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SocialistAppeal

October 2004 issue 126

Price: £1 - Solidarity Price £2



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out of
IRAQ**

No to Blairism ! Fight for Socialist policies!

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Please note our new address:
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Out of touch

"I come to bury Caesar not to praise him."

Tony Blair paraphrased Mark Antony's words at this year's TUC saying he had come to "praise Warwick not to bury it." He was referring to the agreement reached between union and Labour leaders at Warwick castle over certain minor reforms in relation to pensions and workers' rights. Are these meagre promises the height of ambition for Labour's third term in office? No, this is nowhere near enough.

As we go to press Blair is addressing the 2004 Labour Party conference. This may turn out to be his last conference speech as leader - it certainly should be. After seven years in government, Blair has dragged Britain into a war in Iraq, presided over a widening wealth gap, and ploughed on with the desperately unpopular privatisation of public services.

But according to Blair it's our fault, we aren't listening, he keeps telling us things are getting better, but, silly us, we prefer to rely on our own experience in work, in schools, in hospitals, than trust in government statistics, spin and soundbites. He is trying to speak to us but it is as if he is in an area where his mobile phone doesn't work, he said. He is right about one thing, he is out of touch - according to the most recent poll 63 per cent of people agree. The Blairites live in a different world.

A party member from Devon disrupted Blair's opening words by shouting "You've got blood on your hands" in protest at the war in Iraq. The invasion and occupation of Iraq has been a complete disaster. The

death toll continues to mount; the imperialists have failed to gain control of oil supplies, which was one of their objectives; the Iraqi people are fighting back against the occupation of their country; and now even Blair has to admit there never were any weapons of mass destruction. Everyone now knows the war in Iraq was based on a lie. Blair's holier than thou image is destroyed. His popularity has plummeted. The entire labour movement must demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops and an end to imperialist interference.

Blair's slavish adherence to US imperialism in foreign policy only mirrors his subservience to the interests of the City and big business at home.

As a result Labour membership has fallen below 200,000, the lowest figure for seventy years. Party membership has halved since 1997. Many of those who joined in the euphoria following the defeat of the Tories have left, leaving the party in the hands of the careerists on one side and the old stalwarts and, decisively, the trade unions on the other.

Unions dominate Party

Once again the stage managed atmosphere of Labour's conference has been shattered by the dominance of the trade unions. Those who have mistaken the period of Blairite leadership for a fundamental transformation of Labour into a British version of the US Democrats are at a loss to explain not only the party's union base, but the power which the trade

unions continue to wield inside Labour.

The leadership has been defeated on its plans for further privatisation of council housing stock, forced into a debate on Iraq, and defeated on renationalising the railways.

No matter say Blair, Brown, Darling and co, we will not take any notice of conference decisions, anyway! Despite its huge popularity, and the disaster of private ownership, the Blairites will not countenance taking the railways back into public ownership because they are ideologically wedded to the market.

It would cost £22 billion, they argue, and that money would be better spent on health. We could not agree more. Take the railways back into public ownership, under the management of the workforce, without paying a single penny in compensation to the fatcats who have already made a fortune from destroying the rail network, and spend £22 billion more on health. If only they had £22 billion, they say. Such a pledge on its own would win the next election. In defeating the leadership at conference the unions have demonstrated what they can do when they only raise their little fingers. But now Blair and co say they will ignore conference decisions, so what's the point? Obviously democracy does not mean a great deal to the Blairites. This is not news. The only conclusion to be drawn is that passing a resolution alone is not enough. A real concerted campaign around a programme of socialist demands, could mobilise the activists and the rank and file around the country. MPs could be deselected, the leadership changed and, most importantly, the policy and programme of the party turned to meet the

needs of the working class people who vote Labour.

Now is not the time for unions to be debating disaffiliation or even cutting finances that would eat into the number of delegates the unions get. Instead the unions must mobilise their membership into the GCs and begin the serious work of taking the party back from the careerists.

In contrast to the heckling that greeted Blair, the standing ovation for Brown, is another indication of the desire for change. However, our ambitions would be low indeed if our objective were merely to get another pro-market, pro-privatisation leader into Number Ten. Brown has more roots in the movement than his next door neighbour in Downing Street, and therefore a better understanding of how to speak in front of a trade union audience.

Nonetheless this is only window dressing, behind it lies the same pro-market Blairite agenda. Brown would not be an alternative to Blair but a continuation.

In recent elections Labour voters have stayed at home in their droves. They are likely to do so again in the forthcoming general election. Not Labour's popularity but the ongoing shambles in the Tory party continues to make a third term the most likely outcome, though this is not guaranteed. After seven years of Labour government, there has been precious little to praise. Now it is time to bury Blairism

- For Socialist Policies at home and abroad
- Troops out of Iraq
- Trade unionists reclaim Labour
- Finish off Blairism and fight for a Labour government with a socialist programme.

Jaguar workforce to "fight like tigers" against 1100 job losses

by our industrial correspondent

JAGUAR'S OWNERS, Ford, have announced plans for big changes at the company which employs 6700 in the UK; 400 jobs are to go at the firms Coventry plant at Browns Lane, 400 are to be transferred, and 750 jobs are due to go with the closure of the R&D centre at Whitley. This would leave only 2 Jaguar car production plants in the UK at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham, and Halewood in Liverpool. Browns Lane would remain open with 310 workers making wooden panelling for dashboards.

The workforce are furious not only because of the lack of consultation - workers found out about the closure through the media - but also because the company is reneging on a promise that they made to keep Browns Lane at the centre of UK Jaguar production. The workers believed this promise of the company and even agreed to changes in working practices in order to keep the plant viable.

At a recent factory meeting members of the TGWU and Amicus voted 86% to hold a ballot on industrial action to save their jobs and this is now going ahead. Workers at other Jaguar plants have voted in factory meetings to support any action, and similar meetings are being organised across Ford, Aston Martin, and Land Rover plants.

The leaders of the unions involved have vowed to do what is necessary to save the plant. Tony Woodley of the TGWU said: "Jaguar has undermined the trust of the workforce by breaking an agreement on the security of the West Midlands plants. Members are solid in their opposition and they are being backed all the way by the unions' leadership". Derek Simpson of Amicus has promised: "We will support and lead our members in whatever action they feel will be the most effective in opposing the cuts."

The closure of this plant would be another blow for the British motor industry that is still reeling from a big programme of closures in the last 5 years. The jobs can be saved but it will mean a struggle and the trade union leaderships must be prepared to back the workforce all the way. Now is the time for the awkward squad to prove themselves in action. Workers in the industry have had to give up too much in the last period - there must be no more job losses. The trade unions must put pressure on the Labour government to nationalise any company threatening redundancies or plant closures. □

Norwich Union: "Together we are stronger" - In a Union

by Kris Lawrie

INSURANCE COMPANY Norwich Union (NU) has declared its intention to outsource a further 950 jobs to India and Sri Lanka next year. This will lead to redundancies at the company's bases in Norwich and York with some job losses at other locations around the UK. The company expect to make up the majority of these through voluntary redundancy, but have said that 150 will be by compulsory redundancy.

NU have already "offshored" about 3,600 workers in the last year, and have plans to make this 7000 by the end of 2007. Amicus, now the UK's largest finance union, believes that NU's parent company, Aviva, has plans to outsource up to 25% of operations to India in the coming period.

This is pure greed on the part of NU - offshoring is a nice way of saying sacking. The company is sacking workers in Britain, and exploiting workers in India who earn 40% less than their British colleagues. NU made profits this year of £1.9 billion, none of which benefited the NU workforce whether in Norwich or Bangalore. In spite of this they have a target of a further £250 million in "efficiency savings." □

Strike dates set in airport's dispute

AS WE go to press strikes are looming in separate T&G disputes at London's two biggest airports Heathrow and Gatwick. These follow a rash of strikes which have affected ground crews around Britain over the last year.

The dispute of baggage handlers working for Servisair at Gatwick airport is over an increased workload for baggage handlers and cargo loaders. Two strike dates have been set for the beginning of this month with the dispute threatening to escalate if the company do not settle. Relations between unions and the company have been strained all summer but the mood for strike action, already high, was strengthened when the management sacked a union steward.

Meanwhile refuellers working for AFS (H&G Fuel Contracting Services) at Heathrow airport are planning 48 hours of consecutive strike action. This is over low pay at the company. Tanker drivers are doing a very skilled and potentially dangerous job, and complain that they can earn as little as £22,500 a year. AFS has grown quickly taking over rivals so they now control 40% of refuelling at Heathrow. This has resulted in drivers being transferred on lower money. The T&G estimate that one third of drivers have lost £9,500 a year. A union spokesman said: "the company is playing for high stakes and the clock is ticking away.... We are dealing with a serious situation. The union treats it seriously but the company are treating it with disdain." □

TUC must fight for jobs and pensions

by a TUC delegate

IN HIS speech to the TUC in Brighton Tony Blair was able to boast that the Labour government has reduced unemployment to its lowest level in generations, and invested more than any other advanced economy in health and education - then why the lack of applause? Blair was given an icy reception by almost everybody in the room. There was hardly any heckling, but hardly any applause either.

Blair admitted that he may have been 'slightly distracted' by all the international issues that he had to deal with in the last period, but "now is the time to show that I am back, even if I was never away." Many people - at least 100,000 civil servants - will be wishing that he had stayed away if the recently announced cuts are the result of Blair turning his attention back to the domestic agenda.

Instead of the normal lecture on flexibility and compromise the speech was designed to strike a conciliatory note, an attempt to shore up trade union support before next year's general election. Blair pointed to the recent government-trade union summit in Warwick where a deal was done to establish a 56-point programme of reforms from pensions to workplace rights as an example of how partnership between government and the trade unions works. Delegates tended to see the Warwick deal as too little, too late.

Given the good impression he was trying to create it is not surprising that Blair never mentioned the planned redundancies in the civil service - he was the only one. The PCS held a fringe meeting that attracted hundreds of delegates and about a dozen general secretaries on the evening before the debate on the planned cuts. PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka condemned the government's macho posturing with the Tories to see who could cut the most, and asked for solidarity from the other unions present virtually all of whom spoke offering full support. In the following day's debate all speakers came out in support of the stand that the union is taking. It was noted that the cuts would lead to a sharp decline in service. Parallels were drawn with the disastrous cuts in British Airways which left existing staff unable to cope.

The Labour Representation Committee (LRC) held a successful fringe meeting at

conference with 80-100 delegates and visitors in attendance. The LRC was established earlier this year by leading trade unionists and Labour Party members to develop a strategy to reclaim the Labour Party with socialist ideas, and has the backing of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs. There was an impressive array of speakers including John MacDonnell MP, Kevin Curran, Tony Woodley, Jeremy Dear, and Mark Serwotka. A debate developed on the approach we should take in reclaiming the party. Woodley and Curran, who were leading players in the Warwick agreement, favour using union muscle to pressurise the current leadership into action, at least until the election. While Dear and MacDonnell tended to talk about what we could do to replace the current Blairite leadership with a more socialist leadership.

"If we have to strike we will strike"

Another important issue that has been building up for a long while is pensions. Brendan Barber promised to continue to lead a fight on pensions "We will negotiate, we will campaign, and if we have to, we will strike." He also called for the state pension to be linked with earnings, the current state pension of £79.60 is equivalent to only 17% of the national average.

Most of the big private employers in Britain have taken pensions holidays in the last 20 years and many now find themselves with a huge shortfall in the schemes - where this happens the company, not the government, must be forced to put more money into the scheme to cover pensions - why should workers underwrite the companies profit.

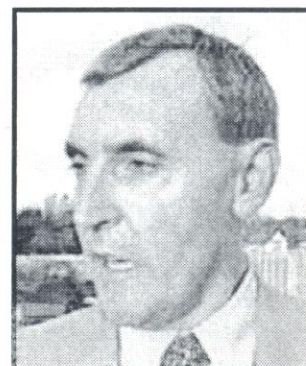
An important theme running through conference was employment rights and the repeal of the anti-union laws. An emergency motion was moved by the GMB in support of the sacked Wembley construction workers, who were present in the hall and received a standing ovation.

The problems facing

industry were discussed at length, motions were put calling for government intervention to protect industry. The problem with these motions is that they mistakenly focus on preserving profits rather than preserving jobs - rather than call for nationalisation of failing industries they call for subsidy.

This year will be an important year for the movement. A new layer of more left-wing leaders dubbed 'the awkward squad' has emerged in union elections over the last few years. As we have argued before this reflects a desire among the membership for a different approach and an increased willingness to fight. These new leaders are still largely untested, but already on the horizon is a civil service strike which could be the biggest event in the movement for a decade. This will test the leaders and challenge them to put their money where their mouth is. Promises to fight over jobs and pensions must be turned into action. A radical speech at the conference rostrum will have no effect in making the employers back down if they do not believe it - an empty threat is no threat.

Above all if this opportunity is to be seized it is important that we build on the good work that has been done reforming the unions - and taking the struggle to the employers to fight for fair pay, rights and conditions for all employees from day one. In order for this to work it is necessary to take the struggle into the Labour Party to fight for a fundamental change of leadership and approach - If Labour wants to keep its massive majority it must use it in the cause of labour. □



Victory at Wembley Workers 1 - Bosses 0

Socialist Appeal: Congratulations on your victory at Wembley. What is the situation now?

Tony Connor - Leading member of the strike of Wembley construction workers, and now Amicus shop steward: The latest development is that two thirds of our workforce are back on site as of Monday 27th and we have an SPA in place. Everything is now done all above board legally as per the NAECI agreement which really we had in the first place but we didn't have it as an SPA. Everybody feels a lot safer, a lot stronger now through what we've achieved through this dispute.

SA: How did the dispute get settled?

TC: In the end the dispute was settled by negotiation. In the end it was the two national officers from both unions Paul Corby for Amicus and Keith Hazelwood from GMB and they took up the negotiations and really they got the SPA. Full credit to them for what they've done. I think a lot of the lads felt that they preferred the stance that the GMB took. To begin with they didn't repudiate the action, they looked into everything before they made any decision whereas Amicus didn't they just repudiated the action immediately.

SA: What about the compensation issue what are you going to do about that?

TC: Basically that is in the hands of the union lawyers at this moment in time but they don't want to jeopardise anything. They want to wait till everybody's back on site but they will be taking up a claim for TUPE and unfair dismissal.

SA: What do you feel you have achieved by the dispute?

TC: I think we have achieved quite a lot. Okay we've suffered badly with five weeks loss of earnings but I think the industry as a whole has achieved something, I think it's a major victory. It's sent out a message to all these other sites, we're not here to

be bullied, we don't want agency workers in doing our job. We've achieved that here, we've really protected the national agreement and I think that definitely been a major victory.

SA: You said that the GMB gave you more support. What kind of things did they do that Amicus didn't?

TC: The GMB didn't repudiate the action. They said it is a lawful picket and that we have done nothing wrong and we've been locked out and we were entitled to demonstrate. If Amicus had done the same everybody would have felt a lot better. But Amicus sent no representation to the job whatsoever. I think a bad, a very bad, fulltime official handled this very very poorly and if there had been a decent man in there this dispute might never have happened.

SA: In light of the dispute how do you feel that the union has to change to serve the members better?

TC: I think obviously one thing that has got to happen and if it had happened by now this dispute wouldn't have taken place is, as Derek Simpson promised in his campaign, that the construction section would get its own autonomy and we would get our own full time officials who would be elected by the members and that they would be people in this industry.

SA: Where do you think the construction industry is going to go from here in terms of the tasks of the union organisation?

TC: I think if we do get our own autonomy and we do get our own elected fulltime officers that construction will get stronger and the union will get stronger as well. This victory, I mean the eyes of the country have been on our dispute and they're seeing a bit of a victory here now and that sends out a message to other sites - if the union get behind the members and give us our own autonomy, give us our own fulltime officers elected, then we can only get stronger.

SA: What would you like to say to the people who helped you with the dispute?

TC: I would like to thank everybody who helped us. The support that we got behind the scenes was fantastic. The Socialist Appeal, the Morning Star, the Gazette and the Socialist Workers among others were fantastic. The local UNISON office was fantastic, I can't believe the support, it was incredible. A lot of people behind the scenes really done us proud, they did a lot more for us than the actual union did. I'd like to thank the other sites that sent us in support as well, they were totally behind us because they knew that if we didn't get this dispute solved here the rank and file would have come out and backed us. The only thing we are going to do here, we are giving ourselves a few weeks to get settled in and get some money together, but then we are going to have a party and everybody who helped us in the dispute is invited.

SA: What do you feel you've achieved?

Andy, Leading member of the dispute: I feel it's a good result, eventually after four weeks scraping for money and keeping ourselves down there, keeping the lads, together everything's turned out okay. We've achieved our rights for the future, the NAECI, bluebook, agreement and everything that we should have had transferred over under TUPE.

SA: Do you feel that it's sent out a message to the rest of the industry?

Andy: I should imagine so because friends in the industry have been looking at this and taking note. Cause its happening all over, they're using cheap labour. Things are getting a bit disgraceful in our industry. People are being taken on by French and Belgian consortiums, they're using Portuguese labour and all health and safety, terms and conditions are going out the window.

or something you know what I mean. It's not acting like a union by any means. We had no support from Amicus till the later stages when the union was under a lot of pressure at the TUC.

SA: How do you feel Amicus has got to change?

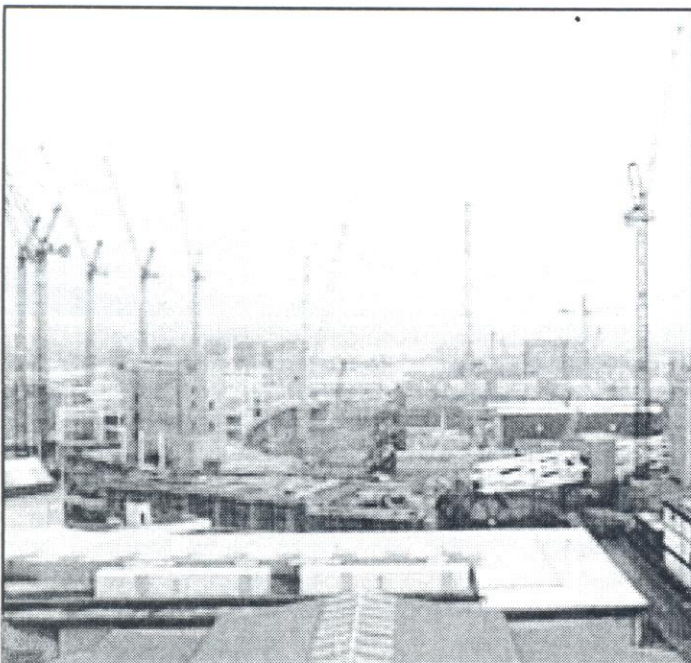
Andy: They've got to start listening to people really, I mean a union is a union of men. A union isn't five or six blokes sat up top dictating to people is it?

SA: Were you one of those active in supporting Derek Simpson's campaign?

Andy: Yes, I was on Canary Wharf at the time, I shook hands with Derek when he came down, and gave him my full support and I gave him my vote. You don't really know what happens behind the scenes. It always seems that people have got great ideas then when they get to the top they realise these great ideas were not quite as simple as they first thought they were, I can understand some of the situation that Derek Simpson is put in, you can't please everyone. I suppose it's the same situation as with the Labour Party. As far as unionism's concerned and what happened to us they sacked 240 blokes for nothing but demanding our terms and conditions and we got no support from the union - that's disgraceful really.

SA: What's the mood of the lads now, are you happy?

Andy: We don't know. We're happy now, we might be unhappy tomorrow. It's happened to us before, we've been sacked for no reason when a company's done it before why can't they do it again. When we've been on there and got the feel of it for a few weeks then maybe we'll be happy, but you're never going to be totally happy till you find out how they're going to treat you.



Livingstone announces new rises in bus and tube fares

by our London correspondent

On September 21, at his weekly press conference, the London Mayor unveiled plans to increase fares on London's public transport. Ken Livingstone, formerly known as "Red Ken", announced that the new fares for London Underground and buses are an "essential" measure to secure a £3 billion investment programme for London's public transport. The new fares will be effective from January 2005. Tube fares will rise by 1% above inflation while bus fares will shoot up by 10% above inflation. These measures will hit the 3 million who squeeze into the tube each day and millions more who depend on the bus. On the other hand Livingstone pledged that by September 2005 the free travel on buses for children under 11 will be extended to all under-16s. He also defended the fares rises saying that commuters will pay the same average fares as when he was first elected in 2000. While the investment plans will be something progressive and positive for all Londoners the means that Livingstone is using to finance these plans are damaging the already precarious finances of the majority of families in London and also his electoral support. Ken Livingstone is failing to put pressure on central government to get funds to improve London transport. If Livingstone waged a serious struggle to make the Secretary of Transport finance these plans he would receive the backing of the majority of pensioners, students and workers who use public transport everyday. Instead of putting pressure on the Blairite government he is making the poorest layer of Londoners pay for this much needed investment plan. Workers and their families in London did not elect him as a Mayor to put even more economic pressure on them. □

Defend civil service jobs

Rachel Heemskerck, Chair PCS DWP East of England (personal capacity)

ON THE 12th of July Gordon Brown launched an unprecedented attack on civil service jobs by announcing 104,000 job losses. The worst affected areas are Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Defence, Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue. However, every government department, agency and non-departmental public body will be expected to make savings and these will impact on all civil service jobs in what the government is calling "efficiency savings". At the same time as these cuts the government plan to move 20,000 jobs out of London and the South East.

In further attacks on civil servants the government is planning to change the rules around self-certification of sickness in an attempt to bully staff into work. Adding insult to injury they also plan to force us into working until we are 65 instead of 60, which is when we can get our civil service pension under present rules.

The government believes these cuts will improve the service it offers to the general public. How can closing 40 local Department for Work and Pension offices

and moving what they do into call centres help? How can disbanding the Local Pension Service help, where can people get the 1-2-1 advice they need and want when the only way to contact the service they now rely on to be in their local town will be via telephone or on the internet? This government is moving away from the face-to-face contact people are used to and will offer more services "on-line". Gordon Brown said he wanted less faceless bureaucrats and a more streamlined service. The cuts he is proposing will not give this. The jobs that are being axed are those of workers at the sharp end who process benefits and help pensioners not the bureaucrats in their ivory towers in senior posts. The service offered will not improve and it will be the most vulnerable in society who suffer.

Faced with attacks on this scale it is essential that the full force of the union be mobilised to defend our jobs and conditions of service. We must support the National Executive and General Secretary in the campaign to save our jobs. The union has grown by 28,000 since the

beginning of the year to over 315,000 members and is still growing due to the attacks from management at all levels.

From 1st October to 23rd October there will be a ballot for a one-day national strike of the whole civil service to take place on the 5th of November. This national one-day strike will bring PCS members from every department together in a massive protest, one that the government will not be able to ignore. This must be the start of a growing co-ordinated campaign including increased joint industrial action until all civil service jobs are safe. □

Social Workers Strike in Liverpool

by Ray McHale, Cheshire UNISON (personal capacity)

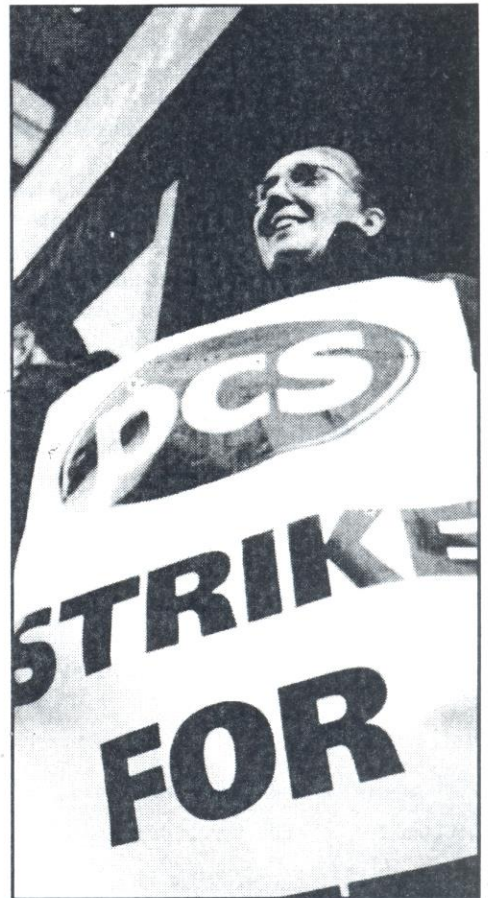
OVER ONE hundred social workers and other staff in Liverpool City Children's Services have been on all out strike since 24th August. This is the culmination of a dispute, which has been bubbling since February, when Social Work Emergency Duty Team staff took action.

The dispute is not about money but about the quality of service that is provided, and the bullying management style that has developed under Liverpool Chief Executive, Sir David Henshaw. Management's refusal to fill vacancies has left Children's Services' staff with unmanageable workloads, and lack of consultation over changes - including ignoring agreed procedures - has led to deteriorating working relations.

Staff who took strike action earlier in the year, to try to prevent the closure of the Emergency Duty Team, have been victimised after returning to negotiations. If the team closes emergency calls will be handled by call centre staff with no social work training, who will then refer on the information. Social workers believe that this will lead to much initial assessment information being lost, with a consequent danger to vulnerable children.

Staff have been picketing establishments, and looking to widen the strike.

Donations to the "The UNISON Strike Fund" can be sent to the Branch Secretary, Liverpool UNISON, GO1, The Cotton Exchange Building, Bixteth Street, Liverpool, L3 9JR. □



Don't let bosses divide us

by Kris Lawrie

IT IS hardly possible to open a paper these days but it is filled with horror stories about invasions of foreigners who are coming over to sunny Britain to live off our fantastic benefits system, or steal the best council houses and jobs. Workers are confronted with a wave of propaganda designed to turn them against foreign workers. In the absence of a clear class lead from the trade unions and the Labour Party some workers can get sucked in and develop illusions in these ideas.

The BNP have been trying to spread their filth in working class areas, especially those that have been impoverished by the collapse of the traditional industries. The BNP are no friends of the British working class - quite the reverse. However, the lack of any decent response, let alone lead, from the leaders of the labour movement has caused some workers to become resentful and look for easy targets to blame for their problems. It is all too common to hear people say - foreigners are stealing our jobs - they are attacking me by undercutting my wages - they are lazy, they are just here for a free handout.

This has been stoked up and manipulated by the bosses using their mouthpiece the tabloid press. It suits their interests to divert the blame for social problems away from themselves and their government and onto foreigners. They are trying to divide up the working class and sow resentments so that they spend their time squabbling and fighting among themselves.

In many industries, particularly those on short-term contracts such as construction or road transport, foreign workers have been brought in intentionally and paid lower wages by the bosses in order to drive a wedge between them and British workers. These industries are easy targets for the employer because workers here change jobs a lot, so a workers wage and con-

ditions are constantly changing anyway. If the workforce is divided in this way it strengthens the employers hand and leads to further attacks on both British and foreign workers.

Wherever workers are employed on lower wages or worse terms - especially when that employment is designed to undermine existing wages and conditions - the union's job is to recruit those workers and wage a united struggle for better wages and conditions for all workers.

Solidarity and unity of all workers is an old principle of the trade union movement. It is not a moral or sentimental question but a question of concrete necessity - for the working class division always spells defeat. Foreign workers are not trying to undermine wages they are only doing what they need to do to earn a living. It is the British employers who are exploiting foreign workers and at the same time using them to attack British workers. The main enemy of British workers is the British bosses, and the main enemy of foreign labour working in Britain is also the British bosses. The effect of disunity among workers is a lesson that was learned by workers in the past by bitter experience. This poison of racism and xenophobia must be spat out.

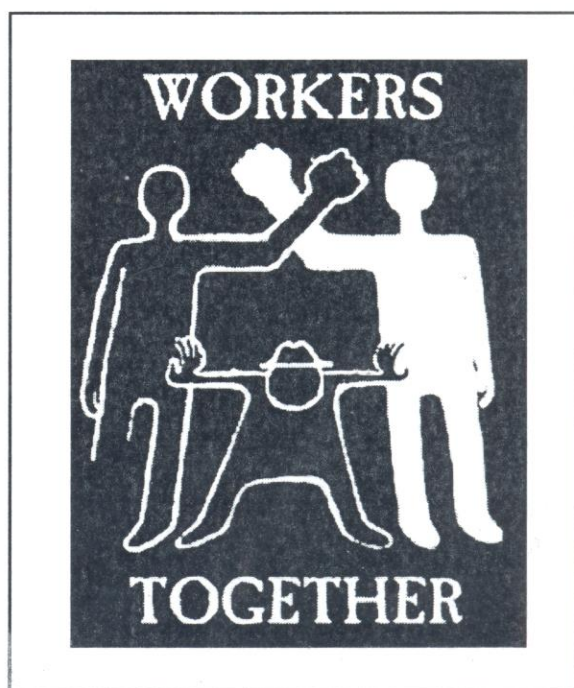
Fight the real enemy

The truth is that there is no shortage of jobs needing done, just look around any area of Britain and you can see that. You will also see that neither is there any shortage of money to pay for this work. The problem is that the money is in the hands of the penny pinching bosses - it is not used for the benefit of society. So while the employer rakes in his millions of pound - millions of workers from all ethnic groups are condemned to a life of want. They are eating a steak dinner and they want us to fight over the

crumbs from their table. We must direct our blame where it belongs.

At the moment the unions play into the bosses hands by arguing for the 'defence of British industry' through state subsidy - they want the government to subsidise profits to protect British capitalists from foreign capitalists - this isn't the role of the union. The Labour government is playing an even worse role pandering to middle England with their racist rhetoric on asylum seekers.

It is time for the labour movement to change policy. Stop protecting the bosses start defending the workers! We need a serious campaign to defend jobs and create more, fight for decent wages and living conditions for all workers. If the employers say they can't afford it then they shouldn't be in business. The Labour government should nationalise any company that is threatening closures or paying poverty wages and use the profits in the interests of the working class. The only way to stamp out racism and all other divisions among the working class is to unite the class in a common struggle. □



This year the European Social Forum comes to Britain!

by Ramon Samblas, Hands off Venezuela campaign

ON THE 15th, 16th and 17th of October the European Social Forum is going to take place in London. The European Social Forum (ESF) was launched following the first meeting of the World Social Forum that took place in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This massive gathering will be a chance for trade unionists, youth and activists from very different political backgrounds to express their rejection of a capitalist Europe and their will to build a new Europe where human need replaces capitalist profit as the main priority. During these three days people from all over Europe and other parts of the world will meet and discuss their experiences, ideas and programmes for waging a struggle against capitalism. On October 17 a massive march will flood the streets of London. Two years ago the ESF march gathered around 1,500,000 in the Italian town of Florence. A very strong element of that demonstration was against the imperialist war and this fact attracted loads of people from all over Italy and Europe. Participants on that demonstration were very impressed to be received by the local population showing clenched fists from their balconies in solidarity and people at their front doors offering coffee

and biscuits to the public.

The 2003 edition of the ESF was also very impressive, however the demonstration that took place was far less well-attended than the previous year. This year at the ESF people will have the chance to visit the stalls held by different campaigns, trade unions and leftwing groups from all over Europe. Different seminars and workshops will also take place and they will deal with the different problems and events that are happening from China and Iraq to Cuba and Venezuela. There will also be music, cinema and other cultural events.

Get organised

However not everything is as nice as it seems. This year the registration prices are very high. Waged individuals are required to pay £30 and the unemployed and students are required to pay £20. Last year tickets were available at 10 euros each. It is quite evident that these prices are going to put off many people potentially interested in a left wing gathering like the ESF. Also some complaints have sprung up from different NGOs, left wing activists and campaigning groups about the lack of transparency in

the decision making process. However, organisational problems are not the main threat to the ESF. There is the danger that the ESF will become just a talking shop. It is up to everybody involved in the daily struggle against capitalism to analyse the role of international gatherings like the ESF. On the one hand it is not correct to dismiss it as useless because the ESF is a great platform for all genuine anti-capitalists and socialists who want to put their ideas and programme for a fairer society forward. On the other hand we cannot put our hopes in the ESF as a magic solution for the international struggle against capitalism. The ESF is not an end itself nor the main means in the struggle for socialism. If you want to get involved in the fight for a socialist future don't reserve this fight just for international gatherings. Get organised, adopt the internationalist ideas and programme of Marxism and of course raise international issues in your trade union branch, your College or your University like the rejection of the US occupation of Iraq, the US embargo of Cuba and the need for solidarity with the Venezuelan Revolution. □



Don't forget to look out for the Marxist.com and Hands Off Venezuela stalls at the European Social Forum. Why not come to our seminars and find out more about getting involved in the struggle for socialism.

□ Ask your *Socialist Appeal* seller for more details.

It's Always Fair weather?

by Steve Jones

THERE HAS been a very long standing joke over the years about the British tendency to complain about the weather. Suddenly it is not very funny any more. Last year we had the hottest August on record, following on from one of the wettest winters with serious flooding around the countryside. This year we had a very hot June then a very wet July and August. Flash floods resulted in a number of life threatening incidents in Cornwall and elsewhere, causing major damage and disruption. The south of England was hit by thunderstorms which lasted for hours and hours. The 'experts' are now telling us to expect the unexpected so far as weather is concerned!

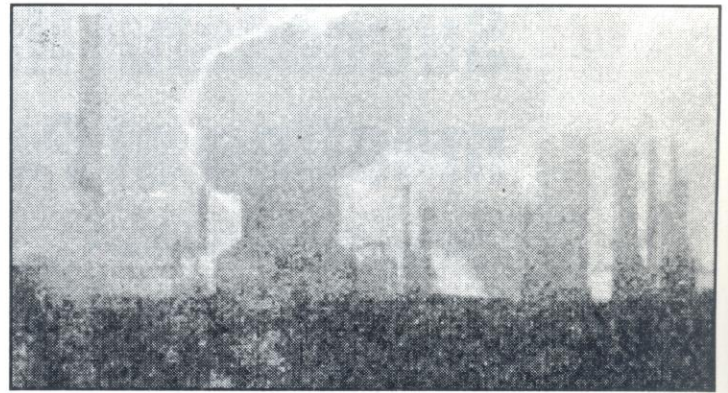
But this chaos is not just confined to the shores of the United Kingdom. Throughout the world we are seeing unusual patterns emerging in the weather systems. As I write we have just witnessed on our TV screens the damage caused by a whole series of hurricanes and tornados which have hit the Caribbean and American coastlines. Freak flooding around the world has cost the lives of hundreds of people and left many thousands more without homes. At the start of the summer a major Hollywood film speculated that our chaotic weather could lead to a new ice age - a theory which some scientists now think possible.

Governments and various international agencies are now openly talking about a global fight against climate change. Indeed for decades now the

international community, as they like to be called, have been meeting to attempt to tackle the ongoing damage to our environment. And they have certainly had a lot to talk about; from pollution of the rivers and air, to shrinking ice caps; from the decline of the rainforests to the damage to the ozone layer. If this article was to attempt to summarize even the most essential questions and problems now being faced, it would fill a now rather large and grim book.

So what is being done? Considering the prospect before us and those who will come after us, this is a very pressing question. Tony Blair has made a series of speeches on the question, even the Tory leader Howard has now spoken up on it - raising a few cynical eyebrows in the process. But actions seem to not be matching words. The *Independent* newspaper (14 Sept, 2004) has reported that the target figure to cut Carbon Dioxide emission levels by 20% by 2010 will not be met - indeed UK emission levels are rising. The UK may be on target to hit the modest reduction levels of 'greenhouse' gases by 2010 agreed at the Kyoto conference but this has been rather undermined by Bush's decision to withdraw the US, the main culprit here, from the agreement.

The same newspaper report went on to comment that most of the other targets on pollution are only being partially met - and this from a government which is supposed to be committed to taking action.



Countries like the US are not even doing that. Why is this? Are they mad? Well, considering that the great powers have spent decades and billions of pounds funding a nuclear weapons programme whose sole purpose is to wipe out all life on earth, you might well think so. But the truth is more fundamental than that.

Governments have defended their decisions not to take effective action on the environment by stating that they wish to 'defend jobs.' This may seem a strange thing to say given the tendency of the ruling class to lay people off at the drop of a hat - they haven't been very keen to keep people in work up to now. But if you translate 'defend jobs' into what they really mean, which is 'defend profits,' then it makes perfect sense.

Action required conflicts with capitalism

The sort of action required to get companies to, quite literally, clean up their act would eat into their precious profits and this is something they are not prepared to do. The tendency towards short-termism on the part of our bosses means that they are not interested in what will happen tomorrow - that is someone else's problem - but rather what are the profit levels today. The very nature of capitalism means that ever greater resources are wasted in overproduction of goods which will go from factory to waste dump without ever being used. All this in the face of people going without.

The answer is to produce what is needed and ensure that the people get it. But that is not what capitalism is about - in the final analysis what capitalism produces is just one product, profit for themselves - a profit, it should be remembered, gained on the backs of a working class who actually produce the goods and services they seek to benefit from. This chaotic method of production is at the heart of capitalism and they cannot do otherwise. This is why we are socialists. Because socialism is the sort of society which can, on the one hand, produce what people want and need on the basis of a planned system of production and, on the other, cut out the destructive wastage which is burning up the earth's resources. Where the profit motive is removed then you can get the sort of action taken which will properly reduce levels of pollution, restore essential aspects of the worlds eco-structure and begin to repair the great harm caused by war, profit and greed to our planet so that our children can enjoy a safer, better standard of life. One thing all the scientists agree on is that the crisis of climate change and the damage to the environment is not an irreversible problem - the human race can still take effective action. It doesn't need us to give up on industrial society and return to some rural idyll which never was. What it does need is for us to change society in favour of one which will act in all our interests not just those of the few. □

Successful Hands Off Venezuela meeting at Portcullis House

by Ray Smith and Fred Weston

THE HANDS Off Venezuela campaign public meeting held on September 7 in Portcullis House (Houses of Parliament annex) was very successful with around 70 people attending, among them a group of the local Bolivarian Circle, who arrived wearing red Bolivarian caps and T-shirts supporting the "No" in the referendum.

The meeting was of particular importance as it was the first time that a public debate was being held in London since the recall referendum took place on August 15.

Among the speakers were two Labour MPs, John McDonnell, leader of the Campaign Group of MPs, the left wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, another well known left Labour MP, who is known for his socialist views on many issues and also for having voted against Blairite policy repeatedly over the past few years.

Alongside them were Alan Woods, editor of the In Defence of Marxism web site and Jorge Martin, international secretary of the HOV campaign (www.handsof-venezuela.org) and the European correspondent of "El Topo Obrero" (journal of the Venezuelan Revolutionary Marxist Current).

Alan Woods has visited Venezuela on several occasions, the most important visit being last April when he was officially invited to take part in the celebrations around the second anniversary of the defeat of the 2002 coup. He was invited because of the authority he has built up as the editor of Marxist.com through his many articles analysing events in Venezuela, and because he was among the first to promote the Hands Off Venezuela campaign. While he was there he met Chavez personally and spoke at several meetings where Chavez was pres-

ent. He has also discussed with many activists in the Bolivarian movement. Because of his experience, Alan was able to give a very good insight into what is really happening in the country.

Jorge Martin, on the other hand has paid lengthy visits to Venezuela, as part of his task of promoting and building up the Hands Off Venezuela campaign, and he has just returned from his latest visit there.

John McDonnell MP

We have to highlight the role of John McDonnell in supporting and promoting the Hands Off Venezuela campaign. He explained how he presented in parliament an "Early Day Motion" in support of the popular movement in Venezuela, for which he got the support of 30 Labour MPs. Although this is not going to change the views of Tony Blair and the Cabinet, it does play an important role in getting the question discussed and brings to the attention of many activists on the left what is going in Venezuela.

John McDonnell has repeatedly expressed his sympathies for the struggle against imperialism in Venezuela in speeches and press statements. In his introductory speech he commented on the experience of Chile in 1973 and he linked the movement in Venezuela with the experiences of the Chilean people back in the 1970s.

He rounded off his speech by expressing his commitment to gather Left Labour MPs in favour of the Venezuelan Revolution and to give the Hands off Venezuela campaign "a parliamentary voice". But he did not limit his commitment simply to the parliamentary level. He emphasised the need to extend the Venezuelan solidarity campaign to the wider labour

movement, in particular to the trade unions and he also stressed the need for international solidarity.

Jorge Martin spoke after John McDonnell explaining the role of the international and Venezuelan bourgeois media in spreading lies and distortions. He gave a full report on how the media has consistently tried to undermine the popular movement in Venezuela. He explained how so-called "serious" newspapers like "El Universal" and others have been openly talking about another coup d'etat and they have even openly discussed in their pages the idea of assassinating Chavez.

He compared this to Britain, and pointed to the fact that if this were done here, there is no doubt that the authors of such articles would be arrested. And yet Chavez shows incredible tolerance of these right-wing reactionaries and lets them continue unhindered in their dirty work. In spite of this the western media continue to brand Chavez as a "dictator". If any criticism can be made of Chavez on this question, it is that he is too mild with these people, the exact opposite of what the western media accuse him of.

Jorge Martin described how the movement, the grassroots, the rank and file workers and poor, organised themselves to win the referendum.

But the most inspiring part of his speech was when he talked about how the Venezuelan workers had taken over and run the state-owned oil company by themselves during the opposition organised sabotage of the company. Jorge Martin pointed out that the workers had demonstrated concretely that "bosses are not needed to run one of the most sophisticated companies in the world - the PDVSA oil company". The experience of the oil workers highlights

the power of the conscious movement of our class.

Alan Woods analysed the situation after the recall referendum. He congratulated the Venezuelan masses for their victory but he advised them to remain vigilant. In referring to the results of the recall referendum he said, "We've had a victory in a battle but the war is not finished". He explained what a revolution is. Many people see a revolution as the day the barricades are manned. That is ignoring the real process of revolution. Alan explained that a revolution is when the mass of working people say, "enough is enough" and decide to take their destiny into their own hands.

He explained how the poor and downtrodden masses of Venezuela have risen to their feet. They have acquired a dignity they did not feel they had before. He stressed how the reforms carried out by Chavez, the free education, healthcare, cheap food for the poor, etc., were the basis of the mass support for Chavez. He pointed out that as opposed to Britain or the USA, in Venezuela there is a concrete difference between the "Opposition" and the Chavez government, and the masses can feel this. That is why they turned out so massively in the elections.

Alan, however, warned that there is no guarantee that these reforms will be maintained. He explained that the Opposition had received a serious blow in the referendum, but the Venezuelan oligarchy and its imperialist backers will not give up. They are already dis-



From left to right:
John McDonnell MP, Rob Sewell, Alan Woods, and Jorge Martin.

cussing what step to take next. So long as the economic levers of the country remain in their hands the revolution is still in danger. He added that it was the duty of workers and youth internationally to support the revolution in Venezuela.

Solidarity Links

After the speakers had finished giving their introductory remarks, there was a very interesting debate. There was a lively discussion about what the tasks of our Venezuelan brothers and sisters are in order to defend and ensure the future of the Revolution. Calls were made to set up solidarity links between British and Venezuelan students. Different activists from the RMT, the NUJ, the Bolivarian Circle, the Global Women Strike, the Labour Party and the Hands Off Venezuela campaign itself put forward their views.

One RMT member present asked the MPs what could really be achieved by being in the Labour Party. In his concluding remarks John McDonnell explained that we are not going to convince Blair, but that there are many

people in the Labour Party, including Members of Parliament who are fighting to win the Labour Party to socialist ideas. He stressed the need to fight to change the party.

Jeremy Corbyn arrived a little later during the debate as he had a prior commitment, a meeting with Hans Blix who had come to speak on his experience in trying to find non-existent "Weapons of Mass Destruction".

Jeremy pointed out that the Venezuelan Revolution is a beacon for all the Latin American masses. One of his comments that caught the ear of the audience was his definition of the recall referendum as "a rightwing plot with an amazing result". He correctly reminded the audience that the campaign to have a recall referendum was in fact a manoeuvre of the opposition, in the first place.

He reminded everyone of how the Bush administration had immediately come out in support of the April 2002 coup in Venezuela that had attempted to remove Chavez from power. But even here in Britain a certain undersecretary in the Foreign Office had also declared support for the

coup.

In his concluding remarks, Alan Woods answered some of the points that had been raised. Some of those present had emphasised the need for "peaceful revolution". One member of the audience had said that "we fight the opposition with the Constitution". Alan pointed out that Marxists are in favour of peaceful change. We are also realists. The opposition will not use peaceful means. That is why the revolutionary movement must be prepared, and the workers must know how to use arms. How else can you defend the democratically elected government of Venezuela against coup plotters and foreign armies.

Long Lasting Solution

He added, however, that the only real long-lasting solution is to expropriate the oligarchs, to take over the commanding heights of the economy and place them under democratic workers' control and management. He pointed out that during the American Revolution, the property of those supporting the British was expropriated. What was good for the American Revolution is good for the Venezuelan.

At the end of the meeting we found out that whether they agreed or not with the different speakers and different opinions put forward during the debate, people had enjoyed the meeting and learnt something from it. There was a collection for the Hands Off Venezuela campaign which raised £120. ■

World of worry

by Michael Roberts

OVER THE summer, world stock markets tread water. Indeed, the movement up or down in share prices was the smallest since 1979. That tells us that investors in capitalism are really unsure whether the world economy is set for sustained growth (as their political leaders tell them it is) or not.

Certainly in the first half of this year, the US economy seemed to increase its output at a very fast pace, at something like an annual 4.5% increase. Japan grew even faster, although of course this was from a low level, after years of comparative stagnation. The rest of Asia too, led by China, was racing along at around 6% a year. Only Europe, Latin America and, of course, the Middle East and Africa were limping along.

But investors remained worried over the summer. Sure, the government and the Federal Reserve, America's monetary authority, were saying that all was well and prosperity was returning after the recession year of 2001 and the weak recovery of 2002 and 2003. But the summer figures for job growth in the US and for wages and incomes were poor.

Indeed, despite all the efforts of Messrs Bush and Greenspan, it looks certain that there will be fewer people employed in the US at the end of Bush's first four years than there were when the president came into office in January 2001. And that would be the first time that had happened since President Hoover presided over the Great Depression of the 1930s.

And many of the jobs that had been created were low-paid, unskilled work in the retail and catering industries without decent incomes, pensions, healthcare or sick pay. Other jobs were in government ("homeland security"), which in no way contribute to boosting output and an efficient economy.

Even this improvement from the recession of 2001 had only been possible through a mas-

sive increase in credit not backed by productive investment. First, Mr Greenspan at the Federal Reserve, drove down interest rates to 1%, an unbelievably low level. So low, alongside average inflation of prices in the shops of 1.5-2.0%, that in effect the monetary authorities in the US were lending money for nothing in real terms! As a result, the supply of money increased at over 20% a year during 2001 and 2002. That's credit with a vengeance.

Awash with credit

Alongside that, the Bush administration launched a whole series of tax cuts, aimed mainly at the rich and big business, but also affecting middle-income groups. Also they increased government spending by over 20% a year. Americans found that they could borrow money for virtually nothing to buy houses and cars and other goods. And as long as they had a job, they also had to pay less in taxes. The US was flush with paper money and credit. No wonder Americans went out and spent like there was no tomorrow.

But there is a tomorrow and that's when this binge comes to an end. So far, the huge American credit bubble

has continued right up to this summer. How has it lasted so long? Well, the main reason has been the weakness of economic recovery in the rest of the world. Americans have spent more with their credit and bought goods from the rest of the world. The US is now running a deficit on trade equivalent to nearly 6% of its annual output. That's a record high.

That deficit has been financed by the rest of the world. Japanese, Chinese and European exporters have sold their goods to Americans and piled up the dollars. These dollars have been put in the banks and not spent (on the whole). In turn, the banks in China, Japan and Europe have promptly used all these savings to buy US government bonds and shares, or just kept dollar accounts, even though they could expect only 1% interest on their accounts. So in effect, the rest of the world has given the US its savings to finance the spending of Americans. The whole great credit bubble has gone on inflating.

Why have foreigners gone on doing this? The monetary authorities of China, Japan and Europe do not want America and the dollar to collapse. If they stopped buying American bonds or stopped holding dollars and switched into yen or euros, America would come tumbling down and push the world into recession. So they have gone on perpetuating this imbalance in world capitalism. It's another example of how capitalism never develops the productive forces of the world in a planned or balanced way.

This very imbalance cannot last forever. It's gone on much longer than expected already. There can be no more tax cuts because the US government is running up a huge deficit on its annual budget and the Fed cannot lower interest rates any more. The answer to the problem is for the US to grow steadily,



not through a credit binge but through increased investment in equipment and more employment of labour. Then the US can sustain its economic recovery, at least for several years. That would mean the dollar was secure and Japan, China and Europe could also expand in the same way.

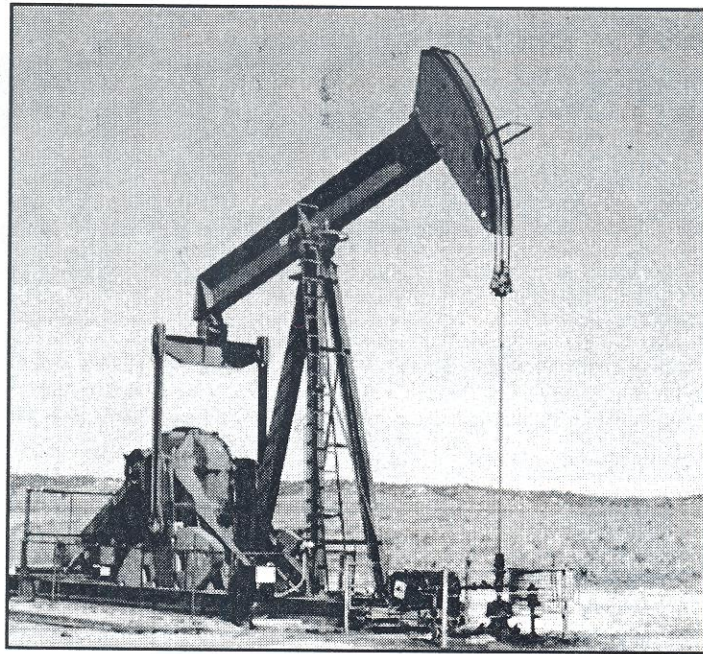
Then world trade would grow much faster than world production and so provide the markets for capitalism. The worry this summer was that the US might be faltering in its recovery. Several factors suggest that all is not well for the hope of sustained and balanced growth.

Oil price rockets

First, there is the oil price. Demand for energy has rocketed over the last few years. China is sucking up as much oil as it can find to run its industries that are flooding US and European shops with cheap goods. At the same time, the supply of oil has been restricted by the US occupation of Iraq and subsequent guerrilla resistance, which has cut off most of Iraq's oil exports. And there is just too little leeway in excess production capacity for comfort. So the oil price has rocketed.

The trouble with oil is that both industry and households cannot do without it to run businesses and transport. So if more is spent on petrol and fuel, then there is less to go round to spend on other things. As a result, Americans are starting to cut back on more spending in the shops. Less spending means fewer sales for business and eventually lower profits.

And here is the crux. From the depths of recession in 2001, American and



European businesses have raised their profits massively. They've done so by ruthlessly cutting their workforces to the bare minimum. Millions of Americans lost their jobs. And companies also boosted profits by not spending anything on new computers, machinery, building etc. They saved money. And with American households increasingly flush with borrowed money, sales rose sharply. The growth in profits hit 30% a year by 2003.

But things don't look so good from here. As companies start to employ more people and start to invest more, they will drive up costs. And US, European and Japanese companies still find it difficult to raise prices when faced with competition from low-wage China in world markets. And with oil prices so high, it all adds up to sharp decline in profit growth just at a time when Americans are starting to spend less in the shops. Profits are set to be squeezed.

The government and the Federal Reserve are hoping that America's economic growth will continue. Then Bush can expect the huge budget deficit to narrow and Greenspan can start to raise interest rates (as he is gingerly doing) and so keep foreigners

financing the American economy.

But if American consumers spend less and businesses do not increase investment because profits are weaker, then the game could be up. Any slowdown in US growth in the rest of 2004 and into 2005 will hit growth in Europe (still weak) and in Japan (dependent on exporting to the US).

The world capitalist economy has also relied on the expansion of world markets. In the boom of the 1990s, world trade grew at an average rate of 7%, about twice as fast as world production. That provided real support to each national capitalist economy. However, since 2001, trade has grown only slightly faster than production. In 2003, it rose about 4% compared to a similar rise in production. The big hope for 2004 was that it would double that pace and so generate new demand for capitalist industry.

The huge rise in oil prices and the slowdown in American spending could put paid to that hope over the next six months or so. And if trade growth does slow down, the competition for markets will intensify, put further pressure on profits and so stifle investment.

The boom of the 1990s for capitalism was a product of many things apart from world trade. One was the collapse of Stalinism. That meant capitalist governments could cut back on defence spending, reduce taxes and so boost the profits of the private sector. Another was very low prices for commodities like copper, zinc and oil used in industry and the poor countries of the world were unable to raise prices. Another was the boost in hi-tech innovations like the Internet and e-commerce that raised productivity and reduced the need to take on too much labour. Finally, there was the massive credit bubble.

All the factors that helped capitalism in the 1990s are no longer around. The credit boost is coming to an end. House prices are beginning to flag everywhere. The cost of government is rising dramatically for capitalism in this era of American imperialist adventure. Commodity and oil prices have reached new heights. And the great hi-tech productivity revolution is exhausted.

Too many maybes

Maybe the American credit bubble will go on expanding for a little while longer. Maybe oil prices will subside and things will improve in Iraq, North Korea and other hotspots to allow a reduction in the spending on the 'war on terror'. Maybe world trade growth will accelerate and China will go on growing at 9-10% a year. But the risks are rising that none of these maybes will happen. That's what has been worrying capitalist investors as we go into the autumn north of the equator. □

Lenin's role in the October revolution

As part of our series on Lenin, we are republishing an edited piece *by Alan Woods*, originally written in November 1992 to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution. This article outlines the vital role Lenin played in rearming and preparing the Bolshevik Party for the successful socialist revolution in October 1917.

THE PROVISIONAL Government which emerged from the February Revolution was a government of landlords and capitalists calling themselves "democrats." The right-wing Labour ("Trudovik") leader Kerensky entered the government as Minister of Justice. The war minister was the big Moscow industrialist, Guchkov. The "liberal" Milyukov became Foreign Minister.

The worker activists were deeply distrustful of the government. But among the mass of society there was a wave of euphoria. The masses had illusions in their leaders, and regarded Kerensky as their spokesman in the government.

The prevailing atmosphere of revolutionary democratic intoxication even affected some of the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd. Lenin was still in exile in Switzerland. The main leaders in Petrograd were Kamenev and Stalin, who succumbed to the pressure for "unity." Instinctively, the Petrograd Bolsheviks came out against the Provisional Government, which they correctly characterised as a counter-revolutionary government. However, Kamenev and Stalin steered the party into a close alliance with the SRs and Mensheviks, and even proposed re-unification with the latter.

From exile in Switzerland, Lenin watched the situation with alarm. His first telegrams to Petrograd were utterly intransigent in tone and content: "Our tactic: absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the proletariat the sole guarantee; immediate elections to the Petrograd town council; no rapprochement with other parties."

After Lenin's return in April, the

Bolshevik Party entered into a crisis. This is a law in a revolutionary situation, when the pressure of alien class forces bears heavily upon the party and its leadership: the pressure for "left unity," the fear of isolation, and the rest.

The tension between Lenin and the majority of the leaders was so great that, immediately after his return, Lenin was compelled to publish his April Theses in Pravda under his own signature.

At the April Conference, where a fierce struggle occurred, Lenin warned that, rather than accept the position of Kamenev and Stalin, he would prefer to be alone "like Karl Liebknecht, one against 110" (referring to Liebknecht's courageous anti-war stand in the parliamentary faction of the German SPD).

Lenin explained that the revolution had not achieved its central objectives: that it was necessary to overthrow the provisional government; that the workers must take power, allied with the mass of poor peasants. Only by these means could the war be ended, the land be given to the peasants and the conditions established for a transition to a socialist regime.

"Patiently explain"

In essence, these ideas were identical to the perspectives brilliantly worked out by Trotsky in 1904-5, and known to history as the "permanent revolution."

Lenin's ideas won the day. However, the Bolsheviks remained a minority in the Soviets, and the Soviet leaders - the SRs and Mensheviks - were backing the Provisional Government. And here we see the

flexible tactics of Lenin, far removed from ultra-left adventurism. Under the slogan: "Patiently Explain," he urged the Bolsheviks to face to the Soviet workers to put demands on the reformist leaders, to demand action instead of words, to publish the secret treaties, to end the war, to break with the bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands. If they would do these things, Lenin repeated many times, then the struggle for power would be reduced to the peaceful struggle for a majority in the Soviets.

However, the Mensheviks and SR leaders had no intention of breaking with the bourgeois Provisional Government. In reality, they were terrified of taking power, and were more afraid of the workers and peasants than the counter-revolutionary general staff.

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

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

One of the main features of a revolutionary situation is the suddenness with which the mood of the masses can change. The workers learn quickly on the basis of events.

Thus a revolutionary tendency can experience explosive growth, passing from a tiny minority to a decisive force, on one condition; that it combines flexible tactics with

implacable firmness on all political questions.

At the beginning, Lenin was derided by his opponents as a hopeless "sectarian," who was doomed to impotence by keeping out of the "left unity." However, the tide soon began to flow strongly in the direction of Bolshevism.

The failure of the bourgeois Provisional Government to solve a single one of the basic problems of society provoked a sharp reaction in the main working class centres, especially Petrograd, where the militant proletariat was combined with the revolutionary sailors (who, unlike the infantry, were usually drawn from the factory proletariat, especially the skilled workers).

The constant increase in prices, the cut in the bread ration, caused a ferment of discontent. Above all the continuation of the war raised the temperature to boiling point.

The workers reacted by a series of mass demonstrations starting in April, which indicated an ever-increasing shift to the left in the mood of the workers. In a parallel move, the forces of reaction attempted to mobilise on the streets, leading to a series of clashes.

Demonstration

The Bolsheviks called a demonstration in April, to put pressure on the reformist leaders, and test the mood of the capital.

Resolutions from the factories and workers' districts flooded in to the Soviet Executive, demanding a break with the bourgeoisie. Workers came to the local committees asking how to transfer their names from the Mensheviks to the Bolsheviks. By the beginning of May, the Bolsheviks already had at least one third of the workers in Petrograd.

In April 1917, the reformist leaders of the Soviet could have taken power "peacefully" - as Lenin invited them to do. There would have been no



civil war. The authority of these leaders was such that the workers and soldiers would have obeyed them unconditionally. The reactionaries would have been generals without an army.

But the refusal of the reformists to take power peacefully made bloodshed and violence inevitable, and put the gains of the revolution in jeopardy. In the same way the German Social Democratic leaders handed back the power won by the German workers and soldiers in 1918, a crime for which the whole world paid with the rise of Hitler, the concentration camps, and the horrors of a new world war. Instead of taking power, the Menshevik and SR leaders entered the first coalition government with the bourgeois leaders.

The masses at first welcomed this, believing that the socialist Ministers were there to represent their interests. Once again, only events could bring about a change in consciousness. Inevitably, the socialist ministers became the pawns of the landowners and capitalists, and above all of Anglo-French imperialism, which was impatiently demanding a new offensive on the Russian front.

The mood of the workers in Petrograd was near boiling point. As a warning shot and a trial of strength, the Bolsheviks considered an armed demonstration to put pressure on the Congress of Soviets in June.

The party was giving voice to the growing feeling of frustration of the Petrograd workers, summed up in slogans, directed at the reformist leaders of the Soviet: "Take over state power!" "Break with the bourgeoisie!" "Drop the idea of a coalition and take the reigns of power into your own hands!" The idea of an armed demonstration caused an hysterical reaction on the part of the middle-class leaders who launched a campaign of slander, misrepresenting it as an attempted coup. The Menshevik Minister Tsereteli warned ominously that "people who did not know how to use arms must be disarmed." As a small minority in the Congress of Soviets (which the demonstration was planned to coincide with), the Bolsheviks decided to retreat. The idea of an armed demonstration was dropped. In its place, the Congress of Soviets itself called an unarmed demonstration on July 1st. This attempt to out-manoeuvre the Bolsheviks backfired.

The workers and soldiers came to the "official" demonstration carrying placards with the slogans of the Bolsheviks: "Down with the secret treaties!" "Down with the ten capitalist ministers!" "No to the offensive!" "All Power to the Soviets!" In a revolution, even such extremely democratic and flexible organisations as the Soviets were not capable of reflecting the rapid shifts of mood of the masses. The

Soviet lagged behind the factory committee, the factory committees lagged behind the masses. Above all, the soldiers lagged behind the workers, and the backward provinces lagged behind revolutionary Petrograd.

As the Bolsheviks had warned, the government seized on the opportunity to crack down on the movement, leaning on more backward regiments. The "July Days" ended in a defeat, but thanks to the responsible leadership of the Bolsheviks, the losses were kept to a minimum, and the effects of the defeat were not long-lasting.

A revolution is not a one-act drama. Neither is it a simple, forward-moving process. The Russian revolution unfolded over nine months. The Spanish revolution took place over seven years - from the fall of the monarchy in 1931 to the May Days of Barcelona in 1937. Within the revolution, there are periods of breathtaking advance, but also periods of lull, of defeat, even of reaction. Thus the February revolution was succeeded by the reaction that followed the July Days. The Bolsheviks were accused of being German agents and mercilessly hounded, arrested and imprisoned. Lenin was forced to go into hiding, and then move to Finland.

Counter-Revolution

From February onwards, the counter-revolution had been biding its time, hiding behind the coat-tails of the Provisional government. The offensive, and the crushing of the Bolsheviks in July, now tilted the pendulum to the right. The officer caste began serious preparations for a coup d'etat, culminating in General Kornilov's uprising at the end of August. Only the courageous reaction of the workers and soldiers saved the revolution. The railway workers, risking their lives, refused to drive

the trains, or mis-directed them. Kornilov's army found itself without supplies, without petrol, disorganised and disoriented. Agitators, mainly Bolsheviks, got to work among Kornilov's troops and won them over. Kornilov ended up a general without an army. Reluctantly, the Mensheviks and SRs were forced to legalise the Bolsheviks. But by now the masses had begun to realise the true state of affairs. In an early article on the revolution, written between sessions at the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations in 1918, Trotsky recalled events still fresh in his mind: "The growth of the influence and strength of the Bolsheviks was undoubted, and it had now received an irresistible impetus. The Bolsheviks had warned against the Coalition, against the July offensive, and had foretold the Kornilov rebellion. The popular masses could now see that we had been right."

Panicked by the advance of Kornilov's "savage division," the reformist Soviet leaders had been compelled to arm the workers. The position of the Bolsheviks now became decisive in the Petrograd soviet. Moreover, the time was growing near for the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, at which the Bolsheviks were assured of a majority. At one point, the counter-revolutionary policies of the reformist leaders of the Soviets had inclined Lenin to consider dropping the slogan "All power to the Soviets," and substituting for it the idea of taking power through the factory committees. This fact shows the extreme flexibility of Lenin's tactics. There was no question of making a fetish out of any organisational form, even the Soviets. However, the Soviet form of direct elections from the workplaces and garrisons represented a far more democratic expression of the will of society than any regime of bourgeois parliamentary democracy known to history.

One of the most blatant lies about October is that the Bolsheviks were "undemocratic" because they based themselves on Soviet democracy rather than a parliament ("Constituent Assembly"). The argument is that Lenin and Trotsky represented, not the masses, but only a small, tightly disciplined group of conspirators. For these critics, October was not a revolution, but a "coup."

The truth is very different. The Soviet system in 1917 and the years immediately following the revolution was the most democratic system of representation of the people ever known. Even the most democratic models of bourgeois parliamentarianism cannot compare with the simple and direct democracy of the Soviets. Incidentally, the Russian word "soviet" merely means a "council" or "committee." The Soviets were born in 1905 as extended "strike committees." In 1917, the workers soviets were broadened to include representation by the soldiers, who were overwhelmingly peasants in uniform. Representatives to the soviets were elected directly by their workmates and instantly recallable. Compare this to the present system in Britain, where parliaments are elected every four years on average. There is no means of recall. Once a parliament is elected, it cannot be removed until the next general election. Governments are free to renege on their promises - and invariably do so, in the knowledge they cannot be removed.

Most of the parliamentarians are professional politicians, with no contact with the people who elected them. They live in another world, with high salaries and expenses which puts them in a different social category to the people they are supposed to represent.

In a revolutionary situation, where the moods of the masses change rapidly, the cumbersome mechanisms of formal bourgeois democracy would be utterly incapable of reflecting accurately the situation. Even the soviets, as we have seen, often lagged behind.

The right wing socialists tried by all means to prevent the soviets from taking power. First, they organised the so-called "Democratic Conference," calling for a "responsible" Ministry. This satisfied no-body, and was attacked from the right and the left. The rapid polarisation between the classes doomed all the manoeuvres of the "centre" to defeat in advance. The endless intrigues and combinations of the politicians contrasted with the desperate position on the front that cold and wet Autumn. The mood in the villages was increasingly impatient. The right wing socialists argued that the peasants should wait for the election of the "Constituent Assembly."

The Bolsheviks demanded the immediate transference of the land to the peasants' committees. The slogans of "peace, bread and land" won the mass of the peasants over to the side of the Soviets. By October, the stage was set for the last act in the revolutionary drama.

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

The main blows of the Bolshevik propaganda and agitation were directed, not against the right-wing labour leaders, but against the class enemy - the monarchy, the landowners, the capitalists, the Black Hundreds (fascists), and the liberal bourgeois Ministers in the coalition government.

Bolshevik Majority

By October, the Bolsheviks had a clear majority in the Soviets. Trotsky insisted that the date of the insurrection should be timed to co-incide with the opening of the Congress of Soviets, where the Bolsheviks would win the majority of the Executive Committee, and could therefore act with the full authority of the Soviets, which comprised the decisive majority of society.

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

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

gentsia and educated liberal leaders masquerading as socialists. These leaders represented the first confused, amorphous strivings of the masses to find a way out by the shortest road.

However, the workers and peasants learned by experience that this alleged short-cut represented a cruel deception. This experience, together with the correct policies, strategy and tactics of Lenin and Trotsky, prepared the ground for the massive shift of opinion in the direction of Bolshevism. This would never have been possible if the line of the conciliators had been accepted.

Lenin was constantly being accused of "sectarianism" by the enemies of Bolshevism - and by a section of the Bolsheviks leaders who wanted a "broad left front" with the Mensheviks and SRs, and were terrified of being "isolated." This fear was even more pronounced after the experience of July. With the exception of Lenin and Trotsky (who joined the Bolsheviks in the period of reaction during the Summer, together with an important group of non-party Marxists, the Mezhrayontsy), most of the other prominent Bolsheviks favoured participating in the "Democratic Conference" and even in the fake "pre-parliament" which was set up at this Conference - a "parliament" without any powers, elected by nobody and representing only itself.

The old party leaders reflected the past of the workers and peasants, not their present or their future. Finally, the Bolsheviks demonstratively walked out of the "pre-parliament," to the general applause of the workers and soldiers - and the horror and indig-



nation of the conciliators.

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

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

All power to the Soviets

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

The power base of the

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

Some years later, the celebrated Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein made a film called *October*, which contains a famous scene of the storming of the Winter Palace, during which there were a few accidents. More people were killed and injured then than in the actual event! The propaganda of the bourgeois against the October revolution is a crude falsification of history. The actual seizure of power took place smoothly, and with very little resistance. The workers, soldiers and sailors occupied one government building after another, without firing a shot. How was this possible? Only a few months earlier, the position of Kerensky and the Provisional Government appeared to be unassailable. But in the moment of truth, it found no defenders. Its authority had collapsed. The masses deserted it and moved over to the Bolsheviks.

The very idea that all

this was the result of a clever conspiracy by a tiny group is worthy of a police mentality, but will not stand a moment's analysis from a scientific point of view. The overwhelming victory of the Bolsheviks at the Soviet Congress underlines the fact that the right-wing reformist leaders had lost all their support. The Mensheviks and SRs won only one-tenth of the Congress - about 60 people in all. The Soviets voted by a massive majority for the assumption of power.

Lenin moved two short decrees on peace and the land which were unanimously approved by Congress, which also elected a new central authority, which they called the "Council of People's Commissars," to avoid the bourgeois ministerial jargon. And power was in the hands of the working people.

A new October

Now the film of history appears to be being played in reverse. The Soviet working class has paid a terrible price for the crimes of Stalinism. The collapse of the bureaucratic regime was the prelude to a move back to capitalism. However, as Lenin used to say "history knows all sorts of transformations." On the road of capitalism, there is no future for working people.

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

In the aftermath of the storming of the school in Beslan

By Misha Steklov in Moscow

We received this report from Moscow shortly after the storming of the school in Beslan in North Ossetia. It provides some information which has not been made evident by the media here in the West. It highlights the divide between the ordinary people of Beslan and the authorities. The parents and relatives of those being held had no confidence in the ability of the authorities to defend their loved ones. The government also initially played down the numbers being held, whereas the families knew that the number was far higher. All this reveals a very high degree of cynicism on the part of the Russian government, and of Putin himself.

Having said this, the attitude of the hostage-takers was a barbaric one. They treated these poor people abominably while they were holding them, and then were prepared to shoot at fleeing, desperate children. This event has struck the minds and hearts of millions of people around the world. How could anyone not be moved at the scenes of dead and wounded children, at the desperate parents trying to find their young ones?

The unfortunate thing is that all this will now be exploited by the Putins of this world, and by the Blairs and Bushes too. This barbaric act of individual terrorism will not serve the cause of the

Chechen people. It will be used to step up measures of repression inside Russia. The operations of the Russian army in Chechnya over a decade now have destroyed the region. Grozny, the capital, is a shell of its former self. Many Chechens have been killed. There will now be an ongoing spiral of attacks by the Russian army, followed by more acts of individual terror, with one feeding off the other. It will also, no doubt, be used by Bush in his election campaign to justify his own "war on terror", which of course is no such thing.

As this article shows, the people of the Caucasus want peace, not war. If power remains in the hands of the Russian oligarchy, war will continue. And the manoeuvres of US imperialism in the region will not help, especially in Georgia. The great powers are not really interested in the lives of ordinary working people. What they are interested in is power, privileges, control of resources and profits. Caught in the middle of this conflict are the working people. The barbarism of the last few days will, unfortunately, be repeated. It can only be eliminated once and for all when the system that breeds it is overthrown. Only when the workers have full control over their own destinies will people be able to live in peace. (Editor's note)

A LOUD explosion and an exchange of gunfire announced the security forces intention to take the school by force at around 12:00 local time, ending the three day hostage crisis. A group of twenty or so hostages, including children, tried to escape, and were fired at by the hostage takers. First aiders who went to the rescue of the wounded were also shot at. On the ground tanks and ambulances crowded the streets, while above them helicopters circled the school.

Panic gripped the hostages' relatives waiting outside as the following hours were filled with chaos. What was at stake was not the official total of

over 300 children and adults, but the real figure of between 1-1,500 hostages, according to the mothers with young babies who were released yesterday.

The tension mounted when further blasts ripped through the school, apparently the work of the Special Forces to allow hostages, who had stripped to their underwear in cramped conditions and 40 degrees centigrade, to escape. Some 200 ran for cover, risking further sniper fire. Reports spread that a ceiling had collapsed in the sports hall where the hostages were kept.

Anxiety mounted for the remaining hostages still inside. The security chiefs

declared the situation was under control, but desperate relatives brushed this claim aside and rushed through the school grounds in search of the captured schoolchildren.

Word spread that among the escaped hostages 13 or so terrorists had also run for cover. Two female suicide bombers apparently escaped dressed as nurses. Shoot-outs were reported in the south of the city and in a nearby tower block where the terrorists were thought to be. Every police officer in North Ossetia was called upon to block every road and railway line leading out of the region.

Local armed militia in their hundreds took the

search for the terrorists into their own hands. State Russian radio described unconfirmed reports of locals executing one terrorist they found fleeing the school.

At 15:00 news agency reports on the internet claimed that the crisis was over. But sporadic gunfire was heard for some hours more as soldiers rooted out remaining terrorists suspected to be still hiding in the building.

The site gazeta.ru initially quoted a source in the security forces who gave the number of casualties as "150 - minimum," but the real figure later turned out to be much higher. At least 330 were killed, nearly half of them

children

In a repeat of the response of the families during the Nord Ost hostage crisis in Moscow nearly two years ago, pictures in the papers today show the Beslan relatives standing with placards calling on the authorities to concede to the terrorists' demands.

The authorities claim that they could not do this since these demands were not clear. But they were clear. They wanted the release of fighters who broke into Ingushetia in late June, leading to 100 dead, and to the withdrawal of federal forces from Chechnya.

To the locals neither the exchange of the thirty Chechen and Ingush men for hundreds of their family and friends nor an end to the war in Chechnya, which they correctly blame for giving birth to the terrorist attack in their town, represented a problem. But for President Putin such concessions were not an option.

The situation is different from the first war in Chechnya, from 1994-6, which was brought to an end after botched hostage rescue attempts. On June 14, 1995 two thousand were held captive at a hospital in Budyonovsk near Chechnya - 100 died. On January 9, 1996 three thousand were taken hostage in Kizlyar at another hospital in southern Russia, leaving 78 dead as the terrorists made their way back to Chechnya with some of the unreleased hostages for protection.

Unlike President Yeltsin, who suffered from low popularity and a weakened military, President Putin is in no mood to backtrack, especially since he came to power with the slogan of restoring Russian control over Chechnya.

Given the deadlock in negotiations the people who gathered around the school and throughout Beslan were sceptical of Putin's promise not to use force and to save life at all costs.

Indeed the authorities did little to inspire confidence. They gave out little information to the public, and lied about the number of hostages. Moreover the local leaders, who were requested by the hostage takers to conduct the negotiations refused. Larissa, a café owner who was waiting for news of her nephew in the school told the correspondent from the Financial Times, "Where are our leaders? They did not come. They are useless."

After the tragic events, Putin visited Beslan and the townspeople used the occasion to vent their anger against Putin for coming for such a short time and they accused him of posturing for the TV cameras instead of meeting the people who had been traumatised by the tragedy. "He saw no one and talked to no one," said one resident, called Boris, and whose neighbour and family had disappeared. "He just wanted to show the world how young and handsome he is but he hasn't helped and he won't help and he can't stop this happening again."

The repercussions of the hostage crisis

The reason why the terrorists decided on taking a school in North Ossetia is not difficult to work out. In 1992 a conflict broke out between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in which thousands died. Following on from the assault from Chechnya into Ingushetia in June, this latest attack is clearly an attempt to spread instability so that there is war not only within Chechnya but also between the various nationalities that comprise the Caucasus.

The ethnic composition of North Ossetia illustrates what a disaster could be unleashed by a wider conflict beyond Chechnya, where the population was largely composed of only two nationalities - Chechen and Russian.

According to the official North Ossetia government website 95 nationalities live in North Ossetia, "the most highly represented national groups include Ossetin - 334,000 people (53% of the whole population), Russian - 189,000 people (29.9%), Ingush - 32,783 people. (5.2%), Armenian - 13,000 people (2.2%), Georgian - 12,000 people (1.9%), Ukrainian - 10,000 people (1.6%), Kumik - 9,500 people (1.5%)."

The other national groups (Germans, Greeks, Jews, Koreans, Chechens, Azeris, Kabardis, Tartars and others) account for 0.6 of the population."

Other regions in the Caucasus have a similarly mixed ethnic make-up, underlining that people historically do not live and settle according to the boundaries that were made up by diplomats in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus if there is conflict along national lines in one area of the Caucasus, like in North Ossetia and Ingushetia, it would inevitably affect all the nationalities that live in the conflict zone and could lead to retaliation elsewhere.

In particular, apart from the unresolved conflict in the Nagorno-Karabach between Armenia and Azerbaijan, destabilising North Ossetia could bring to a head tensions that are brewing in South Ossetia and Abkhazia between Georgia and Russia, sparking off a wider conflict beyond Russia's borders.

One pro-Chechen website (Chechenpress) featured an article which gave a clear idea of the logic of extreme terrorists who welcome the threat of war between Georgia and Russia. In a blunt display of contempt for human suffering and the nightmare consequences pregnant in such a development, the article argued that such a war would provide the basis for a pan-Caucasus war against Russia. Such a war would not be in the

interests of any of the peoples of the region, but it would serve the narrow interests of the terrorists who feed off the violence and turmoil that war brings with it.

In the event of such a war Russia clearly would use North Ossetia as a base to defend South Ossetia, which is currently an autonomous part of Georgia and where Russians, Ossetians and Georgians live together peacefully as long as war is not imposed upon them from without. The threat of war is escalating with the losses of army personnel in the Russian and Georgian armies in border skirmishes. In the latest signs of tension, Mikhail Saakashvili, Georgia's President, conducted a purge of the military elite, which is now to be controlled only by officers trained in the US, while Russia refused to give back army installations on September 1, as agreed, due to technical difficulties.

The descent into further conflict, despite possible temporary diplomatic agreements, does not at all mean that people in the Caucasus want conflict. Among all the reports in the papers regarding the hostage crisis one little reference to protests taking place throughout the Caucasus, including in Chechnya, against the seizure of the school illustrates that what people want is peace and a better future for their children.

However, the reactionary leading cliques of the region will never guarantee peace. And if they won't it is up to ordinary men and women to fight for their own future, which will only be secure in alliance with the struggle of the working class in Russia against our leaders here, who not only put at risk the lives of people in the Caucasus but send young Russian men to fight a war they don't believe in and thereby create the conditions for the carnage of terrorism further afield. ■

October 1934, Lessons of the Asturian Commune

70 years ago the mining and industrial region of Asturias in Spain witnessed one of the most fascinating revolutions in the history of the 20th century. During the course of 15 days men and

women fought to establish a new society free of exploitation and ruled by the principles of workers democracy. This was the beginning of the Asturian Commune.

by Ramon Samblas

On April 12, 1931 the Spanish masses voted massively for Socialist and republican candidates in local elections that took place throughout the country. Two days later, on April 14, the hated Monarchy collapsed, the king was forced to flee the country, and Spain became a Republic.

The masses sought to finish centuries of exploitation, cultural backwardness and the influence of the almighty Catholic Church in the economic and social affairs of the country. The Bourgeois-Democratic programme of land reform, development of industry, the separation of the Church from State affairs and the promises of decent education and healthcare for all filled the Spanish peasants and workers with hope.

This situation opened up a period of Socialist-Republican coalition governments and hope for historically oppressed masses in Spain.

However by 1934, the working class was beginning to see that this Republic had not solved any of the problems they faced. In the November elections of 1933 the workers abstained massively and a shift to the right took place in parliament.

At that time the situation in Spain was one of profound instability which ran through every section of the country, beginning at the top. In the space of two years the cabinet had changed 6 times. However, the Radical party (a bourgeois party which employed a left rhetoric) was a permanent feature.

Another permanent feature of this period was repression. The Republican-Radical government utilized laws passed by the socialists when they were in office (in coalition with bourgeois republican parties) to repress them. Between November 1933 and September 1934 more than 100 issues of "The Socialist" were sequestered. Before the uprising which followed in 1934 there were 12,000 workers in prison. The Socialist militias were banned and disarmed. The funds of the trade unions were also

sequestered. It was a cruel irony for the Socialists; they were prosecuted with the same laws they passed against "wreckers and enemies of the Republic".

The impotence of parliamentarism in the face of such a severe crisis of capitalism was becoming increasingly evident.

This period was one of Revolution and Counterrevolution across Europe. The economic crisis that began in 1929 boosted this process even more. However, the Social democratic leadership, and the ultra-left and sectarian policy pursued by the Communist party, led these revolutionary processes to bloody defeats and the triumph of Fascist and other reactionary regimes.

In 1933 Hitler had taken power in Germany. The best-educated and organised working class in Europe was defeated without smashing a window pane. A similar situation unfolded in Austria. Years before the Italian working class had been crushed under the boot of Fascism.

The defeat suffered by the German and Austrian working class alerted the rest of the European proletariat to the danger of Fascism, especially the Spanish. From the rank and file of all the workers' parties and trade unions a feeling of unity sprang up. Here we saw in practice an example of how the working class rejects splits and divisions as a general rule. The Spanish proletariat did not want to pass through the same experience as their German comrades.

The situation across Europe pushed the Second International to the left. This was initiated by the growth of the left wing within PSOE (Spanish Socialist party). Largo Caballero and his supporters in the UGT (Socialist trade union federation) and in the Socialist Youth stated they were in favour of the preparation of the proletarian revolution. Even Prieto (identified with the moderate wing of the party) stated in Las Cortes (the Spanish parliament) his commitment to preventing by whatever means necessary, including an armed

uprising, a fascist regime coming to power. The pressure of the masses on their leaders was pushing them further and further to the left.

However, the PSOE leaders were far from being Marxists or Leninists. They replaced their earlier parliamentary cretinism with an increasingly ultra-left policy. Having abandoned the idea of changing society slowly through parliamentary means, they now failed to grasp the role that the platforms provided by the system could play in the fight against capitalism.

The Revolutionary Workers' Alliance

At the same time as a wide layer of the PSOE ranks was shifting to the left a new phenomenon, the Revolutionary Workers' Alliance (RWA), was springing up all over the country. In October 1933 BOC (Peasant and Workers Block) and the Catalan federation of PSOE organised a rally appealing for the formation of a Workers' United Front. Later on, after the defeat suffered by the leftwing parties in the November General Election and the failure of the last Anarchist uprising promoted by the FAI (Anarchist federation), a Revolutionary Workers' Alliance was created in Barcelona. The original committee consisted of the BOC, UGT, PSOE (Catalan federation), FSL, Communist Left, USC (Catalan Socialist Union), Unio de Rabassaires (Catalan small and middle landowners union), trade unions expelled from the CNT (controlled by the BOC) and the dissident trade unions within the CNT gathered around Angel Pestana.

The Unio de Rabassaires and the USC withdrew from the Workers' Alliance. The fact that both were giving support to the bourgeois Companys government quite quickly brought them into conflict with the original spirit of the Workers' Alliance as a workers' united front.

The first practical test for the Workers' Alliance took place on March 13 1934. The Workers' Alliance called for a strike



against the increasing influence of reaction in the central government. However, the strike was called without appealing to the CNT (Anarchist trade union federation). The CNT was organising half of the unionised working class in Spain at the time. The adventurism of the Workers' Alliance leaders and the sectarianism of the CNT leaders (especially in Catalonia) prepared the ground for the defeat of that strike, particularly in Barcelona.

The sponsors of the Alliances, the Communist Left and the BOC led by Andreu Nin the former and Joaquin Maurin the latter, never tried to unite the workers' organisations at the rank and file level. They always sought unity from the top. This bureaucratic method undermined the project despite the desires and mood in favour of unity against fascism from the rank and file of the trade unions and workers' parties. They failed to stand for a Leninist policy on the united front- march separately and strike together.

The sectarianism of the CNT leadership and the then tiny Communist Party played a major role too. The Communist party went so far as to call the Workers' Alliances "Reactionary Workers' Alliances". This was in line with Stalin's policy of the Third period where the Socialists, Anarchists and Trotskyists were denounced as Fascists.

Despite the opposition of the CNT to the Workers' Alliance in Catalonia the Asturian CNT leaders supported the idea of the Workers' Alliance and they eventually joined it against the will of the CNT leaders in the rest of Spain.

The explanation for the curious behaviour of the Asturian CNT is to be found in the fact that the UGT and the CNT had almost equal forces in Asturias. This situation had pushed the workers from the Socialist and Anarchist trade unions to work together and fight together. For instance, whilst the SOMA-UGT (Socialist mineworkers' trade union) dominated in all the pits, the majority of the metal workers were organised in the CNT.

However, the process of drawing the CNT into the Revolutionary Workers' Alliance was not free from controversy and opposition within the CNT itself. The

stronghold of La Felguera controlled by the FAI always opposed the Workers' Alliance.

It is also important to remember the role played by the Communist party leadership. By 1934, the Comintern had ceased to be the tool of the working class to spread the Bolshevik revolution. Instead, they played the role of border-guards for the Stalinists in Moscow. This policy led them to split the labour movement down the middle and facilitate the access to power of real fascism. Later on, the Stalinists shifted to the right and adopted the tactic of the popular front. They changed their ultra-sectarian outlook on the Social democracy for one of class collaboration. Marxism explains that ultraleftism and opportunism are two sides of the same coin. Both policies resulted in catastrophe during the course of the Spanish Revolution. In Asturias, on the eve of the uprising, the PCE (Communist party) leadership dropped their definition of the Workers' Alliance as the "live nerve of counterrevolution" and instead applied to join it.

From the General Strike to the Revolution

By the end of September the crisis was so chronic that the Radical-Republican cabinet headed by Samper collapsed. When the cabinet collapsed during the first October days, Alcalá Zamora (the president of the Republic) asked Lerrox from the Radical party to appoint a new government.

The ruling class did not have a real way forward, at the same time there was mounting anxiety and tension amongst the working class. Everybody was wondering whether Lerrox was going to appoint CEDA members for some ministries or not. The CEDA was a far right party, which represented landowners, "caciques" (direct

political representatives of the landowners in the countryside), army officers and the bosses. The working class regarded the entry of CEDA into the new government as the first step in installing Fascism in Spain. On October 3 Lerrox appointed three ministers from the CEDA, 6

hours later the UGT and the Workers' Alliances called for a general strike.

Despite the shortcomings of the leadership- they failed to call upon workers to occupy factories and peasants to seize land; the lack of real soviets and the lack of clarity- the working class threw themselves into the fight.

In the end the general strike was doomed by the lack of participation of the workers of some key sectors of the economy organised by the CNT, like the railways. The absence of the railway workers in the struggle allowed the transport of ammunition and troops to suffocate the protest. The workers did not receive arms until hours after the public appeal for the general strike. These hours were used by the Army to arrest workers and disband militias. The general strike went on for days and the workers paralysed industry and trade. In spite of the limitations of the leadership when the working class starts to fight with such determination, it cannot be easily stopped. A ferocious struggle ensued. However, in the end, the failure of the leaders was decisive and the movement was defeated.

The failure of that movement was analysed by Leon Trotsky. In his article called "The consequence of parliamentary reformism" he stated the following,

"The Socialist Party, like the Russian Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, shared power with the republican bourgeoisie to prevent the workers and peasants from carrying the revolution to its conclusion. For two years the Socialists in power helped the bourgeoisie disembarass itself of the masses by crumbs of national, social, and agrarian reforms. Against the most revolutionary strata of the people, the Socialists used repression (...). When the Socialist Party was sufficiently compromised, the bourgeoisie drove it from power and took over the offensive on the whole front. The Socialist Party had to

defend itself under the most unfavourable conditions, which had been prepared for it by its own policy". Trotsky pointed out that as a result of the previous parliamentary cretinism of the Socialist Party, Anarcho-syndicalism was strengthened as a tendency within the labour movement and it drew towards itself the best militant layers of the proletariat. Nevertheless the role of the Anarchist leadership was as pernicious as the social democratic leadership. They refused to support the insurrection led by the Socialists. The insurrection is a decisive moment. However, the insurrection is not a game and it must be skilfully used and prepared. Concerning this point Leon Trotsky wrote the following: "Marxism is quite far from the thought that armed struggle is the only revolutionary method, or a panacea good under all conditions. Marxism in general knows no fetishes, neither parliamentary nor insurrectional. There is a time and place for everything"

The worst betrayal of the movement took place in Catalonia. Lluís Companys (Catalan Premier) feared the workers more than the troops sent by the Republican government. The divisions within the labour movement in Catalonia (especially in Barcelona) were used by Lluís Companys to proclaim the "Estat Català" (Catalan state). The President of the Generalitat appealed to the Catalan people to calm them down. When the troops arrived from Madrid and surrounded Barcelona, he just surrendered without resistance. Of course, this "Estat Català" did not challenge private property nor the current social establishment. It was pretty clear that the representatives of the Catalan bourgeoisie were attempting to divert the attention of the masses through this manoeuvre. Handing the leadership of the struggle to the petty bourgeoisie represented by the ERC (Catalan Republican Left) and the Unió de Rabassaires proved to be a grave mistake.

This manoeuvre of the Catalan petty bourgeoisie could have been overcome. However, the CNT leadership dismissed the general strike as "political" and did not join the movement. As Dialectics explains nature abhors a vacuum. The vacuum was filled by the petty bourgeoisie with disastrous consequences.

Nevertheless the Madrid government "rewarded" Lluís Companys with jail and the death penalty which was commuted. With the failure of the insurrection in Catalonia the struggle in the rest of the country was seriously undermined.

UHP! (Proletariat brothers and sisters unite!)

In Asturias, the General Strike took the form of an armed uprising. Only hours after the armed uprising began important mining areas like Mieres were under the control of the revolutionary workers. In two days the revolutionary workers took over the Oviedo council, the council of the Asturias capital. The Workers' Alliance had been established more than a year ago and was a real united front. As explained before, the pressure of the workers on the leadership in Asturias made them unite whether they wanted to or not. The miners led by González Peña and Grossi were clearing the way ahead with dynamite barrels due to the lack of arms and ammunition. The revolutionary Asturian proletariat was overcoming the lack of means and experience by their class instinct and creativity. While the workers and peasants were establishing a new order called the Commune, the institutions of the capitalist system were collapsing. The Civil Guards and the Assault Guards were running away from the barracks. When they saw the armed workers, some of them even joined the proletarian army. The case of lieutenant Torrens is one of the most famous. This officer surrendered his squad of Civil Guards and joined the workers as a military advisor.

The Workers' Alliances and the bodies emerged from them (like the Revolutionary Councils) during the revolution, acted as real soviets. In Asturias they led the revolutionary process. During the 15 days that the Asturian Commune lasted, the Revolutionary Councils seized lands, occupied factories, put the enemies of the working class in front of Revolutionary Tribunals, established Workers' Democracy and held back the Moor troops and the Legion, the two most reactionary bodies of the Spanish army. In spite of the courage of the Asturian masses the movement faced serious problems. On the one

hand the insurrection only took place in Asturias, this made it easier for reaction to take advantage of its isolation to defeat it. On the other hand the lack of coordination from the different areas where the uprising was taking place also made it very difficult for the militias to overcome their lack of ammunition and weapons. Only the failure of the insurrection in the rest of the country made it possible for the Republican government to focus their effort on smashing the Asturian Commune. In Spain it used to be said that if 3 Asturian Communes had taken place, the Revolution would have been successful in the whole of the country. Instead of the greatest of victories came the most terrible of defeats. The Republican Army, led by Franco, did not hesitate to use aerial bombing against the civil population. They also sent thousands of troops to kill, rape and torture women and children. The ruling class could not allow the workers and peasants to decide their own fates. Different sources fix the number killed during the repression of the Commune at 2000-4000. The people in jail were counted in dozens of thousands.

Once again, the lack of a clear programme and tactics proved to be a disaster and the working class had to pay for it. If a genuine Bolshevik leadership from the Socialist and Communist party and the trade unions (both Anarcho-syndicalist and Socialist) had led the process in all the country, the result would have been substantially different.

But the sacrifice of the Asturian workers was not completely in vain. They managed to prevent the coming to power of Fascism to power by parliamentary means. The ruling class could only impose its open dictatorship after a 3 year long civil war in which the Spanish workers fought like lions despite being led by lambs.

From the pages of this journal we want to pay homage to the struggle of these men and women who bravely fought for a better world. They showed to the workers and peasants of the entire world that a society without classes is possible. Once again we reclaim the motto of the Asturian Commune against capitalism, Unios Hermanos Proletarios! (Proletarian Brothers and Sisters Unite!) UHP! □

Cuba, Venezuela, Latin America: Is the revolutionary spark spreading?

Interview with Celia Hart

Celia Hart, daughter of Armando Hart, who for many years was the Cuban Minister of Culture, studied physics from 1983 to 1987 at the Technical University in Dresden and works as a research physicist. Celia is a member of the Communist Party of Cuba.

As a Cuban communist, how do you view the revolutionary process in Venezuela?

The Bolivarian revolution finds a lot of support not only among longstanding and experienced communists in Cuba, but also in the ranks of the youth, where the vivid revolutionary process in Venezuela sparks off much more enthusiasm than some of the boring and monotonous [official] "socialist" rhetoric and lecturing. Ché Guevara once spoke about creating "many Vietnams" in Latin America. Now we face this new task and we have the possibility of deepening the Bolivarian revolution and consolidating it as a socialist revolution. From Venezuela can and must come the impulse for the socialist revolution across all of Latin America. The idea of the Permanent Revolution, for which also Ché Guevara was fighting, is relevant today.

But some fear that a socialist revolution in Venezuela could provoke reaction and even a military invasion. Do you think that Hugo Chávez has been "clever" over the last weeks in seeking some form of consensus in the negotiations he has had

with the bosses' associations?

Reaction knows what it wants and does not need to be provoked. I hope that Hugo Chávez is not going to fall into the reformist trap and make concessions to his sworn enemies. The Venezuelan oligarchy needs to play for time. When the moment is right the oligarchy will attempt to eliminate Chávez, in the same way as the Chilean ruling class eliminated the socialist president Salvador Allende and with him many other leftwing activists in 1973. The majority of Venezuelans, to be sure, would fight against an invasion as did the Cubans against the invasion of the Bay of Pigs 1961. In such a case, as internationalists, we have to assist the Venezuelan revolution as international brigades did in the Spanish civil war in 1936.

Hasn't the Cuban Revolution survived for 45 years without having to "export" their revolution?

Revolutionary Cuba has maintained itself because of the decisive break that Fidel Castro made with capitalism and imperialism. From my experience in the GDR [the former East Germany]

and in Cuba I have reached the conclusion that "socialism in one country" is impossible. The spreading of the revolution across the Latin American continent is essential for the survival of revolutionary Cuba. Cheap Venezuelan oil alleviates the energy crisis in Cuba; and Cuban doctors and teachers provide assistance to the poor population in Venezuela to develop dignity and self-esteem. The present-day special relations between Cuba and revolutionary Venezuela gives us a glimpse of the enormous possibilities and progress that a network of democratically planned economies throughout Latin America - freed from imperialist paternalism and interference - would allow. In the long run, an isolated revolutionary Cuba cannot survive.

Do you think that Cuba will end up like the GDR and suffer a capitalist counter-revolution?

I think there exists a real danger of this, and every sincere revolutionary that I know, fears the same. Although the planned economy in Cuba has a state monopoly of foreign trade, although the means of production are state owned, and the bulk of the joint



ventures are controlled by the state, time is running out. Dollarisation has already had its negative effects. The management of joint ventures and the officials in foreign trade are at risk of being bought and they are also susceptible to bourgeois ideas. If the exiled Cuban capitalists return and try to usurp the country with the aid of pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist forces, there will be the menace of a counter-revolution and a capitalism of the worst sort. All the achievements of the last 45 years are in danger. For this reason, we have to defend the revolutionary heritage of Lenin, Trotsky and Ché Guevara and advance the global revolution. □

Interview by
Hans-Gerd Öfinger

For more on the Cuban and Latin American revolution, and to read more articles by Celia Hart, check out the regular updates at www.marxist.com

Iranian Embassies picketed in three continents

ON SEPTEMBER 20, there was a very good response to the appeal sent out by the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network to organise protest pickets outside the Iranian embassies. The day of action was organised in support of the seven worker activists facing trial in Saghez, Iran. The action undoubtedly embarrassed the Iranian diplomatic authorities, who are busy trying to portray the Iranian regime as one that respects basic human rights. The European Union is also trying to sell the same story.

In the last year asylum seekers from Iran in countries like France and Belgium have been rejected on the basis that Iran is a "safe country". Nothing could be further from the truth. If you are a worker and trade union activist that stands up for workers' rights, Iran can be a very dangerous place. Proof of that was the killing of the Khatoonabad workers earlier this year.

The trial of the seven Saghez worker activists, which is due to start this

Thursday, September 23, highlights the real plight of Iranian workers. Their brothers and sisters, their comrades from several countries around the world, including important trade union leaders, turned up at the gates of Iranian Embassies and Consulates yesterday. They were there to protest at the treatment of Iranian workers and to bring petitions signed by many workers demanding the dropping of all charges against the seven Saghez worker activists, Jalal Hosseini, Mahmood Salehi, Mohsen Hakimi, Borhan Divangar, Mohammad Abdipoor, Esmail Khodkam and Hadi Tanoomand.

A full report of solidarity activities around the world can be read at marxist.com. As you can see from the reports at some of the Embassies promises were made that this protest would be brought to the attention of the authorities in Iran. The supporters of the IWSN campaign should make sure that this is followed up on with phone calls and letters.



Youth Rally in Pakistan (above). Picket of Iranian Embassy in London (below).



Leading British trade unionists support Iranian Saghez workers

At this year's TUC congress a number of leading trade unionists signed the Saghez workers protest letter to the Iranian Embassy. Below is a small sample of the signatures to date.

Please add your name to the list at www.marxist.com

Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

Ruth Winters, President.
Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary.

Communication Workers Union (CWU)

Billy Hayes, General Secretary.
Phil Waker, NEC.

Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union

Joe Marino, General Secretary.

NATFHE

Paul Mackney, General Secretary.

Transport and General Workers Union

Tony Woodley, General Secretary.
Mohammed Taj, TUC General Council Member.

National Union of Journalists

Jeremy Dear, General Secretary.

Amicus

M. Thomas, NEC Member
John King, NEC Member
Eddie Grimes, NEC Member
Steve Davison, NEC Member

Amicus, TUC Delegates

Phil Willis, D. Ryan, Mick Holmes, Lorene Fabian, Ginny Klein, Peter Currall

UNIFI

Paul Auburn, NEC Member
Sybil Dillworth, NEC Member

NUM

Nigel Pearce, NEC Member

Communication Workers Union, TUC Delegates

John Donnelly, Bobby Kelly, Graham Colk, Amarjite Singh, Tricia Clarke, Chris Tapper.

Transport and General Workers Union, TUC Delegates

Betty Gallacher, Jacky Clarke, Arlene Minnis, Richard Crease, A Wilson, S Abbas, Mick Quinn, Terry Britton.

Others

Rachael Webb, Branch Secretary 1/888;
J Nicholls, Delegate to RTC Trade Group;
W. House, Delegate to RTC Trade Group;
J. Bradley, Delegate to RTC Trade Group;
Ann Marie Powell, TUC Delegate, Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union;
Mary Frances Howites, TUC Delegate, Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union;
Trevor McDowell, TUC Delegate, Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union;
Dave Uren, TUC Delegate, UNIFI;
Jim Humphries, Branch Secretary, Central London Branch, National Union of Journalists; Paul Novak, General Municipal Boilermakers Union.

Letter from Cesar Zelada from the San Pedro Penal prison (Bolivia)

We publish below a letter we have received from comrade Cesar Zelada, from the San Pedro Penal prison in La Paz, Bolivia. We must stress the inhuman and humiliating treatment he has suffered at the hands of the Bolivian police, and above all the fact that the prosecutor uses as one of her arguments the fact that Cesar was carrying with him "Marxist propaganda" (!!).

We must intensify the international campaign of protest against the arrest of Cesar, a well-known student and labour movement activist in Perú, member of the Socialist Left Force (FIS), and Peruvian organiser of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign. Please

"Dear comrades,

This is your comrade Cesar Zelada (Fuerza de Izquierda Socialista) writing to you to let you know that on Tuesday, September 14, at approximately 2pm, I was going to visit a friend who lives in La Florida district (La Paz), when I was captured by the Bolivian Technical Judicial Police (PTJ), accused of possession of explosives – a stick of dynamite – according to article 211 of the Bolivian penal code.

After having been strip-searched and handcuffed in the street, I was taken to the district police station. My human rights were violated (presumption of innocence was not respected). I was abused, questioned and filmed by the Bolivian intelligence services, without the presence of my lawyer (the cell where I was kept was in very precarious conditions).

On Wednesday, at 2.30 pm, the public hearing of my case took place. Present were Miguel Zubieta, of the Miners' Federation, from Huanuni, and representatives of human rights organisations.

The public prosecutor, Hinojosa, arrived late (around 3pm) and presented her case, saying that I refused to identify myself, that I was carrying Marxist

propaganda, that I "lied" about my address, and showing a blank stick of dynamite. She declared that since I do not have a fixed address where I can be found until the end of the investigation, she was asking for my preventive incarceration. At the end the judge declared, "seeing that there are no guarantees of his address, the verdict is one of preventive detention until the end of the investigations [which could last up until 6 months]"

At the end of the hearing, Zubieta demonstrated his solidarity and promised that Solares (the Bolivian Workers' Union secretary) would make a statement regarding my case. The students from the Oruro Technical University, in struggle against the corrupt cliques and for a "university revolution", are organising solidarity actions already with leaflets and public meetings in favour of my release.

After four days at the PTJ jail, without food and in bad health (as a result of the lack of any humane conditions at the PTJ cell) I was transferred to the San Pedro Penal prison, where I was sent to the Pinos section.

I need your help in publicising my case here in Bolivia. I am also expecting

send urgent messages of protest demanding the release of Cesar Zelada to:

Presidencia de la República (Carlos Mesa):
webmaster@presidencia.gov.bo

Ministerio de Gobierno. Dr Saúl Lara
Torrico: mail@mingobierno.gov.bo

El Viceministro del Interior:
vicemingob@mingobierno.gov.bo

With copies to:
solidaridadconcesarzelada@yahoo.com

solidarity from the Oruro students who issued a document in solidarity with the struggle of the Peruvian students on September 22. Unfortunately such a document is now in the hands of the prosecutor.

In the San Pedro Penal I have met with the heroic communards of Ayo Ayo, and also with the Colombian Francisco Cortez, a peasant leader and human rights activist.

Now I can see even closer the suffering of the comrade workers and youth in Iraq, Palestine, Colombia, Haiti, etc.

Long live the unity of the workers of Latin America and the world!

Down with Yankee imperialism!

Long live the student struggle in Peru and Bolivia!

Illare shows the way!

Socialism or barbarism!

We will win!

César Zelada (FIS),

Prisión de La Paz,
September 19, 2004

Penal de San Pedro"

Iranian Embassy in London Picketed

On the same day as activists in several countries across three continents gathered to protest against the sham trial of the Saghez workers and activists, a number of trade unionists and political activists gathered outside the Iranian embassy in London (see picture, previous page)

The picket included trade unionists who have been following the Iranian workers' struggles for their just demands for a number of years. They have consistently lent their support to various campaigns like the Esfahan textile workers three years ago, the Behshahr textile workers' hunger strike, the state killing of the Khatoonabad copper workers and the general campaign for workers' rights. Of course, since May, these comrades have also been active in the international campaign for the defence of the Saghez workers and activists.

The activists handed a petition signed by the representatives of over one and a half million British workers to the embassy staff. One of them, Mr Eskandari, pretended not to have heard about the trial(!). He was given a copy of the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network leaflet, which includes a summary of the trumped up charges, to 'enlighten' him. He promised that the petition and the protest letter will be passed to the ambassador and the British trade unionists' protest against this trial will be passed to higher authorities.

Iranian Workers' Solidarity
Network
September 20 2004

Pet Shop Boys meet Battleship Potemkin: Revolution in Trafalgar Square

by Jordi Martorell

ON SUNDAY evening, September 12, more than 40,000 people gathered in London's Trafalgar Square. They were not there to oppose the war on Iraq, to defend the rights of pensioners or to demand free education. They were there for the screening of Sergei Eisenstein's revolutionary film "Battleship Potemkin" on a giant screen, and the live playing of a new score by the Pet Shop Boys and the Dresdner Sinfoniker string orchestra.

Eisenstein's film, made in 1923, describes the mutiny of the sailors on the Battleship Potemkin, in 1905, which then linked up with the local population in Odessa. The events played a major role in Russia's 1905 revolution. Eisenstein was a revolutionary above all and he used cinema as a tool for revolution. He once declared: "The Revolution gave me the most precious thing in life - it made an artist out of me. If it had not been for the Revolution I would never have broken the tradition, handed down from father to son, of becoming an engineer. The Revolution introduced me to art, and art, in its own turn, brought me to the Revolution."

While at the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 he was not directly involved in any revolutionary organisation, he soon joined the Red Army commanded by Leon Trotsky as a civil engineer. However, his main field of battle was to become that of ideas and agitation. Soon he was involved in organising theatre groups in the Military Construction Units

and staging revolutionary plays. He then became involved in the Agit trains which accompanied the Red Army. The fight against counter-revolution was primarily a political struggle and the Bolsheviks used all tools at their disposal: art, propaganda, cinema, music, etc.

The Russian Revolution produced an impressive flourishing of art and culture and Eisenstein was one of the most outstanding representatives of that generation of revolutionary artists which experimented freely with all sorts of new and advanced ideas. Eisenstein for instance devised his "montage" technique, that is, the juxtaposing of two film images to produce a new idea, directly inspired by dialectical materialism, and the law of the interpenetration of opposites. He explained his ideas in an essay called 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', which starts with a quote from Goethe: 'In nature we never see anything isolated, but everything in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it and over it'.

Eisenstein was part of the Proletkult movement together with many other Russian revolutionary artists like Mayakovsky, Malevich, Tatlin, Meyerhold and others. They advocated the rejection of all previous culture as being "bourgeois" and the creation of a brand new form of proletarian culture. Both Lenin and Trotsky strongly disagreed with this view, as they understood the need to take from the old society all that was good and use in the

development of the new. However, they also had the view that artists should be free to express themselves fully. In the early days of the Russian Revolution all were allowed and encouraged to express their views and ideas and from this struggle, constant debate and freedom of expression great works of art were created.

In his early films he abandoned the use of characters and replaced them with the anonymous individuals that make up the mass of people, belonging to different social classes that clash in real life. His first film *The Strike*, depicting a fictional strike movement was made with ordinary workers instead of professional actors. In his famous *October*, which describes the 1917 October Revolution, he used the same technique, but had great difficulty finding people who would play the Mensheviks or the Social Revolutionaries, and even more finding anyone who would play the bourgeois! He had to resort to trickery, telling people they would be playing a Bolshevik, allowing them to make fiery revolutionary speeches, and only in the editing process they would become Mensheviks opposed to the taking of power. This was not too difficult considering his were silent movies and the speeches would not be heard.

Another anecdote from the filming of *October* was that more damage was done to the Winter Palace and more people died during the filming of the storming of the Palace than during the actual events in October 1917! An

old porter of the Palace commented: "you people were more careful the first time round!"

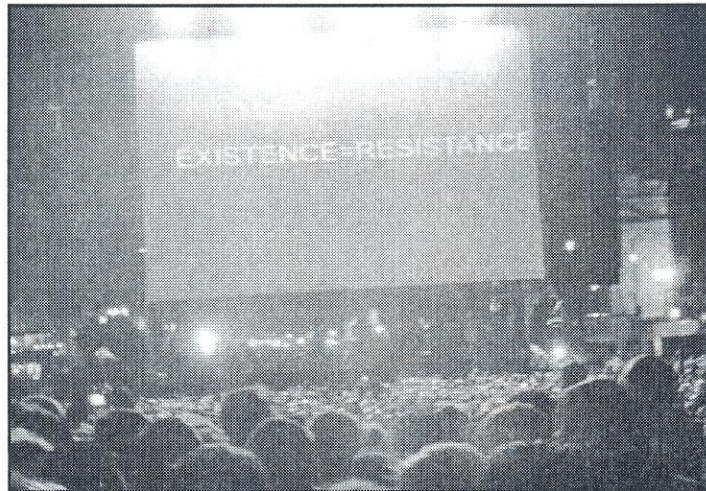
The Battleship Potemkin was supposed to be part of a project called Towards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In the end, however, only Potemkin and *October* were ever made. In the film he depicts very clearly the building up of tensions between the sailors and the officers, leading up to a point in which an apparently trivial incident, the rotten meat covered in maggots, leads to a sudden explosion and the mutiny of the crew which then raises the red flag. Incidentally, this being a black and white film there was no easy way of showing a red flag flying over the ship, so Eisenstein went to the trouble of painstakingly painting the flag in red in every single frame (something that was not seen in the copy that was shown in Trafalgar Square on Sunday!) The death of one of the leaders of the rebellion during the mutiny in turn leads to the uprising of the people in Odessa itself which are then brutally attacked by the Cossacks in the famous scene of the Odessa steps. Finally tension mounts as the fleet is sent to put down the uprising, when the final conflict is about to take place the sailors in the other ships also rebel.

If the film looks powerful today, this must have been even more so at that time, in the early days of cinema and in a revolutionary epoch. In France the authorities destroyed all copies they could get their hands on. In

Germany it was released but subject to censorship since "long-lasting" danger to public order and safety was assumed and military personnel were banned from watching it for fear that they would mutiny. In Pennsylvania, USA, it was banned on the grounds that: 'it gave American sailors a blueprint as to how to conduct mutiny'. In Britain the film was banned until 1954, when it was only given an "X" certificate. It was not until 1978 that it was given a "Parental Guidance" rating. Even in 1933, in Indonesia, the crew of the Dutch battleship *De Zeven Provinciën* claimed at their trial to have been inspired to mutiny by *Potemkin*.

That freedom of experimentation, the search for new forms of art, and the freshness that accompanied it were later replaced by the stale forms of "soviet realism". The genuine workers' democracy that existed at the time of Lenin and Trotsky was abolished, drowned in blood and replaced by the monstrous dictatorship of the grey bureaucracy under Stalin. And Eisenstein, like many other revolutionary artists, was to suffer the consequences of this transformation. For instance, Trotsky, who appeared many times in the original version of *October*, as his role in the Revolution had been at the same level as Lenin's, was to be cut down to just one appearance, where he is seen arguing for a delay in the date of the insurrection.

More than 3,000 (1000 metres) feet of footage had to be cut on Stalin's personal instructions. Even the *Battleship Potemkin* itself was subject to censorship by Stalin. The first version was introduced by a quote from Trotsky: "The spirit of mutiny swept the land. A tremendous, mysterious process was taking place in countless



hearts: [...] the individual personality [...] became dissolved in the mass, and the mass itself became dissolved in the revolutionary élan [...]" (From Trotsky's 1905). In 1934, after Trotsky had been expelled from the Communist Party, this was replaced by a quote from Lenin (which was also seen in the version screened in Trafalgar Square on Sunday): "Revolution is war. Of all the wars known in history, it is the only lawful, rightful, just, and truly great war...In Russia this war has been declared and won." ("Revolutionary Days").

Eisenstein went for a long period to the US and then to Mexico. When he came back to Russia in 1932 he found the political climate had changed completely. Many of his friends and collaborators had been purged and even the 1932 edition of the Soviet Encyclopaedia denounced him as a "petty bourgeois".

Later on when he directed *Ivan the Terrible*, Stalin also interfered at every stage of production. Although Eisenstein had apparently capitulated to Stalinism, this was probably just a way of saving his own life, and the film can also be seen as an indictment of Stalin and Stalinism. In fact it was heavily criticised by the Stalinist bureaucracy and not released until after the death of Stalin.

Potemkin and Trafalgar Square

The showing of such a powerful revolutionary film as *Potemkin* in a massive screen in Trafalgar Square is in itself quite a political act, but the presentation to the screening was also extremely political. Simon McBurney of *Complicite* was in charge of introducing the film, which he did in a very effective way from the roof of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields Church.

He described Trafalgar Square as a place for mass protest and reviewed the most important demonstrations to have taken place in the square (from the most recent "Stop the War" demos, going back to the 1990 massive Anti-Poll Tax demonstrations, the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, the 1930s National Unemployed Movement marches, etc.) while images of what he was referring to were being shown on the screen. He went on to remind us of the fact that 200 years ago, before the Square was built, the slums of Charing Cross, where poor workers lived, occupied the place. To illustrate the point about their living conditions he quoted from Engels' classic "The Conditions of the Working Class in England".

He then explained the meaning of the *Potemkin*

sailors' mutiny in the context of the 1905 revolution and ended with the famous closing words of the Communist Manifesto: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries Unite!"

One can argue whether the Pet Shop Boys were the best choice for such a political event and whether their music was up to the previous scores to *Potemkin* (one of the early pieces of music associated to it was Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony). But they were definitely aware of the meaning of the event, and Neil Tennant himself said: "*Battleship Potemkin* is about a revolution, and Trafalgar Square is one of the arenas for extra-parliamentary political expression. It's amazing to be given Trafalgar Square for a night."

In another interview he added: "If you think about the bottom of Nelson's column, you see Michael Foot giving a speech at a CND demonstration. You see the poll tax riots, which brought down Mrs Thatcher, or Nelson Mandela speaking. The audience will sit with their backs to the National Gallery, so they can see the Houses of Parliament in the distance. We're staging it like a political meeting."

They performed with German contemporary classical music orchestra *Dresdner Sinfoniker*, who hit the charts last year in Germany by playing classical versions of songs by German rock band *Rammstein*.

At the end of the film the screen showed massive letters announcing "More than 50% of the world's population live on or below the poverty line" and then "Existence=Resistance".

A truly political evening in Trafalgar Square! ■

Tally Ho! Xmas target announced

WELL IT has not been a very good month for our landed gentry chums. First fox hunting with dogs moves a step nearer towards abolition. Then the Right To Roam Act starts to come into effect so that people can now freely walk on the privately owned lands of these people. Oh dear! This has left these relics of the Middle Ages in a state of near apoplexy. They rage on about the need to defy the government and bring it down - in truth these people were never very happy about elected governments in the first place. They dream of the good, very old, days when the titled few ruled the land and all who stood on it. The role of the masses was to bend the knee and do as they were told. But times have moved on. The capitalist class now runs things and these Charlie-Nice-But-Dim's are left wondering why people laugh at their silly accents and 19th century clothing. At their core lurk the royal family - the ultimate expression of the land-owning elite- who stand firmly behind the slogan: 'forward to the 16th century.'

They are the embodiment of reaction used by the capitalist class to front their rush for profit but having little power themselves. Seeing this gang of inbred imbeciles reminds us of why we should be fighting for socialism. When they talk about defending the country way of life, about which they know very little in truth, they really mean defending the world of us and them, of knowing your betters, of old style deference to the Lord of the Manor. They hate the upstarts of the City but know that is

where the power really is. The time has now come for the capitalist class to join the landed toffs in the wastebin of history. This is the task to which Socialist Appeal has set itself.

But unlike the Countryside Alliance rabble, who can always sell a few tiaras and spotless Land Rovers or Barbour jackets to make ends meet, we are reliant on the donations received from our readers. After the dizzy heights of early to mid summer we have received very little in over the last few weeks. So we need to get going. The next few months will see the build up to Christmas, the traditional time for raising cash and getting in donations.

Out Autumn/Xmas target this year is £5,000 to be got in between Oct 1st and the first week of January 2005. This is a very modest target but, even so, it will only be achieved if everybody plays their part. All sellers must start making plans to raise the cash needed - organising fund raising events, socials and, above all, drawing up the lists of those to be approached to make seasonal donations.

But readers should not wait for this. We need the cash now. So please send us what ever you can. Contributions should be made payable to Socialist Appeal and sent to our new address at PO Box 50525, London, E14 6WG. □

Thanks in advance.

Steve Jones

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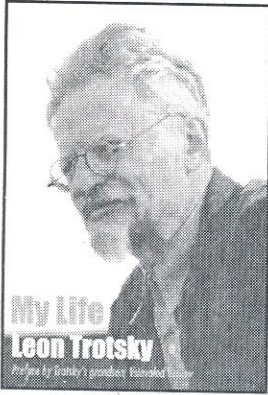
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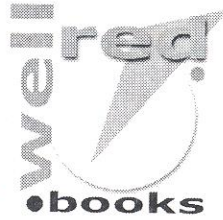
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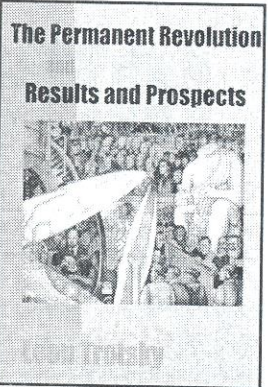
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- ✚ **For a Labour government with a bold socialist programme!** Labour must break with big business and Tory economic policies. Vote Labour and fight to reclaim the party.
- ✚ **A national minimum wage of at least two-thirds of the average wage.**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

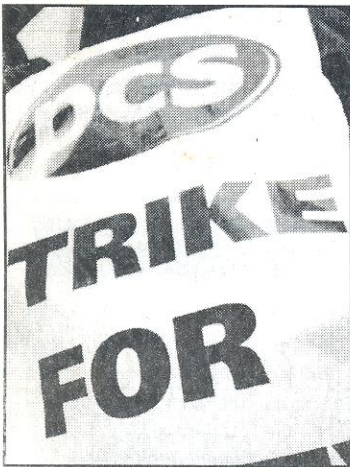
- for equal work. Invest in quality childcare facilities available to all. Scrap all racist immigration and asylum controls. Abolish the Criminal Justice Act.
- ✚ **The reversal of the Tories' cuts in the health service.** Abolish private health care. For a National Health Service, free to all at the point of need, based on the nationalisation of the big drug companies that squeeze their profits out of the health of working people.
- ✚ **Reclaim the Labour Party!** Defeat Blairism! Fight for Party democracy and socialist policies. For workers' MPs on workers' wages.
- ✚ **The abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.** Full economic powers for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, enabling them to introduce socialist measures in the interests of working people.
- ✚ **No to sectarianism.** For a Socialist United Ireland linked by a voluntary federation to a Socialist Britain.
- ✚ **Break with the anarchy of the capitalist free market.** Labour to immediately take over the "commanding heights of the economy." Nationalise the big monopolies, banks and financial institutions that dominate our lives. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of need. All nationalised enterprises to be run under workers control and management and integrated through a democratic socialist plan of production.
- ✚ **Socialist internationalism.** No to the bosses European Union. Yes to a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation.



Socialist Appeal

Marxist voice of the labour movement

PCS: Strike for jobs



The campaign against a massive 104,000 job cuts in the civil service is gearing up after a flying start at last month's annual TUC Conference. Almost 300,000 workers are being balloted strike action, and the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) is asking members for a resounding YES vote in favour of a one-day strike on November 5th as the opening shot of the campaign to save jobs.

The government who talk a lot about engaging in dialogue and doing "the right thing", haven't even bothered to consult with staff or the union. Instead we have the disgraceful spectacle of a Labour govern-

ment vying with the Tories over job cuts to see who can go highest.

Meanwhile, the cuts have already started and are ongoing, the PCS estimates that 2000 people are earmarked to go in the first round of cuts. Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) staff in 42 Job Centres and benefits offices around the country have been told that their offices are closing and they will be losing their jobs - and these are just the first of an estimated 550 office closures in the DWP alone! This has led to unofficial walkouts by eleven offices in Scotland and others in England.

In typical Blairite newspeak the government has talked about getting rid of waste and freeing up resources to improve the service - they have said that cutting out bureaucracy in the behind the scenes jobs will free up frontline services. Like most government statements this means exactly the opposite of what it says - how can cutting one in five jobs possibly deliver a better service? How can you make a distinction between frontline and behind the scenes services when one backs up the other and both are necessary to do the work.

These cuts are the biggest

attacks in the history of the Civil Service. Many departments are already overstretched to the point of collapse, and those are the very ones that are going to suffer the most from the redundancies. Despite being the lowest paid and having a heavy workload, The DWP stands to lose 40,000 staff, when unemployment rises again the service will be swamped.

Other big losers are the Ministry of Defence, and the Treasury/Inland Revenue with 15,000 and 16,850 redundancies respectively. All departments are losing some staff, and some are small departments so even small cuts can have a devastating effect.

This is not only an attack on working conditions and trade union organisation within the service, it is a direct attack on the entire working class because it is an attack on the welfare state, education, culture and other historic conquests which the working class had to fight for.

These attacks will affect anyone who applies for a passport, anyone who depends on state funding for sports or cultural activities, anyone who needs to use a hospital, or anybody who loses their job and is forced to claim benefit.

It is critical that the whole movement rallies round to give full support to civil servants in this dispute - this is the thin end of the wedge. If the government is allowed to destroy the civil service it will pave the way for them to move on to the rest of our public services.

The union movement and its leaders turned out in force to support the dispute at the TUC - it is important that these leaders take that support into the wider movement, into the union branches, and onto the picket lines. The PCS can win the dispute and save the jobs and the service members have dedicated their lives to. But they will need the full support of the rest of the movement.

This is a political issue and it cannot be decisively won without a political struggle. The unions must take the struggle into the Labour Party. We must end Labour's infatuation with partnership and pro-capitalist policies. Only a Labour government with a socialist programme can deliver an efficient civil service, a decent welfare state and good public services for all.

This bonfire night light a rocket under Blair and co, vote to strike on November 5th.

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