

# permanentrevolution

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## Venezuela: a revolution for our time?

### INSIDE

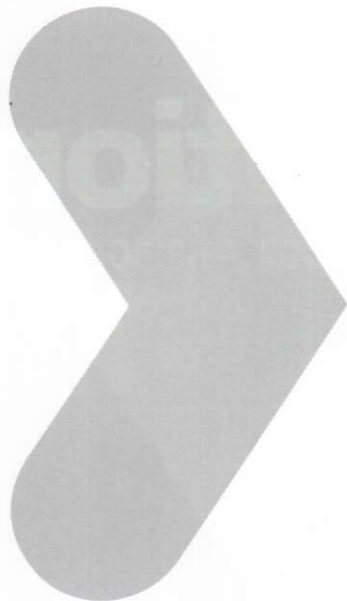
**Climate change /**  
Tipping point for capitalism

**Prostitution /**  
Marxism versus moralism

**Anarchism /**  
Should we take power or not?

**Political Islam /**  
Behind the global jihad

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# From the editors

## **Permanent Revolution 3**

Winter 2007

A quarterly review of revolutionary politics and theory

### **Co-Editors**

Clare Heath, Keith Harvey and Stuart King

### **Editorial team this issue**

Alison Higgins, Bill Jefferies, G R McColl

### **Production Editor**

Jon Dennis

### **Production team**

Linda Wilde, Dave Gay

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PR Publications,  
Flat 1, 89 Gipsy Hill,  
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### **Email**

contact@permanentrevolution.net

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Welcome to the third issue of *Permanent Revolution* (the second in its current format). We have had a lot of favourable feedback on the last issue and it has sold well. We plan to get the journal into more bookshops this year, so if there is one near you where people might buy it let us know. And if you want it in your university library get the librarian to send for details.

This issue tackles a range of important contemporary political questions: the nature of the "revolutionary process" under way in Venezuela; the politics of anarchism which is influential in sections of the anti-capitalist/social forum movement; the ecological disasters brought on by rampant capitalism; and whether prostitutes are victims to be rescued or workers to be organised. Again we value feedback, not just on these issues but on any of the questions covered in the journal.

Like all groups on the left producing "hard copy" magazines we are trying to develop a useful relationship between our journal and our website. The economics of producing any journal means it relies on paid sales, subscriptions and donations (and we would like to thank comrades, especially from outside the UK who have helped us with money). If you like the journal please subscribe and, even better, send a donation.

You can now subscribe using PayPal on our website either for the printed version or a cheaper pdf edition. Unfortunately, because of capitalist economics and the cost of producing a printed journal you cannot access it for free, although you can access lots of other material free, including back issues.

The PR Network will be holding meetings and debates in the coming months around the major issues dealt with in the journal - Venezuela, anarchism etc. Watch our website for details.

We have also been developing our international links with visits to Ireland, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Our aim is to restart an international discussion process among Trotskyists, that has as its goal the re-creation of a revolutionary communist international, something that has been absent for more than half a century.

# permanent revolution

Issue 3 / Winter 2007 / [www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

## Contents /

### Briefings /

#### 2 / World Review

Americans voted to leave Iraq but Bush has other ideas

#### 4 / Reports

Islamophobia / Somalia / Amicus and TGWU merger / Busworkers / John McDonnell / French left / Australian anti-union laws / Northern Ireland / Fighting immigration controls

### Backspace /

#### 53 / Obituary

Augusto Pinochet 1915-2006

#### 56 / Reviews

Remembering 1956: Revolutionary History Vol 9 No 3 / Making Globalisation Work by Joseph Stiglitz / Redemption Song by Chris Salewicz / Rebel Girls by Jill Liddington / The Occupation: war and resistance in Iraq by Patrick Cockburn / Naked Imperialism by John Bellamy Foster

#### 68 / Letters

The autumn TU conferences / Observations on the world economy

### 15 Prostitution / Marxism versus moralism

The killing of five sex workers in Suffolk has been brought the issue of prostitution, and how society reacts to it, onto the front pages of every national paper. Unfortunately, some on the left, like the Scottish Socialist Party, have joined in a moralistic offensive and call for the abolition of sex work. Helen Ward puts forward a class analysis of prostitution, explains its relationship to monogamy and outlines why we should support decriminalisation and union organisation

### 22 Venezuela / 21st century socialism?

Armed with a new mandate, President Hugo Chavez has promised to deepen his "socialist revolution" in Venezuela. Stuart King argues that, while his social reforms have been radical, he has left the economy in the hands of the capitalists and multinationals

### 32 Theory / To take power or not?

Some anarchists want a revolution to abolish the state overnight; others hope it will wither away if we turn our back on it. Carlene Wilson shows why they are both wrong

### 42 Climate change / Tipping point

In a review article Clare Heath and Pete Ashley explain why business is addicted to fossil fuels and incapable, left to its own devices, of taking measures to safeguard the planet

### 48 Radical Islam / Behind the global jihad

Modern Islamic "fundamentalism" has its roots in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s provided political Islam with a cause and a recruiting ground for a new generation of global jihadists, symbolised by Osama bin-Laden. Keith Harvey reviews two recent books on radical Islam – Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower* and Jason Burke's *Al-Qaeda* – which trace the ideology and goals of this reactionary force

Our website contains fuller versions of some of these articles and background documents. Visit our website to download back issues, discussion documents and recent statements and leaflets [www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

## Bush's year of living dangerously

THE UNITED States' ruling class is divided and even in disarray over Iraq. Mass popular opinion wants troops to leave and soon. Invasion was easy, occupation a disaster. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed as well as 3,000 US troops. December 2006 was the worst month for deaths since the war began.

Americans passed their judgement on Iraq at last November's Congressional elections when the Republicans were hammered and lost control of both houses of Congress. Architect of the invasion, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, paid the price and was sacked by Bush.

As the insurgency and civil war reached new heights the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group (ISG) in Congress published its report which urged a new strategy upon the White House, one of diplomatic engagement of Iran and Syria to stabilise Iraq, and getting most US troops out by mid-2008. This was a policy of damage limitation and of managing failure in conditions where nearly three-quarters of people polled say they are opposed to more troops being sent in.

But in the new year the cabal of neocons in the American Enterprise Institute counter attacked and on 10 January George Bush endorsed their plan to send in more troops - 22,000 extra - to crush the insurgency in and around Baghdad and al-Anwar province; "victory is still possible", he said.

Bush sacked the two lead generals in Iraq - John Abizaid and George Casey - because they were opposed to more troops being sent in and replaced them with two who were.

"The political process has failed to quell the insurgency", say the proponents of the "surge". The plan is to overwhelm the western Sunni and mixed ethnic parts of Baghdad and "cleanse" them of insurgents.

This is a last, desperate throw of the dice for Bush. He needs a quick success and hopes to deploy quickly and pre-empt any Congressional obstructions. But it is bound to fail. A similar surge of troops last summer failed; and even the troop numbers announced fall short of what any expert (including the neocons behind the plan) believes are needed to carry out the proposed counter-insurgency operations. The only certainty is that the insurgency will mount and more US troops, not to mention Iraqi civilians, will be killed.

The Bush plan also entails major pressure being put on the coalition government of prime minister Nouri Maliki to stop sheltering the Shia militias that murder Sunnis and have taken control of the police force - Maliki's interior ministry is also renowned now for its death squads and torture chambers. But Bush has limited leverage to reshape the government to do his bidding. He risks shattering the fragile balance between the various Sunni and Shia factions and thus pushing more of them into the insurgency.

It is not only in Iraq that Bush is on a new offensive. As we write the USA is using AC130 gunships to pound villages in southern Somalia, having aided and backed the Ethiopian invasion of the country. The USA was not going to sit idly by when the Union of Islamic Courts' militias swept the US-backed warlords from Mogadishu and threatened the powerless, if UN-backed, national government. It quickly showed the power of "empire", financing and aiding its Ethiopian client state from its US bases in Djibouti and its fleet off the horn of Africa.

But it is the Middle East and its strategic oil supplies that are crucial to US imperialism. The removal of Saddam Hussein was the first step to ensuring the end of any regimes threatening US interests there. Iraq has yet to be stabilised after the overthrow. Its oil fields have yet to be handed over and made available to be safely exploited by the US multinationals - although the Maliki government has taken the first steps in this direction.

Two other "setbacks" have to be dealt with - the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 elections in the Palestinian Authority, and the failure of Israel to crush Hezbollah in its July/August war.

Following the election victory of Hamas, the USA and its allies, the EU, Russia and the UN all proceeded to show how seriously they took democratic elections by imposing a vicious economic blockade on the Palestinians. Coming on top of the Israeli efforts to destroy the Authority's economy this had disastrous effects on the people of Gaza and the West Bank - poverty, hunger, unemployment increased dramatically.

The formal aim was to make Hamas renounce violence and agree to the recognition of Israel enshrined in the Oslo Accords. The real aim was to wear down the Palestinian masses and make them submit to imperialism and its agent in the area, Israel - to force the removal of Hamas, seen as an agent of Iran, and to re-impose the corrupt and more compliant Fatah regime.

In December the President, Mahmoud Abbas, a member of Fatah, called for new elections, a completely illegal proposal but one backed by imperialism. This attempted "democratic coup" sparked serious clashes between Fatah and Hamas militias, clashes that had been prepared for by the USA arming and training the Presidential guard and the movement of Fatah militia from Jordan to Gaza. Imperialism hopes that an exhausted Palestinian people will abandon Hamas at the polls.

Lebanon remains an unresolved problem. Hezbollah emerged from the battle with Israel strengthened, its military force still intact. In the reconstruction effort Hezbollah has again strengthened itself politically. In contrast to the incompetent and corrupt government of Fouad Siniora, it has quickly given compensation and started rebuilding destroyed houses and businesses in its stronghold of southern Lebanon. The imperialists can



only wring their hands and bemoan the "state within a state" – one financed from Iran and other sympathetic Islamist organisations.

At the heart of all the US problems in the Middle East at the moment lies the important regional power of Iran. The USA's destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime has had the perverse effect of strengthening Iran, US imperialism's major enemy in the region since the overthrow of its puppet, the Shah, in 1979. The Bush/neocon game plan was to proceed swiftly from the war in Iraq, to dispatching the Iranian regime. Iraq was meant to provide the military bases, oil revenue, and springboard for an attack on Iran. Reality turned out differently as US and British troops got bogged down by the Iraqi resistance.

US imperialism's need to dominate the Middle East and protect its client states in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and elsewhere, demands that it deals at some point with the Islamic regime in Iran. Iran supports Hezbollah and Hamas and has close links with the Shia resistance in Iraq. It is developing long-range rockets and nuclear capabilities, capabilities that could make it immune from threats from Israel and the USA. It has the power to blockade the Straits of Hormuz through which much oil destined for the USA has to pass.

But the debacle that is Iraq means that Bush has to forget the goal of regime change in Tehran. It cannot be done militarily or politically while Iraq is burning. But tighter sanctions and a military strike against Iran's nuclear development programme are possible.

Israel destroyed Iraq's French built nuclear reactor with air strikes when it was nearing completion in 1981. The Pentagon has continued its regular war game preparations against Iran and recently a second aircraft carrier has been sent to the region. In part these are to keep up the diplomatic pressure on Iran, as are UN sanctions, but Somalia shows that US imperialism is willing to pursue new "military adventures" even while embroiled in Iraq.

The risks for the USA though are considerable as long as 150,000 US and British troops are in Iraq. An attack on Iran which leaves the regime intact and armed opens the possibility of a wider regional conflagration. The USA knows that Iran can call on Shia militias to open a large scale guerrilla war against the occupying troops and supply them with the necessary munitions and training to make the current level of US casualties look like chicken feed.

This is the bind US imperialism is in. A retreat from Iraq at the hands of undefeated insurgents would have dramatic implications not only for Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon but also for its collection of client states throughout the Middle East, states left at the mercy of a growing Iranian regional power and providing an enormous impetus for political Islam throughout the region.

Bush does not want to go down in history as the man

who lost Iraq. But other, growing factions in the US ruling class want to return to the foreign policy "realism" of Clinton and Bush senior in the 1990s, before the neocon evangelism of "bringing democracy" to authoritarian regimes gained the upper hand. But the risk for the "realists" is that an "organised retreat" from Iraq can turn into a rout if economic pressure and diplomatic overtures fail to secure US strategic interests.

The increasing globalisation of multinational capital, the ever-greater dependence on foreign markets, foreign capital and foreign energy sources, means the US government has to pursue an active, interventionist, imperialist policy abroad, including military aggression. But Iraq has punctured the hubris of the Bush Doctrine; its

## The fate of Bush's plan lies with the insurgency in Iraq and the global anti-war movement – particularly in the USA

author however is determined to give it one last push, cost what it may.

The forces of opposition to Bush's plans are legion; even two-thirds of Republican senators opposed more troops. Democrat senator Edward Kennedy has tabled a motion to withhold funds for extra troops. But Bush knows the Democrat Congressional leadership will do little while US troops are fighting the battle of Baghdad against "insurgent terrorists".

Nancy Pelosi, the new Democratic leader of Congress, has been very careful to say Bush will have to "justify" his increased troop deployments, not that they will cut off funds.

The fate of Bush's plan lies with the insurgency in Iraq and the global anti-war movement – particularly in the USA. Both are destined to rise again in the face of the new offensive. But the latter must go beyond lobbying of senators and must not wait for late 2008 and regime change in Washington.

The key to the success of the anti-Vietnam war movement was the disaffection in the army and the links it built with the student movement. The "surge" will lengthen the tours of duty and draft in more National Guard reservists at a time when more than half of soldiers are recorded as having no confidence in Bush's Iraq policy.

This is fertile ground for the building of a mass anti-war movement that can force Bush to exit Iraq and the White House.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

# Religion, racism and rank hypocrisy

▶ ONE OF the immediate consequences of Bush and Blair's war against Iraq has been the rise of Islamophobia. This is seen not just in increasing racist attacks and abuse on the street; at the forefront of the attacks on the Muslim population has been the British state, ably supported by the media.

Muslim communities are being systematically targeted by the police and intelligence services: raids on houses, arrests and imprisonment with no right to a trial, let alone an appeal. Home Secretary, John Reid, has even encouraged parents to spy on their own children. At a meeting in east London he advised Muslim parents to "look for the telltale signs now and talk to them before their hatred grows and you risk losing them forever." No doubt he meant losing them to being indefinitely held at Her Majesty's pleasure.

This campaign is designed to intimidate the Muslim community in order to neutralise any opposition to British and US adventures in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Many will be reminded of the experience of the Irish community in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s where similar repression was used as a warning not to fight against the imperialist occupation of Ireland. It gave rise to frame-ups such as the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four cases where innocent people were locked away for decades.

Last year saw an orchestrated state offensive against the Muslim community. Trevor Phillips, head of the soon-to-be abolished Commission for Racial Equality, suggested it was multi-culturalism not racism that was the real threat to society. The Muslims themselves, not racism, were the cause of their own isolation from

the mainstream. "Integration" and "Britishness" became the new buzzwords. Blair and Reid told the Muslim elders and self-appointed community leaders to put up or shut up – either they took responsibility for policing young people and turning the radicals over to the cops, or they were no longer welcome at the top table, they could kiss goodbye to their lucrative quango jobs, their OBE's and occasional peerages.

Jack Straw waded in with his much publicised statement that he felt "uncomfortable" when women came to his constituency surgery for advice and help wearing the full veil – the niqab. He asked them if they minded removing them, an action designed to make them feel at ease no doubt! This led to a raging debate over the wearing of the niqab – should women be allowed to wear them? "No"

## Socialists should not be afraid to criticise organised religions but we support the freedom of individuals to practice their religious beliefs

screamed the *Sun*. Allowed to work in them? Certainly not shouted the *Daily Mail* – sack the lot of them!

And a teacher Aishah Azmi duly was, for her insistence on wearing a veil whilst working in a primary school in Dewsbury. This was used as an example of how unreasonable Asian women were in refusing to conform to British norms even though a tiny proportion of Muslim women wear the niqab – somewhere between 1% and 5%. What this campaign certainly did was to drive many more young Muslim women to put on the hijab

(a scarf that covers the head, not the face like the niqab) as a sign of defiance and solidarity, a response to a racist and intolerant witch hunt.

The whole issue posed difficult questions for socialists. We believe that the veil, along with the nun's habit, the priest's robe, the Jewish skull cap, the Sikh turban etc, represents a subservience to the superstitions and oppression of all religions, and we say so openly. Socialists should not be afraid to criticise organised religions just because racists attack religious minorities. But we support the freedom of individuals to practice their religious beliefs and oppose the forced removal of religious symbols in education and work. Wearing a niqab might restrict what a teacher can do since teaching demands pupils can see their teacher's face and moving lips. It might mean only part time work is available. Is it really beyond the ability of educational authorities to adapt? Just as they do for religious diets and prayer rooms.

Certainly for all supporters of women's liberation the niqab, the burkha and the nijab, representing as they do the insistence on

"modesty for women" imposed by religion, the hiding of their face and beauty from all but husband and immediate family, is symbolic of the oppression of women in the feudal and semi-feudal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as Iran. In many places in the Muslim world it goes alongside the most horrendous oppression of women – the Taliban regime was only the most publicised.

We do not hide our belief that wearing such religious garb is a step back for women – even if it is voluntary (and for the vast majority

it is enforced by law and culture). Some young Muslim women wear the "veil" through their own choice. It is seen as a symbol of religious choice and religious identity, rather than patriarchal oppression. Yet it is colluding with the religious oppression of women, it is buying into a system that discriminates against and oppresses women.

That the government campaign for "more integration" is just hypocrisy, a cover for intimidating the Muslim community, is shown by their determination to divide children by religion in schools.

British education has always been scarred by religion. From the very first schools, religion has sought to control the next generation of children. The most recent examples have come with the Blairite drive for City Academies. More than one-third of all academies will be run by faith groups. Those in the Christian church have been scarily honest about their intentions. Church Commissioner Peter Brunivels declared of the Anglican church's involvement in academies in the *Church Times*: "It's about frontline evangelism."

When Jack Straw was railing against Muslim women wearing veils, the Anglican church were busy defending their right to religious indoctrination subsidised by government. When the idea was floated that money should not longer be provided for new faith schools, the church was outraged. And what was New Labour's response? They immediately backed down and dropped the policy, leaving us with an increasingly divided education system.

The existence of faith schools is one of the most effective ways of segregating children. In 2002 in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 17 primary schools had over 90% Bangladeshi pupils, nine other primaries - faith schools - had fewer than 10% Bangladeshi children. Four secondary schools in Tower Hamlets have less than 3% Bangladeshi pupils, they are all faith schools. Three nearby comprehensive schools have more than 90% Bangladeshi pupils.

(statistics from *The New East End*, Dench, Gavron and Young, 2006).

Labour plans will produce hundreds more religious schools - Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist - alongside the existing thousands of Catholic and Church of England schools. It is of course a recipe for religious and societal segregation, reproducing the Northern Ireland model on the mainland.

## **Marxists are committed to secularism within the state. We oppose all religious schools. Religion should not be used to divide young people**

Marxists are committed to secularism within the state. We oppose all religious schools. Religion should not be used to divide young people, so within our schools there should be no religious assemblies, no religious instruction. This does not rule out the teaching of the history of religions, for instance as part of the history of ideas or the sociology of religion. Certainly, in order to ensure that *all* children can attend state schools, arrangements should be made to allow for special religious dietary, dress and other requirements.

Some on the British left seem to have forgotten this basic socialist position. At last year's NUT conference the left was divided over a motion on faith schools. Some argued that since Anglican and Catholic faith schools existed, other faiths should also have the right to their own schools.

Others, like the Socialist Workers Party, opposed the abolition of faith schools arguing that since Britain clearly is a racist society and since Islamophobia is on the increase, it is not surprising that some British Muslims want their own schools. Not to support such demands would be to side with the Islamophobes. Such arguments confuse the problem with the solution. Oppression is not defeated by further division, but by a unity

which allows those of all faiths to struggle alongside each other.

Lindsey German's comment at the first Respect Conference when she declared herself to be proud to be in a room with so many women wearing the veil was a classic example of muddled Marxist thinking. If those women were attacked because they were wearing the veil, we should defend them but that does not mean we defend the

veil, or are pleased that so many women wear it.

To overcome Islamophobia requires a commitment to actively fight racism. Of course, within the labour movement trade unionists could be doing much more to counter Islamophobia. Many workplaces and trade union branches had strong anti-war groups. Activists need to campaign against the racism of the Labour Party leadership and fight alongside fellow workers for the rights of religious minorities in workplaces.

When bosses argue that practising one's own religion prevents someone from doing their job, such as in the case of Aishah Azmi, we should argue for an enquiry by fellow workers to examine the facts of the case. And within the trade unions we should support the right of all black workers to caucus separately to discuss such issues.

As the "war on terror" continues and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan intensify, Islamophobia and repression of the Muslim community will get worse. It is up to socialists and the trade union movement to use their power to defend them.

**Kate Foster**

## INTERVIEW

### Somalia invasion “a mercenary job”

Interview with **Wondimu Mekonnen**, former lecturer at Addis Ababa University and Ethiopian activist

**PRN:** What were the ties between President Yusuf of Somalia and the Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi before Yusuf came to office in 2004?

**Wondimu:** Before coming to power, Meles was under the protection of Somalia for a long time. He was travelling using a Somali passport. He was one of those trained and deployed by Somalia against Ethiopia. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed's ties with Ethiopian leaders go way back. At one point he was also jailed in Addis Ababa by the Dergue regime. He was released from jail by Meles in 1991. Since then he has been backed by Meles to this day. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and Meles Zenawi have been buddies for over 14 years.

**PRN:** What were Meles's aims in backing Yusuf?

**Wondimu:** In my own opinion, there are two:

1. As Yusuf is from the warlord gang backed by Ethiopia from the first, Meles is bringing his friend to office.
2. More than that, there are more important things for Meles. As you know, the Ethiopian regime's image has been tarnished following the crushing of the popular democratic movement after the May 2005 Election. Thousands are jailed, hundreds are killed. Donors were not happy to give generously as they used to. However, there was this thin thread to rescue that measure. Meles has put himself in the camp of the allies of the war against “Islamic terrorism”. He has ventured into Somalia to carry out a mercenary job, using the Ethiopian army, to fight a proxy

war for America. This is not backed by the people of Ethiopia, but is Meles's cash cow. He is fighting an American war, instead of American soldiers using the Ethiopian army.

**PRN:** What form has US backing for Meles taken over the last years? Is Ethiopia a client state of the USA in the Horn of Africa?

**Wondimu:** As I said above, Meles is fighting the US's war on terrorism. The backing is real. Meles has all his ammunition and money from the USA. This is a fact. For example, the USA has supplied armoured vehicles – we have photographic evidence to prove this – for the war on terrorism and these were used to quash the demonstration in Addis last year. That means it was evident that the USA and Ethiopia had been preparing for this war for a long time. The USA were sitting in

neighbouring Djibouti and Gode [a predominantly Somali town under Ethiopian control] and monitoring the movement of the Union of Islamists' army. Wherever their fighters were setting up traps to ambush the advancing invaders, the USA monitored them via satellites and gave the exact coordinates of the waiting force, pinpointing them for bombardment. The battle was quickly settled because the USA was providing advanced military information, while the Somalis were using rudimentary war machines.

Yes, today, Ethiopia is the client state of the USA in Africa, thanks to Meles.

**PRN:** How has this affected the attempts to highlight human rights abuses in Ethiopia?

**Wondimu:** Meles's action has a serious human rights impact in Ethiopia. Everybody's attention is now on the war in Somalia. Therefore, nobody is paying attention to the plight of the opposition, trade unions and human rights organisations.

An example is just last week where four Ethiopian Teacher's Association activist teachers were

## ETHIOPIAN TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

### Teachers' struggle continues

THE MELES Zenawi regime in Ethiopia continues to crack down on the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA). The government tried to suppress the ETA in 1993, sacking its leaders and setting up an alternative state supported ETA.

Since then, despite rulings in its favour in the courts, the repression has got worse, with members arrested, tortured and even murdered. The ETA was especially targeted after the ruling party was defeated in the elections in the capital in the May 2005 elections. a defeat that was followed by widespread repression against teachers, students and activists.

With the support of Educational International the ETA will hold a

conference during 7-10 February 2007 in Addis Ababa. The union continues to fight and relies on the support given by the International Labour Organisation, the NUT in Great Britain and trade unionists around the world to expose the Zenawi government's actions. If the conference is attacked trade unionists should be ready to bombard the Ethiopian government with protests.

#### LINKS

For an article by Wondimu Mekonnen, on the ETA's battle for survival, go to: [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1075](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1075)

We will update the site about any significant events around the conference



arrested. Three of them were brought to court for a preliminary hearing with evidence of beatings and violence. The fourth, whom no one has heard from since his arrest was not brought to court, and is missing, presumed dead. Now, Meles can do whatever he wants with the opposition and the rest of the community like the USA and UK have been tongue-tied. They are not saying a word against their boy. He is doing their job. He is their loyal servant. They will not say anything when he abuses his people.

Now we need to work harder, at least to reach the trade unions and human rights organisation across the world to stand with the Eritrean Teachers Association and others who are suffering.

PRN: Meles says Ethiopia has no plans for its troops to stay – is this likely? What is his government's strategy for the region?

Wondimu: In the first place, Ethiopia should have never gone into this war because her boundaries were not violated. This war has a serious consequence for Ethiopia. The battle is too quickly won but not the war. The Islamic Court fighters simply ran away and did not fight.

This is a war without an exit plan. Yes, Meles is saying Ethiopia has no plans to stay but then he cannot also pull out. This is because:

1. If he pulls out, the war lords and the Islamists may come back and thrash the weak and useless government of Somalia. Everything can easily return back to square one. In that case the human life and resources lost in this war are going to be "wasted" just like in the case of the War with Sha'biyya – Eritrea.
2. If he stays to babysit the weak government of Somalia, just like the British and the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan, the invading army is going to get into a murky situation, finding it very difficult to come out. More than that, Addis Ababa can be a legitimate target for all Muslim extremists to burn down the city. Our people will be exposed to danger that Meles cannot rescue us from. So, Meles has gone into a

limbo that means he does not know what to do next. What ever he does, Ethiopia will lose any way.

PRN: What is your analysis of the Union of Islamic Courts – their aims, their popular support base, their prospects now?

Wondimu: I cannot comment much about the Union of Islamic Courts, because I simply do not know much about them. However, they are another version of the Taliban of Afghanistan. At least, through their Sharia Law, they managed to bring some order to some parts of the country and probably they might have succeeded doing the same in the whole country.

However, I don't see wisdom in their approach. They became too

over confident and started boasting too soon. However, they seem more systematic in their administration than the so called government that had been backed by Meles and his gangs.

Their aim is clear: to bring Somalia under Sharia Law and make Somalia great. After this, I don't see any prospects unless they are embarrassed by the rest of the war lords.

Just for the morale of Somalis, they should have put up a stiff resistance rather than abandoning their posts and fleeing. Their strength and credibility has been tarnished. I don't see them coming back at the same level any more, as many of the warlords have held grudges against them.

#### LABOUR MOVEMENT

## Union mergers: super- or supine unions?

UNION LEADERS are counting down the days to Gordon Brown moving house. With the keys to the door of Number Ten comes the top job and the bosses of Britain's trade unions desperately hope the new Prime Minister and Labour Party leader will listen to their pleas for a more worker friendly government.

But to give Brown a little push in this direction the leaders of Amicus and the TGWU have agreed to combine their forces and merge their unions – a move set to be completed by May Day 2007, creating a union of almost two million members, casting a significant block vote in the Labour Party.

This is essentially a bureaucratic solution to the long term decline in union membership that has taken place since the 1970s. The new union will unite workers from widely differing industries. It will not increase solidarity. It will make it more difficult. Workers will not be united in a common

organisation across a single industry – one union, one industry. They will find themselves divided into autonomous sectors where the sectoral bosses of each group vie for power and influence inside the whale.

The super union will not build joint organisations with its smaller rivals. It will try to gobble them up to increase its size. Its branches will number thousands but those branch meetings will rarely reach double figures. Its officials will be strangers, even more distant and aloof from the members than they are today.

But it will be a giant. It will be able to force other unions, by its sheer size, to follow its line. It will have vastly increased resources and it will become a means of putting pressure on Brown. At least that is the bureaucratic plan. The problem is that it is a plan that has been shown to fail.

It is what led to Amicus in the first place, and Unison and the GMB. They are all products of

mergers and yet none of them have been able to tilt the balance of power away from Blair in the party or stem their own decline in the workplaces. Why should the new super union prove any different?

This is especially the case because the new union is not addressing the root cause of this

laws of class society. And the most fundamental of those laws is that there is no use having "power" (in the sense of a sizeable organisation) unless you are prepared to use it to force someone to submit.

You can have as many members as you want in this or that industry, but unless you can organise them

representation in the occasional grievance then they won't join up. But if they can see a union is willing to fight and can win them decent pay and conditions while they are still alive then maybe they will have something to leave behind in the free wills and will join up.

Woodley claims that this will be true of the new super union. Welcoming the decision of the TGWU to go ahead with the merger in December 2006 he said:

"A growing union, really investing in organising, will give more power to the elbow of our shopfloor representatives everywhere. If this merger is about one thing, it is this: working class unity, the historic aim of our movement."

But we know this is so much helium from brother Woodley. Why? Because the TGWU has long had the resources to invest in serious organising but has for just as long held back from doing so, fearful that rank and file militants

## The reason that union membership figures are down is because the unions have not been organising a serious fightback

decline – the refusal of the unions to act as militant champions of the workers they represent. Years of defeat together with Blair's endless lectures about the need for the unions to "modernise" (i.e. eschew class struggle) have deprived many of the bureaucrats of an understanding of the fundamental

to fight and bring the bosses to their knees then you won't deliver decent pay and conditions. The bosses don't give these things out of the goodness of their heart. They have to have them wrenched from their hearts. Workers are not daft. If the best a union can offer them is a free will service (Amicus) and

### TRADE UNIONS

## London busworkers get organised

THE CURRENT spate of strikes on London buses indicates a return to militancy of what is potentially one of the strongest industrial units in the country. Two days of strikes by workers at Metroline forced a 5.75% wage increase – nearly twice the employer's original offer – and must be seen as a victory.

Australian multinational bankers, Macquarie, are determined that the 4,300 staff in East London buses will pay for a big deficit in the pension scheme and managed to get a court injunction to prevent a strike scheduled for Monday 8 January, but that is surely not the end of the matter.

In addition, although their wage claim was settled, the same East London shop stewards looked to

the future in a strategic way by proposing "a campaign to achieve equality of rates of pay and terms and conditions for all London bus workers through central pay bargaining". The motion, implicitly rejecting the current bogus campaign by the TGWU for key worker status, went through the London Advisory Committee (LAC), the TGWG convenors' group across London, and the London Bus Conference of all London shop stewards on 7 December without opposition.

We are now awaiting a recalled Bus Conference to discuss implementing this decision and the Bus Conference also promised to reinstate the quarterly London Bus Conferences after the LAC meetings in response to the

movement from the grass roots.

The Alternative Busworker's Charter [see links] was produced in response to this situation in an attempt to mobilise on a clear basis. The aim is to move the centre of power away from the very conservative TGWU full-timers like Tom Scanlon and towards building a rank and file busworkers movement in London that would be affiliated to the RMT's proposed National Shop Stewards Network.

London busworkers will not regain the standards they had back in 1992 until they organise to wield the strength of the London fleet and overcome the divisions imposed by competitive tendering and privatisation. But as 2007 starts we have begun well.

**From a London Busworker**

### LINKS

For the Busworkers Charter go to: <http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1057>  
For a report on the RMT initiative see Letters, page 68

doing the organising would become strong enough to challenge the bureaucrats controlling the purse strings.

More than that, we know that Woodley had the power to achieve the historic aim of working class unity during the Gate Gourmet dispute at Heathrow. All that was required was that it bring out all its members in support of those sacked to close the airport down. And all that was needed was for Woodley to defy the anti-union laws that officially prohibited such action. He didn't. He ran for his life and sacrificed working class unity for a shoddy deal that has left his members jobless and poverty stricken.

The reason that union membership figures are down – just 6.3 million in TUC affiliated unions, much less than one-third of the entire workforce, and with union density in some sections of manufacturing below the 10% mark – is because the unions have not been organising a serious fightback. Or more precisely, the union leaders have refused to co-ordinate the fightback that workers themselves are attempting to wage across different sectors of industry.

The leaders have bought into the idea of partnership with the bosses. What this means in practice was shown just a few days before New Years Eve 2006 when the figures for the pay rises received by top bosses were announced. Those pay rises are obscene especially at a time when workers, like those who recently struck at the JJB sports firm in Wigan, are below the national minimum wage.

Instead of using these obscene bonuses to mobilise and unite the flurry of pay disputes that marked the end of 2006 – at JJB, Metroline buses, Fujitsu, Falkirk Council, Central Trains, Iceland to mention just a few – Brendan Barber, the leader of the TUC, called for an inquiry into top people's pay. He stressed he wasn't against big pay awards to the rich but merely wanted to ensure that everything was seen to be fair. He said: "No-one should resent proper rewards for hard work or risk taking. There

is nothing wrong with people who have big responsibilities or who perform well getting more pay, and the nation needs smart, experienced and competent people running major companies. I recognise that envy is never a very attractive attribute."

Hang on – since when has resenting the fact that a jumped up barrow boy like Alan Sugar is worth millions because he ripped off countless working class people through schemes like his Sky dish sale, been regarded by envy in the labour movement? It isn't about envy, and it isn't about rewarding toffee-nosed "risk takers" (who risk our pension funds when gambling on the Stock Exchange). It is about fighting back against a system that has increased the gap between the poorest and the richest every year since Blair took power.

The union bureaucrats have

always been cowards and traitors, notwithstanding the occasional left rebel within their ranks. But the degree to which they regard militant class struggle let alone socialism, as a thing of the past has never been more pronounced.

The task of socialists is to carry out the work necessary to bring those elements to the fore, to rebuild militancy, to build shop floor organisation and build rank and file links in struggle. In short, fight to build a genuine rank and file organisation that can hold our leaders to account, take action when they retreat and replace them with militant fighters.

**Mark Hoskisson**

#### LINKS

For more articles on the state of trade union struggles in Britain go to: <http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=category&cat=95>

#### LABOUR PARTY

## McDonnell leadership campaign stalled

▶ JOHN MCDONNELL'S "challenge" for the Labour leadership appears stalled. His campaign and alternative programme for Labour has not become a talking point in the labour movement, a point of reference, a dividing line. It is all a bit tame.

To put it into perspective we should look back at the last major left challenge in the Labour Party – the Benn for Deputy campaign in the 1980s. That campaign united the Labour left with the left outside the Labour Party, especially in the unions, and mounted a mass organised and almost victorious challenge to the right. Everybody was debating it. And Benn's programme was, in reformist terms, far reaching.

Even at the level of the activists, McDonnell's campaign falls well short of what is needed given the

impact of Blair's crimes against the labour movement. Attendances at his meetings are low. There is no directing centre for the campaign and no mobilising committees, and limited intervention in the unions depending on where McDonnell has contacts.

The campaign is a mere echo of Benn's, a faint one at that, lacking numbers, organisation and a clear sense of political, purpose. After all, John McDonnell knows he isn't going to win or come near winning. So what is the aim of his campaign?

One reason we support McDonnell is to try and make it a campaign that leaves something permanent behind. It needs to organise for the fights that will take place against the new Labour leader. This won't happen mainly in the Labour Party, which as John McDonnell himself says is something of a ghost organisation,

but in the unions.

In Amicus for example, McDonnell has won the support of the organised left around the *Amicus Unity Gazette*. McDonnell is, despite the RMT's expulsion from Labour and the FBU's disaffiliation, the parliamentary spokesperson for both unions. He works closely with the unaffiliated PCS. He also has support from the left of other many unions too.

Uniting the left in these unions around the campaign to support McDonnell is only a first step. We must fight to unite them in a permanent network of rank and file union organisations able to carry the fight to Blair's eventual successor, over privatisation, over war, over racism, over cuts and so on.

But on its own McDonnell's campaign will not solve the crisis of politics in the labour movement because of the essentially reformist political solutions it serves up in its alternative programme.

In our view the problem facing the working class is capitalism. The politics needed to fight capitalism effectively are revolutionary politics. This does not simply mean shouting revolution at every struggle or counter-posing the need for revolution to every partial campaign that takes place. But it does mean trying to demonstrate the need for and relevance of the strategic answer of revolution in each of these struggles and campaigns.

It means showing that privatisation is the product of capitalism, not just of Blair or Brown. To end privatisation we need to end capitalism. It means fighting for tactics that can win victories now that put the bosses on the back foot rather than compromises that leave them poised to launch future attacks.

Above all, it means seeking to unite militants in a new party that states its commitment to revolution as a goal. It means building a party that fights for the interests of workers with no regard for the interests of capital. It means using every campaign and dispute to take the working class closer to the goal

of revolution rather than closer to a state of permanent co-existence with – in reality subordination to – the economic and political system that exploits and oppresses them.

Set against this objective the McDonnell campaign is clearly inadequate. But at least John McDonnell is honest. To quote him, "the Labour Party has never been a socialist party but has always had socialists in it". It follows that even if he won the leadership of this broad, non-socialist church, he would not be able to tackle the root cause of the attacks that are launched every day by the bosses on the working class.

A reformist Labour Party, no matter how honest its reformist

leader, has had over one hundred years to prove its worth to the working class. And it has failed. Worse, its betrayals and its downright crimes against the working class far outweigh its reforms. John 4 Leader is a campaign jingle not a strategic solution to the political crisis in the labour movement. Moreover, the failure of the Labour left itself to unite behind McDonnell – with clear indications that there may be a rival left candidate like Meacher – point to the fact that the Labour left is now so weak and divided that it is becoming less and less part of the equation, never mind part of the solution. **MH**

## FRANCE

# French left squanders workers' militancy

FIVE YEARS have passed since the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste – PS) suffered a devastating defeat in the presidential elections, opening the door to a run off between the right's Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen of the extreme right Front National. In the first round of voting in 2002, the two main parties of the Gauche Plurielle (the reformist left governmental alliance), the PS and the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français – PCF), received historically low votes, pushing Jospin, the Socialist Party's candidate into third place behind the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen. The echoes of that electoral disaster continue to reverberate in France.

The 2002 elections demonstrated the thirst for a new radical response to the betrayals of the Gauche Plurielle. The candidates of the far left organisations, Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), gained more than 10% of the vote in the first round of the elections, with

each candidate gaining more than the PCF whose support declined due to its participation in Jospin's government.

Since 2002 the French working class and youth have time and again demonstrated their willingness to resist the neo-liberal onslaught of the government, only for the anger to be dissipated and betrayed by the leaders of the movement.

In an attempt to regain ground lost in 2002, the PCF has tried to distance itself from the PS (and its own complicity in the anti-working class policies of Jospin's government) by cosying up to the anti-capitalist movement through the Non campaign. The PS's support for the undemocratic, neo-liberal European constitution breathed new life to the French "left of the left". A vibrant and militant campaign was set up to give voice to a progressive, non-nationalist opposition to the constitution.

Local committees emerged all over France during the campaign, uniting the PCF, the LCR, the left



FROM AUSTRIA

## Der Neue Kurs 3 (winter 2006/7)

Latin America in revolt: a continent in struggle for socialism?  
Pacifism, civil society and Oaxaca: a reply to our critics  
Sandinistas in Nicaragua condemn women to death  
Commentary on the US elections / Socialist Party minority government?

Available at [www.arbeiterInnenpolitik.net](http://www.arbeiterInnenpolitik.net)  
Contact [derneuekurs@gmx.at](mailto:derneuekurs@gmx.at)

of the PS represented by Jean-Luc Melenchon's supporters, alongside trade unionists of the CGT and Force Ouvrière, and youth looking for an alternative to the bosses' Europe.

The spectacular victory of the Non camp not only derailed the plans of the European bourgeoisie, it reinvigorated the left, offering for some, particularly the LCR, a renewed perspective of building a left electoral challenge to the PS.

With this year's presidential election in mind, local organisations, collectifs unitaires, were set up to search for a candidate of the anti-liberal left. However, it wasn't long before the fragile political basis of the Non campaign scuppered any hopes of a viable candidate to oppose the PS.

Both the Non campaign and the collectifs unitaires were based on the supposed existence of two "lefts" in France. One consisted of the leadership and overwhelming majority of the PS, hell bent on its rightward trajectory, embracing a "social liberalism". The other, an anti-neoliberal, and often erroneously called, anti-capitalist left, comprising the PCF, tiny minority factions within the PS, the anti-mondialiste movement symbolised by José Bové and Attac, plus the LCR.

In other words the anti-neoliberal left is a broad church made up of various shades of left reformists – fundamentally no different from the PS – alongside organisations like the LCR who consider themselves to be revolutionaries.

This alliance worked as a basis of united struggle against a specific threat (the draft EU constitution) but when it came to putting together an electoral alternative the cracks soon began to show. Months of discussion have come to nought with Bové withdrawing and both the PCF and LCR putting forward their own candidates.

For the cunning, sectarian reformists of the PCF, the collectifs unitaires were merely a means to prepare the way for their own candidate as well as proving to the PS that it still has some clout within

the social movements milieu. The PCF was never going to withdraw in favour of a unity candidate. At the same time as participating in the collectives, the PCF has held meetings with the PS over the forthcoming legislative elections.

Indeed, the double dealings of the PCF has led to one of its newest sections, a section composed of unemployed workers and trade unionists, in Aisne where unemployment is more than 20%, recently brought into the PCF, has dissolved itself, with a number of members joining the LCR. This was in protest at the national decision of the PCF not to stand in parliamentary elections in Aisne, in return for places on PS slates in the municipal elections.

For the LCR, the key test for the PCF seems to lie in its attitude to the PS and its willingness or not to enter into electoral agreements with the PS. Of course, the PCF had no intention of breaking its ties with the PS. Additionally, the qualitative distinction made by the LCR between the politics of the PS and the PCF led it to refuse to criticise the PCF's record in government in the 1990s.

### The opportunity to build a political alternative based on the recurrent struggles that have rocked France, have been squandered

Instead of calling on the PCF to break with its reformism, the LCR focused all its efforts on calling on the PCF to refuse any agreement with the PS, thus wrongly locating the problem of the PCF in its relationship with the PS rather than its inherently reformist politics.

The electoral platforms of the LCR and LO, despite not being hindered by the presence of electoral partners, do not go beyond left reforms that, though important, are presented within the framework of bourgeois democracy. The concept of

the struggle for power and its relationship to recent and current struggles in France does not get a look in.

The opportunity to build a political alternative based on the recurrent struggles that have rocked France, one that could contain within it precisely the seeds of that struggle for power have been squandered by these two organisations. LO turned its back on the joint initiatives, in time honoured fashion abstaining from the actual struggle for the hearts and minds of workers, preferring to continue its propaganda for socialism, passively waiting for a time when the working class is miraculously free of its reformist shackles.

Despite calls to give political expression to the dynamic unleashed in the Non campaign and the movement against the CPE, the LCR chose to chase the tail of the PCF with its craven electoral politics. In fact the movement provided part of the answer to the crisis of working class leadership.

The rank and file organisations that sprang up allowed the movement to flourish and decide

for itself not to back down until they had won. In other words, the reformist union leaders were not able to limit the movement and sell it out, as they had done with the strike over teachers' pensions. The collectifs unitaires that were formed across France, had the potential to turn themselves into bodies that could focus and unify the struggles. However, the main focus was always on the leadership of the organisations involved rather than the rank and file.

Today organisations like Aclefeu, which have been giving voice to the youth in the banlieu,

# Briefings / Reports

should take the lead in forming united committees of action. The immediate task of such committees would be to turn the "cahier of doleances" (list of grievances) which emerged from the organisations in the banlieus into a programme of action around which the working class and youth can mobilise for struggle against present and future government attacks.

A further task will be to open up a mass, democratic debate centred on the crisis of leadership with the aim of creating a new, party

capable of truly representing the workers and oppressed, which for Permanent Revolution can only be a revolutionary party capable of mobilising the working class for power. **Christina Duval**

## LINKS

**For a profile of the Socialist Party presidential candidate go to:**

<http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=951>

**For more on France go to:**

<http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=category&cat=131>

## AUSTRALIA

# Bureaucrats fail to fight anti-trade union laws

▶ ONE AREA where Australian Prime Minister John Howard's neo-liberal agenda has been particularly successful is around industrial law "reform". The latest industrial relations laws, mockingly entitled WorkChoices, have been in operation for nearly a year and have begun to achieve the government's aim of casualising the workforce and minimising union action.

The laws focus around a series of provisions which prevent workers claiming unfair dismissal if the company has less than one hundred employees. This has given business massive new "flexibility", as employers can sack and re-hire whole workforces, but on much reduced wages and conditions.

Equally draconian are the provisions which prevent industrial action. Any change to normal work is viewed as industrial action - which means that workers cannot institute overtime bans or any other sort of partial action. Workers undertaking such action have had their entire pay docked despite a full week's work, according to the new law they are on strike!

Employers themselves have no discretion as to whether they will put the regulations into place. These harsh attacks on industrial

action include a minimum docking of half a day's pay for even the smallest infringement on work time - workers back from a break even five minutes late are deemed to have taken stopwork action and therefore must be punished by law. A company that doesn't dock their pay can be fined.

All this goes alongside Australian Workplace Agreements or AWAs. These are, effectively, individual contracts which employers are trying to force onto individual workers and whole workplaces.

## What is particularly frustrating is that it is clear the fight has not been kicked out of the Australian working class

A union study of all the AWAs signed in the last year has shown that every one has cut wages or conditions to some extent and in combination with the unfair dismissal legislation they are being used to drive down conditions particularly in the workplace. Workers who refuse to sign an AWA are simply sacked.

For over two years now more

militant activists in the trade union movement have been putting pressure on the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to run a campaign against the laws. Such an unrelenting attack on basic union rights, should see a massive response from the trade union leaders but rather their actions have been minimal and stage-managed.

The Your Rights at Work campaign has consisted of a few, sometimes huge, showpiece rallies, particularly in traditionally militant centres like Melbourne, designed to allow the more militant sections of the working class to let off a bit of steam. Most financial resources have been directed at a series of TV and print advertisements explaining how nasty the new laws are.

This advertising focus shows three things: firstly, that the trade union officials are worried their message about how bad the laws are has failed to get across to the members; secondly, it underscores the officials' refusal to consider industrial action to stop the implementation of the laws and thirdly, that the union bosses have only one way of fighting the industrial relations laws - to elect an Australian Labour Party (ALP) government later this year!

The beginning and end of the ACTU's strategy is to "wait for Labor" - Labor leader Kim Beazley spoke on at least two of the major Melbourne rallies - rather

sickeningly congratulating workers on their Aussie patriotism. This electoralism reached new heights at the 30 November rally where, instead of taking to the streets, workers tried to fill the Melbourne Cricket Ground. After numerous speeches telling the gathered workers that the only way to defeat the laws was get rid of Howard and elect the Labor Party, the main

## Stop the War and CND National Demonstration

NO TRIDENT REPLACEMENT – TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ!

Saturday 24 February 12pm Central London

For info go to [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)

banner slogan "Your rights at work – worth fighting for" was changed to "Your rights at work – worth voting for." Despite the cheers from some parts of the crowd, it was a sad and indeed demoralising moment for Australian unionism.

What is particularly frustrating is that it is clear the fight has not been kicked out of the Australian working class. Groups like Union Solidarity have been continuing to organise pickets of workplaces where people have been sacked or where employers are trying to force AWAs, and many of these actions have been both well supported and successful. Admittedly these are small-scale disputes – but it is clear that there is a willingness to fight and, more importantly, that bosses back down in the face of resistance.

Yet there are no mainstream forces calling for the kind of industrial action that can win. In fact there is almost no public talk of industrial action at all. In Western Australia 107 CFMEU workers facing massive fines for walking off the job have been told by their union that now the best support they can hope for is a fundraising campaign. It sets a terrible precedent, especially coming from a union that has been seen as a leading light of militancy. Rank and file union members must mobilise to force the officials to act or take action themselves if the officials continue to sit on their hands.

The only way to have defeated these laws before they were enacted and the only way to get rid of them now is by a class-wide response to a class-wide attack, not limited to electing an ALP government, which at best may water down the worst anti-union aspects. If Howard thinks all industrial action is strike action, then let's make him understand the difference. Partial work-to-rules or overtime bans are simply not enough. The militancy that remains in the Aussie working class needs to be tapped and used to mobilise the apathetic or defeatist layers. The next big action needs to be, not a rock concert and a stroll down the road, but concerted strike action that builds for a general strike. **PR (Aus)**

### IRELAND

## Where now for Sinn Fein and the Assembly?

AT THE end of December, two-thirds of the Sinn Fein (SF) *ardchomhairle* (leadership body) voted in favour of holding an *ardfheis* to debate a motion which commits SF to "actively encourage everyone in the community to co-operate fully with the police services . . . and actively supporting all the criminal justice institutions."

Since the IRA declared an end to its war with the British state and effectively disarmed, the issue of policing has become the "final hurdle" over which Republicans were asked to jump by Blair and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

SF's acceptance of the largely protestant Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI – ex-RUC) is the price they must pay if Blair is to reconvene the suspended Northern Ireland Assembly by the end of March this year and devolve major powers to it. The DUP too will refuse to form a joint power-sharing executive with the Republicans if SF do not take this "seismic" step.

And it is a major step, even more so in some ways than the IRA agreeing to end its war with the British state. SF president Gerry Adams said after the *ardchomhairle*:

"I realise this is a very difficult issue for many Republicans, not because we oppose law and order but because our experience is of a police service which served only one section of the community and which was involved in murder, torture, collusion and shoot-to-kill."

But whether it actually does take place in late January as planned is open to doubt because, as in the past, every time SF makes a concession to the DUP, they demand more. So, instead of openly acknowledging the decision of SF as removing the last barrier to power-

sharing, the DUP merely accepted the decision was "a move in the right direction".

DUP Deputy leader Peter Robinson's response was guardedly positive, reflecting the DUP leadership's keen awareness that the British and Irish governments have made detailed preparations for a radically new departure for joint authority over the North, with increased powers for the South if the talks fail – the so-called Plan B. "It would be churlish not to acknowledge the potential of the Sinn Fein's statement," he said.

But DUP MEP, Jim Allister, voicing the position of the so-called Twelve Apostles, has challenged the St Andrews timetable, saying Sinn Fein's commitment to policing could not be tested between now and 26 March. Sinn Fein must encourage Republicans to join the PSNI and, as the next intake of recruits was not until March, how therefore, could there be devolution in March?

DUP MP for South Antrim Willie McCream raised the bar again: "Sinn Féin has to agree to the dismantling of IRA structures, the handing over of IRA ill-gotten gains – including the Northern Bank robbery money, informing on those responsible for the murder of Robert McCartney, and identifying the whereabouts of the disappeared – to name but a few of the outstanding issues."

There is also opposition within Sinn Fein to the move. After the *ardchomhairle* meeting, former Sinn Fein councillor Martin Cunningham, when asked on BBC's *Radio Ulster Talktime* if it was the "right thing to do", responded with: "It is the right thing to do if M15 are controlling you." As ex-IRA prisoner Anthony McIntyre says: "In Long Kesh, we shouted defiantly: 'Up the 'Ra! Jail Paisley!' Now the Sinn Fein

# Briefings / Reports

slogan effectively is: 'Up Paisley! Jail the 'Ra!'"

With dozens of resignations and the threat of more, the Sinn Fein leadership has faced tougher opposition over policing that over any other issue, including weapons decommissioning. But the resignation of hardliners benefits the leadership in the long run.

Should the Assembly resumes, it will remain one based on a sectarian headcount with ultimate power residing in Westminster and the power to suspend it in the hands of the Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain. The DUP will retain major veto rights to bloc anything vaguely democratic and progressive put before the Assembly.

And if Sinn Fein is allowed back

into power it will be happy to take responsibility for health cuts, hold the line against an anti-unionist youth rebellion against the RUC/PSNI, defend the preservation of grammar schools against progressives and much more.

Whatever was democratic and anti-imperialist in the Sinn Fein/IRA struggle against unionism and British imperialism has evaporated in the heat of the peace process. What has crystallised out is a hard rock of sectarian, communal reformist politics.

**Maureen Harrington**

## LINKS

Go to our website:

<http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1017>

## IMMIGRATION

# Defend asylum seekers - no to deportations!

EVERY YEAR the British government's immigration controls kill thousands of people. They deport people to the "Democratic" Republic of the Congo (DRC) despite the civil war that has killed four million. They charter special planes to enforce deportations to Iraq where hundreds of thousands have died as a result of the invasion.

Their racist immigration policies also kill people in the UK - 34 migrants took their own lives between 2000 and 2005. Earlier this year Abiy Abebe, a 35 year old engineer from Ethiopia, killed himself just a few hours after having his asylum claim rejected, saying in a suicide note, "I can't go back. I'd rather die."

Others suffer untold personal misery and trauma at the hands of Blair's hired thugs. Ethiopian asylum seeker Sitotaw Abichey was snatched from his home just before Christmas in Cheadle, Greater Manchester and taken to Harmondsworth

Immigration Detention Centre pending deportation to Ethiopia. His pregnant wife, Azeb, was so traumatised that she fell ill and was rushed to hospital meaning, that their four-year-old daughter had to be taken into care. "We were told that she couldn't sleep," said Sitotaw, "she's never been apart from us both before. What sort of system is it that can do this?"

Asylum seekers are hounded by the state and vilified in the press. "The killer asylum seekers", "Under fire! FAMILIES of Britain's brave troops are living in rat-infested slums - while luxury quarters go to illegal immigrants". Far from a life of luxury, over 20,000 asylum seekers are completely destitute with a further estimated 200,000 immigrants working illegally in dangerous conditions for appalling wages.

Immigration controls weaken and divide the working class, diverting us from a united fightback against our real enemy the capitalist system of war,

plunder and environmental destruction.

But New Labour's unrelenting campaign of oppression and murder has not gone unopposed. The Sukula campaign has spearheaded resistance to Section 9 of the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act that threatens families of failed asylum seekers with loss of benefits and eviction. The Act makes adults homeless and takes children taken into care. The campaign, supported by local unions including Bolton Unison and Bolton National Union of Teachers, opposes all deportations, and is leading a struggle against all racist immigration policies.

While social workers are refusing to implement Section 9, and some local councils are refusing to evict families, Section 9 remains on the statute books.

The 31 March Liverpool conference backed by Greater Manchester Trades' Councils, Bolton Unison and NUT (among others), is an important initiative. The conference fights for the abolition of all immigration controls, rightly recognising that all such controls are racist and only benefit the fat cat profiteers by dividing the working class.

The Permanent Revolution Network supports initiatives to organise migrant workers, make links with trade union activists abroad and for workers in local authorities, colleges, hospitals and benefit offices to refuse to implement immigration controls and checks. Without justice there can be no peace. Join us at the conference on 31 March.

**Jason Travis / Bolton NUT,  
Chair Sukula Family Must Stay  
campaign**

## Trade union conference against immigration controls

Organised by No One is Illegal  
For details contact [info@noii.org.uk](mailto:info@noii.org.uk)

**Saturday 31 March 2007**

Asylum Link, St Annes Church,  
Overbury St, Liverpool 7



# Marxism versus moralism

*The recent murder of five women  
in Suffolk has underlined the  
vulnerability of sex workers.*

*Helen Ward argues that those  
who see it as simply violence  
against women misunderstand  
fundamental features of women's  
oppression under capitalism*

"PROSTITUTION IS only a particular expression of the universal prostitution of the worker".<sup>1</sup> This quote from Marx might suggest that prostitution is a relatively straightforward issue for socialists, but instead it has proved a real challenge, with leftist positions ranging from advocating repression and abolition on the one hand, to decriminalisation and union organisation on the other.

Much of the current debate centres on whether prostitution can really be considered as work or whether it is best dealt with as a form of violence against women.<sup>2</sup> The two positions lead to diametrically opposed strategies. If prostitution is work, then fighting for self-organisation and rights are a key part of the socialist response. If, on the other hand, prostitution is violence and slavery then the participants are victims who need rescuing.

Kathleen Barry, organiser of an international feminist conference on trafficking in 1983, expressed the latter view when she refused to debate sex worker activist Margo St. James, arguing that "the conference was feminist and did not support the institution of prostitution . . . (it would be) . . . inappropriate to discuss sexual slavery with prostitute women".<sup>3</sup> More recently writer Julie Bindell has echoed this view, writing about the GMB decision to start a branch for sex workers, she argues, "how can a union on the one hand campaign against violence against women, but unionise it at the same time? Rather than society pretending it is a career choice, prostitution needs to be exposed for what it is - violence against women. Unionisation cannot protect the women in this vile industry".<sup>4</sup> Most recently the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has entered the fray and declared that prostitution is violence against women [see page 17].

## **A Marxist position on prostitution**

Prostitution is the exchange of sex for money. However, since there are other situations in which such an exchange occurs - in some forms of marriage, for example - most dictionary definitions go a little further. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* a prostitute is "a woman who offers her body to indiscriminate sexual intercourse especially for hire".

A more extensive definition is offered by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, where prostitution is the "practice of engaging in sexual activity, usually with individuals other than a spouse or friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables." These definitions add "indiscriminate" or "other than a spouse" to try and encapsulate what we all intrinsically understand - prostitution is sex outside of those relationships where sex is usually permitted.

The term prostitution appears to unify many different people and relationships over time. The hetairae of ancient Greece, the Japanese geisha, the European courtesan, the street walkers of Soho and the brothel workers of Mumbai, all share the label of prostitute. This appearance of a timeless occupation, contained in the cliché of the "oldest profession", shields many different social relations. The thing these women share is that they perform sex outside of the private family sphere where sex is linked to reproduction and maintenance of a household.

# Marxist theory/ Prostitution

This is important since it gets to the heart of the matter – prostitution can only be understood at all in relation to monogamous marriage. As Engels put it, “Monogamy and prostitution are indeed contradictions, but inseparable contradictions, poles of the same state of society”.<sup>5</sup> Bebel, writing on women and socialism in the 1880s explained, “Prostitution thus becomes a necessary social institution of bourgeois society, just as the police, the standing army, the church and the capitalist class”.<sup>6</sup>

To understand this dialectic, the “interpenetration of opposites”, we need to look first at the essence of prostitution in capitalism, consider how it varies according to the mode of production, and then return to explore the relationship between private and public sex and the oppression of women.

## Prostitution: the commodity

Like most commercial transactions under capitalism, prostitution is based on the sale and purchase of a commodity. In common parlance, a prostitute “sells her body”. But this is a misnomer, since at the end of the transaction the client does not “own” the prostitute’s body. What the client buys is a sexual service. Some feminists and socialists object to the idea that the woman sells a service rather than her body, but, recognising that it is temporary, describe it as the sale of the use of her body for their sexual pleasure.

But even that is misleading. If you go to any place where prostitution takes place, whether it is on the streets, in a brothel or through an agency, there will be a tariff. It is not generally written down because of legal restrictions, but it is clear: there is a price for masturbation, usually higher prices for oral, vaginal or anal sex. Some escorts will charge by the hour, but will also clearly state what sexual services are, and which are not, included in that fee. The commodity is sex – or rather a particular sexual service.

Turning sex into a commodity is regarded by many people as the fundamental “sin” of prostitution. Mhairi McAlpine from the SSP writes, “prostitution is the commodification of sexual relations, taking it out of the sphere of mutual pleasure and into the domain of the market.”<sup>7</sup> I have had similar discussions with many comrades over the years – surely such an intimate behaviour should never be turned into an alienable thing to be bought and sold? This rather romantic view of sex as mutual pleasure is itself an abstraction from social relations. Under capitalism, and previous class societies, sex is highly regulated and has an economic dimension. The regulation is based on the need to defend private property through inheritance.

In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels outlined how monogamy (for women) arose alongside private property. The monogamous family “develops out of the pairing family . . . It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father’s property as his natural heirs.”<sup>8</sup>

The exact form of the family has changed through different forms of class society, but the centrality of female

monogamy has not, which explains the extensive and consistent laws, religions and customs that ensure its defence. It was not prostitution that took sex “out of the sphere of mutual pleasure” but the monogamy required to defend private property. Daughters became property to be bought and sold for their capacity to produce heirs in return for deals of land, cattle or cash.<sup>9</sup>

Prostitution emerged from the same process, since no society yet has been able to enforce monogamy for men as well as women. Demosthenes, a Greek orator, summed up the attitude to women in the slave society of Athens, “We resort to courtesans for our pleasure, keep concubines to look after our daily needs, and marry wives to give us legitimate children and be the faithful guardians of our hearth.”<sup>10</sup>

But is this view not outdated? Surely in the 21st century sex is predominantly for mutual pleasure rather than production of heirs or transfer of cash? There has been considerable sexual liberalisation over the past 40 years, due to changes in the social position of women and the development of effective contraception, and prostitution is not the only form of non-marital sex. However, social structures still favour monogamous heterosexual relationships in relation to property, and women worldwide are still condemned as whores and sluts if they openly seek non-monogamous sex.

## The class structure of prostitution

On the surface prostitution does not appear to fit into standard economic categories. One historian writes:

“... the prostitute does not behave like any other commodity; she occupies a unique place, at the centre of an extraordinary and nefarious economic system. She is able to represent all the terms within capitalist production; she is the human labour, the object of exchange and the seller at once. She stands as worker, commodity and capitalist and blurs the categories of bourgeois economics in the same way as she tests the boundaries of bourgeois morality . . . As a commodity, therefore, the prostitute both encapsulates and distorts all the classic features of bourgeois economics.”<sup>11</sup>

While it is wrong to suggest that a single prostitute can represent all the elements of capitalist production, it does point to the many different roles that prostitutes can play. They can indeed appear as worker, commodity, seller and even capitalist, but this is because different prostitutes can have different relationships to the commodity they sell.

Commodities have both a use value and an exchange value. The use value in prostitution is satisfying the client’s desire, the provision of sexual pleasure. The exchange value is the social labour embodied in that commodity, that is, the physical and mental labour involved in providing the sexual service. This is equivalent to what the sex worker needs to reproduce herself under socially average conditions for the industry.

Like many service and some productive industries under capitalism, prostitution takes place in a variety of ways, with the prostitute having a different relation-

ship to the means of production and to the purchaser in each. Many prostitutes are wage labourers: they are employed by an individual or business and required to work certain hours. This is the case for millions of women working in brothels, saunas and bars across the world. They are paid a wage based on the hours worked or on the numbers of clients seen.

In this case they are not selling the sexual service directly to the client – they sell their labour power to the boss. This boss (a pimp, madame, brothel or bar owner) takes money from the clients and passes a proportion back to the sex worker (or requires a proportion of the sex workers' fee to be handed over to them). It is actually in this sense that the sex worker, like all other wage labourers, can most be said to “sell their body” in that they sell their capacity to labour. However, as Marx explains in Volume 1 of *Capital*, this is not the same as selling oneself:

“... the owner of the labour power [worker – HW] should sell it only for a definite period, for if he were to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity.”<sup>12</sup>

There are indeed sex workers who exist in such conditions of slavery – where they are sold and bought as commodities themselves, and then put to work for the

## To say that prostitutes are not exploited by clients is not the same as saying they are not oppressed by them

slave-owners. The revival of this modern slavery, mostly reported in relation to trafficking of people, is not exclusive to prostitution but exists in domestic work and other menial tasks. The fact that slavery exists in some parts of the sex industry should not blind us to the fact that far more prostitution takes place in the more common condition of wage slavery.

Most sex workers are neither slaves nor wage labourers – largely because legal restrictions on prostitution have impeded the expansion of a “legitimate” industry

### SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY

## The errors of zero tolerance

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Party (SSP) has been debating prostitution in response to proposals to create toleration zones for street sex work in Scotland. They issued the following statement:

“The SSP after much debate and discussion concluded that prostitution by definition was violence against women and therefore harmful to them. There can be no tolerance of it.”

This line then informed a motion they put to the Scottish Parliament in December 2006 in response to the Ipswich murders. They urged that “society, government and all agencies must work towards the eradication of abuse of women through prostitution and the harm it causes”, and later, “... there should be a zero tolerance approach to the men who buy the use of women’s orifices and who are violent to women and that the emphasis of the discourse on these issues must switch to the swift identification of men who present a risk to women rather than on the lifestyles of women.”

Their position is based on a number of false understandings. First, they see prostitution as the way that sex (and therefore women) have become commodities, and do not recognise that monogamy and the family are at the centre of link between sex and private property, and that prostitution flows from that relationship, not the other way round.

This false idea runs through their discussion pamphlet. The leading article from Mhairi McAlpine argues that “prostitution allows men to assert their power over women in a manner which is unacceptable in any other sphere.” This will come as news to the millions of women who are regularly abused and beaten by their husbands and fathers with the full backing of bourgeois morals and, in some cases, the bourgeois courts.

Secondly, they begin with a description of prostitution in which the overwhelming pattern is of abused women forced into street prostitution to support

a drug addiction. In fact most sex workers do not work on the streets but indoors, most are not drug addicts, and most opt for prostitution rather than other jobs, the majority of which are also dreadful and pay far less.

Thirdly, their demand for zero tolerance for men who pay for sex will not protect women but will give the state more licence to interfere and harass them. If men are violent and abusive then they should be prosecuted for that, not for the economic basis of the sex.

Finally, they ignore the demands of the people involved. Hundreds of thousands of sex workers across the world have organised unions and demand decriminalisation, toleration and an end to the harassment of them and their clients. Sex workers see organisation as the way to tackle exploitation and abuse – while it remains a crime to sell or buy sex then the industry will be in the hands of criminals and workers will have no protection.

# Marxist theory/ Prostitution

and have kept it in the shadows of the black market and criminal economy. Many sex workers are direct sellers; they do not work for anyone but trade directly with the client. In this situation they are still selling a commodity, but this time it is not their labour power but the commodity in which their labour is incorporated, i.e. the sexual service, and they sell this directly to the purchaser. They are, in effect, self-employed, although in most countries they cannot be legally registered as such. Some have resources and own or rent their means of production – the premises, phones and other tools of the trade. They are classic petit bourgeois.

But most women in this situation are far from the image of the middle class, self-employed business person. Most of them are poor with few resources, and for some the trade is more akin to a primitive form of barter. For example when sexual services are traded directly for subsistence, such as food and shelter, or for drugs. These people are only peripherally involved in the capitalist economy – they are part of what Marx would have called the *lumpenproletariat*.

And then there are prostitutes who employ others to work for them. Some sex workers go on to run their own businesses, as madames and brothel owners. As bosses they own the means of production and exploit the labour of others, while often continuing, for a while, to sell sex themselves. Thus some prostitutes are workers, some are slaves, most are petit bourgeois, and a few are capitalists.<sup>13</sup>

## Exploitation or oppression?

It is at this rather high level of abstraction – of commodities, use values and exchange values – that Marx identified the nature of exploitation. Workers are exploited by capitalists not through deceit or trickery, but by the nature of wage labour itself: workers exchange a commodity for a wage. The commodity is not the product of their labour but their capacity to labour, their labour power.

The exploitation exists in the difference between the value of that labour power and the value of the commodi-

ties they produce during the time their labour power is used by the capitalist. Exploitation results from the fact that the worker does not own the product of their labour but merely their capacity to labour. Even when the wage is paid at the full value of the labour power, a fair exchange in capitalist terms, the worker is exploited.

Roberta Perkins, writing about the sex industry in Australia, provides a useful description of how this operates in sex work businesses:

“Brothels, or parlours (bordellos, bagnios, stews, seraglios) are the equivalent in structure to a small to medium sized factory, a hotel, or other building used solely as a workplace, involving large capital expenditure, high overheads and a large regular profit. The ‘owner of the means of production’ may be an individual, a partnership, or a company of shareholders, who employ auxiliary salaried staff, such as managers, receptionists, barmaids, or cleaners and commissioned staff, or the prostitutes. The prostitutes here work in the proletariat tradition in which their labour is hired and exchanged for cash. The prostitute’s exchange-value is usually half the exchange value of the goods (sex) purchased by the client (customer or consumer). This is her commission [or wage – HW] in a shared arrangement with the owner, whose share is a surplus value from which wages for auxiliaries, rent, power, telephones, advertisements and other overheads, and capital for re-investment into the business (for example, improvements or expansion) must be extracted. The balance of this surplus value is the profit for the owner(s).”<sup>14</sup>

As with other wage labourers, exploitation and profit lies in the difference between what it costs to employ the sex worker and the income she can generate through the commodity she delivers. For the petit bourgeois there is no exploitation in that sense, and profit comes from raising the price above the costs of the business.

This analysis is rejected by feminists who argue that the client also directly exploits the sex worker. Certainly in the prostitute-client relationship, the client is almost always in a privileged economic position, but he is not exploiting the prostitute. His role in the relationship is that of consumer. There are many others who exploit her – the employer who may be a pimp, a business or a madame – but in economic terms it is not the client.<sup>15</sup>

Here Engels’ analogy about prostitution and monogamy is relevant. In the family the husband has many advantages over his wife in terms of power within the household, disposable income and freedom from many mundane tasks. But he has not in general achieved this through economic exploitation of his wife – he has “inherited” this from the general position of men and women within capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

To say that prostitutes are not exploited by clients is not the same as saying they are not oppressed by them. Many sex workers are brutally oppressed by clients who treat them in a degrading and often violent way. The state also treats sex workers in this way, often denying them basic human and legal rights. For example, until recently in the UK, a woman who had previous convictions for soliciting was labelled a “common prostitute”. Once this was on her record she had fewer rights than anyone

### LINKS

A series of articles and discussions on prostitution can be found on the Permanent Revolution website at [www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net) – search for prostitution

#### Bebel on prostitution

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/ch12.htm>

#### Sex worker rights organisations/unions

International Union of Sex workers [www.iusw.org/](http://www.iusw.org/)

#### International Centre for Trade Union Rights, special newsletter on sex worker union organisation (2005)

[www.ictur.org/IUR124.pdf](http://www.ictur.org/IUR124.pdf)

#### International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers In Europe

[www.sexworkeurope.org](http://www.sexworkeurope.org)

#### Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee

[www.durbar.org](http://www.durbar.org)

else. Future convictions did not require the evidence of two witnesses but could be obtained on the statement of a single police officer, and her previous record was brought up in court.

In many countries, women with prior convictions for prostitution have restrictions on their rights to travel, they are often denied custody of their children, and today in England street working women are served with anti-social behaviour orders which lead to effective curfews for an activity that is not actually a crime. More extreme examples of the oppression of prostitutes include the high rate of murder and violent assault, and the vicious way in which prostitutes are treated in the press. Women who are "outed" as prostitutes can find themselves cast out by families and friends, can lose their children and can never move into "straight" jobs. They become outlaws.

These legal and social sanctions not only affect women working on the street; they extend to any woman found to be a "whore". But it is clearly the most vulnerable women - those with no money, poor education and little social support - who suffer most. They are reviled from all sides. It is unsurprising that many of them develop drug or alcohol addictions and other mental health problems. But the popular stereotype of women who were abused as children being driven into prostitution to "feed" a drug habit is not the most common story.

There is usually a combination of circumstances that lead women to start sex work, and the common denominator is not drug addiction or abuse, although these are factors, but lack of money. The lack of money may be absolute or relative - many women find the sex industry to be a better option than the low paid, highly exploited jobs available to them in the formal sector.

The situation is no different in other countries. Sex workers in India produced a manifesto in 1997 that includes this statement about why women take up sex work:

"Women take up prostitution for the same reason as they may take up any other livelihood option available to them. Our stories are not fundamentally different from the labourer from Bihar who pulls a rickshaw in Calcutta, or the worker from Calcutta who works part time in a factory in Bombay. Some of us get sold into the industry. After being bonded to the madam who has bought us for some years we gain a degree of independence within the sex industry. [We] end up in the sex trade after going through many experiences in life, often unwillingly, without understanding all the implications of being a prostitute fully. But when do most of us women have access to choice within or outside the family? Do we become casual domestic labourer willingly? Do we have a choice about who we want to marry and when? The 'choice' is rarely real for most women, particularly poor women."<sup>17</sup>

## Public and private

This Marxist analysis demonstrates that prostitution developed as the other side of the coin of monogamy which exists to defend private property, and that sexual relations cannot be fully separated from economic rela-

## Policies on sex work

- › Prostitution must be decriminalised and those who sell or buy sex should not be persecuted. Remove all laws specifically on sex work. This is not the same as legalising prostitution which would mean creating a specific legal regulatory framework, such as toleration zones or a list of registered workers. Such regulation is not designed to protect workers but to protect "polite society" from such workers. We oppose such "sex worker" specific regulation as it gives the state the power to control sex workers, forcing them to have health checks, for example, in ways that would not be tolerated in other industries. Where state control of sex work exists, as in Austria and Greece where registered workers are required to have tests and certificates, this form of legalisation perpetuates hidden sex work and state harassment. Forms of regulation designed to protect sex workers from criminals, violence and so on, can and must be developed, as they have been in other industries, by unions representing sex workers once their work itself has been decriminalised.
- › There must be no toleration of exploiters and abusers. Unions of sex workers along with equal rights with other workers will allow sex workers to challenge their exploiters. While they remain on the fringes of legality or are actually criminalised they will have no effective recourse to the law.
- › For the free movement of labour across borders; no immigration controls. This is the only way to undermine the power of the sex traffickers.
- › No enforced sex work; within a decriminalised framework sex workers themselves can ensure under age and vulnerable adolescents are not exploited.
- › We need campaigns against the hypocrisy surrounding sex work - with sex workers in general unions this will become easier within the working class, but we need also to tackle the vile position of the press and the state.
- › We reject the forced testing of sex workers for HIV and other STDs, and the detention of sex workers found to be infected. For women, men and children who work as sex workers, HIV and other infections are an occupational risk, and they must not be punished. Education for sex workers and clients should promote the use of condoms and safe sex practices.
- › Recreational drugs should be legalised, with their distribution regulated and made safe. Hard drug use and dependency should be treated as a medical/social problem. This will undermine the drug crime that is linked to much of the violence around prostitution.
- › We need to challenge the double standard that tries to deny women the right to free sexuality while encouraging it in young men. This is part of the fight against sexism.
- › Any campaign for sex worker rights should be linked to improving the education and training of young women and providing decent jobs and wages.

# Marxist theory/ Prostitution

tionships in class society. Women's oppression is rooted in the separation of private domestic toil and reproduction from social production and social life.

Prostitution poses a threat to society because it threatens to blur this sharp distinction – taking sex out of the home and into the market. Secondly it shows that under capitalism prostitutes are not a single class. Our programme on prostitution should reflect this understanding, and be based neither on our own romantic ideas about what sex should represent, nor on our horrors at the most extreme exploitation of sex workers.

## Sex workers organise

Over recent years there has been a huge growth in organisations of sex workers. In North America and Europe many of these organisations grew out of women's groups and other social movements, but have had to break with feminist positions on sex work in order to campaign for their rights. Many feminists want to abolish prostitution, regarding it simply as violence against women. They argue that it must be eliminated through sanctions against managers and clients and rescue missions to save prostitutes. Indeed many will not talk of prostitutes, let alone sex workers, but use the term "prostituted women". This particular form of patronising language reveals their attitude – they regard sex workers as dupes, and accord them no role in liberating themselves from any oppression or exploitation they endure.

So sharp is this dispute between the feminist saviours and the sex workers' rights groups that they will rarely share a platform. The Women's Library in London recently organised an exhibition on prostitution, and did not allow any representations from sex workers' organisations, leading to protests outside from the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW).<sup>18</sup> The most extreme position is taken by the writer Julie Burchill, who wrote, "Prostitution is the supreme triumph of capitalism. When the sex war is won prostitutes should be shot as collaborators for their terrible betrayal of all women, for the moral tarring and feathering they give indigenous women who have had the bad luck to live in what they make their humping ground."<sup>19</sup>

Sex workers' organisations have been criticised for romanticising prostitution, and representing only the middle class "professionals". But in India, a mass organisation of sex workers exists and takes exactly the same positions. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (or "Durbar", which in Bengali means unstoppable or indomitable) is based in West Bengal, India, and grew out of the Sonagachi AIDS prevention initiative. Durbar has 65,000 members, working in some of the poorest areas of the country:

"Durbar is explicit about its political objective of fighting for recognition of sex work as work and, of sex workers as workers and for a secure social existence of sex workers and their children. Durbar demands decrimi-

nalisation of adult sex work and seeks to reform laws that restrict the human rights of sex workers, that tend to criminalise them and limit their enfranchisement as full citizens."<sup>20</sup>

Their 1997 manifesto, cited earlier, reveals an understanding of sexual oppression that would put many socialists to shame:

"Ownership of private property and maintenance of patriarchy necessitates a control over women's reproduction. Since property lines are maintained through legitimate heirs, and sexual intercourse between men and women alone carry the potential for procreation, capitalist patriarchy sanctions only such couplings. Sex is seen primarily, and almost exclusively, as an instrument for reproduction, negating all aspects of pleasure and desire intrinsic to it . . . The young men who look for sexual initiation, the married men who seek the company of 'other' women, the migrant labourers separated from their wives who try to find warmth and companionship in the red light area, cannot all be dismissed as wicked and perverted. To do that will amount to dismissing a whole history of human search for desire, intimacy and need."

Organisations of sex workers are a key to fighting exploitation and oppression. Given the class divisions within prostitution these organisations need to be run for and by those sex workers who are employed or who work for themselves, and not be left to be recruiting grounds for those who want to employ and exploit others.

The unions and community organisations of sex workers need to have strong links with other workers' organisations – as part of a united and strong workers' movement they will be better able to fight against widespread prejudice.

Over the past decade several unions have agreed to organise and represent sex workers. In the UK, the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) persuaded the general union the GMB to form a sex industry branch in Soho, and it has successfully unionised a brothel and negotiated recognition agreements in lap dancing clubs. Sex workers are also included in general unions in Germany (Verdi) and the Netherlands (FNV).<sup>21</sup>

## Prostitution and socialism

The life of sex workers is often hard and dangerous, not least because it is criminalised and repressed exposing sex workers to abuse from pimps and clients. Many sex workers are unhappy with their work and would like to leave if there were realistic alternatives. But is a form of alienated labour like others under capitalism.

Prostitution, in this form, would not exist in a socialist society, neither would the family nor work in their current form. There may well be specialist sexual entertainers and experts, but freed from the links with private property and state sanctified or enforced monogamy, sexual relations will evolve in ways that we can only

speculate about. The key thing is that the distinction between public and private, in the sense of public social work and private reproduction, will have to dissolve and in that process women will be truly liberated.

#### About the author

Helen Ward, a PRN supporter, is a public health doctor and researcher who has worked with sex workers in London and Europe for over 20 years. Together with anthropologist Sophie Day she has researched HIV and other health risks, occupational mobility and life course in sex work, and established one of the largest projects for sex workers in the UK. She is a supporter of the International Union of Sex Workers.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Marx K. *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*, 1844. This and the other classic texts are available on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)
2. In the article I use the terms prostitution and sex work. There has been extensive debate about which is preferable, and sex work is generally preferred by activists and refers to a wider group of people involved in the sex industry. However, historical, and current debates about the role of commercial sex in society have tended to refer to prostitution (exchange of sex rather than sexual imagery, for example) and therefore I think it important to continue to use it. I also refer exclusively to female sex workers and male clients when discussing the general features of prostitution. This is because this is the dominant form and most closely linked to general sexual oppression. However, this is not to deny that a large number of men also sell sex. The UK government estimates there are 70,000 sex workers in Britain today.
3. RS Rajan, "The prostitution question(s). (Female) Agency, sexuality and work", in *Trafficking, sex work, prostitution, Reproduction* 2, 1999
4. J Bindell, *The Guardian*, 7 July 2003
5. F Engels, *The origin of the family private property and the state* Section II part 4, Lawrence and Wishart, 1972
6. A Bebel, *Woman under socialism*, Schocken Books, 1971
7. Scottish Socialist Party Women's Network, "Prostitution: a contribution to the debate", 2006, at [www.scottishsocialistparty.org/pages/prostitution.html](http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org/pages/prostitution.html)
8. F Engels, op cit
9. Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International 1986, "The origin and changing nature of women's oppression", In *Theses on women's oppression*, at [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=375](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=375)
10. JA Symonds, "A problem in Greek Ethics", 1901, at [www.sacred-texts.com/lgbt/pge/pge00.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/lgbt/pge/pge00.htm)
11. S Bell S, *Reading, writing and rewriting the prostitute body*, Indiana University Press, 1994
12. K Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, Penguin, 1976 (emphasis added).
13. This class heterogeneity is not unique to prostitution. One can make an analogy with the peasantry, who can range from serfs tied to the land, through small farmers relying on their own labour alone (plus family) selling their products, to richer farmers employing others.
14. R Perkins, *Working girls: prostitutes, their life and social control*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1991
15. Of course, clients can and do rip off prostitutes by refusing to pay for the sexual service they have had, but this is theft not exploitation.
16. The exception to this is where the family is a productive unit, most commonly in peasant and early industrial societies, where the husband is both head of the household and head of the business, exploiting the work of his wife and children.
17. *Sonagachi Project, Sex workers' manifesto*, Calcutta, 1997, at [www.bayswan.org/manifest.html](http://www.bayswan.org/manifest.html)
18. For details of the exhibition, which runs until the end of March 2006, see <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/whats-on/prostitution.cfm>
19. [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Julie\\_Burchill](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Julie_Burchill)
20. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee [www.durbar.org](http://www.durbar.org)
21. G Gall, *Sex Worker Union Organising*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

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## CHAVEZ'S BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

# What type in the 21st



IN THE early 1960s the young leaders of the Cuban revolution were fêted by the new left and by progressives around the world. Hugo Chavez, elected president of Venezuela for the first time in 1998 and re-elected in 2006, is becoming the Fidel Castro of the early 21st Century. The former army colonel and charismatic leader of a popular movement, Chavez denounces the occupation of Iraq, stands up for the poor, ridicules George Bush and excoriates the neo-liberal policies pursued by Washington in Latin America and elsewhere.

Chavez has survived a military coup "made in the USA", a general lockout/strike led by employers and unions, and a recall referendum to remove him as President. Through these he has become more radical as the masses of Venezuela have mobilised in his defence. In 2005 he announced that only "socialism" offered an alternative to neo-liberalism and imperialism. He received a thumping endorsement in his recent re-election with 62% of the vote; and he has promised to "deepen the revolution". Little wonder then that he has become the poster boy of the international left.

### The extent of social change

But what sort of socialism does Hugo Chavez offer? It might seem churlish to ask such a question when, in much of the third world, neo-liberalism, reaction, religious fundamentalism and war dominate the agenda. Yet precisely because Chavez and his movement is being held up as a model for others to follow it is necessary to examine the reality of the change in Venezuela. It is necessary to look beyond the rhetoric and wishful thinking that surrounds the "Bolivarian Revolution" and examine the extent of real change and the programme that lies behind it.

Many on the left prefer not to delve too closely but would rather bask in (and exaggerate) the successes of



# of socialism century?

the government of Venezuela. Leaders in this field are those who refer to themselves as Trotskyists, but who since the 1950s have tailed every radical movement from Tito to Peron, from Castro to Ortega. They believe that the “blunt instrument” of Stalinism or left nationalism is a substitute for the building of a revolutionary Bolshevik-type party, that the “revolutionary process” can drive such movements on to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers’ state, despite their inadequate and reformist programme. For these groups the task of revolutionaries is to integrate themselves into such movements, cheering them on while offering an occasional piece of left wing advice.<sup>1</sup>

## A revolutionary process?

Is there a revolution taking place in Venezuela? Chavez certainly calls himself a revolutionary and he talks about the Bolivarian Revolution. But this refers back to the national revolution, the struggle for independence from Spain that the impeccably bourgeois Simon Bolivar led. The term is used by many parties in Latin America to signal that they stand for “radical change” and this is certainly how Chavez has used it.

In the Marxist sense there has been no revolution in Venezuela. Nor is there a “revolutionary process”, in terms of an ever-upward curve of struggle where the masses drive forward to socialism and revolution. Rather, there has been a period of major political struggles involving large-scale, but episodic, mobilisations of the masses.

Chavez was elected president in 1998 on a programme of radical democratic change and an economic programme which posited an alternative to neo-liberalism and US domination of the South American continent. This programme threatened the power of the old oligarchy, represented by the two traditional parties – Accion Democratica and Copei – who took it in turn to rule (and loot)

the state. It also threatened the interests of US imperialism. This led to a series of anti-democratic attempts to oust Chavez from power, and episodes of profound and radical class struggle. There was a short lived pre-revolutionary situation during the coup of April 2002 where the masses took to the streets and the army was split, and a two month long mobilisation of the working class, including some factory occupations, around the employers lockout between December 2002 and February 2003 [see Timeline panel].

But because of the weakness of the working class – its small size, the large informal sector, high unemployment/underemployment, and corrupt trade union leadership (Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela – CTV) – these struggles never developed into revolutionary situations or periods of dual power where workers’ councils challenged for control of society.

Cuba in 1959 and Nicaragua in 1979, in contrast, had revolutions where the army was defeated and broken, where the government and state apparatus was overthrown, and general strikes and armed insurrections led to periods of dual power led by armed popular organisations. The state apparatus in Venezuela has never seriously been threatened (outside of the 48 hour April coup crisis). This has not stopped Venezuela’s supporters in the west peddling the idea that Chavez is indeed leading “a revolution” nor declaring the latest presidential election victory “a new stage in the revolution”.<sup>2</sup>

## A radical, reforming government

There is no doubting that the Chavez presidency has been a radical reforming government since it came to power in 1998. The programme of his Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) has focussed on a number of key tasks, the first of which was to summon a constituent assembly and introduce a new constitution. This was vital to break

# International / Venezuela

## TIMELINE

**1954** Hugo Chavez Frias born.

**1971** Joins army.

**1980-85** Tutor in the military academy at Caracas.

**1982** Forms Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200 (MBR-200) - a secret political circle amongst officers.

**1992** Chavez, now a colonel in the parachute regiment, leads failed coup attempt.

**1994** Released from prison and proceeds to build MBR-200.

**1997** Chavez forms the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) to aid his presidential bid and draws smaller parties - Patria Para Todos (PPT).

**December 1998** Wins Presidential elections with 54% of vote. Major traditional parties Accion Democratica and Copei suffer voting collapse. Oil price per barrel drops to \$7.60 on world markets.

**1999-2000** Constituent Assembly works out new constitution, which is adopted in national referendum.

**2000**

**July** Chavez wins six year term as President under new Fifth Republic with 59.7% of popular vote and clear majority in new National Assembly.

**2001**

**January-June** Growing opposition on streets led by the employers federation (Federcameras), private media and CTV trade unions linked to Accion Democratica. In reply Chavez calls for Bolivarian Circles to be formed in local communities.

**November** Enabling Law published - 49 laws enacted by the President including land reform, increased royalties on oil, and a joint venture law insisting on 51% state share with foreign companies.

**December** One day business lockout called by the opposition.

**2002**

**January-April** Large scale pro and anti-Chavez street demonstrations. General lockout and strike called by employers and CTV for April 10-11 as a cover for coup attempt. Chavez arrested by army high command and the media reports his resignation.

**April 12-14** Pedro Carmona head of Federecamas is sworn in as transitional President. National Assembly is dissolved, the constitution annulled and all elected governors and mayors sacked.

**April 14** Mass demonstrations organised by Bolivarian Circles at presidential palace demand the return of Chavez. Many military bases are surrounded by crowds and some army units declare loyalty to Chavez. The palace guard retakes Miraflores palace and Chavez restored to the Presidency.

**May-November** Chavez follows policy of conciliation. Radicals in economic team replaced with moderates, head of PDVSA replaced with a president acceptable to business. Opposition returns to the offensive. Chavez retires 60 admirals and generals and consolidates support in the army command.

**Early December** Federecamas and CTV launch lockout/strike centred on PDVSA and oil sector.

**2003**

**January** As lockout continues the masses mobilise and Chavez sends in army to take control of oil installations. By the start of February, with help of oil workers and tanker crews, the lockout is broken. (The oil strike and lockout has severely damaged the economy which contracts by 28% between the fourth quarter of 2001 and the first quarter of 2003.)

**Spring** sees launching of "social missions" in health, education and adult education, subsidised food distribution - Mercal, agricultural training etc. Oil prices have increased to \$50, a barrel a fivefold increase in as many years.

**August** First Congress of UNT a movement of independent trade unions that have broken with the corrupt CTV.

**2004**

**January** Campaign by the opposition to oust Chavez, this time constitutionally through the recall mechanism, is in full swing.

**August** In recall referendum led by opposition 59.25% vote for Chavez to remain President. Opposition achieves 40%. Chavez uses "Electoral Battle Units" (UBEs) at neighbourhood level formed into squads, platoons etc.

**October** Mayoral and Governor elections in which Chavez supporters win vast majority of offices.

**2005**

**January** In closing speech to World Social Forum in Brazil Chavez declares "We have to re-invent socialism . . . It can't be the kind that we saw in the Soviet Union, but it will emerge as we develop new systems based on cooperation not competition."

**Jan-June** First half of year sees Chavez attempting to re-organise base of his movement. The UBEs (renamed Endogenous Battle Units) and Bolivarian Houses/Cultural centres are to be centres for local organisation and "participatory democracy".

**December** National Assembly elections. Opposition parties withdraw a week before elections. Result is that the Chavista parties win all 167 seats. Economy grows by 10% in 2005, having grown by 18% in 2004.

**2006**

**December** Chavez wins another presidential election with 62% of the popular vote and calls for a "United Socialist Party of Venezuela".

**January** Chavez announces nationalisation of major telecoms company, Cantv and promises to recover Venezuelan state's property in other "strategic sectors" like Orinoco oil fields. "We're moving towards a socialist republic of Venezuela, and that requires a deep reform in our national constitution" he declared in a speech on the eve of his inauguration.

the power of the old corrupt parties, not only over the parliament, but in the Supreme Court and amongst state governments and municipalities. It has been combined with active voter and citizenship drives that have dramatically increased the participation of the workers and poor (the electorate has increased from 11 million to 16 million since 1998) – social forces which the old system sought to keep out of the political process.

But this was no revolutionary constituent assembly, convened to solve the poverty of the peasantry by expropriating the large *latifundia* or one that placed economic power into the hands of the workers by expropriating the banks and large industrial enterprises and media monopolies. Nor was it a body that started the struggle against imperialism by repudiating the massive foreign debt. It stayed scrupulously within the bounds of bourgeois legality and enshrined in its provisions respect for private property, emphasised the role of the state in encouraging private enterprise, and for good measure gave autonomy to the Venezuelan National Bank. Proposals to enshrine a woman's right to choose in relation to abortion were quickly quashed, apparently at Chavez's insistence.

Although the constitution is full of fine phrases about building "a democratic, participatory and proactive society" and allows for some initiative, referenda and recall by the electorate, it is a classically centralised and "Bonapartist" constitution, concentrating powers in the hand of the President and his selected ministers. Indeed Chavez has used his two-thirds majority control of the National Assembly to pass enabling laws which reduce Assembly members to virtual onlookers for initiatives carried forward by the Executive.

### Spreading the oil benefits

It is the Chavez government's initiatives to help the urban and rural poor that have bolstered his popular support at home and abroad. Having won the battle to control the surpluses from the state oil company (PDVSA) Chavez proceeded to fulfil his electoral promises to the masses.

A series of social missions were launched in 2003, the most important of which were in health and education. Barrio Adentro used thousands of Cuban doctors to set up medical clinics for the workers and poor in areas which had never had access to free health before. A large scale literacy programme, Mission Robinson, was launched, again using the model of the literacy campaigns in Cuba from the early 1960s, aimed at getting one million people to read, write and learn basic arithmetic. Another mission aimed to re-engage adults in education classes; 600,000 were engaged in the programme. The education budget was raised considerably and now stands at 4% of GDP, while social spending generally has gone up from 8.2% of GDP in 1998 to 11.2% in 2005.

A Women's Development Bank was launched to offer training and provide micro-credit for women involved in the informal sector. Small incomes were allocated for women looking after children and the minimum wage was raised. In 2004 Mission Vuelvan Caras aimed to put a million people through training programmes, the major-

ity in agricultural skills. This was linked to a programme to encourage migration from the cities to agricultural areas with subsidies and homes being offered to form new agricultural co-operatives.

The army played an important role in these missions as part of Chavez's determination to integrate the army into the government programme and to commit it to the reform process. Given that the new government worked with the old state system and civil servants, renowned for their corruption and lethargy, it was essential to use the

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army and missions to get round the existing unreformed bureaucracy. Not only did the army play a major role in running PDVSA during and after the lockout, but they were also used to launch a subsidised food distribution mission called Mercial. Now in the poor areas of cities and in many rural and isolated areas Mercial food stores provide basic supplies at 25-40% less than market prices.

These measures have had a considerable impact on alleviating poverty. In the 1990s under the impact of IMF structural adjustment plans and the slashing of social expenditure, an estimated 80% of the population existed on the minimum wage or less. The Venezuelan national statistical office reported that 50% of the population were below the poverty line in 1998 whereas by the second half of 2005 this figure had fallen to 43%. But this underestimates the reduction in poverty under Chavez because these statistics only measure cash incomes not standard of living. Over half (54%) of the population now receives free health care, while an estimated 40-47% of the population buy subsidised food through Mercial.<sup>3</sup>

While undoubtedly the workers and the poor have seen their living standards raised, life remains grindingly hard for the majority of Venezuelan people. This is not the case for the middle and employing classes. Chavez has done little to change the massive disparities in wealth between the rich and poor that scar Venezuela.

The country is in the middle of an economic boom, having turned in growth rates of 18%, 10.3% and 10.2%, in the last three years as a result of the continuing high price of oil. As always under capitalism it is the rich who benefit most. The *Financial Times* recently commented on the "ebullient consumerism" in the middle class areas before the recent elections and pointed out that car imports had tripled in a year with the "new vehicles on the streets of Caracas, including the latest models of Hummers, BMW and Audi, causing gridlock."<sup>4</sup>

None of this should be surprising, Chavez is not a revolutionary socialist and he has never suggested that it is part of his programme to expropriate the capitalists and the super rich. He is in the fortunate position of being able to pursue his reformist socialist agenda and his anti-poverty programmes courtesy of the fact that oil, which

accounts for 80% of the countries export earnings, has risen from less than \$10 a barrel in 1998 to over \$50 throughout this decade, so he can do it without having to tax the rich and redistribute their wealth.

Indeed even the opposition has adapted to the changed economic and political situation, with Manuel Rosales, the opposition candidate in the December 2006 elections, promising to retain the social programmes and introduce a monthly stipend for the poor, the Mi Negra Card, that supposedly would have distributed 20% of the oil surpluses directly to the poor.<sup>5</sup> While these promises did little to dent Chavez's support they undoubtedly helped to shore up the opposition support and contributed to its 4.2 million votes.

## Transforming the economy?

The Chavez movement (MBR 200 and MVR) has always had a transformative economic programme running alongside its commitment to radical political and welfare reform. Since his army days Chavez has criticised the economy's one-sided economic dependence on oil.

For the old corrupt parties and ruling class, as long as the oil industry brought in billions of dollars, financed its ruling parties and bought off the middle class and labour aristocracy in the CTV, the rest of the economy – the poverty ridden countryside for example – was of little importance.

Agriculture stagnated and Venezuela was importing two-thirds of its food by the 1980s – 75% of the land was owned by the largest 5% of landowners and huge farms and *latifundia* went unused or under-utilised as the owners involved themselves in more lucrative commercial ventures linked to the cities and the oil boom. As elsewhere in Latin America, hundreds of thousands of rural workers migrated to the cities to eke out a living in the shanty towns and the informal sector which involves half the labour force. Ninety per cent of the population is now urban.

The collapse of oil prices in the early 1980s had brought to an end the grandiose state-directed projects to diversify the economy such as the steel and aluminium factories at Ciudad Guayana powered by massive hydro-electric dams. By the 1990s these under-invested and decrepit industries were either privatised (steel) or being prepared for selling off (aluminium and oil). Chavez and the MVR denounced these neo-liberal policies as selling out to imperialism and proposed an alternative economic plan based on "endogenous development".

The aim of the National Plan of Development 2001-2007 was to develop and diversify the economy away from oil to develop new industry and re-invigorate agriculture. It draws on the work of Osvaldo Sunkel, a Chilean economist, influential in Latin American development economics. He is a critic both of neo-liberalism and the 1960s development models of "import substitution", where high tariff barriers were used to protect nascent industries in Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

The plan makes clear the commitment of the government to a mixed economy, encouraging both private and

foreign capital. It uses the state, both to control strategic industries like oil, and to take initiatives to promote export oriented industries. The state had to create favourable conditions for investment, investing in infrastructure and above all training for the workforce. It is a model that draws on the Japanese and Asian economic development in the 1960s and 1970s where the state played an important role in encouraging the monopoly-led export economies. It is seen as an alternative to the deregulated neo-liberal model pushed by Washington.

This explains why, despite the hostility of Washington, Chavez has remained on good terms with foreign capital, particularly the multinational oil, gas and mining companies who have continued to invest heavily in Venezuela.<sup>7</sup> A recent series of oil and gas "joint venture" agreements replaced the existing operating agreements and increased the PDVSA holdings to a 51% stake. These changes were agreed by companies like Shell, BP, Texaco-Mobil and Repsol. New proposals outlined in a speech by Chavez in January appear to want to extend these changes into the important Orinoco region, where companies like ConocoPhillips, Total, Chevron and Exxon Mobil have big investments in heavy oil projects. Currently the government has only a 40% stake in these fields which, if made economically viable, could give Venezuela the largest oil reserves in the world, ahead of even Saudi Arabia.

Justifying the 51% deals struck towards the end of 2006 the Minister of Energy and Oil, Rafael Ramirez said, "We have done nothing more than reclaim the biggest oil reserves in the world from the jaws of imperialism", an argument rightly described as "Orwellian" in its double-think by one commentator.<sup>8</sup>

## The "social economy"

A relatively minor part of this plan, but one that has been seized upon by Chavez's cheerleaders around the world to demonstrate the socialist nature of the government, is to encourage and develop the "social economy" – production based around co-operatives, family and self-managed micro-enterprises. The aim in this sector was described in the plan, "to transform the informal workers into small managers" creating a newly trained "managerial class".<sup>9</sup> The Women's Development Bank, some of the social missions, such as the agrarian oriented Vuelvan Caras, and generous state support for co-operatives that goes with them, were all aimed at achieving this.

The Minister of Popular Economy, Elias Java, has said, "Our idea is to lay the foundations of a new socio-economic model which our president calls 21st century socialism". It is certainly true that Chavez sees the development of the co-operative model, of Social Production Enterprises (EPS) as they are being called, as central to his view of socialism. But this is not a "new socioeconomic model" – it is the return to the ideas of Proudhon, Saint Simon and Robert Owen, ideas that Marx and Engels characterised as utopian or "petit bourgeois socialism".

As a result the number of co-operatives has risen dramatically – from about 800 in 1998 to 100,000 in 2005, employing up to a million individuals. Many are tiny, as

## TRADE UNIONS

## The UNT and workers' control

The most well-organised and independent of the mass organisations in Venezuela are the new unions organised in the UNT. These unions went through an explosive period of growth between 2003 and 2005. The UNT now has 600,000 affiliated members, with many new unions still not affiliated to either federation. May Day celebrations have seen hundreds of thousands of workers out on the streets marching with the UNT while the old corrupt and bureaucratic CTV now only mobilises hundreds. Nevertheless while the CTV cannot compete on the streets it still retains an important apparatus and base in the traditional organised workplaces.

Unlike the CTV, the UNT organises on a democratic basis. The majority current is the Class Unity Revolutionary and Autonomous Current (C-CURA) led by Orlando Chirino, also known as the classist current. There are four other significant currents linked to Chavist parties and the government. At the second congress there was a walkout by the four minority currents, ostensibly over differences about moving to national elections for the UNT. In fact political tensions had arisen over the the C-CURA current's policy of seeking to maintain complete political independence from the government.<sup>1</sup>

C-CURA has taken a critical stance towards co-operatives where workers become owner-capitalists. Whilst it supports co-management it sees this as a transitional and educational phase through which the workers can move to workers' control. C-CURA's arguments for it to be extended into PDVSA and other important state industries have been rebuffed by Chavez, who sees these industries as too important for experiments in

workers' participation.

The UNT has played an important role in campaigns to take over firms threatened with closure, and Chavez's policies on co-operatives and co-management have sparked considerable debate in the unions. For example at one point the workers' leaders at Invepal dissolved their union and pressed for a 100% co-operative ownership. The majority of the UNT argue for keeping the unions and for co-management. But there is much debate about the term as it is constantly confused with "workers' control".

It is not only the workers who are confused. Supporters and advocates of the Chavez brand of 21st Century Socialism regularly talk of co-management and workers' control interchangeably.<sup>2</sup> The fact is that the nationalised industries in Venezuela, as elsewhere, operate within a capitalist state i.e. they are state capitalist enterprises used to develop and subsidise private capital in the country. Co-management aims to involve the workers in improving the efficiency of these state capitalist enterprises, to make them more productive, and more exploitative, by improving profitability.

Workers' control is the antithesis of this. It aims, through trade union struggle, to exert a workers' veto over the managers' right to manage, to hire and fire. Workers' control of production can only become a reality in a growing revolutionary crisis, situations of dual power, where factory committees organise on the basis of an economic plan – controlling the factories, selling goods, supplying raw materials, arranging credit and so on.

This must lead directly to confronting the capitalist state and establishing a workers' government. As Trotsky pointed

out, "workers' control is not a prolonged 'normal' condition, like wage scale agreements or social insurance. The control is a transitional measure, under conditions of the highest tension of the class war, and conceivable only as a bridge to the revolutionary nationalisation of industry".<sup>3</sup>

To advocate or endorse "co-management" in state-capitalist enterprises and pretend it is "workers' control" is to encourage the workers to use their creativity in the interests of the capitalists, to participate in their own exploitation. It takes a potentially transitional, revolutionary demand and converts it into a reformist one.

1 The C-CURA leadership is linked to the Party of Revolutionary Socialism (PRS) which declares itself sympathetic to Trotskyism. The other four currents are all closely linked to the government, the Bolivarian Workers Force (FBT), led by Osvaldo Vera (also an Assembly deputy for the MVR), the Autonomous Union, linked to the PPT, and the collective led by Marcela Máspero which is close to the Ministry of Works. For a good political report of the second congress see "The Real Fracture in the Venezuelan Labor Movement", Steve Mather, [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com)

2 *Green Left Weekly, In Defense of Marxism* etc are all guilty of this confusionism. A recent article by Gregory Wilpert, a leading figure in [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com), declares, "Currently at least four production plants, which produce paper, valves, and agricultural products, have been expropriated and turned over to worker control." "The Meaning of 21st Century Socialism for Venezuela", [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com).

3 See Leon Trotsky, *What Next: Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, Jan 1932. Part 14, "Workers' control and collaboration with the USSR", contains an important discussion on the fight for workers' control and workers' management.

the Women's Development Bank has granted more than 75,000 small credit loans for "micro businesses". They often involve the poorest workers in the shanty towns and informal sector, providing work through state aid and subsidy but often at "wages" – that is, shared profits – at or below the minimum wage. Workers in the shanty towns are also being encouraged to become "homeowners", to seek titles to their land and houses, through Urban Land Committees (CTUs).

In mining areas, co-operatives of 10-15 miners exist alongside, and trying to compete with, major multinationals like the largest gold producer in Venezuela the US-based Hecla, and the Canadian firm Crystallex.<sup>10</sup> In rural areas the new state subsidised farming developments are organised as co-operatives and existing small producers are encouraged to form small co-operatives to receive state aid.

This is petit bourgeois because it develops a strategy of turning the masses into groups of small producers, working for themselves in collectively owned business. Instead of setting about drawing the workers from the informal sector into the proletariat proper, through mass programmes of public works, expanding and developing state owned industry and services etc, Chavez wants to encourage them to become small capitalists. Marx and Engels were scathing about such strategies. In his polemic with the German Proudhonists around the question of how to deal with housing shortages caused by mass migration to the cities, he said:

"... it must be pointed out that the 'actual seizure' of all the instruments of Labour, the seizure of industry as a whole by the working people, is the exact opposite of the Proudhonist 'redemption'. Under the latter the individual worker becomes the owner of the dwelling, the peasant farm, the instrument of labour: under the former the 'working people' remain the collective owners of the houses, factories and instruments of labour."<sup>11</sup>

The co-operative can be a useful tool *in the transition to socialism*, where the workers have already expropriated the capitalists and established their own state. They can be used to break down individualism and competition within the peasantry as part of the transition to collective state organised farming. As Trotsky and a section of the Bolsheviks recognised, they were a necessary compromise, a route to a socialist solution to the land question that avoided Stalin's brutal policy of forced collectivisation.

However, as a strategy to build socialism alongside capitalism it is both reformist and utopian. It develops a strategy of transforming the economy bit-by-bit, expanding ever further the co-operative sectors of the economy. It avoids the question of the capitalist state and the necessity of the proletariat to smash it to achieve socialism. Instead it advocates a gradual economic transformation, capitalism "growing over" into socialism – a reformist strategy. It is also utopian because it fails to recognise the advantages of monopoly capitalism (advanced machinery, access to capital, international division of labour, high levels of productivity and exploitation) over small co-operative enterprises. Co-operatives can only compete by driving down their "wages" to below those of workers in capitalist enterprises.

## Agrarian reform not revolution

Venezuela has a massive land problem. A mere 1% of landowners own 60% of the land, much of it left unused or under utilised while Venezuela has to import the bulk of its food. Ownership of large estates often has dubious roots with much land transferred from the state through corrupt land deals. Meanwhile 75% of poor landholders try to scratch a living from 6% of the land.

In early 2001 the Chavez government passed a very moderate land reform law which was aimed at redistributing under-used government lands and some unused big estates. A new law of January 2005 was aimed at privately owned big estates of more than 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) where it was determined that the land was under-utilised. The government and its bureaucracy has moved at a snail's pace to implement these laws.

It has been the poverty and land hunger of the rural workers and peasants and their militant response to these laws that has pushed them forward. Often the initiative has been taken out of the hands of the authorities through land seizures and occupations. One example was the case of the multinational Vestey, whose British owners are renowned for their tax dodging activities. It found its El Charcote ranch occupied and was finally forced to hand over 20% of its idle lands.

The landowners have often fought back, hiring thugs, often from Colombia, to intimidate the peasant squatters. Land activists have been killed and corrupt local police, and even the army, have colluded in attacks on squatters. A peasants' conference in early 2005 criticised the slowness of the land reform and the collaboration of local judges and army commanders with attacks on peasants attempting to seize land. The activists called for self-defence units, the organisation of collective farms, and for "a revolution within the revolution" – a slogan raised as well in the workers' movement to signal the need to clear out the obstructers and reformists.<sup>12</sup> In July 2005, 6000 peasant and rural labourers protested outside the National Assembly against the impunity that the landowners apparently had in killing over 150 peasants during the previous few years.

These organisations undoubtedly represent the vanguard in the peasant movement. In contrast the Chavez government wants to establish co-operative farming peacefully, without alienating the large landowners and multinationals. It is part of the idea of establishing a small producers sector of the economy, a strategy that eschews nationalisation and expropriation of large agribusiness and handing it over to the control and management of the workers, the only strategy, that could really solve the land question in Venezuela.

## Nationalisation, co-management and workers' control

In industry as well, the Venezuelan government has, until recently, little appetite for nationalising capitalist firms. For example the major steel plant SIDOR, in Ciudad Guayana, privatised shortly before Chavez was elected

in 1998, remains in private hands. Only a handful of working factories have been taken over by the state, but Chavez has encouraged workers to take over and restart several hundred closed plants as co-operatives. The government is keen to encourage workers to set up their own businesses but unenthusiastic about taking over viable capitalist enterprises.

Invepal, a paper plant, was one of the first nationalisations which took place only after a long campaign. The company had closed down and been occupied by the workers. In 2005 it was finally nationalised and placed under co-management, with 49% of the company given to the workers, while 51% was owned by the state. The aluminium plant, Alcasa, was also put under co-management, this time on the initiative of the Labour Ministry as its state management had been deeply corrupt and incompetent.

These measures are still seen as "experiments" by the government, rather than the beginning of new nationwide policy. Indeed key strategic state industries, such as the PDVSA and gas, have been declared "off limits" for such experiments. For a while, in the struggle around the PDVSA lockout, the workers formed "guide committees" to exert some control and guard against sabotage, but once the state and the military were firmly back in control these committees were not encouraged and fell into disuse.

Hugo Chavez has recently signalled a change in policy towards nationalisation. In January 2007 he promised to take over "strategic sectors" of the economy. What this will amount to has yet to be seen. He has said the broadcasting licence of the private Radio and Caracas Television (RCTV) will not be renewed, although it is not clear whether it will be given to a more sympathetic private operator – RCTV backed the coup in 2002. He has announced that the telecommunications company, Cantv, which the US company Verizon has been trying to sell its large stake in, will come under state control, and he has suggested the Caracas power company might be nationalised. If such a policy is left at the state capitalist nationalisation of a few important companies, and increasing the government joint venture stakes with the oil companies, it will not signal a fundamental change in the nature of the Venezuelan mixed-economy – though no doubt it will be greeted as heralding a "new stage in the revolution" by Chavez cheerleaders in the west.

## International dimension

Chavez was intelligent enough to realise that a programme for the national development of Venezuela, which went against the Washington consensus on privatisation, de-regulation and free trade, could not survive if kept within the bounds of the country. Here he drew on the history of Bolivar's internationalism, his attempts to establish a unified federation of Latin American states. In an interview in 1995 he declared how Bolivar had a vision "of uniting all these Balkanised territories of Latin America in order to confront the imperial power of the north. Now everyone is struggling for this goal, not just Venezuela."<sup>13</sup>

While Chavez has not been shy of floating grand schemes – a single Latin American currency, a Latin American NATO (without the USA of course!), a continental OPEC – his initiatives have been more limited and geared towards building allies against US intervention. He has also attempted to diversify foreign investment to reduce dependency on the USA and Europe. China's emerging multinationals have taken on major projects, building a petroleum company, a large Orimulsion plant from which it is contracted to buy all the fuel.

He has sought to bolster the discipline in OPEC to maintain the price of oil, supplied cheap oil to Cuba and at preferential prices to 11 Caribbean and Central American States. He has expended much energy to rally sympathetic Latin American states to torpedo the US drive

## Like all sudden populist movements, the electoral landslide in 1998 left Chavez with severe problems

to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and presented an alternative in the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA).

ALBA is still an organisation in development but is meant to offer a non-market based approach to economic and political integration. So far only Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia have fully signed up. Telesur, a Latin American news channel, an alternative to CNN, is one recent initiative, a development bank and continental petrol company are planned. None of this however stopped Venezuela joining Mercosur in July 2006, the South American trading bloc based on impeccable neo-liberal principles.

## Popular organisations and Bonapartism

Hugo Chavez is not unique in Latin America. He follows in a long tradition of progressive military leaders who have been repelled both by the poverty of their country and its prostration before the US colossus to the north. Some have tried to develop their economies and break free of imperialism using military regimes, others have taken the civilian road.

Chavez's initial heroes were all progressive military regimes – Torrijos in Panama, Velasco in Peru. His secret military organisation, MBR-200, was committed to overthrowing the elected government and establishing a military one, a strategy that ended in his failed coup attempt of 1992. In the late 1990s the economic crisis, and discrediting of the old parties, was of such a scale that Chavez believed he had a chance of launching a civilian movement and being elected president.

But like all sudden populist movements, the electoral landslide in 1998 left Chavez with severe problems. He had no mass party with deep roots in all areas of society – workplaces, schools and universities, shanty towns and working class neighbourhoods, peasant and indigenous

communities – a mass organisation to defend him against the anti-democratic manoeuvres of the opposition and imperialism. Neither did he have a mass organisation to use as a lever to carry his more radical policies into life.

This second aspect was particularly important because having come to power in elections, not as the result of a civil war or revolution as the FSLN did in Nicaragua, he was to a large extent the prisoner of an unreformed and hostile state bureaucracy. Even the new constitution failed to alter this awkward fact. Much of the constant change and experimentation with organisations of civil society – Bolivarian Circles, Patriotic Circles, Communal Councils Mark 1, Endogamous Battle Units and currently Communal Councils Mark 2 – is an attempt by Chavez to build such a base.

Like all leftist “Bonapartes”, leaders who have to balance between the masses on one side and capitalism and imperialism on the other, Chavez needs, and has, a strong and direct relationship with the masses. His mass rallies, walkabouts and his popular Sunday radio and TV programme *Alo Presidente*, a cross between a party political broadcast and *Jim’ll Fix It*, where anyone with a problem will write in and the president will try to solve it, all reflect the reliance of the Bolivarian revolution on one person, its leader. But still he needs to build organisations that can mobilise millions when needed – to threaten the capitalists when necessary and deter imperialist intervention.

The parties that support Chavez, including the largest, the MVR, carry little real weight in Venezuelan society. They know they are creatures of the president, parties that would have no future without him. They are also highly undemocratic, based on top down appointments and patronage, and are often corrupt at a local and regional level. Thus the masses look to the president for change, not to these parties, which many hold in contempt.

Chavez himself knows this. He regularly threatens and

## Like all leftist “Bonapartes”, Chavez needs, and has, a strong and direct relationship with the masses

denounces his own party, complains of the inability to get things done. His constant attempts to build “popular organisations” outside of these parties and municipal structures has caused conflict and tension. There have been clashes between Communal Councils/UBE’s and locally elected officials, both claiming the democratic mandate. Recently Chavez called a meeting for party activists, shortly after the December elections, and announced to surprised supporters that a new party should be built, a “United Socialist Party of Venezuela” from the base up. Apparently while the crowds in the cheap seats cheered, the party bureaucrats in the stalls looked glum.<sup>14</sup>

Real power in fact lies with a small group of advisors and ministers, mayors and governors, and above all with Chavez’s support base amongst the officers of the army.

Political arguments within this group or the MVR are carried on behind the backs of the masses and differences finally settled by Chavez himself. Far from being the marvellous “participatory democracy” that starry eyed supporters like Hilary Wainwright of *Red Pepper* claim, it is a classic top down Bonapartism where the initiatives are laid down from above while the masses encouraged to debate how to implement them.

This does not mean the masses are passive, only that they have no mass organisations through which they can exercise their power over the state. There are no workers’ and peasants’ councils, factory committees, a mass revolutionary party. Indeed the mobilisations against the right, and in defence of Chavez and his welfare programme, have brought hundreds of thousands into political life. They participate in elections, in social missions, in Bolivarian Houses and cultural clubs – but they have no power or control over the direction of state policy.

## Whither 21st century socialism in Venezuela?

In a period where socialism has appeared to be on the retreat and neo-liberalism triumphant, it might appear like carping to criticise a leader and who openly attacks George Bush and his policies. Yet those who don’t explain to the workers the limitations of the Bolivarian revolution, its fundamentally bourgeois character (however radical it appears or says it is) do no service to the poor and down-trodden or the cause of international revolution.

Every self-proclaimed “revolutionary” movement attracts its radical and uncritical supporters – Chavez more than most. But the lessons of history show that however radical a government, however many excellent reforms and benefits to the masses it introduces, unless it destroys capitalism itself, the root of exploitation and poverty, those gains will be rolled back. This was the lesson of the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 where the gains of the 1980s were rapidly swept away by neoliberal governments of the 90s.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, Venezuela has enormous advantages over a poor country like Nicaragua, it is oil rich. But the considerable reforms and welfare programmes being developed in Venezuela are absolutely dependent on the temporary high price of oil on the world market. A collapse as sudden as its rise, could sweep most of these reforms away and Chavez along with it. That is because the Bolivarian revolution has made no attempt to change the fundamentals of the country. The power of the multinationals, the capitalists and the media moguls have been left untouched, as has their wealth. They might be licking their wounds now, after several electoral defeats, but a downturn in the economy could bring them back to power as disillusion spreads and Chavez’s promises of a new dawn fails to materialise.

Many on the left see it differently, they think the Bolivarian revolution offers a new model. Michael Lebowitz and his book *Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st Century* is typical. He believes Chavez has put “Marxism back on the agenda”, that the development of the “social econ-



omy", state enterprises and co-operatives, is "evolving increasingly from a complement to an *alternative* to the logic of capital". "By degrees these two ownership forms are expanding relative to private capital (which thus far retains its enclaves - especially in the media, banking, telecommunications and food processing)." 16

Lebowitz is in fact reworking the Stalinist stages theory of revolution for the 21st century. The social economy will gradually be expanded until the society is transformed, but for the moment it will co-exist alongside the capitalist "enclaves". He clearly doesn't recognise that the tail does not wag the dog and that in Venezuela capitalism is the driving force in the economy. But this is because like many others, the IMT for example, he thinks the state is already in our hands, or rather in the "unerring revolutionary" hands of Commandant Chavez.

In fact the state remains a capitalist one, defended by a police force and an army. The army is not, as Chavez would have it, a "civil-military union", but a body of armed men standing above society and separated from it. It is organised under military discipline, led by officers who are in no sense revolutionary socialists, but who agree with Chavez that Venezuela must remain a mixed economy capitalism. Anyone who forgets the importance of the army forgets all the lessons of Chile in 1973.

The developments in Venezuela offer enormous opportunities for a party of socialist revolution to organise within the masses - amongst the workers, the poor, the rural workers. But such a party would have to champion real workers' democracy, organise real workers' control, and fight for workers' councils in the neighbourhoods. It would need to develop an intransigent critique of the

failings of the Bolivarian programme as a whole, while supporting every measure taken that was in the interests of the workers and the poor. But it would put forward its own revolutionary action programme to tackle these burning issues - for example tackling the chronic housing problems, not by offering "titles" in the shanty towns, but by a mass programme of modern house building, expropriating the land needed (including the posh golf course in the heart of Caracas) and expropriating the under-used and second homes of the bourgeoisie.

Health has undoubtedly been improved by Cuban doctors but it could be made a lot better by expropriating the private hospitals, currently the preserve of the Venezuelan rich, and placing them at the disposal of the masses. The massive disparities of wealth should be tackled by a steeply progressive wealth tax on the rich and the expropriation of dubiously obtained assets.

What is needed in Venezuela is a revolutionary workers' government, one that puts the factories, mines, banks and farms at the disposal of the masses. That develops a plan of production using workers and peasants' councils and workers' management, democratically determining what needs to be produced. Any such government would need to take immediate steps to arm the workers and immediately encourage the formation of soldiers' committees and unions, making officers responsible to the rank and file soldiers. These and other revolutionary measures could really mobilise the masses and start the construction of a real 21st century socialism. Only by organising a mass revolutionary socialist party to fight for them, one that is independent of the Chavez state, will give the Venezuelan masses a hope of achieving it.

ENDNOTES

1 Foremost among the cheerleaders are the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) and their Hands Off Venezuela Campaigns. See *The Venezuelan Revolution; a Marxist Perspective* by Alan Woods which expounds on Hugo Chavez's "unerring revolutionary instinct". Similarly uncritical cheerleading can be found in *Green Left Weekly*, paper of the DSP Australia and *International Viewpoint*, online magazine of the Fourth International. The infection has even spread to the British SWP, which used to have little time for the revolutionary credentials of the FSLN in Nicaragua or Castro. A recent *Socialist Review* (Dec 2006) declares "Hugo Chavez is the most prominent representative of a far reaching revolutionary process in Venezuela..."  
2 See for example "After the election: Venezuela's Road to Socialism" on the IMT's website, *In Defence of Marxism*, which in a report of the president post election speech says "President Chavez did not outline concrete plans to move the revolution forward... However, one of the most important points in his speech (and which can have a greater impact in the new period that opens up after this revolutionary victory) was the idea that the revolution not only continues but is also going to become more intense."  
3 See "Poverty Rates In Venezuela: Getting The Numbers Right" by Mark Weisbrot, Luis Sandoval, David Rosnick, Center for Economic and Policy Research, at: <http://www.cepr.net/publications>  
4 "Petro-populism", *Financial Times*, Friday 1 December: a third term beckons for Venezuela firebrand president.  
5 See "Mi Negra Plan Manuel Rosales: Opposition Candidate for President of Venezuela", by Sean Krietch at: [upsidedownworld.org](http://upsidedownworld.org)  
6 See for example: *Development From Within: Toward a Neoliberalist Approach for Latin America*, Osvaldo Sunkel. Also interview "Commanding Heights" available as html on Google.  
7 Chavez is quite open about the importance of foreign investment.

He makes clear in an interview with Marta Harnecker that if his government had taken a position of cancelling the foreign debt it would have cut them off from such investment. See *Understanding the Venezuelan Revolution*, Monthly Review Press 2005, p 110.  
8 "Joint Ventures: Venezuela's Faustian Pact with Foreign Capital" by Steve Mather, [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com)  
9 See *Build it Now: Socialism for the 21st Century*, Michael Lebowitz, *Monthly Review Press 2006* Chapter 7 for a summary of the 2001-07 plan.  
10 A recent visitor to one such area reported on Crystallex, "It's not difficult to notice their land: a high fence surrounds their huge swath of land, and at the main gate, guards with helmets and riot sticks are keeping away unwanted persons... It's clear: these mining companies are here for the money and not for anything else." "The Open Veins of Venezuela", Jeroen Kuiper, [venezuelanalysis.com](http://venezuelanalysis.com)  
11 Engels, *The Housing Question*, Part 3. Neither was this petit bourgeois socialism limited to the Proudhonists. Engels makes the point in his 1887 introduction of saying it existed in the German Social Democratic Party itself and its parliamentary fraction. He linked it to the growing stage-ism in the party which put off the demand for "the transformation of all means of production into social property" to the distant future while supporting "social patchworks" for "uplifting the labouring class" in the present.  
12 Report translated from *El Nuevo Topo* by Earl Gilman  
13 Quoted in *Hugo Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution*, Richard Gott, p183  
14 See "Its my party and I'll cry if I want to" by Michael Lebowitz on Monthly Review website [www.monthlyreview.org](http://www.monthlyreview.org)  
15 See "Lessons of Nicaragua", [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1061](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1061)  
16 Michael Lebowitz op cit

## MARXISM VERSUS ANARCHISM

# To take power or not?

*Anarchists and Marxists both want to live in a society without a state. But, says Carlene Wilson, on how to get there, they have radically opposed views*

### Introduction

"TO BE governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied upon, directed, legislated, regimented, closed in, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, evaluated, censured, commanded . . . To be governed means that at every move, operation or transaction one is noted, registered, entered in a census, taxed, stamped, priced, assessed, patented, licensed, authorised, recommended, admonished, reformed . . . exploited, monopolised, extorted, pressured, mystified, robbed; all in the name of public utility and the general good. Then at the first sign of resistance or word of complaint, one is repressed, fined, despised, vexed, pursued, hustled, beaten up, garrotted, imprisoned, shot, machine-gunned, judged, sentenced, deported . . . That is government."<sup>1</sup>

These words, penned in 1851 by French anarchist Pierre Proudhon, echo down the ages. In today's world, to be governed is to have our calls monitored, our emails commandeered, to be CCTV-ed, Asbo-ed, tagged, fined, ID-carded, and DNA-tested. To be governed is to be set targets at work, and instructed how to parent our children.

Resistance to these measures will be met with no more sympathy today than in Proudhon's time, while, with the benefit of advanced technology, state surveillance is more pervasive than ever. The state is in our face every minute of the day, monitoring what "good citizens" we are, ensur-

ing we can be swiftly traced, to prove we "have nothing to hide" and be "eliminated from enquiries".

No wonder, given the growth of the modern state apparatus, many people hate it and want to get it off their backs – to abolish it. It is no surprise therefore that the anarchist credo of liberty, autonomy and individual freedom strikes a powerful chord today; indeed, anarchism has, in George Woodcock's old phrase, risen like "a phoenix in the desert" over the past decade, particularly in the western imperialist nations.

The anarchist cause has been further helped by a number of contingent factors. Firstly, of course, we are witnessing a vast acceleration of capitalist globalisation, which has markedly increased social inequality, fuelling grievance and rebellion. Millions of young workers and students feel the future is less secure than ever.

At the same time real governance has shifted to a new layer of unaccountable, distant and bureaucratic para-state bodies – the World Trade Organisation, G8, World Economic Forum, IMF, World Bank and the European Commission – that are even more secret and distant than national governments. They are immune to popular pressure and are able to ride roughshod over the democratic mandates of national parliaments; tear down protective trade barriers and insist on selling off national assets and

resources to imperialist monopolies. It is not surprising that such massive and unaccountable power has rendered "small is beautiful" philosophies so attractive.

In the face of the relentless globalisation offensive, the workers' movement has been in a period of retreat. The lack of great collective struggles has bred a cynicism towards the possibility of mass action and an attraction to "direct action" protest and sabotage by small groups. Where the possibility of mass action might be raised at summit sieges and in social forums, the reformist leaders have discouraged this and in the process strengthened the voice of the anarchists.

The persistence of the Zapatistas in Mexico has also provided a role-model for anarchists, particularly in the imperialist nations where the struggle of an indigenous people was romanticised to overemphasise its spontaneity and democracy and minimise the influence of a leadership of conscious intellectuals (and indeed the existence of a military hierarchy). The Zapatistas inspired the creation of People's Global Action, whose vague "hallmarks" have served as a unifying call for anarchists worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we are still in a world hugely influenced by the downfall of Stalinism, the effect of which has reverberated through the academic institutions in which many left activists are educated. The growth of postmodernist teaching, with its demonisation of the very idea of "power" and its opposition to "metanarratives" such as Marxism, has inevitably left its mark on the political plane. Libertarian ideas often predominate on the campuses.

### One, two, three, many anarchisms?

But what is anarchism? Unfortunately, we have no "comrade Anarch" whose writings form the basis of study. There is no black line of true anarchist teachings with its apostles and apostates.<sup>3</sup>

Instead we have the evolution of a diffuse ideology. The word anarchism has its roots in the Greek word "without leader" or "without ruler" and has evolved to become commonly understood as "without government or state". Its modern manifestations originate with the most radical and plebeian movements during the French revolution (1789-95) and the philosophical writings of the English writer William Godwin.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed it was reflection and debate upon the French Revolution and counter-revolution that prompted the growth of anarchist thought in the first half of the nineteenth century, as the hopes for a republican state, embodying the values of "liberty, equality and fraternity" were dashed by the installation of reactionary Bonapartist and monarchist governments.

During the nineteenth century a body of ideas on economic organisation and political strategy was laid down in succession by Pierre Proudhon (1809-65), Max Stirner (1806-56), Michael Bakunin (1814-76), Peter Kropotkin (1842-1926) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), among others. They differed quite markedly on many points, including the essence of human nature, the way the economy should be organised under anarchism, the place of religion, and whether to support social reforms under capi-

talism. Some anarchists, like Stirner, emphasised the rights of the individual in an anarchist society marked by competitive egotism, while Bakunin and others were collectivist anarchists, laying the stress on social solidarity in a stateless society of essentially co-operative human beings.

Within the collectivist camp, sharp differences existed over the post-state economy. Proudhon believed in "mutu-

## The lack of great collective struggles has bred a cynicism towards the possibility of mass action and an attraction to "direct action" protest and sabotage

alism" in which artisans owned their means of production and would exchange their products with others based on costs of production, without any profit mark up.<sup>5</sup> Bakunin, on the other hand, opposed all private ownership of the means of production, instead advocating that property be collectivised. Yet he accepted, like Proudhon, that workers would be compensated for their work on the basis of the amount of time they contributed to production.

Kropotkin, while agreeing with Bakunin that both the products of labour and the means of production should be collectivised, argued that individuals should not receive direct compensation for labour, but should instead have free access to the resources of the commune, receiving goods in accordance with their needs.

Within anarchism we can find the full gamut of attitudes towards the role of violence in the process of abolishing the state. Proudhon opposed violence while Bakunin enthusiastically embraced and celebrated it. Kropotkin in later life reluctantly endorsed the right of the oppressed to use it, while distancing himself from the outbreak of anarchist terrorism in the 1890s. Leo Tolstoy opposed violence on principle and preached non-violent civil disobedience.<sup>6</sup>

All these shades and divergences remain in the 21st century. The hooded and masked ranks of various groups and individuals identified by the media as the "black bloc", secretly organised and intent on violent property destruction (as witnessed at the anti-WTO protests in Prague in 2000 and the anti-G8 protests at Genoa in 2001) are most clearly indebted to the outlook of Bakunin, if not the anarcho-terrorists of the 1890s in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The latter preached the importance of the "propaganda of the deed" as a way of inciting the passive masses to action; their high-profile assassinations of politicians and royalty did much to link anarchism and terrorism firmly in the popular imagination. The "black bloc" anarchists of today, while preferring to focus their exemplary violence on property rather than politicians, are motivated by a similar belief in the power of a militant few to inspire the many.

By contrast, those identified in the late 1990s as the "pink bloc" or "fluffies" – most closely associated with

# Political theory / The state

People's Global Action – employ a flamboyant, mocking and essentially pacifistic critique of authority and stand in a direct line from Tolstoy, if without his Christian morality. United by their opposition to violent revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state, they prefer to combine alternative, non-capitalist modes of living in the here and now with non-violent direct action and, at most, a limited self defence against the state – to effect a dual process of disengagement and delegitimisation of the state.

The desire to create parallel “autonomous” pockets can be seen both in the temporary road blockades of the Reclaim the Streets movement and the many projects to build self-managed social centres independent of local councils.

## Anarchism and the state

What unites the disparate strands of anarchism is the following, as Peter Marshall argues: “An anarchist [is] one who rejects all forms of external government and the State and believes that society and individuals would function well without them.”<sup>8</sup>

Embellishing this definition, Marshall adds: “All anarchists ... condemn imposed political authority, hierarchy and domination. They seek to establish the condition of anarchy, that is to say, a decentralised and self-regulating society consisting of a federation of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals.”<sup>9</sup>

Peter Kropotkin made a similar point, while making a distinction between government and state. Anarchy, he noted, was “a form of government or constitution in which public and private consciousness, formed through the development of science and law, is alone sufficient to maintain order and guarantee all liberties.”<sup>10</sup>

For anarchists, then, the state and not class society is at the root of oppression. Rather than seeing the state as having a specific form as an instrument of class rule, anarchists regard all states as repositories of “power” or “authority”; and “power” and “authority” of any kind must be eliminated if humanity is to be liberated. So anarchists draw no distinction between a feudal state, a capitalist state and a workers' state.

For Marxists seeking to persuade anarchists of the need to struggle for power, it is this understanding of the class character of the state that is the key stumbling-block; this is a recurrent theme in all anarchist and Marxist writings on the question.

As Lenin noted: “the most urgent, burning and most politically essential issue in the struggle against anarchism [is] the relation of the revolution to the state and of the state in general.”<sup>11</sup>

Engels explained the divide between Marxists and anarchists like this:

“All socialists are agreed that the state, and with it political authority, will disappear as a result of the coming social revolution, that is that public functions will lose their political character and become mere administrative functions of watching over social interests. But the anti-authoritarians [i.e. anarchists] demand that the political state be abolished at one stroke, even before the

social relations that gave birth to it have been destroyed. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority.”<sup>12</sup>

This position was first aired by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*:

“We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be affected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property ...” Later they add:

“Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class; if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”<sup>13</sup>

All the key elements of the Marxist position are here. The revolution obliges the working class to use state power to suppress the exploiters and the basis of their power – private property, which they will not relinquish without a fight. This will be the “despotic” action of the new ruling class, the proletariat. But with the sweeping away of private property and classes then the need for the state disappears.

Two decades later Marx and Engels were able to use the experience of the Paris Commune (1870-71) to flesh out what form the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would take. In essence it was “a semi-state”, a state that is at once repressive of an exploiting minority and in the process of dissolving itself back into civil society by a massive, qualitative extension of democracy and accountability and, crucially, replacing an alienated armed minority – the professional standing army – with the armed people. The political superstructure of the state would no longer appear above and opposed to the mass of toilers but politics would be embedded in their daily lives as much as working.

Hence the state cannot be abolished overnight; it “withers away” to the extent that the material conditions in society improve. Once there is abundance and each can have what they need there will be no need for a public instrument that rations goods, allocates them and supervises the queues.

In the mid-nineteenth century the Russian Michael Bakunin was the most prominent anarchist who contested Marxist strategy within the developing European

workers' movement. He rejected Marx and Engels' thesis that the state was a body that existed to defend a particular set of property relations, a particular mode of production.<sup>14</sup>

Instead saw the state as a universal, something that stood outside of the economic relations of classes. The programme of Bakunin, as laid out in his *Revolutionary Catechism*, states that he is for the:

"Abolition, dissolution, and moral, political, and economic dismantling of the all-pervasive, regimented, centralised State, the alter ego of the Church, and as such, the permanent cause of the impoverishment, brutalisation, and enslavement of the multitude."<sup>15</sup>

In Bakunin's own words, "The State is nothing else but this domination and exploitation regularised and systematised."<sup>16</sup> For Bakunin it was the state itself that was the root cause of all inequality and exploitation, not class inequality that gave rise to the state. Engels, in a letter Theodore Cuno in 1872, sums up the problems with Bakunin's conception of the state:

"Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism, the chief point of which is in the first place that he does not regard capital, and therefore the class contradiction between capitalists and wage earners which has arisen through social development, as the main evil to be abolished - instead he regards the state as the main evil. While the great mass of the Social Democratic workers hold our view that state power is nothing more than the organisation with which the ruling classes, landlords and capitalists have provided themselves in order to protect their social prerogatives, Bakunin maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by favour of the state. As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state, which must be done away with, and then capitalism will go to hell of itself. We, on the contrary say: do away with capital, the appropriation of the whole means of production in the hands of the few, and the state will fall away of itself. The difference is an essential one. Without a previous social revolution the abolition of the state is nonsense; the abolition of capital is in itself the social revolution and involves a change in the whole method of production. Further, however, as for Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can maintain the existence of any state, whether it be a republic, a monarchy or whatever it may be."<sup>17</sup>

Of course, even Bakunin accepted that after a revolution there would have to be some kind of order to prevent the return of the exploiting class:

"If we accept the fiction of a Free State derived from a social contract, then a discerning, just, prudent people ought not to have any longer any need of government or of State. Such a people can need only to live, leaving a free course to all their instincts: justice and public order will naturally and of their accord proceed from the life of the people, and the State, ceasing to be the providence, guide, educator, and regulator of society, renouncing all its repressive power and falling to the subaltern role which Proudhon assigns it, will no longer be anything else but a simple business office, a sort of central clearing house at the service of society."<sup>18</sup>

In many ways this is not that different from the "semi-state" that Marx and Engels saw replacing a capitalist state after a successful socialist revolution. But there is more than a semantic difference here. Bakunin believed that what Marx sought was to replace the capitalist state with something equally destructive to the liberty of the great mass of people.

## For Marxists seeking to persuade anarchists of the need to struggle for power, the class character of the state is the key stumbling-block

In *Marxism, Freedom and the State* Bakunin sets out an essentially idealist vision of state in general which has no relationship to the real forces in society, is not the reflection of class rule or of capital but is a creature with its own independent existence.

Engels explained that "Bakunin maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by the grace of the state."

It is such a simple argument that Engels presents here - which came first? The state, some amorphous form outside of the real social relations between real people, or the fact that wealth, a surplus, was created and those that controlled this needed a way to defend themselves and their wealth against the majority of the populace.

How can the state create wealth? Bakunin can't answer that question. But it is capital (or at least the ruling class in societies prior to capitalism) that created the state. Therefore, it is only the removal of capital - a change in the mode of production, the expropriation of the capitalists as a class and their replacement by the working class - that can bring about the dissolution of the state.

## The dictatorship of the proletariat

It is no surprise that given his ahistorical and idealist view of the state, Bakunin could not be expected to grasp the specificity of a workers' state. In *Statism and Anarchy* he asks: who will the proletariat rule over? Will it not just create a new working class? Will it exploit the peasantry? Won't it lead to the subjugation of other nations, e.g. the Slavs? How will it not lead to an ossified bureaucracy, an elite of the educated? How can the whole 40 million Germans rule?

Marx answered many of these objections in his notes on the book, *Conspectus*. State power would not and could not lead to the abolition of classes and egalitarianism overnight. But it would mean that, instead of the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy being able to wield the state against the working class, the working class would be able to wield state power against its class enemies. Instead of a long, slow, but necessary guerrilla war, it would be able to wage a general war and speed up its

# Political theory / The state

progress, more rapidly bringing it to a conclusion. Far from subjecting the peasantry to dictatorial exploitation, it would take immediate measures and far more far-reaching measures to improve its condition. In contrast to Bakunin's abolition of the right of inheritance and the Church, which the small-holding peasant would not be able to understand except as an attack on itself,

## **Pacifist anarchism believes that violent overthrow of the state cannot lead to a co-operative, pacific post-state anarchist society since the means taints the end**

the dictatorship of the proletariat would open lines of credit to the small peasant. It would encourage collectivisation, but only at the pace that the small peasantry itself could be prepared to travel. It would attack the exploiting peasantry and capitalist farmers by expropriating their land, but would not expropriate – nor expand – the small farmers' land.

As to its foreign policy, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be internationalist, supporting the democratic and national movements of the Poles, the Irish, for example.

Bakunin's charge that the electoral system itself would remain a sham because those elected would not represent the people but only themselves, leading to a bureaucracy and eventually a new bourgeoisie, was given short shrift by Marx. Under the rule of the bourgeoisie, the electoral system hides the differentiation of the "people" into various classes. But under the dictatorship of the proletariat there would be no need to make such a deceit. It would be an election conducted by people of the same class. The functions carried out by the representatives would lose their political character (i.e. their governmental function) and merely become administrative. Just as in a trade union.

But did not Bakunin foresee the problem of bureaucratisation more clearly? As a description of the dangers of an unaccountable and oppressive caste arising after the revolution, it can seem to presage the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1920s. But he doesn't understand the material roots of such a possibility, he merely puts it down to "human nature". This does not take us forward: social being determines consciousness, not the other way round.

At the heart of this confusion lies the conflation of "authority" and "exploitation". Bakunin thought that exploitation would vanish once the state was smashed, thereby making it virtually impossible to resurrect the state. Marx's dialectical materialism allowed him to see beyond this vulgar – and therefore incomplete – materialism. The conquest of power was a qualitative step towards the abolition of classes and exploitation, but not the same thing.

It enabled the proletariat to take much more general and decisive measures against the exploiting classes, but exploitation would not vanish and equality would not emerge until the material basis was established for such an outcome. There is nothing spontaneous in this development towards a classless and state-less society; it needs a conscious, collectively planned approach to raising productivity, reducing inequality for example. But in adverse conditions, the situation can be reversed or stalled, as happened in the USSR of the 1920s.

## **Pacifist anarchism**

Not all anarchists want to seize power to abolish the state and it could be argued that the fastest growing trend within modern anarchism is that which consciously rejects the idea of "taking power" altogether, and with it the notion of violent destruction of the state. Bakunin is as much an anathema to them as Marx, yet as we see they share with the former the same misconceptions about the semi-state.

The roots of this trend are likewise to be found in the nineteenth century. Both the French anarchist Proudhon and later the Russian aristocrat Leo Tolstoy renounced the violent overthrow of the state, preaching instead the path of civil disobedience. In fact this view was justified by conceptualising the state somewhat differently to Bakunin. If for the latter the state was Satanic, all-powerful, monster raised above society, pressing down upon it, then for the pacifists, the state was not "out there", so much as in the midst of us.

As the Tolstoy-influenced German anarchist Gustav Landauer put it:

"The state is not something that can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently".<sup>19</sup>

This view – essentially a pacifist anarchism – believes that violent overthrow of the state cannot lead to a co-operative, pacific post-state anarchist society since the means taints the end.<sup>20</sup> For Landauer the great error of revolutionary anarchists is "the idea of being able to reach the ideal of powerlessness through power . . . every act of force is dictatorship."<sup>21</sup> Only by "living differently", disengaging from society and thereby delegitimising the institutions of power and repression can the state be overcome.

Half a century earlier the French anarchist Proudhon mapped out what this "behaving differently" could be and its implications for the state. As Alan Gilbert puts it: "Proudhon condemned the general confidence in political action of French radicalism . . . Instead, given the 'sincerity of exchanges', he argued, a new mutualist form of social association would spring up among men, and the superfluous political structures would wither away."<sup>22</sup>

This view is widespread in Latin American social movements and was found among supporters of the Oaxaca Commune in Mexico last year.<sup>23</sup> Whereas Marxist revolutionaries insist the capitalist state must be smashed,



that is replaced by a revolutionary workers' semi-state, which will wither away over time as the socio-economic conditions allow, the pacifist anarchists want to create conditions of co-operative labour that negate the logic of capital-wage labour relations in small communities and allow the state to "wither away" before, or rather instead of, seizing state power.

### How to make the state wither away

John Holloway's book *Change the World Without Taking Power*, is an influential text among some anarchists, as well as summing up much of the thinking behind the Zapatista movement and their supporters worldwide about the nature of the capitalist state.<sup>24</sup>

He says that Marxists "have typically seen the state as being the instrument of the capitalist class. The notion of an 'instrument' implies that the relation between the state and the capitalist class in an external one: like a hammer, the state is wielded by the capitalist class in their own interests, while after the revolution, it will be wielded by the working class in their interests.

"... this view fetishes the state: it abstracts it from the web of power relations in which it is embedded... The mistake of Marxists revolutionary movements... has been to misunderstand the degree of integration of the state into the network of capitalist social relations."<sup>25</sup>

"To criticise the state means in the first place to attack the apparent autonomy of the state, to understand the state is not a thing in itself, but as a social form, a form of social relations."<sup>26</sup> The autonomy of form is an appear-

### ENGELS ON AUTHORITY

## The imposition of will

FOR ANARCHISTS, authority is the antithesis of autonomy, the complete freedom of the individual. But all anarchists agree that the post-state economy will have to take hold of and develop the modern means of production: factories, railways, etc. In this case how can any modern, industrial society be run without the subjection of the individual's will to some sort of social authority, whether that be imposed by the single capitalist or by the democratic will of the workers?

In his pamphlet, *On Authority* (1872) Engels addressed these issues. He starts by exposing the demagogic use of "bad" words that imply "bad" intent:

"Authority, in the sense in which the word is used here, means: the imposition of the will of another upon ours; on the other hand, authority presupposes subordination. Now, since these two words sound bad, and the relationship which they represent is disagreeable to the subordinated party, the question is to ascertain whether there is any way of dispensing with it, whether — given the conditions of present-day society — we could not create another social system, in which this authority would be given no scope any longer, and would

consequently have to disappear."

Engels takes three examples of modern society, the cotton mill, the railway and the steam ship, to show that, even if all political authority were abolished overnight on the morrow, the very means of production and transportation would demand co-operation, exact time-keeping, the precise ordering of processes and so on. If these were not imposed by discipline, the raw cotton would be rendered completely useless, the steam at the mill built up at the wrong time; trains would crash and ships sink.

He draws the conclusion that, "wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel".

Yet such a return is itself completely utopian because "the material conditions of production and circulation inevitably develop with large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture, and increasingly tend to enlarge the scope of this authority. Hence it is absurd to speak of the principle of authority as being absolutely evil, and of the principle of autonomy as being absolutely good. Authority and autonomy are relative things

whose spheres vary with the various phases of the development of society."

Engels brushes aside the objections of some autonomists that certain decisions regarding social production can be made by "commissions", saying that this is tantamount to simply changing names.

Similarly, for anarchists (or libertarians in general) to accept decisions taken by meetings, so long as they are attained using the consensus model, or on the condition that political parties are not operating and all participants are acting as individuals, is pure chicanery.

It raises several questions. Are those unable to attend the meeting or to stay until its conclusion still bound by its decisions? Are people still bound by the conclusions of a meeting if later on they change their minds, conditions change or new facts come to light?

In fact, political parties are the natural product of a society dividing into opposing classes. When the positions of these classes, or fractions of classes, become so antagonistic they can encompass a wide range of social issues. When this happens the operation of parties within society clarifies the rational and objective views of individuals, rather than obscure and distort them.

# Political theory / The state

ance, but there are no absolute separations. The task is to "dissolve the categories of thought, to dissolve these forms."

Holloway argues the state in capitalist society is historically unique especially in its most bourgeois democratic garb because it appears raised above society, independent of classes, not a purely functional and immediate tool of the economically dominant class, as in previous class societies.

The spheres of the economic and the political thus seem separate: economic exploitation is carried out on the basis of the operation of the free market between consenting commodity owners (workers and capitalists), which (most of the time) does not require the daily use of force in the workplace to get surplus value extracted.

Politics is carried out elsewhere in other institutions,

not connected with the sphere of work and the labour process.

Yet it is a capitalist state in content since it functions to reproduce capitalist social relations, especially the right of the capitalist to use the labour power they have bought as s/he sees fit.

Holloway wishes to dissolve this state autonomy, but only by criticism, by thought, by not playing the game of the division between the political and economic spheres, by saying 'No'. If the left seek to conquer political power then we are "buying into" their game, accepting the seeming autonomy of the state and of politics as separate spheres, when what we should be doing is engaging in "anti-politics, by ordering our lives differently at work, at home and in the community in a way that contests the logic of profit-making."

## REPRESENTATION AND SELF-DETERMINATION

### Does the revolution need leaders?

THE RANK hypocrisy and manipulation of the people by "hidden leaders" as advocated by Bakunin is rejected by today's "horizontalists". For them people spontaneously resist and rebel against capitalism and within this everyone and no one is a leader. The very idea of some one acting "on behalf of" someone else is rejected in principle. John Holloway explains why:

"Representation involves definition, exclusion, separation." (p229) "Representation separates representatives from represented, leaders from led and imposes hierarchical structures"

"The rejection of representation also means the rejection of leadership or verticality. The assumption of responsibility implies a drive towards horizontality in organisational forms." (p230)

Yet straight away he concedes that apparently leaderless decision-making may not be perfect since it may serve as a cover for "the informal taking of collective decisions by a small group". Direct democracy does have its problems; it is impractical for large assemblies, he says. But

even in small communities some people are "unable or do not wish to participate actively". These problems are "inevitable".

Hence having insisted on non-hierarchical organisation as a principle, he concedes the existence of "a 'vanguard' probably cannot be avoided"! (p230) He accepts that "where decisions have to be taken that go beyond the scope of a particular assembly, then the classic response of direct or council democracy is not representation but delegation, the insistence that the delegate must be immediately responsible to those that have chosen her as their delegate in this matter" (p231)

But in order to prevent the dangers of institutionalisation, the whole process must be fluid and improvised: "There can be no organisational model, no rules."

All is confusion here. The experience of the anticapitalist movement in last seven years has alerted many to the fact that the horizontalists' methods of "consensus" decision-making are often a fraud; there is often no genuine consensus and decisions are arrived at by weariness, adroit steering of a meeting towards a

desired conclusion. The refusal to openly reveal shades of opinion and the support they command by voting, thwarts clarity and genuine dialogue.

But Holloway poses delegation as something opposed to representation when in fact it is a form of representation. Horror of horrors, delegates take your views and represent them to someone else on your behalf. Does this negate self-determination? Not at all. If a person voluntarily chooses to delegate then they are engaged in self-determination. This issue is one of control. It can be done either through imperative mandates, or better, through report back and recall. Why is this better? Mandates are generally best used when one needs to control an essentially bureaucratic leadership, as in a trade union.

But in a living democratic movement the delegates can be allowed to listen and change their mind and then seek to justify this and have their credentials confirmed or revoked as a result.

This is exactly how the Paris Commune operated in its brief existence and Marx and Engels saw in this the outline structures of the semi-state. Holloway's objection to the systematisation of the process of representative leadership, his aversion to "rules" makes genuine accountability impossible and once again opens up the system to abuse by cliques or charismatic leaders.



But this is idealist; the division, the real not fictional autonomy of the capitalists' state cannot be dissolved in thought or by refusing to accept its legitimacy. That is not nearly enough. The state is a material thing, made up of real prisons, armies, spies and police. Its power lies not only in its ideological strength but in its physical force as well. It has to be broken up in practice, by class struggle, by action that destroys its material power. It must be physically as well as ideologically smashed. This is what the socialist revolution aims to achieve by replacing the bourgeois state with the working class semi-state. The working class semi-state is at one and the same time the continuation of the class state but also a working class tool for breaking up exploitation and for the dissolution of the class state. The commune-type state is based on complete democracy, accountability, recallability, armed militia subordinated to the commune.

But Holloway rejects this: "The notion of a soviet state or a 'state of the Commune-type' is an abomination."<sup>27</sup> Again, "the term 'working-class state' is nonsensical" because "the state is a specific form of relations developed historically for the purpose of administering on behalf of, that is excluding."<sup>28</sup> Hence for him, the seizure of power by the working class in October 1917 in Russia "was the defeat of the soviets because soviets expressed the movement towards self-determination while the state by definition excludes it."

Better for Holloway, to have left power in the hands of the capitalist/landlord Provisional Government. How paradoxical that Holloway's opposition to the seizure of soviet power would have put in direct opposition to bulk of Russian anarchists at the time, who overwhelmingly and enthusiastically supported and assisted the insurrection in October 1917.

Holloway does not understand the nature of the semi-state, i.e. the state of the Commune type. In October 1917 the Congress of Soviets achieved sovereignty instead of just contesting it and thereby broke the power of the capitalist state – in Holloway's language, the soviets achieved self-determination by removing the capitalist/landlord block on it. This Commune-type state does not act on behalf of the working class; rather it is the working class organised as the ruling class, with fully democratic and accountable participants.

By contrast Holloway just wants soviets to stay as a partial, limited, contested expression of self-determination; with their power circumscribed by the existence of the very state that Holloway so violently opposes (in words at least.) He wants the soviets to think but not to act. The peace treaty, the ending of the First World War, the nationalisation of land to the peasants, the separation of church and state, free education, the overthrow of the monarchy, workers' control of production, a woman's right to choose, the eight-hour day, self-determination for nations, all came after the soviet seizure of power, not before it.

In Marxist terms he wants a condition of dual power in perpetuity, without its resolution. Yet all history shows this to be impossible; dual power did not survive in Italy in 1920, Germany in 1918-19, not in Spain in 1936-37; not even in truncated form in Argentina 2001. Either go

forward or be crushed is the lesson of history. Nor could genuine soviets survive the rise of a Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR in the 1920s. The latter saw rightly in soviets its negation; that is why they were crushed and the putative semi-state buried underneath a monstrously enlarged state, in form no different to the capitalist state.

At one point in his argument with Marxist revolutionaries, Holloway fears he may be guilty of "crude misrep-

## **The state is a material thing, made up of real prisons, armies, spies and police. Its power lies not only in its ideological strength but in its physical force as well**

resentation" he says for the objective of a genuine revolutionary Marxist is not the "winning of state power . . . just one element in a broader process of social transformation?"<sup>29</sup>

After all, "Lenin spoke not only just of conquering state power but of smashing the old state and replacing it with a workers' state . . ." But no, "the fact remains that the capturing of the state has generally been seen as a particularly important element, a focal point in the process of social change . . ." <sup>30</sup> The problem with this, he says, is that conquering the state focuses the energy of everyone on this narrow task – "first build the army and the party and get rid of the state power that oppresses."

But in this process, "everyone learns the language, logic and calculations of power". We become blind to the myriad of social struggles which are filtered out: "The impoverishment of struggle . . . is inherent in the idea that the goal of the movement is to conquer political power."<sup>31</sup>

But this is a total misconception of what the revolutionary process entails. For Marxists, the process of "smashing the state" is a part of a revolution in society; it is not a putsch of a conspiratorial minority like Bakunin or Blanqui worked for. It can only come about at a certain ripe moment in the unfolding revolution. It is impossible to conceptualise this apart from and outside of mass strikes, factory occupations, soviet-type organisations debating and contesting authority.

So it is not a question of first "focus on capturing the state and then we will turn to transforming civil society" as Holloway puts it. Civil society is turned upside down by the social revolution- utterly transformed – before the insurrection. It prepares and makes possible the "moment" of destroying the capitalists' state power of repression. To conceive of first conquering the state and then moving onto the social transformation is to conceive of a putsch not a revolution. Holloway asks:

"What is the alternative to struggling for control of the state? There is an alternative to the state. Indeed. The state is simply the movement of suppressing that alternative. The alternative is the drive towards social-determination."<sup>32</sup>

# Political theory / The state

But since for Holloway social self-determination does not and cannot exist in a capitalist society "what remains is the drive towards self-determination. This begins with the refusal of determination by others: 'No we will not do as we are told'".

However, this "No" is not enough. Something positive must be posited against this: "It is necessary to move beyond now, in the sense of creating a different logic, a different way of talking, a different organisation of doing. The drive towards self-determination cannot be understood in terms of 'first we destroy capitalism, then we create a self-determining society'." <sup>33</sup>

## "A movement against and beyond" or transitional politics?

Holloway argues that "Traditional revolutionary theory, assumes that the 'against' must come before the 'beyond': first we struggle against capitalism, then we go beyond it and enjoy the promised land." <sup>34</sup>

But what is this "traditional" revolutionary theory? Certainly, insurrectionary anarchism can be seen as making this assumption. Also the Marxism of the Second International in the 19th century argued roughly that it was essential to: "build, large trade unions now, increase our electoral representation now and sometime in the future we will arrive at socialism."

There was no bridge, no way of relating the one to the other – the daily preoccupations with the ultimate goal. Later, Stalinism adapted this brick wall approach to politics by insisting that the struggle for revolution and socialism had to be disconnected (forcibly, violently if necessary!) from the struggle for (bourgeois) democracy in the here and now.

But one "traditional" revolutionary theorist – Leon Trotsky – explicitly rejected this "stage-ist" approach to strategy. Long before Holloway (re)discovered "self-determination as a process" Trotsky centred his whole strategy on the fight for workers' control over day-to-day living and working, to wresting bit by bit, decision-making of what matters: how to work, who shall be employed and dismissed, what should we be paid; even what shall we produce. And not just at work.

Holloway points out that there can be no successful achievement of self-determination in capitalism, only a process. But Trotsky too argued long ago that every act of self-determination (what he called a "transitional demand") may be partially conquered, but immediately comes under challenge from the state and/or employers. In turn this presupposes going forward or else see the gain overthrown, incorporated in a non-challenging manner – that is bureaucratised.

It is a revolutionary process. But for Trotsky of course, it's a collective, class project, not merely the choice of atomised individuals, and it must be located at work in the labour process first and foremost, as well as in the communities and homes. Every step to monitor prices, to organise against landlords is a community project is an act of self-determination.

But our difference with Holloway's anarcho-commu-

nism is also this: that the path of self-determination is regularly signposted: "The State lies ahead". It is the organising centre of all the forces of reaction that are opposed to self-determination, hindering our progress along the way. But it will not cease to do so until we have broken it up, disabled it. This much at least Bakunin understood; maybe because he spent enough time in the state's prison not to underestimate this fact.

At one point Holloway concedes the inevitability of capitalist state violence and the need to counteract it: "We can develop all the self-determining projects we like, but once they become annoying (not even threatening) for the ruling class, they send in the police and the army and that's the end . . . So what's your answer to that, Professor?" <sup>35</sup>

He replies to his own sardonic question, "I have no answer". He says, though, that organising a military response to the state makes no sense since "it would be very unlikely to win against the might of military technology" and a revolutionary army would reproduce a military hierarchy and this negates self-determination.

Once again, he sees only putschism where he should see revolution. A revolutionary insurrection can only succeed because it has already broken the will of the state to deploy armed power through armed self-defence and the break up of command of the armed forces. As for reproducing hierarchies in the revolutionary army, the trait that marks out the revolutionary army from the bourgeois one is that it breaks this enforced hierarchy of officer command with control and election of officers.

Having raised but not answered the question of what do we do when they come for us with their guns, Holloway reverts back to his utopian reveries. For Holloway there is no such "goal", no single aim to the process; the process is all:

"Communism is a moving outwards, an unrest of life, an overflowing . . . of barriers, an overcoming of identities, an irrepressible project of creating humanity. . . This flow cannot be programmed, it has no precise aims, it follows rather a utopian star . . . Rebellion cannot rest contented, but drives outwards and onwards towards revolution, the total transformation of human doing which is the only real basis of social determination." <sup>36</sup>

Here "communism" is defined in such a way as to empty of it any real meaning. Communism is the highest stage of socialism, when we pass from a society governed by the motto "each according to their abilities" to one in which we live by the guiding star, "each according to their need". But this stage of human history presupposes an abundance of material goods and services upon which bases the total transformation of human doing is possible and with it the genuine possibility of separating out what once does from what one is.

For Holloway, communism is the ever challenging present. But how can we transcend the distorting, disfiguring character of poverty and violence in this situation? Real individualism can only flourish when everyone's needs are being catered for. What Holloway is pointing to, at best, is the comradeship and solidarity of struggle for another world.

## A necessary evil

Proudhon famously said when asked what should replace the state after the revolution, "Nothing" and at a time when the seizure of power by the working class seems so far off, it may appear as if the differences between anarchists and Marxists over the final goal of revolutionary strategy should be put to one side, to be resolved at some time in the future.

After all as Lenin noted, "We do not at all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the

state as the aim."<sup>37</sup> Both anarchists and Marxists want to abolish capitalism and with it the capitalist state and state oppression. But as our references to John Holloway have shown, the final goal, how we will abolish capitalist society is intimately related to what we do today. Trotskyists struggle to fight for revolutionary politics within the working class movement because we do not believe that capitalism can be reformed from within.

And to get rid of capitalism, alongside Lenin we say, "we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters."<sup>38</sup>

### ENDNOTES

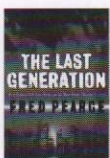
1. Quoted in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the impossible, A history of anarchism*, Fontana, 1993, p20
2. The hallmarks of People's Global Action (the libertarian International inspired by the Zapatistas, and containing Reclaim the Streets and the Disobedienti) as well as the World Social Forum's Porto Alegre Principles are both examples of this fundamentally anti-democratic form of decision making. See "Anticapitalism: summit sieges and social forums" pp13-17, *Workers Power* 2005, p28 for a more detailed analysis.
3. Anarchists, however, see it as a strength that they have no "founding fathers" and that their theories have been developed over time by a wide range of thinkers and thus gets nearer to a grasp of contemporary realities. But the cost of this is often eclecticism in ideas.
4. W Godwin, "Enquiries into the nature of social justice", in the *Anarchist writings of William Godwin*, Freedom Press, 1986
5. Proudhon was living in France during the 1830s and 1840s surrounded by artisans rather than industrial workers and thus tended to promote local small-scale co-ops, as that was the form that would be most appropriate for them.
6. A range of other, secondary issues have divided the 19th and 20th century anarchists, from the attitude to participation in national or local electoral politics, whether it is legitimate to recognise the political authority of some or any leaders in the movement, support for women's rights and education reforms, amongst a few.
7. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Bloc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Bloc) for a useful account of the origin of the black bloc out of the German autonomes movement and more recently the 1990s US anarchist movement Love and Rage.
8. Peter Marshall, *op cit*, pxiii
9. *Ibid*, p3
10. *Ibid*, p324
11. V I Lenin, "State and Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol 25, p480.
12. Frederick Engels, *On Authority*, 1872. *Marx-Engels Reader*, W. W. Norton and Co., second edition, 1978, pp730-733
13. K Marx and F Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *Selected Works Volume 1*, Progress Publishers, 1969, p126, or <http://marx.eserver.org/1848-communist-manifesto/cm2.txt>
14. Later anarchist writers, such as Kropotkin, did accept much of Marx and Engels' explanation of the historical origins of the state as lying in the emergence of private property and conflicting classes. Kropotkin, however, is caught in another contradiction as a result. He suggests that pre-state human relations were essentially harmonious and with the abolition of the state human relations will revert back to this essential condition. But in this case how to explain the development of private property and antagonistic classes which calls forth the need for the state?
15. Michael Bakunin, *Revolutionary Catechism*, 1866: [http://dward-mac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/bakunin/catechism.html](http://dward-mac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bakunin/catechism.html)

16. Michael Bakunin, *Marxism, Freedom and the State*, Chapter III: The State and Marxism - <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/mf-state/ch03.htm>
17. F Engels, *Letter to Theodore Cuno*, 1872, published on [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)
18. *Ibid*
19. Gustav Landauer, quoted in Martin Buber, *Paths to Utopia*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949
20. It is in reality a kind of reformism, not one that depends upon using and transforming the institutions of government, going through the state, but one which seeks to reach the goal of collective, non-capitalist society by going around the state.
21. G Landauer, *ibid*, p5. This is diametrically opposed to Bakunin's take: In *Die Reaktion in Deutschland* he describes how "... there can be no revolution without passionate destruction which is fruitful and salvatory, because ... through it alone new worlds arise." "... poison, the knife, the rope and so on! The revolution sanctifies all means."
22. Alan Gilbert, *Marx's Politics: Communists and Citizens*, Martin Robertson, 1982, p86
23. See *A revolution with an absolute minimal of violence*, by George Salzmann, [http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman\\_g/Strate/2006-10-13.htm](http://site.www.umb.edu/faculty/salzman_g/Strate/2006-10-13.htm)
24. J Holloway, *Change the world without taking power; the meaning of revolution today*, Pluto Press, 2nd edition, 2005
25. *Ibid*, pp13-14
26. *Ibid*, p92
27. *Ibid*, p232
28. *Ibid*, p233-34
29. *Ibid*, p15
30. *Ibid*
31. *Ibid*, p17
32. *Ibid*, p217-18
33. *Ibid*, p217-218
34. *Ibid*, p215
35. *Ibid*, p23
36. *Ibid*, p219. Later he says: "We do not start from an aim and deduce from that aim the path we must follow to reach that aim ..." Yet, he insists that the movement must always be "forward" in this walk in the dark, but how do we know what is forward and what is backward without a reference point, a destination? So within two lines of having dismissed the idea of a goal he reintroduces it - but in an idealist form. He admits that this path is in fact "guided by the utopian star of our own projections" (p221). So we have a choice between being guided by science (the collective, sifted conclusions based on experience), or dreams and hopes.
37. V I Lenin, *op cit*, p441
38. *Ibid*

# Messages from a warming planet

*Last year was the warmest on record in the UK and the year before, 2005, was the hottest on the planet.*

*Clare Heath and Pete Ashley take the temperature of the global warming debate; who or what is to blame and what can be done?*



**The last generation; How nature will take her revenge for manmade climate change**  
Fred Pearce / Eden Project Books / 2006 / £12.99

**Heat - How to stop the planet burning**  
George Monbiot / Allen Lane / 2006 / £ 17.99

**Socialist Register: Coming to terms with nature**  
Edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys / 2007 / £15



IF YOU are under thirty and of a nervous disposition look away now. The catalogue of imminent disasters lining up to engulf you before your retire are pretty awesome: melting permafrost, disappearing forests, acid seas, burning peat, submerged plains and even a mega-fart of methane escaping from beneath the ocean floors.

These processes, all part of the changing global climatic system, will lead to social devastation, as coastal communities and then whole continents, succumb to the effects of global warming.

Last year, awareness of the problem moved up a notch. In the UK some of the most ardent climate change-deniers, such as the *Sun* newspaper and *The Economist* business magazine, finally accepted the evidence that the climate is changing and that this could have enormous effects on humanity. The recently published Stern Report commissioned by the Blair government, on the economic

effects of global warming, is another important example of capitalism recognizing the dangers, if not providing the solutions.

Aside from a shrinking band of climate change deniers most scientists and governments accept the evidence of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the leading research organisation in the field, which shows the necessity of stopping global average temperatures from rising to more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This means no more than 1.4°C above the current point. Why?

Because a global rise of 1.5°C would mean an extra 400 million people being exposed to water shortage and the loss of 18% of the species on the planet. If emissions are not greatly reduced, temperatures are likely to reach that point in about 2030.

A clutch of recent books and essays outline the scale and urgency of the problem and what needs to be done now to prevent the impending catastrophe.

The vision in Fred Pearce's book is pretty apocalyptic, as are many of the predictions. But the main content of the book is a popular explanation of the science behind climate change and its knock-on effects.

It helps you understand why the people of South Pacific islands like Tavalu have to move en-masse to New Zea-

land as their country disappears under the rising seas; why the Larsen B shelf of floating ice, probably in place for 12,000 years and larger than Luxembourg, suddenly detached from Antarctica and shattered!

Pearce, an experienced journalist from *New Scientist*, who has worked on environmental and climate issues for nearly two decades, outlines a series of linked processes that will occur through the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases.

Near Svalbard in the Arctic, there is "a giant whirlpool in the ocean, ten kilometres in diameter, constantly circling anti-clockwise and siphoning water from the surface to the sea bed three kilometres below." A series of such "chimneys" is thought to be the starting point of the ocean circulation; water sucked down in the arctic then gradually moves along the ocean bed southwards, eventually resurfacing to join the Gulf Stream.

Apparently there used to be as many as a dozen chimneys, but the shrinking of the Arctic ice is making them disappear. Now there is only one left. No one fully knows the implications of this observation, but scientists speculate that this could herald a sudden climatic change as the ocean conveyor is reversed.

Another, even greater, threat lies beneath the vast tracts of Siberia. "There beneath a largely uninhabited wasteland of permafrost, lies what might reasonably be described as nature's own doomsday device. It is primed to be triggered not by a nuclear bomb but by global warming. That device consists of thick layers of frozen peat containing tens of billions of tonnes of carbon." This bog is beginning to thaw, and as it does it releases this carbon in the form of methane. Pearce describes two recent visits to Siberia, a few years apart. Over that short time he saw thousands of kilometres of permafrost that appeared to have dissolved into a mass of lakes. He suggests:

"If the methane (contained in the permafrost, about 450 billion tonnes) all came out at once it could raise temperatures world-wide by tens of degrees. That might be an unlikely scenario. Even so, the odds must be that melting along the zero isotherm is destined to have a major impact on twenty-first century climate." (p117)

Pearce argues that the gradual climate change included in the predictions of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) is less likely than a more abrupt set of changes, resulting from the reaching of key tipping points. He is not alone in this outlook. He quotes Jim Hansen, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York, and George Bush's top climate modeller. In 2005 Hansen addressed the American Geophysical Union, saying, "We are on the precipice of climate system tipping points beyond which there is no redemption"(15)

Marxists should not be surprised by these predictions. Scientific enquiry is inherently materialist, and research on climate change reported in this book demonstrates the dialectic at work. Dialectics embodies the law of the transformation of quantity into quality (and vice versa), exemplified by the "tipping points" that are repeatedly referred to in the climate change literature.

The process of change, including warming itself, does not occur as an endless slow progression of incremental

increases, but is likely to lead to sudden qualitative, and in this case catastrophic, changes.

This dialectic can only be understood through a detailed investigation of the interactions of the forces at play to unveil the key relationships that will lead to sudden transformations. Environmental scientists use ecological methods – ecology being the study of the relationships between all living organisms (including humans) and the environment, especially the totality or pattern of interactions.

To understand these interactions, scientists study feed-

## Scientific enquiry is inherently materialist, and research on climate change reported in this book demonstrates the dialectic at work

back mechanisms that underpin that balance. Feedback mechanisms can be negative, where they restore balance and maintain stability, or positive where they lead to escalating change.

One example of positive feedback described by Pearce is the ice-albedo effect (albedo is a measure of the reflectivity of the earth's surface). Global warming leads to ice melting; this in turn means the ice is replaced by a darker surface of ocean or land which reflects less light; with less reflection the land or sea absorbs more heat, thereby amplifying the warming – a positive feedback mechanism that will lead to escalating warming.

It could also happen in reverse, with cooling leading to more ice, more reflection and further cooling. It is not difficult to see why a number of these positive loops can act together leading to accelerating change. The relative balance of positive and negative feedback mechanisms underlies the uncertainty of predictions about climate change. Most models assume that feedback will amplify warming, but Pearce accepts that other scientists think that feedback cycles will moderate change.

But you have to look elsewhere than Pearce if you want to know what exactly is responsible for the impending catastrophe. Most ecologists would subscribe broadly to the notion that excessive "industrialism" and western consumerism is at the root of the problem. But this inexact and misleading diagnosis abstracts from the specific social relations of production from which fossil fuel energy dependence emerged and predominated, it fails to locate the class interests that defend this form of energy dependence and obstruct alternatives from emerging.

The 2007 issue of *Socialist Register*, Coming to terms with nature, helps fill this gap. In an essay on "fossil capitalism" Elmar Altvatar argues that "at the centre of the analysis of capitalism's relation to nature is its inherent and unavoidable dependence on fossil fuels, and particularly on oil." (p39)

He explains how fossil fuel energy fitted industrial capi-

talism's needs well in the 19th century. The advantage of fossil fuels is that only a small amount of energy needs to be used to extract the greater amount of energy locked up inside. The exploitation of fossil fuels also allowed the location of manufacturing to be decoupled from the source of local energy as transport was reasonably simple. Unlike solar energy fossil energy could be used 24/7 with constant intensity and allowed production to take place as the needs of accumulation require.

But the success of this energy regime is contradictory. In the first place emissions are harmful and secondly fossil fuel resources are finite; as Altvater says: "The price of the advantages of the fossil energy regime is ecological destruction and the necessity of finding a solution to the limits of fossils energy's availability." (p45)

Of all fossil fuels, oil has had the biggest impact and its depletion poses the greatest threat to capitalist accumulation. Until the beginning of the 1980s global oil discoveries were larger than oil consumption. Since then reserves have shrunk.

Oil production has either peaked or is about to in the next decade. Up to 2004 accumulated global oil consumption was about 944 billion barrels; but the consumption of the rest (approximately the same amount) will be a lot quicker because of rising demand, the probability that "proven" reserves are smaller than stated by the oil companies and OPEC, who have a financial interest in inflating the figures and as the exploitation of marginal reserves becomes more expensive not all reserves may be exploited for commercial reasons.

Capitalism's continued addiction to fossil fuels while supplies dwindle ensures that the ecological crisis overlaps and reinforces a social and political crisis.

As the availability falls and as costs and demand rises the great oil consuming nations of the global north and

China, India etc press more urgently to do whatever is necessary to secure supplies; and when these are locked below the land or sea of nations in the global south then diplomatic and financial pressure is brought to bear on them by the imperialist nations in the interest of "oil security". And if this does not work, as in Iraq, then invasion and occupation become an option. Since by 2010 the OPEC Middle East countries will account for more than 50% of output this region is set to remain a powder keg of oppression, military adventure and anti-imperialist resistance.

## Can capitalism prevail?

In a further contribution in *Socialist Register 2007*, Daniel Buck asks whether, faced with the ecological crisis, capitalism can prevail? He draws attention to the adaptability of capitalism over two centuries and suggests there are ways that "capitalism can accumulate itself out of, or through an ecological crisis." (p66) He points to the possibility of declining fossil fuel reserves prompting new waves of research and development, and innovation that establish new technological and production frameworks, based on new energy sources.

While this cannot be discounted as a possibility it is more likely that capitalist survival of the ecological crisis, riven as it is by inter-state and inter-class rivalry, would take the form of a social regression (that is, an approach towards barbarism). Resource-rich, militarised powers would seek to offset the effects of climate change for as long as possible by adopting ever more authoritarian strategies. Whole countries, regions and continents would become "gated communities" in which the orgy of consumption would continue while the rest live with

## AVIATION

# Flying into trouble

AVIATION IS the fastest growing source of CO<sub>2</sub> in the UK, having increased by 70% since 1990. Although flights now account for only 3% of emissions this is set to double by 2030 as UK air passenger flights are predicted to double from their present level of 228 million passengers in the next 25 years – the equivalent of another Heathrow every five years!

But it gets worse because due to complex chemical reactions at high altitudes aircraft emissions make flying the most highly polluting form of transport in the world.

Yet the UK government is

committed to reducing carbon emissions by 60% by 2050, recently announcing a Climate Change Bill in Parliament. How is this reconciled with the announcement of transport secretary Douglas Alexander in December 2006 that the government was going to allow airports to expand as they wish? It isn't.

The scope for aviation fuel efficiency savings are negligible so what can be done? Monbiot insists, "If you fly you destroy other people's lives" but higher sales taxes on flights hit working class people harder while business

absorbs the costs and adds to prices, hitting us twice.

The Department of Transport argues that the aviation industry "should pay the external costs its activities impose on society as a whole", but it doesn't explain how.

The answer must involve a moratorium on further airport expansion alongside a massive investment in rail transport, paid for out of taxes on airlines and businesses.

Business flights must be penalised and the use of air-freight for the transport of perishable luxury goods halted. If workers choose to take greener methods of transport for holidays then they should be given longer holidays to compensate for longer journey times.

the effects of rising temperatures and seas, and barren tracts of land.

Even Buck recognises that for the more benign version of capitalist adaptation to occur, the state would have to act (under mass pressure from below) from as the "general capitalist" and cajole and force individual sectors to act radically in the next decade or so to curtail carbon emissions.

For while the bourgeoisie in abstraction needs to protect the environment, individual capitalists are driven by competition to cut costs and this generally means despoiling the environment both in the immediate sense of local pollution, but also in the longer term – they have little interest in reducing energy use if to do so is a drain on profits.

In some situations the capitalist state can act on or even against, individual capitalists in order to protect the longer term interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole. The classic example of this is the role of the state in the Factory Acts as described by Marx – individual capitalists are fully capable of destroying the very source of their profits, namely the working class, in the pursuit of short-term competitive advantage.

The state, under pressure from the working class, moved in to limit the exploitation of workers by restricting the length of the working day and the employment of children. The impetus to introduce such changes came both from the working class and from sections of capital who would gain a competitive advantage from investing in technologies that increased productivity. Current attempts to address global warming through international agreements such as Kyoto, "green taxes" or through technological approaches (energy saving light-bulbs, renewable energy sources) should be analysed in the same way – they are promoted by more enlightened sections of the bourgeoisie, under pressure from workers and environmentalists, who can see that long term accumulation is threatened by their actions. This is the approach of the *Stern Report*.

But it is utopian to think that the bourgeoisie as a whole, internationally, will set aside their conflicting national interests, suddenly see the light and agree to measures that restrict profits now, in the name of saving future generations or even future accumulation. Unlike 19th century Britain, the regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions sufficiently have to operate globally.

### An action plan

The debates about whether global warming was happening and then about the relative contribution of human activity to this warming, have receded as almost all scientists and even politicians, accept that the world is getting warmer, increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels are at least partly responsible and that human activity is producing a huge amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases.

The capping and reduction of carbon emissions is then the most immediate task. Of these, methane seems to pose the most pressing problem. Pearce argues that we need to tackle methane emissions in the short term as these

have a more rapid initial effect (methane is 10-20 times more damaging than CO<sub>2</sub> but its effects are relatively short lived), while CO<sub>2</sub> is problematic as it lasts much longer. Experts such as Hansen agree that it is vital to reduce methane emissions and quickly too, to gain time. He also argues for reducing soot, much of which is created by fires used for cooking in Asia and Africa. Soot has a local cooling effect but a much wider warming effect and acts in the very short term.

In his book, *Heat*, George Monbiot argues that in the relatively rich, industrialised countries CO<sub>2</sub> emissions need to be cut by about 90% by 2030, including 83% for France, 87% for the UK, and 94% for the USA, Canada and Australia. By contrast, the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the only international agreement on climate change in existence, commits it's signatories to cut their carbon emissions by a mere 5.2% by 2012.

Any cuts in carbon emissions will have to be the result of combining and expanding several existing technological advances: more efficient use of energy, a switch to low-carbon and carbon-free fuels (renewables), capturing and storing/recycling some of the emissions that cannot be prevented, and finding new methods of storing energy from renewable sources such as sun and wind.

Here we immediately hit a controversy. Pearce [see panel below] and other eminent ecologists, such as James Lovelock, believe the urgency of the problem of climate change and the time lag involved to get renewable energy resources up and running on the scale required, dictate that any action programme has to include an expansion of nuclear power.

But Monbiot and Altwater are trenchantly opposed to the expansion of nuclear power on three grounds. First, that nuclear plant building and uranium mining are big

## Pearce's programme for action

Pearce's book describes progress in some of these areas and then moves onto outline a brief "action programme" to cut emissions by 25 billion tonnes over 50 years.

- › Universally adopt efficient lighting and electrical appliances in homes and offices
- › Double the energy efficiency of two billion cars
- › Build compact urban areas served by efficient public transport, halving future car use
- › Effect a fifty-fold worldwide expansion in bio-fuels for vehicles
- › Embark on a global programme of insulating buildings
- › Cover an area the size of New Jersey with solar panels
- › Quadruple current electricity production from natural gas by converting coal-fired power stations
- › Capture and store carbon dioxide from 1,600 giga-watts of natural gas power plants
- › Halt global deforestation and plan an area of land the size of India with new forests
- › Double nuclear power capacity
- › Increase tenfold the global use of low-tillage farming methods to increase soil storage of carbon

# Review / Climate change

CO<sub>2</sub> emitters; secondly, that uranium will run out within four decades; and thirdly, that there is no safe method available to store nuclear waste.

Either way at present investment in nuclear power dwarfs that of renewables. In *Socialist Register* Harriss-White and Harriss point out that the UK government has invested a mere £3.6m into research on renewable energy between 1994-2004, "a sum completely swamped by its investments in oil infrastructure and other fossil fuel projects." (p79), while "State economic support for renewable energy is generously estimated as having been the equivalent of 2.5% of the subsidy for the nuclear industry's processing costs alone." (ibid)

## It is utopian to expect each individual capitalist enterprise to consider the long-term impact on the environment of their energy consumption and emissions

These books all contain detailed prescriptions and arguments to prove that the expansion of renewable energy to meet the challenge of climate change is technically feasible and socially urgent but that such solutions face enormous political obstacles, as business lobbyists and bought-and-paid-for governments talk the talk on climate change but refuse to walk the walk.

Pearce tends to imply, for want of anything else, that a few well-argued briefings may see Gordon Brown become rational, adopt an action programme and fight for its implementation across the globe. Some hope. Brown, as he so frequently reminds us, will rule for business and business cares about profits not climate change. The UK government has refused to set annual targets for reducing carbon emissions; the oil companies funded scientists for years to challenge the need to cut carbon emissions and the Bush administration refuses even the most limited action of the Kyoto protocol to protect the interests of the "the America People" or more accurately the SUV-driving republicans voters and oil multinational donors.

Unfortunately for Pearce, Monbiot and the rest, the

people in power across the globe are irrational when it comes to the environment. They are interested in profits - not rationality. They are there to defend a system which is inherently wasteful and destructive - capitalism.

If as a result of its unfettered expansion, capitalism destroys the environment, then that may well be counterproductive for some sections of the capitalist class but capitalism is not a planned system with a central command that addresses such consequences. By its very nature it is made up of a series of competing businesses and states, each trying to maximise profits.

It is utopian to expect each individual capitalist enterprise to consider the long-term impact on the environment of their energy consumption and emissions. A few companies are trying to exploit the growing market in renewable energy, energy saving devices and insulation but most are impervious to long term environmental needs. They have no choice - to care about the environment may well mean they would go bust.

This is where the reform agendas of excellent commentators like Pearce and Monbiot fall down. They do not tackle the underlying cause of global warming - the drive to accumulation inherent in a capitalist economy and they do not recognise the need for centralised planning to achieve the major shifts required. Take an obvious and elementary idea of Pearce's to: "embark on a global programme of insulating buildings", how is this to happen?

More than half the globe lives in such poverty that to talk of double glazing hardly seems relevant but even within Europe the insulation of all buildings would mean a massive amount of investment in old buildings and stringent controls on new buildings. Who will enforce it, pay for it and make it happen? The capitalists won't. Over the past two decades there has been a shift to deregulation of businesses and towards lower taxation and devolution of powers. Companies will resist expensive directives to change and certainly will not voluntarily do so within the relatively short time span required. Only the working class can force them to act against their fundamental profit driven interests.

Action is urgent. Carbon emissions need to be cut now and continuously. A programme for implementation after capitalism has been overthrown in one or more major centres is not sufficient. But neither can it rely on the workers and the poor of the world limiting their own consumption in order to save the planet. The workers and the poor generally don't consume that much and what they do consume they can't afford to give up. Cuts through working class self-abnegation will be marginal when compared with the scale of the problem and unjust when compared with the wealth of the bosses.

Instead we should tax the rich and use the revenues to invest in renewables, to protect the rainforest from further annihilation, the destruction of which accounts for 25% of emissions alone and halt the wasteful gluttony of the super rich elite, the top 1% richest people own 40 times the wealth of the bottom 50%. Business should be forced to cut unnecessary travel before working class give up their foreign holidays. Unions should demand that workers get longer holidays to compensate

### GLOSSARY

**Greenhouse gases:** The gases that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere. The main ones are CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and water vapour.

**Greenhouse effect:** Energy from the sun enters the earth's atmosphere as light and heat. Some is absorbed by the earth, vegetation and the sea, the rest is reflected back into space. Greenhouse gases trap heat and reduce the amount of energy going back into space, thereby producing global warming.

**Permafrost:** Parts of the earth's surface are covered in soil and vegetation that is "permanently" frozen. In some areas this layer can be two kilometres deep. When these layers melt, they release large amounts of methane.



for longer journey times if they elect to travel overland and not by air.

There is an urgent need for a more radical approach to addressing climate change by looking at who has the interest and the potential power to change. People who work on the land, in the factories and live in the cities have a direct interest in protecting the environment, they will feel the brunt of the effects of climate change. The experience of Hurricane Katrina shows that it was the poor and oppressed who suffer from unpredictable climate change.

We need to find a way of harnessing the power of the workers and oppressed across the globe to tackle climate change. The key has to be in using struggles around the immediate interests of the workers and poor peasants to build the kind of organisations that can build a different type of social organisation and challenge to global bourgeoisie for power.

It is in the immediate interest of millions of workers to improve public transport. Campaigns are needed to expand bus and rail travel and promote cycling and walking within local areas. But rather than leave this in the hands of local bureaucrats and rail bosses we should start with transport workers and users deciding fares the expansion of routes, the frequency of timetables etc.

Funded by a steeply progressive tax on the rich, this will bring workers and users into conflict with the rich. It will require a massive campaign of action - drawing in wider sections of the community and building action committees to expropriate, expand and control public transport.

On energy conservation, we should establish groups in each workplace to review current usage. Office workers know how and where energy is wasted, for example leaving computers on standby, keeping buildings heated and lit overnight etc. The employers prefer this as it makes it quicker to get everyone working each day rather than "waste" precious time switching on lights and computers in the morning.

We should demand that all buildings are run in an energy efficient way and that this is enforced by committees of workers and users of the buildings. In less developed countries there is an even greater potential for mobilising workers and peasants. Massive campaigns for affordable, energy efficient housing for all will improve the lives of millions world-wide.

Local struggles alone however successful will be limited, unless they start to link up and address the other problems of waste and inequality in capitalism. But by rooting local struggles in organisations of workers and communities to control transport, production or even office lighting, the seeds of a better way of organising society - socialism - are being sowed.

We recognise that climate change is one of the most fundamental challenges of this century. Capitalism will be unable to solve it, and in the process of trying will condemn the majority of the world to greater poverty and exclusion as they build fortresses for the rich and deny others access to energy and development. To really address climate change we must rid the world of the capitalist system that creates it. And urgently.

## CAR INDUSTRY

# Can cars be made greener?

CUTS IN car pollution will play an important part in reducing carbon emissions. Yet in the UK since 1997, rail and bus fares have risen in real terms by 7% and 16% respectively, while motoring costs have fallen by 6%. While walking and cycling have declined, a quarter of all our car journeys are less than two miles. A mere 12% of freight travels by rail. Even the more energy-efficient cars only save around 30% on emissions.

Average fuel efficiency for cars has improved slightly in the EU, 8% since 1995. In the USA it has deteriorated, average mileage per gallon is now 22.1, which is worse than the Model T Ford, which in 1908 managed 25!

As Monbiot states, "the car manufacturers will continue to produce the odd demonstration model to keep the regulators off their backs, but while they make most of their money from sports utility vehicles they are not interested in serious fuel economies".

Only a planned, (very) cheap or free, comfortable, regular and efficient transport system, run by its users and workers poses any chance of seriously reducing the emissions from car use or of forcing trucks off the road.

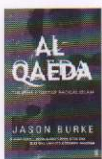
The various alternative technological solutions to reduce car emissions are unlikely to deliver, governments in Europe

and North America are developing bio-fuels as an alternative to petrol. George Bush is one of its biggest supporters. But the carbon-saving from using bio-diesel is a tiny fraction of the possible emissions and the loss of forest carbon sinks caused by its production. Palm-oil imports from Malaysia and India, together with ethanol produced from rainforest land in Brazil lead to environmental destruction in these countries and will literally mean crops for cars not people. Hydrogen is unlikely to be a viable or a safe fuel alternative within the next twenty years according to a *New Scientist* report in 2003.

## AL QAEDA

# The roots of global jihad

*Islamists – including many trained in al-Qaeda’s Afghan camps – have been ousted from Mogadishu by Ethiopian troops before they could consolidate their Taliban-like grip on Somalia. Keith Harvey looks at the roots of radical Islam’s global jihad*



**The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda's road to 9/11**  
Lawrence Wright / Allen Lane / 2006 / £20

**Al-Qaeda; the true story of radical Islam**  
Jason Burke / Penguin / 2004 / £8.99

LAST NOVEMBER in London a judge sentenced British citizen Dhiren Barot to 40 years for plotting to bomb multiple targets in the USA and Britain before and after 9/11. He was dubbed a “senior al-Qaeda lieutenant” and an “experienced, well-trained, full-time terrorist” by the head of Scotland Yard.

His plans – including blowing up a London tube train under the Thames to flood the Underground and gassing the Heathrow Express train – never got off the laptop on which they were discovered in Pakistan. No materials were ever found and his movements over the previous ten years were only ever vaguely understood. Yet the trial judge said “it could be assumed that the plans had been presented to and approved by Barot’s al-Qaeda overlords in Pakistan”.

But can this be the case? A reader of either of these books by *The Independent*’s Jason Burke and the *New Yorker*

journalist Lawrence Wright would be right to question Barot’s probable relationship to al-Qaeda. His case certainly raises all the key questions about al-Qaeda’s organisation and methods dealt with in these works.

There is a great deal of overlap in the two volumes, drawing as they do on common source materials. Both are concerned with tracing the evolution of the al-Qaeda network during the 1980s and 1990s, by tracing the political evolution and movements of its leader Osama bin-Laden.

But while Wright’s book also at some length lays bare the failings of the US intelligence services in the 1990s – especially the turf war between the CIA and FBI which fatally obstructed the detection and prevention of 9/11 – Burke’s book is better at getting into the mindset of the Islamic radical, explaining the real grievances that motivate young, mainly male, Muslims to sign up to bin Laden’s reactionary, nihilistic religious millenarianism.

The press coverage of the Barot case suggests that he was – in Burke’s words – a member of “a fantastically powerful network comprising thousands of trained and motivated men, watching and waiting in every city, in every country, on every continent, ready to carry out

the orders of their leaders, Osama bin Laden, and kill and maim for their cause." (p1) But, as Burke book goes onto demonstrate, "this al-Qaeda does not exist." Rather, the threat is "far more dangerous, complex, diverse and dynamic" than this.

## Islamic fundamentalism

To understand the nature of al-Qaeda's "threat" it is necessary to understand where it stands in the tradition of political Islamic thought and militancy, only then can one grasp what its project is and why it is so reactionary.

Like any and all religions Islam is beset by doctrinal differences, a multiplicity of sects clashing with each other over who and what represents the "true Islam". The strand of Islam that motivates such apparently disconnected people as the London tube bombers and the 9/11 hijackers is Salafism as developed in the post-war period by Hasan al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and later Sayyid Qutb.

Salafists view the first three generations of Muslims, the prophet Muhammad's companions and the two succeeding generations after them, as perfect examples of how Islam should be practiced in everyday life. It is "fundamentalist" because Salafism believes that Islam has become corrupted by "modernism", not only capitalism and communism but all concepts derived from the bourgeois revolutions like constitutions, political parties, revolution and social justice. And this modernism has in its turn corrupted the political leaders in Muslim countries. Salafis believe Muslims should not engage in "Western" activities like politics, even with the aim of injecting Islamist ideas into them. Salafis aim to "purify" Islam, to purge it of modernism to return it to the teachings of the Quaran and the example of the prophet Mohammed's life. Salafism insists that the separation of politics and religion is not valid hence Salifism stridently insists that non-believers must be made to believe and adopt the lifestyle prescribed by its "pure" Islam.

Hasan al-Banna the founder of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, took Salafism to its extreme: "It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations, and extend its power to the entire planet." (Wright p25) Although the Quaran states "there is no compulsion in religion" the Salifist Muslims like Hasan al-Banna or Qutb believed that "Islam is not merely a 'belief' but that Islam is a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men. Thus it strives from the beginning to abolish all these systems and governments which are based on the rule of man over men." (Wright p108) So the imposition of Sharia is no compulsion, it is the only choice: Islam. Hence its consequences are utterly reactionary. Hasan al-Banna refused to think of his organisation as a mere political party; it was meant to be a challenge to the entire idea of politics. Banna completely rejected the western model of secular, democratic government, which contradicted his notion of universal Islamic rule.

Although al-Banna and later Qutb were executed by Egypt's governments for their attempts to overthrow

them, their ideas were to take root in many organisations. Osama bin Laden was steeped in this religious dogma; later he and Zawahiri were to take its tenets in an even more reactionary direction, through the sanctioning of terror against civilians.

Burke is at pains to prove that in the 1980s and 1990s al-Qaeda was a work in progress, moving over ten years or so from a name, to a tactic, and only by mid-1990s to an organisation. Wright however is more emphatic; he says that the decision to set up "al-Qaeda" was taken by a show of hands on Saturday, 20 August 1988 after a week long meeting of bin Laden and other Arab Muslims at Peshawar on the Pakistan-Afghan border. Both agree, however, that whenever you date it, al-Qaeda emerges within the ranks of the "Afghan Arabs" – the Islamic fighters that flocked to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight the Soviet occupiers who invaded in December 1979.

When the Kremlin's tanks motored into Kabul, bin Laden was a relatively disinterested observer in his native Saudi Arabia. His wake up call came from the Palestinian Sheikh Abdullah Azzam working then in Jeddah. Azzam was a "warrior-priest" in the classical Islamist tradition, who "combined piety and learning with a serene and

## They believe Islam has become corrupted by modernism – not just by capitalism but by constitutions and democracy

bloody intransigence" and who "mesmerized audiences with his vision of an Islam that would dominate the world through the force of arms." (Wright p95). By 1981 he was in Pakistan and soon moved to Peshawar, the headquarters of the Afghan resistance.

Under Azzam's influence bin Laden set up recruiting houses in Jeddah for young Saudis and young Muslim pilgrims to go fight in Afghanistan. Bin Laden was wealthy as a result of his work for the family firm and it was this wealth that he used to finance the offices and accommodation he had set up to funnel Arabs into Afghanistan.

Contacts in the Saudi intelligence service helped to get Algerians and Egyptians into the country and from there they could "join the caravan". In Cairo the Saudi bin Laden Group set up offices which were also used to funnel fighters. All the while bin Laden tapped "the petrobillionaires of the Gulf" for funds, eagerly given.

## To Afghanistan

In 1984 Azzam persuaded bin Laden to go to Afghanistan and together they took charge of the Arab influx at a time when the Afghan mujahideen treated them as no more than "glorified guests" (Wright p102). With bin Laden's money each fighter was guaranteed about \$300 a month per household. Wright suggests that despite the financial inducements and a searing *fatwa* by Azzam that

declared it a personal duty of all Muslims to fight in Afghanistan, "their initial efforts were largely a failure" (p103). But over time more and more recruits came, perhaps several thousand by 1988 although never more than a few hundred were in battle at any one time.

While many of the Arab leaders were well-educated, middle class professionals many of these fighters were marginalised militants in opposition to or fleeing from their own governments who denied them any hope of returning. It was at this time that the cult of martyrdom arose among the Arab fighters. Azzam took this message throughout the whole world in fundraising and lecture tours, including to the USA. Wright points out that, "The lure of an illustrious and meaningful death was especially powerful in cases where the pleasures and rewards of life were crushed by government oppression and economic deprivation. The young, underemployed population of these states from Iraq to Morocco were denied entertainment as solace as well. Martyrdom promised such young men an ideal alternative to a life that was so sparing in its rewards." (p106)

Most Afghans thought this preoccupation with death was bizarre; they were nationalists, fighting to rid their country of foreign occupiers. By 1986 a rift opened up between bin Laden and Azzam. The latter had wanted the Arabs to subordinate themselves to the Afghan command and be dispersed among their units. But bin Laden foresaw the day the Russians would be kicked out and a new war front would be opened up. He decided to set up the first of the Arab camps inside Afghanistan (Lion's

## When Saudi Arabia's rulers allowed US troops on their territory bin Laden declared war on them

Den near Jali) to train future fighters in the global war. Elaborate and extensive cave systems were built using bin Laden's massive construction machinery. It was following this - 1987-88 - that bin Laden and the Arabs saw serious, if limited, military action against the USSR's troops which built up their reputation for reckless courage and disorganisation among the Afghans.

The dispute with Azzam was not unconnected to the arrival in Peshawar in 1986 of the Egyptian doctor, and radical Islamist, Zawahiri who was destined to become bin Laden's number two in al-Qaeda in the mid-1990s. Zawahiri arrived in Peshawar as a doctor in Red Crescent camp. He had been an activist in the Egyptian underground since the age of 17 and was jailed for three years after the assassination of Egypt's President Assad in 1981 by Muslim militants outraged by the peace deal he signed with Israel. On his release he went to Pakistan where he recruited to Islamic Jihad from among the Egyptians attracted to the war against the USSR. He and bin Laden co-operated in the 1980s but they differed over goals. Zawahiri was not interested much in the Afghan war except insofar as it generated a pool of potential recruits

for his Egyptian ambitions but he realised that he could get funds and logistical help from bin Laden. For his part, bin Laden never voiced criticisms of Arab regimes but was in Afghanistan to free a Muslim country from infidels, while nurturing latent hostilities towards the USA (then an ally against the USSR) for its support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinians.

## Global jihad

In May 1988 Soviet troops began the long withdrawal that led to the end of the occupation in February 1989 - leaving behind 15,000 dead and 30,000 other Soviet casualties. The Afghan mujahideen thought, by and large, "job done", although the new isolated capital Kabul was still in the hands of a pro-USSR government.

But the Arab "internationalists" believed this war was but one part of the long term struggle to bring "pure" Islamic regimes to the whole Muslim world. The 1988 Peshawar meeting was convened to discuss the future of the Islamic *jihad*. Where was the next battleground and who the next enemy? The Arab unity brought on by the war crumbled as various groups split along national or ethnic lines. Bin Laden sought to stem this by setting up his group in Peshawar on the Pakistan border of about a dozen men committed vaguely to building an "international army" to defend Muslims.

There was a fierce debate. Azzam wanted to build up an international vanguard of jihadists to restore Islamic rule in non-Muslim countries where the caliphate had once ruled whereas Zawahiri wanted the revolutionary overthrow of "traitorous" Muslim regimes like Egypt. The latter manoeuvred to ensure bin Laden took over leadership of Arabs from Azzam. Bin Laden did not know who to support among the Afghan warlords that plunged the country into chaos after their victory over the USSR. Saudi's rulers advised him to return to home.

So in 1989 bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia, but another key turning point for his strategy was around the corner. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 Saudi Arabian rulers decided to allow US troops (the infidels) to station themselves in the country. This was treachery to Islam and bin Laden's relationship with the House of Saud deteriorated sharply; he urged them to use a Muslim army to fight Iraq in Kuwait but he was scorned. Soon he sought the downfall of the Saudi royal family, justified by the Salafist doctrine of *takfiri* which sees Muslims that do not abide by the "pure" doctrines of Salafism as apostates and legitimate targets for assassination.

Unable to stay in Saudi he left for Sudan in 1992 and set up businesses and camps there under the originally benign gaze of the country's Muslim leader Hasam al-Turabi who had helped lead an Islamist military coup in 1989. Turabi had courted bin Laden and opened the borders to all Muslims wanting to carry on the fight begun in Afghanistan. Bin Laden was now in need of Turabi and used Sudan as a base for furthering his plans, and financing his operations.

If Wright's book aims to find bin Laden's fingerprints all over every act of Islamic terror, Burke's book shows

that he is only one, albeit important, element in the global picture of "Islamic fundamentalism" and especially its terrorist wing.

The training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan not only survived during the first half of the 1990s, after the al-Qaeda "hardcore" had left but grew considerably. Burke explains how the Pakistan state had sponsored the growth of the Deobandi Muslim sect in the 1970s and 1980s to hothouse Islamist militants to fight India in the disputed territory of Kashmir. They had set up schools (*madrasses*) for the poorer and less literate sectors of rural youth and trained them in little more than a thorough knowledge of the Quaran.

In the 1980s hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees were educated in these schools – the origin of the Taliban generation. The military training was carried out in many of them by instructors from the Pakistani army's elite Special Services Group. It was these schools (often with camps attached) and other camps in Afghanistan set up by warlords that continued to receive and train tens of thousands of Muslims in the 1990s and inject them with "the anti-rational, millenarian worldview already prevalent by the early 1990s among many 'Arab Afghans'." (Burke p94)

So with Pakistan's help the "narrow, dogmatic worldview" "broke out of the ghetto" and spread through wide layers of the Pakistani population.

## Rethinking the strategy

In Sudan, according to Wright, bin Laden was on the verge of withdrawing from active involvement in the *jihad* to concentrate on his business interests when the USA's decision to deploy troops to Yemen and then Somalia made him commit to a new strategy – away from fighting infidel armies on Muslim soil to fighting the USA anywhere and everywhere.

Yet he was not in a position to put any ambitions into action. Burke says bin Laden's involvement in the 1992 Yemen bombing was "tangential" (p147). He rather acted as a clearing house, received militants from Chechnya, Bosnia etc and gave money to various groups. There is no evidence he was involved in the Mogadishu "Black Hawk down" actions against the US marines in October 1993 and the same goes for the series of bombings by Saudis in 1995 and 1996 in Saudi Arabia.

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad also used Sudan as base from which to launch the assassination attempt on Mubarak in Nairobi in 1995. After this the Saudi and USA turned up the pressure on Turabi to deal with bin Laden. Turabi wanted political power in order to build an Islamic society in Sudan and he did not share bin Laden and Zawarihi's views of global *jihad*. Consequently, bin Laden was forced to flee Sudan for Afghanistan in May 1996, leaving 90% of his wealth behind.

The Taliban were by now in control of most of the country and Wright says of this time: "The Saudi was isolated, stripped of his once great wealth, dependent on the hospitality of an unknown power." (p232) However, on 23 August 1996 he issued his Declaration of War

Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places. Its main focus was an attack on the House of Saud but it also outlined the many crimes of Zionism and colonialism against the Muslim world.

Burke argues this statement represented a "clear shift" in al-Qaeda's strategy; the main priority henceforth was to target the "Crusader-Zionist Alliance". In February 1998 Zawahiri, bin Laden and others issued a joint declaration and *fatwa*; "The ruling to kill Americans and their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." (Wright p260) Its attractiveness, says Burke

## It was bin Laden's vision to create an international jihad corps

was that "the focus on the USA, a common foe, is a useful way of overcoming the particularism that had hobbled extremist, and less radical, Islamic reformist movements over the preceding three decades." (p166)

But whereas Al-Banna and Qutb had "decided to patiently build popular networks and organisational structures that would allow them to achieve their aims" bin Laden argued instead for "fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy" (Burke 163).

For al-Qaeda the well-prepared, stunning terrorist action was seen as the key to success; it would draw the enemy into a battle it could not win, like the USSR in Afghanistan, and it would attract money and recruits to the cause. It was then in 1997-2000 that al-Qaeda took final shape. Burke describes the structure:

"There is the hardcore, a small number of committed activists, many of whom are veterans of the Afghan war, who have coalesced around bin Laden and who fill senior administrative positions in the most specialised camps or perform command roles for those who graduate from them; there is the next group . . . men belonging to or recruited by individual groups in their own countries and sent to Afghanistan for training. Many of these men have previous experience of conflicts in Bosnia or elsewhere.

"Some of them are selected by the first group, the 'hardcore' for 'martyrdom' operations. Others are merely sent home. Thirdly, there is the broad mass of volunteers who fill camps like Khaldan. Predominantly young men, increasingly drawn from more deprived social groups, these are the cannon fodder, who inspired by the literature of Azzam, the sermons of local firebrand clerics or the message of bin Laden himself, find their way to the camps." (Burke p171-72)

Many of these camps were run by the Taliban and other Afghans. Bin Laden did not take over their administration. Instead he just creamed off "the most talented and motivated volunteers" (Burke p168) who were willing to attack the USA and were willing to be martyrs. Wright says: "At a time when there were many Islamist movements, all of them concentrated on nationalist goals, it was bin Laden's vision to create an international *jihad* corps." (p332)

Burke describes how in these years bin Laden was able for the first time to provide a central focus for the many disparate elements of radical Islamism. Many had national agendas, some mistrusted his internationalist aims. But in al-Qaeda's Afghan camps they were able to find "resources – training, logistic support or use of diplomatic facilities." (p12) He compares bin Laden's relationship with the disparate Islamist groups to the relationship the USSR or the USA had with its various proxies during the Cold War.

Wright says: "Al-Qaeda had developed a management philosophy that it called 'centralisation of decision and decentralisation of execution'. Bin Laden decided the targets, selected the leaders, and provided at least some of the funding. After that the planning of the operation and the method of attack were left to the men who would have the responsibility for carrying it out." (p318) It explains Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, a 25 year old Pakistani, who set off a bomb underneath the World Trade Centre in February 1993, killing six and injuring a thousand. He had hoped to topple one tower into the other and kill 250,000. This is the background to the Beeston bombers Shehzad Tanweer and Mohammed Sidique Khan who helped kill 52 people in London in July 2005. It is the story of Islamic terrorists who "were able to put together the constituent elements for a terrorist attack again and again without at any stage being affiliated to any one individual or organisation." They are freelance terrorists, using contacts made via training camps, tribal and family connections, able to tap sources of finance and equipment

Ramzi studied electrical engineering at Swansea University in 1989 and used his skills to train others in bomb-making in Pakistan's camps. He spent time in Philippines training others in 1990. He received funding from Gulf and Pakistan businessmen but was never in touch with bin Laden's group and the latter had no connection with the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre. Yet like Dhiren Barot, Ramzi is often referred to as an "al-Qaeda agent", which Burke suggests is fanciful.

## The road to 9/11

In August 1998 two bombs at US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-el-Salem were the first clear fruits of bin Laden's strategy – the first documented al-Qaeda operation. In retaliation Bill Clinton bombed a Sudanese chemical plant and Afghan training camps near Khost. Both were militarily ineffective and politically disastrous. Wright says of these: "the missile attacks exposed the inadequacy of American intelligence and the futility of military power." (p285) The effect of the attacks was to massively increase support for bin Laden among Muslims and at the same time it turned the Taliban against the USA. Mullah Omar refused to honour a pledge to hand bin Laden over to Saudi and Pakistan intelligence.

In 1999 Mohammed Atta and three friends from Hamburg decided to go to al-Qaeda camp in Afghanistan; there they were spotted and chosen for the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11. While that was in its planning stages, on 12 October 2000, a huge bomb ripped

into the side of the USS Cole moored in Aden harbour. Seventeen US personnel were killed. After it money and new recruits flooded in.

The spectacular attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September was the most successful action of Islamoterror carried out by al-Qaeda. Within two months it brought about the invasion of Afghanistan and the wiping out of the camps – the operational hub of al-Qaeda. Zawahiri and bin Laden were forced to flee and hide and within a year a high proportion of the key "hardcore" leaders were either dead or in detention.

But, as the Madrid train bomb outrages of March 2004 and the London bombs little more than a year later proved, there were enough freelance Islamist terrorists – either with a history of training in the camps or inspired by the subsequent "war on terror" – to mount operations despite the break up of the organisational centre and the operational high command. There were and are many thousands eager to act on the February 1998 *fatwa*.

## The future of radical Islam

The millenarian, reactionary religious utopianism of these political Islamists is of course a reaction to manifest injustice in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world. The brutality of Israel over the Palestinians, inside the Lebanon is one example. So too is the ruthless barbarism meted out to Chechens by Putin's Russia.

Over the last half century the failure of secular and nationalist regimes to successfully fight imperialist oppression – and the collusion of Muslim governments in this oppression – have pushed young Muslims away from these ideologies.

The rise and popularity of Islamic terror is a punishment visited upon the reformists and nationalists. But it is important to understand that al-Qaeda is only one particularly brutal form of radical, political Islam. Even if we lop off the indiscriminate terror and even the lust for martyrdom, we are still left with a political ideology that – essentially Salafist in content – is uncompromising in its hostility to not only Zionism and imperialism but to the democratic, secular, revolutionary movements that fight those twin evils.

Wherever possible it is essential to join forces with Muslims to oppose invasion, occupation and war against their countries and to resist attacks on their communities in the west. But their ideology that propels many political Islamists is hateful of democracy and secularism. For them the imperialists and the secular forces ranged against them have more in common with each other than with the Muslims who suffer oppression they are both guilty of modernism; that is they share their origins in the politics of the enlightenment and the bourgeois revolution, which they detest and think are part of the corrupting influence on Islam that needs to be purged.

For the true emancipation of Muslim people from oppression, the hold of political Islam over these radical militants – some, genuine anti-imperialists – must be broken. The emancipation of the Middle East lies not in the restoration the caliphate but through a socialist republic.



## Augusto Pinochet 1915-2006 Death of a tyrant

BY DIEGO CARMONI /  
Revolución Proletaria, Chile

At the age of 91 the ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet died on 10 December 2006. Like most generals he did so in his bed. He passed away in the same military hospital where – among others – Salvador Allende's defence minister, Jose Tohaa, and leaders of the MIR, such as Bautista van Showen, were assassinated.

During his final hours TV cameras beamed pictures "live and direct" from the entrance foyer, showing the hospital packed with ex-collaborators, rightist politicians, allies, close family, nephews, lawyers, secretaries and an extensive coterie that including famous TV soap actors.

Pinochet entered the military hospital just as Judge Victor Montiglio had ordered his house arrest on 27 November for the detention and murder of two political prisoners in 1973, one crime among innumerable others for which he was facing court action.

To write a full obituary of Pinochet is a task that would fill a book with his numerous crimes and charges pending against him but which were dragged out so that he could die in peace. In Chile everyone was convinced that Pinochet would never be nailed whilst he was alive, and after he died the worst thing was that he was interred with "military honours" as an ex-President, thanks to the Concertacion government which allowed him to die unpunished.

Augusto Pinochet Ugarte was an obscure Mr Nobody in the army until General Carlos Prats Gonzales recommended him to Salvador Allende as his replacement when

Gonzales had to abandon the post of Commander in Chief of the army on 22 August 1973. Once appointed, Pinochet was made aware late in the day of the coup plans to overthrow Allende's government. He immediately headed up the elaborate plan that the chief of the air force, Gustavo Leigh, had prepared, alongside other high officials in the navy and the special police. Like Pinochet nearly all of these coup plotters were to pass away in their beds too. Nineteen days after his appointment Pinochet led the military coup on 11 September 1973.

General Prats told Allende he had full confidence in Pinochet's "democratic" inclinations when he was Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean army, a post that he had occupied since January 1972. Allende mistakenly took Prats to be the one official loyal to the constitution among

to the position of Alvarez (basic grade of an officer) at the age of 22. During this time he served in Concepcion, Valparaiso and Iquique, and, after further studies, graduated as an Oficial de Estado Mayor (Officer of General Staff) at the war academy in 1951 aged 36.

He first met Salvador Allende (a senator at the time) in 1948 together with a group of parliamentarians who had been instructed to visit a regiment in Iquique where dissidents of the Communist Party had been imprisoned as a result of a law which banned the party. Pinochet denied them permission to visit the prisoners.

In the same year he obtained permission to enter the school of law at the University of Chile, but he never finished this course. Aged 41 he was sent to Quito in Ecuador to advise, together with other officials, on the creation of a

### Augusto Pinochet Ugarte was an obscure Mr Nobody in the army until General Carlos Prats Gonzales recommended him to Salvador Allende as his replacement

the handful of coup-makers within the leading corps of army generals. So on 24 August 1973 Allende, named Pinochet Commander-in-Chief of the army. It was a mistake which was to cost Allende his life. However, Prats too was assassinated in Buenos Aires a year later.

Pinochet was born in Valparaiso in 1915. He studied at various religious colleges in the region including at the Maristas and with the Franciscan fathers. At 18 he entered a military path, advancing

military academy. He spent three and a half years there.

On his return to Chile in 1949 aged 44 he began working in Santiago and then Iquique - where he was also named as Intendente (mayor) in the province of Tarapaca; it seems that in this period it was acceptable for a political post of this kind to be filled by a military figure. In 1971 aged 56 he returned to Santiago and was appointed general in charge of the city, and in the following year chief general

for the army in Chile; next year he was made Commander-in-Chief of the army.

## The military dictatorship

The military coup of 1973 was led by Gustavo Leigh of the air force, Jose Toribio Merino of the army, and Cezar Mendoza of the police. Some of them later confirmed that the original idea had been to rotate power between them, others that the army would always have priority due to it being the oldest and most prestigious wing of the armed forces. The fact is that Pinochet led the junta during the whole period.

During the coup-d'état the seat of government was bombarded by the air force. Two days later the military junta dissolved Congress and outlawed all political parties that had supported Allende's government. Moreover, political activity in general was officially declared to be "in recess". Pinochet would say in 1998, in an interview

## The first years of the dictatorship were marked by persecution, assassination, deportation and exile of the the left. In 1991 the government documented 2,279 assassinations

with Spanish Television (TVE), "I never sought any kind of political path or career. I sought a career in the army and destiny made me President of the Republic".

The first years of the dictatorship were marked by persecution, assassination, deportation and exile of the leaders of the left. The *Rettig Report*, commissioned in 1991 by the government, documents 2,279 assassinations. These disappearances consisted of people who were detained by government agents (police or military) and, to this day, no one knows their whereabouts.

During the military regime

practically all the political leaders of the left who were detained were victims of torture. The *Valech Report*, commissioned by the government in 2004, indicates that 94% of those detained for political reasons were tortured, documenting more than 28,000 cases of torture, including atrocities such as electric shock treatment, beatings, rape, and humiliations which left grave scars on the prisoners. The report says, "the experience of political imprisonment and torture was an act of complete ruin that affected all aspects of the lives of the victims and their families, and which remains with them to this day".

At the international level the military junta government took part in something that would come to be known as Operation Condor, an international offensive against left dissidents in South America, coordinated by Chile and with the cooperation of the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay.

Victims of Operation Condor included the leader of Chilean

including the deregulation of markets, abolition of the minimum wage, privatisation of the pension system, and a reduction of taxes for the rich. Moreover, trade unions were prohibited, workers' parties were banned and public spending was reduced, having a negative effect on the poorest and a positive effect on the richest sections of society.

## After the dictatorship

A new constitution was adopted in 1980 that increased the power of the armed forces; made Pinochet the country's President instead of just President of the Junta; prohibited the President from removing the heads of the armed forces; allowed for senators to be appointed by the President and fixed an election for eight years later. But in 1988, instead of convening elections, the junta presented Pinochet as the sole candidate for the office of President and organised a plebiscite to confirm him.

After years of political paralysis this was a key moment for a new generation for whom democracy had only ever been a theory. The results of the plebiscite delivered a victory to the "no to Pinochet" campaign, with 45% against and 43% in favour according to official figures, and with 60% against and 38% in favour in the figures of the Concertacion.

Instead of recognising the result, Pinochet desperately proposed to the members of the military junta that they pass a decree under which he would assume all powers and so be able to refuse to recognise the results of the plebiscite. This divided the members of the junta and was opposed in particular by the chief of the Air Force, Mathei, who went to the government palace and announced to the press that the "No" campaign had won.

Pinochet surrendered power to the Christian Democrat president Patricio Aylwin on 11 March 1990, but remained head of the Army. He decided to stay in this post "in order to be with my people and



to protect them from whatever should happen in the future”, as he noted in his autobiography. He had the opportunity to do this in 1991: his son was investigated because the Army had bought shares in a company which hadn't operated for years, and which had paid out cheques to his son's name (the case of the Pino-cheques). A national scandal broke out and the government offered to abandon the investigation on condition that commander-in-chief Pinochet renounce his post. He refused but the whole episode had a lasting effect, discrediting him and the army

In 1998, he became an Appointed Senator, something he had put into the constitution, in the midst of protests that took place outside the national Congress. This same year, during a visit to London, he was arrested after an order to detain him was issued in Spain by the investigating judge Baltasar Garzon for the torture of 96 Spanish citizens during the military dictatorship. After 18 months in England the extradition request – approved by the courts – was denied by the Home Office “for humanitarian reasons” and Pinochet returned to Chile.

But by now he was no longer legally invulnerable; his judicial situation became more complicated in Chile and over the next five years various cases went from the Court of Appeal to the Supreme Court, with numerous judgements in favour and against, cases adjourned temporarily because of senile dementia, others re-opening etc. All this with the added difficulty for his accusers that his post of Appointed Senator put him outside parliament's reach, that is to say, gave him legal immunity.

In 2004 a report of a parliamentary committee of the United States Senate concluded that US Riggs Bank maintained business with and helped Pinochet to steal millions of dollars while he was under arrest in London. The figure was between US\$4m and \$8m. It was deposited, not in his name but rather, under the names of family members and

also under completely false names. This industrial-scale theft involved the falsification of at least two passports that he used to open these accounts.

In January 2005, the Chilean Army finally accepted its institutional responsibility for past abuses. Lucia Pinochet, the oldest daughter of Augusto Pinochet, declared that the use of

– his Riggs accounts – that brought him down.

The fact that he was an assassin, that he had abused his position in order to murder and torture, something that the whole of Chile and the entire world knew, did not send him to the gallows like Saddam Hussein, the brutal dictator hanged by US stooges less than three weeks after Pinochet

## It was not the 1998 plebiscite that defeated Pinochet, the account of 3,000 murders, nor the 30,000 cases of torture and violation, but his illicit enrichment that brought him down

torture was “barbaric and without justification”.

In May 2005, the principal Presidential opposition candidate and leader of the alliance of parties that formed the government with Pinochet, Joaquin Lavín, was asked about the violations of human rights and Pinochet's secret bank accounts, and declared cynically: “Knowing as we do today what took place then, obviously I wouldn't have voted yes in the 1998 plebiscite”.

The unfortunate truth is that it was not the 1998 plebiscite that defeated Pinochet, any more than the publication of the *Rettig Report* with its account of 3,000 murders, nor the *Valech Report* with its 30,000 cases of torture and violation. It was to be his illicit enrichment

slipped away peacefully and surrounded by family.

The scorn and ridicule meted out to the Iraqi dictator in his final moments as he felt the noose tighten would have been an appropriate and just end for Pinochet, but then the job he did for the USA in “saving Chile from communism” was always destined to be rewarded with a quiet death.

**Santiago, December 2006**

➤ In early January an appeal court dropped fraud charges against Pinochet's widow, daughter and daughter-in-law relating to the falsification of passports used to open up the Riggs accounts for Pinochet. A number of charges are still pending against other family members.

## Secret no more: 1956 and the crisis within the Communist Party of Great Britain

REMEMBERING 1956

Revolutionary History Vol 9 No 3  
Porcupine Press / 2006 / £9.95



1956 WAS a watershed in the history of the international left. Opening with Khrushchev's secret speech and closing with the Hungarian revolution, the events of that year provoked a crisis which shook Stalinism to its foundations.

The current volume of *Revolutionary History*, published late last year, contains several original contributions which shed light on aspects of the crisis, and in particular its impact on the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Paul Flewers focuses on the reception of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in Britain; Steve Parsons further analyses the crisis within the British CP; John McIlroy outlines the political biography of the CP historian Brian Pearce, and the volume re-publishes the correspondence which led to his break from the CPGB. In addition, several shorter articles examine the consequences of Khrushchev's Secret Speech on the French and Italian CPs, and the political trajectory of the Trinidad Trotskyist CLR James.

This is an episode in the history of British Marxism with important lessons for today. Whilst the direct heirs of the Communist Party of 1956 are few and far between these days, the story of how a "Marxist" leadership used bureaucratic means to stifle debate and deny the existence of inconvenient truths will be familiar to many supporters of this journal, resonant as it is of the practice of much of the contemporary far left.

### The British left in the fifties

In 1956, Britain was an imperial power in decline. Sir Anthony Eden's Conservative government and most sections of the British ruling class still clung to fading delusions of imperial grandeur, and brutally fought to preserve the last vestiges of empire in Cyprus, Kenya and colonial Malaya. In November of that year Eden launched a fateful and unsuccessful attempt to wrest control of the Suez canal from Egypt as the USA vetoed the action, symbolising and underpinning British imperialism's demotion in the pecking order of world powers.

Yet at home Britain was emerging from post-war austerity as the post-war boom took hold. Rationing was over and a new consumerism and youth culture was discernable. Living standards were rising above pre-war levels and in 1957 Tory prime minister MacMillan boasted that "most of our people had never had it so good." On the back of a stable economy and Cold War propaganda the trade unions and Labour Party were in the grip of the right wing reformists.

To the left of Labour, only the CPGB was in any way significant. Its membership had declined from a high point of 45,000 immediately after the war to approximately 34,000 in 1956, and the party lost its only MPs in the general election of 1951. Like every other western European CP, it had, by this time, dutifully embraced the parliamentary road to socialism, and continued as before in its unquestioning loyalty to the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, it had a highly organised and steeled cadre of activists, contained many genuine working class militants, maintained an impressive record

of shop-floor organisation and leadership, and had an influence amongst left-wing intellectuals which belied its size.

By contrast, the forces of British Trotskyism in 1956 were only several hundred strong, in theoretical disarray over the consolidation of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe and, since the collapse into centrism of the Fourth International, divided into competing sects, led by Tony Cliff, Ted Grant and Gerry Healey. All practised entryism within the Labour Party to varying degrees, and none of them had any significant roots within the working class except for a few constituency Labour Parties, and some small but exceptional gains in individual unions.

### Stalinism after Stalin

Hence, the greater part of the Marxist left in Britain in 1956 loyally supported Moscow and praised Stalin. Given the Stalinist credentials of the CPGB, it should come as no surprise that when Stalin finally died in 1953, few were more fervent in their praise than the leading theoretician of the party, Rajani Palme Dutt: "The genius and will of Stalin, the architect of the rising world of free humanity, lives on forever in the imperishable monument of his creation - the soaring triumphs of socialist and communist construction."

Yet aside from the eulogies of the leaders of the CPGB, all was not well within this "soaring triumph", and the ruling bureaucracy around Khrushchev and Mikoyan knew it. The arbitrary and brutal nature of Stalin's rule, whilst enabling the country to industrialise at breakneck speed during the 1930s, had become even more wasteful and inefficient in a new post-war era of technological innovation, space exploration, nuclear proliferation and - even in the Eastern Bloc - rising consumer expectations.

Cautiously at first, the collective leadership of the Soviet

OUT NOW

# REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY REMEMBERING 1956

## Vol. 9 No.3

The Hungarian revolution and the reaction in the Western European Communist Parties

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party introduced a degree of liberalisation in public life and the economy. Former "enemies of the people" were rehabilitated, and inmates were released from the very prisons the Stalinists had denied even existed. Even the Yugoslav leader, Tito, denounced in 1948 and expelled from the Cominform for daring to defy Stalin, was tentatively welcomed back into the fold in 1955.

### Krushchev's secret speech

The slow distancing of the bureaucracy away from the figure of Stalin culminated at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956. The British party sent three delegates to the congress: General Secretary Harry Pollitt, the Vice-Chair and senior theoretician Rajani Palme Dutt, and Assistant General Secretary George Matthews.

First Secretary of the CPSU, Krushchev, took seven hours to plough through his address to the congress – but this was not yet the famous "secret speech". In his public speech, Krushchev mentioned Stalin by name only once; various "shortcomings" in the economy, the party apparatus and the government were carefully identified. These were now to be rectified by the assembled delegates, and by the country as a whole. Krushchev's deputy Anastas Mikoyan elaborated further in subsequent speeches – and was even more forthright than Krushchev in naming Stalin – but initially the critique was far from explosive.

Rather it was Krushchev's secret speech which blew up Stalin's reputation once and for all. Krushchev exposed how, out of a total of 1,966 delegates to the 1934 Party Congress, 1,108 had been arrested by 1938. Stalin had falsified historical accounts and encouraged his own sycophantic cult of personality. Krushchev alleged Stalin had ordered the assassination of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov in 1934. The old Bolshevik leader Sergei Ordzhonikidze was given the choice between suicide

or execution. The threat of Nazi invasion was at first ignored by Stalin, and once Germany had finally invaded, Stalin fled east from Moscow. Stalin was guilty of anti-semitism and orchestrated the "Doctors' Plot" after the war. Krushchev even accused Stalin of forcing him to perform a Ukrainian folk dance as ritual humiliation for the amusement of the dictator.

No foreign delegates were allowed to attend. The full text of the speech was leaked and published on the front pages of the world's newspapers on 17 March, several weeks after it was reported to have taken place.

### Igniting the spark

Many delegates were stunned and confused by the extent of the revelations. It is probable that Krushchev calculated that the contents of his speech would soon be known both within his own country and around the world. In seeking to inject some initiative into Soviet society from above – the better in order to "peacefully co-exist" with imperialism – the bureaucracy calculated that a decisive distancing of the current leadership from Stalin's policies would minimise the most fatal risk

only the "violations of socialist legality" which were regrettable.

The speech did not provoke upheavals in the Soviet Union itself, except for bizarre riots in defence of Stalin's legacy in his native Georgia. However, its impact was almost immediately felt in those countries in Eastern Europe where the native Stalinists had the most tenuous grip.

The first attempt to crack the monolith came in Poland. On 28 June police in the city of Poznan fired on a demonstration by workers protesting against wage decreases and demanding unpaid overtime, killing 53 and injuring 300. Workers armed themselves with sticks, rifles and petrol bombs. Demands for democratisation, led by workers' councils, crystallised around the demand to reinstate the ousted "reform communist" Gomulka. Soviet troops massed on the Polish border, but Krushchev yielded to popular demands, and gave permission for Gomulka to take power in October.

Whilst embarking on a degree of liberalisation similar in many respects to that being pursued by Krushchev himself, and acknowledging the legitimacy of some of the workers' economic grievances, Gomulka insisted on the political primacy of the Polish CP and loyalty to Moscow. For

## The CPGB dutifully embraced the parliamentary road to socialism, and continued as before in its unquestioning loyalty to the Soviet Union

of all: of "initiative" spilling over into a questioning of bureaucratic rule as a whole.

At no point did Krushchev question the purge and murder of revolutionists inside the CPSU in the 1920s when the system of bureaucratic rule was congealing around Stalin. When a purge was called for, all well and good – according to the new line, it was

this "reform communist" at least, workers' council democracy was never on the agenda.

If the gamble had been won in the Soviet Union, and only narrowly won in Poland, Hungary presented the most serious challenge. Ironically, the impetus for the Hungarian Revolution came from a gathering of students demonstrating in support of the

Poles. In Hungary, demands for democratisation, the removal of the premier Rakósi and his replacement by the reformist Imre Nagy came from the Petofi Circle, a group which had its origins within the Hungarian CP's youth and student

– repeated the line handed down to the assembled delegates during the open session of the CPSU Congress, and concluded that, notwithstanding the “errors” which had occurred during Stalin's leadership, things had now been

an open and honest appraisal of Stalinism, but this is precisely what the leadership around Pollitt and Palme Dutt immediately tried to prevent. For the loyalists, the new line on Stalinism had already been given by Moscow, and further discussion was therefore inappropriate lest it draw more radical conclusions. Moreover, despite the condemnation of Stalin now emanating from Moscow, the leadership still could not help itself from proclaiming Stalin's greatness, warts and all. As Palme Dutt wrote, “That there should be spots on any sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper”.

## The CPGB never fundamentally broke from a position of support for Moscow, right up until it followed the Soviet Union itself into political oblivion in 1991

wing, and which had initiated discussion meetings drawing in thousands as a result of Krushchev's speech and the riots in Poznan.

The Hungarian revolutionary uprising of 1956 was a genuine workers' uprising to defend and democratise socialism, not abolish it. By 28 October real power was in the hands of the insurgent bands and the workers' councils; by 1 November Nagy had gone much further than the Polish Stalinists, had withdrawn Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and had legalised opposition parties. Unable to countenance any real break from the system of bureaucratic rule, Krushchev ordered his tanks and troops into Hungary and installed the puppet regime of Janos Kádár on 7 November. Imre Nagy was executed in 1958 after a show trial.

Krushchev had unleashed forces which came dangerously close to toppling the rule of the bureaucracy in Poland and Hungary. That crisis quickly made itself felt in the international communist movement as a whole.

### Crisis in the CPGB

Only two months before the 20th Congress, the British CP, in the Christmas edition of its weekly paper, *World News*, praised Stalin as “the great communist leader and the architect of socialism”. In March, George Matthews – in his report on the CPSU Congress to the party's Executive Committee

identified and put right. It was the task of British communists to fall into line, and not to raise any inconvenient questions about the Stalin years.

However, even before the full text of the Secret Speech was made available in the *Daily Worker* several weeks after the 20th Congress, the communist press published members' criticisms of both Stalin, and the role of the CPGB leadership in excusing his crimes. The fact that such criticisms were aired at all, prior to the publication of the secret speech in its entirety, testifies to the extent to which disquiet amongst the more independent thinkers within the party had been growing for some years.

The *Daily Worker* only published a full report on the secret speech the Monday after the text had already appeared in the bourgeois press – *The Observer* published it as a supplement. Not surprisingly, this did nothing to stem the tide of criticism from across the country. As a member from Cambridge wrote, “Did we really have to wait for Mikoyan to tell us that ‘for twenty years the cult of personality flourished’ before we were aware of it or before we could admit it?” Another raised the question of whether communists in Britain “should accept everything that happens in the Soviet Union uncritically as ‘the best of all possible worlds’”.

The ferment brewing amongst rank and file members required

### The crisis takes hold

However, dissent would simply not go away. John Saville, a prominent intellectual within the Communist Party Historians' Group, hit back at Palme Dutt by calling for an examination of the party's previous errors and for a critical Marxist analysis of Stalinism, and concluded that, without such an analysis, the party would never convince British workers that socialism meant anything more than a knock on the door at 4 am in the morning.

Saville was merely one amongst several leading intellectuals disgruntled by the party leadership's inability to come to terms with Stalinism. Within the CP, professionals and intellectuals were organised in an impressive array of interest groups and discussion circles, of which the historians were one of the most prominent.

Now unable to get articles and letters published in the party's journals, Saville and fellow historian EP Thompson began publishing *The Reasoner*, “a journal of discussion”, in which they attempted to begin the process of intellectual de-Stalinisation, in opposition to the clique around Pollitt, Palme Dutt and (from May) new General Secretary John Gollan.

The editors of *The Reasoner* were clear that, whilst they had no intention of forming a faction

within the party, or still less at that point to leave it, they were equally clear that their views could not be silenced by a compliant party press. A quote from Marx appeared on its masthead: "To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality".

However, *The Reasoner* was short-lived, and whilst the editors received hundreds of letters of support from members and fellow-travellers, both Saville and Thompson decided that they could no longer operate as Marxists within the party after having been instructed by the party apparatus to cease publication. Both were later instrumental in publishing the *New Reasoner* which later it fused with *Universities and Left Review* in 1960 became *New Left Review*.

The final issue of *The Reasoner*, published at the time of the Hungarian Revolt, called on CP members to disassociate themselves from the leadership's unequivocal support for the Soviet invasion. The CP lost a number of regional and district trade union officials, many fearful of their chances of re-election if they retained their membership cards.

Significantly, the 16 communists on the 22-member executive of the Fire Brigades Union resigned together. Attempts by the leadership to characterise dissent as a phenomena confined to petit bourgeois intellectuals, rather than the party's core of workers and trade unionists, were demonstrably false.

Additionally, many prominent Jewish members – amongst them veterans of the struggle against Moseley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s – resigned in protest at the anti-semitic nature of the post-war purges in the Soviet Union, Hungary and especially Czechoslovakia.

The statistics of the party's losses are as follows: around 2,000 left the party immediately after Krushchev's speech from March; a further 5,000 left following the events in Hungary, and a further 2,000 left following the decisive defeat of dissent at a Special Congress in April 1957. In June

1956 membership stood at 34,117; by February 1958 the figure was 24,670, a loss of 27.7 per cent of the total membership. These losses were not just quantitative – they were qualitative too, as the party lost significant trade union cadre and prominent intellectuals.

### Stalinism discredited

Several hundred members were attracted to the small Trotskyist groups and their critique of the Soviet Union. Trotskyists lobbied the CPGB's March 1957 Congress, insisting that "To understand what is happening in the USSR, you must read the works of Leon Trotsky". The historian Brian Pearce did so along with Peter Fryer, whose reports of the Hungarian workers' uprising the *Daily Worker* refused to publish.

Already collaborating with Gerry Healy's group, and having spoken at several conferences organised by an amalgamation of Trotskyist groups, Pearce was expelled from the CPGB. He concluded that the USSR was ruled by "a bureaucratic caste freed from real democratic control acquiring material privileges" – exactly the analysis made by Trotsky 25 years earlier.

Needless to say, the CPGB never fundamentally broke from a position of support for Moscow,

right up until it followed the Soviet Union itself into political oblivion in 1991. Nevertheless, after the events of 1956, things would never be the same again on the British left. The Trotskyists and the New Left increased in confidence and recruits, and after 1956, new members within the CP itself, having been schooled in the post-Stalin era, were less willing to blindly follow the line handed down by Moscow.

By the time the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, most western European CPs, including the British, condemned the invasion. However, neither the CPGB in 1956 or 1968, nor its rump continuation today in the *Morning Star* and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), have ever grasped the real nature of Stalinism. They have rightly paid for this inability in a loss of influence and members.

The greatest tribute we can give to those who fought on the streets of Poznan and Budapest is to do exactly as the British Trotskyists advised in 1956 – to read the works of Leon Trotsky – and to popularise a genuinely revolutionary communist politics for the 21st century. This issue of *Revolutionary History* provides some much needed background material to aid this process.

James Drummond

## A reformist critique of the institutions of globalisation

**MAKING GLOBALISATION WORK: The Next Steps to Global Justice**  
Joseph Stiglitz  
Penguin Allen Lane / 2006 / £20



JOSEPH STIGLITZ is the Nobel prize winning, former senior vice president and chief economist at the World Bank. He is also the million selling author of *Globalisation*

and *Its Discontents*, published in 2002, which echoed many of the criticisms of globalisation made by the anti-capitalist movement. He is the Tony Benn of the international finance system, the former insider turned critic.

*Globalisation and Its Discontents* pointed to the disastrous effects of the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the catastrophic decline in living standards which followed it. It pointed out how the wages of the average US worker had declined



over the previous decade and how income inequality had surged over the 1990s – a US business executive was now making over 400 times the average wage of a worker. He explained how poverty in sub-Saharan Africa continued to rise and why the financial imbalances of the world economy had led to the melt down of the world's financial systems in 1997-98.

*Making Globalisation Work* is fundamentally a renewal of

of finance capital who actually admits capitalism and markets do not always operate perfectly, he's no radical. His Nobel prize winning work aimed to prove that "whenever information is imperfect, in particular when there are information asymmetries – where some individuals know something that others do not – the reason that the invisible hand seems invisible is that it is not there. Without appropriate

non-ownership of the means of production. The consumption of workers is limited by their wage. The consumption of peasants is limited by the price that they can gain for their produce. The consumption of capitalists is limited only by the size of their fortune.

If Stiglitz's followers in government even sought to radically re-distribute incomes to increase the effective demand of the poor (never mind seriously reshape patterns of property ownership), the information transmitted to the major corporations and banks would be: "we have to get rid of these guys".

Stiglitz has evidently enjoyed his role as economic guru to the social forum movement. He describes the "colourful crush of humanity" at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004 and contrasts it favourably with the World Economic Forum of finance ministers at Davos shortly after. But the fact that he was one of the few to attend both, is a neat illustration of his attempt to straddle both camps, to propose globalisation with a human face.

Through the course of the book he addresses many of the key issues which face the world's peoples today: the inequality of power in the current trade system, where for example, NAFTA opened up Mexico to US farm produce, but limited Mexico's ability to export manufactures to the US; the patent system still dominated by a few massive multi-national companies; the dependency of poor countries in Africa and Latin America on resources and the vagaries of the price of raw materials.

He points up the inability of the great powers to implement meaningful limits on carbon emissions, the power of multi-national corporations over poor developing governments, the burden of debt on these poor nations and how this limits their ability to escape poverty, the frenetic and unregulated nature of the world finance system and the fact that all the institutions of world finance are completely undemocratic. The head of the

## Stiglitz sees himself following in the footsteps of economists like Maynard Keynes

Stiglitz's earlier work; he repeats his earlier criticisms of globalization except now in a different context. The economies of the former "communist" states are recovering and China's growth is providing the major dynamism in contemporary capitalism.

Meanwhile, the anti-capitalist/social forum movement, which announced itself with such militancy at Seattle in 1999, has declined and many of its leaders have moved rightwards. They no longer want to break up the financial institutions of global capital, the IMF, World Bank and WTO but rather seek to reform them and make them work for the people.

Stiglitz's earlier tome served as a rallying cry for the right wing of the anti-capitalist/social forum movement, those who sought a reformist redirection to globalisation. In *Making Globalisation Work* Stiglitz builds on this, and sees himself following in the footsteps of economists like Maynard Keynes who "was vilified by conservatives, who saw his prescription as increasing the role of government ... But Keynes actually did more to save the capitalist system than all the pro-market financiers put together."

So while Stiglitz might be a surprise, a leading academic economist and one-time servant

government regulation and intervention, markets do not lead to economic efficiency."

His critique of markets is that the optimum allocation of resources is only prevented by imperfect information. But there is a far more fundamental problem with markets – they only recognise needs that are backed up by money (effective demand). Even if there were "perfect information" markets would only meet the needs of the moneyed people. It is "perfectly" clear that millions in Africa need mosquito nets to prevent them getting malaria, but they cannot afford them and so they die.

When "people", consumers enter markets they have a particular set of "endowments", they own different amounts of resources, in the form of commodities or money. What determines how far they are able to meet their needs is how many resources, or how much money, they have.

Rich people can meet more of their needs than poor people. The median income of a poor Indian person is \$2.70 a day, which will never buy very much even if it is spent "efficiently".

And what determines the set of endowments, the relations of distribution that limit people's consumption? Their relationship to the means of production and, critically, their ownership or

World Bank, for example, is appointed by the US President, without even the need to consult congress!

He concludes with the rallying cry: "We can make globalization work, not just for the rich and powerful but for all people, including those in the poorest countries."

We can, but not by "saving" capitalism from itself. Even international trade co-operation

on a rational and equitable basis between north and south and cross-border planning to tackle carbon emissions, cannot be achieved by capitalism, a system driven by profit, however well regulated it is. For that we need to destroy the system of capitalism and all the international financial institutions that support it – to replace it with a communist system based on need not profit.

Bill Jefferies

## "Of the left, always of the left" – one combative rocker

### REDEMPTION SONG:

The definitive biography of Joe

Strummer

Chris Salewicz

HarperCollins / 2006 / £20



"REMEMBER VICTOR Jara in the Santiago Stadium". These words sprang to my mind on learning of the death of Chilean tyrant, Augusto Pinochet last

December. Jara, a left wing poet and folksinger, was among the early victims of the 1973 Pinochet coup.

The phrase comes from the song, *Washington Bullets*, a denunciation of US imperialist interventions and a naïve paean to the Nicaraguan revolution, which featured on the fourth Clash album, *Sandinista!*, and was penned by the band's lead singer and main lyricist, Joe Strummer.

I suspect that I was not alone in recalling the song's lyrics as news of Pinochet's death broke, testimony to the exceptional significance Strummer and the band had for a generation of left activists on both sides of the Atlantic who cut their political milk teeth in the late 70s and early 80s.

Nearly four years after his sudden death, aged 50, from an

undetected congenital heart defect, Strummer is the subject of a mammoth biography by his longtime friend, the music journalist, Chris Salewicz. Weighing in at more than 600 pages the adjective "definitive" in the subtitle would seem justified.

The book embodies the new school of rock biography, richly illustrated while also literate and extensively researched, albeit rich in anecdote and sometimes thin on analysis. It holds an obvious appeal for those of a certain age, who graduated from religiously reading the *New Musical Express* in its heyday (when at least a few of us optimistically viewed it as an important arena of combat in the ideological class struggle) to such glossy monthlies as *Mojo* and *Uncut*.

Remarkably, though, this Strummer biography will also fascinate members of a younger generation of socially conscious music fans, a fair few of whom I have spotted wearing Clash t-shirts on demonstrations protesting against the Iraq war and George Bush. In the ephemeral sphere of pop and rock, The Clash are an exceptional phenomenon – a band that disappeared more than 20 years ago and yet exercise a considerable influence, frequently garnering more mainstream media attention than many contemporary acts.

Having transcended the

aesthetic constraints of the initial surge of the punk "movement", the band achieved a unique degree of commercial success while producing a body of work that combined astute lyrics with musical innovation and numerous radical gestures.

In writing of his old friend, Salewicz eschews hagiography in favour of a frank and unflinching depiction. For me, Strummer's hypocritical public stance regarding "hard" drugs was not news, though the image of a priapic rock star was. In short, Salewicz depicts no secular saint, but a man with a welter of contradictions, yet portrayed with unreserved affection.

Strummer was born John Graham Mellor in Ankara, Turkey in August 1952. The son of an Indian-born father, who rose to the upper-middle ranks of the Foreign Office and a Scottish mother, who trained and worked as a nurse, Mellor was the younger of two brothers. The boys had a peripatetic early childhood in Egypt, Germany, Malawi and Mexico. The family eventually acquired a Surrey bungalow and the brothers were bundled off as boarders to the City of London Freemen's School, when John was nine.

Some 15 years later during the early days of punk, revelations about his father's job and his own years at public school dented Strummer's street cred. Ironically, his scholastic career was singularly undistinguished as he displayed little more than a modest aptitude for art and some talent as a middle distance runner. He eventually scraped four O-levels. The image of the mischievous, academically indifferent teenager stands in sharp contrast to the determined autodidact who read voraciously through much of his adult life.

His eclectic reading selections ranged from Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* though to the US "Beat generation" writers, particularly Allen Ginsberg, with whom the Clash collaborated on the band's last proper album, *Combat Rock*. This literary mix informed lyrical concerns from the

murder of a west London car park attendant through to the Spanish Civil War, the failure of Britain's welfare state and the fear of nuclear meltdown.

Salewicz also identifies a largely hidden but hugely important influence. In July 1970 shortly before his 18th birthday, his older brother was found dead in Regent's Park, having committed suicide with a massive overdose

## In writing of his old friend, Salewicz eschews hagiography in favour of a frank and unflinching depiction

of aspirin. David, not yet 20 when he died, was a maladjusted loner who had dabbled in the occult and apparently joined the National Front (NF).

Whether as John Mellor or Joe Strummer he rarely discussed his brother's life and death, which evidently had a devastating effect on their parents. Salewicz speculates that his brother's involvement with the fascist right shaped Strummer's own very public opposition to the NF. "From the time in 1978 that The Clash appeared at the Rock Against Racism concert in Victoria Park [Hackney, north London]. . . their front-man was almost indelibly associated with the side of punk rock that had disassociated itself from those flirtations with swastikas espoused by Sid Vicious and Siouxsie [Sioux, lead singer of the Banshees]. Joe changed that image of punk, becoming rather righteous in his role of tragic, vulnerable spokesman."

Salewicz sheds little light on Strummer's political influences, though intriguingly suggests that his father was among them; he held views that were surprisingly left wing for a man in his position. In drifting between art schools, a series of odd jobs and the loose squatters' movement that emerged in West London in the mid-70s, the pre-Clash Mellor had casual brushes

with individuals from a spectrum of left traditions. But Salewicz is clear that by the time of his definitive incarnation as Strummer he was firmly committed to pursuing some kind of fame and fortune in the world of rock 'n' roll.

As a youth at boarding school Mellor was a keen listener to pirate radio stations broadcasting US and British rock and pop tunes that the BBC would rarely air before the

launch of Radio One in 1967. He was especially obsessive about the early Rolling Stones, but went on to become an avid student of their own influences among African-American rock and bluesmen such as Lee Dorsey and "Screamin' Jay" Hawkins.

Along with the Clash's main composer, Mick Jones (a very early white British exponent of New York hip hop), Strummer was an honest musical magpie, pilfering influences from not only the early New York punk of the Ramones but also from the Who and relatively obscure British performers such as Vince Taylor and the tragic Texan quartet, the Bobby Fuller Four. Covers of songs associated with the latter two featured on the international breakthrough album, *London Calling*.

But an even more significant influence was to come in the form of reggae, which Strummer and the band's bassist, Paul Simonon, followed with devotion. From their eponymous first album with a cover of Junior Marvin's "Police and Thieves", the band time and again appropriated Jamaican influences throughout their career. By the time of the *Sandinista!* album in 1981 the band could reasonably claim to be forerunners of "world music" before the term became vogueish.

What is beyond doubt and

frequently documented in the pages of *Redemption Song* is the commitment by Strummer and the band to using their stage to combat racism, giving support slots in front of overwhelmingly white audiences to the likes of Jamaican toaster (a kind of dancehall rapper and DJ), Mikey Dread, the then marginalised rock pioneer, Bo Diddley, or the obscure (at the time) New York rapper, Grandmaster Flash. There were more overtly political gestures including an ill-conceived if well-intentioned attempt to give platforms to Aboriginal land rights campaigners during a 1982 tour of Australia.

The Australian experience exposed to the band the extent of anti-Aboriginal racism within the white population as once friendly hotel bar staff blanked the band after their first Sydney concert. A later performance by a local Aboriginal dancer in Brisbane apparently gave the cue to racist vandals to smash up his home.

Strummer himself was the subject of a substantial Special Branch file, which grew initially out of his insistence for a time in 1978 on sporting a t-shirt advertising Italian Red Brigade urban terrorists.

By calling in the pages of the NME for "Troops out of Northern Ireland" and wearing an H-Block t-shirt onstage in London, Strummer became an apparent target of a loyalist terror outfit, the Red Hand Commandos. Salewicz also includes an account of a solidarity speech Strummer gave in carefully rehearsed Spanish during a Clash concert in Madrid as IRA prisoner Bobby Sands lay dying from the effects of his hunger strike. The author concludes that he would have been prepared to give a similar message in front of a British audience but was simply out of the country at the height of the Republican hunger strikes.

Though locked into an unfavourable contract with record company CBS, the Clash's international success eventually ensured Strummer a substantial income and privileged lifestyle for



what proved the last two decades of his life. In the wake of the Clash's eventual demise in 1985, his output as a songwriter plummeted, while attempts at a cinematic career proved unsatisfactory. His ideological compass also veered wildly – in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 he appeared to support the war in Afghanistan, though later interviews suggest he had reversed that position.

The self-described wilderness years ended symbolically, however, with the birth of a new Strummer-led band, the Mescaleros, in 1999 that eventually produced three albums (one completed posthumously). Drawing on Latin and gypsy influences, as well as rock and reggae, the band's CD's did not sell particularly well, but some of the songs from this period number among Strummer's best – not least "Shaktar Donetsk", a powerful account of a migrant's perilous journey to gross exploitation in Britain.

His last performance in London was a benefit concert for the striking firefighters of the FBU on 15 November 2002. A night that became all the more remarkable in hindsight also featured the first onstage reunion in nearly 20 years with Clash guitarist and songwriting partner Mick Jones.

That FBU concert cemented Strummer's reputation as a man "of the left, always of the left", and Salewicz's biography strengthens his claim to being one of the most intriguing and significant figures in the past half century of British popular culture.

#### George Binette

George Binette is the author of "The Last Night London Burned", an account in words and pictures of the November 2002 FBU benefit concert by Joe Strummer & the Mescaleros, published jointly with the London region of the FBU as fundraiser during the 2002/03 pay dispute.

organised women textile workers through the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

The Yorkshire rebel girls were less attracted to the NUWSS. Outside of Lancashire the NUWSS was dominated by wealthy liberal ladies, including its leader Millicent Fawcett, widow of Liberal MP Henry Fawcett. Others were the wives of the mill owners that forced working class women to work in grim conditions for starvation wages. The rebel girls were closer to the more militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) of the Pankhurst sisters that organised direct action.

WSPU organisers were sent to remote mill towns around Huddersfield and Halifax, intervening in strikes and local by-elections to get a hearing, taking their exciting and controversial ideas right into working class communities. The WSPU also had strong links to the socialist Independent Labour Party. The success of the WSPU with working class women in Yorkshire may have been, in part, due to the lack of union organisation of the activists which freed them from the constraints of respectable reformist campaigning and enabled them to embrace militant direct action.

Liddington describes the painfully limited lives her protagonists are struggling to escape from – several had absent, useless or violent fathers and were left with mothers struggling to feed a family on one wage. Children from poor families had to leave full time education when they were ten to work in the mills. Career prospects beyond the mills were non-existent for most, but a few became pupil teachers, training on the job at 13 while others entered domestic service. Given the constraints of Edwardian morality, many were desperate to reach 21 to have at least some control over their own lives.

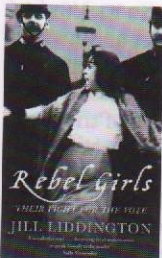
Lavena Saltonstall, a cloth cutter from Hebden Bridge, railed bitterly about the lot of women of her generation and class in her *Letters of a Tailoress* printed in the local

## The hidden history of the women's suffrage struggle

### REBEL GIRLS, THEIR FIGHT FOR THE VOTE

Jill Liddington

Virago Press / 2006 / £14.99



THE COVER image of Jill Liddington's book *Rebel Girls, Their Fight for the Vote* shows a young working class woman, clearly in her teens, "struggling in the grasp of two burly policemen" (*Daily Mail*). This is Dora Thewlis, a 16 year old weaver from Huddersfield, no doubt on her first trip to the capital. She was arrested after a lobby of the House of Commons in March 1907 and sent to Holloway Prison for six days, becoming briefly notorious as the "baby suffragette".

*Rebel Girls* focuses on Yorkshire and includes some of the hidden

history of the women's suffrage struggle. Liddington used local newspaper archives, information released from the 1901 census and scrupulous detective work to track down descendants and identify papers, diaries and campaign minutes books. Putting them together she sheds light on the many courageous women like Dora who endured violence, lost their jobs and the risked being shunned by their family, all to win votes for women.

Liddington's earlier work with Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, covered the suffrage movement in Lancashire. Together with *Rebel Girls* it charts the history of the women's suffrage struggle beyond the well-rehearsed stories from London and the three famous Pankhurst sisters. *One Hand Tied Behind Us* traced the development of the movement in north-west England, including the "constitutional" response of

Worker's Educational Association newsletter (1911): "Should any girl show a tendency to politics or ideas of her own, she is looked upon by the majority of women as a person who neglects doorsteps and home matters . . . if their daughter shows any signs of a craving for higher things than cleaning brass fenders or bath taps, they put a stop to what they call 'high notions'".

Lavena, however, had different ideas: "Being a tailorress, and living in an age when poverty, vice and disease are stalking through the land and attacking particularly the people of my class, I have decided to abandon the so-called womanly accomplishments and have something to say about these evils."

Women like Lavena disrupted meetings where Liberal MPs and ministers were speaking. They stood on soapboxes and "lurrys" in town squares or outside mill gates. They lobbied MPs in Parliament and attempted to storm the House of Commons. They threw stones at windows, spat at policemen, fired homemade "bombs" into pillar boxes and empty houses. They went on hunger strikes, refusing water too. They attempted an attack on the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London.

And they did the mundane stuff too - fundraising teas and dances, petitioning and letter writing. But their direct action was serious, with serious consequences. Mary Gawthorpe, a working class WSPU organiser from Leeds was kicked so hard in the stomach by a policeman that she never fully recovered. Lilian Lenton, another working class activist, nearly died from a lung infection after her trachea was torn when she was force-fed in prison.

While the suffragettes often had the active support of husbands, lovers and sons, there were many men who were more than ready to throw rotten eggs and vegetables, to try and topple a platform, chase the women through the streets, knock them over and tear their clothes. State violence from the police and in prison escalated - the Cat and Mouse Act (1913) was brought in as a response to hunger

strikes, a woman was released from prison on licence if her health deteriorated and rearrested once she had recovered sufficiently for the next bout of forced feeding.

Lilian Lenton twice took the opportunity to escape from the police while they guarded the house she was released into - once disguised as a boy - moving to a safe house. Recently-released public records also document secret photographing of suffragettes in prison to help police track them down at a later date. Liddington suggests this was the first instance of state photographic surveillance.

In Yorkshire, as in London, the response to this militancy was to

ban women from meetings and from entering the Palace Yard at the Houses of Parliament. The ban applied to all women unless they were individually granted permission.

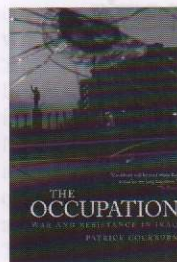
Although fascinating, the book lacks an analysis of how working class women's militancy did or didn't impact on the wider labour movement, and fails to draw lessons for future struggles. However the courage and militancy of the women in *Rebel Girls*, especially the mill workers with so much (or perhaps so little) to lose, is as startling now as it must have been at the time.

Alison Higgins

## The US in Iraq - the self-inflicted disasters of war

THE OCCUPATION: WAR AND RESISTANCE IN IRAQ

Patrick Cockburn  
Verso / 2006 / £15.99



PATRICK COCKBURN has been reporting from Iraq since 1978. His 1999 book, *Out of the Ashes: the Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* was

banned there, but widely read underground: a copy was found in the house of Saddam's half-brother Sabawi, head of the General Security Service.

In his new book, Cockburn has not only provided a timely resumé of the war in Iraq, recalling such "milestones" as the "handover of sovereignty", and the approval of a new constitution, he has also assembled a trove of his own and other eyewitness testimony, most of which will be new even to those who have watched the conflict closely and all of which epitomises the US/UK generated disaster in Iraq.

Cockburn was present at the conference of Iraqi exiles at the

Metropole Hotel, Edgware Road, three months before the March 2003 invasion. These were the men with which the USA and Britain hoped to work after Saddam's demise. One confided to Cockburn: "I have only one fear. It is that the Americans will realise at the last moment that attacking Iraq and overthrowing Saddam Hussein is not in their best interests."

The way in which decisions based on the self-interested advice of sections of Iraqi (and Iraqi exile) society have badly backfired on the occupiers is a recurrent theme in the book. Perhaps the most egregious example was the wholesale disbandment of the Iraqi army in the aftermath of the invasion.

Cockburn entered northern Iraq from Syria, arriving in Arbil, an initial base for a number of reporters, on 15 February 2003. Things were already going wrong for the Americans before the fighting started; unable simultaneously to satisfy their Kurdish friends and their Turkish allies - bitter enemies of each other - they chose to abandon the northern invasion route from Turkey, rather than snub the Kurdish peshmerga ground forces

who they were even less able to do without. This in turn was a consequence of trying to fight a war "on the cheap", following the model of the capture of Kabul in 2001, by using US air-power and indigenous foot-soldiers. But having alienated the Sunni officer caste of the Iraqi army, and rapidly the rest of the Sunni population too, the occupiers were forced to rely on the Shias and their clerics.

In the old imperialist game of balancing one ethnic group against the other, Washington was dealt a decent hand, but played it badly. This can be at least partially explained by the arrogance and blind ignorance of the occupiers; L. Paul Bremer III, the head of the Coalition Provision Authority (CPA), which officially ruled until June 2004, was an emblem of this. As the insurgency developed throughout his year as dictator of Iraq, he took the growing violence of "desperate men" supposedly loyal to Saddam to show that "those who refuse to embrace the new Iraq [were] clearly panicking". Enconced in the Green Zone in Baghdad Bremer and his administration lost their grip on reality. Soon Cockburn stopped interviewing them - too often he found that he, not they, was the one providing the information:

"One day I had gone to visit a pleasant and previously well-informed non-American diplomat. He claimed that, going by figures he had just received, the gasoline shortage had at last been sorted out. I pointed out mildly that I was a little late for the interview because there were enormous traffic jams throughout Baghdad caused by long lines of vehicles, sometimes several miles long, queuing for gasoline."

A major obstacle to reconstructing the country was the corruption with which the process took place: \$8.8bn went unaccounted for under Bremer's CPA, and a further \$2bn under Iyad Allawi's government - mainly into the bank accounts of US contractors and their Iraqi placemen. There was little oversight, and funds were kept in cash: freshly printed \$100 bills. When an American soldier gambled away the cash entrusted to him to

help redevelop the Iraqi boxing team, it was uncertain whether the amount was \$20,000 or \$60,000 - no one had kept a record of how much he had been given.

Financial corruption naturally hindered not just efforts at civil reconstruction, but with the occupation so dependent on mercenaries, security too. Scott Custer and Mike Battles, whose company, Custer Battles (you couldn't make it up!), was awarded the \$16.8m contract to secure Baghdad International Airport, failed to procure X-ray machines for which they were paid in advance, and provided a sniffer-dog that refused to sniff. In a leaked memo, the airport's director of security wrote that they "have shown themselves to be unresponsive, uncooperative, incompetent, deceitful, manipulative and war profiteers. Other than that they are swell fellows."

Cockburn's book sifts the layers of insurgency. The uprising against the occupation doubtless gained its greatest initial impetus when the (mainly Sunni) Iraqi officer corps was thrown out of work along with the rest of the army immediately after the invasion. Amputees and others reliant on war pensions after a quarter-century of wars and rebellions in Iraq were also made destitute. Even the able-bodied were unlikely to get a job with unemployment running at 70% of the workforce.

## **In the old imperialist game of balancing one ethnic group against the other, Washington was dealt a decent hand, but played it badly**

Cockburn was at a demonstration of unemployed officers at the gates of the Green Zone in the summer of 2003. "We did not fight for Saddam, but we will fight for our children," one former artillery officer told him. The demonstration was angry, but not really violent, so that even if

it was true, as a US spokesman later claimed, that some stones had been thrown at US troops, their overreaction - to shoot two of the demonstrators dead - was not just a crime, but a blunder which was replicated across Iraq that summer and was to have grave consequences for the occupation.

Collective punishments, such as the destruction of orchards and date groves, representing the livelihood of entire villages were casually meted out. Near Dhuluya, American bulldozers blared jazz from loudspeakers as they tore trees up by the roots. A US lieutenant-colonel explained: "We asked the farmers several times to stop the attacks or to tell us who was responsible, but the farmers didn't tell us." When Cockburn investigated the incident, a farmer told him he felt "as if his hands had been cut off."

The insurgents' most deadly tactic - the roadside IED (improvised explosive device) - is well known. Its technical basis, a country littered with old munitions and men with military experience, was put in place by US foreign policy going back decades. The foreign suicide bombers, on the other hand, are of much more recent genesis. Studies by the Saudi government and intelligence services showed that of 300 young Saudis intercepted on their way to fight or blow themselves up in Iraq, very few had any contact

with al-Qaeda or any other radical organisation prior to 2003. An Israeli study of 154 foreign fighters in Iraq also concluded that almost all had been radicalised by the invasion of Iraq alone.

Short of troops, and having permanently alienated the majority of Sunnis, the US forces

have made themselves dependent on the good will of the Shias to a degree that has forced them to accept demands that they had hoped to resist. The national poll to elect the constituent assembly of January 2005 was not part of Washington's original plan. Rather it was demanded by a fatwa issued in June 2003 by Al-Sistani, who did well from it: his United Iraqi Alliance (containing all the main Shia parties) won 140 out of 275 seats; the Kurdish bloc won 75; and the party of Iyad Allawi, prime-minister, ex-Baathist, and hope of the US and secular nationalist came third with a mere 40 seats. Meanwhile, in Sunni Anbar province, only 2% of people voted.

In October 2005 the Sunnis, however, did come out to vote against the draft constitution, which they saw as paving the way for an ethnic break up of Iraq in which the Kurds and the Shias would be left with all the oil. They failed however, to bloc a federal constitution giving significant rights to the regions.

At parliamentary elections in December 2005, the vote split again along ethnic lines, producing an assembly to sit until the end of 2009 in which the United Iraqi Alliance held 47% of the seats (about a quarter of which were held by the radical Shia cleric al-Sadr), the Kurds 19%, the Sunni parties 20%, and Iyad Allawi's party 9%.

After these elections the US spent most of last year waging a losing political battle to force the ascendant Shia-based government of prime minister Maleki to accommodate the Sunni population's concerns and especially rein in the sectarian Shia militia and Iraqi security forces which has taken both the anti-occupation insurgency and ethnic civil war to new depths.

*The Occupation* is a chronicle of a war which is not over, and it is no fault that Cockburn does not provide much in terms of an explicit conclusion. One thing that is clear is that whatever the eventual outcome, the Iraq war will have massively damaged the power and reputation of the US.

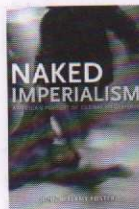
Cockburn at one point approvingly quotes the Duke of Wellington: "Great nations do not have small wars". In fact, Bush and the neocons mistook a big war for a small one. They set a course which would inevitably lead them to tussle not just with Iraq, but with Turkey, Iran, Syria and

Saudi Arabia yet they made hardly more preparations than if they were changing the government in Panama, Grenada or Haiti.

The maxim to which Cockburn's compelling account really lends support is that of Machiavelli: "Wars begin when you will, but they do not end when you please".

## The drive for US hegemony – more than just a neocon policy

**NAKED IMPERIALISM – THE US PURSUIT OF GLOBAL DOMINANCE**  
John Bellamy Foster  
Monthly Review / 2006 / £13.99



NAKED IMPERIALISM is a collection of articles published in *Monthly Review* from 2001 to 2005, in which John Bellamy Foster – a long time radical leftist from

the Sweezy school of Marxism – attempts to show that the Iraq war and the drive of the Bush neocons for a more assertive and unilateral US foreign policy, is not simply the policy of a few hard liners who have accidentally captured the state but is an inherent part of imperialist capitalist economics.

Bellamy Foster reveals how the goals of the US establishment have changed since the collapse of the USSR in 1990 to one which, in the words of leading neocon Paul Wolfowitz, "preclud[es] the establishment of any global competitor."

Paradoxically, while Bellamy Foster wants to prove the economic basis of imperialism, his book is strongest in describing the ideological and strategic aims of the US, the main focus of the book. In doing this he covers familiar ground, showing how the US rulers took advantage of 9/11 to accelerate their shift towards a more overtly imperialistic foreign policy (the Bush Doctrine).

He effectively challenges the ultra-imperialist theory of Negri and Hardt's *Empire* by showing

the US actions that refute the idea that the days of national policy are obsolete. He points to the spread of US bases across the world, and reports how several major advocates of US hegemony have rediscovered a notion of imperialism as a justification for their overtly expansionist policy. More latterly, he considers whether Iraq will prove to be the next US Vietnam.

But it is where Bellamy Foster's attempts to describe the economic basis of imperialist capitalism, that his analysis is at its weakest. This analysis is, incidentally, almost identical to that put forward by John Rees in his recent book *Imperialism and Resistance*.

Bellamy Foster draws explicitly on the work of underconsumptionist Marxists such as Harry Magdoff, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and radical Keynesians like Joan Robinson, Michal Kaleki and Josef Steindl. He pulls this together to show that imperialist monopoly capitalism is by definition crisis ridden and stagnant. He quotes Kaleki, "Long run development is not inherent in the capitalist economy. Thus specific 'developmental factors' are required to sustain a long run upward movement", a far cry indeed from Marx's assertion that capitalism can only exist by constantly revolutionising the relations of production.

He summarises his position: "giant corporations tended to promote widening profit margins, but were constantly threatened by a shortage of effective demand,

due to the uneven distribution of income and resulting weakness of wage based consumption ... thereby generating a strong tendency towards economic stagnation." Investment, he says, which could provide an alternative source of demand, makes the situation worse by expanding productive capacity.

The most immediate and obvious problem with this analysis is that it was developed in the middle of the post-war boom, when capitalism was expanding at its fastest rate ever. How can the under-consumptionist theory cope with this blatant contradiction? Bellamy Foster lists four countervailing factors: the growth of automobiles after World War Two, cold war military spending, growing waste, and the expansion of the financial superstructure. Taken together he considers these were sufficient to explain the post-war boom.

Given that all of these factors continued into the crisis years of the 1970s and 80s, why was the post-war period so different? And how has capitalist globalisation been able to escape the constraints of effective demand, when production has expanded so massively with the restoration of capitalism in the former workers' states, military spending has fallen so sharply from its cold-war highs and when, as Bellamy Foster confirms later, income inequality is rising? Of course Bellamy Foster doesn't believe it has escaped. He cites Istavan Meszaros who claims that we remain in the "third phase" of imperialism, which began with the "onset of capitalism's structural crisis in the 1970s."

For all his attempts to explain contemporary US neo-conservative foreign policy as an inherent feature of capitalism itself, in practice he is forced to fall back on the notion that the USA goes to war to spend money on arms. It is the old 1960s military/industrial complex once again and as an explanation of contemporary US foreign policy is completely inadequate.

What such under-consumptionists forget is that effective demand is simply the

total value of production in the economy, the amount spent on wages, capital and the total of profits created. Capitalism produces the amount of demand necessary to realise its output in the production process itself. The separation between production and sale implies the possibility of capitalist crisis, but it does not explain it. Due to disproportions in the world

former degenerate workers' states in the 1990s, rates of profits began to rise and with them output and demand. The tendency towards stagnation of imperialist monopoly capitalism was significantly offset.

The overt aggressive imperialism of US foreign policy in the current century flows from their need to pre-empt future threats - to prevent the establishment

## How has capitalist globalisation been able to escape the constraints of effective demand, when production has expanded so massively with the restoration of capitalism in the former workers' states?

economy, there may be a shortage of demand here, an oversupply of commodities there, but these are the inevitable shifts through which capital establishes an average rate of profit, they do not determine the level of output itself. A shortage of demand cannot explain the level of production or capitalist crisis.

What the underconsumptionist/neo-Keynesian stagnation theorists forget is the role of the rate of profit in capitalist production. What determines the level of output, the amount of production and therefore demand, is the rate of profit. After World War Two the rate of profit was restored, as redundant capital was destroyed in the war years, and the USA could guarantee expanding markets through its global economic, diplomatic and military supremacy.

As the rate of profit declined from the mid-1960s onwards, so did output and effective demand. With the defeat of workers in the global north in the 1980s and the overthrow of capitalism in the

of global competitors and secure energy supplies - rather than the stagnation of their economy. In the second half of the 1990s and again since 2003 the USA has enjoyed growth and profit rates not seen for 25 years or more. With the addition of the former planned economies of the Stalinist states to the world capitalist market the sphere for capitalist production has been greatly expanded.

Unsurprisingly Bellamy Foster produces almost no empirical data to substantiate his assertion of capitalist stagnation and decline. While his book is a good example of the Marxist/radical Keynesian underconsumptionist theories, and provides some useful insights into the ideological justification for US neo-conservatism in particular, it has no real explanation of the contradictions of contemporary imperialist globalisation, their duration or how they will eventually explode.

**Bill Jefferies**

## **SUBJECT / Autumn trade union conferences – a lost opportunity**

Dear comrades,

I went to the two labour movement conferences this Autumn – the RMT's National Shop Stewards Conference and Respect's "Organising Fighting Trade Unions". The RMT conference was the smaller of the two. There were about 200 delegates and there was little evidence that it had been seriously built for. By contrast, the SWP had worked to ensure that the Respect Conference was, in its terms, a success and an impressive 700 or so delegates were brought to Shoreditch Town Hall.

Even with the small turn out at the RMT conference, both conferences had the potential to use the experiences of the trade union militants present to identify the character of the attacks we face and they also had the potential to hammer out the concrete strategies and organisational forms needed to defeat these attacks. Sadly, little of this potential was realised and in the end activists were ill served by both conferences. I think many like me left feeling frustrated at the lost opportunity.

This failure flowed from the determination of the conference organisers to control them, to limit what could be debated and decided upon, with agendas structured to ensure this control. In reality they were not conferences but rallies, weighed down by the number of platform speakers. The RMT conference featured a platform of nine speakers, most of whom were general secretaries or union officials. The Respect conference was divided into three main sections with four keynote speakers in each, plus various "guest speakers". Some of the speakers spoke compellingly, others did not. The important point is that the emphasis on platform oratory meant that debate on concrete proposals, which could have been in the form of resolutions and amendments, was severely curtailed, debate that addressed the burning questions of what we should actually do and build.

As a result the conferences did not address important questions of the bosses' offensive (privatisation,

pensions) in the sense of allowing a comradely debate on differences of strategy. Entirely absent from the conferences were proposals for dealing with a problem faced by every activist, the problem of a trade union bureaucracy that regularly blocks action, sells out struggles and witch hunts militants. The treacherous character of the bureaucracy is seen time and time again: in the betrayal of the sacked Gate Gourmet workers by Tony Woodley and the T&G officials; in the deal signed up to by the leaders of the public sector unions which conceded two-tier pension schemes; in the decision of the Unison leadership to call off action in defence of local government pensions after a single day's strike. These betrayals flow from the very nature of the bureaucracy: a caste that mediates between the workers and the bosses and which derives its material privileges and social prestige from this role.

What needs to be built in and across the unions is a rank and file movement that has, as its objective, their transformation from top to bottom. Such a movement would seek to ensure that all officials were elected, recallable and paid the same wages as those they represent and that all struggles were controlled by union members through strike committees and mass meetings. A rank and file movement, moreover, would build itself through action, organising its own strikes, if the bureaucracy were obstructing this.

It is a moot point as to which conference was the least democratic. The RMT conference allowed quite a large number of speakers from the floor. However, when it came to the single resolution for debate, a resolution containing the conference's founding statement, only the most perfunctory discussion was allowed – and no amendments were permitted!

This bureaucratic prohibition on amendments was revealing, since the resolution contained the proposition that the National Shop Stewards Network (to be founded in spring 2007) would not "interfere in the internal affairs and elections of TUC affiliated trade unions or the functions of the TUC". In other words, this network, as conceived by

the founding statement, would not threaten the interests of the trade union bureaucrats and the control they exercise over their respective unions. Although the idea of a rank and file movement was frequently invoked at conference, this policy is in complete contradiction to it. A genuine rank and file movement, as a report on the Permanent Revolution website noted, "would not hesitate to interfere in the affairs of other unions when the leaders of those unions are selling out their brothers and sisters."

At the Respect conference speaker slips were carefully vetted by the organisers and no voices critical of the overall SWP/Respect project were heard. The organisers did, however, allow the extremely bland Workers Charter to be amended – with a few useful strengthening amendments on support for unions defying the anti-trade union laws being incorporated. However, debate on this, the only part of the day dealing with concrete decisions, was squeezed into the last hour of conference. What should have been the focus of the event was reduced to a tokenistic add-on.

Serious militants had a right to feel patronised by both conferences. Militants experience the class struggle and the problems faced by the labour movement on a daily basis. They want to be involved in debate which addresses and attempts to resolve these problems. They deserve to be treated as more than just rally fodder.

Dave Gay  
NUT (in a personal capacity)

George Binette adds:

Having been elected to the committee that emerged from the RMT conference I attended its first meeting in early December. The meeting was comradely and businesslike. We focussed on the organisation of a further conference as instructed by the conference resolution. We provisionally agreed the date of Saturday 12 May.

There was a consensus that we did not want a repeat of either of the autumn conferences, with domination by top tables and an absence of structured debate. There was general agreement that speeches from union tops should be kept to a bare minimum.



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A proposal from me for a conference structured around resolutions deciding policy received little support. In my view, despite the flaws in this project, union militants should seek support for the conference and the network more generally. A further committee meeting is due to take place in mid-January.

#### **SUBJECT / World economy – end of long expansionist wave?**

Dear comrades,

I am writing to express my appreciation both for the excellent article you wrote on the world economy and the public meeting that followed. I found the content of the article and the level of discussion in the meeting to be of a refreshingly high standard. And again I endorse your criticism of your old Workers Power comrades for their failure to view the world economy in an objective light.

It reminds me of the polemics we had after the collapse of the USSR. It was pointed out at the time that without an economic compass there can be no political perspectives. Drawing up perspectives is like predicting the weather. If you insist it is going to be hot when in fact it is going to be cold and you dress accordingly, you end up with a political cold or even political frostbite. I fear your old comrades are not suitably dressed.

We agree that the world economy is in a long period of expansion. It was this period of expansion that allowed China and then India to join the world economy and add to its expansion. It allowed companies in the more established economies of the Pacific Rim to join the ranks of the multinationals and in some cases, like Samsung, to dominate its sector.

The duration of this upturn is not in dispute. A possible difference I have is the extent of this upturn. I feel your article does not sufficiently isolate the fictitious part of the economy and the change in accounting rules that distinguishes this period from that of previous upturns.

Since the 1990s and the deregulation of the financial sector, new forms of finance have become

available. This has had the result of socialising lending to industry, but also, and more to the point, it has fuelled new and creative forms of speculation. I do not have the figures to hand, but the amount invested in speculation exceeds that invested in expanding production. The number of shares on the major bourses is actually falling due to the lack of new issues. Large companies have reduced their debt, and yet the banks are earning record profits. These are truly magical times and while it lasts, the magicians in companies like Merrill Lynch have paid themselves some epic bonuses.

We should also add that the shift of financial services like pensions from the state to this sector has inflated it even more. Adjust for these changes and quite a bit of the growth rates of the economy is skimmed off.

Secondly since Reagan and Thatcher massacred their departments of statistics they have been under-resourced. Accordingly they have concentrated their statistical efforts on the centralised parts of the economy. But looking at Tesco's to the exclusion of what is happening in the smaller shops, overstates growth as Tesco grows at the expense of the smaller shops.

In addition, the way productivity has been calculated and with it GDP has changed. Because of the rapid fall in the price of new information technology, volumes in other parts of the economy have been exaggerated. The changes in a new sector have been extrapolated over older sectors where labour times are not tumbling. So a large part of the productivity miracle is illusory. I cannot begin to quantify it, but it is there. Since the adoption of these formulae the German economy has been shown to be growing faster than before.

So if we adjust for these factors we have a long expansion, but as far as the older economies go, an unremarkable expansion except for the rich who have gotten unforgivably more rich. For the majority of the population fundamental problems, like pensions, health care, housing, infrastructure etc have only deepened.

So where do we stand today? The world economy continues its expansion. New areas of strength like India, parts of Eastern Europe,

a more robust EU are adding to the expansion. However from now on it is likely to become more lacklustre and uneven.

The main reason for this is that the speculative froth has blown off. The steady rise in interest rates has made it more costly to stay at the table. In particular the most feverish area of speculation, the commodity market – oil, gas and minerals – is collapsing. This will be larger than the dotcom bubble and more important because of the active involvement of the major banks (for which it was a significant source of profit) and it is now collapsing with the financial fall out yet to materialise.

Of course it is possible the new chair of the Fed will follow in the footsteps of his predecessor and slash interest rates, but that act will be harder to follow with inflation lurking in the wings.

In addition it is questionable whether China's stellar performance will remain unchallenged by the slowing US economy and its structural weaknesses especially the accumulated trade deficit. We are soon to find out how many of the new factories in China are running at profitable rates. This slower growth will intensify competition, eroding US economic hegemony leading to the eclipse of the dollar as world currency – witness a growing assertiveness of the EU and an acceleration in the shift in the economic centre of gravity towards the Pacific.

As for long waves, there is much that is wrong with this theory. At the very least the technical composition of capital which accelerates over time as technology advances should suggest a shorter cycle with more violent swings. The best course for Marxists is to examine conditions as they are found.

The defeat of organised labour in the west, and the destruction of the workers' states in the east, represented a generational defeat of the working class. It ended the stalemate between capital and labour and opened new areas of exploitation. It therefore ushered in an extended period of expansion which has now reached its mature phase.

Brian Green

# permanent revolution

Issue 3 / Winter 2007 / £2.50 €4.00

## NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

Central London  
Saturday 24 February 12 noon

- End the killing in Iraq!
- Stop Trident!
- Troops out of Iraq!

# IRAQ

## Blair's bloody legacy

TONY BLAIR will soon be gone from office. But as he prepares for his lucrative lecture tours and maps out the future at his new Blair Foundation he leaves behind the wrecked lives of millions of Iraqis.

Last year The Lancet revealed the occupation has claimed 100,000 lives. This month the UNHCR said that one in eight Iraqis have left their homes due to war, with 50,000 more joining them each month – the largest displacement in the Middle East since Palestinians were ethnically cleansed to make way for the creation of Israel in 1948.

The number of refugees in surrounding countries stands at two million. A further 1.7 million inside Iraq have been displaced.

In 2003 Blair lied to us about Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" to justify the invasion. During the next two years he said the occupation was working well to bring security and freedom; prosperity was around the corner. But this war was all about achieving "oil security" for the gas-guzzling consumers of the USA and big profits for oil companies. The rhetoric of bringing democracy to the Middle East – and so undermining "extremism" – was cynical cover for imperialist aggression. Its hollowness has been shown, as first Iraq, then Palestine and now Lebanon have

exploded into resistance. It is also exposed by the manner in which Blair and Bush have bolstered undemocratic and repressive regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and Ethiopia as long as they sign up to the "war against terror".

By the end of last year so high was the Coalition death toll at the hands of the insurgents, and so out of control was Sunni-Shia violence, that Blair admitted to David Frost on al-Jazeera TV that the policy in Iraq had been pretty much a "disaster". But before he leaves Number Ten he wants Labour to spend around £27 billion on weapons of mass destruction – the new Trident

– with the potential to slaughter 40 million people!

Despite some Labour supporters' hopes that Gordon Brown will revise Britain's policy in Iraq, Brown insisted on the BBC in early 2007 that he still backed the decision to invade, and that "policy will be the policy that we are pursuing now".

The anti-war movement has always had truth and the numbers on its side ever since the massive demos on 15 February 2003. But our leaders do not listen. Four years on we have another chance to protest against these policies. Let us make the 24 February London demo massive.

**World review** / Bush and the "new" Iraq policy – see page 2

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