

British economy □ Lenin □ Agenda for change □ Venezuela

SocialistAppeal

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Lessons of Spain



Troops out of Iraq now!



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An appeal to all Labour and trade union organisations.

It is our intention to once again carry May day greetings from organisations and individuals from the movement in our May 2004 edition.

Our struggle is the struggle of the international working class. May Day is an important date in the calendar of the Labour and trade union movement and we are therefore asking all readers to consider sending us greetings and messages of solidarity for inclusion in this edition. Our rates are very reasonable and different sized and designs are available. In addition, and at no extra cost, all greetings will be placed on our websites to be viewed by people in struggle from all around the world.

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Driven to Debt and Depression

THE HOUNDING of Dr. David Kelly to his death rightly continues to make headlines. There has been somewhat less coverage, however, of another tragic case of suicide. Last month 37 year old father of two Stephen Lewis, from Worksop, took his own life after running up debts of £65,000 on 19 credit cards. In the month before his death Mr. Lewis had to make minimum repayments of between £5,000 and £6,000 and had accrued interest of between £3,000 and £4,000. Yet he earned just £22,000 a year as a production worker at an engineering firm.

Shamefully, The Royal Bank of Scotland group - which has just announced record profits of £6 billion - is still pursuing Mr. Lewis' widow for part of the debt he left behind, as, indeed, are 11 of the credit card companies involved. These leeches were only too willing to dish out the debt. Now, after a man has been driven beyond the edge of reason, they chase his widow for the money he could not repay.

This was not the first such suicide, nor will it be the last. The stress of debt, overwork and uncertainty about the future is illustrated by the following disturbing statistic. In 2002, doctors in Britain prescribed some 26 million anti-depressants. Six million people now take such pills regularly. This level of pressure cannot be endured indefinitely without provoking an explosion. For now, many families are being driven to debt, and depression, just to pay the bills that falling real incomes mean their wages will not cover.

There are now 1,500 different credit cards available in Britain. Malcolm Hurlston of the Consumer Credit Counselling Service says he has recently helped one client with 39 credit cards and another with 37. Credit card lending has doubled in just four years. All-pervasive 'buy now pay later' advertising, combined with the

claim that the economy is sound - boom and bust has been cured and so on - has resulted in debt becoming more widespread than ever before. Even before interest rate rises start to bite the result has been mounting bad debt.

A report published by the Leeds Business School claims that the amount of debt being chased by bailiffs now stands at a record £5 billion. The typical household in bad debt now owes £25,000 spread across an average of 15 different lenders. A staggering total of 20 million cases of bad debt have been passed to collection agencies in the last year. Short of bad debt, borrowers are behind by two months on debt payments totalling £60 billion: more than £2,000 for every household in the country.

The Blair government is keen to tackle this problem. They intend to make it easier for the various leeches and sharks to get what they are owed through a new law giving bailiffs the right to break down doors and seize goods.

Democratic debt

Capitalism is very democratic when it comes to credit, everyone, no matter how poor, is able to get up to and over their necks in debt. New 'doorstep lending' companies have sprung up and spread like a virus. These companies typically charge rates of over 100 or even 150 percent, quickly trapping the poorest sections of the community into debts they can never repay. Eyeing this attractive corner of the market, the Post Office intends to replace the custom it lost when benefit giro's were replaced by direct payments to bank accounts, by offering their own unsecured loans.

On average British households now owe 124 percent of their incomes. Averages, of course, can be deceptive. Those with an annual income of less than £11,500 currently

owe 430 percent of their income, up from 330 percent in 1995.

Inequality in income, assets and debts has spiralled under the Blair government. In 1976 the richest 50 percent of the population owned 88 percent of non-housing wealth. Today they own 99 percent, meaning conversely that the poorest 50 percent own just one percent of the wealth between them.

Despite Brown's constant claims of prudence - the unwillingness of a Labour government wedded to the market to invest in public services - he has in reality presided over record breaking high street borrowing and personal indebtedness. British household liabilities exceed incomes by one third. That is a record. Average credit card debt now stands at £1,100 per head, double the figure just five years ago. Total consumer debt excluding mortgages now stands at £3,400 for every adult in Britain, £1,150 more than in 1998.

While industry remains in the doldrums and manufacturing investment continues to fall, the economy is being kept afloat by credit cards and unsustainable house price inflation. This house price/credit card economy cannot continue indefinitely. There is always a morning after the night before and this time will be no different. Karl Marx explained a long time ago that credit simply takes the system beyond its limits. Lacking a market, they create one artificially by lending money. However, this only amounts to using up tomorrow's market today. In this way crisis is merely postponed a little. For all Blair and Brown's illusions they have not abolished the boom and slump cycle. As David Walker explained in *The Guardian*, "People think they can easily work off their debts - by doing overtime, winning promotion or getting a new job. But that's to make a heroic assumption about economic

conditions. Orgies do not go on forever. The economic cycle has not been abolished; unemployment will start growing again - history is littered with gurus who proclaimed its end."

This boom - the longest uninterrupted growth since the industrial revolution according to Gordon Brown - has not been much of a party for the working class. Stress, job insecurity, debt - this is the best this system can offer us, even in a boom.

On the one hand the fate of the British economy is more than ever tied to the world market. Continued recession in Europe and the fall of the dollar limit the growth of exports, constrained anyway by the decimation of manufacturing and the long term failure of British capital to invest.

On the other hand the British economy is precariously poised like a house of cards where each new interest rate rise adds another card to the teetering edifice of consumer debt and overvalued houses.

Socialist programme needed

The key feature of the present period is instability and uncertainty, in the economy, in politics and in international relations. Record debt and rising interest rates will combine with anger and disillusionment over the war in Iraq and seven years of failures by the Blair government to create a social explosion. Unlike in Spain, where the Socialist Party was able to capitalise on opposition to the right wing government, here there is no alternative outside Labour - but there is an alternative to Blair. That alternative means fighting for a socialist programme to end the debt-stress cycle, to end low pay, to invest in health and education, to address all the problems facing working people. We must fight for this programme inside the labour and trade union movement. □

Fighting for Truth

by Sylvia Courtnage, ADM Delegate

IN THE aftermath of the Hutton report there was a highly charged mood at the recent National Union of Journalists' Annual Delegate Meeting in Liverpool. There were lots of new delegates, increased numbers of women and general enthusiasm.

The union has made important gains. The Labour Force Survey showed journalists' pay has gone up by 5.1% in the last 12 months and pay for the lowest paid has risen 20% over the last two years and membership is growing.

A move to 'save money to spend on the real issues' by making conference only every two years was defeated. Delegates spoke of the need to respond quickly and Kate Simon said that ADM was crucial to keep alive an active union.

Delegates reported spontaneous walk-outs over the BBC's sacking of Greg Dyke - although the protests were really more of a response to Government attacks on the BBC's editorial independence and support for public service broadcasting.

Anne Alexander said: "Management dissolved into a blob of jelly and completely disappeared. If we wanted to walk out - there was nothing they could do to stop us. The only line of defence was the ordinary workers."

People were disappointed that the political fund ballot had been narrowly unsuccessful (47% for, 53% against in a 29% turnout), but this lays a good foundation for a future campaign. There was some criticism that the vote had been lost because the union leadership had been over-democratic in allowing the 'No' campaigners too much say and had not begun the campaign early enough.

Mick Gosling said: "It was months before any information was published. One individual was allowed to email all union members [opposing] - just before the vote. Why couldn't my branch have the right if reply?" Others chorused agreement.

International Issues

Another big debate took place over Iraq and the war on terrorism.

Jeremy Dear quoted from a recent meeting with Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary,

who had unashamedly told him: "Journalists knew that they had to report the truth. If they wrote rubbish, they would find that they were not quite so well protected."

Chris Youett reported how members were regularly 'turned over' at Birmingham Airport. Cameras were taken from them and films often badly developed.

Kris Lawrie argued that the Euro was being used to introduce austerity measures and privatise public services throughout Europe. But a motion to mount a 'No' campaign was heavily defeated.

The conference also debated the situation in Venezuela. It agreed to continue to support the working class there and widen the debate across the union.

The "Burning Issues" rally was addressed by Tony Woodley (TGWU), Billy Hayes (CWU) and John McDonnell MP. He said that he wanted: "an irreversible shift of wealth and power to working people."

A Left meeting attracted about 60 members, an increase on the previous year- and crucially agreed to hold a full conference to discuss a programme and organisation.

A commitment was also made to discuss throughout the union a campaign for genuine press freedom under workers' control. □



Support sacked press officers

LABOUR CONTROLLED Haringey has hired a flashy firm of PR consultants to inject 'efficiency' into the council's affairs, and characteristically the first thing they have done is to begin sacking workers.

In the name of restructuring, six council press officers were given their notice - this was all done at lightning speed to prevent the union taking any action to protect the workers. The union took the decision to ballot the affected members for industrial action, but under employment law this process takes at least three weeks by which time their notice had run out and they would have been out of work.

Sacked staff were then offered the chance to apply for four newly created jobs in the press department - all but one refused to apply in protest.

The council issued a statement to the sacked staff effectively notifying them that they were to be locked out: "You will be given an opportunity to collect any personal items and you will then no longer have access to the Communications Unit. Your access to the council's systems including the electronic press management system will be revoked with immediate effect."

The following day they turned up for work to find the offices closed. So they returned home and later received their final redundancy notices by motorcycle courier.

These sackings are clearly part of a wider picture. In all local authorities, staff (with the obvious exception of management) are finding their wages, conditions, and even their jobs under threat. The seemingly relentless drive for 'greater efficiency' in reality means saving money by cutting corners.

It is important that the NUJ takes a stand on these type of issues which affect all our members indirectly, and our members in Haringey Press Office very directly. We have therefore offered our full support to our colleagues in Haringey. □

by Kris Lawrie

New threat to car jobs

FROM VAUXHALL'S in Luton, to Ford's in Dagenham the heart has been ripped out of the motor industry. Announcements have been made in the last few months which promise a new round of attacks and cuts by the bosses.

Peugeot has announced the scrapping of a shift this June with the loss of 700 jobs at its Ryton plant in the West Midlands. It was taken on one year ago as a weekend night shift to help the company meet high demand for the Peugeot 206 and is now being axed because of the downturn in the European car market.

This blow comes in spite of the workers jumping through hoops to safeguard jobs. Last summer they were told their jobs would be secured if they signed up for new flexible working patterns, reduced hours, and a cut in wages. The bosses are constantly asking for more in return for less and, at the end of the day, still make the cuts anyway without a second thought.

Meanwhile, Landrover, now owned by Fords, has recently announced that it will move Freelander production from Solihull to the Jaguar plant at Halewood on Merseyside, meaning another wave of job losses in the West Midlands.

At Vauxhall's largest remaining UK site, Ellesmere Port, 450 jobs have been lost from the engine plant in the last year. It has now been reported that they want to shut the engine plant altogether, with another 150 job losses, and move production to Poland where they can pay workers much less for the same product.

We have a new layer of leaders in all the major car unions - elected on a militant platform of ending sham partnership, and fighting for workers rights. It is time our leaders turned these words into action and led a fight to save jobs.

- ❑ We need a programme of militant action to save our industry and our jobs.
- ❑ We must accept NO further job losses, or cuts in wages and conditions.
- ❑ All companies making cuts or closing plant should be nationalised by the Labour government under the democratic control of the workforce.

Miners celebrate anniversary

by Steve Brown, Sec: Wansbeck and Castle Morpeth TUC.
Alcan GMB shop steward. Personal capacity.

ON THE sixth of March 2004, at Ashington Leisure centre in Northumberland, six hundred miners, their wives and families, trades unionists and supporters came together to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the most bitter and hard fought industrial dispute in British working class history. This was an evening mainly of entertainment, food and drink, but was also a chance to meet old friends and comrades, to re-live some of the memories of a year made up of struggles and difficulties but contrasted with great excitement and comradeship. It was a chance also to remind ourselves of the sense of community which has been lost since the strike and the hard times which ensued from that defeat.

However, it is testimony to the resilience of the working class that we can come together to celebrate a major defeat in such a way, to mark an event that symbolises a real turning point in our political and industrial history and a turn for the worse at that. But in the same way that Dunkirk symbolised defeat for the British army in the face of an advancing fascist force in northern France, the lessons learned from that rout became a precursor to and partly laid the basis for, the eventual victory of the allies in 1945. The lessons learned from the 84/85 dispute will also echo down the years and will stand the working class in good stead in the battles that will unfold in the future.

The mood on the evening was positive and reflective but was tainted with the announcement from British Coal a few days earlier of the closure, within the next two years, of Ellington colliery the last deep mine in the North East with the loss of 350 jobs. The capitalist class sure know how to rub workers noses in the dirt. The call must go up for the immediate re-nationalisation of the mining industry under democratic workers control with no compensation for these robbers.

It's time to rub their noses in it! ❑

RMT and Labour

RMT WREXHAM branch took the decision last month to affiliate to Wales First, a new political party in Wales formed by John Marek, who was deselected as Labour's Welsh Assembly candidate for Wrexham, but won on an independent ticket in last May's election.

This follows the decision taken by the union at a Special Recall Conference in February to allow branches to affiliate to political parties other than Labour, bringing them into conflict with the Labour Party's rules and effectively leading to the disaffiliation of the union.

It is entirely understandable that workers whose jobs, conditions and services are being attacked by Labour in office, should question their union's links with Labour. The responsibility for this threat to the unity of Labour movement rests squarely on the shoulders of Blair and Co. But it is easy to take a knee jerk reaction to this and walk away from the struggle.

The members of the RMT are now being faced with a very difficult journey out into the cold. They are presented with a choice between a range of - Heinz 57 varieties - small sects. These groups are all in favour of renationalising the public services and railways, investing more in schools and hospitals, ending the imperialist war in Iraq and repealing the anti union laws. At the moment Labour stands for none of those things!

Unfortunately these groups are not, and never will be, in a position to do anything about these things which affect working people. The growth in support for these fringe groups (such as it is) reflects the first strivings of some union activists to do something about Blair. This will prove to be temporary however, and foreshadows not the further growth of these groupings, but the real battle to come - inside Labour.

Two months on RMT members must be looking at what is going on and wondering whether the conference decision was the step forward that they were told it was - Why are we supporting a collection of small groups - rather than getting stuck into the Labour Party which the mass of workers still look to?

By tapping into the massive hatred for Blair which exists in the union movement we can build a serious rank and file opposition to Blair both in the union movement and inside the Labour Party. This would enthuse a layer of workers to kick out the Blairites and begin arguing within the party for policies in our members interests. Only a Labour Government with genuine socialist policies can solve the problems facing workers and society as a whole. Such a Labour government can only be created by a united struggle on the part of the unions inside Labour. ❑

Agenda for Change

by our industrial correspondent

AGENDA FOR Change is a new pay structure that is being proposed for the National Health Service, with the full backing of most of the trade union leaderships. In reality, however, Agenda for Change is nothing new, it has a history dating back 9 years, to similar measures implemented in local government called Single Status. Both local government and the health service have very complicated pay structures that have been negotiated at national level and effectively came out of the ark in the 1940s. They have been tinkered with a little, but not a great deal. The wage structures concerned affect 2.5 million workers if you take everyone in local government and the health service into account - the single biggest employers in the country. Built into these complicated pay structures there are many anomalies.

One of the biggest is that they can be challenged in law - through the industrial tribunal system - on the basis of equal pay and equal value. The story of Agenda for Change starts 9 years ago in sleepy place called Gloucester where 5 nursery nurses took their employer to an industrial tribunal for equal pay. They compared themselves to a number of men who were employed in the local authority. The group that was chosen as the comparators was the architectural technicians - almost all of them male. The argument they put was that the skills they had developed, not under formal training but through years of experience, were undervalued. And that the skills that they had were of the same value as a male architectural assistant. These skills included caring for children from different ethnic backgrounds; caring for children with a whole raft of illnesses and disabilities; giving education and training to parents.

The tribunal found in their favour and they won. Their salaries went up from around £9,000 to £19,000 and the increase was backdated 2 years, so they picked up £18,000 in backdating, a further 2 years in compensation for being discriminated against, plus a £10,000 pay increase. That was a huge victory.

Within 9 months the local government employers made an approach to all of the local government unions with a deal called Single Status. This was a based-on-job evaluation, and it was devised as a method of giving some people increases based on other people having pay cuts to pay for it. Vitality for the employers, a new job evaluation scheme would act as a defence against Equal Pay claims and Equal Value claims.

Single Status was rolled out in local government 7 years ago, so it took 2 years to prepare it. To date 19 local government employers have been able to reach agreements on the basis of Single Status. There are more than 500 local government employers. In effect this was a con-trick by the employers, and worst of all a con-trick perpetrated on union members by their leaders. It was argued against by some as a con-trick, that it would never be introduced, that it couldn't be introduced - and that it was challengeable. Nonetheless the employers thought that they had a solid defence against any further Equal Value and Equal Pay claims.

Local government

Newcastle City Council, UNISON, and GMB have already done a deal under Single Status, and they are now being sued by their own members because they have come to a deal which is significantly less than the deal that the members could reasonably expect to get from a tribunal. In Redcar and Cleveland, another large local government branch where UNISON has 3,000 members, the branch also came to a deal with the employer on Single Status, and they too are being sued.

In Redcar and Cleveland the Single Status deal gives 2,800 members a pay increase and £3.5M is shared out. Solicitors representing 130 UNISON members have lodged Equal Pay claims for them and they get £2.5M for 130 members. There are thousands of members in these areas now suing the union for signing a deal that gives them less than they would reasonably expect to get from

an industrial tribunal. What an indictment of the union leaders.

The members were not consulted about these deals, and in one of the areas they didn't even receive backdated pay. Agreements were signed to ensure there would be no further equal pay claims once the deal was done.

That is the background in Local Government. Single Status was rolled out as a defence mechanism to protect the employers against Equal Pay, a timebomb which is ticking within both the health service and local government.

That brings us to Agenda for Change (AfC). These proposals either maintain the status quo or make the position worse for workers. AfC neither abolishes low pay, nor rectifies the situation in terms of the discrepancy in salaries between women and men in the health service.

Given the complex web of pay structures involved there is a great deal of detail to sift through in the proposed changes before coming to the conclusion that in essence it consists of a re-grading, incorporating bonuses into salaries - which are then sold as pay increases, but in practice will mean pay cuts - and a safeguard against further equal value and equal pay claims.

A basic 37.5 hour week will see all extra benefits - overtime structures etc. - replaced by a maximum 25% of salary. Given that Sunday working is double time and Saturday time and a half, the new proposals based on a MAXIMUM of 25% of salary - and that is only if they work more than 21 hours a week after 7 at night, or before 7 in the morning, and Saturdays and Sundays - is no improvement. It is almost a physical impossibility for any group of workers to work within these limits and trigger the 25% payment.

It is a very significant pay cut for engineers, for example. There is a big push in Amicus to get them onto technician grades, though they would still be facing a pay cut unless they manage to qualify for the 25% then it is break even.

If they get regraded they go on to band 4 - £18,000 + 25%, not so bad? The problem is there is a thing called 'a gateway.' You don't automati-

cally go through the gateway. The gateway is determined by knowledge and skills, and there is going to be a new knowledge and skills framework rolled out across the whole of the country - we are going to be expected to vote on this deal, some unions already have voted and don't have plans for another vote and nobody in the country to date knows anything about this "knowledge and skills framework." But there is no guarantee that any single employee will go through the gateway. You have to have, and be able to prove that you have, additional knowledge and skills to go through the gateway.

Nurses

This will affect all layers - take nurses for example. At the moment D-grade is the largest in the health service, it covers the standard staff nurse. Under AfC staff nurses will go on to band 5 which on paper will mean a rise from £18,240 to £22,710. This looks like a rise of about £4000 a year but again it is deceptive because of the Gateway.

Both D- and E-grade nurses are being merged into band 5. E-grade nurses have superior skills and knowledge, for example a teamleader, or a specialist nurse. No-one has said that a D-grade nurse who is on top salary for that grade will automatically go through the gateway to the top of band 5.

I suspect that the gateway increments, and therefore the top rate of salary, are going to be reserved for the E-grade nurses, and D-grade nurses will not go through. For one grade of staff alone to go through the gateway, onto the highest band of pay, will cost an employer millions, and there are over 100 grades of staff in the health service. It isn't going to happen.

The other factor which negates the effects of any increase is that all benefits and allowances for weekends and unsocial hours are being scrapped and subsumed into the payrise. For example, at the moment D-grade nurses receive time and a third, and time and two thirds respectively for working Saturdays and Sundays, and time and a third for unsocial hours - all of that will go. So the nurse who expects a £2000 pay increase is getting an increase on paper but by the time you take the cuts in shift allowances in to account is actually only standing still.

This will have an even more devastating effect on nightshift workers. It is a fact that 99% of workers who work nights in the NHS are women. At the moment a nightshift nurse will get a maximum of 30% for unsocial hours because they are permanent night shift workers, and additional time and a third every time they

work a Sunday. The maximum they will ever get on the unsocial hours programme under AfC is 25%. It is a disaster for staff that work nights. It is a big pay cut. And the union is selling it.

Pathology lab staff, who are predominantly organised in Amicus-MSF, will be going into grades 3 and 4 (maybe 5) of the new spine. For instance Medical Research and Scientific Officers (MRSO) who do very important lab work in all sorts of areas from haematology to identifying cancer clusters will be going into bands 5 and 6.

Notionally under the new deal an MRSO going onto band 5 gets a £400 a year increase. However the current MRSO pay structure is a very old agreement - it has no facilities for working nights and weekends. Because under the agreement there are no fixed rates for these types of shifts, they have been negotiated on an area by area basis and some of these agreements are excellent. It is not uncommon for them to be earning £5-10,000 on top of the basic salary, which takes their earnings up and over the £30,000 mark. Under AfC all bonuses and allowances are ditched, so it is not a surprise that the biggest opposition within Amicus is coming from path. lab. staff.

Equal pay

In 1997 UNISON in Carlisle filed a whole series of Equal Value claims. They are now almost finished, and the union has won 58 out of 60 test cases. The claim used various male comparators, and compared them with women in similar jobs on lower incomes. Every single comparator used in the Equal Pay claim has since been downgraded under Agenda for Change.

This will cost around £250M in Carlisle healthcare trust alone, and sets a precedent that could be replicated in all 480 healthcare trusts. The Carlisle Equal Pay claim and the massive liabilities that they could inflict on the health service is the reason for Agenda of Change.

The union should be using the threat of Equal Value to negotiate a far better deal than AfC. We are not going to oppose anything that is a genuine step forward, we are not even going to oppose a marginal win. We might criticise it but we are not going to try to convince members to vote against it if it is a genuine reform - but this is not a genuine reform.

When it comes to the choice between Equal Value and Equal Pay on the one hand, and Agenda for Change on the other - lets present the facts honestly to the members and ask them what they want. The union must fight for the best deal for the members. □

Scottish Nursery Nurses take action

FROM MARCH 1st 5000 nursery nurses across Scotland have been on all out indefinite strike. Their current starting salary is only £10,000 with the average nursery nurse earning just £13,361. The union is demanding a £4000 a year increase which would bring the starting salary up to approximately £14,000 and a top band salary of £18,000 for experienced staff.

The current dispute goes back to 2001 when the union first put the claim in. Since then the employers have been giving the union the runaround threatening a massive downgrading of the job, cutting hours, pay and pensions of thousands of nursery nurses.

As a result the nursery nurses balloted for strike action and voted 87% in favour. In the preceding period the union had tried negotiation, lobbying, campaigning and demonstrating all of which the employers ignored, so they were forced to take action.

As we go to press the strike is still solid. The union is still putting forward the original claim. However at the same time it has come to deals with at least eleven of the 32 Scottish councils, and it seems that talks are taking place in another seven.

It seems that these councils have made better offers, which have been accepted by the union. It has been reported that in Aberdeenshire they have accepted a deal which will give them a £13,000 starting salary and a top rate of around £16,000. If this is the case it shows that the employers are on the ropes, the strike is having the desired effect and they are eager to cut a deal, so why stop there? Hold firm and get the full claim. At the end of the day it is up to the workers to decide and the union should ballot the members before signing up to any new deal.

The nursery nurses are fighting a courageous battle.. It could give inspiration to other low paid workers, particularly low paid women who are discriminated against under the current local government pay system. □

Mass students and youth protests in Spain

by Ray Smith

THE DAY of Action held in Spain on March 4th was a success. The university and high school students were called out on strike against the reactionary laws passed by the rightwing government. The result of this appeal from the Students' Union (SE) was that two million took strike action, a hundred thousand of them flooding the streets in more than 50 demonstrations and rallies all over the country. The biggest demonstrations took place in Barcelona (50,000 students) and in Madrid (30,000 students). The demonstrations that took place in Valencia (4,000 students) and Seville (2,000 students) were very important as well. Many of these students' demonstrations merged with workers that were also engaged in industrial action. For instance, students and shipyard workers marched together in Seville. Cleaning workers who are on indefinite strike and students merged in the streets of Girona as well. In Madrid, leaders of CCOO and STE (the two main education unions) addressed solidarity messages to the students at the end of the demonstration. These events were not an accident. The SE, the conveners, and the shop stewards of the workers in struggle had agreed to unite. The Marxist leadership of the Students' Union has always stood for the unity of the students and the labour movement in order to fight back against the capitalist system and their representatives in the government.

All the demonstrations and rallies were peaceful, but Barcelona's demonstration witnessed some trouble. This trouble was provoked by small groups which were completely unconnected to the students' mobilisation. The Students' Union also denounces the provocative behaviour of the police during the Madrid and Barcelona demonstrations. The police tried to create trouble and threatened the students as well. The intentions behind their approach are pretty clear. However, not even these violent attempts by the PP succeeded in cowering the anger of the youth and the working people. As Aniol Santo (General Secretary of the Students' Union in Barcelona) stated "once again the students are taking to the streets in a 100% political strike against the regressive and anti-working class policies of the government". It was clear that the (now former) rightwing government didn't want these historical mobilisations to take place while they were in office. Since long before the beginning of the Electoral Campaign for the General Election, the Popular Party attacked anyone who dared to stand up to it. Rightwing ministers flooded the media with provocative statements. They even stooped to calling the leaders of different left parties "terrorists". However, this sort of provocative statement only shows how isolated the rightwing is from the youth and the working class.

Revolutionary potential of youth

The workers and their families have seen the disparity between their wages and current prices grow. They have also seen how production has been moved to countries in Eastern Europe and the north of Africa, where the system provides "cheap labour costs". The youth has been victimised by a battery of regressive laws and state education has been under permanent attack by the government. At the top of the list, the rightwing government was a supporter of "the war on terror" and lied to the people over the "Prestige Disaster". This tragedy destroyed the Spanish Atlantic coasts' landscapes and thousands of jobs as well. After the terrorists' blasts in Madrid the



rightwing leaders tried to mislead the people and use 202 casualties for their own electoral profit. This last crime triggered all the anger of the youth and the labour movement. The mobilisation on March 4th put more pressure on the left leaders as well. On March 9th, the statements of J.L.Rodriguez Zapatero (Socialist Party leader) appeared in the Spanish newspaper "El Mundo". He proposed "an alliance with the students in order to repeal the anti-education laws passed by the PP". He promised to withdraw the 2,000 Spanish troops from Iraq.

Only three days later, the Students' Union called for another students' strike and demonstrations in support of the victims of the brutal terrorist blasts in Madrid and to expose the opportunist approach of the government to the tragedy. It was the only political force in Spain that understood the revolutionary potential of the youth. Without the decisive intervention of the Students' Union, it is possible that the right wing and the fascist elements could have had an influence, at least in the first stages when confusion reigned. In Madrid at the beginning of the demonstration some fascists turned up brandishing Spanish flags. But they were quickly silenced by the members of the Students' Union who seized the microphone and began chanting "Workers and Students Unite!" The SE's demonstrations took place all over Spain: 50,000 in Barcelona, 20,000 in Madrid, 10,000 in Salamanca, 10,000 in Gijon, 8,000 in Bilbao. The militant approach of the Marxist students corresponded completely with the militant mood in the streets. Many lessons can be learned from these events were the youth has played a key role. The most important is the necessity of a militant organisation for the youth in Britain like in Spain. Only with a determined organization linking up with the workers' organisations can we face and defeat attacks on our academic and work conditions. □

School Students Fighting Suspension

by a Cumbrian School Student

ON THURSDAY (March 18th), a student was unofficially suspended from his studies at 6th form, because he went home on the Wednesday afternoon as he had no more lessons that day. It was clearly explained to him on the day of his suspension, and the day he returned to 6th form, that the suspension was predominantly due to him leaving school when he had free periods, but also because he missed a maths lesson that morning. Myself and another student felt that the treatment of this student was unfair, almost every student in the 6th form (that's nearly 200) go home early or come in late if they are free. If there is a rule against it, the students have never been made aware of it and it has never been implemented. We felt that if it was to be implemented for one student it should be implemented for all or not at all.

On the Friday we started a petition for the student, saying we felt the suspension was unfair and could not be tolerated by the students of the 6th form. We demanded that he be allowed back into school with immediate effect and that all future suspensions were official.

On the Friday afternoon the Tory "chief whip" and local MP, David McClain, was in the school talking to the year 10 students, some 6th formers were allowed to attend, including myself. Unfortunately they ran out of time before I could ask a question, but undeterred I made a quick exit at the end of the assembly and caught up with him. I asked him some questions on the UN Convention on the Rights Of the Child, and then asked if he would sign the petition. He explained that it was something that he couldn't get involved in. We then photocopied the petition and put it on the desk of the Head of 6th Form.

On the Monday, on arriving at school we were informed that there was a "special assembly", most people had come to the conclu-

sion that it was in reference to the petition, and they were correct. The head of 6th form took the assembly, lasting around 15 minutes, in it he explained how he was personally offended by the petition, and that the names on it would affect how he thought about them in future, especially given the fact that he will have to write references on their behalf.

After the assembly me and the other student that started the petition were taken to the head's office where he went into a 20-minute rant on how he was personally offended, and he felt like "physically hurting" us, he continued in an aggressive manner, waving the petition around and slamming it several items down on his desk, and coming intimidatingly close to the other students face. The result of this was an official one-day suspension for both of us, "seeing as how we are fond of official suspension". At the time I asked the head of 6th form to explain and clarify why we had been suspended, to which he replied "what the head said" and "the following letter will explain it", which of course it didn't. The letter is extremely vague and so we have replied asking them to explain the suspension and the rules I have broken. I am allowed 7 days to appeal against the decision, we sent the letter on the day of the suspension and now 3 days have elapsed without us hearing a word from the school, any further delays by the school would suggest they are trying to prevent me from appealing.

Also on the Monday, as I started my suspension, the school started, what can only be called, a propaganda misled, telling all the 6th form students that they had been deceived and misled by myself and the other student. This is surely a breach of article 16 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child 1989, which states "1. No child shall be subjected to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation." □

20th March - One year since the imperialist occupation and there is still massive anger and resent amongst the population

by Ray Smith

On March 20th a mass demonstration took place in London. The march was one of a series of worldwide protests to mark the anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq. Rallies also took place in Japan, South Korea, India, Bangladesh and Thailand, while in Europe crowds turned out in Italy, Germany, Greece and Spain amongst other countries. The biggest demonstration took place in Rome, where one million people flooded the Italian capital. In London 100,000 took to the streets. The presence of youth and workers like a contingent of Scottish nurses (who were taking industrial action) was remarkable. The supporters of Socialist Appeal set up a stall with Marxist literature. Lot of books were sold. The best sellers were Trotsky's books, and the books and pamphlets published by Socialist Appeal. This fact reflects

the interest of a wide layer of youth and workers in the ideas of Marxism. The march ended in Trafalgar Square where union leaders and well-known left leaders addressed the demonstrators. Also 2,000 black balloons were released after a minute's silence in solidarity with the victims of the imperialist atrocity. At the end of the demonstration the Marxists of Socialist Appeal held a public meeting where an eyewitness of the events in Spain and a Spanish Marxist from our sister paper "El Militante" spoke out. Both gave an exhaustive report of the situation which led from the mourning for the Madrid victims to the defeat of the rightwing government. The meeting was attended by almost 40 people. Those at the meeting were inspired by the examples they heard.

The demands of the demonstrators were pretty clear. People flooded the streets to reject the imperialist occupation of Iraq and the representatives of the ruling

class, who are responsible for this crime. After one year of occupation we have seen neither hide nor hair of the famous weapons of mass destruction. In the Baghdad suburbs, sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites is on the rise. In Kirkuk, the intimidation continues of the Turkoman and Arab minorities. On March 22nd an angry crowd attacked the British troops in Basra. The terrorist blasts in Madrid showed that we are very far from the "defeat of the terrorist threat". Meanwhile, the troops are coming back home inside plastic bags, on an almost daily basis.

Demonstrations like the ones that took place on March 20th send a very clear message to Bush and Blair. The situation is far from solved and the people are fed up with this unpopular occupation while back home social, health and education expenditure is being dramatically cut. □

The Miners and the Printers

Jim Brookshaw, former Chairman of the Times Newspapers engineers' chapel adds some comments to Alan Woods' recent review of a TV documentary on the Miners' Strike

AT THE time of the miners strike of 1984 I was a member of the Fleet Street branch of the AEEU and Chairman of the Times Newspapers engineers chapel. Our branch and chapel (workplace organisation) actively supported the miners during their strike. Many workers on the national press understood that the miners were fighting a battle on our behalf too. Some of my members were conned by the media picture of the miners as the aggressor. It is interesting that one of the Welsh miners on the programme referred to older miners who did not run from the police onslaught. They did not believe that the police would attack them with such venom. Many of my chapel members thought this way too. The first time that we were attacked at Wapping a good number of the older men stood their ground saying, "They won't attack us if we are peaceful". Often followed by saying to an officer, "Hold on there, you can't do that to me," as they were shoved, bowled over or whacked by a uniformed thug.

The thing about the printers was that they were a conservative group of people. They had relatively high pay and better working conditions than most workers did. They were not about to make a revolution but they knew very well that their position depended completely on their trade union and particularly chapel organisation. The chapel leaders and most of the members recognised that a defeat of the miners would open up a general assault by the Thatcher regime on all organised workers. When the

chapel at *The Sun* refused to carry the fabricated 'Hitler salute' picture of Arthur Scargill, the battle lines were drawn. 'Those bastards are next', was the cry of the Thatcherites. What about that porn merchant Kelvin McKenzie trying to portray a printer on the programme! He only played himself in his attempt to depict a chapel official. There were some people like that in Fleet Street but they were the ones who scabbed and became managers after our defeat.

New Technology

The lie told by McKenzie and others of his ilk was that Fleet Street workers would not accept new technology. New technology was not the issue but how that new technology would be used. It was estimated in the eighties that with new technology everything printed in Britain could be produced with less than half the labour. So which way would it go? Either a 20 hour week or half the workforce on the dole! It was clear which way the press barons would go. The last thing the bosses at News International wanted was an agreement with the chapels. They wanted to end forever their having to reach agreements. They wanted to dictate, or as it is put by the mealy-mouthed, have 'management's right to manage'. A story, which may be apocryphal, went the rounds. One of Murdoch's managers had reached an agreement with a small chapel. It seems that this chapel had rolled over and played dead to get a deal. The manager went to his bosses and said, 'I've got a

deal'. The boss said, 'Well, you had better go and f**k it up then'. The offending manager, a former chapel official, was later reported to have, 'waved McKenzie in the air in a Wapping office!!

Talks had taken place at *The Sun* and the *News of the World* about a move from Fleet Street to the new plant in Wapping. The engineers chapel had been involved in planning the move. They had produced a book detailing all of the equipment and its maintenance requirements. They fully expected to go to Wapping. No talks had taken place with chapels at *The Times* and *Sunday Times*. Completely out of the blue the first paper to be printed in Wapping was a supplement to *The Sunday Times*. At this time I was Father of the Chapel for the Times Newspapers engineers. I was sent to our production manager to ask for talks. He refused. We went on strike. Our strike too, like the miners, was a defensive struggle. Like them we had the full force of the state thrown against us. Like them in spite of a heroic struggle we were beaten. Our defeat led to the general collapse of union organisation in Fleet Street. After this not only the *Tory Daily Telegraph* but also the supposedly liberal *Observer* and *Guardian*, began a campaign of bullying against their workers. This is to say nothing of the regime at the Labour-supporting *Mirror*, both with and without pension thief Bob Maxwell.

Wapping

Engineers were enraged by the role of the EEU in recruiting and training scab labour for Wapping. They felt angry at the almost total lack of support from their own AEEU. They were appalled by the weakness of someone like SOGAT leader Brenda Dean. She had the nerve on the

programme to pour scorn on a fighter like Scargill. They were enraged by the outright betrayal of their leaders in joining what was seen as the organisation largely to blame for the Wapping strike. Many of our best fighters left the union. What is happening to the AEEU/EEPTU/AMICUS now shows that even the most apparently corrupt and useless workers' organisations can be renewed. Where else can we go? Should we start all over again building new unions? Just to ask the question shows what nonsense that would be. The men and women now rebuilding AMICUS are not weighed down by past defeats but are seeking to deal with the challenges of today.

After the 1987 defeat most of my brothers and sisters looked to a Labour victory as the way ahead. A Labour Government would get rid of the anti-union Tory laws. Often fellow workers would scold me for banging on about the Blairites. 'We must get rid of the Tories.' Even after the disappointments of the first term they were saying that we should hang on and hope for the best.

Now with the failure to get rid of anti-union laws, the support for privatisation, the war, the outrageous treatment of fire fighters and post workers, things are beginning to change. Once again new layers of workers are turning to their unions. One lesson at least they can learn from the miners and the printers. Use your unions to regain your Labour Party. Stop the nonsense of MP's you support backing policies, like PFI, which your union opposes. Running off and forming new parties is just as barmy as trying to set up new unions. The tiny clique at present controlling our Party will not be hard to shift. □

Southall 23rd April 1979 - 25 years on

Barbara Humphries (Ealing Southall CLP)

IT IS now 25 years since the events in Southall on 23rd April 1979. Southall, a suburb of West London is home to one of the largest Asian communities in Britain, the majority of whom originally came from the Indian Punjab. During the election campaign of 1979 the National Front, a fascist organization tried to hold a public meeting in Southall Town Hall. This was clearly intended as a provocation to the Asian community. There was no way that this meeting was to be a genuine public meeting. It would be attended by a handful of fascists plus selected invitees from the press. Although the NF were not standing a candidate in the area, the ruling Conservative Council in the borough allowed them to hire the local Town Hall. The minority Labour Group on the council fearing trouble on a large scale appealed to the then Labour Home Secretary to ban the meeting but without success.

The Asian community together with activists from the wider labour movement and the Anti Nazi League vowed to organize against the meeting to prevent it from going ahead. The local Indian Workers Association, partially a welfare organization which gave advice and help to workers in the area, called a general strike in Southall and for people to have a sit-down protest in front of the Town Hall. Immediately the police moved in to remove those sitting down and as a result all hell broke loose. Riot police were moved into Southall on a large scale. As local workers reported - one police horse-box after another crossed the main road bridge into the center of Southall. All roads into the town were closed. Workers trying to leave or return home were prevented from doing so.

By the evening Southall was virtually under police occupation. The demonstration was swelled by more and more people as the evening wore on, but they were kept well away from Southall Town Hall where the fascists were escorted to their meeting to prattle on that Southall should be restored to being an English hamlet! Demonstrators were attacked by riot police. Hundreds of people were arbitrarily arrested on trumped up charges and

many were seriously injured as police tried to clear the streets. It was reported that as many as a thousand people needed hospital treatment that night. The Special Patrol Group, an elite thug group of the police, since disbanded, went out in force later in the evening attacking demonstrators still left on the streets. It is they who were accused of murdering a London school teacher and Anti Nazi League activist called Blair Peach by hitting him on the head with a truncheon. Blair Peach died that night of a blood clot on his brain.

Racism

The events of Southall on that night were to be remembered for ever by all those who witnessed them. And yet their implications went far further for the labour movement in Britain. Attacks on the Asian community in Southall were to be a trial run for attacks by riot police on trades unionists in dispute. The Tories having won the 1979 general election were to use the forces of the state against the miners during the 1984/85 strike in order to force through their industrial agenda. That was why the issue of racism and attacks on the Asian community in Southall had to be taken seriously by the whole labour movement.

Workers from the Punjab had started moving into Southall, an industrial working class town in the 1950s to provide cheap labour for local factories. One of these - the Woolf Rubber Company had an appalling record of low pay, poor health and safety and long hours. In the 1930s the company had exploited workers escaping mass unemployment in South Wales. Asian workers with little knowledge of English were vulnerable to exploitation. Victimisation of trades union activists was rife. This led to frequent walk outs in the factory. In addition Asian workers faced race discrimination from some of the white workforce. The fascist British National Party tried to capitalize on the fears of white workers in relation to overcrowding in housing and schools and stood candidates in Southall in elections.

Some local Labour councilors shamefully called for residential qualifications to get on the council housing waiting list bowing to the demands of the racists. However the Indian Workers Association assisted in the organization of workers at Woolfs and other factories, into the trades union movement. As more Asians were able to buy houses in the center of Southall, the area changed very rapidly and soon the majority of the population in the area was of Asian origin. Labour retained the Asian vote in Southall and maintained its political control of the town. The BNP followed the white exodus into neighbouring suburbs. However violent attacks against Asian workers and school students continued on the fringes of Southall and in 1976 a student was stabbed to death in the town center. Threats of retaliation and race riots were avoided as the IWA, local trades council, Labour Party and community organizations organized a united peace march through the center of Southall. In 1981 again a fascist band tried to organize a concert in a Southall. This time local youth were prepared for them and burnt the pub to the ground. Hundreds of youth were to turn out on the streets.

In the 1980s the labour movement organized against racism. Thousands had marched through Southall against the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976 and demonstrated against the National Front in 1979. This was in contrast to the couple of hundred aroused by the BNP in the previous decade. The solidarity of Asian workers which sustained their own disputes for trades union recognition at the Woolfs Rubber Factory in 1965/6 was extended to the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984/85 dispute. The NUM were given money and food most generously from the people of Southall. But the problem of racism has not gone away. The BNP are on the march again in parts of the country and have gained council seats. The traditions of solidarity of the 1970s and 1980s will be the only way that they will be defeated. □

The Struggle to Reclaim Labour

by Phil Mitchinson

UNDER THE leadership of Tony Blair the Labour Party has been dragged further to the right than ever before. Against the background of a lengthy period of inactivity in the labour movement - for reasons we have explained many times: the defeat of the miners, the prolonged boom (for all that it did not benefit the working class and the youth very much): the collapse of Stalinism; the anti-trade union laws and the role of the union leaders - Labour in office has demonstrated the commitment of the leadership to the market economy, to privatisation, and to attacking workers' rights wages and conditions. It is hardly surprising then that some in the trade union movement have raised doubts about maintaining the link between the two wings of the labour movement, the trade unions and the Labour Party. If you are a firefighter, or a nurse, or a teacher, or any worker who has borne the brunt of these attacks it is entirely understandable that you might question why your union is funding the party which, in government, is attacking you. The responsibility for these doubts, and the anger that lies behind them, belongs fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the Labour leaders.

Having said that, once the question is raised, we cannot let emotions or frustrations decide. The question must be thought through to its logical conclusion. Is there about to be a new mass working class party in Britain? The Labour Party created through strug-

gle over generations may seem far removed from many of us today. True, it has been hijacked by a bunch of careerists and Tories. Nevertheless, it retains the support of the majority of working people. That support is deep rooted indeed. Whilst some workers have seen through Blair and co. it would be a great leap indeed to believe that millions of workers are willing to change that allegiance lightly. In any case, for their own reasons, the leaders of the main trade unions have no intention of forming such a new party. The vast majority of the affiliated unions' members, when ballots are conducted, support maintaining the link with Labour, too.

RMT

The recent decision of the RMT to allow its branches to support parties other than Labour was used by Blair and co to turf the union out of the party. This will not be the end of the matter, however. The railway workers played a key role in the founding of Labour and will have a role to play in its transformation in years to come. For the time being, though, the RMT is out on a limb, and its membership has been disenfranchised. There can be little doubt that had a ballot been held throughout the union's membership, a majority would have voted to maintain the link. This was the case, for example, when the idea of breaking the link was raised in the broadcasting union BECTU recently. Although one or

two other unions are still considering breaking from Labour, notably the FBU, for the majority of unions the question now being raised is not breaking the link, but using it to reclaim the party.

The important thing is not just to get angry, but to get even. The departure of the RMT will have been warmly welcomed by Blair and co, they can only be strengthened by such a step. What will worry them is not the prospect of the link being broken - an idea which was always at the heart of their project to transform Labour into a new version of the US Democrats - but the sight of trade unions seriously organising to use their weight inside the party to defeat Blair and co. and to campaign for socialist policies.

In this sense the formation of the Labour Representation Committee will be worrying the Blairites far more than the loss of the RMT. The role of the unions in this new organisation will be decisive. For all those who have claimed that Blair has succeeded in his project already and there is nothing any of us can do about it, we have only to point to last year's national conference. Yes, it was a disgrace that no proper debate was held on the war in Iraq, but at the same time how can one ignore the fact that the unions dominated that conference; decided which motions would be discussed; passed policies against the wishes of the Blair leadership; and even changed the rules of the party to allow more contemporary motions to be

discussed in future.

The trade unions wield 50 percent of the votes at the party conference. Just four major unions - UNISON, T&GWU, Amicus and GMB - effectively hold 40 percent of the vote in their hands. The shift to the left which has begun in the unions must therefore be reflected inside the Labour Party. An interaction between these changes inside the unions and events in society is already having an effect inside Labour. Blair can no longer rest on right wing trade union leaders like Jackson - they have been defeated.

Blair's grip weakened

Blair's grip over the parliamentary party has been severely weakened too by the events surrounding the war, and by the changes in the unions. Labour's huge majority was turned into a humiliating victory by just five votes for Blair's policy on top-up fees. Many MPs, formerly loyal for the sake of their jobs, now find it prudent to oppose the leadership for the same reason. Others may genuinely have been moved by events in society. Whether their new found opposition is real or not does not really matter, it amounts to the same thing: the weakening of the grip of Blair and co.

In the ranks of the party Blair has only the narrowest base of support. A survey by *The Guardian* of party members found that 60 percent believe Blair should resign before or after the next election. The survey also uncovered some interesting statistics about the nature of the party's mem-

bership, which now numbers around 250,000. Those who swelled the ranks in the period between Blair becoming leader and Labour's landslide victory in 1997, have left in great numbers. 70 percent of the current membership joined the party before Blair became leader. The mean length of party membership is, in fact, 26 years. The links with the unions tells us more about the nature of the party than descriptions of the individual membership can, nevertheless, the Blairite image does not sit well with the bulk of the party's members. According to the survey 60 percent of the rank and file are semi-skilled workers, manual workers or benefit claimants. Only 25 percent come from what the sociologists call type A and B (professional, managerial and middle class).

With no base in the union, in the ranks of the party or even in the parliamentary party, and growing divisions even inside the cabinet, Blair is clearly finished in the not too distant future. This much is clear. For us however, changing the captain of the ship for another who remains committed to the market is not enough. The struggle is not just about getting rid of one or two elements from the leadership, it is about changing course. Getting back on course, in fact. Returning the Labour Party to its original purpose - the political party of the working class, struggling for a socialist society.

In this struggle, in years to come, there will be ample opportunities for Marxism to build support. In the long run it will be from the struggles to transform and retransform Labour and the unions that the mass forces of Marxism will emerge in Britain. For now, with our eye firmly on that goal, we must participate in the struggle to reclaim Labour. Inside the unions and the party we should fight alongside those campaigning for more democracy, and for socialist policies. Those who argue that a shift to the left is the only way to guarantee keeping the Tories out have a point. We want Labour to win the next election, not for the sake of maintaining ministers in the life to which they have become all too accustomed, but in order to carry out policies in the interests of working people. The struggle to get rid of Blair and co. is only the beginning. We must fight for a socialist programme. At the same time as supporting those fighting to reclaim Labour, we must also point out the weaknesses of their alternative. A programme based on higher taxes to pay for reforms in the interests of working people may be a step forward, but it remains a sticking plaster and not a solution. Ultimately the problems facing society cannot be solved by remaining within the narrow confines of the capitalist system. What is required is a root and branch transformation. Only a socialist programme can offer such a way forward.

Appeal from LRC

WE ARE publishing below the founding statement of the Labour Representation Committee and their appeal for support. Whilst the aims stated here do not go as far as we would like, *Socialist Appeal* certainly gives its support to this serious effort to organise the reclaiming of Labour from Blair and co.

"We are committed to ensuring that Labour wins the next election so that it retains the Parliamentary majority we need to create the fair and just society envisaged by the founders of our party.

To be successful, our party needs active and committed members who feel part of the overall project of the party. Too often in the recent period many Labour Party members and trade unionists have not felt themselves to be a part of a shared project. There has been a sense of being left out of the real policy making processes of the party in government. We believe we can be a successful, and united party, and in government at the same time.

We believe that there is a need to offer Labour Party members and trade unionists a new opportunity to enable them to participate fully in the work of the party both in developing the party's policies and in campaigning to promote our socialist principles.

That is why we are launching the Labour Representation Committee. This new initiative aims to bring together members of the three main sections of the Labour Party, (constituency party members, trade unionists, and members of affiliated bodies), to support recruitment, encourage participation and promote socialist policies within the party.

The aim is to establish a new campaigning group within the Labour movement to restore a sense of socialist purpose and pride back into our party.

We invite you to do a couple of things if possible,

- Express your support and your organisations support for this initiative.
- Sign and ask your organisation to sign up to the attached statement.
- Speak at the convening a conference on July 3rd at the TUC.
- Encourage your organisation, Regions and branches to attend the conference on the 3rd July 2004.
- Sponsor the conference, and encourage your Regions and branches to sponsor the conference as well. All publicity materials will carry sponsors names, logos etc etc.

A conference of this nature costs at least £10k to organise and promote, your attention, in helping with these costs will be most appreciated, also the promotion of the conference, would be a tremendous asset as well."

FOUNDATION STATEMENT

THE LABOUR Party was formed by trade unionists and socialists at the turn of the last century to give working people, their families and communities, political representation for the first time. Founded on the principles of eradicating the evils of poverty and inequality in our society, the Labour Party was also founded on a belief in the redistribution of wealth, power and opportunity into the hands of the many.

Today's Labour Representation Committee aims to ensure that the Party reflects these views, has socialist policies that give hope to our supporters, encourages Party membership, and enthuses those looking for an ethical 21st Century and helps those that come forward to represent these aims with confidence and support.

The Labour Representation Committee is therefore committed to ensuring that the trade unions and their branches, other affiliates and socialist societies, elected representatives, the woman's organisation, the black socialist society, the youth organisation, lesbian & gay members, disabled members, retired members, branches and constituencies, are all encouraged to be active and involved in their Party.

How healthy is the British economy?

by Michael Roberts

JUST BEFORE Gordon Brown announced his 2004 budget, the European Commission declared that the British economy was one of the healthiest and strongest in the European Union.

Of course, that is not saying much. The Commission forecast that UK national output would rise by 2.6% in 2004, more than double the expected Eurozone average of 1%. The Commission also predicted that the rate of growth in the number of jobs likely to be created in Britain this year - at 0.5% - was second only to Spain and Luxembourg. By contrast, Brussels estimates that seven EU member states including Germany will see jobs disappear. The unemployment rate will be lower, the government debt is lower and even after Gordon Brown's increased public spending, the government's budget deficit will be lower as a percentage of national output.

If the UK is the best with just 2-2.5% annual real growth, then all this just shows what a terrible state European capitalism is in. Europe, it seems, cannot manage to grow or find jobs for its people.

But it does pose some questions. Why is the UK apparently doing better? And does this mean that British capitalism has finally overcome what used to be called the British disease: slower growth, higher inflation, continual currency crises and a falling behind in living standards compared with the US, Europe and

Japan?

The reality is that the underlying health of British capitalism is really no better than it was in the terrible days of the 1970s and 1980s. It certainly has not returned to the brief halcyon golden days of the 1960s. Consider these facts. National output rose an average 3.4% a year in the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s it managed only 2% a year. Now after the great 'reforms' of the Thatcherite days and under New Labour, it manages 2.3% a year.

Manufacturing

And as for the manufacturing sector, it has been decimated. Whereas it grew at a 3.6% clip in the 1960s, it failed to grow at all for two decades in the 1970s and 1980s and is now growing at just 0.8% a year. And of course, it is now a pathetically weakened and forgotten part of British capitalism, employing less than 3.4 million workers out of a total workforce of 30m. Indeed, last year for the first time since before the industrial revolution, more people worked as self-employed in various useless services (estate agents, financial advisers, advertisers, etc) than now work in British manufacturing making something!

Only the service sector (finance, property etc) has kept the UK economy growing. New Labour's trade and industry secretary, Patricia Hewitt, says that "modern manufacturing is central to

our future as leading knowledge-based driven economy". The problem is that British capitalists don't agree. They prefer to invest in financial services or send their profits abroad. As a result, British industry is increasingly not British-owned at all. Whereas in 1973, 17% of UK manufacturing output came from foreign-owned companies, now that figure has reached 25%, and the share of British workers in foreign-owned manufacturing companies has risen from 13% to 17%. Inward investment from foreign companies was just 0.5% of GDP back in the days of Harold Macmillan.

Now our prosperity and the financing of our trade deficit depend on nearly 3.5% of GDP coming from investment by foreign manufacturers (over half of which are American). And that's the big worry for British capitalism. If inward investment should die, the UK will be exposed.

UK capitalist business is the least efficient in Europe, with the exception of Greece and Portugal. Manufacturing productivity is just 67% of that of the US, while France is up to 85%, even though French workers have the longest holidays and shortest working week in Europe. Whereas in the 1960s, British productivity (the amount of output per employee) grew at 3.2% a year, in the 1970s and 1980s, that rate fell back to just 1.6% a year. In the 1990s there has been no improvement.

Indeed, the government's

own survey of industry found that of 18 industrial sectors, British productivity was lower in eight (media, insurance, chemicals, autos, engineering, electronics and other manufacturing) compared to Europe. It was higher in just five (banking, oil, pharmaceuticals, supermarkets and retailing).

Parasitic Capitalism

It is no surprise that the UK leads in the 'rentier' industries of finance in the City of London and retailing (a nation of shopkeepers) but not in the heartland of new technology and industrial innovation. The British economy is a parasite on the rest of productive capitalism.

But does it matter that British capitalism is no longer industrial capitalism? After all, if we can all make a living, why worry if it is in a factory making a car or in an estate agents selling a house or in a club lapdancing?

But it does matter. It means that all of us who work in this country are now even more dependent than before on the rest of capitalism succeeding. Britain no longer drives industrial growth globally or in Europe. So if industrial growth collapses elsewhere, we shall be hit the hardest. British capitalism's dependence on the rest of the world's capitalists means that it has done well in the boom years. But it also means it will do badly in the lean years.

That is the danger that lies ahead. British economic growth is not driven by

One of the worst features of the rentier economy must be housing. We don't build houses, we just speculate on the price of the existing ones. We are now in a massive property bubble that will eventually burst, but in the meantime is creating more and more inequality in wealth and income.

investment in productive capacity. Indeed, although the economy grew by 2% last year, investment by big business as a share of their profits fell to an all-time low! All the economic growth came from incomes made in 'business services' like insurance, banking, property, consultancies etc. That is the name of the game for the UK.

In the last few years, the average British household has not increased their living standards much through increased wages from work. It came from borrowing more and more to finance spending on homes, cars and life. Whereas the average household used to save 9% of income after tax in the 1980s, now they save just 2.3%. And we know that huge swathes of people save nothing and borrow more.

And inequality has never been so bad for over one hundred years as a result of becoming a rentier economy. The latest analysis by the Rowntree Trust shows that poverty (defined as an income 60% or less of the average) is still just as bad as it was when New Labour came to office in 1997. Indeed, whereas inequality (the share of income going to the top 10% versus that going to the bottom 10% of income-earners) rocketed under Thatcher's Tories in the 1980s (the top 20% of income earners saw their incomes rise 30 times faster than the bottom 20%), it was actually reduced a little under Major's government. Under Blair and Brown, it has widened again.

The latest data show that the top 10% of households spend nearly seven times more than the bottom 10% of households every week. The richest 10% spends £850 a week on aver-

age, while the average household spends £390 a week and the poorest 10% spends just £125 a week. The richest 10% spends ten times as much on eating out or going to the theatre or holidays than the poorest 10%. And they spend 14 times more on their motor cars. But just as depressingly, the richest 10% spends only 50% more a week on cigarettes and cigars than the poorest 10%.

Housing

One of the worst features of the rentier economy must be housing. We don't build houses, we just speculate on the price of the existing ones. We are now in a massive property bubble that will eventually burst, but in the meantime is creating more and more inequality in wealth and income.

The supply of 'social housing' (good accommodation at reasonable rents) has disappeared. Thanks to the destruction of council housing by the Tories and New Labour, there is no decent public housing to live in and rents in the private sector have rocketed. The Rowntree Trust found that

new house construction is at its lowest level since 1924!

Young people are forced to stay with their parents (the average age of a first-time buyer is now 34 compared to 29 three decades ago), or crowd into shared flats or spend hours commuting. At the same time, rich property owners are using their wealth to buy more property to rent out to the poor. The richest 10% are turning themselves into a rentier class. Left to the market, the housing needs of the average Briton will never be met. Public ownership and national planning is essential, just as it is for public transport.

'Education, education, education', was the cry of Tony Blair. Yet the latest report from the OECD shows that the UK's total spending on university education in 2000 was just 1% of GDP, with just 0.7% from the public sector. The overall share was well below the OECD average of 1.3%, let alone the US share of 2.7%.

The UK's share of GDP spent by the public sector was lower than that of every member country, except Italy, Japan and

Korea (where the private sector is bigger). No significant change in this picture is in sight. By 2005-06, public

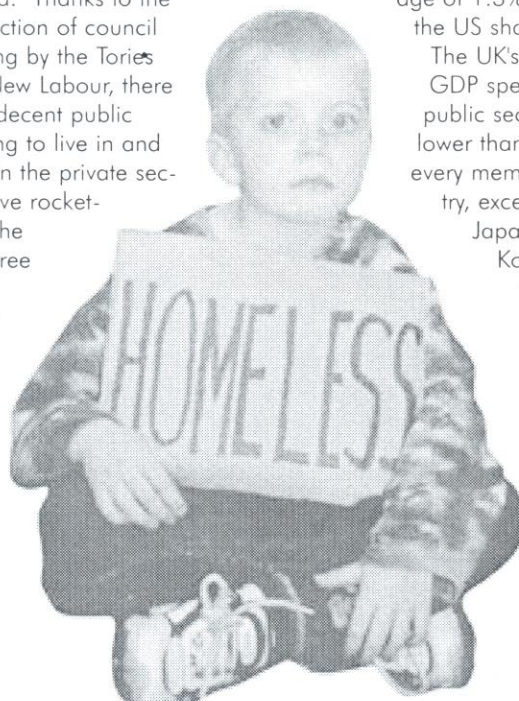
spending on tertiary education is set to reach about 0.8% of GDP. To add insult to injury, the government has increased its inspections and regulations, as it has reduced resources per student.

Finance capital

So the UK may be doing better than Europe - briefly. But British capitalism is now a huge financial parasite, providing services for those sectors of the world that are creating productive wealth. In 2003, the world's financial markets went up sharply after three hard years. That helped all the parasitic sectors of capitalism, like the City of London, the banks and the consultants, to boom. Huge bonuses in the City were paid out after Xmas and the property boom resumed.

British capitalists gave up on manufacturing and industry in the 1970s. They left it to the Germans, the Japanese, even the Americans and finally the Chinese. They became internationalist, they became financial - in short they became like a large island Switzerland. Now nearly 60 million people depend for their prosperity and their ruin on world finance capital avoiding any crises.

But if economic growth in the US and even China should slow later this year and the financial markets turn back down, then it is the parasite economy of Britain that will suffer the most. British capitalism's future has never been so closely tied to the movement of stock prices on Wall Street and the London Stock Exchange and on the 'confidence' of the speculators. It's a sobering prospect. □



Lenin



80th Anniversary of his death

Lenin's Last Struggle

By Alan Woods, 1970

Continuing our series on the life and ideas of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who died 80 years ago, we are republishing this article which was originally written to commemorate the Lenin centenary in 1970. The early symptoms of bureaucratic degeneration in Russia were already noted by Lenin in the last two years of his politically active life. He spent his last months fighting against these reactionary tendencies, leaving behind a vital heritage of struggle in his last letters and articles. The struggle of the anti-Stalinist Left Opposition, led by Trotsky after Lenin's death, really begins here.

IN THE last active period of his life, Lenin was chiefly absorbed by the problems of the Soviet economy under the New Economic Policy. In 1921, under the pressure of the millions of peasant small proprietors, the workers' state had been forced to retreat from the path of Socialist planning and industrialisation, in order to procure grain for the starving workers in the cities. The old Civil War practice of requisitioning grain had to be abandoned to placate the peasants, whose support was necessary if the workers' state was not to succumb to the reaction. A free market in grain was re-established, and concessions were made to the peasants and small traders, while the main levers of economic power (nationalised banks and heavy industries, state monopoly of foreign trade) remained in the hands of the workers' state.

This retreat which had been forced upon the Bolsheviks was not to create a Socialist, classless society but to save millions from starving to death, to rebuild a shattered economy and to provide houses and elementary schools - i.e. to drag Russia into the twentieth century.

The triumph of socialism demands a development of the productive forces to a level unheard of in any previously existing society. Only when the conditions of general want and poverty are obliterated can the thoughts of man be raised to loftier horizons than the grinding, day-to-day struggle to live. The conditions for such a transformation already exist in the world today. For the first time in human history we can say truthfully that there is no longer any need for anyone to starve, to be homeless, to be illiterate.

Plan of production

The potential is there - in the science, technique and industry created by the development of capitalism itself which draws upon all the resources of the planet albeit in an incomplete, anarchic and undeveloped way. Only on the basis of an integrated, harmonious plan of production can this potential be realised.

But this can only be carried out on the basis of common ownership of the means of production and a democratic socialist plan.

These elementary truths of Marxism were taken for granted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They did not lead the workers to victory in October 1917 with a view to "building Socialism" within the frontiers of the former Tsarist Empire, but to strike the first blow for the international Socialist Revolution:

"We have made the start," wrote Lenin on the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution. "When, at what date and time, and the proletarians of which nations will complete this process is not important. The important thing is that the ice has been broken; the road is open, the way has been shown."

For Lenin, the first significance of the Russian Revolution was the example it provided in the eyes of the workers of the world. The failure of the revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the period 1918-21 was the decisive factor in the subsequent development. On the basis of a victorious European revolution, the enormous potential mineral wealth of Russia, its vast labour force, could have been linked to the science, technique and industry of Germany, Britain and France. A Socialist United States of Europe could have transformed the lives of the peoples of Europe and Asia and opened the way for a Socialist World Federation. Instead, as a result of the cowardice and ineptitude of the labour leaders, the European working classes faced decades of hardship, unemployment, Fascism and a new World War. On the other hand, the isolation of the only workers' state in the world in a backward, peasant country, opened the door

to bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinist reaction.

The defeat of the German working class in March 1921 forced the Soviet Republic to look to its own resources in order to survive. In a speech on October 17, 1921, Lenin spelt out the consequences:

"You must remember that our Soviet land is impoverished after many years of trial and suffering and has no Socialist France or Socialist England as neighbours to keep us with their highly developed technology and highly developed industry. Bear that in mind! We must remember that at present all their highly developed technology and industry belong to the capitalists who are fighting us."

In order to survive, it was necessary to conciliate the desire of the peasant to make profit, even at the expense of the working class and the building up of industry - the only real basis for a transition to socialism.

The concessions given to the peasants, small businessmen and speculators ("Nepmen") staved off economic collapse in 1921-22. The trade between town and countryside was restored, but on terms greatly disadvantageous to the former.

Kulaks

The reduction of taxes on the peasant cut into the funds necessary for investment in industry. Heavy industry stagnated, while much of light industry was in private hands. Even the revival in agriculture strengthened the capitalist, not the socialist element in Soviet society. Huge profits were made by the "Kulaks" (wealthy peasants), with the largest and most fertile farms and the capital necessary for equipment, horses and fertiliser. In fact, it soon became clear that under NEP, the difference between the rich and poor in the villages was growing at an alarming rate. The Kulaks took to hoarding grain to push up prices, even buying up the grain of the poor peasants to sell it back to them at a later date when prices rose.

These tendencies were watched with anxiety by Lenin, who repeatedly warned of the need for the working class to keep a tight rein on the levers of the economy. At the 4th Congress of the Communist International, in November 1922, Lenin put the matter in a nutshell:

"The salvation of Russia lies not only in a good harvest on the peasant farms - that is not enough; and not only in the good condition of light industry, which provides the peasantry with consumer goods - this, too, is not enough; we also need heavy industry. And to put it in good condition will require several years of work. Heavy industry needs state subsidies. If we are not able to provide them, we shall be doomed as a civilised state, let

alone a Socialist state."

At this period Lenin grappled with the problem of electrification as a possible area where a breach could be made in the solid wall of Russian backwardness.

Trotsky, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the overall state planning of industry, which had been practically lost sight of under NEP. All along he stressed the need to strengthen "Gosplan", the state Planning Agency, as a means of encouraging a general planned revival of industry. Lenin, at first, was distrustful of the idea - not because he rejected planning but because of the prevailing scourge of bureaucracy in Soviet institutions, which, he feared, would turn an enlarged and strengthened Gosplan into a paper game.

However different their approaches to this question, Lenin and Trotsky were in complete agreement about the urgent need to strengthen the Socialist elements in the economy and to end backsliding in the direction of "peasant capitalism".

However, such was the pressure of the Kulak interest that even a section of the Bolshevik leadership began to bend. The question of which road the Soviet power would take was posed point-blank by the controversy over the monopoly of foreign trade which broke out in March 1922.

The monopoly of foreign trade, established in April 1918, was a vital measure for ensuring the socialist economy against the threat of penetration and domination by foreign capital. Under NEP the monopoly became even more important as a bulwark against the growing capitalist tendencies. Early in 1922, at Lenin's request, A.M.



Lezhova drafted Theses on Foreign Trade which emphasised the need to strengthen the monopoly and strictly supervise exports and imports.

Despite this, the Party Central Committee was split. Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev opposed Lenin's proposals and advocated the relaxation of the monopoly, while Sokolnikov, Bukharin and Pyatakov actually went so far as to call for its abolition.

On May 15, Lenin wrote the following letter to Stalin:

"Comrade Stalin,

"In view of this, please get a directive passed through the Politburo by collecting the votes of the members that 'The CC reaffirms the monopoly of foreign trade and resolves that a stop be put everywhere to the working up of the question of merging the Supreme Economic Council with the Commissariat for Foreign Trade. All People's Commissars to sign confidentially and return the original to Stalin. No copies to be made.'"

At the same time he wrote to Stalin and to Frumkin (Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Trade) stressing that a "formal ban should be put on all talk and negotiations, commissions etc. concerning the relaxation of the foreign trade monopoly."

Stalin's reply was evasive: "I have no objections to a 'formal ban' on measures to mitigate the foreign trade monopoly at the present stage. All the same, I think that mitigation is becoming indispensable."

Foreign trade monopoly

On 26 May, Lenin suffered the first onslaught of his illness, which put him out of activity until September. In the meantime, in spite of Lenin's request, the question of "mitigating" the monopoly was raised again. On 12 October, Sokolnikov moved a resolution at the plenary session of the Central Committee, for the relaxation of the foreign trade monopoly. Lenin and Trotsky were absent, and the resolution was carried overwhelmingly.

On 13 October, Lenin wrote to the Central Committee through Stalin, with whom he had already discussed the matter. Lenin protested against the decision and demanded that the question should be raised again at the next plenum in December. Subsequently, Stalin wrote to members of the CC:

"Comrade Lenin's letter has not persuaded me that the decision of the CC was wrong... Nevertheless, in view of Comrade Lenin's insistence that fulfilment of the CC Plenary Meeting decision be delayed, I shall vote for a postponement so that the question may be again raised for discussion at the next Plenary Meeting which Comrade Lenin will attend."

On 16 October, it was agreed to postpone the matter till the next plenum.

However, as the date of the plenum approached, Lenin became increasingly worried that the state of his health would not permit him to speak. On 12 December, he wrote his first letter to Trotsky asking him to take upon himself "the defence of our common opinion of the unconditional necessity of preserving and reinforcing the monopoly of foreign trade." The letters written by Lenin clearly indicate the political bloc that existed between Lenin and Trotsky at this time.

They demonstrate Lenin's implicit faith in Trotsky's political judgements, a faith born of years of common work at the head of the Soviet state. And it is not accidental that at this time Lenin would turn to no-one else to defend his views on the Central Committee. Even his other confidants, Frumkin and Stomoniakov, were non-members of the Central Committee.

Learning of Lenin's preparations for a struggle and his bloc with Trotsky, the Central Committee backed down without a fight. On 18 December, the October resolution was unconditionally rescinded. The first round in the battle against the pro-Kulak element in the party leadership was won by the Leninist faction.

The battle was continued after Lenin's death by Trotsky and the Left Opposition, who alone held high the banner and programme of Lenin in the teeth of the Stalinist political counter-revolution.

Friedrich Engels long ago explained that in any society in which art, science and government are the preserve of a minority, that minority will use and abuse its position in its own interests. Because of the isolation of the revolution in a backward country the Bolsheviks were obliged to call on the services of a host of former Tsarist officials to keep the state and society running. These elements, who had held the workers' government to ransom in the first days of the revolution gradually realised that the Soviet power was not going to be crushed by armed force. After the dangers of the Civil War had passed, many former enemies of Bolshevism began to infiltrate the state,

the trade unions, and even the party.

The first "purge", in 1921, had nothing in common with the later grotesque frame-up trials of Stalin, in which the entire Old Bolshevik leadership were murdered. No-one was tried, killed or imprisoned. But special party commissions were set up to expel from the party the thousands of careerists and bourgeois who had joined in order to further their own interests. The offences for which people were expelled were "bureaucratism, careerism, abuse by party members of their party or Soviet status, violation of comradesly relations within the party, dissemination of unfounded and unverified rumours, insinuations or other reports reflecting on the party or individual members of it, and destructive of the unity and authority of the party."

In order to carry out a struggle against bureaucracy, Lenin advocated the setting up of a "Commission on Workers and Peasants Inspection" (RABKRIN), as the highest arbiter and guardian of party morality, and as a weapon against alien elements in the Soviet state apparatus. At the centre of RABKRIN Lenin placed a man whom he respected for his organisational abilities and strong character - Stalin.

Amongst other important functions, RABKRIN scrutinised the selection and appointment of responsible workers in the state and party. Whoever had the power to hold up the promotion of some and advance others obviously held a weapon which could serve their own interests. Stalin did not scruple to use it for his.

RABKRIN turned from a weapon against bureaucracy into a hotbed of careerist intrigue. Stalin cynically used his position in RABKRIN, and later his control of the party Secretariat, to gather around himself a bloc of yes-men - nonentities whose only allegiance was to the man who helped them climb into comfortable positions. From the highest arbiter of party morality, RABKRIN sank to the lowest depths of bureaucratic cynicism.

Threat of Bureaucracy

Trotsky noticed what was going on before Lenin, whose illness prevented his close supervision of party work. Trotsky pointed out that "those working in RABKRIN are chiefly workers who have come to grief in other fields," and drew attention to the "extreme prevalence of intrigue in the organs of RABKRIN which has become a by-word throughout the country."

Lenin continued to defend RABKRIN against Trotsky's criticisms. Yet in his last works we see that his eyes were opened

to the threat of bureaucracy from this quarter and the role of Stalin who guided it. In his article "How we should reorganise the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate", Lenin connected the question to the bureaucratic deformation of the workers' state apparatus:

"With the exception the Peoples Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, our state apparatus is to a considerable extent a survival of the past and has undergone hardly any serious change. It has only been slightly touched up on the surface, but in all other respects it is a most typical relic of our old state machine."

However, in "Better Fewer, But Better", Lenin's last article, written on 2 March 1923, he delivered the most scathing attack on RABKRIN:

"Let us say frankly that the Peoples Commissariat of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate does not at present enjoy the slightest authority.

Everybody knows that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers and Peasants Inspection, and that under present conditions nothing can be expected from this People's Commissariat."

In the same article, Lenin included a remark directed straight at Stalin: "Let it be said in parentheses that we have bureaucrats in our party offices as well as in other Soviet offices."

That Lenin singled out Stalin as the potential ringleader of a bureaucrats faction in the party is an example of his far-sightedness. At this particular time, Stalin's power in the "apparatus" was invisible to the majority even of party members, while most of the leaders did not believe him capable of using it, in view of his notoriously mediocre grasp of politics and theory. Even after Lenin's death, it was not Stalin, but Zinoviev who headed the "Troika" (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin) which pushed the party on the first, fateful steps away from the traditions of October under the guise of an attack on "Trotskyism".

It was no accident that Lenin's last advice to the party was to warn it against Stalin's "disloyal" and "intolerant" abuse of power and to advocate his removal from the post of General Secretary. □

Friedrich Engels long ago explained that in any society in which art, science and government are the preserve of a minority, that minority will use and abuse its position in its own interests.

The concluding part of this article will appear in next month's Socialist Appeal

Historic congress of Pakistan Marxists

ON SUNDAY, March 21, in the Alhambra Hall No. 1 in the centre of Lahore, 1107 workers, trade unionists, peasants and youth gathered for the annual national congress of The Struggle, the Pakistan Marxist organization, which has grown rapidly in recent years and is now completely dominant on the Left in Pakistan. There were delegates from all over Pakistan - all four provinces were represented - Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh and the North West Frontier Provinces - as well as a strong delegation (146) from Kashmir.

The variety of the delegations was evidenced in a colourful array of national dress and headwear, but irrespective of differences of language and dress, all were united in their enthusiasm and revolutionary spirit. A very important element here was the presence of a large number of women - more than 200. Despite the almost insurmountable barriers placed in the way of any woman who wishes to be politically active in this country, the crisis of capitalism and the appalling conditions of the masses have acted as a spur to a growing number of Pakistani women and girls to participate in revolutionary politics. The Struggle organization has always stressed the need for work among women and this persistent work has yielded excellent results.

The platform was impressively decorated with huge portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, with red banners containing quotations from the great teachers in Urdu. A prominent place was occupied by pictures of Trotsky, owing to the presence of Esteban Volkov, Trotsky's grandson, who has come to Pakistan to launch the first Urdu translation of Trotsky's *My Life*.

Comrade Volkov opened the congress with a brief speech, which started with the following words: "More than 150 years ago, Marx and Engels wrote the Communist

Manifesto. The capitalists have attempted ever since to bury Marxism in the graveyard of history, but the ideas of Marxism today are more alive and vigorous than ever. And this will be so as long as exploitation and oppression exist on earth."

He went on to stress the role of Leon Trotsky: "The contribution of Leon Trotsky to this arsenal is invaluable and absolutely relevant," he said.

Comrade Volkov ended his speech with the words: "I am filled with joy and emotion at being here and witnessing the opening of this congress of The Struggle organization in Lahore, with the revolutionary Marxists of Pakistan who are fully conscious of the great value and complete correctness of the ideas and struggle of Leon Trotsky. Today all genuine revolutionary Marxists clearly understand that Trotsky is the continuator of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Comrades, go forward! The inspiration and example of the revolutionary Leon Trotsky is imperishable and inexhaustible!"

Comrade Alan Woods, editor of Marxist.com and Socialist Appeal, introduced the first session on world perspectives. He explained the general instability as a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism on a world scale. He explained at some length the great significance of the recent events in Spain as a concrete indication of the general world turbulence. "Dialectics tells us that things change into their opposite. In these conditions sudden and sharp changes are rooted in the situation. We must be prepared."

The mood of the delegates in all sessions was electric. The discipline was impressive and the degree of organization impressive. Most were youth - the average age of the delegates was 22 - although there was a sprinkling of older experienced comrades. In this congress there were students from all the universities, medical and engineering colleges and youth organizations in Pakistan. But the big majority were workers.

Three members of parliament were among those present and even one district governor, Nazar Gondal, of the PPP, the only one who resisted the pressures of the Musharraf regime to defect in all Punjab. He said "There was a time when nobody spoke of socialism, and many of us who fought in the revolution of 1968-9 began to think that all was lost. But now I have attended this congress, I am filled with new courage and enthusiasm. Even in the darkest days, The Struggle alone maintained the faith in socialism. In the most difficult conditions, it is incredible that such forces of revolutionary socialism have been built in Pakistan."

Comrade Lal Khan, editor of the Asian Marxist Review, introduced Pakistan Perspectives, emphasizing the deep crisis of Pakistan capitalism and the reactionary and corrupt nature of the bourgeoisie. He told the delegates: "Corruption is the basis on which the Pakistan economy is running. This shows that the claims of the ruling class that they wish to uproot corruption is a farce: if they uproot corruption they uproot themselves."

This discussion took place at a time when US imperialism is intensifying its pressure on Pakistan to launch an offensive in the tribal areas on the borders of Afghanistan, in the hope of eradicating Al Qaeda and capture or kill bin Laden. The Pakistan army has met with stiff resistance and taken heavy losses in this campaign, which has been characterized by heavy bombing of villages and numerous civilian casualties with little to show for it. Lal Khan commented ironically:

"The regime has announced a cease fire. This is a confession of defeat. The imperialist aggression in Afghanistan means that the war has spread to Pakistan. The massive flood of heroin has also increased all the contradictions within the state."

The Marxist MP Manzoor Ahmad, who was able to point to remarkable gains on all fronts, presented the organizational report. "This is only the beginning", he said. "We must step up the work in all fields - workers, peasants, students and women, and we will build a strong socialist revolutionary organization that can lead the whole subcontinent to the socialist revolution and build the Socialist Federation of the Subcontinent as the first step in the world revolution."

There were a significant number of foreign delegates and visitors from India, Iran, Sri Lanka, Denmark, Britain, Mexico and Belgium. The congress was closed by comrade Alan Woods, who once again underlined the example of personal sacrifice of that great martyr of the proletariat Leon Trotsky and urged the delegates to carry the message of the congress to every factory and village and every school and college.

After unanimously approving a resolution in solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution, the congress closed with the singing of the Internationale. □



The lessons of Spain

The following major article by *Alan Woods* was originally published at www.marxist.com the day after the Spanish General Election

SPAIN'S SOCIALISTS won a sensational victory in yesterday's general elections. This vote confounded the polls, which predicted that the PP would win. This was a sudden and complete change in the whole situation. It represented a massive shift in the mood of the masses in a matter of days.

These events deserve the closest attention because they throw into sharp relief the fundamental processes that are taking place on a world scale. The suddenness of the transformation is a reflection of the general crisis of world capitalism that now affects every country in the world.

The present period of world history is characterised by colossal and unprecedented instability on a global scale. This expresses itself in tremendous volatility at all levels and can manifest itself in sudden and violent swings in the mood of both the ruling class and the masses. Moods of despair alternate with moods of euphoria. Violent swings to the right are followed by even more violent swings to the left.

Taken together, these phenomena are the surface reflection of the organic crisis of capitalism. This is far deeper than a mere conjunctural crisis of the economy. It has a universal and intractable character. At bottom, it expresses the fact that the productive forces have outgrown the narrow con-

finances of private ownership and the nation state.

Globalisation was an attempt to find a way out of this impasse. It had an initial effect, enabling the capitalists to avoid a deep slump in the last period, but has now reached its limits. All that has been achieved is to reproduce all the contradictions on a far vaster scale than ever before. Globalisation manifests itself as a global crisis of capitalism. This expresses itself in many different ways. It is expressed by economic, financial and monetary crises, but also by political, diplomatic and military crises.

Terrorism, which has acquired the characteristics of a chronic and incurable disease, is only another symptom of this crisis. By concentrating on the symptom, while ignoring its root cause, the bourgeoisie hopes to divert the attention of the masses from the fundamental impasse of their system. They are trying desperately to solve the problems that arise from the crisis of world capitalism by the use of brute force.

By attempting to restore "order" by the use of overwhelming military power, they merely add to the convulsions and turbulence, giving them an even more violent and barbaric character. Thus, the military intervention in Iraq has solved nothing but created even greater chaos and instability than that which existed before.

Terrorism and war feed off each other and create an infernal cycle of action and reaction. The kind of barbarism we have seen for decades in the Third World is now spreading to the advanced capitalist countries. The Madrid massacre is a terrible confirmation of this. But this has immediately set in motion a chain of events that has rapidly transformed the situation.

A lesson in dialectics

Dialectics teaches us that things change into their opposite. This morning, as he contemplates the electoral disaster suffered by the right wing PP, José María Aznar had a good opportunity to meditate on the correctness of dialectics on Sunday night as he listened, ash-faced, to the news of the defeat.

Even one week ago the dominant mood of the working class was one of pessimism. But not now! The mood of the workers and youth of Spain has been transformed overnight. Today's Independent describes the scenes that followed the announcement of the election result:

"The street outside the Socialists' headquarters in Madrid was awash [with] scarlet and white flags. "Za-pa-tèro Pre-si-dente!" ecstatic supporters chanted. Cars drove around the capital with their horns honking in triumph until the early hours."

How do we explain this dramatic change? The decisive role was obviously played by the terror attacks that killed 200 people and injured 1,500 in Madrid last Thursday. These events produced a huge mobilisation of the electorate. The participation was massive. Turnout reached 74 per cent 9 percentage points more than in the last election in 2000, which had produced an absolute majority for the Popular Party. However, the predictions that the terrorist atrocity would help the PP were shown to be false. The people voted massively to kick out the PP, thereby showing considerable political maturity and class consciousness.

Aznar and the pollsters were not alone in supposing that the PP would easily win the general election. This was the universal opinion of the polls and was shared by the great majority on the Left. For years the Spanish working class has had to put up with a reactionary right wing government that seemed to have no end. There was a mood of pessimism, even of fatalism. Now all that has changed, and this change occurred in the space of a couple of days.

The reason for this lightening change in the whole situation is attributable to one thing and one thing only - the sudden eruption of the working class on the scene. After the terrorist attacks last Thursday the mood of Spanish society passed swiftly through a wide gamut of feelings - from stunned shock, to sadness, confusion, frustration and finally rage. The indignation of the masses finally focussed on the government itself.

The PP government had at its disposal almost complete control of the



mass media, and they used this control with astounding cynicism to manipulate the information. They mounted an unprecedented campaign of lies and distortions, designed to sow panic and stampede public opinion behind the government. But contrary to the view commonly held by left intellectuals according to which that control of the media poses an insurmountable obstacle to the socialist transformation of society, all the press propaganda counted for nothing in the moment of truth. In fact, it proved completely counterproductive.

Aznar cynically used the massacre to try to foment a mood of panic and stampede the electorate behind his party on the basis of the so-called "war against terror". The authorities told blatant lies and concealed the facts in order to persuade people that ETA was responsible for the outrage. They did not want people to know that there was evidence of al Qaeda involvement, because they knew that this would raise questions about the PP's decision to back Bush's war in Iraq.

The leaders of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and United Left (IU) foolishly fell in line behind the government and supported the call for "national unity." The mass demonstrations held all over Spain last Friday were backed by 12 million people, over two million in Madrid alone. But even on these demonstrations, which were supposed to be a manifestation of national unity, symptoms of disunity were already becoming evident. When Aznar appeared at the head of the Madrid demonstration together with the Prince of Asturias, there were whistles of disapproval from a section of the crowd.

With every passing hour, it became known that the version issued by the government, which insisted that ETA was responsible for the atrocity, was not the only hypothesis. To the degree that people understood that this was probably an attack by al Qaida, the initial shock turned to indignation. Everywhere the cry went up: "Who is responsible?"

Intervention of the masses

The differences that could already be discerned on the demonstrations on Friday continued to grow and become sharper and more focussed. On the numerous demonstrations and vigils over the weekend, there were altercations between different sections. The usual form these clashes took was between young and old, working class and middle class. This already revealed the beginning of a class differentiation in the mass movement.

The murderous attack of Thursday 11th March struck the working class. The districts affected were not the bourgeois Barrio de



Worker covers a Popular Party (PP) election banner for Mariano Rajoy, after the right-wing PP was beaten by the Socialist Party.

Salamanca but places like Vallecas and Pozo. The people who were killed were not bankers and stock exchange speculators but workers going to work in their overalls and children from working class families on their way to schools and colleges.

In the funerals there were few suits and ties. The faces of grief were the faces of ordinary working class people, consumed with grief and suffering. They were people who had been forced to pay a terrible price for actions beyond their control or comprehension.

In normal times people like these pay little or no attention to politics. They do not interest themselves in events that unfold on the world scale, because such events seem very distant and remote. They do not impinge upon their everyday lives, or those of their families. But now, like a thunderbolt from a clear blue sky, the world crisis blasted the world of ordinary men and women and turned their lives upside down.

The main reason why the people of Spain voted massively to eject the PP is that they correctly thought that Aznar's slavish support for George Bush and his so-called "war on terror" had put Spain in the front line as a target for Islamist radicals, and directly produced the devastating terrorist attacks in Madrid on Thursday. However, none of this would have happened without the direct intervention of the masses.

The demonstrations called by the PP were everywhere turning into anti-PP demonstrations. By Saturday, the movement was beginning to take the form of attacks on the PP itself. People saw that Aznar and his government were hiding information pointing to al Qaida's possible involvement, through fear

that it would rebound against it in the elections. This produced an explosion of indignation that was manifested on Saturday in angry demonstrations outside the PP's headquarters.

The television reports showed incredible scenes of people - some of them obviously old age pensioners - confronting the forces of public order, arguing and remonstrating the heavily armed riot police. The latter, clearly nervous, responded by striking out with batons and even pointing their guns at the demonstrators. There seemed to be a danger of a serious clash. But the huge numbers of demonstrators, numbering up to 10,000 in the end, forced the police to give up.

Government spokespersons made statements to the effect that the demonstrations were "illegal", since they were taking place on the so-called "day of reflection" [i.e. the day prior to the elections when all political events are banned by law]. This shows how out of touch the leaders of the right wing were. Under such circumstances to imagine that the

masses would sit with their arms folded was absurd. We are talking about Spain here, and anyone who is acquainted with the traditions of the Spanish working class would not be surprised at what happened on Saturday.

The attempt to criminalise these demonstrations backfired. The demonstrators chanted defiantly: "What the people does is not illegal!" and also, "Illegalise the PP!" There were other slogans that showed the anger of the people: "Liars!" "Assassins!" "Tell us the truth!" and always: "Down with the war!"

The mood of anger among the masses was shown in Barcelona, where the PP leaders Rato and Piquet were driven from the demonstration by the violent hostility of the crowd. Similar events were reported all over Spain. The mood of panic in the governing party was shown by the fact that they issued a formal appeal to the electoral commission, blaming the opposition parties for deliberately fomenting the attacks on the PP headquarters.

The commission rejected the complaint, for the simple reason that it lacked any basis in fact. Nobody had organised these demonstrations. The workers and youth who protested outside the PP headquarters did so quite spontaneously, in the best traditions of the Spanish working class. The leaders of the opposition were nowhere to be seen.

It is this spontaneous movement of the masses that produced the historic victory of the Socialists in the election, and nothing else.

Decisive role of youth

Another important element in the equation was the youth, who played a decisive role

both on the demonstrations and in the elections. The electorate was swelled by some two million first-time voters. The youth of Spain was supposed to be non-political and apathetic, but they participated massively in the elections and voted overwhelmingly for the Socialists.

The reawakening of the youth is a vital factor in the whole situation. The Marxist-led Students' Union [Sindicato de Estudiantes, or SE] has played a key role in organising, mobilising and politicising the youth. It reacted swiftly and decisively to the recent events and has been to the forefront in all the mobilizations. (See YFIS page)

The role of reformism

It is a law that when the masses begin to move, they will inevitably express themselves in the first place through the traditional mass organizations. If anyone doubts this, let them look at what happened in Spain. Despite the fact that the leaders of the PSOE played no role in the mass movement against the PP, when the workers looked for an alternative, they voted massively for the PSOE. Even in the Basque Country, the PSOE increased its votes and seats, becoming the second political force, after the nationalist PNV.

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who will become Spain's new Prime Minister, won 43 per cent of the vote, which gives him 164 seats in the 350-seat chamber. The Socialists can count on the support of other left-wing or regional parties, enabling them to form a government without holding a majority of seats.

As a matter of fact, the support for the Socialists is far greater than these results suggest. Election results only give a very partial idea of the real frame of mind of the masses. They are only a still photograph of a mood that is changing all the time. In the case of Spain, the mood of the people was changing by the hour, and the current was turning swiftly against the government.

These elections took place only three days after the atrocity. The mood was still confused. The mass media, scandalously manipulated by the government, were still attempting to cast doubt on the al Qaeda connection. To the degree that the authorship of al Qaeda is

conclusively proved, and the manipulation of the news by the PP completely unmasked, the indignation would have been even greater. The Socialists' majority would have been correspondingly increased, giving them an absolute majority.

However, to tell the truth, the Socialist leaders were more astounded than anyone else at the election result. That is always the way! The reformist leaders have no confidence in the working class, and are always astounded when the masses hand power to them. In the same way, the Spanish trade union leaders were astounded when the workers responded massively to their call for a general strike.

Let us speak clearly: the defeat of the PP was nothing to do with the actions of the PSOE leadership, who did nothing to bring it about. On the contrary, by immediately accepting Aznar's call for "national unity" after the events last Thursday, they played right into the hands of the PP. If it were up to them, the PP would still be in power today. What changed everything was the spontaneous movement of the working class from below.

Mass Demonstrations on March 12

With trembling hands, Zapatero has

accepted the power that has been unexpectedly given to him by the working class. He said last night: "Today Spaniards have spoken with a massive voice. They have said they want a government of change. Thank you for this confidence." That is quite right. The working class has given Zapatero their votes and their confidence. But this confidence is based upon the idea that a Socialist government will break with US imperialism and withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq.

The youth flocked to the Socialist cause. In addition, Socialists who stayed at home last time, disillusioned by the policies and conduct of the leadership, came out in huge numbers in their determination to teach the government a lesson. This was therefore not a vote of confidence in the Socialist leadership, as Zapatero imagines, but above all a vote of protest against a hated right wing government for its collaboration with US imperialism in a criminal war in Iraq.

One of the main planks of Zapatero's platform was his promise to bring home the 1300 Spanish troops now serving with the coalition in Iraq. This is a position supported by all the other parties in opposition to the Popular Party. It now becomes the most burning question, and one that will

immediately act as the focal point for the workers and youth who, having brought down the PP government with their votes, will now demand that the PSOE does what it has promised.

Will the Socialist leaders honour their promises? The speech of Zapatero after learning of the PSOE's victory did not seem very promising. His style was not that of someone who had just won an outstanding victory. Rather it was that of a man who is afraid of the power that has been placed in his hands and wishes to dampen the spirits of his supporters and reduce expectations. He said he wanted a "tranquil change", which sounded very much like no change at all.

The report in today's Independent says: "Mr Zapatero was conciliatory to his opponent, Mariano Rajoy, whom he described as a 'worthy rival'. The incoming Prime Minister said that the result was 'a victory for us all.'" Zapatero pledged himself to be just as determined



in the fight against terrorism as Aznar was. He said he wanted the "maximum unity of all political forces to pursue that struggle". This is not at all the kind of thing the millions of workers who voted for the PSOE wanted to hear!

The international implications

The cause of the election result in Spain must be sought, not in Spain, but in the turbulent arena of world politics. And the repercussions of the events in Spain will not be confined to the borders of Spain but will have profound international consequences.

Last night's vote was a crushing defeat, not only for the right wing PP and its leader, but also for Bush and Blair. Aznar had hoped to hand over power effortlessly to his hand-picked successor, Rajoy. Like Franco, he thought that everything was "tied up, and well tied up." But he was wrong. Now Bush and Blair must be deeply concerned that similar processes can affect them. They are not wrong. The masses in Britain and the USA will be following the events in Spain with interest.

The masses inflicted a severe punishment on the Popular Party government for supporting the war in Iraq. This has set the alarm bells ringing in London and Washington. Bush and Blair have lost their most reliable European ally. Now isolated in Europe but for the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, Blair must be contemplating the prospect that his absolute majority may, like Aznar's, melt away. The lesson will not be lost on Tony Blair and his friend in the White House.

The Bush administration has even more reason than Blair to be alarmed. With Presidential elections just around the corner, the mood of the American public is also slowly turning against a war that seems to have no end. They fear that the defeat of the PP will leave them even more exposed, and may lead to Spain pulling out of Iraq. That would increase demands in the USA for withdrawal.

This morning, Zapatero has issued a statement to the effect that the war in Iraq was a disaster and warning that Spain would pull its troops out of Iraq by June "if things did not change." This statement suggests that he means to honour his election pledge to withdraw from Iraq. But it contains certain sub-clauses that may still affect the outcome. Already Tony Blair is arguing that "things are changing" in Iraq, so there is no need for Spain to withdraw.

There is also the possibility of some new manoeuvre in the United Nations, with some resolution designed to make the occupation of Iraq "legal", and thus provide an excuse for keeping Spanish troops there. The Spanish workers and youth must be on their guard! At the slightest indication of a retreat, they must mobilise.

In the next few weeks Washington and London will place enormous pressure on the government in Madrid not to withdraw. Even before they have formed a government, the leaders of the PSOE are coming under pressure from the ruling class and imperialism. Zapatero will have received telephone calls from London and Washington, congratulating him on his success and, in passing, reminding him of his "international obligations". With astonishing arrogance, even before the election result was announced, Powell and Rumsfeld were issuing warnings to the Spanish Socialists that they must not pull their troops out of Iraq and that they must continue to back the "war against terror."

The American imperialists imagine that they have a god-given right (a "manifest destiny" they used to call it) to dictate to every other government in the world. To weak states that cannot fight back they say: "Do as we say, or we will bomb you!" "Do as we say, or we will occupy you!" They bully Cuba and Venezuela. Now they wish to bully Spain. But this will only provoke greater anger in the mass of Spanish people.

But it will not be so easy for the Socialist leaders to ignore the wishes of their supporters. This election has taken place at a time when the masses have entered into action. The genie has been let out of the bottle. It will not be easily put back. The masses will give the new government a little time, but Zapatero does not have a blank cheque. If he does not withdraw the Spanish army from Iraq, the stage will be set for massive mobilisations.

Any suggestion that the new government is bending the knee to Washington and London will be met by an explosion of opposition by the workers and youth, and also by the rank-and-file of the PSOE. The PSOE leaders will be ground between two millstones. Already banners are appearing everywhere with slogans like "No to war!" Any attempt to break the PSOE's election pledge will cause a furore.

A revolutionary policy is needed!

Under these circumstances, the Communist Party and the United Left should be growing. But in these elections, the IU lost a lot of ground. Although the votes for IU remained more or less stable, they lost many seats, being reduced from nine seats to five. They lost all their seats in their traditional strongholds of Andalusia and Asturias - a very serious setback.

In part, this can be attributed to the so-called "useful vote" [i.e. tactical voting] - those who wanted to kick out the PP voted for the Socialists in order not to split the Left vote. But this does not explain everything. It is a law that where the working class is confronted with two workers' parties, one bigger and the other smaller, with a similar pro-

gramme and policies, the workers will vote for the bigger of the two, and the smaller will tend to disappear.

If the Communist Party stood for a real Communist policy, radically different to the policies of the PSOE, then at least the most advanced workers and youth would see the difference and vote Communist. But at the present time, the difference is not at all clear. The leaders of IU have gone steadily to the right, abandoned Marxism in all but name, and adopted a reformist programme.

In the recent crisis that preceded the election, the position taken by the leaders of IU was completely indistinguishable from that of the PSOE. They immediately fell in behind the PP's demand for "national unity". They had no independent position. Now they have paid the price for opportunism.

In the ranks of Izquierda Unida and the Communist Party there are many honest Communists who want to fight for a Communist policy. They must demand a change of course. If ever the ideas of Marxism were shown to be correct, that moment is now. The demand for a revolutionary policy will grow in the coming months and years, as an increasing number of people come to understand that on a capitalist basis no way out is possible.

The stage is set for new explosions, nationally and internationally. The masses are learning some very hard lessons, but they are learning quickly. It is the duty of the Marxist tendency to march shoulder to shoulder with the masses, to push the movement forward, actively advancing the most militant policies and tactics. Above all, however, it is necessary to win over the working class, beginning with the most advanced elements and the youth, to the programme of the socialist revolution.

Whatever happens, this will not be a tranquil period. The stage will be set for an even bigger movement to the left in the next period. Ideas that today are listened to by a small minority will find an echo in a growing number of people.

Lenin once said that capitalism is horror without end. We saw the face of that horror in Madrid last Thursday. But today we see another face: the face of a triumphant working class that has dealt a heavy blow against its enemies, nationally and internationally. In place of pessimism there is optimism. In place of defeatism there is a new confidence that we can win. Armed with the correct policies and ideas, we can win - not only in Spain but everywhere.

The lessons of the past few days in Spain must be studied carefully by all those who wish to understand the nature of the period through which we are passing. What has occurred in Spain will tomorrow happen in Britain, the USA and every other country. We must be prepared! **□**

Kosovo - workers have no interest in nationalist conflict

by Goran M. in Belgrade

THE PEOPLE of Kosovska Mitrovica, the Balkans' very own Belfast, have recently experienced heightened tensions. An 18-year-old Serb was shot in a drive-by shooting on a Monday evening. This was nothing new, since the Serbian minority, which stayed in the province after the war scattered in numerous enclaves, has been an object of sporadic harassment and violence from the armed Albanian nationalists since 2000.

That evening, the Serbs living in the area blocked local roads in order to protest against both this killing and the conditions they have been facing in general as a minority in the province since the NATO bombings ended and Belgrade lost all authority over the region.

On Tuesday, while the protests in Northern Mitrovica continued, terrible news started to spread across the southern part of the city inhabited by Albanians. Three Albanian boys had drowned in the river Ibar that afternoon and a rumour was spreading that these boys had been chased into the river by their neighbours in the North. This was the event that inspired protests on Wednesday morning in the Southern Mitrovica.

A few thousand Albanians started heading towards the bridge over the river Ibar, dividing the two communities. Soon afterwards, the UN police roadblock was broken and Albanian protesters started entering the Serbian part. At that moment, all hell broke loose, as the two sides collided. In the words of one of the UN officers it was "urban warfare" in which stones, Molotov cocktails and firearms were used. Reports state that two inhabitants of the northern part were killed by sniper shots that came from three tall buildings in the south.

Events in Mitrovica served as a spark for an all out attack on Serbian enclaves by the Albanian nationalists. In numerous villages houses were set on fire, orthodox churches were destroyed and Serbs who lived in predominantly Albanian villages started flooding towards the more ethnically homogenous part

of Kosovo. The few remaining Serbian buildings in Pristina were evacuated as the riots started and the Albanian youth clashed with the foreign troops in the city. The violence continued throughout the night. By Thursday evening official figures stated that at least 31 people had been killed in the events and more than 500 had been injured.

As the news started reaching Serbia, groups of angry nationalist youth started to gather in cities across the country. A few hundred football hooligans, members of ultra nationalist groups and others set fire to the Belgrade mosque and clashed with the police. There were attempts to reach the Albanian and American embassies, but police prevented these incidents. In the southern city of Nis a local mosque was burned to the ground. Albanian shops were trashed and attacks on minorities (mainly Roma people) were reported across the country.

Nationalist Hysteria

As Marxists in the Balkans, with the fresh memory of butchery along ethnic lines, we must be extremely cautious when we analyze these types of events. We must at any cost avoid the trap of being sucked into the nationalist hysteria on any side. In Belgrade, we have a limited access to information about the Albanian population in Kosovo, its mood and its political life. We should be very skeptical towards our domestic media and its version of the events taking place. However based on the information we have gathered so far we concluded that it would be wrong to characterize the recent events in a way most

western media did - as "ethnic clashes between two sides" and as "spontaneous".

These actions carried out by chauvinist thugs were clearly planned beforehand. The incident in Mitrovica served as a mere excuse for Albanian nationalist leaders to launch a campaign against the remaining Serbs. Buses full of armed thugs were organized from Pristina to go to other parts of the province to commit acts of violence.

This violence must be seen as a final echo of the events that took place in a vacuum after the Serbian army withdrew from Kosovo and the Albanian nationalists started acts of "retribution" against the unprotected Serbian Kosovars. Around 100,000 Serbs fled from the region at that time.

Social tensions in Kosovo have been high ever since. The imperialist forces have not improved the living conditions of the Kosovars. Unemployment is extremely high, factories are empty and production is reduced to a bare minimum. The imperialist forces also started a wave of privatization of Kosovo's companies and natural resources. Kosovo's parliament is a farce. As in Bosnia, the people have the feeling they are not in control of their own destiny. The dictatorship of Belgrade was just replaced by the dictatorship of imperialist powers.

The Albanian leadership is very corrupt and chauvinist. Most of the parties emerged from the KLA guerrilla army whose leadership was tightly controlled by the imperialists and used as their pawns against Milosevic in the region. After the war, these gangsters jumped into suits and served in the new puppet government. In this atmosphere it was only a matter of time before the Albanian masses would rise up. Unfortunately the nationalist

leaders were able to divert the anger and frustration of the masses against the Serbian minority, thus saving themselves and imperialist rule on the ground. It is the same vicious process of diversion of the class struggle that we have witnessed year after year in the Balkans.

Meanwhile, in Serbia the extremely weak, newly formed nationalist government tried to use the situation to its own advantage and called for "national unity". Of course these events whipped up



Serbian nationalism, but the situation is very indicative of the processes taking place inside Serbia. Belgrade lost all control over Kosovo and its influence at the moment has been reduced to the local Serbian representatives in the Kosovo parliament. What hurts the Serbian government most is that the imperialists have been ignoring them for some time now and have based their rule on their Albanian puppets.

It does not need a genius to figure out that events in Belgrade and Nis were not all that "spontaneous" either. Links between the various ultra-nationalist groups in Belgrade University, the right wing of Kostunica's party and structures within the police and the Orthodox Church are obvious for anyone willing to see. It is likely that the government, in the face of its impotence and dependence on the West, used the simultaneous burning of mosques in two major cities as a valve to let off the steam that had built up.

Crime of imperialism

The government tried to mobilize people and organized a protest on Saturday morning. The official line was a kitschy emulation of the Western "war against terrorism". The protest took place in front of a church and all that the new Prime Minister Kostunica could tell the people was to "pray"! Despite the official mobilization and full backing of all the media, the crowd was very small for a city of two million people - only around 10,000. What became obvious in the past few days is that the workers in Serbia are not prepared to go out and protest over this question. Most of the crowd, in all events, was made up of frustrated and unemployed youth. Unable to mobilize the unions, the government looked for the help of student union organizations. School lessons were cancelled on Thursday and Friday the pupils were sent onto the streets. The average Serbian worker feels cheated and demoralized. For him or her, Kosovo was "lost" long ago and there is no way they would go out and protest over such an issue. And they definitely would not support another war for so-called "national interests".

Imperialism created an apparently unsolvable situation in Kosovo. After years of hypocritical talk about "multiethnic" Kosovo, the imperialists and western corporate media now are saying they have been hit on the head by "reality". They admit



what horribly "naïve idealists" they have been in believing that the Balkan "tribes" could live together in unity. The Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica has already put forward a proposal for the "cantonisation" of Kosovo, which would in reality split the province into two parts, and it seems that some elements within the imperialist camp may be willing to impose this "Cypriot solution".

Marxists in the Balkans and all over the world should fiercely oppose these ideas. Enough is enough! The imperialists have been drawing borders in the Balkans for the past 15 years and nothing good has ever come out of it. The division of Kosovo along ethnic lines would only alienate Albanian and Serbian workers even more and create conditions for future wars. The status of Kosovo cannot be resolved within the limited bourgeois framework of borders of nation-states.

In order to bypass the imperialist trap the working class and youth of Serbia should denounce these initiatives and avoid falling into the atmosphere of nationalist hysteria that has been created by these events. People living in Kosovo should have the right to determine their own destiny. But they must understand that on a capitalist basis this will never be possible. Their autonomy can only be guaranteed when all the peoples of the Balkans are genuinely free, which can only come about if the workers come to power. The pro-bourgeois

regime in Belgrade will never be able to improve the living conditions of the Kosovars living there, just as it is not capable of helping the 100,000 ex-inhabitants, who are in Serbia at the moment.

Also, we call upon Albanian workers and farmers in Kosovo not to allow themselves to be manipulated by their nationalist politicians either. The Serbian minority is not the cause of the hard-

ship you are facing today! Turn your fire on the real source of power in Kosovo - the imperialists and their local Albanian servants.

Only by acting along these guidelines can we close the Pandora's box that the Balkans has turned into. The only REALISTIC solution for this region is a Socialist Federation of the Balkans which would allow for an economic development of the region and ensure genuine rights for all the various nationalities that live next to each other. What died last week was not the idea of a multi-ethnic Kosovo but the idea that any progress or unity can be achieved under the imperialist occupation of a territory.

We are not utopians. A united Kosovo will not fall from the sky and there is even less of chance that it will be created through pathetic liberal NGO initiatives. The only way Serbs and Albanians can unite is through a joint class-conscious struggle against the imperialists and local pro-bourgeois forces. The history of this region shows us that this is quite possible. There will never be progress on the Balkans until the process of the restoration of capitalism is reversed and there will be no peace on the Balkans until the last imperialist battalion is kicked out and the last NGO office is shut down! □

□ **Against the division of Kosovo along ethnic lines!**

□ **To the Albanian workers and youth: the Serbian minority is not your real enemy in Kosovo!**

□ **To the Serbian workers and youth: ignore the nationalist hysteria of the Serbian media!**

□ **For a united Kosovo as a part of the Socialist Federation of the Balkans!**

March 23, "Hands off Venezuela" International Day of Action

ON TUESDAY, March 23, supporters of the Hands off Venezuela (HOV) campaign visited Venezuelan embassies around the world. They expressed their solidarity with the Bolivarian revolutionary process and also their concern at US imperialism's interference in Venezuelan internal affairs. They condemned US manoeuvres to back the right-wing "opposition" in its attempts to remove the democratically elected President and government of the country.

In **Austria** some 30 people attended the picket at the embassy. Given the heavy rainstorm this was quite a good turnout. There were trade unionists, Young Socialists (Youth of the SPÖ), supporters of *Der Funke*, who are coordinating the HOV in Austria, as well as activists from Cuban and other Latin American solidarity committees. The gathering shouted anti-imperialist slogans and held placards that expressed their opposition to US interference in the internal affairs of Venezuela. They explained that the US government, after its support for the Carmona coup in April 2002, has no moral authority to give lessons on democracy to the Venezuelan government and people. They presented a copy of the appeal and our statement to a representative of the embassy (the Encargada de Negocios) and they received a very friendly welcome.

The Austrian Marxists of *Der Funke* eagerly took up the appeal of the "Hands off Venezuela" campaign right from when it was launched and started to organise a series of activities in solidarity with the movement of our brothers and sisters in Venezuela. They sent us the following report.

"During the bosses lockout in 2002/2003 in Venezuela (the so-called oil workers' strike) we moved a resolution at the national congress of the Socialist Youth, condemning this counterrevolutionary act and calling for international solidarity. The more than 200 delegates at the congress unanimously voted in favour of the resolution. Ever since then the revolutionary process in

Venezuela has regularly been covered in our publications.

In January of this year we finally succeeded in organising a speaking-tour with Herman Albrecht of the "Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria". At seven meetings in five cities Herman explained the situation of the movement especially highlighting the occupied factories.

Taking up the "Hands off Venezuela" appeal of the "In Defence of Marxism" website we launched the initiative in branches, meetings or conferences of working-class organisations - in the Socialist Youth, Trade Unions and Social Democratic Party. So we are making sure that the call to stop imperialist intervention is widely heard in the movement. Many ordinary workers and youth, but also shop stewards and high-ranking party and TU officials, decided to help the campaign by signing the appeal. In several organisations comrades called for more information, so we are going to organise discussions, film nights etc., on the situation in Venezuela.

As part of this ongoing campaign comrades from various YS and TU branches in Vienna gathered at the embassy of the Bolivarian Republic to loudly express their protest against imperialist manoeuvres and to show their solidarity with the revolutionary movement. Miriam Garcia de Perez, Deputy Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic, joined the gathering for a moment, stating that the government is

willing to take up the fight for its national sovereignty and expressed her gratitude for this international campaign. Her "tropical greetings" went especially to the 30 people in Vienna who despite an icy winter rain showed up to the gathering and stayed for more than one hour on the street in front of the embassy.

History shows that without a conscious Marxist leadership the revolution will fail, as our enemies are prepared to use any mistake of the movement to regain control over the situation. As conscious internationalists and revolutionaries we are well aware that the further deepening of the revolution in Venezuela would become an example for the working-class on a worldwide level. As Gustavo Adolfo Marquez Marin, the Ambassador of Venezuela in Austria put it: "Our country is in the eye of the hurricane." All decent humans want to see an end to this hurricane of misery, wars and barbarism on a worldwide scale. Let us start from Venezuela!" - Editorial Board *Der Funke*, March 25 2004

In **Italy** a delegation from HOV, coordinated by *FalceMartello* visited the Venezuelan Consulate in Milan. The Consul (Antonietta Arcaya Smith) is very much a supporter of Chavez. She expressed her interest in the "Hands off Venezuela" campaign, especially after they mentioned the fact that last Sunday Chavez dedicated 20 minutes in his *Alo Presidente* TV programme explaining what the campaign was

about and who was organising it. They asked for her support for the campaign, and particularly for a speaking tour they are planning at the end of April. She said there would be no problem in advertising our meeting through the consulate. In the conversation they had with the Consul she expressed great satisfaction at receiving such acts of solidarity. In the next few days our comrades will go to the embassy in Rome and to the consulate in Naples. They are also in touch with Bolivarian circles in Florence and Rome. They are very keen to organise



something with us. This is all part of the build up for their solidarity campaign which will consist of a speaking tour at the end of April and all the comrades are very enthusiastic.

In the **United States** the Venezuelan Deputy Consul General in San Francisco, Jose Egidio Rodriguez met with one of the coordinators of the HOV, for a meeting. Our statements on Venezuela, solidarity signatures and a copy of the *US Socialist Appeal* were handed to him. The discussion centred on the international HOV solidarity with the Revolution. He expressed our support for the right of the Venezuelan people to defend themselves against US intervention. The conversations also covered such issues as the trade unions in the USA, the events in Spain, Healthcare, our tendency's (In Defence of Marxism) history, the Socialist Parties, the Communist Parties, the upcoming election for President, and even a brief chat about baseball! The Deputy Consul General thanked us for our support. Supporters of the HOV in other parts of the USA are considering visiting their local Venezuelan Consulates/Embassies.

Across the Ocean from San Francisco, in **Australia**, supporters of the HOV visited the Venezuelan Embassy in Canberra and were received very cordially by the Ambassador who was very supportive of any effort to build a solidarity campaign.

In **Mexico** the supporters of the *Militante* journal, together with CEDEP (Committees in Defence of State Education) and CoTDeSi (Workers' Committee in Defence of the Trade Union) went to the Venezuelan Embassy to express their solidarity with the Venezuelan workers and with the revolutionary process. They expressed their concern at US interference in the process and condemned US imperialism's manoeuvres in backing attempts to undermine the authority of the CEN (National Electoral Council) in Venezuela. The comrades read out the statements of *Militante*, *Cedep* and *Cotdesi*. A delegation was received by the comrade Ambassador, Lino Martínez Salazar, a man with a long history of struggle in defence of workers' rights in Venezuela. A resolution calling on US imperialism to keep its hands off Venezuela, signed by 354 youth, lecturers and workers, in various colleges and unions was handed to the Ambassador. Another resolution voted by 140 rank and file activists of the PRD at a conference held on March 21-22 was also handed in. A copy of the Mexican edition of Alan Woods' book,



Bolshevism, the road to revolution, was given to the Ambassador. The event was rounded off with the chanting of several anti-imperialist slogans and the singing of the Internationale.

In **Belgium** the 'Hands off Venezuela' campaign has been contacted by Venezuelans in the Netherlands. They have a website dedicated to defending the Bolivarian Revolution in the Netherlands, on which they publish material from *In Defence of Marxism* in Dutch. They are very grateful for our support for the revolutionary process in Venezuela. The supporters of *Vonk*, who are coordinating the HOV in Belgium, will be talking to the Venezuelan Ambassador tomorrow.

In **Britain**, the following day, on Wednesday March 24, a meeting was held in the House of Commons to speak out against the smoke screen that the mass media has created to obscure the issue of the Venezuelan revolution. The meeting, organised by left Labour MP John McDonnell - who is a supporter of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign - was used to publicise and explain the Early Day Motion (EDM 854) being introduced into Parliament.

EDM 854

That this House condemns the interference of the United States of America in the internal democratic affairs of the Republic of Venezuela and in particular its covert attempts to secure the removal of President Chavez, whose government has used the country's considerable oil reserves to launch a programme to tackle poverty, including specific measures targeted at women, such as the constitutional recognition of unwaged housework as economically productive, entitling housewives to social security benefits, the prioritisation of single mothers and indigenous people for land distribution, the guaranteeing of food for pregnant women and nursing mothers, and the

significant increase in access to education and decent housing for the poor.

An Early Day Motion is a motion with no fixed date for debate. In reality, it is a device used to draw attention to a particular issue and to elicit support by inviting other MPs to add their signatures to it. Most are never actually debated. So far 20 MPs have added their names to this motion. EDM 854 puts a heavy emphasis on the position of women in Venezuela - which is indeed a very important question - at least partly because it was originally put forward by a group called Global Women's strike.

Pablo Sanchez addressed the meeting on behalf of the Hands Off Venezuela Campaign. The audience consisting of around 30 people showed a great deal of interest in developing a campaign in Britain to support the revolutionary movement in Venezuela.

Alan Simpson MP (Labour), Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs agreed to sponsor the campaign and to canvass for further support in Parliament. This is an important step in building support in the British labour movement for the revolutionary process in Venezuela and against the intrigues of US imperialism.

In a further development, this weekend the national conference of the National Union of Journalists - whose General Secretary, Jeremy Dear, is a sponsor of the campaign - will discuss a motion to support the new Venezuelan trade union, the UNT.

Also, the AMICUS London General Industries Sector Conference 2004 passed a resolution presented by Espe Espigares, a delegate from Branch 974, condemning US interference in Venezuela. The text of the resolution reads as follows:

"This conference deplores the intent of the United States to intervene in the internal life of Venezuela. Two attempts have been made to overthrow the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez and behind

Venezuela

these attempts has been the hand of the CIA. Conference pledges its support to the revolutionary movement of the Venezuelan people in their struggle for socialist equality and justice. Furthermore, Conference pledges support to the 'Hands off Venezuela' campaign which seeks to promote awareness of what is happening in Venezuela."

Hands off Venezuela!

In the last few days the campaign of provocations and pressure on the part of US imperialism against the revolutionary process in Venezuela has intensified. Leading US administration spokespersons have made statements, putting pressure on the National Electoral Council (NEC) to rule in favour of the opposition in their effort to call a presidential recall referendum. The Venezuelan government has denounced publicly this growing foreign intervention. Imperialism and the local ruling elite cannot tolerate a government that increases investment in health and education, refuses to privatise publicly-owned companies and utilities, opposes the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement, reasserts the nationalised character of the oil industry, etc. Above all they cannot tolerate the process of mass organisation and politicisation that has taken place in the country. On two occasions the revolutionary movement of the Venezuelan masses has defeated the plans of imperialism and the local oligarchy, when they organised their coup in April 11, 2002 and during the oil sabotage and bosses' lock out of December 2002-January 2003.

On 17th of March the "Hands off Venezuela!" campaign kicked off with a public meeting at the NUJ headquarters in London. This meeting was attended mainly by students and trade unionists. After the speech of Jorge Martin (eyewitness of the process in Venezuela), there was a debate about the challenges of the Bolivarian Revolution. Although there were less than 50 people, "Hands off Venezuela!" collected more than 160 pounds for the campaign. "Hands off Venezuela" has been launched by the socialist website Marxist.com. With this initiative we are trying to get the solidarity of the workers and youth around the world to denounce the attempts of US imperialism and the local reactionaries to defeat and smash the revolutionary process. All internationalists must urgently assist the struggle of the working class in Venezuela against the reaction. □

□ **Join and finance Hands off Venezuela!**

□ **No to US intervention in Venezuela!**

□ **Defend the Venezuelan revolution!**

□ **Forward to Socialism!**

Anyone who wishes to add their signature to this appeal can do so by writing to Jorge Martin at: handsoffvenezuela@yahoo.co.uk

President Chavez dedicates 20 minutes to In Defence of Marxism on the TV programme "Alo Presidente"

CHAVEZ, the President of Venezuela, does a regular TV programme, Alo Presidente. In the latest one he dedicated twenty minutes to In Defence of Marxism (www.marxist.com). Chavez had received a copy of *Reason in Revolt* sent to him and personally signed by Alan Woods. Chavez spent the whole time on the programme with the book in his hands. And towards the end of the programme, after having congratulated Zapatero and the Spanish people for having won the elections, he explained that the book had been sent to him by Alan Woods.

He read out quite a long quote from the book, the bit in the section on physics which explains the need for a catalyst to accelerate the molecular processes in the transitional phase, of the change from one physical state to another. He ended by quoting the bit that says that if the catalyst is missing the transitional phase will be longer, etc. Then he raised the idea that the "misiones educativas" [special literacy programmes], the Plan Vuelvan Caras (jobs), and the local elections in August must become the catalyst of the revolutionary process in Venezuela.

He then went on to explain that Alan Woods is a leading figure of the publication In Defence of Marxism, that in the Spanish speaking countries is represented by the Spanish journal *El Militante*. Then he read out Alan's note to Chavez in the book and also a part of the accompanying letter. First he read the bit that explains that *Reason in Revolt* was written in 1995 when internationally the bourgeoisie was launching an offensive against the ideas of socialism, taking advantage of the collapse of Stalinism.

Then he read the whole of the Hands off Venezuela international statement and he explained that In Defence of Marxism were the organisers of this campaign. He quoted Manzoor Ahmed, one of the Marxist MPs elected to the Pakistani Parliament and then listed the other Pakistani MPs who had signed the Hands off Venezuela appeal. He also read out other signatories. This led to some laughter because of the way some of the names were pronounced. The audience were splitting their sides laughing, and Chavez joined in.

He read out from the list of signatories many of the names. He mentioned Pepe Martin, many from the PSOE and the UGT, Pilar in the name of the Telefonica Moviles union committee, Txus from Vitoria. He then read out several from Italy. He spent a lot of time reading out the French, German and US signatories. He also read out signatures from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Greece, India, Iran, Luxemburg, Mexico, Peru, Sweden and Britain.

At the end he passed the list to the "canciller" (Foreign Minister) and to his Department for International Relations and he told them that they must put In Defence of Marxism in touch with all the others that support the Bolivarian Revolution and he ended by saying that more and more, people belonging to different left currents are beginning to realise that the Bolivarian Revolution is part of their own project to build an international alternative to Neo-liberalism and Globalisation.

What this demonstrates is that solidarity action with Venezuela is very important and that any action that our supporters organise around the world should be reported to us. Any action that you carry out will get into the Venezuelan press; the people like to hear about it. □

The Rulers of Israel have killed Hamas' Shaikh Ahmad Yassin

A bloody crime against both nations

by Yossi Schwartz
 and Fred Weston

AT DAWN Israeli helicopter gunships fired missiles at Shaikh Ahmad Yassin as he left a mosque, killing the Hamas leader and at least six other people. According to Al Jazeera: "A Reuters reporter who rushed to the scene on Monday after hearing three loud explosions found the blown-up remains of Yassin's blood-soaked wheelchair". One witness who lives near the mosque told reporters what happened moments after the first explosion. "I looked to see where Shaikh Ahmad Yassin was", he said. "He was lying on the ground and his chair was destroyed. People there darted left and right. Then another two missiles landed."

Yassin's body was rushed to Gaza City's Shifa hospital, but obviously nothing could be done for him. At least six people died in the attack including at least two of Yassin's bodyguards. A further ten were wounded.

The Israeli army later admitted it had carried out the killings. Sharon has been saying he would step up operations to track down and kill Hamas leaders after a string of acts of individual terror had been carried out against Israeli targets, including one at a strategic port last week in which ten people were killed. According to the BBC, military sources in Israel had stated that the attack on Sheikh Yassin was personally organised and directed by Sharon himself!

This event shatters any hopes any might have had that some kind of compromise could be reached in the conflict between the Palestinian people and the Israeli state. Now we can only expect the killings on both sides to intensify.

As news of the killing spread, thousands of Palestinians, many in tears, poured onto the streets, denouncing Israel and calling for revenge, while fighters fired into the air. The demonstrations spread to other Palestinian areas. Clashes between Palestinian youth and Israeli soldiers were reported.

Yassin, who was in his late '60s, had been confined to a wheelchair since an accident as a teenager that paralysed him. He was also partially blind. He had been sentenced by Israeli courts in 1989 to a life sentence for founding Hamas and inciting

Palestinians to attack Israelis. But Israel released him in 1997, allegedly as a goodwill gesture to Jordan's King Hussein after an attempt to assassinate Hamas leader Khalid Mashal in Jordan failed.

As we have explained previously, Sharon, and with him many others in the ruling circles, would love to leave Gaza. What he is concerned about is that the opposition, including Hamas that is very strong in Gaza, will rule the place once Israel pulls out.

Thus Sharon took the decision to strike at the heart of Hamas. Only a fool could believe that this is going to solve anything. Yassin will now become a martyr of Hamas. Instead of reducing the suicide bombings, this act will serve as a tremendous tool in the hands of the Hamas recruiting sergeants. Many more young people will be prepared to carry out attacks now. This is confirmed by what Abdul Aziz al Rantissi, a senior Hamas leader, said: "The battle is open and war between us and them is open. Today they killed an Islamic symbol."

How many ordinary working Israelis must now be dreading what is to come next? Where will the next act of terror take place? That is what Sharon is counting on. He wishes to use the reaction of some of the Palestinian youth to step up repression against the Palestinian people as a whole. It also serves nicely to justify the wall they are building which cuts right through the living body of whole Palestinian communities.

Real issues buried

This act is aimed at making sure that the status quo remains unchanged. The Palestinian people will continue to live in a prison house, without jobs, without decent water, etc., while the Israeli people have their minds concentrated on the fear of being bombed at any moment. In this way the real issues remain buried. On both sides life is becoming more difficult. While access to work for the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is blocked, in Israel unemployment has been going up while the government has been attacking all the social reforms the workers had won over many decades. So long as this continues both peoples will see their living conditions worsen. That is why the killing of Yassin is a bloody crime against the masses of both nations, the Palestinian and the Israeli.

The rulers of the US refused of course to condemn the terrorist act of the criminal gang ruling Israel. They just called for "restraint" on both sides! For Bush and co., state terror is legitimate. Sharon is just copying the methods of Bush on the international arena. He sees his moves against Hamas and other Palestinian organizations as part of the general "war on terror". We have seen how successful Bush's war on terror has been in Spain! Instead of curbing the terrorist threat we have seen the terrible killing that took place in Madrid, where ordinary working Spaniards had to pay the price for the imperialist adventures of its government.

The killing of Yassin merely adds petrol to the already burning fire. It opens up a nightmare scenario for both Israelis and Palestinians. This just proves once again that the way out of the bloody trap is an independent policy of the working class. In spite of all the wolves howling in the wind, in spite of all the so-called "practical" realists, we will not cease to explain that the Israeli people and the Palestinians must find a way of breaking this deadlock and this can only come through united struggle under the leadership of the working class to end the capitalist nightmare.

It is the duty of the labour movement organizations on both sides to step in and offer an alternative. The first thing that needs to be done to escape from this nightmare is to organize a struggle of the masses of both nations against both state terror and individual terror, like in Spain where the slogans that emerged on many of the demonstrations were against both the terrorists and the imperialists who had launched the war in Iraq.

The Communist Party in Israel can play a role in this. It has branches throughout Israel and is also present in the Trade Unions. It should take the initiative in raising inside the Israeli labour movement the need to demonstrate the workers' opposition to the methods of Sharon. The workers of Israel have nothing to gain from all this. What is needed is a mass demonstration under the demands: down with the terrorist government; bring down the government; put an end to state terror and individual terror. This can only be achieved by mobilising the masses. It was possible in Spain. It can be done in Israel also. ■

**Marxist voice of the
labour movement
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Socialist Appeal



Civil servants strike to defend jobs and pay

IN HIS recent budget speech the Chancellor Gordon Brown announced plans to slash jobs in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue and the Department for Education and Skills. 40,000 of these job losses will be in the DWP.

Management wrote to all staff on Budget day in the form of questions and answers. One of the questions was "Why is this Budget a 'good deal' for DWP?" A good question, as most staff cannot see how losing 40,000 staff can be 'good news'.

The letter says that apparently it offers a real opportunity for DWP to continue to modernise, to automate clerical processes and reduce costs. This shows that management have already decided job cuts will be in the lower clerical grade not within higher management. The letter goes on to say that the losses are in fact only 30,000 in real terms as the DWP has already agreed to 10,000 losses under the Gershon review. Staff should be proud Government has asked them to make these further efficiency cuts!

The reduction in staffing will be started immediately with a freeze on recruitment and promotion. There will now be no progression out of the lowest paid jobs. In one step management and Government have put the lowest paid workers into a deep depression with no light at the end of their tunnel. DWP has the highest levels of absence due to work related stress. These job cuts will just add to these levels within the lowest paid grades and with draconian management absence policies, which can lead to workers being disciplined after only 8 days off, things will only get worse.

In addition Gordon Brown has endorsed the Lyons review into the civil service and its plans to move 20,000 jobs out of London and the Thames Gateway. These job moves will involve staff facing pay cuts of up to 27% with the loss of London weighting.

This budget came as a blow to all staff working in the department and many are seeing it as another nail in their coffin. DWP is in the middle of industrial action over this years pay offer with a further two days of strike action planned for the 13th and 14th of April. Management must be shown that staff will not take anymore. These two days must be supported.

by Harriet Ross, Department for Work and Pensions

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