

●Pensions ●Textiles ●Unpopular capitalism ●Mexican workers

Socialist Appeal

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

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Oil crisis

Blairism on the ropes



Prague: Globalised Protest

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Labour's Seismic Setback

"Predicting the course of events is hazardous. What can be said is that Labour enjoys a lead such that only seismic setbacks over the coming months could deprive it of a comfortable majority at the next election."

The *Financial Times*, 11th September, as the fuel blockade started to bite.

Socialist Appeal has warned repeatedly that we live in a period of sharp and sudden changes. It was false, as many Labour movement activists were prone to do, to simply look at the surface of things. To understand developments, we have to look at the underlying processes in society.

Again, as *Socialist Appeal* has explained, despite the boom, there exists a colossal discontent building up throughout society. It was inevitable that at a certain stage this discontent would burst through. The political scene has shifted profoundly over the last few weeks. For the first time since January 1992, Labour support has collapsed and the Tories have overtaken Labour in the opinion polls. This represents a political earthquake that has shaken the Blair government to its very foundations and poses a serious question mark of the plans for a second-term Labour government.

Shaking heads

Many Labour activists must be shaking their heads in despair at this outcome. After 18 years of Tory nightmare, the Blair government's pro-capitalist policies threaten to throw away a 179 Labour majority. The writing has been on the wall for a long time. The string of election set-backs for Labour in the European and local elections, as well as the results in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, were clear for all to see. The Blair leadership has been repeatedly warned, even by right-wing MPs, such as Peter Kilfoyle, of a haemorrhaging of support amongst Labour's core vote. "What has really changed?" they ask. Now this drain of support has been further exacerbated by the government's handling of the fuel crisis. Rather than address real grievances, the government branded the protesters as "bully boys", and threatened to bring in new laws to deal with any future action. There are none so blind as those who refuse to see.

"The spell has been broken", states an editorial in the FT. Not only has Labour taken

a hammering in the polls, Blair's personal rating has also taken a damaging tumble. It now stands at minus 34, the lowest for a Labour leader since Neil Kinnock in 1989. This was always viewed by the right wing as their key asset. Now the government is perceived to be "out of touch" and "arrogant", as the discredited Thatcher government was in the past. More than 70% of voters do not believe ministers' claims to be a "listening government".

For many, the fuel crisis proved to be the last straw. As fuel prices rocketed, squeezing people through indirect taxation, discontent reached boiling point, resulting in a spontaneous blockade of the oil refineries. Protesters followed the example of French lorry drivers and farmers, who successfully forced the Jospin government to cut fuel taxes. With the trade union leaders totally engrossed in "New Realism" and oblivious to the discontent that was building up, a vacuum was created, which, given the inaction of the TUC, was then filled by groups of farmers, road hauliers, taxi drivers and the like. Following the French lead, in a totally unprecedented action for Britain, they began to blockade fuel supplies in an attempt to force the Blair government to cut fuel taxes.

Given the "just-in-time" methods introduced across British industry to slash costs, the blockade had a devastating effect within days. "If nothing else," laments *The Economist*, "the blockades of Britain's oil refineries have been a lesson in how to bring a modern, industrial society to a halt." (16th September). To the horror of big business, it is a lesson that will not be forgotten!

The fuel protests were supported by 80-90% of the population, which means not only the working class, but also the bulk of the middle class were in support. Commentators have correctly drawn parallels with the massive opposition to the Poll Tax under Thatcher. As *The Economist* remarked: "the French way seems to be gaining ground."

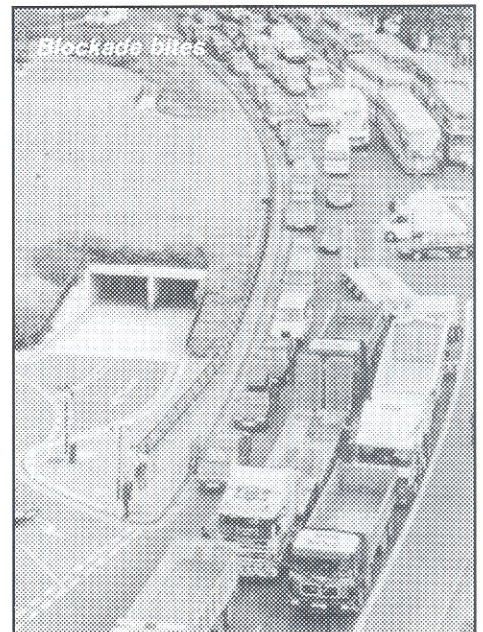
With the economy rapidly grinding to a halt, the government panicked and denounced the protesters as "bully-boys" employing "intimidation" to obtain their aims. They were followed by the TUC leaders, who compared the protesting lorry drivers to Chilean lorry drivers who helped bring down the Allende government! They, in turn, were followed by the *Morning Star*, who, grovelling before the trade union bureaucracy, described the protests as a "bosses' blockade". The truth is there was very little "intim-

idation", and the protests were overwhelmingly peaceful.

As for the character of the protesters, they were undoubtedly from varied backgrounds. They were overwhelmingly made up of small hauliers, small farmers and self-employed workers. Many were on the verge of ruin as fuel prices soared. There were no small number who were trade union members. Of course, there were also politically backward elements, like Brynle Williams, caught up in the protest - which is inevitable in any mass movement - given the paralysis of the workers' organisations. They filled the vacuum. Nevertheless, the protest movement received overwhelming public support for their stand. It was a just struggle. Why should those on lower incomes be subject to massive increases in indirect taxation, while taxes on big business were being reduced by the Blair government?

This was clearly no reactionary "bosses' revolt", as stated by the *Morning Star*. They had the overwhelming support and sympathy of workers up and down the country, including the majority of unionised tanker drivers. In fact, the British ruling class were alarmed by the protests which threatened their profits and was an example which they did not want repeated. The *Financial Times* attacked Hague for his opportunist demagoguery, rather than defending the 'rule of law' and the strategic interests of the ruling class:

"It is not a question of whether, as Mr Hague said, the people involved are 'fine,



upstanding citizens", states the *Financial Times*, the organ of finance capital. "No doubt, many of them are. It is not even a question of whether the cause is just. It is rather about the limits of legitimate protest. When a group successfully threatens to halt the economy, the government has lost its monopoly of coercive power.

"For Conservatives, in particular, opposition to such protests must be a matter of principle... What they must not do is give the slightest support, covert or overt, to threats of huge disruption. This is to betray not just the party's achievements, but its raison d'être. If the Conservatives are not a party of law and order, what are they?" (19th September, our emphasis).

It is quite possible that the oil companies "colluded" with the protests to a certain extent. They would profit from a reduction of fuel tax, as there would be more scope to increase prices. But there were clear limits to this "collusion". With the economy increasingly paralysed, their sales and profits were under threat. As soon as the blockade was called off, the oil companies announced an immediate rise in petrol prices - which they were forced to rescind!

Rather than deal with real grievances, the Blair government is now threatening to bring in legislation to prevent a further blockade of the oil companies. Such legislation poses a threat to democratic rights, and the right to strike in particular. The army are to be given extra resources to train soldiers to drive oil tankers. Despite the concerns by the leaders of the TGWU and other unions, they opened the door to this legislation by backing the government's line.

Wasted opportunity

On the continent, particularly in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, the trade unions led the protests against fuel prices. In Britain, despite the biggest industrial action for decades, the unions failed to give a lead, not wishing to offend the Blair government. Within days, the protesters had reduced the anti-union laws to dust. The government was impotent. If the unions had adopted a militant stance, Blair would have been forced to concede, and the non-union layers, struggling shoulder to shoulder with their trade union counterparts, could have been organised. Unfortunately, the right wing trade union leaders wasted this opportunity.

The collapse of support for Labour cannot be brushed lightly aside. The report to Labour's annual conference warns about poor morale amongst Labour voters. "The danger is that turnout will be low." And concludes, "A low turnout will be bad for Labour." This fear was reinforced by the party's declining membership, which fell from 387,776 in 1998 to 361,000 last year.

There is disillusionment amongst Labour supporters with the actions of the Blair government. The continuation of Tory spending plans, the introduction of PFI, privatisation,

the insulting 75p increase for pensioners, has left a bitter taste in people's mouths. Now Hague promises a big rise in pensions and a cut in petrol tax! While Labour supporters stay at home, former Tory voters are turning back to the Conservative Party.

There is acute alarm in Labour's marginal seats. The Blairite, Hilton Dawson, MP for Lancaster and Wyre recently blurted out: "There is no doubt Tony has lost a lot of ground. We need a common sense approach that treats people not as enemies of the state but as people with legitimate grievances... they feel he has misread the situation."

"At the moment, things are difficult" says Dawson, sitting on a precarious 1,295 majority. He wrote to the prime minister urging him to recognise the strength of the protesters. "It is all very well for the chancellor to characterise protesters as 'no more than 2,000 pickets holding the country to ransom', but I have no doubt that the vast majority of my constituents support them... some of these belligerent statements [from ministers] are going down very badly indeed."

The Blair government, having gained a historic electoral victory, has squandered the support of large sections of the working class, as well as the middle class. The driving out of the Tories in 1997, was a fundamental rejection of Tory policies. Unfortunately, the Blair government has continued where the Tories left off. It is this, the feeling that nothing has changed, combined with the constant stress within the workplace, that has caused this present shattering earthquake. The pro-capitalists policies of the government have again breathed new life into the Tories. Their "moderate" policies have proved a disaster!

The 'market economy' is in a blind alley. The only salvation is for Labour to break with Tory policies and base itself on a bold socialist programme. As an immediate step, fuel taxes should be slashed, and the oil companies nationalised under democratic workers' control and management. A socialist transport policy should be introduced, based on the nationalisation of the railways, bus companies and major haulage firms. The banks should be taken over, with cheap loans offered to small businesses. To plan the economy, the government should nationalise the 'commanding heights of the economy', the top 150 giant monopolies and insurance companies, under democratic workers' control and management. Compensation should only be paid on the basis of proven need.

Only in this way can the lives of ordinary working people be transformed. The wealth created by a socialist plan of production could lift living standards dramatically, ending unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. The example of a socialist Britain, as the fuel protests showed, would spread like wild fire throughout Europe and elsewhere. Laying the basis for a socialist united states of Europe and a world federation of socialist states. ☆

Workers and the middle class

by Leon Trotsky



"The advanced workers should learn to give clear and concrete answers to the questions put by their future allies."

"While the farmer remains an 'independent' petty producer, he is in need of cheap credit, of agricultural machines and fertiliser at prices he can afford to pay, favourable conditions of transport, and conscientious organisation of the market for his agricultural products. But the banks, the trusts, the merchants rob the farmer from every side. Only the farmers themselves, with the help of the workers, can curb this robbery. Committees elected by small farmers should make their appearance on the national scene and jointly with workers' committees and committees of bank employees take into their hands control of transport, credit, and mercantile operations affecting agriculture.

"By falsely citing 'excessive' demands of the workers, the big bourgeoisie skillfully transforms the question of commodity prices into a wedge to be driven between the workers and farmers and between the workers and petty bourgeoisie of the cities. The peasant, artisan, small merchant, unlike the industrial worker, office and civil service employee, cannot demand a wage increase corresponding to the increase in prices. The official struggle of the government with high prices is only a deception of the masses. But farmers, artisans, merchants, in their capacity of consumers, can step into the politics of price-fixing shoulder to shoulder with the workers." ☆

September 1938

Index

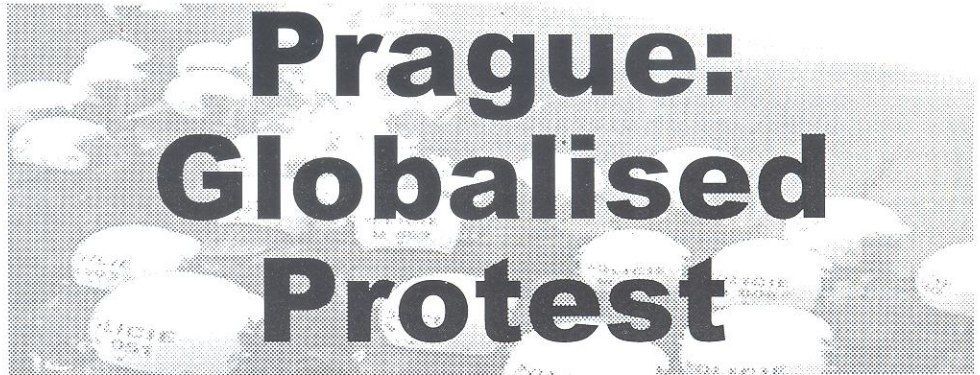
Editorial.....2
 Prague protest....4
 Labour Party.....5
 Trade union news.6
 Rights of way.....9
 "Unpopular
 capitalism".....10
 Russian
 workers.....13
 Marx
 was right.....14
 Trotsky.....16
 Youth.....19
 Mexican
 workers.....20
 Egypt.....21
 Colombia.....22
 Pakistan.....24
 Review.....25
 Sri Lanka.....26
 Letters.....28
 Press Fund.....29
 Wellred.....30

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Prague: Globalised Protest

GATT's successor, the World Trade Organisation, established in 1993 along with its associates the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, have achieved international notoriety. A recent opinion poll claimed that a majority of young people did not know what the TUC is, while around the world thousands of young people turn out to protest against the global capitalism that the Bretton - Woods institutions represent.

by Tanja Gantner

This should tell us two things. Firstly, that the leadership of the British trade union movement and their class collaboration policies have driven the mighty TUC into anonymity, totally failing to offer young people a lead. Secondly, that those young people are not as apathetic as we are often told, they are more than prepared to protest when given the opportunity. Meetings of the IMF, etc provide just such an opportunity giving the free market a recognisable face.

As we go to press just such a demonstration is taking place in Prague at the 55th annual meeting of the World Bank Group and the Board of Governors of the IMF.

The police estimate that 30,000 young people from across Europe set out for Prague. Far fewer reached their destination as border guards and their reinforcements tried to prevent demonstrators getting through and repeating the scenes in Seattle earlier this year. 11,000 Czech police have been mobilised in Prague. They have announced that they are prepared to use tear gas and water cannon if necessary. According to the Prague Post six armoured personnel carriers, six troop trucks, two fire engines, two Mi-17 helicopters, and two W-3A Sokol helicopters are also on standby.

This may sound heavy handed but there can be no doubt that the capitalist class are

becoming increasingly concerned by these regular protests. The establishment of GATT after world war two was a precursor to the economic upswing of the 50s and 60s. The fall of Stalinism combined with the boom in the west created the illusion amongst many capitalists that the establishment of the WTO would be the launch pad for another upswing. However in the end trade agreements are only pieces of paper. Much of today's growth in trade takes place between different branches of the same big companies, leading not to increased investment as a result of competition, but rationalisation through the increasing power of monopolies. The WTO and its associates have become the public face not for the glorious achievements of globalisation, but the impoverishment of third world debt, low pay, child labour and the destruction of the environment.

Whatever happens in Prague, these demonstrations will not go away. They will be repeated at the Summit of the Americas next April and around the world next May Day.

These are no longer simply single issue protests against a war, or for debt relief. However unclear their demands, they represent the genuine and growing opposition to the international capitalist system. These demonstrations remember, like the protests across Europe against fuel prices are taking place at the height of a boom in capitalism. In other words against the background of the best situation this system can offer us.

A few thousand young people cause chaos at a meeting of the world's most powerful bankers. A few hundred lorry drivers and farmers bring Britain to a virtual standstill. These forces if led by the organised working class could effortlessly and peacefully transform society. The workers movement in Britain with the TUC awoken from its anonymity, united with this militancy and enthusiasm on the basis of a socialist programme would be unstoppable. ☆

"It was very impressive", said Colin Rice, an eye witness at the Prague protest. "Thousands of youth were there expressing their disgust towards big business and capitalism in general. The anti-capitalist protesters blockaded the delegates preventing them getting to their meetings in a normal way."

Trade Unions Draw Line in Pensions Revolt

This year's Labour Party Conference took place amid the biggest political crisis facing Labour for eight years. Delegates were visibly shaken by this sudden turn-around in the party's fortunes, and were looking for answers from the party leadership.

by our correspondent

Despite the stage-managing of the conference by the Blair leadership, pressures were clearly building up and burst through sharply over the question of pensions.

"Reassurances" about pensions and the minimum wage from Gordon Brown, failed to placate the hundreds of pensioners who descended on Brighton, and exerted pressure on delegates. In a fringe meeting on pensions, the social security minister, Jeff Rooker, was howled down by angry pensioners, and chased from the meeting, while Barbara Castle and Tony Benn were praised to the skies.

"We are fighting for the restoration of the welfare state and the abolition of the mentality of the poor law - don't let it come back," she said.

Given the control by the leadership, most of the time the conference hall was half-empty, whilst in contrast the fringe meetings were full up. The pensions fringe meeting was full to overflowing even before the morning session of the conference was finished. This was to have a major effect latter in the week.

Blair's speech to the conference, silver-tongued, but devoid of content, was an attempt to mark some clear blue water between New Labour and the Tories. He talked about the future in the most general and vague terms. His theme appeared to be that the present Tory Party were extreme Thatcherites, while Blair offered a form of "Pink Toryism". It is no accident that he appealed to the "good honest Tories" in the country - but these did not include those in the leadership of the Conservative Party.

He said the differences between Labour and the Tories were: "Stability or boom and bust. Jobs or unemployment. Investment in schools and hospitals, or cuts. Leadership and engagement in the world, or weakness and sour isolation." But rhetoric will not change the real situation on the ground. It says it all - after three years of Labour government, Blair has to spell out how the government differs from the Conservatives!

"I am listening, I hear and I will act," states Blair. But who is he listening to? So far he has heeded the advice of big business.

Why, after three years, is the gulf between rich and poor even greater? Why,

three years later, are the poor worse off? The widening gap between rich and poor has been exacerbated under New Labour, with an additional half-million falling below the poverty line in their first two years. The Department of Social Security reported that 100,000 more children became poverty stricken in the first two years of this government. It is now 4.5 million - more than one in three.

Survey after survey, including those of the DSS reveal the extent of poverty - that there are, for example, more old people under this government than under the last two years of John Major!

The number of pensioners living in poverty has risen by almost 100,000 since Labour came to power.

This revelation comes as a London University report says that more than 26,000 elderly people die from cold in London each year - more than Finland, which is twice as cold.

This situation has resulted in mass disillusionment with the Blair government. It was these pressures that have been brought to bear at the trade union conferences, with demands to restore the link between pensions and earnings. After years of retreat, the trade union leaders were pushed to present a pensions composite to this year's conference. Despite all the arm-twisting, and the desire of most union leaders including Morris and Bickerstaffe to remit the motion, the pressures on them proved too great. Edmonds stuck his heels in, and the resolution put to the vote, which was won 60.21% to 39.79%. This defeat was a severe embarrassment to the Blairites.

Interestingly, the majority was achieved entirely with the union votes. 84.17% of the union vote supported the motion. In contrast, the Constituency delegates backed the leadership's plea to reject the motion by two to one. How things have changed! In the past, it would have been the other way around. This shows how out of touch the CLP delegates are. This also explains why, despite a few platform defeats, opposition to the leadership was rather muted.

This shows, as *Socialist Appeal* has explained many times, that the trade unions are *still* the decisive force in the Labour Party. Under pressure from below, they will



become the opposition to Blairism. Despite all the stage-managing, the pressures of the working class still break through.

With utter contempt for this democratic decision, Gordon Brown launched an attack on the unions stating: "I'm not going to give in to the proposal that came from the union leaders today...It is for the country to judge, it is not for a few composite resolutions to decide the policy of this government and this country." The GMB accused the Chancellor of intransigence, to the alleged annoyance of Blair.

This whole issue reflects a fault line running through the Labour movement - which could have major implications for the future.

Certainly Blair's grip on the party is not as solid as before the fuel crisis. Despite the attempt to summon the rank and file behind the leadership, there is trouble ahead. This was even recognised by the *Economist* which realised that: "Divisions lower down the Labour hierarchy may also emerge as the party's MPs begin to fear for their political future. If the latest polls are right, one in four Labour MPs can no longer be sure that they will survive the next election. On ICM's figures, for example, Labour could expect to win at most 310 seats, more than 100 fewer than in 1997. Labour MPs whose careers are in jeopardy may well be more inclined to rebel against the party leadership." (September 23, 2000)

The article concludes: "The trouble is that since he became leader Mr Blair has relied on his party's respect, rather than its love. If respect is eroded, he may find he has few bonds of loyalty to fall back on."

This Labour government will not be judged on the empty rhetoric or sugar-coated promises of slick ministers at Party Conference, but on the real situation affecting the lives of millions of workers.

Unless socialist policies are implemented, capitalism - even under a Labour government - will never be able to answer the problems of working people or fulfil their aspirations. ☆

PCS General secretary election

The PCS is facing an election for General Secretary. This should have been the perfect opportunity for Left Unity within PCS to take the fight to the members and show that there is a credible alternative to the right wing within the union, which has been led for so long by Barry Reamsbottom and the Moderates.

But by a narrow majority of 44 votes to 39 at a recent Left Unity conference the decision was made to give qualified support to Hugh Lanning the Membership First candidate and not stand ourselves. There are no real political differences between the Moderates and Membership First. They are both right wing groupings that have no wish to see National Pay Bargaining and both believe in the Partnership deals with Management and the Government that do little to protect members interests.

Left Unity have made their decision not to stand a candidate on the premise that any General Secretary is better than Barry Reamsbottom. The membership are being denied the right to vote for a Left Unity candidate because of the short sighted hatred some have from CPSA days of the Moderates and their persecution of left activists. If they truly believe that Hugh Lanning will be any different once elected then they are sadly deluding themselves.

Only a Left Unity general secretary could satisfy the aspirations of PSC membership on all issues. If Left Unity had decided to stand, it would give us the opportunity not only to offer a real alternative to the membership, but also allow us to build up the left in all areas. The building of a rank and file left organisation is indispensable for winning the union back for the membership. Events will expose the inadequacy of the so-called Moderate or Membership First leadership. Left Unity should not be held responsible for Lanning. Such an approach will only serve to confuse and disorientate our members. As events themselves shake the union from top to bottom, Left Unity has a responsibility to prepare the ground, on a principled basis, to challenge for the control of the union. The Left should not be side tracked into supporting right wing candidates. ☆

By **Rachel Heemsker**,
PCS Branch Secretary South Essex ES (personal capacity)

Warning from striking council workers

Unison strike leaders in Scotland warned that their actions in support of a 5% wage claim, involving 70,000 of public sector workers, were set to continue.

In a display of union militancy reminiscent of the 1979 winter of discontent, members of the largest union in Britain staged a series of one-day-strikes across Scotland. Dozens of schools were forced to close, refuse was left uncollected and libraries, swimming pools, leisure centres and public gardens were also hit by the strike. In the highlands council run ferries did not sail.

The union, having gained moral support from the TUC in Glasgow, now plans to step up its action by walking out for two and three days at a time.

The public sector workers are in dispute over a 2.5 per cent pay offer from the local government umbrella body the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Workers in England and Wales were offered 3 per cent for the same job.

Matt Smith, Scottish secretary of Unison called their pay offer an insult. "The effect of this one-day strike is a warning that our members are angry and frustrated. We will

continue to take more strike action if we have to.

We will also increase industrial action from one day to two or three days at a time."

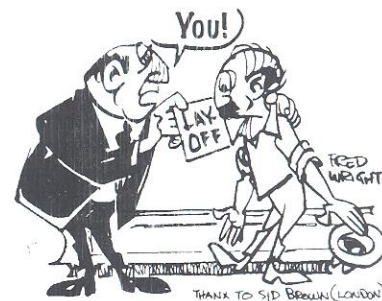
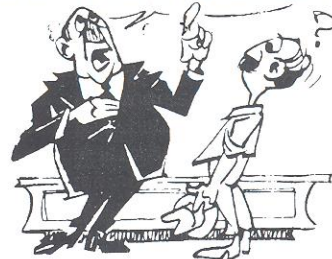
Many employees attached to other unions refused to cross picket lines.

They included 200 school bus drivers, members of T&GW, who were sent home. They will lose a day's pay.

This fight is over low pay. It is essential these workers win. ☆

by **Kenny Brown**, Glasgow

These days all of us are called upon to sacrifice... I have decided to sacrifice...



Ford: Preparing for action

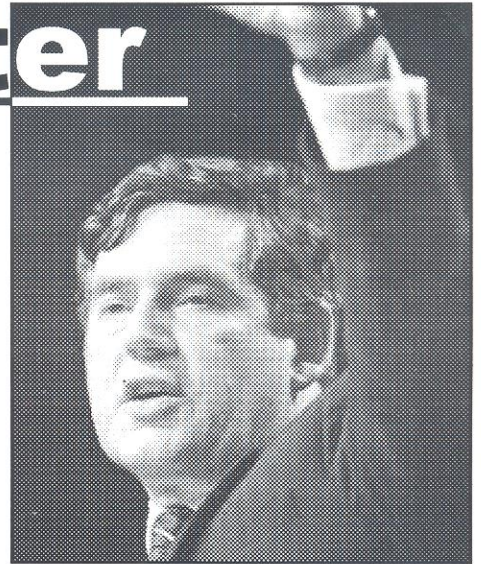
Amidst a deluge of rumours since the return from the summer shutdown, and following on from the 1500 voluntary redundancies and single shifting that has come in since our return, there has been a developing mood of anger in all the plants across the Dagenham estate. The rumours, which the Company deny, have centred around reports in the newspapers that the date for closure of the Paint Trim & Assembly Plant and Body Plant has been brought forward from April 2002 to next summer. Combined with uncertainty over the future of the Dagenham Engine Plant, with production of the Puma engine in Turkey, with the lower wages paid there an obvious threat to jobs and concerns over the future of the Dagenham truck fleet, there has been pressure brought to bear on the unions to launch a combined fightback. With shop steward elections having been held since the shutdown there have been some significant changes of opinion in the Shop Steward Committees, especially in the Engine Plant. On Monday 18th September a meeting of all the Shop Stewards from the Dagenham estate unanimously agreed to call a mass meeting of all Dagenham workers on the 23rd October to recommend a ballot for strike action to save the Plants. On the day of the meeting there was a two hour stoppage in support of the call for action in the Dagenham PTA. If this call for action is supported by the workforce a postal ballot will be called with strike action likely before the year end. Once the result of the ballot for strike action is known there must be a campaign launched at all the Plants from the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee to ballot for strike action in support of Dagenham. This way the whole of Ford's European operations would quickly be brought to a standstill, as they were in the two week strike of 1988, and the closure decision reversed. ☆

by a Ford Shop Steward

Echoes of Winter of Discontent deafen TUC

With trade union membership on the increase and the most successful militant action since the trade union-led strikes of the 1970s, it should have been a stirring week at the TUC. This should have been doubly the case with the TUC being held in Glasgow, where 80 years ago trade unions were forged on Red Clydeside.

by Rob Sewell in Glasgow



But as the fuel blockade threatened to bring the economy to a standstill, the TUC Congress was also to be in a state of total paralysis. Instead of putting themselves at the head of this movement, the trade union leaders recoiled against it. Completely sidelined by the events on the picket line, the union leaders simply lined up to condemn the actions of farmers, self-employed lorry drivers, taxi drivers and other sections involved in the blockade, who had simply followed the example of their counterparts in France.

Amid scenes reminiscent of the 'winter of discontent', Chancellor Brown addressed the assembled ranks of the TUC, as the venue was encircled by protesters, blowing their horns and creating the maximum noise - to the irritation and embarrassment of the TUC General Council.

Caught with their pants down, it was left to Bill Morris, head of the TGWU, to put the line. "This campaign has crossed the line from democracy to anarchy", he said. "If they are breaking the law, the protesters should be arrested."

After some delay, John Monks, the general secretary of the TUC, moved an emergency General Council statement in the same tone as any CBI chief, attacking the 'bully-boy' blockades. "What we have seen this week in this country has gone well beyond democratic protest. What we have seen is bullying, intimidation - holding the country to ransom."

Monks, in a truly grovelling fashion, continued: "The Prime Minister is absolutely right to stand firm against the blockades, and insist on the rule of law in the face of this intimidation."

Where were those who usually called for law and order? Where was the Conservative Party? Turning his back on all forms of civil disobedience that helped to build the trade union movement in the past, he warned: "You will not, and should not, shift this government - any government - with bully boy

blockades and civil disruption." And in the same breath slandered the protesters by referring to Chile in 1973, where "trucks and lorries were used by the self-employed and the far right to attack democracy."

He concluded by saying that "these blockades are not blockades on fuel. They are a blockade of our democratic system. Congress they must not succeed."

These words will come back to haunt the TUC. As *The Economist* noted: "The very sins, indeed, that the trade unions were guilty of in the 1978-79 'winter of discontent'. Monks' speech will be repeated with glee by every tin-pot employer threatened with strike action by its workforce. The bosses will gladly stand up to the 'disruption' of the trade unions in the name of 'law and order' and 'bully boy blockades', quoting John Monks word for word.

Monks was oblivious to the fact that 94% of the population supported the protests over fuel prices. The complete inaction of the TUC leadership over this issue had left a vacuum, which was filled by angry farmers, road haulage drivers, and others. Some of these elements have played a reactionary role in the past, particularly when solidarity was needed in industrial disputes. Now they are at the thin edge of the wedge - together with the bulk of low-paid workers, squeezed by sky-high fuel prices.

The trade union bureaucracy was eager to remain in the government's good books. While there was criticism of certain government policies, it was pretty muted. The TUC leaders also wanted to maintain their 'moderate' image. The TUC was thick with talk of 'new unionism' and 'partnership deals', accepting the bosses' arguments for increased competition, productivity and profits. It was a totally bankrupt approach.

While the protesters came from various backgrounds and formed a heterogeneous group, they had articulated the feelings of millions of workers who are being bled by rising petrol prices. Even unionised tanker driv-

ers, out of sympathy with the protest, refused to handle fuel. While the Blair government has increased petrol tax, falling heaviest on the poorest sections, it has cut the taxes on big business. It has shifted the burden of tax, as did the Tories, onto indirect taxes, that increasingly bear down on those least able to pay. Blair came out with a blistering attack on the protesters, claiming they were involved in widespread intimidation and violence. But as the police confirmed, this was untrue.

The trade union movement must come out unambiguously for a large cut in petrol tax. If the government complains of a shortfall in tax revenues then let it put up taxes on those most able to pay - the rich.

Those who raised an outcry over the effects of the blockade on the aged and sick simply wanted people to suffer in silence. "Of course the government should look with sympathy at sectors hit hardest", said Monks. But no amount of sympathy will solve the issue. Sympathy doesn't pay the bills. Of course, we are interested in the plight of the most vulnerable in society. Emergency supplies should have been organised to guarantee the needs of these sections. The trade union movement had the ability to do this, by putting itself at the head of this movement.

The oil companies have made a profits' bonanza. It is they that are holding the country to ransom. They should be nationalised under workers control and management, with compensation on the basis of proven need.

The TUC simply echoed the reactionary arguments of the Blair government, which has proved hopelessly out of touch with the real mood in the bulk of the population. It is about time the trade unions broke from class collaboration policies and gave a lead. The issue of fuel prices has not gone away. The bulk of the population, through numerous opinion polls, showed overwhelming support for the blockade. It is about time the TUC took heed. ☆

Textiles: Hanging by a Thread

In a further decimation of the British textile industry Coats Viyella, one of three major suppliers to Marks and Spencer announced that it is to axe 1,900 jobs and sell off its loss-making M&S clothing division.

by Miles Todd, Scunthorpe

Coats Viyella has always been regarded as one of the big players in textile manufacturing and said it was no longer profitable to trade with Marks and Spencer. Knitwear and lingerie factories will be closed in Scunthorpe, Shepshed in Leicestershire, and Ollerton and Worksop in Nottinghamshire. Another 5,600 jobs in the clothing division are at risk in the UK if no suitable buyer is found for the remaining businesses. Once again unions described the decision as another blow for the beleaguered UK textile sector and called on the Government to act.

The General Secretary of the GMB, John Edmonds, said: "What we are witnessing is nothing less than the annihilation of the UK textile industry. The Government must act to prevent textile manufacturing plunging from Saville Road to Skid Row." Another major supplier to M&S, SR Grant based in Barnsley, pulled the plug on its supplies last year with hundreds of redundancies as the troubled high street business ended its long-standing "buy British" policy and started to outsource from the Far East taking advantage of non-unionised and cheap labour.

Coat's business is reported to have made a loss of £8.5 million in the first half of the year, and it raises doubts as to whether other M&S suppliers can any longer make profit out of what was once seen as a prestigious contract with the high street giant. The Chief Executive of Coats Viyella, reflecting on the decline in the business, commented that it "requires levels of investment, which in the face of downward pressure on volumes and prices do not make financial sense." The Chairman of the group in a further cynical comment said: "We have determined to invest only in those businesses capable of delivering profitable growth and to sell or close the rest." This was on the day that Coats Viyella unveiled half-year profits of £35.6 million. (***) a few sentences before it says losses of £8.5m - I don't understand - Emil) It is yet another graphic illustration of the decline of British industry as profits are put before the working lives of ordinary men and women.

In Scunthorpe where 381 jobs are due to go, predominantly female, one machinist commented: "The writing has been on the wall for months and we all knew it was coming but it was a question of when? But to hear it on the radio first was adding insult to injury." The factory in Scunthorpe has traded for 46 years and local MP and Government Junior Minister Elliot Morley said he was "particularly bitter" that the latest closure was due to their major consumer Marks and Spencer buying from abroad: "I don't believe this will be in their long-term interests and the workforce deserved better."

Many of the employees are members of the Knitting, Footwear and Apparel Trade Union (KFAT), which has 22,000 members. General Secretary Paul Gates said: "We are all completely shocked. There can be little doubt that it was ultimately pressure from Marks and Spencer for a further price cut that pushed Coats Viyella into making this decision. Not content with telling suppliers they will be paid two percent less for autumn season orders, we've learned that M&S now want an even bigger mark-up. It's high time Marks and Spencer put their suppliers and customers before consultants and bankers."

Many workers would agree with these comments but if the haemorrhaging of jobs in the UK textile industry is to be reversed

then socialist policies are necessary. As ever, one manufacturing company's output is another company's input, and the relationship between Marks and Spencer and its suppliers is an illustration of how socialist planning could be effective if the retailers and manufacturers were in state hands. Once again the old adage applies, "you can't control what you don't own," and until big business is taken out of the hands of private ownership then British industry will continue to sack thousands of workers at the slightest profits waning.

Workers have looked for more from a Labour Government than just hand-wringing, especially as the avalanche of sackings continues in the manufacturing sector. Labour must break with big business and Tory policies and introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people!

No redundancies.

Nationalise the big retailers.

Nationalise the textile industry with compensation only on the basis of proven need.

Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives.

For a democratic socialist plan of production under worker's control and management. ☆

World Steel heading for bust

As we pointed out in the last issue of *Socialist Appeal*, the British steel industry is in crisis with exports falling and imports increasing. This is against a backdrop where world steel production during the first six months of 2000 escalated by 11%.

MEPS (Europe) Limited, the Sheffield-based company of independent steel industry analysts has forecast steel production this year is likely to be 830 million tonnes - up 47 million on last year and which would represent an increase of six percent on last year's figures. In particular there is strong demand in industrial and construction sectors throughout Western Europe which this country's steel makers are failing to take advantage of.

In the former USSR domestic demand has increased and double-digit percentage growth is anticipated and in other Eastern European nations improved home consumption and higher exports have provided opportunities for increased steel output. This boost in steel is being led by America which has actually increased capacity but it is here that recession will hit hardest. Despite increased demand in South East Asia and South America, with globalisation now a reality, the present boom can turn to bust very quickly and a new downturn would have disastrous effects on the already weakened British industry. Now more than ever socialist policies are needed internationally. ☆

'This Land is Our Land'

The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill will introduce a legal freedom to roam on open countryside in England and Wales. It will apply to mountain, moor, heath, down and common land with provisions to extend this to coastlines in the future. The bill also contains changes to the law which will help keep public footpaths free of obstruction, and will force local authorities to take action against landowners guilty of blocking paths on their land and require councils to come up with plans to improve rights of way networks. This bill, to which the Labour

Government is committed in its election manifesto and which has the support of over 80% of the public went through the House of Commons virtually unchallenged. It now however has been threatened by more than 300 potentially wrecking amendments from the House of Lords. This could mean that the bill is lost.

by Barbara Humphries

The House of Lords although reformed by the Labour Government still contains large numbers of hereditary peers who are landowners and claim to represent the "landed interest". Their mentality is summed up by Marian Shoard, author of two excellent books on the land question in Britain ('The right to roam', and 'This land is our land: the struggle for Britain's countryside'), She says "in Britain the vast majority of people have so little stake in the countryside that they are not even allowed to enter most of it. Instead an elect few control it utterly choosing for the most part to use their control to exclude their fellow citizens from entering their holdings even for so harmless a purpose as to wander about looking at the bluebells or listening to the skylarks. For many of these 'owners' of Britain this right of exclusion is not merely incidental but one of the principal attractions of land ownership itself."

Land laws in Britain date back to the Norman conquest. From that time the public have been excluded from the countryside not just for making a livelihood but for leisure purposes as well. The introduction of capitalist farming accentuated the process through the enclosure of common land. The situation we have today is that public access to land is only on designated public footpaths and rights of way. Anything else counts as trespass. 87% of land in the UK is privately owned. Privatisation of public bodies such as the Forestry Commission and the Water Board has made the situation worse. The Forestry Commission contains many private landowners on its board. In reality a handful of titled families own one third of the land in Britain. This means that the majority of the population is excluded from 77% of our land. 90% of woodland is out of bounds to the walker. Although the majority of the population live and work in

towns and cities, the countryside remains an important area for leisure and relaxation, with walking being the most popular leisure pastime.

Access to the countryside has been an issue for the labour movement from its early days. Members of the Independent Labour Party removed obstacles to public footpaths by landowners. The most spectacular challenge however came with the mass trespasses on moorland in the Peak District in the 1930s. The British Workers Sports Federation led by Benny Rothman organised a mass trespass on Kinder Scout, a moor in the Pennines, which is easily accessible to the populations of industrial towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Resisting the attacks by gamemen employed by the landowners six of the protesters faced arrest and six months imprisonment for "riotous assembly". Organisations such as the Ramblers' Association have conducted legal campaigns to keep footpaths open but we must be grateful to Benny Rothman and his colleagues because their militancy helped to protect and extend what access to the countryside we have. Their actions influenced the policies of the 1945 Labour Government which introduced legislation to set up national parks. These have helped to preserve areas of the countryside but they do not guarantee access to land. Even

though they are called 'national parks' they are not publicly owned and only cover 9% of land in the UK. The 1945 Labour government fell short of introducing right to roam legislation relying on voluntary agreements, which have not worked.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill then is seen as a piece of radical legislation, which has been Labour Party policy since 1994. The amount of land covered is modest, but it introduces an important principle. The opposition to this bill demonstrates the power and arrogance of the landed section of the ruling class in Britain and their determination to preserve their interests. A minority of landowners are frustrating the wishes of urban and rural populations alike. Their claims to speak for the "countryside" are false. Their lack of commitment to the interests of the rural population can be seen by the low wages paid to agricultural workers and the declining quality of life in rural Britain - few public transport services and shops, pubs and post offices which are under constant threat of closure.

This bill will also test the resolve of the Blair government. If the Bill falls through lack of time it will question the government's commitment, as other bills, not part of Labour's manifesto such as ending the right to trial by jury and dealing with football violence are pushed through, why can this bill not have priority?

It also shows the limited effect of the reform of the House of Lords which the government has carried out. The fact that the House of Lords is still in a position to wreck legislation shows that its powers have not been effectively curtailed by the government's reforms. If this modest piece of legislation is lost it will show how little the ruling class are prepared to give way to a democratically elected government and the labour movement must draw the political conclusions from this. ☆



"Unpopular Capitalism"

"Put simply, it's becoming fashionable to be anti-corporate."
(Business Week, September 11th, 2000)

Amid the protests taking place in Prague against the International Monetary Fund, pollsters everywhere are detecting a growing anti-corporate mood throughout the major capitalist countries. After years of privatisation, stock market euphoria and propaganda about the wonders of the capitalist market, the pendulum is certainly swinging in the opposite direction.

by Rob Sewell

Karl Marx once said that "social being determines social consciousness." As we predicted, years of downsizing and corporate domination are causing a reaction not only amongst the working class, but also in the middle class.

All too often the capitalist media and their shadows in the labour movement, attempt to paint a picture that everything is wonderful in the market economy. For the strategists of capital, the golden economy is piling up wealth and prosperity on an unimaginable scale. Everyone is a winner in this corporate world.

But the growing mood in society is a lot different. This is no more the case than in the citadel of world capitalism, the United States, where "market values" have penetrated deep into the national consciousness. Despite nine years of economic expansion in the US, there exists a profound disquiet at the domination of big business, and a growing backlash against the ever-powerful corporations that dominate everyday life. "Amid the good times, Americans feel uneasy", states *Business Week*. In fact, according to a poll carried out by the magazine, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed think that business has gained too much power over too many aspects of their lives.

The *Business Week* article continued: "The revved-up New Economy has also left many families feeling overworked and stressed out." One of the key elements in the recent strike at Verizon Communications, where the unions gained a victory, were complaints about stress and compulsory overtime. "At the same time," states the article, "many Americans feel they're not getting their fair share of the riches. The reason: average wages and benefits have outpaced inflation by only 7.6% since the last recession

ended in 1992, while productivity has jumped by 17.9%." (*Business Week*, September 11th, 2000).

The growing intensification of labour, which Marx described as relative surplus value, is having a colossal effect on the outlook of the working class, and also the middle class. The growing levels of stress in the workplace are a reflection of this process, whether it is in the New Economy or the Old Economy. But the squeeze certainly has its limits. Stephen Roach, the chief economist and guru of flexibility, realised this when he warned that this squeeze would prepare a workers' backlash at a certain stage. Part of this "backlash" is the growth of anti-corporate feeling.

This process has also taken place within Britain. The Labour landslide in 1997, which represented a political earthquake, was a total rejection of Toryism and all it stood for after 18 years in power. It also represented, in a way, a "backlash" against big business and capitalism generally.

In a recent article in the *Financial Times* entitled "Unpopular Capitalism", this reaction to big business is analysed from the point of view of the ruling class. The article sounds a note of warning to its readers. It states that

"the economic liberals' conviction that the companies serve the interests of society best by maximising profits does not convince the US public. So, too, with the UK. In a recent Mori poll for the *Financial Times*, only a quarter of those surveyed thought the profits of large companies a good thing. This compared to half in 1969." (*FT*, 11/9/2000).

Last year, when the *FT* first commented on these results, it was very concerned that under Tony Blair there had been no improvement in this outlook: "Worrying for both the business community and the politicians, the growing unpopularity of the profit motive also parallels the privatisation of state assets, begun by the Conservatives in the early 1980s but now accepted by all the main political parties." (*FT*, 22/2/99).

Since then, privatisation has become even more discredited in Britain. The train disaster at Ladbroke Grove saw support for the renationalisation of the railways in one poll climb to 75%. There is widespread opposition to the privatisation of London Underground and air traffic control. Similarly, there is a general perception that privatisation is blatant asset-stripping, at the expense of the services. It is a license to print money. No one believes a word the privatised utility bosses say anymore on safety or anything else. The overall view is they are fat cat executives, who are only concerned with maximising profits for their shareholders without regard to health or safety of the public.

According to the *Business Week* poll, 73% of Americans feel that top executives of US corporations are overpaid. In the same poll, two-thirds thought large profits were more important to big com-



panies than providing safe, reliable products.

"Crony capitalism is an understandable public concern," warns the *FT*. "The legal bankrolling of politicians by big business in the US, another Nader theme adopted by Mr Gore, is a strain on democracy. In murky Europe, big business in France was implicated in the Mitterrand government's illegal funding of Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union in Germany. The alleged vehicle for the transfer of funds in this intriguing case of cross-border cronyism was Elf Aquitaine, the French energy group.

"Still murkier relations between government and business in Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea have led to profound public disillusionment."

The *Financial Times* forgets to mention the sleaze in Britain under the Tories and the present links of business with the right wing tops of the Labour Party. The Bernie Ecclestone and Mandelson affairs are no one-off experiences. Peerages have been handed out to millionaire businessmen, while others, who have never been elected, have been brought into the government. These blatant manoeuvres, together with the pro-capitalist policies being pursued by Blair have led to widespread disillusionment, especially amongst Labour's core support.

No wonder there is growing panic amongst the serious strategists of capital at this mood of anti-capitalism. "Where will it all lead?" they ask themselves. According to *Business Week*, "For Corporate America, there is a danger in the new climate: In a word, renewed government regulation. For two decades, market deregulation has fostered competition and lowered many prices. *But the pendulum may have swung too far for many citizens, who now take the gains for granted and want to dampen the extremes that can come with unfettered capitalism.*" (Our emphasis).

Daniel Yankelovich, chairman of pollsters DYG Inc, also warns that: "There's an increased readiness to believe negative things about companies." And this is not only affecting the youth, although they are at the cutting edge of this anti-corporate revolt. "If today's anti-corporate backlash is more low-key than the counterculture of the 1960s, it may be even more dangerous for Corporate America," states *Business Week*. "Back then, anti-business attitudes were restricted mostly to youth and college students... Today, those Americans angry at corporations cut across generations, geography, and even income groups."

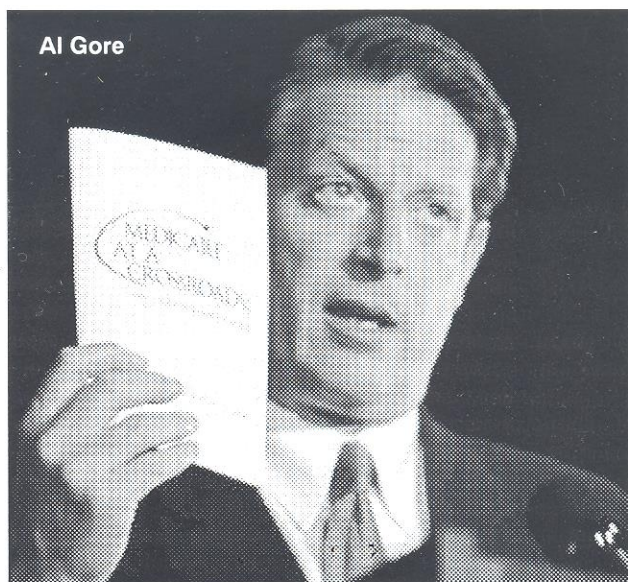
This is a truly remarkable picture ten

years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and all the capitalist euphoria that went with it. Wide sections of the American population - working class and middle class - are becoming anti-big business. It is the early reflections of a profound radicalisation that will sweep the United States in the years that lie ahead. It is this that terrifies the representatives of Capital. For his short-term opportunistic electoral interests, even Al Gore is adopting certain anti-corporate rhetoric! So desperate is he for votes, he has stated that Americans must "stand up and say no" to "Big Tobacco, Big Oil, the big polluters, the pharmaceutical companies, the HMOs." However, more interestingly, 74% of those polled by *Business Week* agreed with his remarks. The *BW* poll also revealed that 43% believe medical corporations (HMOs) serve their customers poorly. But Gore is playing with fire in stoking up anti-capitalist feelings, and in the future will get his fingers burnt. If elected in November, Gore will drop this radical language like a hot potato, but those who agreed with him will not be so forgetful.

Breaking point

Nevertheless, states the magazine, the greatest threat to the corporations comes from their own workers. "Assaults from citizens' groups are bad enough," says *BW*, "but for most executives, the most potentially hazardous attitudes lie with their own employees." According to the bourgeois economists, the best economy in 30 years has brought a bounty of jobs and exuberant consumer spending. The competitive wars against Europe and Japan of the 1980s and 1990s have been won. Why then this discontent on the shop floor? Why isn't everybody happy? "Many employees in Corporate America think they're being worked to the breaking point..." explains the magazine.

Last year, 43% of workers at big US corporations said they "find it very difficult to balance my work and personal responsibilities," up sharply from 36% in 1997. Again 44% said that they are "very much underpaid for the work I do," up from 38% two years earlier. At the same time there is growing resentment at soaring profit levels and stratospheric levels of boardroom pay.



Even more telling, *Business Week* explains that "such feelings reflect the stark discrepancy between the high productivity rate the US economy has achieved in recent years and the slower pace of wage gains. This is one reason *an astonishing 40 million employees say they would vote in a union today if given the chance, double the number of a decade ago*, according to pollsters Peter D. Hart Research Associates." (Our emphasis).

There is a sea change taking place in the mood of working people in the USA, with union organising drives on the increase in recent years. This is the other side of the American boom. Super profits and squeezing at the bottom has produced a backlash against big business and created more of a pro-union mood. This is also reflected in the high levels of public support for industrial disputes, which is in marked contrast to the 1980s under the Reagan Presidency.

This mood is also beginning to affect the workers in the New Economy, such as telecommunications. The recent union victory at Verizon Communications demonstrated that the idea that the Information Economy would be union-free was a fallacy. Without doubt, the American trade union movement scored a major victory at a company that epitomises the New Economy.

The inheritors of the old Bell system, including Bell Atlantic, AT&T, and SBC, assumed that when they merged with largely non-union cable and cell-phone companies, the non-union parts of the business would eventually supplant the unionised parts. There were certainly union fears about such a possibility, as this actually happened at AT&T, where members of the Communication Workers of America were reduced to 25% of the workforce when the company merged with other cable and wire-

less operations. In turn, this served to harden AT&T's anti-union stance.

However, recent events have stopped this trend in its tracks. At Verizon Communications, the American unions have succeeded in establishing a foothold in the virgin fields of broadband and wireless. At the centre of the dispute was the union's aim to organise the non-union workers in what used to be GTE and Vodafone. Other issues involved the company's ability to transfer work from union to non-union units, work-control and overtime. These were key grievances in an industry where workers are under pressure to service customers with only a two-second break between calls, and are forced to follow a rigid script.

The two unions involved in organising Verizon, the Communication Workers and the Electrical Workers, now represent 53% of the 250,000 workers employed in the company. At SBC, the union density is even higher.

The willingness of telecom unions to take action - not simply over wages and conditions, but over the future of hi-tech unionism - is opening a new chapter for American labour. It is a clear answer to those who wrote off the working class following the decline of heavy manufacturing industry.

In Britain, a similar process has begun to unfold, beginning with a number of strikes at call centres. Damned as the "sweat-shops of the 21st century", these workers have been subjected to Fordist production methods superimposed upon the emerging 24-hour service economy. They are at the sharp end of "time and motion" techniques pioneered by Frederick Taylor 100 years ago. Impossible targets, understaffing, continuous stress are all part of these modern white-collar factories.

As Sue Fernie, research fellow at the London School of Economics Centre for Economic Performance, put it: "The possibilities for monitoring behaviour and measuring output in call centres is amazing to behold - the tyranny of the assembly line is but a Sunday school picnic compared with the control that management can exercise in computer telephony."

The dispute at BT last year centred on the threat of disciplinary action if workers failed to complete every call within 285 seconds. No won-

der that in a number of cases the turnover of labour can be as high as 80%.

As in the USA, stress levels in Britain, also in a boom, have reached record heights. In a recent survey conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, analysing the effects on workers of the constant drive by companies to reduce costs and increase profits, job insecurity has reached its highest level since the second world war.

Lack of trust

Far from finding that job insecurity fell as unemployment fell, research showed that the workplace was permeated with a lack of trust, sense of a loss of control over the pace of work, general anxiety, and a sense that employees were being worked too hard. Despite the campaign by the TUC for 'partnership agreements', only 26% of workers said they believed workers and management were on the same side.

In the survey, more than 60% claimed that the pace of work had increased over the last five years, as downsizing had put pressure on the remaining workers to do more. Half said current staffing levels were inadequate or very inadequate. Again, two-thirds

of workers said they always or regularly worked longer than their basic hours; just over 30% of men said they were putting in more than 48 hours a week, and 39% said that the length of the working week had increased over the past five years against 15% reporting that it was now shorter. The European directive on working hours has not made a fundamental difference.

The report also showed a link between job security and health, with workers failing to adjust to the higher levels of stress. "On the contrary, physical and mental well-being continues to deteriorate the longer employees remain in a state of insecurity," states the report.

Last month 300 council workers in Plymouth took strike action over budget cuts, which resulted in an increased workload and stress. The Unison branch secretary Tony Staunton said staff cuts and heavy workloads were placing workers at "considerable risk" of stress and even mental breakdown. "We are pulling people out on strike to protect them from unreasonable work demands," he said.

Royal Mail management has been struggling to impose new 'flexible working' arrangements for years, pushing the workforce at every point. This has resulted in a spate of so-called "wildcat walkouts", usually localised, exploding suddenly and over very quickly. The Post Office accounts for nearly half of all recorded stoppages - 84 of the 195 logged by the Office for National Statistics last year.

But this is a gross underestimate. In the three months from April to June this year, 5,976 working days were lost in 74 disputes at Royal Mail - all except four of them were spontaneous or unofficial walkouts, staged without lawful ballots. In 1999-2000, the total number of strikes was greater than the 84 recorded officially; Royal Mail admitting to 210 stoppages (only 27 of them official). In 1998-99, there were 206 (70 official), and in 1997-98, around 337 (176 official).

Eight official one-day strikes in 1996-97, more than 100 unofficial stoppages and another 70-odd walkouts meant that the number of days lost topped the 80,000 mark. Now management are coming back for more! They want to discuss even greater flexible working to handle the increased volume of mail. "In the Post Office, there is hardly a day goes by without something going off," says Steve Jones, a CWU

Twiddle-dee-dee and Twiddle-dee-dum or the spider and the fly

"Partnership' has become the common currency of industrial relations and in general that is a very good thing. It is, after all, an enormously simple and compelling idea. Employers and employees (and their representatives in the TUC and CBI) achieve more when they work together in a climate of trust, seeking mutual advantage. Who could disagree? And indeed the CBI doesn't; it is enormously welcome that over recent years we have had the least adversarial industrial relations culture for a generation. Take one proxy of harmony in the workplace - the prevalence of strike action - and the figures speak for themselves. Last year just 242,000 days were lost due to stoppages; only slightly more than 1997 (at 235,000, the lowest on record).

... The TUC's New Unionism project has outlined a significant change of philosophy. It is a recognition that the old union role of bulwark against managerial innovation and initiative is dead. In companies that operate in global markets, looking to prevent moves to end restrictive practices, or cut excess overtime by shifting to annualised hours, are bound to be damaging to the long term interests of the business and its staff."

Digby Jones, Director General of the CBI (The House Magazine, 11/9/2000)

"There is a large degree of mutual interest. Employees want to work for successful organisations that can provide secure and fulfilling jobs. Employers will always do better with a loyal and committed workforce. This is the basis of the partnership bargain."

John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC, (The House Magazine, 11/9/2000)

official based at Mount Pleasant in London.

Despite the boom, the growing pressures in work have reached intolerable levels as employers put on the squeeze. The *Financial Times* once described this as a 'Joyless Boom'. Workers are being forced, with growing insecurity, to work harder and for longer. The British workers work longer hours, take few holidays and get less pay than their European counterparts. Now European bosses are attempting to reduce their workers' standards to British levels, all in the name of competition. It is part of a global squeeze to drain the last drop of surplus value from the labour of the working class. Under the banner of 'competition' and 'free trade', the capitalists are blackmailing workers to engage in a race to the bottom, where there is no finishing line.

It is these conditions, together with the growing reaction to the demands of the 'market economy' and the insatiable desire of the monopolies for greater power and wealth, that are primarily responsible for the changing mood in the USA, Britain, and elsewhere. All this in the longest boom since the second world war! Where is it all leading to?

Anti-market sentiment

The *Financial Times* recently posed the question bluntly. "But if the anti-market sentiment is so strong when economic growth is robust and globalisation remains far from complete," it asks, "what might happen in a downturn as globalisation grinds on and unemployment figures rise?" (11th September).

This sums up their dilemma. The pendulum has shifted far to the right over the past 20 years. It is set to swing sharply to the left over the coming decade. It is the very conditions of life that come into conflict with the aspirations of the mass of people. A new economic downturn, which is inevitable, will have devastating effects socially, politically and economically. We have already entered a new period of instability on a world scale, as is witnessed in the bombing of Yugoslavia. It is a period of sharp turns and sudden changes. This volatility marks not a rebirth of capitalism, but the opening of a period of revolutionary convulsions on a world scale. The anti-capitalist mood will give way to a pro-socialist outlook as events shake the consciousness of the masses.

This whole episode is a preparation for the entry once again of the working class onto the stage of history. As always they will tend to take the least line of resistance and move through their traditional organisations. These, in turn, will be transformed and retransformed. The Marxist tendency can, on the basis of these events, carve out a decisive position for itself. One victory for the working class in one country will transform the entire world situation. The socialist revolution will be on the order of the day. ☆

Russian workers on the march against Gazprom

On 4 September there was a march of the inhabitants of the workers' settlements that surround a gas processing plant, which passed through the Molodyozhny, SU-6 and SMP-255 settlements to Astrakhan. The march was caused by the ecological genocide which is being carried out by Gazprom against the workers. The demands of the workers were the completion by Gazprom of its obligation to rehouse the families living within an 8 km safety zone of the plant. More than 10,000 people live within, or close to, this zone.

Accidents regularly happen due to the poisoning of people by sulphur. There are signs in schools explaining "this is the assembly point when gas is dangerous."

In Astrakhan the municipal authority refused the picketing of the buildings of Astrakhan gazprom. There followed a 2km march from the railway station to the building of the regional administration and a meeting. The workers who were present were supported by the townspeople, who were members of the trade union *zaschita*, the union of the front of workers and the general council for the affairs of pensioners led by O Shein, deputy of the state duma.

The governor of Astrakhan A Guzhvin, who was in the building, refused to meet those gathered outside, which sharply increased the tension of the meeting. At first Communist street was closed, and then Lenin street also. A further picket was organised in the district where the new office of gazprom is being built. In a show of solidarity the municipal workers (some of whom were Yugoslavian) stopped work for a while. After the meeting about 80 people closed the Astrakhan-Aksaraisk road in which sulphur is transported to the gas processing plant. The picketers decided to blockade the road around the clock with the intention of standing there until the governor pressed Gazprom to agree to rehouse the families.

(The municipal workers, the North Caspian shipworkers' union and the Astrakhan bus and tram drivers union supported the blockade. Local police were sympathetic, reflecting the support of the people of Astrakhan for the workers' families near the plant. The governor was forced to negotiate with the workers. Along with a director from Gazprom he agreed to the construction of 300 homes (the number that had been demanded), on the condition that Gazprom could allocate them (to management).

A mass meeting was called which called for no compromises. (In new negotiations on Friday morning Gazprom capitulated.)

These are the terms of the agreement which were announced by O Shein and reported in *Rabochaya Demokratia*:

Today at 3pm an agreement was reached between the workers committees, the regional authority and the Krasnoyarsk authority, which was reinforced by the joint agreement of the governor A Guzhvin and a representative of the directors of Astrakhan Gazprom, V Shchugoreva.

In accordance with the agreement:

- In the course of the next 16 months 320 flats will be provided for the families of the workers settlement, of this figure 20 flats will be provided this year and the rest in 2001.
- The financing of the construction of the houses will be divided into 4 equal parts, so that by 1st April it will be clear if there is a breakdown in the plan.
- No criminal or administrative charges to be brought against the participants of the actions.
- For the inhabitants of the villages of Kuianly, Aisapai and Byzan-pristan, who joined in the actions, approximately 25-30 flats will also be allocated.
- In the event of the agreement breaking down, the people's committees reserve the right to resume the picket.
- Also, as was agreed earlier, communal tariffs were reduced by half and the pay for teachers living in settlement S-33 will be increased by 35%. At the end of September the members of the peoples' committees will gather in Moscow on the invitation of the Fund "Alternative", which is leading a seminar of workers' activists.

From the Russian Marxist paper *Rabochaya Demokratia*

Marx was right - It's official!

A decade ago in the heady days of 'capitalism's final triumph', when the New World Order was announced and the End of History proclaimed, the century old industry of writing learned tomes under which to bury the ideas of Marxism appeared to have become redundant.

by Phil Mitchinson

New volumes began to line the library shelves to explain that capitalism was the height of human social evolution. In passing one notes the low level of ambition of these people who believe that a system that leaves two thirds of the world's population in dire poverty, that keeps a billion people unemployed or underemployed, is the best that we can achieve.

Yet before one could finish reading a single volume of these confused scribblings, the New World Order choked beneath the ashes of war in the Balkans; the south east Asian economies collapsed; leaving the New Paradigm hanging by the single thread of the innovations associated with new technology.

More recently bourgeois writers have begun to question just how long the economy can continue to grow, and whether maybe their triumphalism has turned out to be somewhat premature. The writings of George Soros and Paul Krugman, analysed in these pages previously, fall into this category.

Today one finds new works particularly in

the field of economics not only questioning the new paradigm, they even question whether the system can continue at all. Still more astonishing is the number of articles, essays and books one now finds quoting, even praising, the ideas of Karl Marx.

These intellectual giants are astounded to discover that Marx accurately predicted the development of their beloved globalisation over 150 years ago.

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge of *The Economist*, for example, comment in their new book *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalisation*: "As a prophet of socialism Marx may be kaput; but as a prophet of the 'universal interdependence of nations' as he called globalisation, he can still seem startlingly relevant... his description of globalisation remains as sharp today as it was 150 years ago."

Indeed on reading the *Communist Manifesto* today one is amazed at how contemporary Marx's words appear. Not just the growth and interdependence of the world market is predicted here, "In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." But also the domination of that market by a handful of monopolies and the centralisation and concentration of capital that this represents: "It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands."

The reduction of the workforce to the role of slaves to the machine, "in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time, or by increased speed of machinery."

More importantly we find the reason for these developments, the contradiction between the expansion of the forces of production and the nar-

row limits imposed by the twin straitjackets of capitalism - the private ownership of the means of production and the borders of nation states, "The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them."

Running like a red thread through all this new found passing praise of Marx is the rider "of course socialism failed." However such an off the cuff, unsubstantiated assertion will not fool the new generation of workers and youth who are discovering the ideas of Marxism in their search for a solution and a future. Whilst it remains true, and a crime of truly historic proportions, that Stalinism dragged the names of Marx and Lenin through the mud, the accomplishments of capital to date in Russia and Eastern Europe are hardly inspirational. The attempt to restore the market has brought not prosperity but prostitution, profits for the few but misery for the many. This is not to defend or justify the crimes of Stalinism. On the contrary, the disaster in Russia today should clarify that it was not the absence of the market that was the problem but the lack of democracy. It was not the nationalised economy but the suffocating, dead weight of bureaucracy and corruption which strangled the Soviet Union. The one element of the October revolution remaining, albeit in a barely recognisable, perverted form, namely a state owned economy, enabled Russia to develop from a backward country to the second power on the planet. However the monstrous bureaucracy and its totalitarian dictatorship which leached off the life blood of the planned economy doomed it.

Without democracy, control over all aspects of society by the working class, socialism was never created in Russia. It speaks volumes that in addition to their many crimes the Soviet bureaucracy with the immense resources at their disposal came up with not one single original thought. Compare that to the accomplishments of poverty stricken Karl Marx.

The Soviet bureaucracy however were concerned only with their own survival and the survival of their privileges. They developed not one new idea, instead they attempt now to turn the clock back by restoring capitalism. What we saw in Russia was not socialism. Socialism could never be built within the confines of a single country, even one the size of Russia.

Today's new generation discovering Marxism will see this easily enough. Even now in their newfound appreciation of some

socialist
appeal

price: one pound

The Communist Manifesto

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

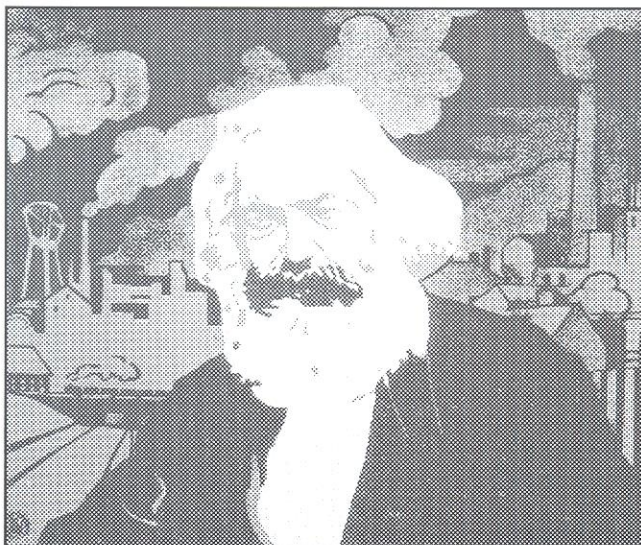
Inside:
Mention today, 1888 Lenin, Leon Trotsky on the Manifesto, Marx and the Labour Party

of Marx's conclusions these learned bourgeois academics are unable to take the next logical step and ask why Marx came to correct conclusions. This is not a question the bourgeois are keen to answer. If on not one, or two, but many occasions a method leads to correct conclusions it would seem reasonable to assume that the theory was correct. A 'lucky guess' is not likely to be repeated often. Yet the prediction of the development of the world market does not drive them to read more of Marx or to accept that not only his conclusions but also his method was and remains correct. Such keen insights were not simply a work of intuitive genius - though there is no doubt that Marx and Engels stood head and shoulders above our modern day intellectual giants. Marx's ideas represented everything that was best in the achievements of the bourgeoisie, bringing together the best of English political economy, French sociology and German philosophy. From this new height they were able to see far indeed.

Understanding the world

Their method was their great accomplishment. Using it we can understand the world around us today, expose the myths of the new paradigm and the new world order, and offer a way out of crisis ridden capitalism. That is why the dreaded question 'Why was Marx right?' is one the bourgeois refuse to address. Instead they attempt to find some less disturbing reason. Take Micklethwait and Wooldridge again. They praise Marx for recognising that "The more successful globalisation becomes the more it seems to whip up its own backlash." This is a common theme in these books, that the market itself is undermining capitalism. To use Marx's own words, "The development of modern industry, therefore cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable." Such conclusions are of deep concern to our authors. There is no mistaking their unwilling agreement, "There is also a suspicion that globalisation's psychic energy - the uncertainty that it creates which forces companies, governments and people to perform better - may have a natural stall point, a moment when people can take no more."

As absurd as the explanation seems there is more than a grain of truth in it. It is true that the crisis of the system, as it reaches its limits, causes the ruling class to split and divide over what to do next, unable to see a way out of the looming impasse. Yet the crisis is not caused by their confusion, but their confusion by the crisis. Capitalism



has very real limits caused by the expansion of the productive forces beyond the borders imposed both by nation states and private ownership. Ideas and philosophies are created and changed by events in the physical world not by "psychic energy." Why is this of any importance? Well, to blame outside forces is to say that in principle capitalism can work fine, but the people running it, their lack of confidence etc, are causing crises. This is one big confidence trick. What robs the bourgeoisie of their confidence is the very real crisis of their system and their lack of an answer. If our writers started from an analysis of the material world, and the impact that events in it have on all classes in society as Marx's method would demand, they too would be forced to conclude that the crisis of the system is very real and intractable. Capitalism increasingly reaches its "stall point" the very real limit it imposes on society, on our ability to create wealth, to harness and use the world's resources safely and efficiently. As Marx also repeatedly explained, however, the bourgeoisie will not accept this and retire gracefully. Fortunately Marx's ideas are not meant simply to convince the bourgeoisie to change their tune. That would be utopian. Marxism instead has the goal of arming the working class and the youth for the revolutionary struggle needed to change society.

Capitalism's genome

In the three volumes of *Capital*, which represent capitalism's genome, there is more than enough argument to convince a thinking bourgeois of the inability of the capitalist system to solve its inherent problems.

Yet today's thinking bourgeois are not studying how society or economy works. They are thinking about how to defend their system and their privileged position. Paul Krugman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology admits this in his book *The Return of Depression Economics*. Like other economists he wants to resurrect Keynesianism not to make our lives better

but simply because he thinks it is the best chance for the capitalists to save their system, "I don't like the idea that countries will need to interfere in markets - that they will have to limit the free market in order to save it."

They think not of how new technology can be used to shorten working hours to allow us time to participate in decision making and implementation. Instead they research how to use new technology to squeeze an ounce more out of our muscles and brains in the name of profit.

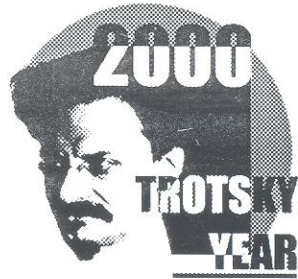
They don't investigate the worldwide eradication of disease through the knowledge contained in the Human Genome, they calculate how to patent chromosomes and medicines to profit from our ill health.

That a new generation of bourgeois thinkers are acknowledging some of Marx's ideas is interesting and itself reflects the desperate scramble for ideas engaging bourgeois academics - all their own having failed. However we have no illusions that the superiority of these ideas can win the allegiance of more than one or two individuals from this class of ladies and gentlemen. Marxism came into being as an attempt to place socialism on a scientific footing, to rescue it from the genius but idealistic utopians of earlier generations who believed that socialism could be achieved by demonstrating this superiority.

More importantly a new generation of workers and youth around the world are discovering Marxism.

In his recent essay Peter Hudis writing for *Britannia.com* quotes Marx, "We are firmly convinced that the real danger lies not in practical attempts but in the theoretical elaboration of communist ideas, for practical attempts, even mass attempts, can be answered by cannon as soon as they become dangerous whereas ideas which have conquered our intellect and taken possession of our minds... are demons which human beings can only vanquish only by submitting to them."

Whilst those who have written to bury Marxist over the last 150 years have vanished into obscurity the ideas of Marxism not only retain their relevance but are now gaining a new audience. Only the very best of the intellectuals may be won over not only in theory but to the side of the revolutionary working class. In general in the hands of bourgeois academics the ideas of Marxism will be transformed and vulgarised into dead dogma. In the hands of the workers movement, inscribed on the banner of the youth, they will serve their true purpose. As Marx himself explained they are meant not only to understand the world but to change it. ☆



The Russian O

Ten days that

Introduction

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 was the greatest event in human history. For the first time, the rule of the capitalists and landlords was overthrown, and in its place was constructed a workers' democracy. State power rested upon the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants, the most democratic organs of rule ever created. At the head of the victorious working class was the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky. For them, the October Revolution in Russia was the first break in the chain of world capitalism, and was the opening shot in the world socialist revolution.

"Who would believe," wrote one of the Russian generals, Zalessky, expressing his class indignation at the Revolution, "that the janitor or watchman of the court building would suddenly become Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals? Or the hospital orderly manager of the hospital; the barber a big functionary; yesterday's ensign the commander-in-chief; yesterday's lackey or common labourer burgomaster; yesterday's train oiler chief of division or station superintendent; yesterday's locksmith head of the factory?"

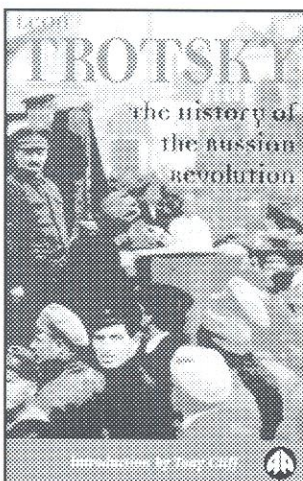
And yet, through gritted teeth, the bourgeoisie had to believe it. It was a social revolution, which struck terror in their hearts. As an inspiration to the working masses worldwide, sickened by the suffering and blood-letting of the first world war, the Russian Revolution posed a mortal danger to the capitalist system. That is the reason why between 1918 and 1920, the old ruling classes of the West aided the counter-revolutionary Whites and sent 21 imperialist armies to Russia to crush the young workers' state. It was the revolutionary struggle waged by the heroic Red Army under Leon Trotsky, together with the colossal support of the working class internationally, which enabled the Soviet regime to survive. "Show me another man who could organise almost a model army in

a single year", stated Lenin in a conversation with Maxim Gorky.

"Lenin is perfectly fitted for sitting in the president's chair of the Soviet of People's Commissars," states A.V. Lunacharsky, the Soviet Commissar of Education, "and guiding with genius the world revolution, but obviously he could not handle the titanic task which Trotsky took upon his shoulders, those lightning trips from place to place, those magnificent speeches, fanfares of instantaneous commands, that role of continual electrifier now at one point and now another of the weakening army. There is not a man on earth who could replace Trotsky there." (*Revolutionary Silhouettes*, Moscow 1923).

In October 1917, as head of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky took charge of the conquest of power. Although a well-known fact, for decades Trotsky's role was vehemently denied by the Stalinists in an attempted to re-write the history of the Revolution. However, before this systematic denigration and falsification of Trotsky, Stalin wrote an article in *Pravda* on the first anniversary of the Revolution, entitled 'The Role of the Most Eminent Party Leaders'. In this article he wrote the following: "All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the President of the Petrograd Soviet, Comrade Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet, and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the party owes principally and first of all to Comrade Trotsky."

As a further contribution to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the assassination of Trotsky, we are republishing the Preface of his monumental work *The History of the Russian Revolution*, which concisely shows the Marxist method. The book itself is available from Wellred Books.



The history of the Russian revolution
by Leon Trotsky

ISBN 0 904383 41 5
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October Revolution: Events that shook the world

During the first two months of 1917 Russia was still a Romanov monarchy. Eight months later the Bolsheviks stood at the helm. They were little known to anybody when the year began, and their leaders were still under indictment for state treason when they came to power. You will not find another such sharp turn in history - especially if you remember that it involves a nation of 150 million people. It is clear that the events of 1917, whatever you think of them, deserve study.

The history of a revolution, like every other history, ought first of all to tell what happened and how. That, however, is little enough. From the very telling it ought to become clear why it happened thus and not otherwise. Events can neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of a preconceived moral. They must obey their own laws. The discovery of these laws is the author's task.

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historical events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business - kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new régime. Whether this is good or bad we leave to the judgement of moralists. We ourselves will take the facts as they are given by the objective course of development. The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.

In a society that is seized by revolution classes are in conflict. It is perfectly clear, however, that the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of the society and its social substratum of classes, are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself, which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them. The dynamic of revolutionary events is directly determined by swift, intense and passionate changes in the psychology of classes which have already formed themselves before the revolution.

The point is that society does not change its institutions as need arises, the way a mechanic changes his instruments. On the contrary, society actually takes the institutions which hang upon it as given once for all. For decades the oppositional criticism is nothing more than a safety valve for mass dissatisfaction, a condition of the stability of the social structure. Such in principle, for example, was the significance acquired by the social-democratic criticism. Entirely exceptional conditions, independent of the will of persons and parties, are necessary in order to tear off from discontent the fetters of conservatism, and bring the masses to insurrection.

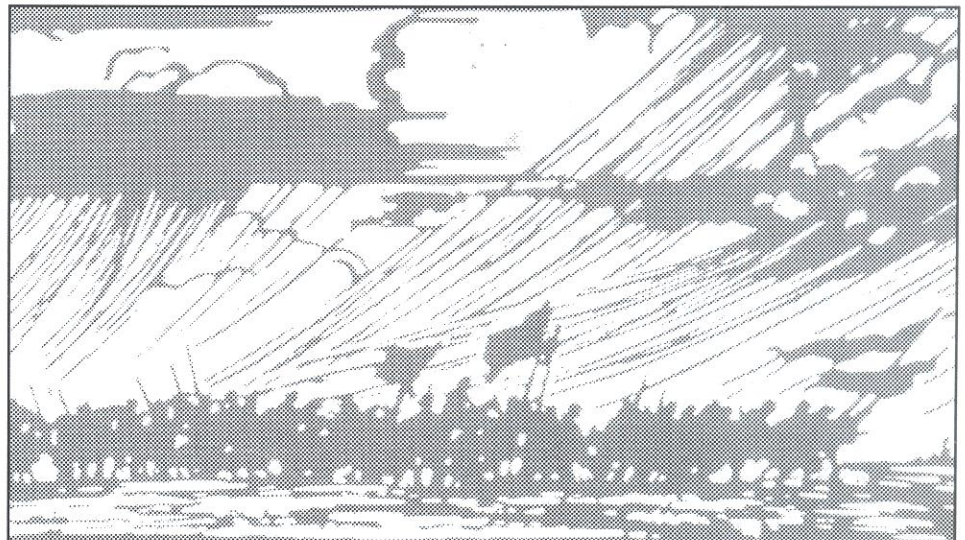
The swift changes of mass views and moods in an epoch of revolution thus derive, not from the flexibility and mobility of man's mind, but just the opposite, from its deep conservatism. The chronic lag of ideas and relations behind new objective conditions, right up to the moment when the latter crash over people in the form of a catastrophe, is what creates in a period of revolution that leaping movement of ideas and passions which seems to the police mind a mere result of the activities of "demagogues."

The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old régime. Only the guiding layers of a class have a political program, and even this still requires the test of events, and the approval of the masses. The fundamental political process of the revolution thus consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis - the active orientation of the masses

by a method of successive approximations. The different stages of a revolutionary process, certified by a change of parties in which the more extreme always supersedes the less, express the growing pressure to the left of the masses - so long as the swing of the movement does not run into objective obstacles. When it does, there begins a reaction: disappointments of the different layers of the revolutionary class, growth of indifference, and therewith a strengthening of the position of the counter-revolutionary forces. Such, at least, is the general outline of the old revolutions.

Only on the basis of a study of political processes in the masses themselves, can we understand the rôle of parties and leaders, whom we least of all are inclined to ignore. They constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important, element in the process. Without a guiding organisation, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.

The difficulties which stand in the way of studying the changes of mass consciousness in a revolutionary epoch are quite obvious. The oppressed classes make history in the factories, in the barracks, in the villages, on the streets of the cities. Moreover, they are least of all accustomed to write things down. Periods of high tension in social passions leave little room for contemplation and reflection. All the muses - even the plebeian muse of journalism, in spite of her sturdy hips - have hard sledding in times of revolution. Still the historian's situation is by no means hopeless. The records are incom-



plete, scattered, accidental. But in the light of the events themselves these fragments often permit a guess as to the direction and rhythm of the hidden process. For better or worse, a revolutionary party bases its tactics upon a calculation of the changes of mass consciousness. The historic course of Bolshevism demonstrates that such a calculation, at least in its rough features, can be made. If it can be made by a revolutionary leader in the whirlpool of the struggle, why not by the historian afterwards?

However, the processes taking place in the consciousness of the masses are not unrelated and independent. No matter how the idealists and the eclectics rage, consciousness is nevertheless determined by conditions. In the historic conditions which formed Russia, her economy, her classes, her State, in the action upon her of other states, we ought to be able to find the premises both of the February revolution and of the October revolution which replaced it. Since the greatest enigma is the fact that a backward country was the first to place the proletariat in power, it behoves us to seek the solution of that enigma in the peculiarities of that backward country - that is, in its differences from other countries.

The historic peculiarities of Russia and their relative weight will be characterised by us in the early chapters of this book which give a short outline of the development of Russian society and its inner forces. We venture to hope that the inevitable schematism of these chapters will not repel the reader. In the further development of the book he will meet these same forces in living action.

This work will not rely in any degree upon personal recollections. The circumstance that the author was a participant in the events does not free him from the obligation to base his exposition upon historically verified documents. The author speaks of himself, in so far as that is demanded by the course of events, in the third person. And that is not a mere literary form: the subjective tone, inevitable in autobiographies or memoirs, is not permissible in a work of history.

However, the fact that the author did participate in the struggle naturally makes easier his understanding, not only of the psychology of the forces in action, both individual and collective, but also of the inner connection of events. This advantage will give positive results only if one condition is observed: that he does not rely upon the testimony of his own memory either in trivial details or in important matters, either in questions of fact or questions of motive and mood. The author believes that in so far as in him lies he has fulfilled this condition.

There remains the question of the politi-



cal position of the author, who stands as a historian upon the same viewpoint upon which he stood as a participant in the events. The reader, of course, is not obliged to share the political views of the author, which the latter on his side has no reason to conceal. But the reader does have the right to demand that a historical work should not be the defence of a political position, but an internally well-founded portrayal of the actual process of the revolution. A historical work only then completely fulfils the mission when events unfold upon its pages in their full natural necessity.

For this, is it necessary to have the so-called historian's "impartiality"? Nobody has yet clearly explained what this impartiality consists of. The often quoted words of Clemenceau that it is necessary to take a revolution "en bloc," as a whole - are at the best a clever evasion. How can you take as a whole a thing whose essence consists in a split? Clemenceau's aphorism was dictated partly by shame for his too resolute ancestors, partly by embarrassment before their shades.

One of the reactionary and therefore fashionable historians in contemporary France, L. Madelin, slandering in his drawing-room fashion the great revolution - that is, the birth of his own nation - asserts that "the historian ought to stand upon the wall of a threatened city, and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged": only in this way, it seems, can he achieve a "conciliatory justice." However, the words of Madelin himself testify that if he climbs out on the wall dividing the two camps, it is only in the character of a reconnoiterer for the reaction. It is well that he is concerned only with war camps of the past: in a time of revolution standing on the wall involves great danger. Moreover, in times of alarm the priests of "conciliatory justice" are usually found sitting on the inside of four walls waiting to see which side will win.

The serious and critical reader will not want a treacherous impartiality, which offers him a cup of conciliation with a well-settled poison of reactionary hate at the bottom, but

a scientific conscientiousness, which for its sympathies and antipathies - open and undisguised - seeks support in an honest study of the facts, a determination of their real connections, an exposure of the causal laws of their movement. That is the only possible historic objectivism, and moreover it is amply sufficient, for it is verified and attested not by the good intentions of the historian, for which only he himself can vouch, but the natural laws revealed by him of the historic process itself.

The sources of this book are innumerable periodical publications, newspapers and journals, memoirs, reports, and other material, partly in manuscript, but the greater part published by the Institute of the History of the Revolution in M^osc^ow and Leningrad. We have considered it superfluous to make reference in the text to particular publications, since that would only bother the reader. Among the books which have the character of collective historical works we have particularly used the two-volume *Essays on the History of the October Revolution* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1927). Written by different authors, the various parts of this book are unequal in value, but they contain at any rate abundant factual material.

The dates in our book are everywhere indicated according to the old style - that is, they are 13 days behind the international and the present Soviet calendar. The author felt obliged to use the calendar which was in use at the time of the revolution. It would have been no labour of course to translate the dates into the new style. But this operation in removing one difficulty would have created others more essential. The overthrow of the monarchy has gone into history as the February revolution; according to the Western calendar, however, it occurred in March. The armed demonstration against the imperialist policy of the Provisional Government has gone into history under the name of the "April Days," whereas according to the Western calendar it happened in May. Not to mention other intervening events and dates, we remark only that the October revolution happened according to European reckoning in November. The calendar itself, we see, is tinted by the events, and the historian cannot handle revolutionary chronology by mere arithmetic. The reader will be kind enough to remember that before overthrowing the Byzantine calendar, the revolution had to overthrow the institutions that clung to it.

L. TROTSKY

Prinkipo

November 14, 1930.



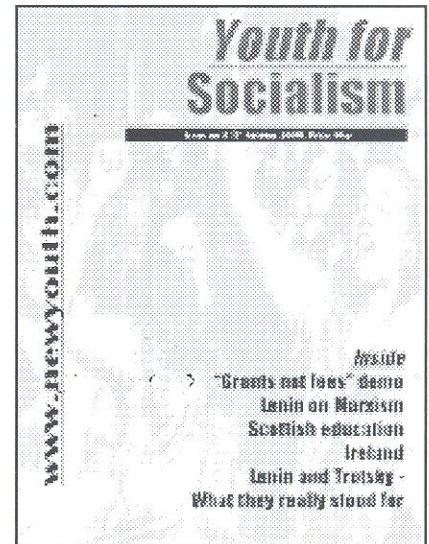
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ism and Marxism... Don't hesitate in contact us, we have produced lots of material to help you accomplish this. And don't forget that you have a very important appointment on the 4th and 5th November at the YFIS national week-end school, where we will discuss the ideas of Marxism in greater depth. The understanding of these ideas and the education of ourselves will enable us to organise our forces and play a decisive role in the coming struggles. We are committed to fighting to improve the conditions of the working class and to end up with the nightmare of capitalism with the introduction of Socialism on a world scale.

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Toiling in the land of 'opportunity'

The "Sunshine State" of California is a wonderful place to live in. Yessir! - a man just can't fail to be happy in this wonderful capitalist paradise, especially if he happens to be a farmer, a landowner, a grower. With profits at a record high - California's annual crop sales are now reaching 26 billion dollars - things have never been better. And being a benevolent breed, these good men have not hesitated to let others share in this unbridled prosperity; they have welcomed into their midst the contratistas.

by Harry Whittacker

Contratistas? The contratistas are the farm labour contractors. They are the ubiquitous parasites, the blood-sucking human leeches who extort profit from the workers in so many fields of capitalist exploitation - they are the middlemen.

There are 700,000 farmworkers chasing 400,000 jobs in California, so opportunities abound for their exploitation, and the contratistas have no scruples when it comes to taking advantage of these desperately poor Mexican field workers, half of whom are illegal immigrants and therefore extremely vulnerable to abuse. Sadly, most of the contratistas are themselves Mexicans, cheating and stealing from their own without remorse. But this is no great surprise: as the California Industrial Commission said of another ethnic group, "If you want to squeeze Italians, hire Italians. They know how to do it."

Between 1942 and 1964 the U.S. government imported between four and five million farm labourers, mostly Mexican, deporting them again at the end of each season.

These "deporters" were poorly paid, but at least the growers did provide basic housing and food. Until 1971 there were more jobs than workers and the United Farm Workers, headed by Cesar Chavez, succeeded in improving worker's conditions and increasing their wages by 156%. The wages attracted more and more illegal immigrants, and the federal government failed to stop the influx. The U.F.W. believes this is because the agricultural lobby did not want it stopped. "The first priority of agricultural business has been to encourage a labour surplus," claimed Cesar Chavez. The union's membership has shrunk from 80,000 at its peak in the early seventies, to 26,000.

The contratista emerged about fifteen years ago when farmers, annoyed by government inspectors trying to enforce health

regulations, demolished their dormitories and stopped employing workers directly. They turned instead to the farm labour contractors to supply the labour and take on the responsibility for attending to government regulations regarding health, minimum legal wage, insurance, etc. It was easy for the contratista to establish himself. He was usually an ex-farmworker, usually a foreman. He paid 10,000 dollars, answered a few simple questions, and he was granted a licence. That licence became a licence to cheat, rob, swindle and degraude. He exploited it to the full. There are 1,200 such contratistas operating in the state of California.

"Green card"

A farm labourer will make his way into California, often with a crudely forged "green card" or faked identity documents. He will perhaps find himself in a town such as Parlier in California's Central Valley. There are dozens of such "towns" in California, where they are known as colonias. In reality they are only large labour camps with a few shops and some gas stations. Parlier, with it's winter population of 2,000 swelling to 10,000 in the high season, has an average annual unemployment rate of 31%. It is a typical colonia.

So here he is, this desperately poor individual, walking the streets. He has no job, no transportation, and no place to stay. But the contratista will provide. He will provide everything: he will give you a job, he will find you a place to stay, he will arrange transport to your place of work; he will even provide everything from tools to toilets, food and drinking water for the worker who toils on the land. He will even take care of all the tax and insurance affairs of his hiring.

Sounds wonderful. So has this Mexican farmworker got it made? Has he finally

found his Utopia in this land of opportunity where so many are beguiled by the great American dream?

Not quite. To start with, the chances are the contratista will probably pay less than the legal minimum wage, which is a paltry \$5.75 per hour. And he will overcharge the worker for all the food he eats and the water he drinks as he sweats and slaves beneath the burning Californian sun. If the worker objects to any of this he will of course be fired. There are plenty others waiting to take his place.

So much for the job, what about transport?

To get the labourers to the fields the contractor will do one of two things: he will come to an arrangement with a raitero - "one who rides" - or he will act as the raitero himself. The worker is compelled to use any pay for this arranged form of transport if he wants to keep his job, despite the fact that it is a violation of Californian labour law to make paying for transportation a condition of employment. "The contratista doubles as a raitero and charges workers for the ride to the fields. He gets 25 workers paying \$5 a day each way. He's not paying taxes. "That's not bad," says Tanis Ybarra, national vice president of the farm workers union. Raitero vans are easy to spot because the windows are blacked out and the wheels are squat from the load of passengers packed like sardines inside. Last year a van carrying farmworkers smashed into a rig on a quiet country road. Twelve farmworkers were killed.

Now what about somewhere to stay? In Parlier the contratista will take the worker to a local slumlord where he will be obliged to share a two-bedroom house with twenty four other workers. The worker will be ripped off and the contratista will get his commission.

In Mecca, another colonia three hundred miles south of Parlier, Roberto Estello

was forced to pay five dollars a night to sleep in an overcrowded trailer with thirteen other men. The contratista owned the trailer, so if Roberto didn't use it he would lose his job. When all the available accommodation is filled to capacity workers sleep in carparks and bathe in ditches in the nearby fields.

Farming is a dangerous business. In American industry as a whole the annual fatality rate is two deaths per 100,000. In agriculture the rate is twenty two deaths per 100,000. These are the figures for 1998.

In August 1997 Olea Lazaro, hired by West Valley Farm Labour Service, was hit on the left knee by a trailer while picking grapes. Despite his injury the contratista tried to persuade him to carry on working but Olea was unable to do so. Then the contratista, who was known to Olea as Jesse Velasquez, gave him an insurance number and told him to make his way to the hospital in Visalia. When he got to the hospital he discovered that the number for the insurance was wrong. He returned to Velasquez who then gave him another number. That too turned out to be wrong. A doctor from the hospital phoned West Valley Labour Service who denied that Olea had ever worked for them. There is no longer any listing for West Valley Farm Labour Service or Jesse Velasquez in Ramona, where they were originally based. According to the health professionals who deal with farmworkers, disappearing middlemen are a fact of agricultural life; they change their names and come and go like the wind.

There are some decent and compassionate Americans who are trying to help restore dignity and justice to these disgracefully exploited farmworkers, but theirs is an uphill struggle. Gloria Romero, whose bill making farmers responsible for the employees hired by their labour contractors has passed through two committees, is determined to keep reintroducing it till it becomes law. The agricultural organizations are equally determined that it will never become law.

This is America, the land of freedom and opportunity, where the "haves" are free to exploit the "haves nots", where the exploited have the opportunity to take or leave it, knowing that if they leave it some other poor sucker will step into their place -not into their boots or shoes, for they probably don't have any.

During the bloody American Civil War many good and courageous Americans gave their lives to rid their great continent of slavery. But slavery still exists in many pernicious forms. Perhaps some day the descendants of those brave men will see the truth and fight once more to change the capitalist system which is so extreme in their country that man's inhumanity to man has become almost a way of life. ☆

Time Bomb under Peace Negotiations

Since its birth in 1948, Israel could only maintain itself politically, economically, and militarily, by courtesy of a never-ending flow of military and economic aid from the US.

However, the presence of US imperialism in this highly strategic region, concentrated on Israel, has been seen not to be realistic and even counterproductive. Indeed, the alliance with Israel has affected American relations with the Arabic world plus several other countries of the so-called Third World. In the 1980s, following the agreements at Camp David, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty and Israel retreated from the Sinai Desert. This was sealed by massive American aid to Egypt. After a short-lived boycott, Egypt was readmitted to the Arab League in 1990 mainly because they could not exist without their natural leader. Ever since, no less than 92 percent of American military aid has gone to just these two countries: Israel and Egypt. On top of this Israel receives each year \$1 billion in economic aid from the US, supplemented by other financial favours. For Egypt the respective figure is \$775 million.

Therefore the peace of Camp David was heavily subsidised. But in the meantime the core problem, namely the Palestinian question, did not take a single step towards a solution.

Israel has withdrawn from southern Lebanon and prepared to start negotiations about the West Bank and maybe the Golan Heights. The main reason behind this is the military deadlock and the continual toll in human lives, caused by the occupation. Public opinion in Israel is turning against this. Hostility against the occupation in the Arab world is also taking a huge economic toll with Israel could not being able to create a regional market for its industry and agriculture.

This economic stagnation has increased social tensions. In 1999, economic growth decreased to 1.5 percent, and unemployment increased to 10 percent, in a situation where Israel for decades knew nothing but almost full employment. Today 1.3 million of the 6 million Israelis live below the poverty line. Still, the fate of the Palestinians in the occupied zones and under the so-called Palestinian Authority is far worse. In 1998 a massive student protest broke out against the rise in tuition fees at the universities. In April 1999 this was followed by a series of strikes in the public sector. To avoid a social explosion, sub-

stantial economic growth is needed.

This "giant of the Middle East" has 65 million inhabitants, 10 times as many as Israel. After South Africa it is the second largest industrial nation in the African continent. Nevertheless, Egypt barely attains a GDP of \$600 per inhabitant. The official unemployment rate is 20 percent. In the long term, the American capital injection has proved a total failure. Egypt complains about European import restrictions, but it would not survive trade liberalisation because of the low quality of its products.

For the past few years, opposition has mounted in the US against the exorbitant amounts of money that flow to Israel and Egypt. While the cash flows could not diminish the social contradictions in both countries, and in some respects have even exacerbated these tensions, a new agreement on the West Bank and the Golan Heights will make the US aid to Egypt even more irrational. The other Arab countries are also supposed to do the same as Egypt: namely to keep the peace with Israel. Meanwhile Egypt has become addicted to these capital injections. With the prospect of the dollar influx drying up, it is seeking a new potential moneylender in Gaddafi's Libya.

No foreign creditor is capable of averting the social explosion in Egypt. There is no room in the capitalist world economy for this country with its limited natural resources and its population pressure. The irrevocable crisis in Egypt ticks on like a time bomb undermining every possible accord about Jerusalem and the West Bank. On the other hand, age-old and culturally highly developed Egypt, with its key position in Africa and the Middle East, has a relatively strong working class and a rich tradition of struggle. The country was, under Nasser, the focus of a radical pan-Arab nationalism. At the same time it learned the limits of such a strategy, while the anti-imperialist responses continue undiminished until today. In the meantime the "fundamentalist alternative" in Iran has passed its zenith and is coming increasingly under pressure from the developing revolution in that country.

Therefore Egypt is predestined to play a leading role in the social revolution of the Middle East and Africa.

Erik De Bruyn,
editorial board Belgian
Marxist paper *Vonk*

Talking peace, preparing for war

"When the peacemakers aim their guns, of course they shoot to pacify, and sometimes they pacify two birds in one shot."

(Mario Benedetti, Ode to pacification)

Over the last few months we have witnessed the pompous presentation of the so-called "Plan Colombia". This plan sponsored by the government of the United States and supported by the governments of other countries (including the Spanish government) has been presented as an effort to eradicate the drug trade in this Latin American country and move forward to peace in the region. In reality it is an imperialist plan disguised as an anti-drug plan, which aims to strengthen the capitalist grip on the region.

The first aim of the plan is to encircle economically and politically the Colombian guerrilla groups (in particular the FARC, the strongest among the Latin American guerrilla armies), to weaken them, and to defeat them militarily. Or, as is most probable, to reach an agreement where the guerrillas disarm, which in practice will mean their surrender.

To achieve this American imperialism has decided to intensify its military support to the Colombian army, while at the same time it is trying to involve the neighbouring countries in its military strategy (military bases in Peru and Ecuador have already been used for this purpose; the United States has been given the use of the Manta military base in Ecuador for a period of 10 years). US\$ 1.3 billion have been invested by the United States in the Colombia Plan. 70% (US\$ 900 million) has been earmarked for military training and the delivery of weapons to the Colombian army. According to the Plan, military "advisers" and "instructors" (with a total limit of 500) will also be sent from the United States. This number can be modified says the document if there is "proof of an aggression", opening the door to a direct military intervention at any moment from the United States.

Apart from the military offensive, the Plan is set to ruin economically the areas under the control of the guerrillas by fumigating them with a fungus (called *Fusarium Oxysporum*)

which according to different experts and ecological groups will devastate the local ecosystem. The effects on human beings are still unknown.

According to the official version, the aim is to destroy the coca and poppy plantations and to stop the supply of cocaine and heroin to the United States. What they are hiding is that those drugs were introduced by the US ruling class themselves into the working class neighbourhoods of the US in the sixties to prevent the struggle of the youth. They also hide the fact that drug addiction among young Americans has been stimulated by the desperate working and living conditions there.

They are also silent about the fact that the major plantations of coca leaves and poppies in Colombia are the property of those same landlords who finance and lead the different paramilitary groups who are fighting the guerrillas. Some of them have not hesitated to come out publicly in support of the Plan Colombia. Another aspect which is hidden in the shadows is that the drug trade generates enormous profits for Latin America, the US capitalists, the Colombian military, the fascist paramilitaries and of course the CIA. Let us not forget that two years ago US Congressmen denounced the "Agency" for promoting the drug trade in the US as a means of financing the "Contras" in Nicaragua.

Does anyone seriously think that those

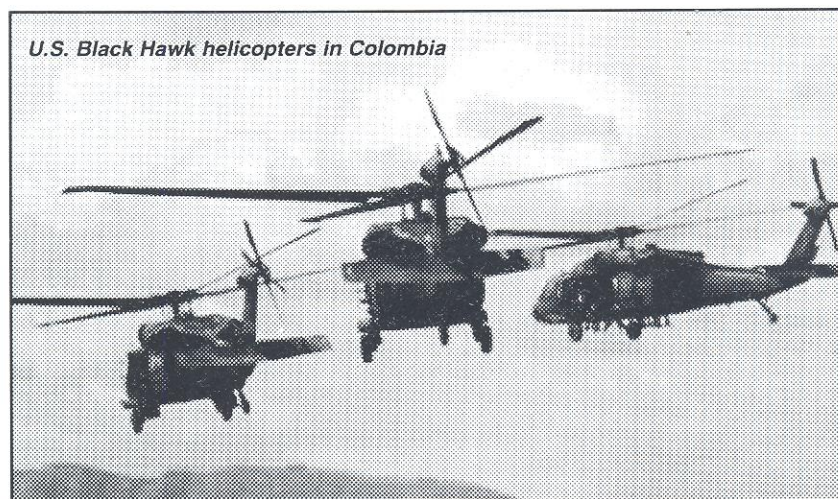
plantations, so politically and financially very profitable for large sections of the capitalists, will ever be destroyed by this Plan? The repression and the consequences of fumigating with gas and fungus will only be felt by the thousands of small peasants for whom the coca and poppy agriculture represents the only alternative for survival under capitalism. Growing coffee or cacao beans is simply suicide for those peasants because of the collapse in the price of those products on the world market. The price collapse is forced on the peasantry by the Western multinationals in order to increase their profits. There is no doubt that the Colombia Plan will not bother the big landowners and the paramilitaries in their thriving drug trade with the American capitalists. The final result of the destruction of the small coca and poppy plantations in the areas controlled by the guerrillas will be the effective monopoly for those big landowners, not only of the production and the trade, but also of the growing of coca and poppy itself.

The destruction of the sole source of income for thousands of peasants can only lead to an increase in misery, which in turn, will increase the hatred for imperialism and the capitalist state. That is one of the most important risks related to the implementation of this Plan. It explains the scepticism of a layer of bourgeois strategists. Moreover, a greater destabilisation of Colombia would rapidly spread to neighbouring countries and

even to Brazil, the economic engine of the continent. This would be a nightmare scenario for the ruling classes of Latin America.

The Colombia Plan is also an acknowledgment by a part of the local capitalists and by "yankie" imperialism of the growing difficulties of maintaining its control over the region by "peaceful" and "democratic" means.

Decades of dirty war, numerous failed peace agreements and more than a year of stagnation



in the negotiations between the Pastrana government and the FARC have not advanced the stability of Colombia. This can only be explained by the incapacity of capitalism in the whole of Latin America to make any lasting important economic, social and political concessions to the workers and the peasants.

As part of this, we need to take into account important differences in Colombia today. Whereas in the past imperialism was able to impose more easily its plans to defeat the guerrillas, this is not the case at present. Not only is the degree of class struggle on a higher level (compared with the serious decline of mass popular resistance movements in the first half of the 90's, we are now witnessing a rise in the class struggle in the whole of the continent), but the FARC itself has a solid position which was lacking in other guerrilla movements in the past. The FARC controls 40% of the territory and

commands some 17,000 well-armed and well-trained guerrilla fighters. This relative strength of the guerrillas stands in sharp contrast to the divisions and the decomposition of the state, which in turn weakens the whole of the Colombian bourgeoisie. This situation has convinced the United States to intervene directly in an attempt to change the balance of forces.

The end result of this intervention is not yet clear. One section of the capitalists, also in the US and internationally, fears entering an uncontrolable escalation of the war. "It is a profound mistake. This is how Kennedy started in Vietnam and this led to the loss of

the lives of 50,000 compatriots", warns David Obey, a Democratic member of Congress (quoted in *El Pais*, 27/8/00).

The trauma of Vietnam is still haunting American society. If they could choose they would prefer another means of controlling the area before resorting to a direct and massive intervention with US soldiers. Such an intervention we should remember would have revolutionary consequences in the whole of the continent. The question is: are they able to choose? And for how long? "In this kind of conflict everybody knows how to start it, but nobody has the slightest idea of how to end it", explains a Republican member of Congress in the same article in *El Pais*.

Towards a new Vietnam ?

Although it is possible that the negotiations between the guerrillas and the government will continue (a breaking off of these talks would have a radicalising effect on the conflict) and that some kind of agreement cannot be excluded (at least with one sector of the guerrilla leaders), the most probable perspective is of an exacerbation of the conflict. Even if they arrive at some kind of agreement (something increasingly remote) not one of the problems of the workers and the peasants will be solved. This in turn will lead to an increase of the violence.

The first result of the launching of the Colombia Plan and of Clinton's lightning visit to this Andean country has been the escalation of the fight between the FARC and the army. In the context of the profound crisis of Colombian capitalism if the polarisation

intensifies in the whole of the continent, as a result of the class struggle, the conflict will reach new heights. The FARC could be in a situation where power will be within arm's reach. If the leaders of the FARC had a socialist programme, or if at least they supported the same measures of expropriation and radical land reform of the other guerrillas, they would probably be able to take power rapidly. Unfortunately, by limiting their programme to democracy without breaking with capitalism, this perspective of power is hampered and fills the future with more uncertainty.

Imperialism and the bourgeoisie cannot tolerate forever the existence of a guerrilla force controlling and governing half of the country and threatening its hegemony. If they are presented with the slightest chance to change this situation, they would not hesitate to use the most barbaric methods in their possession to achieve it.

The only thing which can give peace, land and work to Colombia and the rest of Latin America is socialism and workers democracy. To achieve this the most conscious workers and peasant activists will have to build a mass Marxist organisation based on the methods of struggle, and the traditions and strength of the working class who represent the majority of Colombian society (and in the whole continent). This working class has already shown his revolutionary potential in the general strike which only a few months ago paralysed the country. ☆

by Miguel Campos

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Pakistan: New wave of struggle

On 10th september, 2000 the PPP held a workers convention at Lahore. The last such convention was held 28 years ago. The PPP chairperson Ms. Benazir Bhutto, who has been declared a 'proclaimed offender' on corruption charges by the present military regime, is presently based in London and hence could not be present. The convention was held to reinvigorate the PPP's dwindling support. The party's social base and active support have been severely eroded due to its dismal performance dur-

ing its last two tenures in power. The right wing policies of these PPP regimes resulted in a sharp decline in the living standards of the masses. This resulted in disillusionment and demoralisation specially amongst the advanced workers and the party activists.

by Lal Kahn

But with the advent of the right wing regime of Nawaz Sharif in 1997 and the present military dictatorship in October 1999, the attacks on the masses further intensified at the behest of the IMF.

At this stage the oppressed masses are looking for a way out of the misery they are suffering due to the severe crisis of the present capitalist/ feudal system. More than 12,000 party activists and workers converged from all over the country at the convention in Lahore.

They were hoping to find a radical solution of their problems from the party. But the majority of the speakers toed the official party line and tried to water down the sentiments and hatred of the masses against the regime and the exploitative system. Left wing leaders and activists were denied the chance to speak. However when the convention was coming to a close the pressure from the activists became so intense that they forced Ghulam Abbas, a former MP and popular left wing leader of the PPP onto the stage and the party bureaucracy had no choice but to give way. Ghulam Abbas, a student leader in the past is famous for his fiery and revolutionary speeches. In this speech he condemned the military dictatorship and exposed the massive corruption of military generals involved in shady deals and the kick backs they received in arms deals. He explained how the army was involved in drug trafficking and black money. He also called for elections of

army officers and of the military Chief from the ranks. Comrade Abbas attributed the misery, poverty and disease to the severe crisis of capitalism which

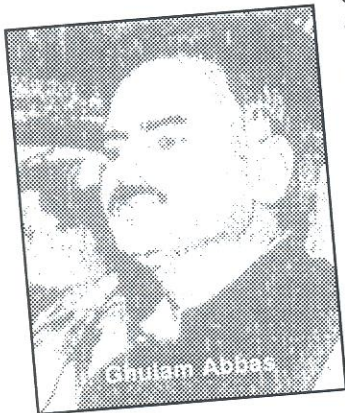
has plagued Pakistani society. He also attacked the party leaders who were representing and belonged to the landlord and capitalist classes. During the earlier speeches of right wing PPP leaders, the party workers had been asked by several speakers to raise their hands and take an oath of loyalty to the party leadership and accept Benazir Bhutto as the life chairperson of the PPP. In his speech Ghulam Abbas said "We the workers and the poor have taken oaths of loyalty to the party and its programme in 1967 when it was founded and remained loyal to it ever since. It is the leadership of the party who has time and again betrayed the Party and its founding revolutionary programme".

Then he asked the leaders sitting on the rostrum to rise and raise their hands to take an oath that they will not betray Party activists, workers and the PPP 1970 manifesto (which calls for a Socialist Revolution). His speech stunned the convention and the leaders sitting on the stage were in a state of shock, their faces pale with the fear of a left wing resurgence in the Party.

The workers on the floor had tears in their eyes. They were hearing what their hearts wanted to say for such a long time. The speech of comrade Ghulam Abbas was punctuated by the slogans of "Revolution, Revolution - Socialist Revolution", "Down with Capitalism" and the whole convention was emotionally charged. His speech changed the whole course and mood of the convention. Immediately after the convention the President of PPP district Rajanpur (South Punjab), a left winger, Ch. Sarwar Abbas, was arrested by the police. He was charged with raising slogans against the military dictatorship and being a threat to public order. He had led a large and very vocal left wing delegation from the South Punjab to the convention. On 12 September at 2.30 in the morning, the police surrounded and raided the house of Ghulam Abbas at Lahore. They climbed on the roof and then forcibly entered the bedroom of Ghulam Abbas by breaking the front door. Although no physical resistance was offered still the Punjab police exhibited its notorious brutali-

ty. Ghulam Abbas and Ch. Sarwar were first taken to a police station and then to the infamous Kot Lakhpat prison. The news of these arrests created a stir. The workers and students thronged to the court building where the bail petition was to be heard. The international pressure mounted and there was widespread condemnation of the arrests. Ultimately the regime had to give in and comrade Ghulam Abbas and Ch. Sarwar Abbas were released on bail on the eve of 15 September. But on 14 September another case was registered in Rajanpur against six PPP leaders who were known for their socialist views. They were indicted on the charge of spreading hatred against the armed forces in the speeches made at a regional PPP convention at Rajanpur on 28 August. One comrade, Jam Nasir, has been arrested and is in prison.

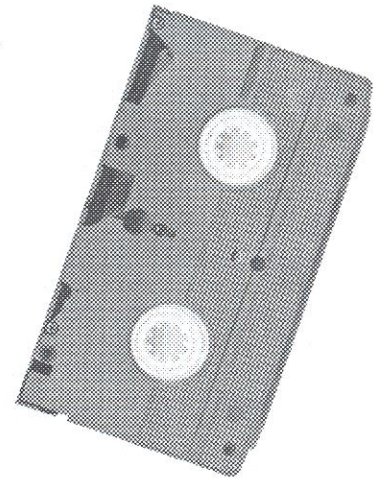
Those accused include Rauf Khan Lund, the general secretary of PPP district Rajanpur and a well known national left wing figure in the PPP. His outspoken Marxist revolutionary views are gaining popularity amongst the rank and file and the youth. He has defied the dictatorship and publicly opposed the right wing, anti-working class policies of the PPP leadership. Rauf Lund also led the mass peasant revolt which erupted in Southern Punjab during the cotton crisis in September 1999. His house has been raided. The other accused are Abdul Qadar Shaheen, Ch. Sarwar Abbas, Mirza Tariq and Rana Shaukat. All these comrades have gone underground and are trying to evade arrest. All these comrades wish to express their revolutionary gratitude to all the comrades around the world who have sent messages and organised activities in their support and solidarity. This is the beginning of a new wave of struggle against the present military dictatorship. Rauf Lund and other comrades accused have issued a statement vowing to fight state terrorism and have pledged to continue the struggle to its ultimate destiny - A Socialist Revolution in Pakistan and throughout the subcontinent. ☆



“Builders Crack - the movie”

You don't have to walk far nowadays to see some construction work taking place. All over big cities such as London major work is being carried out. Last year it was the Jubilee Line extension and the Millennium Dome, this year it is jobs such as the massive work being carried out in Moorgate and the St Pauls areas of London. And there is much more on the way. Undoubtedly someone is making a mint out of all this. But it is not those who actually work on and build these great projects. For the average Brickies, Sparks and the rest it remains a case of long hours, weekend working, uncertain pay and the ever present threat of accidents.

Reviewed by *Steve Jones*



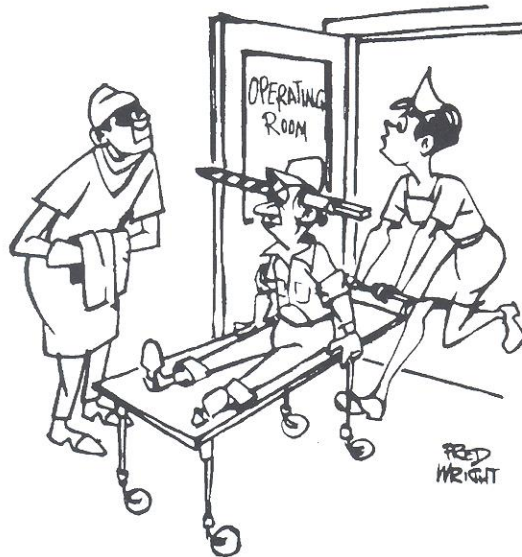
The building trade has always been rife with dodgy dealing and exploitation of the workforce. From the Victorian Age onwards, manual workers were shipped over from countries such as Ireland to work for low pay and in appalling conditions on the great construction sites of the day, from the canals and bridges, through the new town estates and the new motorways up to the towering skyscrapers of today. Such was the degree of recruitment from countries such as Ireland that the joke used to go round the pubs of Dublin that if a priest asked a boy who made the world, he was likely to reply “McAlpine!”

Unions had to fight hard to gain any rights whatsoever such as health and safety rules or the regularisation of employment conditions. However as a worker in a new video just out comments, these rights have been pushed backwards by the bosses. The industry is riddled with a maze of contractors and sub-contractors and sub-sub-contractors. It is not uncommon for bosses to just disappear owing the workers on a site weeks of wages. Health and safety is regularly just ignored or sidestepped and employment rights treated as if they do not exist. Holiday pay? Forget it! Accidents remain commonplace on sites and fatalities are not unknown.

The London Joint Sites Committee, an ad-hoc grouping of union building workers, has in recent years been campaigning on the sites against this exploitation and for union rights. Their journal “Builders Crack” is widely read and has done much to encourage workers to sign up to a union, be aware of their rights and make a stand to get them. Now a video, “Builders Crack - the movie”, has been produced to enable those involved to show what has been done and what is

possible.

With a running length of just 10 minutes or so this video would be ideal for showing at a trade union or LP branch meeting. Footage such as that of protesters bricking up the main entrance to the head offices of the



“It's an emergency, Doc... They need the drill right away...”

Construction Employers Federation will surely raise a chuckle but there is much in the video that is no laughing matter. The conditions described by those interviewed are nothing short of barbaric. If you protested you were called a trouble-maker and told to clear off or face a beating. One worker who moved down to London, having worked on unionised sites, was shocked at the conditions he was forced to work in, at the end of the day it was like “coming out of a mine” such was the dirt and filth.

However the message of this video is that if you stand together and fight back then things can change. One person described how on one site they were forced to get changed in what seemed to be an old oil storage unit, totally unsafe. They all refused to do any work until something was done about it and as a result the management were forced to cave in and provide a new portacabin. The lesson is clear: stick together, do not be divided, sign up to the union and take action in defence of your rights. As one bloke puts it, “don't get angry, get even!... hit them in the pocket!” The success of the workers on the Jubilee Line shows what can be achieved.

Confidence is everything. One of those interviewed put it very clearly, “It's the greatest feeling in the world when you go back to work after having won a strike.” He describes how one worker visibly changed, before going on strike he had shuffled around, shoulders bent, seemingly broken by the system, but afterwards he was completely different, standing upright with a new spirit. The power to change things is there, you just have to act. The bosses won't do it for you, you have to make them. This is a message which applies well beyond the construction industry. Get this video and use it to set off a discussion on workers rights, the power of the unions and so on.

The London Joint Sites Committee can be contacted on 020 8427 8480 (Brickies) or 0976 762040 (Sparks) or by e-mail to builderscrack_jsc@hotmail.com. The video is available for £10 (incl. postage etc.) from “Louder Than Words” 52-56 Turnhill Street, Farringdon, London EC1M 5QR. Tell 'em we sent you. ☆

The Marxists and the situation in Sri Lanka

With Sri Lanka heading for a general election on 10th October, this article looks at the background of left developments in the country, in particular the processes unfolding in the workers' parties.

In 1994, together with the other "Left" parties, including the "Communist Party", the leadership of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) entered the popular alliance (PA) government headed by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (CBK). This

government has been carrying out an anti-working class policies of privatisation and cuts in line with the dictates of the IMF. This has led to the rapid rise of a left opposition inside the LSSP, associated with the well-known mass leader, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, the member of parliament for the Ratnapura district.

by *Lankaloka* in Colombo

The reaction of the LSSP leadership has been to resort to widespread expulsions and suspensions of party activists. They have also refused to convene a Party congress which they are bound to do under the statutes.

According to the Rules, a congress must be called every two years. In fact, the last congress was held in 1994. The leadership does not want to hold a congress for the simple reason that they would be in a minority. The left opposition has responded by organising themselves into the LSSP Majority.

The undemocratic actions of the LSSP leadership have brought the Party to the brink of a split, just at a time when the PA government has entered into a serious crisis and faces an immediate general election. In a desperate attempt to save itself, the PA government tried to make use of the critical military situation brought about by the latest offensive launched by the Tamil Tigers in the north. The government introduced Emergency Laws in May which drastically curtailed civil and trade union rights and introduced draconian press censorship.

At the same time, the PA government pressed on with plans to continue its right-wing policies, such as privatisation of the People's Bank - the biggest bank in Sri Lanka. This has resulted in a mood of discontent building up, reflected in an increase in strikes and demonstrations.

The workers launched a campaign in May to get a wage increase of 3000 rupees, but was cut across by the Emergency Regulations imposed by the government. This campaign was launched by a newly formed trade union federation under the leadership of comrade Quintus Liyanage. Most of the trade union leaders (such as the LSSP and CP leaders) are now actively participating in the PA government and they are not prepared to launch a campaign against the government. That was the reason, which led Quintus

Liyanage to take the initiative to form a new trade union federation for this campaign. Now about 42 trade unions are grouped in this federation.

This campaign was temporally undermined by the brutal Emergency Regulations. But during the past period, the mood of the working class is becoming radical again. On the 28th July, the federation took a decision to launch an island-wide protest campaign.

Token strike

The most significant development was when the railway workers decided to participate in this with a 24-hour token strike. In fact on 28th July this railway token strike took place together with the island-wide protest campaign of other sectors. Comrade Quintus Liyanage was the convenor of the federation which succeeded in uniting different trade unions that previously were loyal to other political tendencies. It was not easy get unions from such different backgrounds and loyalties to unite under one banner. Now the campaign is moving forward. They are planning to hold another token strike in

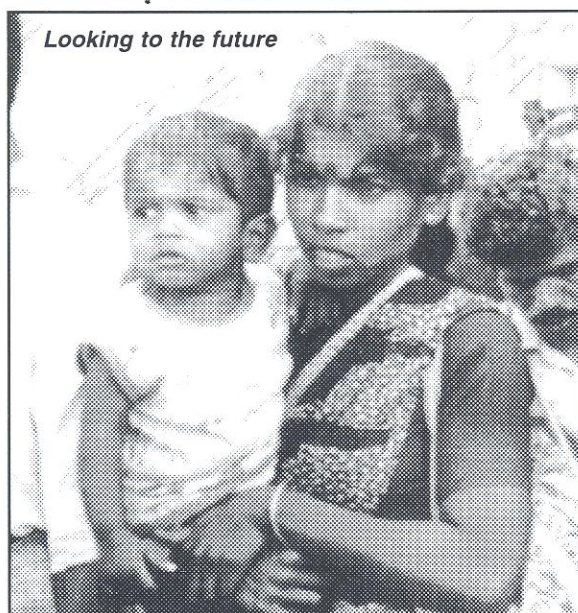
September. The railway workers, the government printing department and the health workers will all participate.

The aggravation of the war situation in the northern part of the island and the rise of cost of living has undermined the popularity of the PA government. The latter has replied with repressive measures.

Aware of the growing unpopularity of the government, the PA was clearly not in a mood for a general election. On the other hand, according to the constitution parliament had to be automatically dissolved by 24th August. Therefore the government, in desperation, wanted to do something quickly. In the first week of August the government tabled two bills by-passing the normal parliamentary procedures arguing that the measures under consideration were extremely urgent.

One of these bills was to amend the present constitution. According to the present constitution, any amendment requires a two-thirds majority in parliament and then has to be approved in a referendum. Therefore it was clear that, even though the government parties could get a two-thirds majority in parliament, they could not implement the new constitution before the next parliamentary session, as they could not organise a referendum in such a short space of time (that is, before 24th August). Therefore they tabled a second bill to amend the Parliamentary Election Act under the present constitution, which includes proposals for a parliament of 298 MPs, of which only 168 would be directly elected, and no fewer than 130 would be nominated! This also required a two-thirds majority in the parliament.

In fact, changing the present Bonapartist constitution is a long-standing demand of the Sri Lankan masses. But this amendment was not intended to abolish the executive (presidential) system. It talked about an "executive premier". But that would



only be from year 2005 onwards, which is after the completion of the present term of Chandrika. If it intended to abolish the presidency only after the year 2005, what was the hurry to present it to parliament at this moment? The real reason is that, under the constitution, the transitional powers are defined in such a way that without going for an election they could extend the period of this parliament for another six years. However, as usual it was presented to the parliament as a solution to the ethnic crisis, which is the easiest way of getting the support from the left and progressive elements and the minority representatives. In reality, no devolution powers are provided by this constitution. Indeed, certain devolution powers including the 13th amendment at the time of the Indo-Lanka accord were removed from the present bill.

On the other hand it was proposed to remove the words "Democratic" and "Socialist" from the name of Sri Lanka. (At present the official name of the country is "The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka").

This was not an accident. By the removal of those two words, they intend to move to the right and enshrine private ownership as a human right.

The whole idea is to assure the western countries and imperialist finance agencies that Sri Lanka has distanced itself from democratic and socialist ideology and will protect the investments of the imperialist powers. Very little time was given to study this constitution. Only members of parliament got copies of the bill. The general public was kept in the dark about the proposed constitution. The reason for this secrecy is clear from the reactionary nature of the content. In order to ensure that the new constitution would be passed in parliament, all kinds of dirty tactics were used, including direct bribery of MPs. Comrade Vasu played a central role in denouncing the reactionary nature of the proposed constitution and forcing the government to withdraw it.

The constitution

The government brought this bill forward as a manoeuvre to avoid immediate elections. Since it was presented as a progressive step towards a solution of the ethnic problem, Sinhala chauvinists and Buddhist monks started an intensive campaign against the proposal. The anti-democratic and anti-socialist features of the constitution did not get the attention of the public.

In fact, there is not much difference between the present constitution and the proposed constitution. The UNP initially agreed to most parts of the proposed new constitution. There have already been a lot of discussions between the PA and the right-wing opposition UNP about amending the constitution as a step towards solving ethnic problem. But sensing the growing chauvinist

opposition and the manoeuvres that the PA was planning to carry out with the constitution, the UNP withdrew their support for the proposal at the last moment.

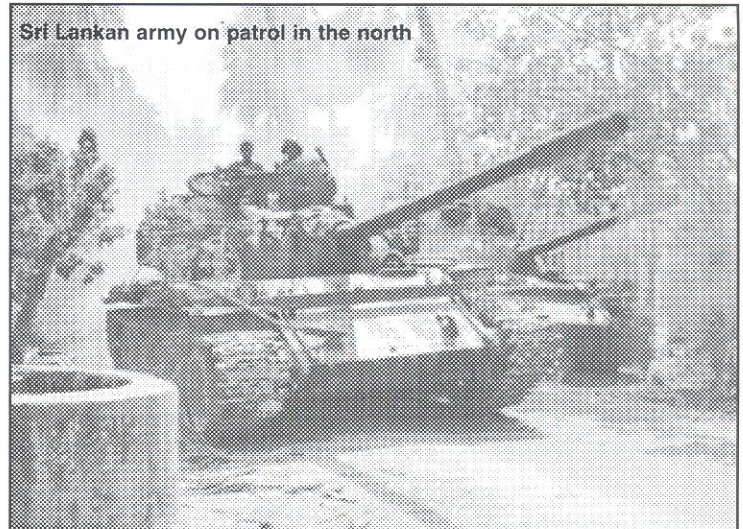
The President CBK herself came to the parliament to table the bill. She did that because she thought that she could buy several UNP parliamentarians and get a two-thirds majority in the parliament.

There were rumours that the PA was prepared to pay 20 to 50 million rupees to anyone who voted for the bill. However, the UNP was equal to the task and just prior to the day the vote was scheduled to be taken in parliament, the UNP leadership sent about 25 of their MPs - potential defectors- to Singapore. So the PA had to postpone taking the vote on both bills. After a couple of days' deliberation, on 18th August parliament was dissolved, and now parliamentary elections are due by the 10th of October.

Ethnic problem

During this episode, only the LSSP Majority analysed and pointed out the real anti-democratic and anti-socialist features of the proposed constitution and the hidden motives behind it. While the main parties were supporting it, saying that it was a step towards solving the ethnic problem, the chauvinist forces came onto the streets, allegedly to "protect the country and Buddhism". Only the LSSP Majority was capable of showing the real reactionary nature of the proposal. Based on that analysis, comrade Vasu delivered a marvellous speech in parliament, which exposed all the hidden motives, and the reactionary content of the proposed legislation. This speech was greeted with overwhelming approval from all parts of the media. The position of the LSSP Majority received powerful confirmation by the fact that the TULF, the main Tamil party in parliament, plus five members of the CWC, the main up-country Tamil party, also opposed to the proposed constitution.

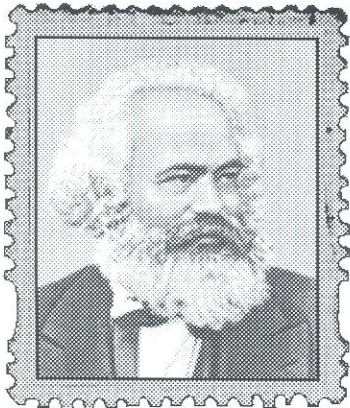
Once the elections had been called, the Sri Lankan Marxists were obliged to take a decision. Yet again the LSSP leadership tamely decided to stand under the PA banner. For a long time the LSSP Majority has been fighting to get the LSSP to change course. The leadership continues to defy the mood and aspirations of the working class by blindly supporting Chandrika. This runs entirely contrary to the opinion of the Party



rank and file. Even the LSSP Central Committee no longer supports the leadership. But the only response of the leadership has been expulsions which have decimated the Party's active base. The LSSP Majority has taken legal action to compel the leaders to convene a congress. But the fear of the members is that either they will still refuse to call a congress or they will call a fake congress in some hotel room behind the backs of the Party with the sole purpose of ratifying the present leadership and electing a Central Committee composed of obedient stooges. Under the circumstances the comrades decided that it was necessary to stand.

The parliamentary elections are now the main point on the agenda. The LSSP Majority is contesting the election under the banner of the LDA (The Left and Democratic Alliance). During the last couple of weeks, seeing that elections were on agenda, the LSSP Majority tried to unite all the left forces to fight the election in a united front. Due to various reasons it was not possible to form a left united front but at the last minute a very important agreement was reached. The LDA and the NLF- the front formed by NSSF and some other small parties - came to a no-contest agreement, that is, they agreed not to field candidates against each other. The LDA decided to stand in districts where they are strongest, including Ratnapura which comrade Vasu is contesting, Kegalle - an LSSP stronghold in the past - and Jaffna the war-torn district in the north, while Colombo and some other districts are being contested by NLF. With this no-contest agreement we can definitely avoid splitting the left vote and thus secure the maximum representation.

In the meantime, a new strike has been called on 1st September and the mood for a fight on the question of a minimum wage is building up all the time. In short, Sri Lanka has entered into a new and turbulent period of the class struggle. ☆



MAIL

CORRESPONDENCE

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e-mail: socialist_appeal@mail.com



Dear reader,
Thanks for your letters.
For reasons of space we
have only published a small selection
of our correspondence. Get
the full selection at www.socialist.net,
and please keep sending
us your comments!



Dear editor,

We take the best that society has developed and put it to the use of the working class. Unfortunately, one of the letters that was published in the *Appeal* was from a comrade who wished to redirect comrades to Green publications. Perhaps he would wish us to look further?

The global warming and the GMO issue are middle class phobias, and should be rejected into the dustbin of history. There is no shortages. Here I agree with Julian Simon on the development of capitalist society. There will never be a situation where we run out of basic resources, because the human intellect is infinite in its development. The Greens were wrong then, and they are wrong now. What is really sick is that in the lull, all the socialist organisations, in a demonstration of their isolation, have adopted the green mantle. They now find themselves totally isolated from the development of society.

Regards,

Brian Baker



Dear Sir/Madam,

I have just read the article by Phil Mitchinson on the web. Whilst I agree with his analysis of how a few individuals can paralyse the country, due more to "just in time" delivery systems rather than the inherent failure of capitalism, I think he got carried away.

Whilst the blockades were in place, aided and abetted by the oil companies, I was reminded more of the hauliers in Chile prior to the overthrow of the Allende government rather than the start of a workers' revolution leading to a socialist society.

This disruption to society was in the main led by a group of people who do not support the labour movement and saw their action as a means of at least weakening the current government, if not cause its fall.

John Kelly



Hi there!

I enjoyed your article on the UK fuel crisis. But we know all this: is there anywhere to go for the deeper analysis. The serious capitalist press hint at worries but then fob the reader off by comparing it to black Wednesday. Some Tory monetary incompetence we can live with (however expensive). What we have just seen is much more serious: when a government loses the "middle" the ruling class are on very dangerous ground. They must thank god there is no Bonaparte to step in. The dispute has also thrown up transitional ideas: an ex Tory councillor, no less, asked me "how come if Britain is the world's sixth biggest oil producer, why don't we burn our own oil?" You tell me mate.

Cheers,

Steve White



Dear comrades,

How was it that the Blair government and most commentators and observers were taken totally by surprise when supplies to the filling stations dried up and nearly brought society to a standstill?

Back in April a small group of farmers and, mostly self employed, lorry drivers set up a loose alliance to fight for their survival. The main enemy at the time was seen as the supermarkets. The monopoly position of these giant capitalist shopkeepers enables them to squeeze all their supplier's profits to the barest minimum. The small farmers and owner/driver transport operators, many in the TGWU, are no exception to this rule. The trigger for their action against the oil companies and fuel distributors was undoubtedly the actions of the French truckers.

Why was this action by a group, unused to industrial action, so successful?

One reason was the practice of oil companies to maintain little excess stock at filling stations to reduce advanced payment of

duty. Tanker deliveries to filling stations are only just ahead of demand. Within a few days stocks were almost depleted. But the burning question is why were these pickets treated with kid gloves compared to other groups of workers such as the miners and the print workers at Wapping who felt the heavy end of police batons during their struggle. The answer is clear when you study the response of the oil company managements and realise that the oil companies had something to gain by the strangling of petrol supplies. With the drying up of supplies a desperate need for petrol has been created. The raising of prices by a few pence per litre would be more acceptable to motorists desperate to fill up.

The response of the Labour government appears to be more draconian laws against workers taking action. It is being touted by ministers that legislation will be passed making it illegal for tanker drivers, who showed great sympathy for the plight of the pickets, to refuse to deliver to filling stations.

Labour must adopt a serious energy policy which takes back into public ownership all public transport and invests heavily in its expansion to provide a comprehensive service which is cheap and reliable.

Given a comprehensive and cheap public transport system in London for instance the use of cars would decline dramatically. The publicly owned railways could be given a monopoly of movement for long distance freight.

The public ownership of North Sea oil is an essential step towards a national energy policy. When Tony Blair obtained the queens consent for emergency powers, one lag in the government, when asked what they could do with these powers, joked that the government could nationalise the oil industry. Well isn't that a good idea!?

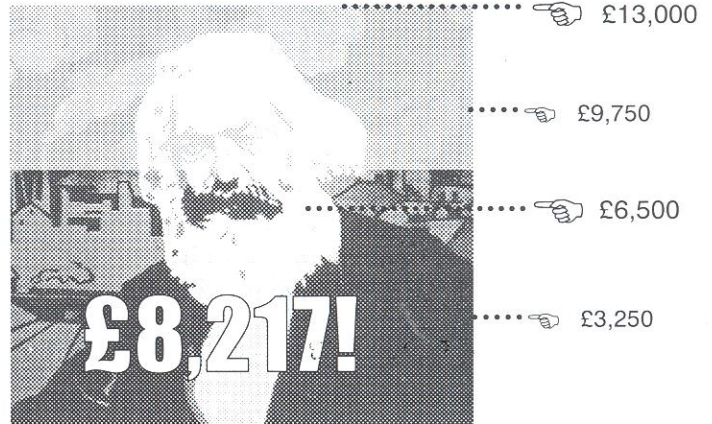
Comradely

Colin Penfold

Socialist Appeal Published an article on the web about the fuel blockade. Here are some responses. Have you got something to say?

£5,000 needed:

Time to get the cash in!



Dear Comrades

I'm afraid I do not share your rosy view of the lorry drivers' and farmers' blockades. The blockades might show the effectiveness of direct action, but direct action is not necessarily associated with progressive causes. Racist attacks are also an example of direct action, and one which all socialists would condemn. If anything, this campaign can be seen as a classic petit-bourgeois revolt - small businessmen acting over high taxation. Of course, the majority of people would be sympathetic to a campaign that calls for reduced taxes; as a motorist I would like to pay less for fuel. But where were other demands that have to be made in respect of transport and taxation, such as higher taxes on the rich and on big business, more resources for public transport? Nowhere.

If the government reduces taxation of fuel, will this lead to farmers and owner-drivers joining any broader campaigns on taxation and transport? I very much doubt it. It will be: 'I'm alright Jack.' Will this campaign bring them any closer to the labour movement. Again, I very much doubt it. True, the response of the Labour Party and union leaders was guaranteed to repel the blockaders, and it would be very difficult for socialists to intersect with such a classic petit-bourgeois movement, but I fail to see anything progressive about this blockade, and I can't see the blockaders moving leftwards because of their action. If any of them do move leftwards, it will be through discussion with socialists on an individual basis, and an adoption of new political ideas, not through this sort of action.

Fraternally

Paul Flowers

Editor's note: Paul is mistaken. The article does in fact say "Labour must immediately remove the tax hikes...tax the fat cat millionaires instead."

A special welcome to all students and young workers who are reading *Socialist Appeal* for the first time. We hope that what you have read will help inspire you to stand up to the system and fight to change it. The bosses have access to the mass media, the press and television, to peddle their lies. Opposition to all this is rarely allowed to be shown, except in a distorted or twisted form. So we have to do the job ourselves. The task of *Socialist Appeal* is to explain and fight for Marxist ideas and demands, raising them in the Labour Party, the trade unions, in the workplaces and in the colleges and universities - everywhere in fact. But our resources are weak. Big business provides millions for their papers, we have to rely just on the honest support of ordinary working people to keep going.

You can help in two ways. First of all, how about taking a regular order of *Socialist Appeals* to sell? The newsagent chains such as W.H. Smiths won't put our journal on their racks so it has to be sold instead by supporters in the movement and beyond. You could be one of these people. Even taking just a few copies each month to sell to family, friends and so on can make a difference. You won't just be complaining about capitalism, you will be doing something about it. Get in contact with us now on 020 7251 1094 or by e-mail to appeal@socialist.net to sort something out. Each journal sold equals £1 towards the class struggle.

The second way you can help is by making a donation to our funds. Every bit helps towards the struggle for a better future. As I write this we have raised

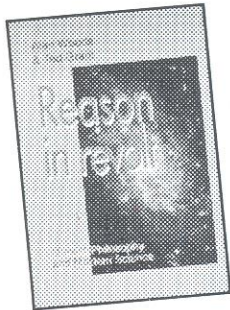
£8,217.18 towards our £13,000 target to be reached by the end of October. So we have just over a month to raise nearly £4,000. It's a tall order but it can be done. Over £2000 was raised during the summer by UK readers towards a special appeal to support the struggle of socialists internationally, so the potential is there. The holidays are over - lets get back to work and get the cash in. If everybody chips in the target can be reached. But it doesn't stop there. We are launching this autumn a special building fund appeal to raise £5,000 as a matter of urgency. This is needed as we intend to move offices in the next period as our lease has expired. The move will cost quite a bit of money, especially as our press will have to be professionally moved. There will also be other costs incurred such as redecoration and so on. No move is ever cheap. Time is against us so please send in what you can. We thank you in advance.

Special thanks to all those who have donated in the last few weeks, including Mick (£60), West London readers (£50), Phil (£17), readers from Essex and Herts (£115), Barbara (£10) Steve Jones, London CWU, (£5) and Paul Rogan, Birmingham (£3). More sales of Trotsky T-Shirts (£76) and others. Donations should be made payable to Socialist Appeal and sent to us at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ.

At the TUC we sold 20 journals and at the Labour Party Conference 70 so far.

Steve Jones

Wellred publications



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Bolshevism
The road to revolution
 by Alan Woods

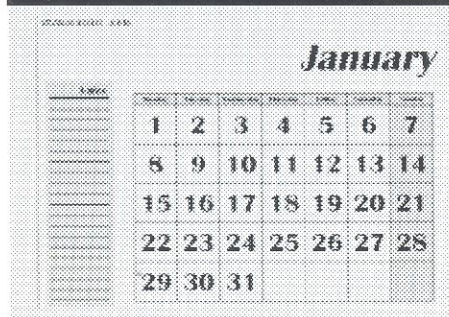
There have been many books and potted histories of Russia, either written from an anti-Bolshevik perspective, or its Stalinist mirror image, which paint a false account of the rise of Bolshevism. Alan Woods, in rejecting these "theses", reveals the real evolution of Bolshevism as a living struggle to apply the method of Marxism to the peculiarities of Russia.

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This book was written as a reply to Monty Johnstone, who, at that time was a leading theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and who had published a reappraisal of Leon Trotsky in the Young Communist League journal *Cogito* at the end of 1968. Alan Woods and Ted Grant used the opportunity to write a detailed reply explaining the real relationship between the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, which had been systematically falsified by the Stalinists ever since the invention of "Trotskyism" in 1924. This was no academic exercise. It was written as an appeal to the ranks of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League to rediscover the truth about Trotsky and return to the original revolutionary programme of Lenin.

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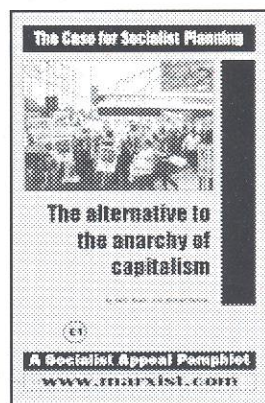
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