

US IMMIGRANT WORKERS LEAD THE STRUGGLE

by Berta Joubert-Ceci

A GIANT has awakened in the heart of imperialism. The “invisible” workers who for decades have been vilified and exploited in quasi-slavery conditions, who get up at dawn to pick the vegetables and fruits we all eat, who work in the crowded and many times unsafe areas of restaurants, shops and food processing plants, who clean and tidy hotels and homes, who take care of children and toil in so many areas for a meagre wage with no benefits—they have awakened to take their rightful place in the history of the working class struggle in the United States.

They are spearheading a revival of working class struggle with a call for a boycott and strike on May Day. Not even a massive roundup by Immigration of more than 1,100 undocumented workers in many areas of the country on 20th April, clearly aimed at turning back this movement, has dampened its ardour.

At no time in the recent history of America, since the courageous African-American movement for civil rights, has a struggle so shaken the very foundations of the imperialist order. Hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers and their allies have been in an almost constant mobilisation across the country, sparked by anti-immigrant legislation approved last December by the House of Representatives.

The Sensenbrenner-King Bill, which declares itself to be for “Protection of Borders, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control”, represents the most vicious racism of the ultra-right in this country. It also attempts to stimulate the vicious xenophobia that was purposely whipped up after 9/11.

Even though other immigration Bills are pending in the Senate, not one calls for full rights or amnesty for undocumented workers. Basically, what has been going on there is a debate between the ultra right and the right.

This struggle happens at a crucial time in the United States. The Bush administration is embroiled in the so-called global “war on

terror”, which includes the quagmire of war and occupation in Iraq. Nevertheless the US still intervenes in Afghanistan and threatens Iran, north Korea, Venezuela and Cuba, funnelling hundreds of billions of dollars into military aggression.

At the same time, social services at home are totally under-funded. The budgets for schools, healthcare, public housing, repairing levees, inspecting meat, even veterans’ benefits—virtually all programmes that provide the support and services people most need—have been drastically cut or eliminated.

In the private sector, there are massive layoffs and a corporate offensive to cut pensions and healthcare, even in unionised jobs. A close look at health care alone highlights the critical situation for the masses in the United States. A recent study by the Commonwealth Fund, a private healthcare policy foundation, found that in just four years the proportion of people lacking healthcare coverage soared—from 28 per cent in 2001 to 41 per cent in 2005.

alarming

According to Karen Davis, president of the Fund, “The jump in uninsured among those with modest incomes is alarming, particularly at a time when our economy has been improving. If we don’t act soon to expand coverage to the uninsured, the health of the US population, the productivity of our

Millions of immigrants and their supporters skipped work, school and shopping on Monday and marched in dozens of American cities from coast to coast.

While the demonstrations did not bring the nation to a halt, they did cause disruptions and conveyed the resolve of those who favour loosening the country’s laws on immigration. Agricultural crops such as lettuce, tomatoes and grapes went unpicked in fields throughout California and Arizona, which contribute more than half the

workforce, and our economy are at risk.”

Immigrants aren’t responsible for any of this. Capitalism is.

At a slower pace and not as extreme, the cut-backs and layoffs here are creating conditions similar to those that have driven the immigrants to leave their own countries in search of work. Their homelands have suffered under financial demands imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which work in the interests of US corporations.

The immigrant workers’ struggle is also an anti-war struggle. Immigrants are well aware of the economic war that Washington has launched against their countries, aided at times by the Pentagon—as in Plan

Colombia, which gives US military and economic aid to a regime that allows death squads to crush unions. While the economic penetration is mostly carried out through so-called “free trade agreements”, they are accompanied by the build-up of US military bases throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. And economic strangulation can also be an act of war, like the sanctions were in Iraq.

Meat-packing companies, including Tyson Foods and Cargill, closed plants in the Mid-west and the West employing more than 20,000 people, while the flower and produce markets in central Los Angeles stood largely empty.

Las Vegas casinos reported few disruptions, partly because many of their own-

ers announced their support for workers at a news conference last week. On Monday, more than 40 casinos set up tables in employee lunchrooms for workers to sign pro-immigration petitions. Smaller businesses in Las Vegas, where tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered on the Strip, also took a hit. Javier Barajas said he closed his family’s four Mexican restaurants in Las Vegas because members of his staff warned him they would not show up, costing him more than \$60,000 in revenue.

Their fight is not only for recognition and respect for

their own rights, but for each and every working person here who is under attack by greedy corporations that wage war at home and abroad to meet their insatiable thirst for profits. What workers won in past struggles is being taken away.

The undocumented workers who participate in the May Day Boycott are especially courageous, and their action will strengthen the entire working class in the United States. As Roger Toussaint, president of the transit workers’ union in New York City and himself an immigrant worker from Trinidad and Tobago, said to a rally before he was jailed for leading the transit strike, “You have to take risks in order to win.”

Our undocumented brothers and sisters are taking that risk. The workers’ movement, the anti-war movement and progressives in general should strive to support their efforts in every way possible—for it will benefit all. Their struggle is our struggle. They are part of the working class here, not outside of it, and they are the most exploited part.

By raising the banner of mass struggle and taking a path independent of both Republicans and Democrats, they are setting a tone of resistance, challenge and defiance that is so needed to show the true power of the workers and end this long period of retreat.

Workers World (US)

FUND

Our fund taking since last week total £153.40. We reached our target fund of £3,000 for April – that’s good news. But we start with just £88.16 in the kitty for the first week of May and that’s not so good. It leaves us £2911.84 to raise to meet our target for the end of May.

We thank our regular north London veteran paper seller for his usual £27.40 and we thank a Cheltenham supporter, who helped us sell copies of this paper on the May Day march, and sent in a total of £10 for the paper and £5 towards our press appeal. We have had other donations of £3, £8 and £5 plus £100 from Southall New Communist Party.

Our press appeal has taken a total of £92 since last week, bringing the total to £537 and leaving £2,463 to raise to reach the target. We thank the Cheltenham supporter mentioned above for £5, a Nottingham comrade for £50, a Welsh supporter for £17 and two other friends for £10 each.

Please keep sending whatever you can, and mark it either for the regular New Worker Fund of the Press Appeal. Both are at PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.

email: party@ncp.clara.net

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THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

Organisation is the key

The May Day March that made its way from outside Marx House on Clerkenwell Green to Trafalgar Square last Monday was the largest for decades and showed that Britain's trade union movement can still turn out thousands when it has a mind to.

Here was the real British working class united and in upbeat mood to fight to defend pensions, education and the NHS; to oppose privatisation and to demand backing for a new Bill of Workers' Rights. It was a far cry from the image of ignorant, apathetic racists that much of the media – and some Blairite Labour MPs – regard the working class to be. There were also plenty of colourful international contingents on the march as usual; reminding us that in celebrating May Day we are part of a global movement supported by billions.

As one speaker in Trafalgar Square put it, "How can we hope to win against people like Bush and Blair? We've only got six billion on our side!"

Organisation is the key. The power and strength of millions of workers can only be effective through unity and organisation. In 1848 the Chartist leader Ernest Jones told a rally in Manchester: "Some tell you that teetotalism will get you the Charter: The Charter don't lie at the bottom of a glass of water. Some tell you social cooperation will do it; cooperation is at the mercy of those who hold political power. Then what will do it? Two year ago and more, I went to prison for speaking three words. Those words were: 'Organise – organise – organise'... And this day again I say: 'Organise! Organise! Organise!'"

Organisation is power and the ruling class know that once the working class is properly organised, they are doomed. That is why ever since the Chartist days they have sought to destroy and undermine working class organisation. They have sent splitters into our movement to foster faint-heartedness, reformism, revisionism, confusion and ultra-leftism.

The front line of the class struggle is inside the labour and trade union movement because the ruling class know that spreading disorganisation here is the key to them holding on to power.

The Labour Party was founded to be the political expression of the trade unions, the organised working class. And the ruling class set out to subvert it from the beginning. The correct strategy of the working class must be to combat that subversion and throw out the treacherous Blairites. But that cannot be done by quitting the arena of struggle. That is to surrender the labour movement to the enemy.

One small group calling themselves communists were calling on the unions to "Break the link with Labour! Defy the anti-trade union laws!" Nothing would suit ruling class better than to have the potential power of organised working class further fractured and splintered. Break the link with Labour and the movement will be fragmented and working class unity virtually impossible to achieve.

We owe it to our predecessors from the Chartists onwards, who struggled to build the labour movement we have today – and to the rank and file trade unionists and Labour Party members who are still working hard to save the party from a catastrophe in the local elections and keep the BNP at bay – to defend the unity and strength of the movement.

The current spate of scandals surrounding John Prescott and Charles Clarke – not to forget Tessa Jowell and the cash for coronets scam – have brought disgrace on the Labour leadership. The privatisation policies of Patricia Hewitt and Ruth Kelly are an attack on the working class. But all of them put together pale into insignificance compared to Blair taking the country into an illegal war on false pretences.

The trade union and labour movement leaders throughout the country must be aware that the leadership of their party is in the hands of the class enemy – and that they have the power and the organisational tools to throw out Blair and his clique. The rank and file have made their feelings clear on May Day. By the time you read this, it is likely that voters throughout the country will have made their views clear. The labour movement must use that power and deliver the movement from Blairism.

Up to our necks

Total mortgage debt in Britain is expected to pass £1 trillion early within a few weeks – catching up with our total credit card and unsecured loan debt, which passed £1 trillion last year.

Drying out

Many residents in a Bolivian slum are forced to walk a mile to fetch dirty water from an unreliable well because they cannot afford to be connected to the privatised mains that runs close to their homes, according to Channel Four's documentary *A World Without Water*.

The same programme revealed that in Detroit, in the world's wealthiest nation, 40,752 households have to fetch their water in buckets because they have been disconnected from water mains for non-payment.

In other parts of America around 800 litres of water per person is used

every day. And 3,900 children die every day because they do not have access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

Building high

The Little Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps is about to get bigger after officials announced plans to build an "extension". The 3,883 metre-high Klein Matterhorn is overshadowed by its bigger brother which, at 4,478 metres, is the seventh highest mountain in the Alps.

But officials from the local tourism board in Zermatt say that is about to change and they are going to add 120 metres to the mountain in the form of a glass pyramid.

Spokeswoman Eva Flatau said: "We're going to build a pyramid on top of the Klein Matterhorn so that it reaches over 4,000 metres. This will give it more prestige among mountain climbers and will increase the number of tourists."

The pyramid will include viewing platforms, a restaurant and even a few rooms where visitors can stay overnight. Building on the mountain's extension will begin next year.

Virtual cuddles

Scientists at the National University of Singapore have invented a kind of jacket that solves the problem of workers who are often away from home for long periods and don't get enough time to hug or cuddle their partners, their children or even their pets.

The person or pet to be hugged has to wear one of the jackets, which is connected to the internet. The person who wants to hug them uses a doll that comes with the jacket. When touched, the doll records the exact sensation and beams it wirelessly to the internet and on to the jacket, which moves to mirror the feeling.

Adrian Cheok, one of the inventors, said: "You can be

in meetings all day unable to talk to your partner if they call because everyone will overhear you. But if you both had this system on, you could give each other a hug to say, 'I know you're busy, but I'm thinking of you'."

The jackets have been tested so far on pet chickens. Makers plan to make "internet pyjamas" for babies that will allow them to feel as though they are being hugged.

No hablo Espagnol

President Bush has problems with the English language so it's not surprising that he disapproves of a new recording of the *Star Spangled Banner* in Spanish – made by a British music producer and featuring a number of Hispanic pop stars.

He said: "I think the national anthem ought to be sung in English and they ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English."

WORKERS all round Britain – and all around the world – took time off from work last Friday, 28th April, to mark Workers' International Memorial Day. This is an annual international trade union event that is growing in size and support.

It is aimed to commemorate all workers who have been killed, injured or made ill at their workplace and is marked by wearing purple ribbons.

Last year more than 200 people died at work and 150,000 were seriously injured. Globally, each year more than 56,000 workers die from job injuries and illnesses, and another six million get injured.

This year's Workers' Memorial Day theme was: "Union Workplaces – Safer Workplaces".

The purpose behind Workers' Memorial Day has always been to "remember the dead: fight for the living" and unions are asked to focus on both areas, by considering memorials to all those killed through work but at the same time ensuring that such tragedies are not repeated. That can best be done by building trade union organisation, and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health and safety laws.

This year trade unionists in London marched from Canada House in Trafalgar Square to the Tate Modern and then on to the Greater London Authority headquarters near the southern end of Tower Bridge.

In the south-west of England the local Forest of Dean history society has commissioned a dramatic sculpture to honour those who worked, suffered and were killed in iron and coal mines and quarries in the Forest.

Last week the sculpture, created by local artists, Graham Tyler and John Wakefield, provided the backdrop for a wreath laying ceremony to mark Workers' Memorial Day.

In Bristol city safety representatives gathered with

Workers' Memorial Day

• The march in London.

other trade unionists at the City Council's Romney House site to tie purple ribbons to the Workers' Memorial Day tree.

A similar event took place in Wolverhampton by the Workers' Memorial Day Tree, next to the war memorial in St Peter's Square. In Birmingham there was a wreath-laying ceremony at the Workers' Memorial Stone, Brueton Park, another in Solihull and a service of remembrance in Coventry.

In Sheffield there was a public meeting followed by a ceremony organised by the Sheffield Trades Council. At Immingham there was a memorial service at the Workers' Memorial in the grounds of the War Memorial.

There were other similar events in Leeds, Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Manchester, Chorley, Preston and Liverpool. In Scotland students on the TUC health and safety planted a tree and placed a bench, both with plaques, in Dundee's Discovery Point – one of the town's busiest tourist attractions.

There were ceremonies in Edinburgh, Bathgate,

Bonnyrigg, and Glasgow.

Trade union leaders spoke at these events and released statements. Transport and General Workers' Union general secretary Tony Woodley said: "We call all these deaths accidents, but it is time we used a more precise term. They are killings, and many of them are the result of criminal greed and indifference to safety at work."

"If the Government wants to show how tough it is on crime, then this criminal waste of human life must be addressed immediately with legislation that identifies the responsibility of company directors for killings at work, and forces them to make workplaces safer."

Bill Callaghan, who chairs the Health and Safety Committee, spoke of the 200 workers killed and 150,000 seriously injured last year in Britain. He said: "There has been progress in reducing this figure but the progress has been slow. Workers have the right to be protected at work. Everyone has a duty to see this happens; employers, regulators, trade union representa-

tives and the employees themselves.

"We must all remember that every injury and death at work seriously affects not only the victim but those around them, their families and work colleagues."

The shopworkers' union Usdaw gave full backing to the Workers' International Memorial Day. General secretary John Hannett said: "In Usdaw we can take pride in the fact that we were one of the first British trade unions to adopt Workers' Memorial Day back in 1995."

"It's good to see how the event has grown in stature and is now truly international so it is only right and fitting that we should all take a few minutes to reflect on the toll of death and serious injury that poor health and safety management causes."

"A safe workplace to work should be a right and not a privilege, yet millions of workers are killed and maimed every year. Even greater numbers suffer diseases and ill health as a result of risks that can and should be prevented."

Biggest May Day march for years

OVER 10,000 trade unionists last Monday took to the streets of London to mark International Workers Day and to give their backing for a new Campaign for Workplace Justice and a Bill for workers' rights.

But the contingent from the RMT transport union alone was well over 1,000. The Transport and General Workers' Union and Amicus also had huge contingents.

Other unions present included public sector union Unison, the Communication Workers' Union, the GMB general union, building workers' union Ucat, train drivers' union Aslef, the National Union of Journalists, broadcasting union Bectu, shopworkers' union Usdaw, PCS civil service union, the National Union of Teachers and many more. There was hardly a union not represented.

There were banners, placards, flags and balloons. And there were jazz bands, brass bands, Punjabi drummers, and a lone bagpiper.

Dozens of trades councils were present, along with pensioners' groups, an assortment of left wing parties and many international contingents. These included the colourful Turkish and Kurdish community groups and even a group from Bolivia.

The Gate Gourmet workers were there in force, along

with the workers from Peugeot's Ryton works, threatened with closure and the loss of 2,300 jobs.

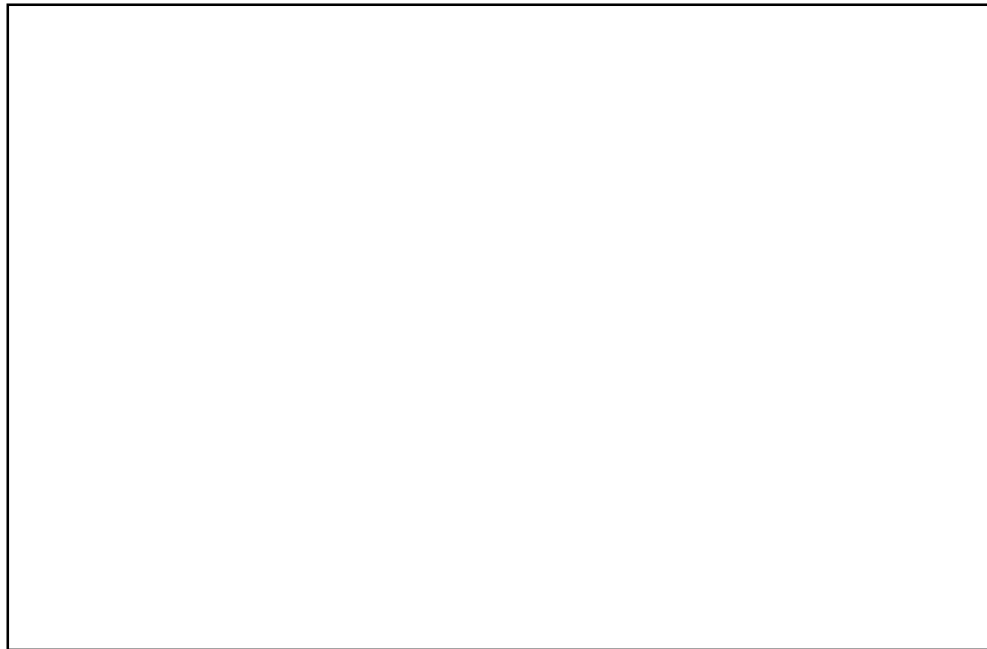
Veteran trade union leader and International Brigader Jack Jones stood near the entrance to Trafalgar Square to welcome the marchers as they entered.

In the Square his successor, the TGWU general secretary Tony Woodley, spoke of the new initiative against the Thatcherite anti-union laws and for justice in the workplace. He said: "Solidarity must be put back at the centre of trade union and Labour Party policies."

He called on the Government to heed the support of many MPs and millions of working people for the Trade Union Freedom Bill, which would allow trade unionists to take solidarity action in certain circumstances, and is supported by Labour Party conference policy.

The Bill would also remove restrictive procedures for ballots and notice of industrial action, and help develop justice at work for those whose rights were stripped away by successive Tory anti-union laws.

"Labour voted against each of those laws when in Opposition," said Tony Woodley. "Surely it is not too much to expect the Government to recognise the need to restore fairness in the workplace through the measures



• Thousands of trade unionists joined this year's London May Day march.

contained in the Trade Union Freedom Bill."

While no law could deliver fairness at work without the vigilance of trade unions to enforce it, the time had come to restore some equilibrium in industrial relations in Britain.

needed now

"Strong trade unions are needed now more than ever to secure proper rights for all workers in safe workplaces. There are those who say that trade unions are old-fash-

ioned and their concerns have been overtaken by the freedoms of the marketplace in labour and services," he added.

"Don't bother trying to explain that to the hundreds of workers killed each year because of unsafe working environments, or to the 150,000 seriously injured, often as a direct result of the criminal indifference of those who employ them.

"The freedom of the marketplace is little consolation to the families of 23 Chinese migrant workers sacrificed on

Morecambe Sands last year to the wickedness of exploitation which has gone on for so long in the farming and food industry.

"And freedom of employers to sack workers by text, by megaphone and by bullying also underlines the vital job which trade unions have to play in fighting for basic rights in employment.

"A series of vicious anti-union laws introduced by the Tories violated the concept of fairness at work, and we have waited more than long enough to restore equilibrium

in industrial relations.

"Our demands are many, and I make no apology for that. But our basic requirement on behalf of all workers – and particularly the underpaid and exploited – is a decent living and a proper balance between working hours and family life."

Amicus general secretary Derek Simpson warned the Labour leadership that they face a "disastrous defeat" at the next general election unless the Government urgently addressed concerns over NHS cuts, job insecurities and pensions.

He called for a change in the Labour leadership to stop the rapid decline in support for the party. Simpson told the rally: "The sooner this Government learns some humility, starts listening to ordinary people, does something about employment laws, does something about pensions, does something to protect industry, then this demonstration would have served its purpose."

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber told the rally strong laws were needed to end poverty pay, close the gender wage gap and tackle discrimination.

"No longer should British workers like the Peugeot workers in Coventry find that they are the cheapest and easiest in Europe to get rid of when the going gets tough," he said.

Maritime Museum staff vote for union

SEVENTY per cent of staff at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich have voted "yes" in a recent ballot for union recognition, supporting two civil service unions: PCS and Prospect.

Staff have stated that pay and job satisfaction are two of the most important issues to them. Workers at the NMM

have seen huge differences in pay when compared with other museums and galleries where PCS is recognised.

For instance PCS members in the Science Museum working as a security officer earn a basic salary of £14,550 per annum in comparison to the NMM where the same worker starts on £12,000.

Amicus to fight Mental Health cuts

THE GENERAL union Amicus says plans to close a mental health Direct Access Service in Watford will cost lives.

The union says plans to cut mental health services in the county will directly impact on vital key performance indicators for psychological services including client suicide rate.

The union say that although breaking financially even, Hertfordshire Partnership Trust is being forced to make five per cent savings to help other NHS Trusts in Hertfordshire.

Rather than take a top slice across services the Trust has opted to target a range of mental health services including an eleven per cent cut in psychological services.

The Direct Access Service, a successful psychological referral service for people suffering mental health problems is planned to close within

the next month despite clients being part way through treatment.

The trust says the only reason they are not cutting posts is because they cannot afford to make redundancy payments but no one knows how or where the psychologists will be able to work following the closure.

The trust says it can save £150,000 by closing the service.

Amicus regional officer for health, Owen Granfield, said: "We are incensed that the county's best mental health referral service which has been held up for best practice has been earmarked for closure.

"This is exactly the kind of service the NHS is trying to replicate up and down the country. GPs want the centre, clients desperately need the centre and the PCT must back down."

Academy sponsors have not yet paid

TONY BLAIR and Education Secretary Ruth Kelly are promoting the semi-privatised academy schools so hard they want hundreds of them set up. It has even been alleged that willing sponsors have been promised peerages if they give the policy vital backing.

But so far, out of 27 of these academies already set up, only four sponsors have paid the essential £2 million that they pledged. Under the scheme, wealthy sponsors – businesses, charities and religious organisations – pay £2 million to set up the school, the taxpayers pays the rest, usually at least £8 million and then the sponsor has control over the school's educational and organisational policies.

Four of the academies set up last September have received no money at all from their private sector sponsors, 10 others have received some money but nowhere near the pledged amount. Only four have received the full amount. In total, less than half the £54 million has been paid.

The figures came to light in response to a parliamentary question. Liberal Democrat education spokesperson Sarah Teather said: "The Government has led everybody to believe that the £2 million would be handed over from the first day the doors open at each academy – after all, this is when the sponsor can exercise control over the curriculum, staffing and admissions.

"At no point have minister made it clear that sponsors needn't have handed over the full £2 million at that point."

National Union of Teachers general secretary Steve Sinnott said the figures prove that "the Government is handing over control of the schools for far less than they have led to public to believe".

Meanwhile new figures show that average primary school class numbers are again rising, in spite of reduction of class sizes being a key Labour election pledge when it came to power in 1997.

Latest figures show that 29,000 primary school pupils are currently being taught in classes of over 30 pupils – an increase of 5,000 on last year.

DWP workers' 48-hour strike

AROUND 80,000 civil servants employed by the Child Support Agency and the Department of Work and Pensions in job centres and benefits offices last Tuesday began the second 48-hour strike in a dispute over job cuts and deteriorating service levels that is becoming increasingly bitter.

The stoppage, organised by the PCS civil service union, saw many offices close, with those remaining open either offering limited service or no service at all to the public. Some offices were forced to close at lunch time.

The high level of support for the two-day strike fol-

lowed a breakdown in talks and a refusal by management to fully recognise the damage being wrought to services in its drive to slash 30,000 jobs by 2008.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "The fantastic show of support demonstrates that staff are not willing to stand by and see the services they deliver damaged by crude job cuts.

"The perpetual self denial of DWP senior management over the level of staff anger and impact of job cuts serves only to undermine services that some of the most disadvantaged rely on. With support for the two day stoppage expected to grow, the depart-

ment needs to negotiate seriously with the union to avoid further industrial action."

Around 17,700 jobs have already gone with three separate House of Commons select committee reports pointing to a "catastrophic failure in Jobcentre plus", 21 million calls going unanswered as well as a lack of trained staff to handle the work.

The union is calling for the DWP to halt and objectively assess the job cuts programme and work with the union to establish adequate staffing levels based on operational need. The union is also seeking a no compulsory redundancy guarantee.

Peugeot workers fight closure

WORKERS employed at Peugeot's Ryton plant near Coventry last Saturday staged a second day of protests against the French company's plans to close the motor factory next July, with the loss of 2,300 jobs.

Workers staged a first protest on Friday outside a Coventry dealership. Unions have come up with an alternative plan that would keep the factory open

They are asking supporters to write to Peugeot chief executive Jean-Martin Folz to protest at the closure and to lobby Coventry MPs as well as the Government.

Workers were handing out leaflets by the Carrs Lane Church Centre opposite Moor Street station making their case for the factory as a profitable concern.

The unions' alternative proposal would prevent the Ryton closure and include moving to a single production shift this summer to allow workers to leave if they wanted to.

A new model would be built at Ryton in 2009/10, when the factory would operate on up to four shifts, the unions suggested.

The Paris Commune

by Caroline Colebrook

NEXT month marks the 135th anniversary of the Paris Commune, when the working class of Paris seized power in their own city and established the world's first workers' government. It did not last long and it was drowned in blood by armed forces of the French government.

But it sent a message of liberation and hope to workers throughout the world and a message of fear to capitalists and landowners. Many lessons were learnt from its mistakes and from its successes. Without it, the great socialist revolutions of the 20th century would not have been possible.

THE PARIS of the 1860s and 1870 had been rebuilt by architect Baron Haussmann at the request of Napoleon III, with wide, well-planned boulevards and fine houses.

It was a time of industrialisation and a growing middle class (the original use of the term "bourgeoisie") with plenty of wealth. But the resulting inflation in prices and rents left Parisian workers desperately hard up – and angry about it.

Paris has a strong revolutionary tradition from the revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848. The strong feelings against royalty, wealth and privilege remained – as did the proclaimed revolutionary virtues of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity (Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood).

The Parisian workers were also angry when the Emperor Louis Napoleon engaged in an unnecessary war with the Prussians. The French army was undermanned, under-equipped and badly led. On Friday 2nd September it was defeated at the battle of Sedan on the Belgian border. The Emperor was taken prisoner and immediately abdicated.

When the news arrived in Paris a crowd gathered outside the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall). There was a power vacuum and a new republic was declared by Léon Gambetta. A temporary government of National Defence was declared, which included the sitting National Assembly deputies for Paris – since, with the Prussians marching on Paris, there was no time for new elections.

This government had no pre-agreed political programme. The Empress Eugénie fled to England.

There were further defeats for the French army as the people of Paris prepared to repel the Prussians, including repairing the old city walls. The National Guard, founded in 1789, still existed and was rapidly expanded by volunteers to 350,000-strong – bigger than the regular French army defending Paris at the time. But it was a very mixed bunch

of people from many different backgrounds.

Many workers who had been thrown out of their jobs by the war joined for the pay of 1.50 francs-a-day plus 75 centimes for a wife. Women also joined the National Guard as – cantinières – officially carrying food and drink to the fighters but actually doing a lot of fighting as well. When a guardsman fighting the Prussians fell, often a cantinière would take up his rifle and carry on the fight.

Paris prepared for a siege by bringing in huge quantities of food, including livestock. Commentators at the time remarked at the public parks full of sheep. But even while the people of Paris were preparing to put up a bitter struggle, the temporary government was seeking a peace deal with the Prussians.

Once the siege took hold, there was a news blackout inside Paris. People tried communicating with the outside using carrier pigeons carrying microfilm – a new development then – but only 59 out of 392 got through.

Manned balloons were a little more successful. They presented a huge target but only five out of 65 were shot down. But they were not easy to control and easily blown off course. They landed as far away as Holland, Bavaria and even Norway.

Outside of Paris the war with the Prussians was still going badly for the French, with another major defeat at Metz.

In spite of the all food that had been stored in preparation for the siege it soon brought great hardship. There was no rationing at first so the poor suffered disproportionately as food prices rocketed.

Strange things started to appear on menus, including animals from the zoo. During the siege records show that 65,000 horses, 5,000 cats, 1,200 dogs and an uncounted number of rats were eaten. By January 1871 they introduced bread rationing.

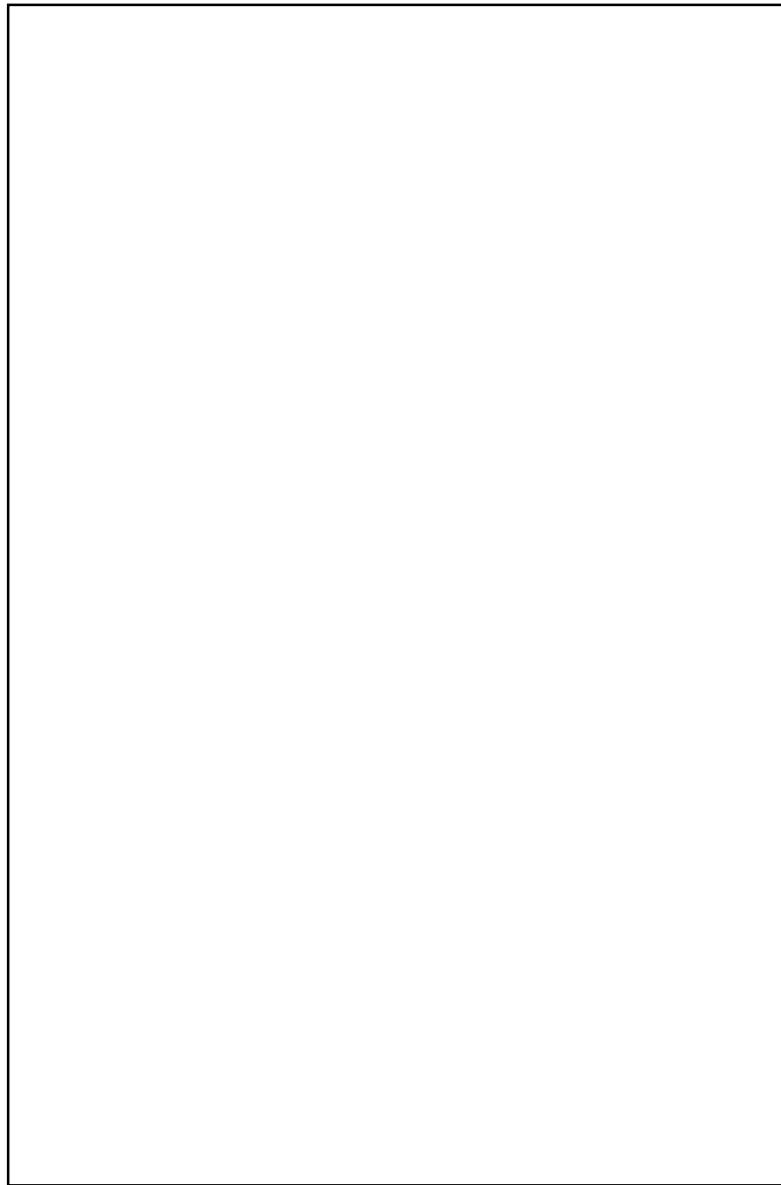
Fuel was also in short supply so people cut down trees and burnt them and their furniture.

Throughout the siege the Prussian bombarded the city with their huge guns, killing 97 but hunger and illness killed many more. In December 1870 the total death toll was 11,865 and in January 1871 it was 19,233.

The people were angry with the temporary French government for not striking back at the Prussians. There were no plans for a strike by the National Guard.

On 18th January the Prussian declared their empire at Versailles. In Paris there was talk of throwing out the government and setting up a commune. On 28th January the French government negotiated an armistice with the Prussians.

Paris felt utterly betrayed. The terms of the armistice allowed the Prussians to enter Paris for two days to celebrate their victory. The people of Paris turned their backs, shut their doors and dressed in mourning. After the Prussians departed they



cleaned the streets.

The new National Assembly was pro-royalist and opposed to the republicanism of Paris.

Adolphe Thiers was elected head of the new government and he drew up a peace treaty with Prussians.

He then stopped pay for the National Guard and ordered Parisians to pay back commercial debts and rent arrears they had run up during the siege.

Anger was rising in Paris and on Saturday 18th March Thiers sent General Lecomte with orders for the army to take over the National Guards' cannon position in Montmartre, overlooking the city. The National Guardsmen

were overpowered and locked up.

But the army had forgotten to bring horses to transport the guns out of Paris so they had to wait until the next morning. Very early the next morning a young socialist, Louise Michel, came to deliver a message to the National Guard. She noticed the army had taken over the gun emplacement and raised the alarm throughout Paris.

Later she wrote: "I went down, my rifle under my coat, crying 'Treason'. A column was forming... Montmartre was waking. The call to arms was sounding out. I was returning indeed, but with the others, to the attack

on the heights of Montmartre: we ran up at the double, knowing that at the top there was an army in battle formation. We expected to die for liberty. It was as if we were lifted from the earth."

Crowds gathered around the soldiers. The people of Paris had paid for those cannons to fight Prussians. They were not going to let the army use them against the city. The people appealed to the soldiers. An officer ordered them to fire on the crowd but the soldiers refused. They turned their rifles upside down.

General Lecomte was arrested, along with General Clément Thomas, an ex-commander of the National Guard

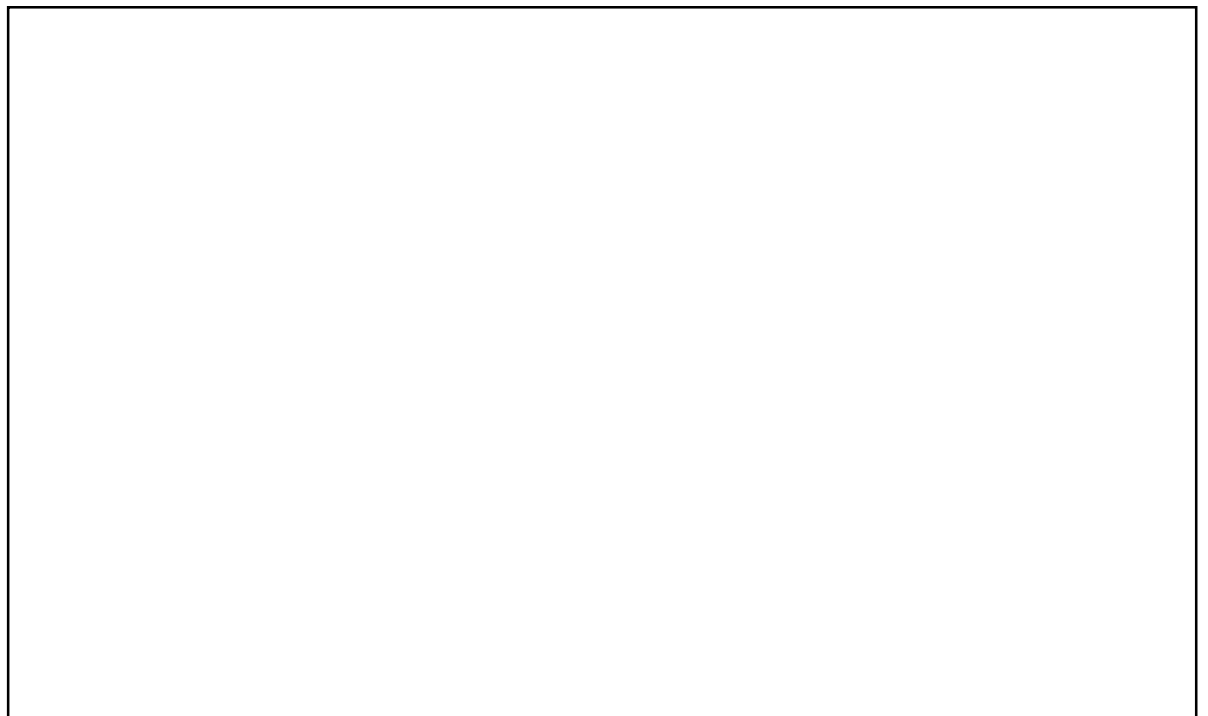
The cannons fired three blank shots to tell the people of Paris that the guns were still theirs. They began to build barricades. Regular troops retreated to their barracks and the Red Flag replaced the Tricolore on the Bastille Column. Confusion reigned – nothing had been planned and no one was in charge.

A crowd stormed the house where the two captive generals were being held and shot them. Thiers realised he had lost control of Paris. He went to the Hôtel de Ville and ordered the government to withdraw to Versailles. They were swift to comply, jumping out of windows, dashing through underground tunnels and clambering into their carriages in their haste to get away. By evening the Red Flag was flying over the Hôtel de Ville.

After they left a new mood of freedom swept across Paris. Although still no one was formally in charge, streets were swept, cafés stayed open. There was no looting and less crime than normal. The National Guard was paid regularly and public relief was handed out to the poor. Many wealthy people fled, saying they did not like "the control of workmen". As in previous revolutions, people addressed each other as "citizen".

Outside Paris, the government waited in Versailles for chaos and collapse.

On 26th March elections



Features

020 7223 4052

“Tomorrow you will belong to yourselves and not to exploiters. The factories in which you are crowded together will belong to you; the tools placed in your hands will belong to you; the profit that results from your labour, your care, the loss of your health, will be shared among you.”

There were around 90 trade unions active in the city. Workers' cooperatives were set up – supported by the Commune. The Commune allowed workers employed in factories and workshops that had been abandoned as the owners fled the city to take them over as cooperatives.

Church control of education was abolished. People were given three years to pay off debts run up during the siege. All public officials were elected; there was a cap of 6,000 francs on top salaries and the Commune paid out to redeem all household goods like bedding and clothing that had been pawned. There was free clothing, food and school materials for children.

The famous artist Courbet was a Commune member. He wrote: “I'm enchanted. Paris is a veritable paradise; no police, no outrages, no quarrels, no exactions of any kind. Paris is moving under its own steam as smoothly as you could wish. We must try and always be like this.”

But in the background, the guns of Versailles continued to bombard Paris. The Prussian army, nearly forgotten, was still there. The Prussians supported the Versailles government against the Commune. They were terrified it would inspire socialism in Germany. On 21st May the Versailles army attacked.

The people of Paris put up barricades to defend themselves but though these delayed the advance of the government troops, they did not halt them.

There followed what was called The Week of Blood as the people of Paris fought a bitter but losing battle to defend the freedom of their city.

The troops entered on 21st May Versailles by the Saint-Cloud gate. When news reached the Communards in the Hôtel de Ville the final Commune session ended as members left for the barricades. No one was left behind to direct the fight except Delescluze, the civilian delegate

for war.

He sent the following message to the barricades: “Enough of militarism, no more staff officers with gold embroidered uniforms! Make way for the people, the bare-armed fighters! The hour of revolutionary war has struck. The people know nothing of elaborate manoeuvres, but when they have a rifle in their hands and cobblestones under their feet, they have no fear of the strategists of monarchist school.”

It did no good. It left the people of Paris to fight, every man and woman for themselves, with no strategic planning or co-ordination. There were many heroic stands at the barricades, including the Women's Battalion defence of Place Blanche but the government troops took the city, with utmost brutality.

They shot men, women and children out of hand wherever they took them. Thiers had promised no retaliation but 20,000 Parisians were killed in one week.

The London *Times*, which had opposed the commune, protested about “the inhuman laws of revenge under which the Versailles troops have been shooting, bayoneting, ripping up prisoners, women and children during the last six days.”

Retreating Communards torched many large public buildings and after this a scare story was put about that women Communards – dubbed *Pétroleuses* – were starting fires everywhere. This led to many women being shot on sight on suspicion of being incendiaries.

Two hundred Communards made a last stand against a wall in the top corner of Pere Lachaise cemetery. The next day 147 prisoners were taken to the same spot and shot.

The killing continued after the Communards had all been killed or taken prisoner; 34,722 prisoners were put on trial and many executed. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 25,000 were killed one way or another.

The new government erected a new church, *Sacré Coeur*, on the heights of Montmartre as a religious gesture of atonement for the audacity and sacrilege of the Commune. Now a famous Paris landmark, this church remains unpopular with left-wing Parisians. Thiers was made President of the 3rd Republic in August

1871.

The Paris Commune failed but its lessons echo through history. After it fell Marx and Engels wrote of the necessity for a dictatorship of the proletariat to be established immediately after any socialist revolution to consolidate it and defend it against counter revolution.

Without the lessons of the Commune, the socialist advances of the following century would have been impossible.

were held and two days later the Commune was proclaimed. Red sashes and red flags abounded throughout the city.

A member of the Commune, Jules Vallés, wrote in his newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple*: “Today is the festive wedding day of the Idea and the Revolution. Soldier-citizens, the Commune we have acclaimed and married today must tomorrow bear fruit; we must take our place once more, still proud and now free, in the workshop and at the counter. After the poetry of triumph, the prose of work.”

Thirty out of the 90 Commune members were working class – a high proportion for that time. There were no formal political parties in the Commune – they were all socialists but aligned in loose groupings: Jacobins, Blanquists and communists. They were all communards.

The Commune gave working people enormous confidence to do things they had never done before or been allowed to do

Many other French cities followed suit and set up their own communes, including: Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Narbonne, St Etienne, Le Creusot and Limoges. But they were all quickly crushed by the Versailles government.

Thiers imposed news barrier so that once again people inside Paris were cut off from news from the outside and vice versa. The outside world was told only Thiers' version of events. He portrayed the Communards as monsters.

The Communards failed to confront the Thiers government or to seize the banks. If they had, they would have been in a stronger position to resist. They were busy planning social reforms but failed to plan to defend the Commune militarily.

The Commune did have arms and men – which Thiers did not have at first. But the Prussians, alarmed at the prospect of working class revolution, allowed Thiers to recruit and train a new army. He had no doubts that this was a civil war.

The Commune had three

military leaders: Lullier, Cluseret and Rossell. They were professional soldiers but they were frustrated by a lack of clear military policy. They were impatient with the new democratic procedures and unable to convey the urgent need to organise the defence of Paris. After seven weeks, they quit.

The Commune did launch one attack against Versailles on 3rd to 4th April. Three National Guard columns set off proudly and jauntily but they were outmanoeuvred by the Versailles troops and limped back tired, wounded and dirty. Many were killed and 1,200 taken prisoner while Versailles lost only 25 dead and 125 wounded.

The Versailles government and the wealthy who had fled Paris treated the prisoners shamefully – cursing them, beating them and spitting on them.

After this morale in the Commune fell and divisions began to appear. The Commune was also getting a very bad press internationally. The London *Times* reported: “The men of the Commune do not intend to be disappointed. They have promised themselves to annihilate Paris, its fortunes, its commerce, its population – and they keep their word.”

“Never was the work of destruction carried on with a more wicked and brutal perseverance.”

Communards were called “the mob, red insurgents, bandits, anarchists, convicts, scum, moral gangrene, socialists”.

Inside Paris news was communicated by newssheets posted on to walls and by readings at political clubs – often located in churches. Readings were followed by discussion on all manner of topics – including religion, women's equality, the abolition of marriage and how to win the civil war.

Women played a very active role in all this. One woman speaker told a club meeting: “Yes, you women are oppressed. But just have a little more patience, for the day that will bring justice and satisfaction for our demands is rapidly approaching.”

• Far left bottom: the cannon overlooking Montmartre are saved for the Commune. Above top: bitter fighting on the barricades. Above middle: Marx fully realised the importance of the Commune. Left: today this plaque marks the 'Wall of the Communards' where so many were shot – fresh flowers are always present.

Home News

Nuclear waste for deep burial

THOSE advocating a new generation of nuclear power stations last week moved significantly nearer to their aim after an influential group of experts advised that the best way to dispose of nuclear waste is by very deep burial.

The problem of waste disposal has been one of the major reasons to reject a new nuclear power policy. Radioactive nuclear waste is deadly

and remains active for many thousands of years. The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (Corwm) has recommended that an underground bunker should be built to house the worst of Britain's existing mountain of nuclear waste, saying: "Corwm considers deep geological disposal to be the best available approach".

The committee concluded

that this underground repository would be "a fair burden to pass to future generations".

Several sites are being considered in Wales, Scotland and the Lake District. The environmental group Friends of the Earth urged that no quick decision should be made, and added that the current storage arrangements for nuclear waste were vulnerable to terrorism and "unacceptable".

British soldiers 'watched Iraqi drown'

THREE British soldiers are facing a court martial, charged with the manslaughter of Ahmed Jabar Karheem, aged 15, in 2003 by forcing him into a canal and watching as the youth, unable to swim, drowned.

The prosecution has accused the men of waiting while the boy struggled then driving off as his disappeared

under the water. The events took place shortly after the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. The soldiers are said to have caught a group of boys looting and beaten them, then forced them into the canal "to reach them a lesson". Most could swim but Karheem could not.

Prosecuting counsel Orlando Pownall QC said:

"Karheem was in obvious distress. His head bobbed to the surface and then disappeared. One of the soldiers who was at the bank made as if to remove his clothing in order to rescue Karheem but then returned to the Warrior tank, which drove away."

Pownall also accused the soldiers, all Coldstream Guardsmen, of giving conflicting accounts and trying to mislead investigating officers.

Depression is biggest social problem

RICHARD Layard, a leading health economist, last week warned that depression, anxiety and other forms of mental illness have taken over from unemployment as Britain's biggest social problem.

He advises the Government on mental health and has recommended a network of 250 centres across the country to offer psychological therapies in preference to the use of drugs.

Layard, who is an emeritus professor at the Centre for Economic Performance of the London School of Economics, said that around 15 per cent of the population suffers from anxiety or depression.

He estimated the cost in lost productivity alone at around £17 billion, or 1.5 per cent of Britain's gross domestic product.

He said: "There are now more than one million mentally ill people receiving incapacity benefits - more than the total number of unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits."

"Yet if you have one of these crippling conditions you are unlikely to get any specialist help at all."

"You can see your GP but he or she is unlikely to prescribe any treatment other than drugs."

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice) has advised that drugs are not the best solution. Effects are often short-term and patients relapse when they come off the drugs. Others suffer serious side effects. Patients prefer the "talking therapies" yet only four per cent of those with depression and anxiety disorders received psychological therapy in the past year.

The cost of therapy is about £750 per patient but Professor Layard points out this is more than paid for by the improved chances of the patients becoming free of the illness for longer periods and their prospects for returning to work.

He estimated that Britain needs another 10,000 therapists to meet current needs.

Widows lose asbestos ruling

INSURANCE companies last week won a House of Lords ruling that will deny full compensation to thousands of widows, whose husbands have died of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related cancers from their work

The ruling sets a limit on the compensation to be paid in cases where victims were exposed to asbestos dust while working for several employers, so the blame for the illness cannot be ascribed to a particular one of those bosses.

The insurers had appealed to the Lords after a previous judgement that favoured the bereaved families. The ruling will save them millions of pounds.

The editor welcomes letters from our readers. If you have a contribution to make, please make sure it reaches us before Wednesday. You can send your letters to: PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ, or email party@ncp.clara.net

FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

New technology and the need for socialism £2 plus 50p P&P.
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Diary

- SATURDAY 6 May** Int. day of action against Iran attack. 1pm, Peace Garden in Tavistock Sq, London WC1.
- SATURDAY 6 May** James Connolly/ Bobby Sands rally. 1-6pm, London Irish Centre, Murry St, NW1. Wolf Tone Soc.
- SATURDAY 6 May** Wolf Tone Soc. benefit social. 8pm, the Boston, Junction Rd, London N17. £3. 020 8442 8778.
- SUNDAY 7 May** Cornelius Cardew 70th Birthday Anniversary Festival. Live music, exhibition, video, discussion. 1-10pm, Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Rd, london NW1. £10/£8.
- MONDAY 8 May** Marx Memorial Library lecture: Charles Townshend - The rising of Easter 1916. 7.30pm, MML, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.
- £1.00/50p.
- SUNDAY 14 May** London Socialist Film Co-op. 5 shorts from Argentina, California, Cuba & Britain. 10.30am, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Sq, WC1. £6/£4.
- MONDAY 15 May** London welcomes President Chavez. 7pm, venue & details 020 7607 4280.
- SATURDAY 20 May** Demo for Palestine. assemble 12 noon, Embankment, rally in Trafalgar Sq. PSC & others.
- MONDAY 22 May** Marx Memorial Library lecture. E Ilyenkov and the fate of Soviet Marxism - Dr Peter Jones. 7.30pm, MML, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.
- SUNDAY 4 June** Nottingham Green Festival. 12-6pm, The Arboretum, Waverly St. Free.

INFORMATION BULLETIN

Published by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE)

- 1) Athens communist & workers' parties conference, October 2004 (2/2004).
- 2) Athens communist & workers' parties conference, November 2005 (1/2005).

£5 each post free from NCP Lit, PO 73, London SW11 2PQ.

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Spanish communists on the march

OVER 200 delegates and observers gathered in Madrid last weekend for the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain (PCPE). Communists from all parts of Spain together with some 20 observers from liberation movements and fraternal parties including the New Communist Party of Britain spoke at this congress that will chart the future of the Spanish communist movement for the next four years.

The PCPE was founded in 1984 during the struggle against the "euro-communist" revisionist trend that dominated the old Spanish Communist Party (PCE) which was legalised when the

fascist dictatorship ended with the death of General Franco and the restoration of a "constitutional" monarchy in 1975.

Since then the Spanish political scene has been dominated by the reactionary People's Party and the social-democratic Socialists, who currently hold the government with the support of the "United Left", a PCE front.

PCPE membership has grown along with its influence in recent years through its work in the labour movement, its opposition to the proposed EU constitution and the campaign for the withdrawal of all Spanish troops from Iraq that was met when the Socialists won the general election last year. This was reflected in the discussion which focused on the current situation in the

world today and the key campaigning issues that face the Spanish working class.

The first demand is for a democratic confederal socialist republic that would recognise and guarantee the rights of the Basques, Catalans and all the other peoples of Spain. Building the left alternative to the class collaborationist policies of the social-democrats and their revisionist allies is another priority, along with the need to build a militant union bloc to challenge the dominance of social democracy in the Spanish labour movement.

"We are especially pleased to be here at this important juncture in your party's life as we are old friends going back over 20 years," NCP general secretary Andy Brooks said in his address to the



• Marching in Madrid on May Day.

congress. "Both our parties were born from the anti-revisionist struggle within the European communist movement. In those days we were a minority. Today, in the

wake of the counter-revolutions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, our view-point has won general acceptance," the NCP leader declared. "Let us all work for a

global anti-imperialist peace movement to shake the whole rotten edifice of imperialism to the ground and at the same time let us fight together to rebuild the world communist movement for socialist advance in the 21st century," he concluded.

Many of the fraternal guests marched behind the Spanish communist banners during the massive 60,000 strong May Day march through the Spanish capital that reflected the militancy and strength of the Spanish union movement.

During the Congress the Andy Brooks had talks with the PCPE leadership and discussions with a number of other communist parties represented at the congress.

An Easter walk to Spain

by Dolly Shaer

During the Easter week-end about 70 men and women went to Perpignan in France and then over the Pyrenees to Figueres in Spain.

The walk was to commemorate and celebrate the way so many of the men and women went to defend the legally elected Spanish Republican government's fight against the fascist Franco, who was supported by Hitler and Mussolini. They went by train and then climbed over the mountains between France and Spain.

That was 70 years ago in 1936 which was also the year the International Brigades were formed.

The commemoration walk started on Good Friday with a gathering at the National Memorial to the International Brigaders in Jubilee Gardens, London.

We travelled to Perpignan by train as the original fighters did. On Saturday we gathered at the memorial plaque to the Republican fighters at Super-las-Illas on the French side.

A wreath in the Republican colours was laid. There were speeches: one by Serge Barba of the FFREEE (Sons and daughters of Spanish Republicans and Children of the Exodus). This is an organisation of Republicans who fled Spain in 1939 and were never able to return.

After refreshments the

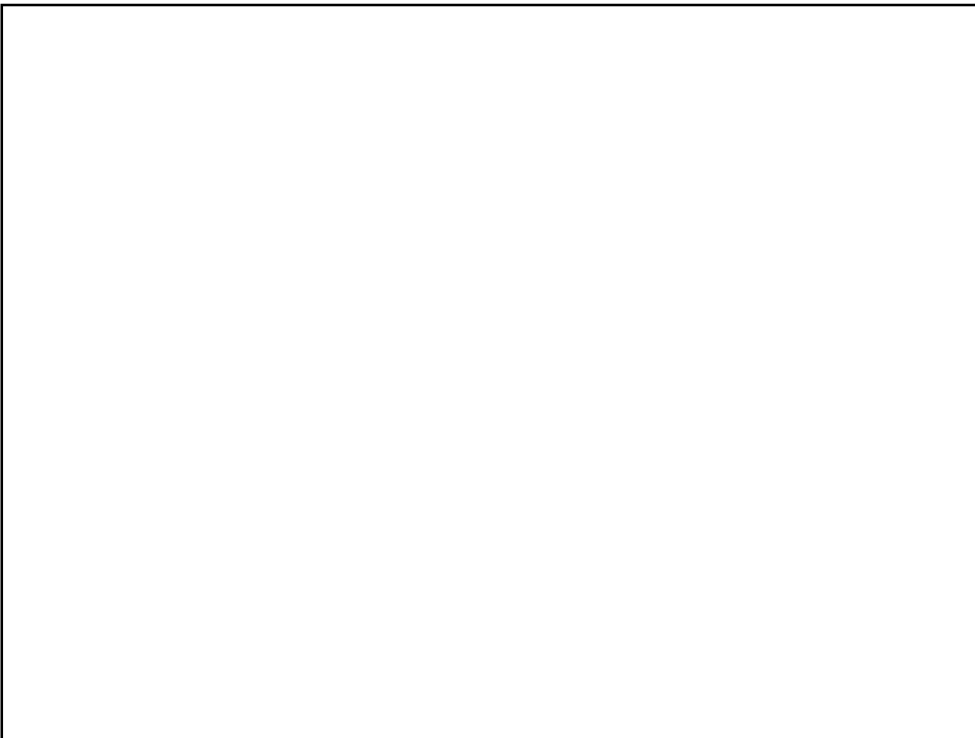
walk began. Some walked 10 kilometres and some 15k. A few of us were taken up by mini bus to the frontier between France and Spain at Coll de Mannell.

We had three Brigaders with us: Jack Jones, 93 years old, Jack Edwards 92 and Bob Doyle 90 years old. All of them had gone over these mountains to join the fight.

At the border there is a Monument to Lluís Companys who was the Catalan President during the Republic. He went to France as a refugee and was captured by the Nazis and sent back to Spain and, on the orders of Franco, was executed in Barcelona in 1940. There were speeches and a wreath was laid. We then continued on to Figueres by coach.

On Sunday morning we went to the Castell de Sant Ferran. This is the castle where the Brigaders coming over the mountain were taken after their crossing and started their training. A commemorative plaque was unveiled and a wreath was laid. The plaque is in four languages: French, English, Spanish and Catalan. A meeting was held in the castle with speeches and songs.

At these various places throughout the visit the group was joined by local mayors, dignitaries and representatives of towns and villages and government, who made speeches and welcomed us. There were also representatives of



organisations with similar aims as the International Brigades Memorial Trust, the Spanish Amigos and the German Association of the Friends of the International Brigade.

On reflection it is difficult to believe how those men managed that climb up those sheer wooded mountain sides in Alpergatas, in silence joined either by a hand on the shoulder of the man in front or a string connecting each person – in the pitch dark.

It took all night and was fraught with danger. My father had to do it twice because near the top they were fired on and so they had to go down and back up the next night.

I personally found it a very moving experience. The majority of them had never been further south than Brighton; most of them did not speak another language. They had to deal with the CID at Victoria station as they were leaving for their "week-end in Paris" and then the French police through France.

But there are many stories of the French working class showing their solidarity while their governments showed only their Non-intervention betrayal.

• Above: Some of the group with the banner of the Connolly Battalion of the International Brigade. Left: The three Brigaders from Britain take a break, Jack Jones, Bob Doyle and Jack Edwards.

Iraq: the voice of the guns

by our Arab Affairs
Correspondent

IRAQ RESISTANCE leaders have dismissed claims that they have held secret talks with US "ambassador" Zalmay Khalilzad as lies. A report in a London-based Arab daily said the talks began in January and that seven meetings took place in the Jordanian capital, Amman, and later in Baghdad. According to *Asharq al Awsat* the talks centred on the end of the occupation.

But US puppet "president" Jalal Talibani, who gave a different version of events, said last Sunday that seven resistance groups had agreed to join the American-run "peace process" and lay down their arms.

Shaykh Sa'di al-Muhammadi, a commander of the 1920 Revolution Brigades, said: "This is nothing but a lie and invention. There are no negotiations. I want the Sunnis of Iraq and the rest of the Islamic world to know that we are continuing our jihad. By God, we would rather hand over our children to the enemy than hand over our weapons to people waiting to ambush us. The only language between us and the occupation will be the language of guns."

And Mujahadeen commander Shaykh Abu Hanifah al-Iraqi told the resistance media: "Now that victory is near, and the truth of the Resistance has been confirmed, we're not going to negotiate with anybody. And anyway, with whom would we negotiate?"

"Negotiate with the Americans, or with the Kurdish students of Mossad, or the sons of Persia among the Shi'a? We'll never sit at the same table with them. We challenge Talibani to declare who these Resistance organisations or leaders are that he suppos-

edly negotiated with, and what kind of talks he had."

US troops and their puppets suffered their heaviest losses for months in April and the resistance is stepping up the campaign to drive the imperialists out of their country.

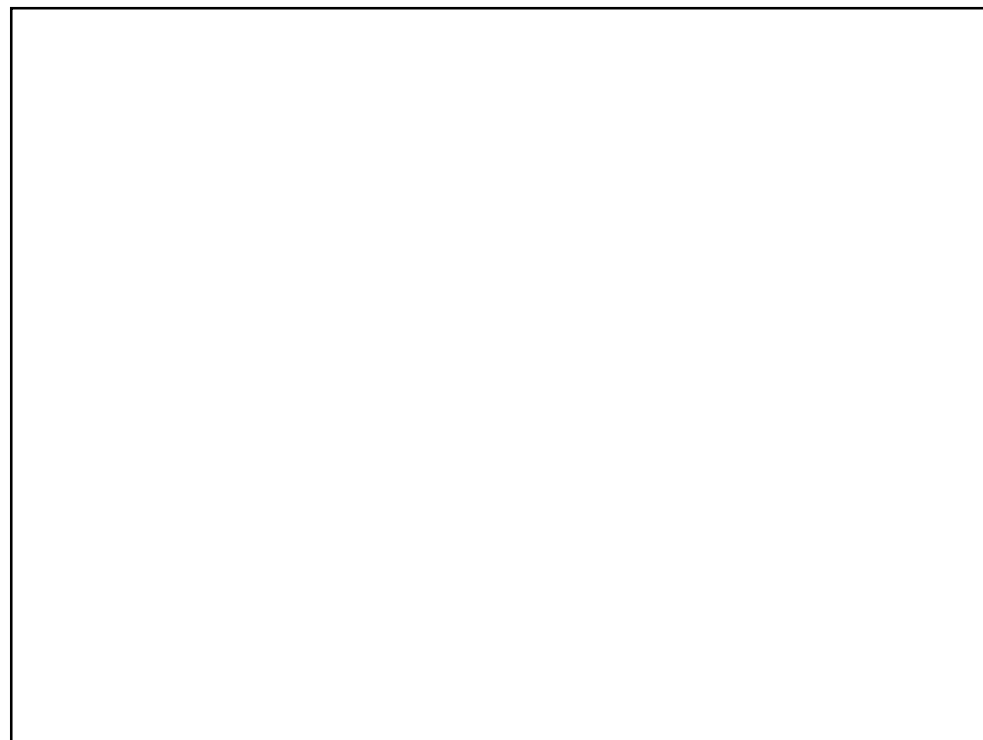
In the fiercely nationalist western border city of Al Qaim the partisans gave puppet troops 72 hours to get out of town or face certain death on Monday.

But in Ramadi, in central Iraq, the Americans are imposing a reign of terror in an attempt to crush the city's partisan units. All the Internet cafes have been raided to cut communications with the outside world and the Marines are arresting anyone seen with a mobile phone. A dusk to dawn curfew is in force. Water and electricity supplies have been severed, the use of private generators has been banned and US troops have threatened to shoot anyone going to the river for water. The resistance hit back on Tuesday in a bold ambush on an American patrol in the heart of town. Two Humvees and an armoured car were destroyed in the hour-long battle.

On the outskirts of Baghdad the Americans launched dawn raids on villages suspected of harbouring partisans last Friday. But resistance units blasted the Abu Ghraib concentration camp after warning street traders to clear the area while another unit hit a puppet army barracks.

In Baghdad the Defiant Iraqi President Saddam Hussein marked his 69th birthday on Friday like his country: a prisoner of the US occupation.

The underground Arab Socialist Renaissance Party [Baath] noted that Iraq had become the most difficult conundrum ever faced by America during its colonialist history.



• The resistance is still stepping up its efforts.

In many respects the role of President Saddam Hussein mirrors the role of Iraq, the Baath said. Like the country he is confined to a US prison, but he remains defiant and

unbowed. In session after session of the American-staged "trial" the Iraqi President has stood firm against the illegal occupation and its mock "trial" as well as against

the charges trumped up by a "court" whose sole "legal" authority is derived from the temporary presence of an alien army of occupation.

Monarchs not wanted in Ireland

BRITAIN'S "Duke of Edinburgh", Philip Mountbatten, joined Irish President Mary McAleese as guest of honour at an awards ceremony in Dublin last week despite protests by republicans.

The Duke of Edinburgh also paid a courtesy visit to 26-County Taoiseach [Irish premier] Bertie Ahern at government buildings.

The visit was widely seen as a precursor to a visit to Dublin next year by the English queen, Elizabeth Windsor.

Her presence is intended to convey an improved relationship between the 26-county state and its former colonial rulers. However, vis-

its by the English monarchy are strongly opposed by republicans, particularly Republican Sinn Fein.

"Despite what the establishment in the 26 counties wants us to believe, our relationship with the British state is an abnormal one. They still claim and enforce militarily control over six counties, said Des Dalton, vice-president of Republican Sinn Fein.

"So therefore on that basis he [Philip Mountbatten] is not welcome here."

Mountbatten was guest of honour at a special joint awards ceremony in the National Concert Hall to mark the 21st anniversary of Gaisce – The President's Award – and the 50th anniversary of the

Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Dalton said he believed the visit was part of preparations for a future visit by the English queen.

"We would organise protests against that visit just like we did against the loyalist march in Dublin earlier this year," he said.

"I think that loyalist march was partly about checking the temperature about how people feel about a visit."

The counter-protest to the "Love Ulster" parade in Dublin in February disintegrated into the worst riots seen in the capital in more than two decades.

AP/RN

Iran Calls on United Nations to stand up to US threats

IRAN has called on the United Nations to take a stand against US threats that includes possible nuclear strikes on its territory and that were "in total contempt of international law".

In a letter addressed to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the UN, pointed to recent comments by US President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on ways to halt Iran's nuclear programme and to news reports of Pentagon planning for possible nuclear attacks against Iran.

The letter says: "Such dangerous statements, particularly those of the US president, widely considered in political and media circles as

a tacit confirmation of the shocking news on the administration's possible contemplation of nuclear strikes against certain targets in Iran, defiantly articulate the United States' policies and intentions on the resort to nuclear weapons."

Tehran's ambassador to the United Nations said the comments by the United States were "matters of extreme gravity that require an urgent, concerted and resolute response on the part of the United Nations, and particularly the Security Council". Zarif also blamed the UN for remaining silent on "these illegal and inexcusable threats" and said the lack of action had "emboldened senior US officials to go further and even consider the use of

nuclear weapons as 'an option on the table'."

Asked at the White House on 18th April if the US was considering military action against Iran, the US president said: "All options are on the table". Two days later, Rice echoed the president in a speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

The US, Britain and France are preparing a resolution to be circulated to Security Council members this week. The resolution would require Iran to stop nuclear enrichment under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which makes compliance mandatory under international law and holds out the possibility of economic penalties and military action.

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Bolivia nationalises natural gas sector

BOLIVIAN President Evo Morales signed a decree on Monday to nationalise the hydrocarbons sector, requiring foreign-owned companies to turn over their natural gas fields to the State immediately and ordering the military to occupy them to ensure production.

Bolivia has the second largest natural gas reserves in South America after Venezuela and the question of how the country should manage these riches has been at the heart of several popular revolts since 2003.

Evo Morales, who became president in January and vowed to exert more state control over the country's natural resources, signed the measure on International Workers' Day — ordering companies to sign new operating contracts within 180 days or leave the country.

The Bolivian leader said: "We are not a government of mere promises, we follow through on what we propose and what the people demand." He added that he was calling on the armed forces to "occupy all the energy fields in Bolivia along with battalions of engineers".

Morales read aloud the government decree, saying that "the State recovers ownership, possession and total and absolute control" of hydrocarbons. He pointed out that this means that the State will own these resources and take charge of their commercialisation, relegating foreign companies to operators. Previously, Bolivian law said the state no longer owned the gas once companies extracted it from underground.

Speaking with reporters in La Paz, Bolivian Vice President Alvaro Garcia said officials from state energy company YPFB and the military began taking control of 53 energy installations — including gas fields, pipelines and refineries — right after Morales signed the document.

At a celebration commemorating International Workers' Day in La Paz, Garcia said the government's energy-related revenue will jump to \$780 million next year, expanding nearly six-fold from 2002.

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