build the forces of Marxism on this question alone. Those who abandon a class approach to the question of war however will find themselves like the tightrope walker without a stick, unbalanced, and certain to fall to earth with a bang.

In the end all serious questions are settled by war. The biggest question of all, the future of humanity will be settled by the war between the classes. However much we wish this weren't the case, to hide from this truth can only lead to defeat, and further terrible wars between the nations. Far better to recognise this truth now and start building a revolutionary force that can change the world. The working class represents the overwhelming majority of the population and once it is conscious of its power it will be possible to carry out a transformation of society quite peacefully and create a new world without borders and conflicts, whose only wars are against poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and disease. ■

Middle East in turmoil

The election of Ehud Barak as Israel's new prime minister was heralded as a new breakthrough aimed at ending "the 100 year conflict" in the Middle East. Barak promised to withdraw from Lebanon in 15 months and honour the Wye river agreement by October. However, regardless of any concessions made by Barak, the situation simply marks a new stage in the conflict between Zionism, imperialism and the Arab masses.

by Rob Sewell

Ever since the Begin-Sadat agreement in 1978, there have been a number of deals involving Israel, the Arab states and the PLO, all of which were paraded as the breakthrough for peace in the Middle East. The Oslo Accord of September 1993, which was supposed to resolve the Palestinian problem, was followed by Paris, Cairo and Wye. Their failure was put down to the intransigence of Netanyahu who froze relations with the Palestinians. But the Oslo Accord was no more than a manoeuvre by the Israelis to ensnare Arafat and the PLO leadership and effectively sell-out the struggle of the Palestinian masses. Barak, an astute representative of the Israeli ruling class, will not act fundamentally differently from his predecessors. While he talks "peace", he continues to expel Arabs from East Jerusalem.

The primary reason for the conflict in the Middle East has been the domination and criminal role of imperialism. The region has always been vitally important strategically, providing the gateway to Asia and Africa. To maintain its grip on the area, imperialism, especially British and French, sought to play off Arab against Arab, and then Jew against Arab. During the First World War, the British cynically promised Palestine firstly to the Arabs and then to the Jews. Such actions were to plant the seeds of future wars and conflict.

In 1917, the Balfour government came out publicly for a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a means of keeping the Arab nation divided. From 1921 onwards, Britain created a whole series of artificial Arab states governed by reactionary feudal monarchies. In 1923, the British government carved out land east of the River Jordan, called it Transjordan and gave it to King Abdulla, the grandfather of the present royal stooge. Between 1921 and 1971, Britain actively participated in forming the autocratic kingdoms of not only Jordan, but Saudi Arabia and Oman, and the reactionary Emirates of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. This served to cut across the living body of the Arab people, and create pliant tools for imperialism.

Before the war, the attempt to form a Zionist state in Palestine was clearly a reactionary step. It would mean war and the expulsion of 800,000 Arabs from their

homeland. It would prepare the way for more wars and instability throughout the whole Middle East. The Zionist idea of the Biblical Land of Israel being a safe haven for Jewish people was a falsehood. As Leon Trotsky explained it would be a "bloody trap" for the Jews. History has confirmed this prognosis. During the 50 years since the founding of Israel, the country has experienced five wars: 1947/48, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. Rather than peace, Israel has been turned into an armed camp, surrounded by hostile states.

Oil reserves

After the second world war, the importance of the Middle East for imperialism was enhanced by its oil reserves. Three-quarters of the world's known oil reserves are concentrated in the region. Increasingly, the USA, the dominant imperialism, gave economic and political support to the Israeli regime as a bulwark against the Arab revolution. They became the biggest recipients of aid of any country in the world. The annual \$5 billion aid from America alone, and the subsidies from rich Jews abroad, turned Israel into the dominant power economically and militarily in the region.

In 1967, the Israeli victory in the Six-Day war resulted in the occupation of new Arab territories: the entire West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Sinai, Gaza strip and East Jerusalem. This gave rise to a new wave of refugees, forced to flee into Jordan and elsewhere, which filled out the overcrowded refugee camps established in 1948. The occupied territories meant that some 1.4 million Arabs now lived under Israeli rule.

A year later under the Likud government, a programme of Zionist colonisation of the occupied lands was begun in earnest. This was done in the name of returning all the so-called Biblical lands to the Land of Israel. The settlers were made up in the main of fanatical orthodox Jews, who, with arms and the full backing of the Israeli state, drove out the local Arab population.

The Arab regimes created the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964. However, the leadership of the PLO under Arafat was incapable of waging a revolutionary struggle that could appeal not only to the oppressed in the Arab states but also the Israeli working class.



Based on narrow nationalism, and beholden to the patronage of the reactionary Arab regimes, the PLO's aim was reduced to "driving the Jews into the sea". They then embarked on a futile campaign of individual terrorism and hijackings. In 1972, they succeeded in murdering 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games. Every bomb attack on civilians inside Israel simply produced the opposite effect, pushing the Israeli population behind the Zionists. It simply served to strengthen the Israeli ruling class, allowing them to build up the state apparatus and the laws against "subversion".

Arafat and the PLO leaders proved incapable of offering a way forward. In Jordan, where the Palestinians made up a majority of the population, they refused to use their support to overthrow the rotten monarchy of King Hussein. "Our policy is not to interfere in the affairs of Jordan", said Al Fata leader Abu Omar. But Hussein - the 'friend' of the Palestinians - could not tolerate a 'state within a state', and in September bombarded the PLO camps, butchering thousands and forcing the rest to flee into Lebanon.

Civil war

Again in Lebanon they made the same mistake. As "guests" they maintained they could not get involved in politics. In the 1975-6 civil war, reflecting a social conflict between the downtrodden masses and the Lebanese capitalists, the PLO stood on the sidelines. Only because they were attacked by the right-wing militias did they eventually resist. However, the failure to offer a revolutionary lead, allowed the conflict to degenerate on sectarian lines of Christian Maronites versus Moslems, Druze and Palestinians. Lebanon was eventually Balkanised, with the Syrian army occupying key areas, and the Israeli army occupying a strip in the south.

In 1982, after a series of attacks on northern Israel by PLO and Amal units, Israel launched a full scale invasion of Lebanon to crush the PLO. While the PLO was eventually forced to leave Lebanon, the invasion became a debacle for Israel. With unprecedented anti-war movements within Israel itself, the Israeli army was forced to withdraw. Only in the far south of Lebanon did they hold on in alliance with their allies in the Southern Lebanese Army. Despite repeated air strikes on



refugee camps in Lebanon, they have been bogged down here for 21 years, harassed by Hizbollah. Faced with demoralised troops and open mutiny in the SLA, Barak has now promised to get out in fifteen months.

The brutal policy of repression in the occupied territories for more than twenty years led to a spontaneous uprising in late 1987. The Intifada, which was originally opposed by the PLO leaders, shook the Zionist state and created internal crisis within Israel. This mass movement of resistance, which saw young children with sticks and stones take on the might of the Israeli army, had more effect in a single day than the 25 years of bombings and assassinations. The Intifada polarised the situation and showed what mass action could achieve. Inside Israel, the opposition to the occupation grew rapidly. Opinion polls showed that the overwhelming majority of Israelis sympathised with the plight of the Palestinians and their desire for a state of their own.

Had the PLO leaders been Marxists they would have provided the mass movement with a class lead. Such an appeal would have had a profound echo within the Israeli working class and the Arab masses, and prepared the ground in the long run for the overthrow of Zionism and the reactionary Arab regimes. But this was anathema to the PLO leadership, who treasured their alliance with the most repressive and autocratic regimes of the Middle East. Arafat and the PLO leaders were in their pockets.

The Israeli ruling class wanted to put an end to the Intifada as swiftly as possible. The Arab regimes also saw the Intifada as a dangerous example to their own oppressed. With the collapse of Stalinism, the PLO leadership looked to the American imperialists to broker a deal with their client state of Israel. It was like

the lamb appealing to the lion to become vegetarian. But the imperialists knew Arafat was a man they could "do business with". The Israelis were persuaded by the US to play ball, after being reassured that they would get what they wanted.

The secret negotiations led to the Madrid Peace conference in 1991, followed by the Oslo Agreement two years later. This was heralded as the historic breakthrough. Within five years, the Palestinians would get their state, and Israel would get its security. In the fanfare, Peres, Rabin and Arafat received the Nobel Peace Prize. Arafat declared that "Gaza will become a Singapore!" There was rejoicing amongst the masses in the occupied territories, believing this deal was the road to a Palestinian state. Those who opposed the agreement were portrayed as an unrepresentative minority.

Sell-out

In reality, the 1993 agreement was a sell-out of the Palestinians. All the sugary coating was soon to melt away. The agreement established a Palestinian Authority, made up of a part of the Gaza strip and the town of Jericho, which comprised a tiny percentage of the West Bank occupied in 1967. The treaty envisaged a phased withdrawal in return for security guarantees. However, all roads and checkpoints would be under Israeli control, as would foreign policy. Israel would still control 80% of the water. The PA can make laws and carry out appointments, but these all have to be ratified by the Israeli government. For instance Arafat wanted his head on the postage stamps and to be addressed as "President". The Israelis refused both, but later acceded to the title of president. Other issues, such as the Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the border of a Palestinian state, etc., would be decided in the 'Final-



Status' negotiations.

As part of the agreement, Arafat would be responsible for internal security within the PA, especially the suppression of the dissidents of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Arafat employs 19,000 police and has the cooperation of no less than nine security services, including the CIA and Shin Bet. The PA has become extremely repressive, with demonstrations being banned, the closure of newspapers, and the arrest and torture of opponents. After Wye, Arafat ordered the arrest of 200 Hamas activists, held without charge or trial.

Nevertheless, the security question (Arafat's failure to fight "terrorism") has become the pretext for the repeated breaking off of negotiations. Eventually, a new agreement was signed at Wye river in the USA, which would place 13.1% of the West Bank under PA control. But again the Israelis after only granting 2% froze things.

Disillusionment

The lack of any real progress has led to bitter disillusionment amongst the Palestinians. Day by day, the situation of the masses is getting progressively worse. In the West Bank unemployment is between 16-33%, depending on access to Israel. In Gaza it is 60%. Poverty is widespread. The Gaza Strip is becoming pauperised, with little sanitation, health care or education. Around 80% of the economy of the West Bank and Gaza depends on Israel. The repeated closure of the border creates colossal difficulties. In 1987, 80,000 were allowed to cross into Israel; now only 8,000 are permitted access.

There is no freedom of movement for the two million Palestinians in the occupied areas. All need security passes from the Israelis before they can travel, a major problem if you are stateless or a refugee. They can't even move between Gaza and Jericho, a distance of ninety kilometres, despite being part of the PA. All roads have restricted access, patrolled by the Israeli army, so there has been talk of building a 'highway on stilts' between the two areas, but this has been rejected as costing too much! As Barak said when the troops were being redeployed from PA areas: "Everything continues as usual."

At the same time, Israel which annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, is forcing Arabs out and expanding the city's Jewish population. Since the Oslo Agreement, Israel's interior ministry has

revoked the ID cards of 1,600 Arabs living in East Jerusalem. There have been 20,000 more acres of Palestinian land expropriated or designated 'security' areas since September 1993. They have expanded over 200 illegal settlements. There are now around 300,000 armed Israeli settlers in the occupied areas. The Oslo agreement leaves the settlements intact. The whole area between Israel and the settlements has become a network of interconnecting roads.

Under these conditions, self determination for the Palestinians is a sick joke. Despite all the talk of "state" and "entity", the PA is still-born, and totally dependent upon Israel. According to Barak: "I intend to do everything to strengthen Israel and bring about a physical separation from the Palestinians. A Palestinian state... is already de facto in existence (sic)." He then went on: "The question is how to ensure that this entity is not a threat to Israel in the future." The Israeli ruling class will never permit genuine self determination for the Palestinians. They are determined not to allow the return of refugees and/or give up Jerusalem. They also want to hold on to the bulk of the occupied territories. That is the reason why they are ethnically cleansing East Jerusalem and have established a series of Cantons on the West Bank.

However, there is a growing backlash against Arafat and his corrupt and undemocratic regime. From a hero, he has now become a Judas for the Palestinians. Opportunistically, Syria's defence minister called him the "son of 60,000 whores." Now Barak has tightened the screws, proposing changes to the Wye agreement so that the second phase be deferred until the Final-Status negotiations. Even Arafat was forced to protest, but he is discredited.

However, more dangerous for the Zionists and the reactionary Arab cliques, is that the impasse will create a new Intifada. The collapse in the price of oil has pushed the whole region into recession. The price recovery in oil in the recent period has only come about by restricting output. Revenues are still tight, and austerity is still being pursued. This in turn has created enormous instability throughout the Arab world. In the Gulf States, the splits within the monarchies are an indication of the crisis. Already riots have taken place in Jordan, Yemen and Bahrain. On the edge of the Middle

East are the opening shots of the Iranian revolution. These events are a harbinger of what is to come.

In Israel itself, the situation is becoming increasingly polarised. The economy is in crisis. The GNP fell by 4.5% in 1996 and 1.9% in 1998, with stagnant growth predicted this year. A few months ago the Shekel was devalued by 10% against the dollar. Unemployment, which is virtually unknown, is set to rise substantially. Already riots have taken place in Ofkim in the Negev, where unemployment stands at 14.3%. That explains the desires of the Israeli ruling class to reach an accommodation and expand its trade with the Arab states. The Arab regimes are also keen to trade with Israel, and are eager for a deal over Palestine.

Netanyahu

The attacks by the Netanyahu government on the Israeli working class created big labour unrest and mass protests. Earlier this year, the working class moved into action with a strike by civil servants and a work to rule by teachers. This was followed by the end of March with a public sector general strike involving 400,000 workers. In face of rising inflation, the Histadut (trade union federation) rejected the government's offer of 3.1% and demanded a 14% wage increase. This was followed by a student strike against education costs. At present, 2,000 water workers are on strike against privatisation.

The conflicts in the Middle East can only be resolved on a revolutionary basis. The Zionist state will never permit genuine Palestinian self determination. On the other hand, neither the reactionary Arab states nor the programme of the PLO can offer any attraction to the working class of Israel. Only a revolutionary programme can forge class unity between the Israeli workers and the oppressed throughout the Middle East. That potential exists. The Palestinian problem can only be solved by the overthrow of the Zionist state and the reactionary Arab cliques. An essential component of this, is the establishment of a Marxist tendency within the working class of Israel and the Arab states. On the basis of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East, the working class can decide the borders of a Palestinian state, allow the return of refugees, and grant autonomy to the oppressed national minorities of the region. ■

Opening shots of Iranian revolution

The earth-shattering events in Iran during July represent the opening shots of a new revolution. In this article, Alan Woods, analyses the events as they unfolded, and draws out the key lessons for the movement. Since the week of violent street protests, the regime has clamped down, hoping to contain the situation by repression. Tough sentences have been handed out to critics of the regime. Students have been arrested, beaten and tortured - for the purpose of extracting forced confessions - while awaiting trial by "revolutionary" courts. At the same time, those thugs responsible for the original assault on the student campus are still at large.

The events in Iran are like the situation in tsarist Russia in the Spring of 1905. The eruption of the students, that most sensitive barometer of the tensions building up in society, are a warning of the explosion to come. They are the first shots in the Iranian revolution. The unrest erupted on July 8 after students protested against the passage of a law curbing press freedom and the closing of a popular left-leaning newspaper. Security forces stormed a dormitory at Tehran University that evening, beating students and pushing them out of windows. It seems likely that the intention of the reactionary wing of the regime, headed by the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wanted to provoke the students into reacting, and then crush them. In this way they hoped to eliminate the "moderate" President Muhammed

Khatami who had initiated a number of cautious reforms in Iran.

However, events did not work out according to plan. The savagery of the attack provoked a massive reaction which caught the mullahs entirely by surprise. Tens of thousands of student demonstrators fought with riot police in Tehran for five days—the first mass demonstrations since the 1979 Revolution. "The demonstrations", Stratfor explains, "began as small, peaceful student protests calling for press freedom after the closure of several liberal newspapers on July 8. They later transformed into widespread riots after riot police, sent in to break-up the demonstrations, injured dozens of students and arrested several dozen others." By noon the number of demonstrators in this area exceeded 50,000. Shopkeepers along the route of the demonstration shut down their businesses and joined the demonstrators. Demonstrators attacked the patrol cars of the State Security Forces, whose agents first fired into the air and then shot at the crowd. The SSF agents were forced to flee. Government vehicles in the area and along the route of the march were set on fire by the people. Furious demonstrators attacked Sepah and Saderat banks at Vali-Asr Intersection. Mullahs who ran into the demonstration threw away their turbans and robes and fled. Crowds of anything up to 100,000 staged demonstrations and sit-downs in the capital.

Initially, the students confined themselves to the limited demands for press freedom in line with the limited aims of the liberal wing of the clergy. But once on the streets, the movement rapidly acquired a

momentum and a life of its own. The students began to feel their own strength and their demands grew bolder and more sweeping. In demanding full democracy, they were demanding the radical abolition of the present regime. But this can only be achieved by revolutionary means. This was not at all the intention of Khatami and the so-called reformers, who immediately took fright and turned against the students. This is entirely logical. Whatever differences may separate the rival cliques fighting for power at the tops of society, their fear of the masses unites them far more.

Press freedom

It was the promise of press freedom and other democratic reforms that persuaded the students and other people tired of the rule of the mullahs to back Mohammad Khatami and helped to get him elected president in 1997. As the Marxists understood at the time, this marked a decisive turning-point, not because Khatami himself would bring a change, but because it marked the beginning of an open split in the regime—the first condition for revolution. When a regime like that of Iran enters into crisis, it always tends to split between two factions—one says: "If we do not reform from the top there will be a revolution." The other says: "If we do reform, there will be a revolution." And both are correct.

In Iran today, except the subjective factor, all of the conditions for revolution exist. The split in the regime has been manifest for a number of years. The present situation was sparked off precisely by the conflict between reformists and conservatives in the government. The profound discontent of the middle class is shown by the movement of the students and the manifest sympathy shown by the people of Tehran towards them. We will speak later on of the working class, which has already been involved in struggles before the recent events. All the conditions are maturing for a decisive showdown between the masses and the regime.

After 20 years the masses are tired of the rule of the mullahs. Originally, Ayatollah Khomeini promised a pure and incorruptible Islamic regime, free from all exploitation and the pernicious influences of the West. But corruption is an inseparable companion to any bureaucratic



regime. The bureaucracy of the mullahs was no exception. Indeed Iran is now one of the most corrupt countries on earth. The mullahs, particularly the middle layers, have cheerfully given themselves over to theft, swindling and bribery on a massive scale. The enrichment of the regime's supporters (who evidently cannot wait for the blessings of a future life in paradise) are in stark contrast to the growing impoverishment of the workers and peasants.

In the past, Iran's great oil wealth guaranteed a certain stability. The regime made concessions to the masses in the form of health, education and other services. However, the crisis has hit the working class hard. The average take-home pay is not enough to cover the average family's food bill, and most people are forced to work in more than one job to make ends meet. Often a man has to take two or three extra jobs to survive.

The world crisis of capitalism reflected itself in the collapse of oil and other commodity prices last year. Although the price of oil has since risen by 80 per cent (for how long is another matter) it caused serious problems for all oil producing countries. The Iranian economy is now in crisis, with high inflation and unemployment, low investor confidence. The hated foreign debt stood at around \$25 billion in 1997. 86 per cent of Iran's GDP comes from the state sector and a large part of the rest is controlled by the Mafia. The stench of corruption hangs over the whole economic life of the country.

In addition, there is a steep rise in crime, the absence of personal security and many freedoms. The oppressive

nature of the regime is manifested in a thousand different ways. Those who want to be students or teachers are interrogated to see if they and their families respect Islamic values. The system is heavily weighted against women. A female student may be expelled if she is caught laughing with an unrelated man. This is supposed to represent a sensuous invitation to sin! The suffocating regime of the mullahs which interferes in all aspects of life, big and small, would be bad enough in itself. But when everyone is aware that the clergy is corrupt and rotten to the marrow, it becomes utterly intolerable.

Discontent

The massive discontent with the regime was reflected in the 1997 election when the reformist Muhammed Khatami won a sweeping victory. Predictably, Khatami's promises of reform did not amount to much. He was blocked at every turn by the powerful hard-line conservative factions under the direction of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. But the split at the top acted like a crack in a dam through which the flood waters have now burst.

Sixty-five percent of the people of Iran are under 25, and they know little of the revolution and Iran's eight-year war with Iraq. In vain does the regime try to appeal to the spirit of the war and martyrdom. The time for such speeches is long past. The youth of Iran will no longer tolerate empty rhetoric and speeches. They want jobs and freedom.

The movement of the students immediately got an echo among the general population. Ordinary Iranians joined the

ranks of the students, and the protests have spread to Tabriz — where one student was killed by security forces over the weekend — and to Yazd, Khorramabad, Hamadan and Sharud. The potential for an all-Iranian revolutionary movement was rapidly looming.

In an attempt to stop the movement, the Governor of Tehran had announced on Monday an official ban on all demonstrations. Bravely defying the ban, the students took to the streets early on July 13 facing several thousand Islamic militia, (estimated by some sources at more than 50,000) many of them brought overnight to Tehran from other towns. That day Tehran resembled an armed camp with large numbers of LEF and Intelligence Ministry's forces occupying the city centre, while helicopters hovered above, issuing appeals from loudspeakers "for calm and order"—a call that was drowned out by bursts of police machine guns firing in the air and explosives used to frighten and disperse the demonstrators.

Demonstrations

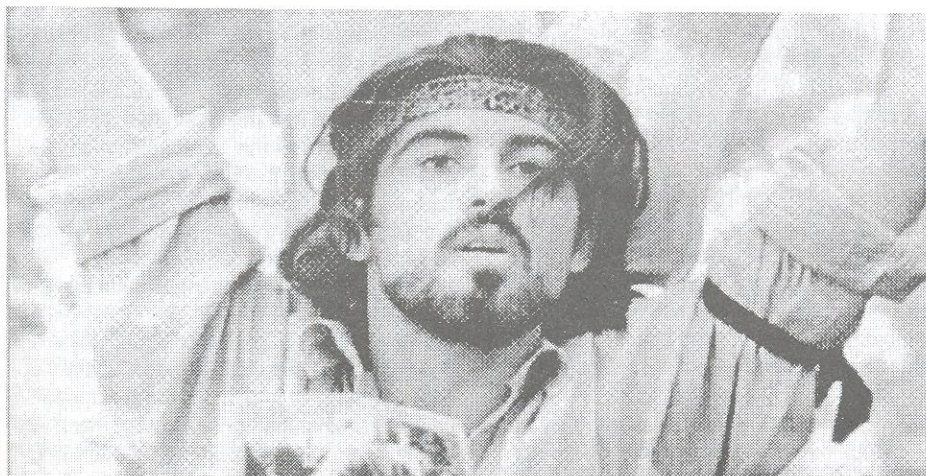
"By mid-day," writes Safa Haeri, "the Iranian capital looked like a war-torn, occupied city, as Ansarshock troops and security forces would check passers-by, private cars and taxis. Demonstrations were scattered and fighting sporadic, yet everywhere, even in downtown Tehran, where protesters attacked a bank, set fire to two buses and several official buildings, tried to occupy the offices of the hated dailies 'Keyhan' and 'Jomhuri Eslami', the former the mouthpiece of the Intelligence Ministry and the second speaking for Ayatollah Khameneh'i, the dailies first founder, owner and editor."

The next sentence is extremely important. The writer continues:

"Curiously, shopkeepers at the sprawling central bazaar, traditionally a conservative stronghold, shut their business and joined the young demonstrators, whose ranks had swelled into thousands thanks to ordinary population of both sexes.." (My emphasis, AW)

Traditionally, the bazaar was a stronghold of the mullahs. If even this most conservative layer of Iranian society joined in the students' demonstration, then the conclusion is inescapable: the days of the regime are numbered.

A report in the *New York Times* dated Tuesday, 13 July 1999, states:



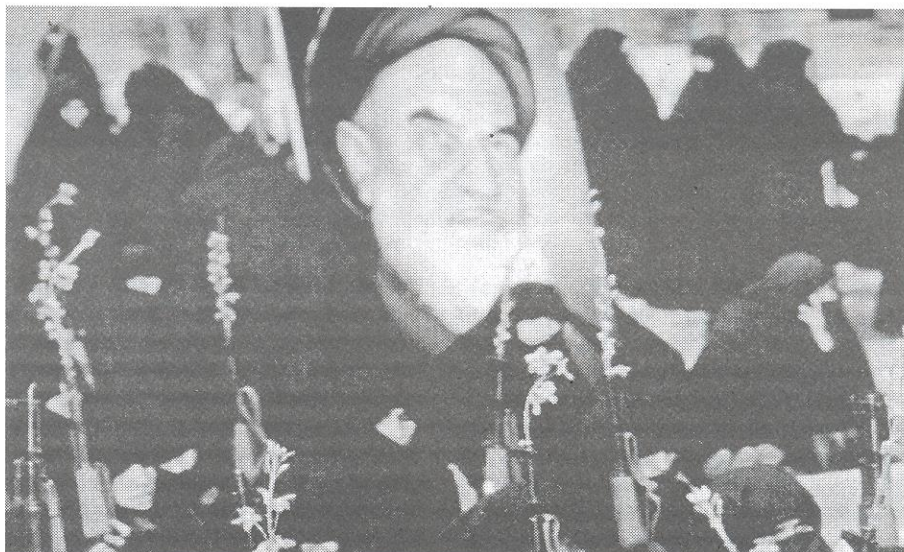
"The clogged streets smelled of fear and confusion as the worst unrest in the Islamic republic's history was countered by tens of thousands of uniformed and plainclothes security police, soldiers, anti-riot forces in shields and face-covering helmets, Revolutionary Guards, intelligence operatives, vigilantes wielding long green batons and ordinary street thugs."

But these tactics did not succeed. Throughout, the crowds showed themselves to be utterly fearless—in the best Iranian tradition. They displayed the same indomitable revolutionary spirit that toppled the monstrous tyranny of the Shah. Among the slogans borrowed from the 1979 revolution was: "Army brothers, why kill your brothers?" This is an appeal to the troops to come over to the side of the insurgents. It must have sent a shudder of fear through the ruling circles. To neutralise the clouds of tear gas, liberally employed by the security forces and Islamic vigilantes, the demonstrators set fire to tires.

Treacherous

As always, the Liberals have played the most cowardly and treacherous role. Like the Russian Cadets in 1904-5, the reforming wing led by Khatami wanted to lean on the students as a lever with which to wrench concessions from the hard-liners. Their aim is not to overthrow the regime but to force the conservatives to move over and make room for them. Their methods flow directly from this aim: not the revolutionary movement of the masses, but endless manoeuvrings and intrigues at the top. If they could achieve their aims without any participation of the masses, by means of peaceful reform or a palace coup, they would be happy. But the reactionaries grouped around the Ayatollah Khamenei have not the slightest intention of surrendering their power and privileges without a ferocious struggle. Since the Liberals' fear of the masses is a thousand times greater than their hatred of the reactionaries, the end result is a foregone conclusion: a rotten compromise with the forces of reaction which will leave the old regime firmly in position.

No sooner had the students begun a serious struggle against reaction, than the Liberals came out in their true colours. From the first moment, Khatami wanted to halt the movement, appealing to the stu-



dents to keep the demonstrations peaceful. This hypocritical language cannot hide the fact that the violence was not started by the students, who were merely demonstrating peacefully for democratic rights, but by Khamenei who, on July 11, issued a statement in the name of the Supreme National Security Council against "illegal rallies" and sent the police to break up the demonstration under the pretext of "trying to avoid clashes and restore calm."

When policemen and Revolutionary Guards blocked off access to central Tehran's Val-e-Asr square and attempted to disperse the demonstrators by force, the students replied by throwing stones. The police arrested at least 20 demonstrators and injured another dozen. The next day, July 12, President Khatami again appealed for calm and warned students to be wary of "provocations" from opponents of reform. "There are those who want to create provocations and clashes," he was quoted as saying. Khatami appealed to students "not to fall into this dangerous trap," saying, "We must be the first to oppose tensions and violence." In this way a united front was established between Khamenei and Khatami, as the right and left boots of reaction. The first tries to disperse the demonstrators with truncheons and tear-gas; the second tries to do the same thing with hypocritical speeches. But the intention is exactly the same.

The start of the revolution is always accompanied with a certain naïvety on the part of the masses, who look for saviours among the "big names" who appear to stand for reform and progress. Only through a painful process of trial and error do the masses learn to distinguish friend from foe and to see which leaders, parties and programmes really represent their interests and which are false, hypocritical and treacherous. In Iran this process has already begun. As yet the masses—even the most militant layer represented by the students—do not clearly know what they

want. But they know very well what they do not want. They do not want the status quo. They do not want the regime that has brought them so much misery, war, unemployment and suffering. This is a most important lesson!

The fact that the students booed Khatami, the man who only yesterday was their leader and hero, is highly significant. In a revolution, the masses learn quickly. Lessons that would not sink into the consciousness of men and women in twenty years of normal social life are now burned on their consciousness in a matter of days or even hours. The exact nature of the state, the role of the police, the judges, the mass media, the schools—and the Church—hidden for decades, suddenly become clear. In this process, the policeman's truncheon can be a valuable educator. The brutal slaying of student protesters at the very beginning of the movement undoubtedly had a radicalising effect on the students. A line of blood has been drawn between the students and the regime.

Revolution

What is needed in Iran is a revolution. This fact was instinctively grasped by the students who have significantly chanted on their demonstrations the slogans of the 1979 anti-Shah revolution. As an indication that they are learning in action, however, the students have introduced significant changes into the old slogans. Whereas in 1979 the demonstrators chanted: "Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic," now, the protesters on the streets of Tehran no longer call for an "Islamic" but an "Iranian Republic."

Moreover, for the mass of workers and peasants, the question of democracy is not an abstract question of legal definitions and paper constitutions. It is above all a question of bread. The first question is whether a revolutionary government will stand for the interests of the workers and



peasants, and whether it will solve their basic needs—work, bread and shelter. How is this to be achieved? Only by means of a nationalised planned economy, under the democratic control and administration of the working class. Therefore, the central slogan of the revolution must be: “*The Socialist Republic of Iran.*”

Popular support

The victory of the regime is extremely fragile, its base is narrower than ever before. At first sight this seems to be contradicted by the calling of a mass demonstration in support of the regime. This is the typical manoeuvre of a Bonapartist regime in difficulties. This was no spontaneous rallying of popular support in defence of the government. The state television and radio broadcast an announcement on Tuesday from the Islamic Propagation Organisation, the country's biggest propaganda machine, calling on the people to take to the streets on Wednesday in a counterdemonstration to “defend the country's national security” and condemn “those people who want to drag the country into anarchy.”

But the most significant fact was not the size of the pro-government demonstration on Wednesday. The government has the means to send hundreds of thousands of people into the streets when it chooses, and has frequently done so in the past. This demonstration was not particularly impressive compared to past experiences. But what was striking was the fact that the regime had to ship in large numbers of people from outside Tehran.

As a serious political force, Khatami is finished. He will be hated by the students and despised by the reactionaries. It is the latter who are firmly in the saddle—for now. But they have had a severe warning. It is therefore possible that they will introduce a few reforms which will change nothing and will be purely for decorative purposes. At the same time they will try to

crack down on all dissent. Those arrested in the demonstrations will be put on trial. The government has threatened to use the death penalty against its enemies in an attempt to put the lid on future disturbances. But in this way it will only create martyrs and stoke up the hatred of the masses. Given the lack of leadership, repression may have the effect of postponing the movement temporarily, but only at the cost of causing an even more violent and uncontrollable explosion later on.

The key to success lies in the direct action of the workers. Already the action against the freedom of the press has led to the threat of strike action by more than 500 journalists. But the decisive element in the equation is the Iranian proletariat. There have been strikes in Iran. Towards the end of 1995 4,000 workers at the German owned Benz Khavar lorry plant struck over pay and holidays. The workers of the textile industry in Gaem Shar struck at about the same time. The possibilities of working class struggle are shown by the history of the all-important oil workers.

The Iranian Oil workers have a particularly decisive significance. In Iran and the Middle-East, industries such as oil and communications are the most strategic of economic sectors. This fact was demonstrated in the 1979 Iranian revolution. While the Shah's regime faced massive street demonstrations, the declaration of a national oil strike on the 5th of October 1978 was a major blow to the regime. Troops were called in, arresting 70 leading workers in the Abadan refinery and the leader of the union of the Tehran Oil Refinery Workers. Following the arrests, the workers in Lavan, Bahrakan, Ahwaz, and other oil fields stopped working. The strike by 70,000 oil workers halted the production and export of oil. Within a month production declined from nearly 6 million barrels a day to nearly 2 million. This was the decisive element in the overthrow of the Shah.

Over the past period, the regime has used other methods—like casualisation—

to cut pay and living standards of the workers. The contract workers are constantly under pressure to do unpaid overtime. Despite this, the oil workers have continued to fight to defend their living standards. Immediately after the Iran-Iraq war, the oil workers organised a struggle demanding the payment of wages instead of coupons. In May 1990, Esfahan oil refinery workers demanded “Double pay for overtime.” Despite 30 arrests and a lot of pressure, the strike continued for two weeks which secured the release of the detained strikers and a promise from the government to increase wages. A government delegation visited the refinery to rectify the situation. The workers made it clear to the delegation that: “It is no use telling you our demands, while we have no right to organise.” Thus, the workers clearly linked the economic struggle with the political struggle—for the democratic right to organise on the shop floor.

On 27 January 1991 the oil workers struck just as they did the year before, for a wage rise and a number of other welfare demands. The strike began at the Isfahan and Abadan refineries with a hunger strike and within days it spread to the refineries in Tehran and Shiraz.

The state

A strike in February 1991 was met with threats from the Ministry of Information (security) in Tehran: “unless they end their strike, the security forces would move in.” Yet again the workers, fighting for their interests, were confronted by the state. Despite this, the strikers won most of their demands. This strike—the first all out strike in the oil industry since the great strike of 1978/79—involved tens of thousands of oil workers.

The government was careful not to encourage other workers to follow the oil workers' example. But it was unable to brush aside the wage issue which is the pressing demand of the whole working class in Iran. The strike forced the Iranian government to indirectly and through its Supreme Council of Labour concede a wage rise of 36% across the board. The effect of the strike and the importance of the oil workers was such that even the Minister of Oil did not allow Islamic Societies (set up by the government in some workplaces) to be established in the oil industry: “The president himself was aware of this fact and on his advice, in



view of the sensitivity of having political organisation in the oil industry, this issue would be considered in due course and appropriate measures with a view to the interests of the system, would be taken."

On the 19th & 20th August 1996 six hundred Tehran Oil Refinery workers, mainly from the oil storage unit and central gas depot stopped work and without prior notice, marched to the Labour House (the central body for the Islamic societies and Councils) where they protested about non-implementation of collective agreements and the enforcement of labour law.

Two-day strike

Oil refinery workers in Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz and Esfahan went on a two day warning strike on 18 and 19 December 1996 demanding recognition of the collective bargaining and agreement by the government. The two days strike was called as a result of government refusal to act on an earlier ultimatum issued in August by the oil workers. The striking workers have declared that failure of the responsible minister to act and agree to their demands will result in an all out indefinite strike within a month. In Tabriz Oil refinery the two day strike was followed by a go-slow for three weeks. This is a most impressive record of struggle, particularly if we bear in mind that the right to strike and organise is not recognised in Iran. Striking workers face dismissal, arbitrary arrest, execution and military occupation of the workplace. It shows that the workers, like the students, are losing their fear and are prepared to fight against all the odds. This fact constitutes the principal motor-force of the revolution in Iran.

Iran occupies a strategic position in the world, not only from the standpoint of US imperialism, but also from that of world revolution. The magnificent revolution of 1979 showed the world the heroism of the Iranian working class. The Shah's regime was equipped with the most awesome means of repression. At his back stood a huge army and a ruthless and efficient secret police, the Savak. The Iranian proletariat in 1979 was far stronger than the Russian working class in 1917. It could easily have taken power into its hands. But it lacked the necessary instrument in the form of a genuinely revolutionary party and leadership, like the Bolshevik party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. All that was necessary was to set up sovi-

ets—democratically elected committees composed of workers, students, shopkeepers, peasants and soldiers—and the problem would have been solved. But the so-called Communist Party, the Tudeh, had no perspective of taking power. The Moscow Bureaucracy dreaded the prospect of a workers' revolution in Iran. The Iranian Stalinist leaders blindly subordinated themselves to the Liberals and so-called progressives. Thus, in the moment of truth, the Iranian working class found itself paralysed and incapable of playing an independent role. The revolution was delivered hand and-foot to clerical reaction.

But now the wheel has turned a full circle. The regime of the Ayatollahs has exhausted itself and now faces revolution, just as the Shah did. This idea is already present in the minds of the students who at this moment are in the vanguard. But the students alone can never triumph against the monstrous state of the mullahs. It is imperative that they link up with the oppressed masses—the workers, peasants and urban poor—who are tired of the heavy hand of clerical reaction. It is also necessary to fight for the complete social and legal emancipation of women—that section of society which has had to bear the heaviest burden under the tyranny of the mullahs. The women of Iran are destined to play a key role in the coming revolution. Already a very important development was the magnificent participation of the women who played a very active role in the demonstrations in Tehran, and were everywhere at the forefront of demonstrations. It is also necessary to defend the democratic rights of the Kurds and other oppressed nationalities in Iran.

But with a programme that confines itself to demands for formal democracy, this is impossible. Of course, it is necessary to fight for every democratic demand—for freedom of assembly, the right to demonstrate and strike, the right to organise, for free and democratic elections and the convening of a constituent assembly etc. But this is not enough.

In order to put this programme into practice, it is necessary to set up democratically elected committees of workers. Committees of action must be formed to organise the struggle against the regime and give it a conscious expression. The students can play a vital role in this if they organise around the revolutionary pro-

gramme of Marxism and link their struggle with the working class. We must avoid the temptation to resort to the senseless tactics of individual terrorism and so-called guerrillaism which have led to disaster in the past. Not terrorism but organised revolutionary work in the factories, in the schools, in the workers' districts—that is the only way to prepare for the inevitable battles that impend.

Above all it is necessary to form an organisation of cadres, educated in the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. And it is necessary to see that the Iranian revolution can only succeed if it inscribes on its banner an internationalist perspective. That was always the position of Lenin and the Bolshevik party. A revolution in Iran would send shock waves throughout the world. We already saw that in a distorted way after 1979, when the Iranian revolution—unfortunately hijacked and distorted by clerical reaction—gave a powerful impulse to so-called Islamic fundamentalism everywhere. This led to a dead end, as we see clearly, not only in Iran but in Afghanistan, Algeria and everywhere.

Internationalism

The alternative to imperialism and capitalism is not fundamentalism but socialist revolution and proletarian internationalism. The second Iranian revolution will have an entirely different content and character to the first. The imperialists can see this and dread it. They understand that the whole of the Middle East is hanging by a thread. There is not one single stable bourgeois regime there. A revolution in Iran would cause them to fall like skittles. A successful socialist revolution in Iran would cause shock waves throughout the Middle East, in Russia, in the Indian Subcontinent. It would undermine the reactionary Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan. Its repercussions would be felt in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It could change the course of world history. Everything depends on the ability of the advanced guard of the Iranian workers and students to create the necessary instrument for carrying out the revolution to the end. ■

Alan Woods, 17th July 1999.

Nigerian students murdered

On 10th July five University students were brutally killed by a gang of cultists (neo-fascists) in the halls of residence at the University in Ife, Nigeria. The following is an eyewitness account of what happened.

"I am very lucky to be alive to send you this account of the events of the past few days. I could have been killed on Saturday July 10th, when the secret cult gangsters, backed by the authorities, attacked the students at Ife, killing five. Their main targets were Student Union activists.

That morning at about 2-3 am some students observed some strange people on the campus dressed in black and wearing masks. They sensed immediately that they were cultists going for an attack. The students went to the Union leaders to get them to act. Unfortunately they did not take the warning seriously. They were tired because the Union had been involved in organising a rally the day before.

By 4.00 am, the cultists had reached block 8 in Awolowo hall where the student union is based. The bandits wanted to strike a severe blow at the Union and strike fear into the minds of the students. The first student they saw who was sleeping in the corridor they shot in the head without questioning. Sleeping in the corridor is very common here as the University

has refused to build more hostels to accommodate students.

They found the Secretary General of the Union, George Iwilade, popularly known as "Africa", in his bed and shot him immediately in the head. Then they smashed his head with their axe to make sure he was dead. As this was going on the other cultists opened fire at random.

They were looking for the President of the Student Union Lanre Adeleke, popularly known as "Legacy". They shouted, "Legacy come out your life has been paid for". They shouted this at all the Union activists they were looking for.

Gunshots

The gunshots woke up "Legacy" and as he opened the door they shot at him and killed him. His room mate jumped out of the second floor window immediately and managed to escape.

They then went after the students shouting, "Awo boys come out if you dare", "Awo boys must leave this school", "we are going to call back", etc. In the process, they entered some rooms and shot defenceless students. Some were shot in the bush.

"Awo boys" refers to the militant students on that campus who traditionally reside in Awolowo hall. This is the hall where the cultists are usually taken to whenever the students arrest them. They are usually interrogated there about their

activities. They fear the hall and they have been hoping for the day that they could have their revenge.

That night I was sleeping with seven other students in a room meant for one, in Fajuyi Hall. At about 4.00 am in the morning, when we heard the gunshots we all rushed out because many of us were likely targets. Our fears were later confirmed. We had previously heard that the Black Axe secret cult organisation was planning an attack on the Student movement at Ife as it is one of the few campuses where they cannot operate freely due to the militant traditions built over the years by the left.

When we got downstairs we saw the Public Relations Officer of the Student Union running towards us and shouting that secret cult gangsters were killing people in the Awolowo Hall, a male Students' Hostel. He wanted to alert the students to mobilise them towards resisting the attack. However, within ten minutes into his address, we heard gunshots close by and we all had to run for cover; some of us ran into the nearby bush others into open rooms and the toilets.

The cultists first smashed open room 11 in block 1. All the occupants were lying on their beds terrified, but they did not kill anybody in that room. They then went up the block to the Student Union room, number 56, housing the Welfare Officer and the Finance Officer. They smashed the door open only to find that they had also left the room when they had heard the first gunshots. A Medical student, Eviano Ekelemu, in room 55, opened his door to see what was going on. They shot him in the lower stomach without asking any questions. He died about twenty minutes later at the University Health Centre. After they shot him, they were heard to have said that "the mosquito has died"! The casualties that morning stood at five dead. About eighteen students were shot in all.

Major targets

One student who ran through a bush path to the nearby female students' hall to warn them about the attack saw the cultists leaving through the same bush path. He was very lucky, as he was one of the major targets of the cultists. I had to treat myself for shock for some minutes after the bandits left.

Immediately after the killings there was a massive outcry everywhere. After the



Where the murders took place

student congress in the morning the students went looking for the cultists. The first suspects were the University authorities themselves. We now know what they mean by "summary expulsion" for raising the issue of reinstatement and standing for independent unionism.

By Sunday some of the cultists had been captured by the student militias. One of the assassins was caught along with one other person. His revelations are very shocking. He linked the Vice Chancellor, Omole, directly to the action. He said that his organisation had received support from the Authorities to carry out the hit whose main aim was to kill the entire leadership of the Student Union and other known activists! This according to them would scare the students in the future from challenging them and the authorities.

The opposite is what they got. The attack rather than demoralise the students brought them out in their thousands and there is massive support for the students from the workers and lecturers. The local ASUU, the lecturers' Union, and other unions on campus sent their condolences to the Student Union.

The funeral

The students killed, "the July 10th Martyrs", were buried on Tuesday, July 20th, on the campus in front of the Awolowo Hall. The funeral was quite an emotional event. About 20,000 people attended: students, workers, lecturers, parents, market women, journalists, etc. The market women in Ife town and suburbs closed their shops and came down for the burial. Student unions from different campuses were also present; there were solidarity lecture boycotts and protest marches on many campuses. During the funeral it was clear that the workers present were seething and looking for a political alternative.

The protests were mainly against cultism, victimisation and the various attacks students have been suffering. The University workers at Ife also went on solidarity strikes. The workers supported the students all the way, to the extent that formal activities on the campus were halted for two weeks. Mass workers' meetings were organised around the issue. Had the cultists known that a major mass movement would develop after their attack, they would not have embarked on it.

The public outcry against the cultists and Omole was so enormous that on Wednesday, 14th July, the Obasanjo regime had to remove him and quickly appoint an acting Vice Chancellor in his place. When the news of the removal of Omole got out, there was massive jubilation everywhere; the whole campus went into a festive mood. The Christian churches that were having a joint prayer session ended the programme and they marched round the campus singing "Jesus removed Omole"!

Student Union

The removal of Omole is very interesting. His two deputies could not replace him as they were equally hated by the students and workers. The chairman of the Governing council, that passed the reactionary resolutions in May, now directed the University management to "work with the student union".

The day before the funeral, the Minister of Education was forced to come to Ife and address a Student Union rally of about 5,000 students and make a pronouncement on the question of reinstatement; the new acting VC was also present. The reinstatement of long standing expelled students is now only a matter of time. If they do not reinstate before next semester there will be more problems for the authorities.

At that mass meeting the students raised a sum of 30,000 Naira among themselves towards organising the funeral. This makes it a total of 45,000 Naira (£300) that the students raised in all. You can see the strength of the movement from the donations; this is the largest amount contributed in the history of Student mass meetings in Ife. More donations also came from the public; a woman donated the five coffins used to bury the students. There were many more like that.

After the attack we made an attempt to call a broad left activists' meeting; made up of the left organisations on the campus, to try to organise a form of united front to combat the situation. This was held on July 14th. The idea of a Students' defence corps was raised along with many other security proposals, together with other student demands. The call was also raised to bring to justice all those responsible for the attack. The cultists have now disappeared from the University and the town completely.



The tasks before the students are enormous. However, with a clear leadership it is possible to achieve much more. Unfortunately some in the leadership pose a threat to the movement in the immediate future. They are not doing anything as regards organising the students in case of another cult attack. Rather they are relying on the State apparatus.

They do not know that relying on the police is very dangerous. During the search for the culprits, the policemen who went along with the students consciously stayed back whenever the students wanted to enter dangerous areas. For example, the day before the funeral, we heard again the Jungle drums (a signal that the cultists were at large). When the policemen were told to come along it took a lot of persuasion before they would follow. When they got near the source of the drumbeats, the drumming suddenly stopped. The police refused to advance further. This shows that the students can only count on their own forces and on the support of the workers.

Death threats

The cultists are already regrouping and are planning attacks, although not in the immediate future. They are again sending death threats. One colleague has already received a message from home that the cultists are saying they are going to kill him! The same goes for some other activists.

The events at Ife show how volatile the situation in Nigeria is. The Obasanjo regime wants to avoid conflict with the students. Even the outgoing military administration of Abubakar had given clear orders to re-instate all expelled students. They did not want to provoke a student movement that could clearly spill over into the working class. Omole represented that wing of the ruling class (at this moment a minority) that wanted no compromise with the students and wanted to step up repression. His actions have provoked a mass reaction in Ife. These events are a clear warning to the ruling class in Nigeria. All the conditions are maturing for an Indonesian type situation. They have been warned."

Ife, Nigeria
28.7. 99

The long view of history

"Guns, Germs and Steel: a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years" by Jared Diamond, Vintage, 480 pages.

Reviewed by Simon O'Rorke

Why has Eurasian civilisation come to so thoroughly dominate the whole world in the last few hundred years? Historical materialism explains the importance of the dynamics of modes of production in shaping the broad outline of history. The competitive forces inherent in capitalism made it so economically dynamic that it engulfed the world. But why did capitalism develop in Europe rather than in New Guinea or pre-Columbian America? Agriculture has been a prerequisite of all historical class societies. But why is it that agriculture failed to develop in some of the most agriculturally fertile parts of the world, such as Southern Africa and Western North America, till Europeans introduced it? When faced with such questions, many people who do not normally express racist opinions nonetheless answer in terms of supposed racial or deep-seated cultural differences. That is not surprising given the lack of worked out alternatives in historiography till recently.

In "Guns, Germs and Steel", Jared Diamond takes a convincing multi-disciplinary approach. His main thesis is that

domination of the world by Eurasian civilisation is ultimately the result not of racial differences but of long-term geographical and biogeographical factors. An indicator of the over-specialisation of academic history is the fact that this book had to be written not by a professional historian but by a biologist who is an expert in several fields with an evolutionary perspective, including ornithology and the development of human diseases as well as human evolution. The broad coverage of this fascinating book means I only have space to outline a few of its major themes.

Domestication

The availability of wild plants and animals suitable for domestication varies greatly from one part of the world to another. Large American mammals, having evolved without humans, were nearly all rapidly wiped out when people arrived, either through predation or habitat loss. So there were few to choose from to domesticate and in fact only one proved suitable, the llama/alpaca, actually two domestic breeds of the same wild animal, the guanaco, one bred as a pack animal, the other for wool. With the exception of maize ("corn"), none of the large-seeded grains that are suitable for domestication is native to the Americas. And maize took thousands of years to develop as a crop because it is radically different from teosinte, its wild ancestor, in several ways.

The main east-west axis of Eurasia made the spread of domesticated crops and technology in general easier by having extensive contiguous zones at the same latitude and hence climate. All the main Eurasian domestic crops were developed in the two small areas of western Asia and China where their wild ancestors were native and then spread to the rest of Eurasia. Whereas Eurasian crops never got across the desert and the jungle to get to temperate southern Africa till the Dutch brought them there

in ocean-going ships.

Diamond is careful not to be a geographical reductionist. He agrees that cultural factors can be important. But he argues that over large enough geographical areas and long enough times societies that tend to maximise the use of their environment will prosper at the expense of societies that do not. Obviously this would have been most important in the days when there were lots of small societies in a given geographical area. And cultural factors that influence technological innovation themselves require explanation. Why did capitalism develop in Europe rather than in China, for example?

China's flat topography, two large rivers and smooth coastline gave it a head start in the rapid diffusion of culture and technology. The first people in the region to develop agriculture and domestic animals engulfed a huge area where now most peoples speak one of the 11 main Chinese dialects, where before, as indicated by some surviving remnants, there must have been thousands of languages spoken. By 221 AD, most of China was politically united. Till the middle ages, China led the world in technology. But then China's geographically easy communication turned from being an advantage for innovation to a disadvantage.

New technology

In the 13th century, Chinese ships of exploration reached the coast of east Africa. But then those voyages were put a stop to due to a factional struggle in Beijing. The dockyards were closed, and there where no nearby rivals to the Chinese Empire to show the folly of this abandonment of new technology.

In contrast, Christopher Columbus approached five different European potentates till eventually he found one willing to sponsor his voyage of exploration across the Atlantic. Once the Spanish started benefiting from ocean-going ships, several other European powers followed suit. Europe's topography is much more fragmented than China's: Europe has five large peninsulas, two large islands and four high mountain ranges dividing the continent. So Europe's moderate level of topographical fragmentation made its peoples isolated enough to remain political rivals but not isolated enough for ideas to spread in this competitive milieu. ■



Terracotta army of third century BC, China



Letters MATTERS

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Nurse's view

Dear Comrades,

Once again we are told that the government is taking steps to improve services and pay in the NHS. Few health service workers will have forgotten Frank Dobson's declaration of war against them on coming to office. On day one of the "New" Labour government, he reinforced the line of the out-going Tories with the words "No one becomes a nurse to make a fortune."

If you wish to enrage a nurse or NHS employee simply mention the words 'Vocation' or 'Job Satisfaction'. For years now these two expressions have served as a form of short-hand which translates into: 'anyone who likes their work or who is dedicated to it can pay for the privilege in low wages and poor conditions'. Nursing staff and junior doctors who are dedicated to the care of patients, find themselves shackled to a poorly paid job, with ridiculous shift arrangements, unpaid overtime, constant exposure to infection, needle-stick and back injuries and the ever-present threat of abusive and violent patients.

If the above description is not sufficient to convince you that health workers are getting the dirty end of the stick, there is also the reign of terror which has prevailed since the Tories set up the NHS

trusts. Any health worker, whether a nurse, doctor or even a porter, who complains about conditions of work or health and safety (for workers and patients alike) is seen as trouble and therefore likely to incur the wrath of an unforgiving Trust. Many a young hopeful has seen their career dashed in the aftermath of a complaint. Dedicated and hardworking staff find themselves passed-over for promotion or other jobs in the Trust, simply because they did not know how to keep their mouths shut.

Waiting lists

Frank Dobson has attempted to draw attention away from the discontent of NHS staff by concentrating instead on patient care and waiting lists. The lists are a joke. It is well known that waiting times for operations have been cut down by preventing sufferers from getting on the lists in the first place. The figures look good but patients in need of minor surgery continue to suffer, with little hope of ever being properly treated.

When delegations present him with clearly stated demands for better pay and conditions, he and others in the government go off on the opposite tack. They try and patronise dedicated public servants by dangling the golden carrot of 'super nurse', who will be paid we are told £40,000 plus. To most skilled nurses a win on the lottery seems like a more secure option of improving their financial

situation. It is an insult.

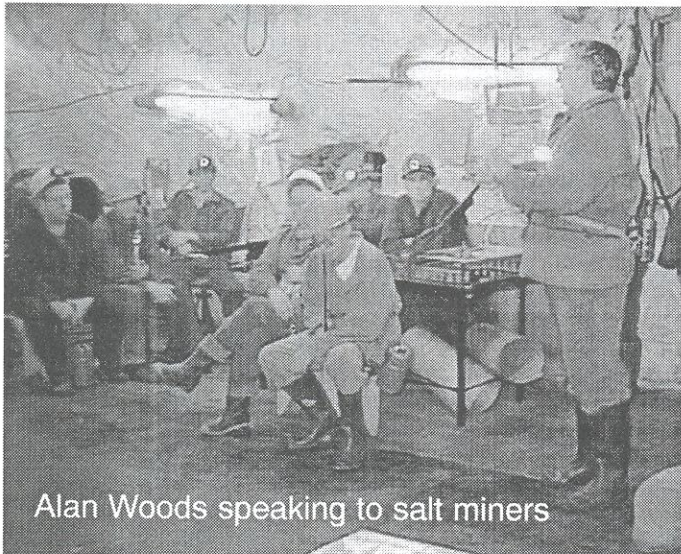
Dobson's refusal to see wood when he is clearly looking at trees is deliberate and intended to diffuse the issue and buy time, placing the responsibility for focussing the debate on those who oppose his actions. This is like trying to run through molasses—very tiring.

It is possible that Dobson will go at some point in a reshuffle. Any replacement is likely to carry on his policy of holding out against the needs of health workers, albeit with subtle differences.

If there is a strike in the NHS the blame can be laid squarely at the door of this Labour government. People throughout the land will rally to the support of these sorely tried workers and there can be no doubt that constituency and branch Labour parties, disillusioned by the governments record, will play a full and active part in countering the expected lies of the capitalist press.

It is not too late. If Dobson and Blair want to avoid a scrap with health workers they can make immediate preparations for a substantial increase in pay, as a first step, followed up quickly by a thorough-going independent review of hours and conditions of work, this time fully involving the trade unions and the NHS workers. Then we can see where the true balance lies.

**Yours,
 An NHS worker.**



Alan Woods speaking to salt miners

SA Editor in Salt Mine!

During a recent visit to Russia Alan Woods visited Solyakansk, in the Urals - a town based on the local salt mines where Stalin sent Trotskyists and other oppositionists in the past. The son of one of those oppositionists now works in the mine. He said: "if only my father had had the possibility of reading the *Revolution Betrayed*. But we have had nothing to read in this country for 70 years."

Alan spoke at two meetings in the biggest salt mine. The first meeting was on the surface. The second meeting took place 300 metres below ground in a kind of canteen during the change of shift. The discussion underground was very lively. This was a representative cross-section of ordinary miners (men and women) and therefore all kinds of views were expressed.

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Using a wealth of primary sources, Alan Woods uncovers the fascinating growth and development of Bolshevism in pre-revolutionary Russia. The author deals with the birth of Russian Marxism and its ideological struggle against the Narodniks and the trend of economism.

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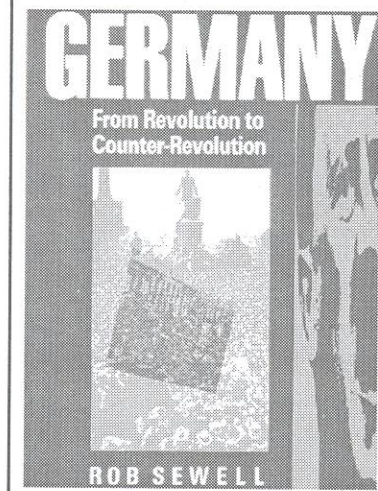
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There are only four months left in which to reach our Millennium sales target. Over the next month students will be starting college all over the country, so every area should be planning stalls for the Freshers' Fairs. Make sure you order enough extra copies of *Socialist Appeal*, along with our pamphlets and books to make those stalls a real success.

There is a real thirst out there for the kind of analysis, ideas and perspectives only on offer in these pages - it's our job to quench that thirst.

Stalls should be organised not only in the colleges but also in town centres, public meetings and Marxist Discussion Groups should be organised too to help spread the ideas of Marxism, and don't forget to send us a report of how you get on.

This month we've got some special offers to liven up the sales and help us to raise much needed cash. Tapes of Alan Woods speaking on his new book on the history of Bolshevism can be ordered from the usual address for £5 plus 50p p&p.

Next summer will be the 60th anniversary of the brutal assassination of Leon Trotsky. We are beginning our campaign on this question with the production of a

calendar for the year 2000 (pictured right). These can be ordered for £1 plus 30p postage from the usual address.

Use them to keep track of important labour movement events, and to note the special events we will be organising to commemorate the occasion. Keep your eyes peeled to this page for further details in coming months.

The last two months has seen an improvement in our sales figures but there's still a long way to go to reach the target we've set ourselves.

Why not help us reach that goal? Become a *Socialist Appeal* supporter, and a seller. How many copies could you sell to your workmates or your friends in college? How many could you sell in your union branch or local Labour Party? If you'd like to give a hand with a stall in a college or town centre, get in touch and we can put you in touch with local *Socialist Appeal* supporters. Help us to build Marxism in the New Millennium. ■



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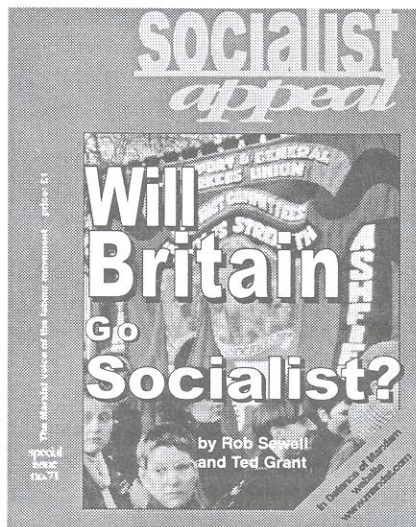
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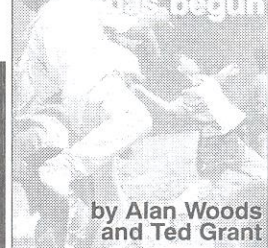


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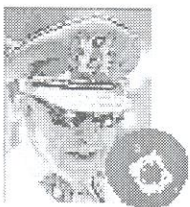
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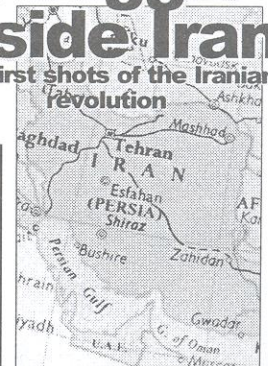


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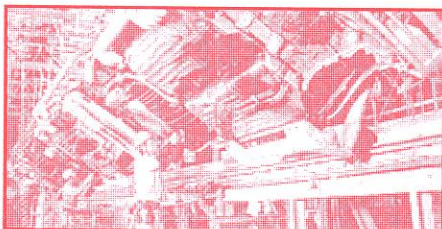
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