

NO STRIKE ON IRAN!

by our Arab Affairs Correspondent

ARAB LEADERS gather in Riyadh for yet another Arab League summit on Palestine amid reports that the United States is preparing a massive air-strike against Iran to resolve the nuclear crisis imperialism's way.

US imperialism has never favoured Arab summitry but this meeting in the Saudi Arabian capital is an exception. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the European Union's foreign policy chief Javier Solana will be in attendance and American foreign minister Condoleezza Rice has just spent four days in the Middle East calling on the Arabs to "reach out" to Israel.

The Riyadh summit is expected to re-affirm its commitment to its own Beirut Declaration of

2002, which offered a "full peace" in return for a "full" Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories it has occupied since 1967, along with a "just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem". Israel rejected it at the time but Tel Aviv is now under pressure from its master in Washington to at least pay lip-service to this initiative and this, many Arabs fear, is because US imperialism wants at least some Arab rulers on its side if and when the White House decides to hit Iran.

None of this is good news for the Blair government which has asked Russia and Turkey help win the release of 15 Royal Navy sailors detained by Iranian naval forces for allegedly entering Iranian waters. The sailors and marines from HMS *Cornwall* were inspecting ships for contraband in what the Royal Navy claim were Iraqi waters.

endorsed

But former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, has endorsed the Iranian action. "In international law the Iranian government were not out of order in detaining foreign military personnel in waters to which they have a legitimate claim,"

Murray said, who was also a previous head of Foreign Office's maritime section, carrying out negotiations on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

"For the Royal Navy, to be interdicting shipping within the 12 mile limit of territorial seas in a region they know full well is subject to maritime boundary dispute, is unnecessarily provocative," he said.

The former envoy said that this was "especially true as apparently they were not looking for weapons but for smuggled vehicles attempting to evade car duty".

"What has the evasion of Iranian or Iraqi taxes go to do with the Royal Navy?" he questioned in comments on his webpage, set up after he was sacked from his post in 2004 after criticising British foreign policy.

Russian military intelligence has reported a flurry of activity by US armed forces near Iran's borders, a high-ranking security source said in Moscow on Tuesday.

"The latest military intelligence data point to heightened US military preparations for both an air and ground operation against Iran," the official said, adding that the Pentagon has probably not yet made a final decision as to when an attack will be launched.

looking

The Pentagon is looking for a way to deliver a strike against Iran "that would enable the Americans to bring the country to its knees at minimal cost" he said, adding that the American naval presence in the Persian Gulf has for the first time in the past four years reached the level that existed shortly before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Inside Iraq the much-vaunted imperialist "surge" offensive has run out of steam without achieving

• Marching in London against imperialist war.

any of its original objectives. Sectarian killings are rising again and the resistance has gone on to the attack again across the country and in the heart of the capital Baghdad.

The top-security "Green Zone" in Baghdad is under regular fire – the most spectacular being last week's rocket fire that forced the end to meeting of the UN Secretary General with puppet Iraqi "premier" Nouri al Maliki.

wounded

Puppet "deputy premier" Salam al Zawbi'i was severely wounded and a number of his bodyguards killed in coordinated Resistance attack last Friday in Baghdad. Three people were injured when the US embassy inside the "Green Zone" came under indirect fire last week and two Americans, a soldier and a mercenary "contractor" died when another rocket slammed into the US military compound on Tuesday.

Two vehicles laden with explosives and chlorine gas smashed into the main gate of a US military base in Fallujah on Wednesday causing a powerful explosion and sending a cloud of toxic gas across the base. Eight puppet police were killed and 20 more wounded along with a number of US troops.

And so it goes on, as Izzat Ibrahim, the leader of the underground Arab Renaissance Socialist Party (Baath) stressed in his appeal for help to the Arab leaders meeting in Riyadh. The "heroic resistance will not stop jihad and expanding and widening this jihad until the last invader sol-

dier has been expelled from the soil of Iraq and until the utter and complete liberation from every kind of control, blackmail, and exploitation, whatever time this may take and whatever sacrifices this may require".

FUND

We've done it, we've reached our £3,000 target for March as £1,553.57 came in last week, bringing the month's total to £3,367.72. Around two thirds of that came from bankers' orders and we give a special thanks to the growing number of comrades who are supporting us in this way.

We also thank a Woking comrade for £154.32, our London Scot for £20, a Croydon supporter for £10, a Vauxhall friend for £50, an old friend now living in Europe for £150, a Manchester supporter for £5.50. Another Woking comrade gave £20 and we had other donations of £3 and £7.50.

Now this good result must not be allowed to lead to complacency – we don't want our next week's total to be an April joke.

Every penny you have sent us so far is needed and will quickly be put to good use, enabling us to produce more material, cover more events and communicate a Marxist-Leninist perspective into the labour movement.

Please keep on helping us by sending whatever you can to the *New Worker Fund*, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.

New Labour: don't avoid the issues!

by Daphne Liddle

THE SCOTTISH elections are approaching and support for Labour is falling; Downing Street is panicking and New Labour is falling apart.

Tony Blair is refusing to do the one thing that would restore Labour's standing in the opinion polls – namely to go now – and Brown is trying to scupper Tory prospects by stealing their policies – and ignoring the traditional working class Labour voters.

He knows they have nowhere else to go. Bad as Labour is, the Tories would be worse; the Scottish National Party are conservatives with a nationalist dimension and the Liberal Democrats are free marketers more keen on privatisation than even Blair.

Every one of those parties would continue with the policy of privatising health and education.

There are no discernible policy differences between Blair and Brown but right-wingers Charles Clarke and Alan Milburn

are waging a campaign to persuade David Miliband to stand against Brown to succeed Blair as Prime Minister – and Blair is encouraging this.

It's the old personality feud between Blair and Brown breaking out all over again and getting their fellow Labour MPs and the media talking about everything except the politics at issue.

Sir Alistair Graham, who used to head the Government's anti-sleaze watchdog before Blair effectively sacked him – has blamed Blair for damaging the public's trust in politics and undermining support for Labour.

He said of the Government's popular credibility that "only tabloid journalists now stand between ministers and the bottom of the league".

Meanwhile Brown's credibility took a knock when figures released last week show that child poverty in Britain is rising again – mainly due to the soaring cost of housing – despite Government pledges to halve the number of children living in poverty by 2010.

On Wednesday evening the Government suffered another setback as the House of Lords rejected the Bill to allow the creation of a super-casino in Manchester.

Neither Blair nor Brown – nor Miliband – will bring British troops home from the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq; none of them will halt the privatisation of our health and education systems that is destroying state welfare in Britain.

None of them will drop the farce of the "war on terror" and restore our civil liberties. None of them will restore the trade union rights of workers in Britain – not even to the level they were at 100 years ago.

But there is one candidate for Labour leadership who is pledged to do all those things – John McDonnell MP.

Brown must not be allowed to succeed Blair without a contest within the Labour Party but spats within the New Labour clique must not be allowed to divert attention from the political issues.

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THE NEW WORKER

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Slavery is a class issue

THE ARCHBISHOPS of Canterbury and York last Sunday led a procession through London that included five middle-aged white men and a 15-year-old youth; they wore chains and were yoked together with makeshift wooden yokes, wearing T-shirts that said "So sorry". It was an event to mark the abolition of the slave trade (though not slavery itself) and to put pressure on the Government to make a formal apology for Britain's leading role in the transatlantic slave trade.

Tony Blair, as ever, made a commemorative speech in which he expressed profound sorrow for the harm done by the slave trade but hedged and fudged and did not deliver the all-important direct apology. Why not? Because to do so would be to admit liability and in capitalist legal terms that means coughing up with compensation. And there is not enough money in the universe to compensate for the horrors that were inflicted on slaves.

So instead the bourgeois politicians and press try to say that slavery is old history, and no one alive today has any responsibility. But the products of slavery are still very present in the modern world. The sugar plantations of the West Indies created the wealth that made Britain powerful. Many existing and still prosperous families and companies became wealthy on the back of the slave trade – companies like Baring's Bank, Tate and Lyle and the Bank of England. These companies are still benefiting from the imperialist exploitation of Third World countries where the resultant poverty is still driving desperate families to sell their own children to modern slave owners, in the hope that this will secure food and work for them. There are still around five million child slaves in the world, according to United Nations estimates.

If the imperialists ever said sorry for slavery, they might have to stop doing it, or at least stop creating the conditions where it still flourishes.

Black workers demanding an apology need the support of their fellow white-working class. They are not seeking to impose an impossible guilt trip on white workers – who are also victims of the imperialist ruling class. In the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries while these rulers were buying and selling black workers in the West Indies, in Britain they were driving native British workers out of their homes and their common grazing land in the enclosure movement to, replace them with more profitable sheep.

Black workers do need an acknowledgement of the vast contribution their work made to the wealth and prosperity of western capitalism and of the suffering it caused and still causes. They need an acknowledgement that their struggles against slavery and imperialism are a major dimension in the struggles of the working class as a whole. We all need an acknowledgement that the struggle of black workers against slavery is not something marginal, far-away and long ago, but a vital part of the mainstream working class struggle and that it continues today.

Meanwhile those who have inherited the big banks and estates founded on the backs of slavery could stop pretending it has nothing to do with them and use their wealth and power to rescue and compensate the modern victims of slavery. They could – as a gesture – wipe out Third World debt; they could stop dumping cheap subsidised products on Africa and Asia – bankrupting small local farmers; they could stop using loans and "aid" as a way of stripping these countries of all their wealth. But they won't; that's not the way that capitalism works.

They won't stop until the united working class, black, white and all colours, stops them. This started happening in Russia in 1917, and later in China, in Korea, in Cuba and Vietnam. Now, while the armed might of imperialism is pinned down by the heroic resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is continuing in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Nepal. Workers of many nations are liberating themselves – as did the slaves of the West Indies.

Too tired to live

A recent survey by the Japanese health and welfare ministry found that 40 per cent of men and women between 16 and 49 had not had sex for more than a month because their work makes them too tired and they prefer a good night's sleep. This is a five per cent increase from 2002.

The family planning association is warning that the country will face problems of a declining population unless people rediscover their appetite for sex.

In 2005 the average number of children born to Japanese women fell to a record low of 1.26; if the trend continues the population will decline to about 100 million by 2050.

Abuse

A German judge has been removed from a domestic violence case after he refused to grant a Moroccan woman a fast-track divorce because, he claimed, the Koran says that domestic violence is acceptable.

Christa Datz-Winter told the German women of

Moroccan descent that she would not get a divorce because she and her husband came from a "Moroccan cultural environment in which it is not uncommon for a man to exert a right of corporal punishment over his wife ... That's what the claimant had to reckon with when she married the defendant."

The 26-year-old mother of two had been repeatedly beaten and threatened with death by her husband.

Germany's Central Council of Muslims was quick to condemn the ruling and to point out that violence and abuse are justification for divorce in Islam.

Satanic symbols

Residents of a Russian village have refused to accept new passports because they include barcodes – believed to contain satanic symbols. "We believe these new passports are sinful," said Valentina Yepivanova, who lives in Bogolyubovo, to Russian television. "They have these bar codes and people say they contain three sixes. We are against that," she said.

Game plan

The Metropolitan Police estimate it will need 9,000 officers every day to police the 2012 Olympic Games and described it as the biggest ever policing challenge faced in Britain.

Deputy assistant commissioner Richard Bryan, who is the newly-appointed head of the Olympic security directorate, said that police officers will be drafted into London from around the country, backed up by a small army of volunteers and community support officers.

Big brother

The London Borough of Ealing is considering using secret cameras hidden in tin cans and bricks to trap "envirocriminals" committing "major envirocrimes" like graffiti and fly-tipping on main roads.

But the secret cameras could also be used against householders who put their bins out on the wrong day and so clog up paths and pavements. The cameras – costing

about £200 each – will be triggered by movement sensors.

A recent council letter to local residents said: "To catch vandals and envirocriminals, cameras disguised as anything from tin cans to house bricks will instantly email images to the council's CCTV control centre."

In the firing line

United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon last week visited Baghdad and told reporters he was considering increasing the UN presence in Iraq because of improved security.

He was speaking in the middle of the "secure" Green Zone and standing beside Iraq's puppet Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, in a surprise visit, hoping to get in and out of the country without a response from the Iraqi resistance. But the resistance knew anyway, and as Ban Ki-moon spoke, he ducked and flinched as a mortar round landed just a few yards away. It brought down debris from the ceiling and slightly injured two guards outside.

Public sector workers battle for pay

by Caroline Colebrook

CIVIL servants and local government workers last week both stepped up their fight against attempts by the Treasury to impose below-inflation pay rises.

The PCS civil service union last Thursday (22nd March) announced a one day strike for Friday March 30th involving nearly 20,000 members in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Identity and Passport Service (IPS) as part of the next steps of its national civil service dispute over jobs, pay and conditions.

March 30th will also see a further 20,000 members starting a month of action short of a strike across four government departments and agencies, with the remaining 230,000 PCS members supporting their colleagues in a day of action short of a strike also on the 30th March.

The 20,000 workers in the MoD and IPS, who will be on strike over the imposition of below inflation pay offers, will be joined by their colleagues in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Department of Health (DoH), Land Registry and Learning Skills Council (LSC) who will be beginning a month of industrial action short of striking, also over below inflation pay offers.

The day of action taking place elsewhere across the civil service will see people refusing to do paid or unpaid overtime and taking proper rest and lunch breaks.

The announcement came a day after the Chancellor repeated his insistence to drive down public sector pay by capping it to below inflation.

The result has been Government departments, agencies and non departmental public bodies (NDPBs) driving down the pay of some of the lowest paid in the public sector by imposing and ta-

bling pay offers more than a percentage point below the cost of living.

The action, across a number of departments and agencies, is part of the union's national campaign against job cuts, privatisation and below inflation pay across the civil service and represents an intensification of the dispute.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Civil servants are amongst the lowest paid in the public sector with thousands earning just above the minimum wage and a quarter earning less than £15,400.

"It is scandalous that whilst the rest of the economy enjoys pay rises in line with inflation that the Government and civil service management seek to impose a real terms pay cut for the people who keep this country running.

"Battered by massive job cuts and privatisation, civil and public servants have become increasingly angry with the Government using their pay as an anti-inflationary measure.

"The Government and civil service management need to start respecting its own workforce and start negotiating with the unions if more industrial action is to be avoided."

Meanwhile the public sector union Unison, which represents hundreds of thousands of local government workers, has rejected an "insulting" two per cent local government pay offer as "insulting and demeaning" at a time when inflation is officially at 4.6 per cent.

Unison and other local government unions rejected the offer as "not good enough to consult on".

The employers' organisation asked for further talks and agreed to take the unions' rejection back to local authorities across England and, Wales and the north of Ireland.

Unison head of local government Heather Wakefield said: "This is effectively a pay cut. With today's inflation rates going up to 4.6 per cent and living costs rising much

faster than council workers' pay, millions of workers are being pushed closer to the breadline.

"This is a paltry pay award which will drive down the morale of staff further.

"Our members are angry; 70 per cent of employers have failed to complete pay and grading reviews promised by the end of this month. In addition, the review of the local government pension scheme has yet to be completed."

In February Unison, TGWU and GMB submitted a local government pay claim to employers covering some 1.3 million council workers in England, Wales and the north of Ireland.

The claim included:

- Any deal was for one year only;
- A five per cent award increase or £1,000, whichever is the greater;
- A guaranteed minimum hourly rate of £6.30;
- An increase in basic annual leave entitlement to 25 days per year as the minimum entitlement for all employees;
- A reduction in the standard working week to 35 hours, without loss of pay;
- An increase in the night shift allowance over a three-year period from a time-and-a-third, to time-and-a-half, to time-and-three-quarters, to double time in the final year;
- An increase in the sleep-in allowance to £60.

Workers covered by the claim include care assistants, cleaners, teaching assistants, librarians and refuse collectors – some of the poorest paid workers with the worst annual leave entitlements.

More than 60 per cent of those people earn just £15,825 or less – around £8,000 less than the national average, and 75 per cent of them are women.

GMB attacks AA cuts

THE GMB general union last week described the decision by the Automobile Association to end its night patrols after 80 years as evidence of the company's "cost-cutting mentality".

The 15 million members of the motoring organisation will now have to make do with AA staff called out on a voluntary "pay per job" basis or local contractors.

The cuts were announced by Damon Buffini, a senior partner in Permira, the private equity company that part-owns the AA, just before he was due to meet GMB general secretary Paul Kenny.

The union has been engaged in a long and bitter dispute with Permira to sustain union recognition in the AA and to defend its members' pay and conditions of work.

Paul Maloney, a GMB official, said the decision to axe AA's night patrols illustrated the "cost-cutting mentality" of Permira in particular and private equity companies in general.

"The AA is currently running a campaign which says that its members have 'got a friend' in the AA. Well it seems their friend will come to their rescue before midnight, but not necessarily after that time. Some friend!

"If people are on call and not on patrol it is bound to take longer to get to the breakdown. If it is a garage contracted to the AA, it is likely to take even longer. This is a serious problem for people who break down at night, especially women.

"Why has the 'fourth emergency service' been reduced to this?"

Home Office blunders

ANNE OWERS, the chief inspector of prisons, last week released a report in which she accuses the Home Office of serious errors in its efforts to round up former foreign prisoners for deportation after last year's crisis.

That crisis cost Charles Clarke his job as Home Secretary but Anne Owers says that the resultant trawl of released prisoners was so indiscriminate that it included some British citizens and a number of Irish ex-offenders. Some of these had lived in Britain for decades with all their family ties here and some had only committed minor offences.

Her report on the foreign prisoner crisis said that immigration officials were unable to cope with the workload created by the decision to detain 1,000 ex-prisoners who had been released without being considered for deportation.

It said: "As a consequence, foreign nationals suddenly and unexpectedly threatened with deportation, also found it impossible to find out what was happening to them, and were held in prisons and immigration removal centres far past their sentence expiry dates, even those who were desperate to return home."

Anne Owers said this significantly contributed to the prison overcrowding crisis of the last six months and destabilised immigration removal centres.

Children to be screened for potential criminality

PRIME Minister Tony Blair last Tuesday unveiled new plans to build a database on all children and to screen them and pick out those believed most likely to become offenders for special attention throughout their childhood.

The screening will take place at key points in a child's life such as moving from primary to secondary school at the age of 11. Children with a parent in prison or who is a problem drug user or have other indications that they may be headed for a life of crime are to be "actively managed" by "specialists" who will conduct home visits.

Blair justifies this stigmatisation of children who have done nothing wrong on the basis that most crime is committed by a small number of offenders who can be identified almost from birth.

He claims that 10 years of tougher sentences have failed to reduce crime levels and now wants to tackle the "underlying causes through better targeting".

The Government is also calling on health visitors to intervene before birth if children are judged to be at risk of falling into a life of crime.

The scheme will be backed up by the database that will contain information

on all children from next year. It will contain basic information identifying the child and its parents and will have a "facility for practitioners to indicate to others that they have information to share, are taking action, or have undertaken an assessment, in relation to a child".

The database was started following the death of child abuse victim Victoria Climbié, and was originally intended to protect children from a similar tragic death. Now it is to be used for cradle-to-the-grave monitoring. The Government is obviously failing to take into account the effect on children of the example of a Gov-

ernment that lies in order to take Britain into an illegal war in order to steal another country's oil reserves.

Nor does it take into account the theft from today's children of community facilities they used to enjoy such as youth clubs, school-based health and welfare checks, playing fields and so on – lost over the last three decades of Government spending cuts.

Reinvestment in community facilities for all young people, to help them develop skills, and become high achievers with confidence and pride in themselves is more likely to prevent children turning to crime.

And it is better to make help and support available for parents who are struggling and encouraging them to ask for it rather than imposing it on them. As it is, there is far too little help and support available for those who are seeking it.

Blair's plans also include giving police wider powers to seize the belongings of criminals, to restrict the lives of "career criminals" after they have finished their sentences and to conduct a review of the police service.

This review is to be headed by the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan – formerly head of the Royal Ulster Constabulary/Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In January this year a report by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Nuala O'Loan, exposed evidence of collusion between officers under the command of Ronnie Flanagan. This collusion related to the supplying of information about members and sympathisers of Sinn Féin and the IRA to loyalist paramilitary death squads – resulting in many murders.

The reports were acknowledged by the current PSNI chief constable, Sir Hugh Orde, who apologised for the wrong-doing of his officers, and by Peter Hain, the state secretary for the occupied north of Ireland.

Order said: "While I appreciate it cannot redress some of the tragic consequences visited upon the families of those touched by the incidents investigated in this report, I offer a whole-hearted apology for anything done or left undone."

'Right to buy' misery

DEBT ADVISERS are warning council tenants about mortgage companies that are targeting them and encouraging them to borrow ridiculous sums to buy their own homes.

They cite Ismail Ali, aged 71, who was persuaded to take out a mortgage costing £430 a month even though his income was just £517 a month. He has now lost his council home and has to live in a seaman's hostel in east London.

A mortgage broker approached him with a leaflet promoting the "right to buy". His length of tenancy gave him the right to a big discount on the price of the home, but a £75,000 mortgage was arranged – £15,000 more than the price of his one-bedroom flat in Canning Town.

The mortgage company that lent him the money said the application form, prepared by the broker, said that Ali was a book-keeper earning £24,000 a year – a job he has never done in his life.

The debt advisers from Capitalise, a Government-funded partnership that provides free debt advice in London, say they are seeing a small but growing trend of people living in council properties being deliberately targeted with loans and mortgages that they cannot possibly pay.

Teenagers less healthy

A REPORT published last week in *The Lancet* claims that today's adolescents are the first generation to be less healthy than their parents.

The report says that alcohol, tobacco, drugs, obesity and sexually transmitted diseases have replaced childhood infections of the past – such as tuberculosis and polio, and are inflicting a greater toll.

But it points out that the modern problems are preventable.

Lewisham police harass campaigners

by New Worker correspondent

THE NORTHERN end of Lewisham High Street in south London is a regular Saturday morning haunt for a variety of left-wing paper sellers and campaigners: Stop the War, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Socialist Workers' Party, the New Communist Party and others. It is a scene of regular debate and discussion with the passing public and among the different paper sellers but usually uneventful.

Last Saturday the biggest problem seemed to be the icy wind until a police car arrived with flashing lights, from the police station immediately across the road.

Two policewomen jumped out and began video filming all the political activists but focussing first on the PSC campaigners. They were challenged immediately and replied that they had no problem with what the activists were doing but they had been ordered to

film "for intelligence purposes".

The police described the presence of the activists as "a demonstration" and did not recognise that several different organisations were there – they asked to speak to "the organiser" – and that the activity was limited to selling papers, giving out leaflets and collecting petition signatures – even though much the same thing has happened every Saturday for more than 20 years.

The police learned nothing they could not have learned simply by looking out of their windows or by walking across the road and talking to the campaigners. Clearly the police agenda was intimidation. But their dramatic action had an opposite effect and provoked a storm of protest and instant mobile phone complaints to local councillors and MPs. But it did give the campaigners an opportunity to point out to the shoppers of Lewisham how this country is descending rapidly into a police state.

Meanwhile the Home Office is planning a major upgrade of the CCTV network that will advance the "surveillance society". New

• We've got our eye on you!

laws will require camera operators to ensure that their equipment produces images good enough for police investigations.

Britain has by far the largest number of surveillance cameras – around five million – in public and private hands or one for every 12 people. The Government claims it is necessary to increase them in order to fight terrorism.

Police are also to gain new powers to seize trespassers at 16 sites around Britain. They range from royal palaces to the official residences of politicians.

Currently police are not allowed to arrest trespassers as long as they agree to be escorted from the site.

But police are to be given more powers at "protected sites". Up to now such places have been military bases and nuclear power stations. If someone trespasses on them, they run the risk of six months in prison or a £5,000 fine, under the provisions of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, amended by the Terrorism Act 2006.

No Olympic joy for poor Londoners

THE LONDON Assembly last week warned that the promised jobs boom from the 2012 Olympics, to be held in London's East End, may not materialise.

Thousands of new jobs and training opportunities have been promised but they may not go to local people.

A report from the assembly's economic, development, culture, sport and tourism committee has raised questions about how many jobs will go to people living in the five London boroughs that will host the games, where around a quarter of the 720,000 people of working age have no qualifications and over 60 per cent are unemployed.

Dee Doocey, who chairs the committee, said: "We need to get this right from the very start, or we risk losing the truly life-changing potential of the games for people. This would be an unforgivable betrayal of people in the area of London that has been characterised by deprivation for generations.

"The last thing we need is a new Docklands where many of the newly-created jobs did not benefit local people."

Killing ourselves to live

by Daphne Liddle

BRITAIN has been breaking records lately, with levels of personal debt, long working hours and having the unhappiest children in the western world. These things are linked and this article aims to explore how the ruling class manipulate us into becoming debt slaves and the cost this is having on our quality of life and that of our children.

Since the Thatcher years of the 1980s, both Tory and Labour governments have tried to justify the rampant privatisation of public services and utilities on the grounds of giving us more choice. A choice of service implies that not all the services on offer are the same quality – some are worse than others. The best services, naturally, are reserved for those who can pay a bit more. When we complain that the poor are getting fobbed off with inferior services they come back saying, “Oh no, everybody has choices, would you like a bit of credit to help you pay?”

So we end up going into debt to pay for things we once had supplied free, as part of the social wage – things like healthcare, higher education, social services and so on. Now, working class people can't get into higher education without going deep into debt; many non-emergency surgical procedures that were once free have to be paid for.

Meanwhile the rapidly diminishing supply of council houses, coupled with rocketing house prices, have forced home buyers to take on record levels of major debt just to find somewhere to live. Banks and credit card companies encourage everyone to borrow up to their limit and then pay back slowly – interest only – in a way that extends the amount of interest eventually payable.

The marketing media and their friends in the Government encourage us to see spending as a pleasurable experience – “retail therapy”.

“Lifestyle” programmes urge us to throw out our old clothes to keep up with fashions, now this also applies to our furniture and home decoration. Our identity is expressed in our belongings and no longer in ourselves or in our community, so that when we are burgled or the bailiffs repossess something we feel as though we have suffered a physical injury.

We are encouraged to be proud of what we own – and to forget what we have lost in terms of the social wage, community spirit and time for relaxation and recreation.

We think ourselves well off surrounded by the latest electronic equipment but forget that in our grandparents' time the wage of one worker, usually a man, was enough to feed and clothe a family. Now it takes the wages of two adults working all the hours they can and they never get to clear their debts or get time to relax.

House prices are so high that now we are seeing new kinds of

mortgages – 50-year mortgages; multi-generation mortgages and interest-only mortgages, which effectively mean the “buyer” will be forever paying interest without ever coming closer to owning the home – they might just as well call it rent.

Bank staff are ordered to pressure customers into taking out loans. So the loans are offered to all, regardless of their ability to pay back, even to people with a history of debt problems and to people with mental health problems. “As long as they've got a pulse,” is the criterion.

Whatever they can persuade us to want, someone is there to arrange a loan or credit agreement. When we get into trouble with the repayments, they offer to consolidate it all “into one affordable loan” – which could take many years to clear and ends up with us paying far more than the original debt.

Thousands of families are so much in debt they are living on the edge of financial disaster. It only takes a sudden change, usually beyond their control, to break them. This could be a rise in interest rates, a sudden illness or injury or losing their job because their employer has gone bankrupt.

According to Credit Action statistics compiled in February, total personal debt in Britain has exceeded £1.29 trillion. The debt growth rate for the past 12 months has been 10.9 per cent, equivalent to an increase of £114 billion.

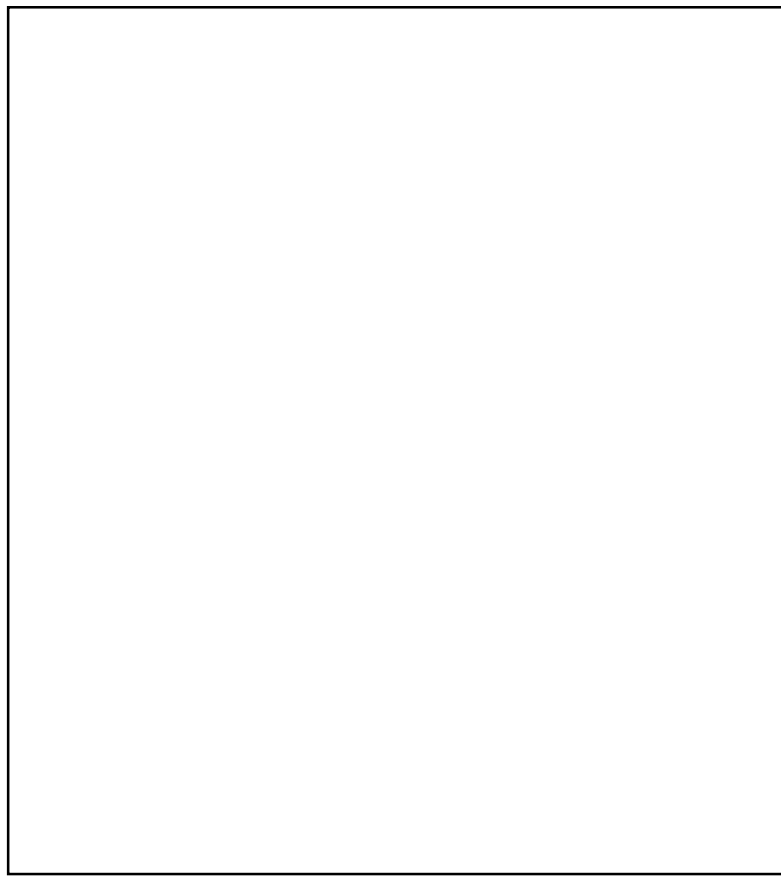
The average household in Britain has £8,791 in debts, excluding mortgages; if you include mortgages the figure is £53,326. The average debt owed by each adult individual is £27,445 and the average interest paid by each household on their total debts is £3,400 every year. Britain's personal debt is increasing by £1 million every 3.85 minutes.

Not surprisingly many people are having serious problems. The Citizens' Advice Bureau has dealt with 1.4 million debt problems in the last year; this equates to 5,300 people a day. Around 1.4 million adults with more than £10,000 of unsecured debt report that they are “quite likely”, “likely” and “certain” to declare themselves bankrupt or take out an Independent Voluntary Arrangement.

During the last quarter of 2006 there were 34,626 mortgage possession actions initiated by the banks and other lenders – a rise of 15 per cent on the previous year.

The number of people given County Court Judgements (CCJ) for unpaid debts increased by 18 per cent, with lenders seeking to recover around £500 million of bad debts through CCJs. This is a step lenders are reluctant to take, because once a CCJ is issued no more interest can be charged and the debt is repaid at a rate the debtor can afford – as low as £1 a week for people on very low incomes.

Working class people tend to see debt problems as their own fault and to feel embarrassed about them. When snowed un-



• Above: yes, but will the key fit anyway? Is it socialism? Below: child poverty Britain.

der with serious debt some try to blank it out and pretend it is not happening. These people are punished most harshly, with high penalties for missed payments that quickly turn a bill of a few hundred pounds into a debt of many thousands. There are threats of court action but the courts can be a debtor's best friend. As soon as a CCJ is set there is no more interest and the repayments become reasonable. Furthermore magistrates have the power to write off some debts. They tend to do this where the debtor is on a low fixed income and has already made payments to cover the original amount borrowed, excluding interest and penalty charges.

But if the debtor does not turn up in court to present their case, they face a visit from bailiffs who are now to be given new powers to break into people's houses to distract goods. This is a punitive measure that finance companies take to shock and intimidate debtors into paying. The goods seized rarely raise enough money to

cover the debt because they are sold at rock bottom prices at auction. When unregulated bailiffs get a reputation for behaving like bullies and terrifying the families of debtors it suits the loan companies, because this will intimidate other debtors into paying up promptly.

How can a worker whose debt repayments and essential living costs combined are greater than their income find more money? Legally there is only one way – to work extra hours, either in overtime or by getting a second job. Again, many workers blame themselves for getting into debt and see the extra work burden as part of the penalty they are paying for being foolish – not as a deliberate policy to exploit them to the hilt.

And it is deliberate ruling class strategy. Chancellor Gordon Brown's “economic miracle” has been based entirely on high levels of domestic consumer spending. Two Australian economists – Shaun Wilson of the University of Sydney and Nick

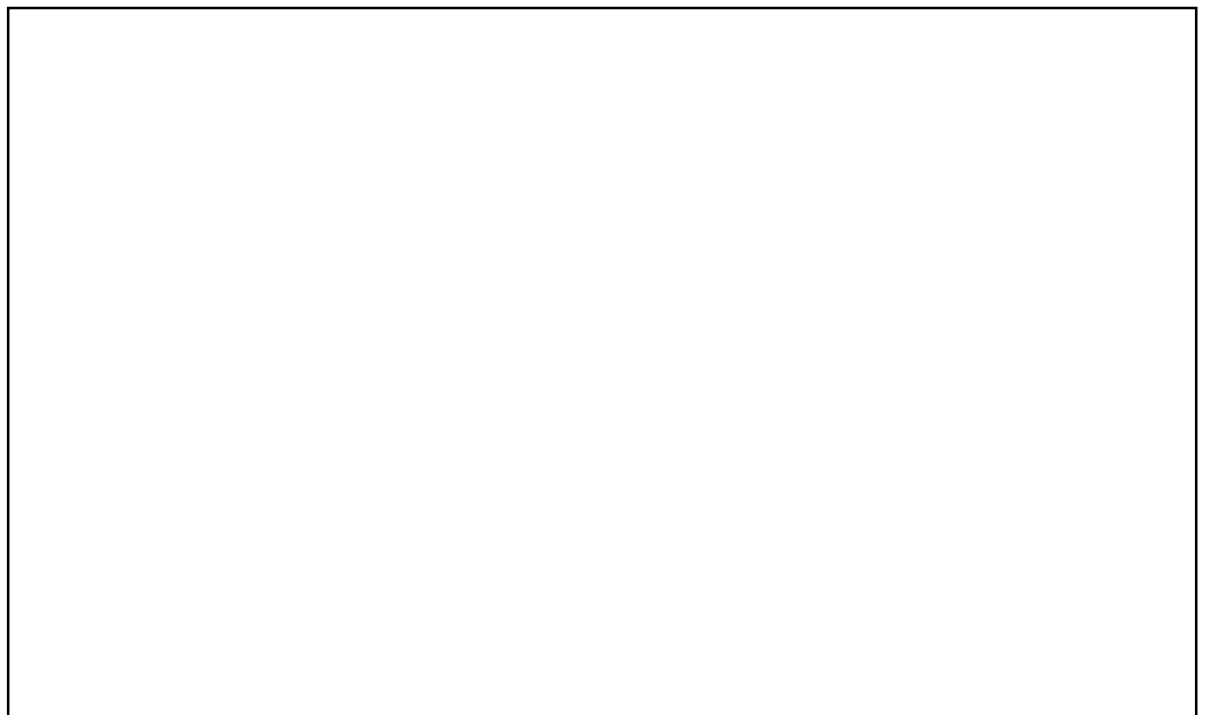
Turnbull of New South Wales – describe this as “secret Keynesianism”. The original forms of Keynesianism, first implemented in the 1930s in Roosevelt's New Deal in America and later in Europe, relied on Government deficit spending on large public works to combat unemployment, take people off benefit and into work and to put more money in circulation.

Many social democrats have seen Keynesianism as relatively progressive in that it did fund public utilities and reduce unemployment – in the short term; they boasted that it did away with the old capitalist cycle of boom and bust. But it was still capitalism and ultimately capitalism does not have a kind face. In the long term it led to the devaluing of money and the rampant inflation of the early 1970s, followed by collapse and a worse crisis than ever – as we saw in the 1980s. The ruling class then abandoned Keynesianism and reverted to old fashioned free market, or “liberal”, capitalism, and started privatising all the public utilities that Keynesianism had built.

Wilson and Turnbull argue that the new “secret Keynesianism” operates not by the Government undertaking deficit spending but by pushing millions of private households into deficit spending.

They describe how the system operates: “Faster growth rates among countries that have placed an ever greater institutional reliance on the private sector have led to now familiar claims about the superior functional performance of markets and the strength of the new, flexible hi-tech economies. Critics of the achievements of these economies, however, point to the shifting burdens of adjustment that faster growth has entailed long working hours, widening earnings inequality and higher consumer debt.”

Then they describe the effect in Australia: “We must now look beyond the formal balance sheets of state finances to understand how the state is continuing to ‘pump prime’ the Australian economy by relying on house-



Features

020 7223 4052

hold-based deficit spending. Are these policies either desirable or sustainable dimensions of Australia's economic performance?"

They continue: "Australian households are no longer net savers, saving less than two per cent of their annual income. At the same time Australia's once modest household debt levels have ballooned out in the last 10 years, rising to about 90 per cent of household income, closing the gap between Australia and other countries like the UK, Canada and the United States. Debt-financed consumption expenditure is important in explaining Australia's recently improved economic growth performance.... Household consumption remains the solid and consistent contributor to Australia's economic growth."

Wilson and Turnbull explain how the Australian government is deliberately pushing households into taking on more debt: "Australia's dependence on rising household expenditure for growth is not coincidental. As we shall see, there are a plethora of public measures, inducements, taxes and incentives to encourage private spending and growth in household debt in order to sustain Australia's growth rate."

They show that household spending on childcare; education and rent have risen linked to the "long-term 'rollback' of public provision". They also say that "gambling accounts for an ever-increasing share of household expenditure" – funded by a run-down in household saving. This follows a dramatic increase in gambling resulting from government deregulation of the industry and an increase in casinos – a warning for Britain.

They conclude: "Recent economic growth has little or nothing to do with the benefits of increased market dynamism. In fact, it is the same old indebted economy we have always had, but with ever greater reliance on household consumption, debt and long working hours to keep it blooming ... government policies have assisted this success as a reworked variant of traditional Keynesianism – something not immediately obvious.

"The state, rather than undertaking the expense and risk of deficit spending to stimulate growth itself, is using policy mechanisms to encourage households to do this. Through these mechanisms households now undertake more of the state's function in maintaining growth, financed by their rising consumption and household debt."

Back in Britain we can see now why the European Union 48-hour directive is not working in Britain. Workers up to their ears in debt are as keen to subvert it as the bosses are. The boss does not need to crack the whip and impose long hours when the bank manager is cracking it harder. But of course the boss is well pleased with all the extra surplus value that long working hours bring.

But the effects on our health and quality of life are devastating. A recent American survey, published in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, showed that overtime and extended working hours are associated with an increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, fatigue, stress, depression,

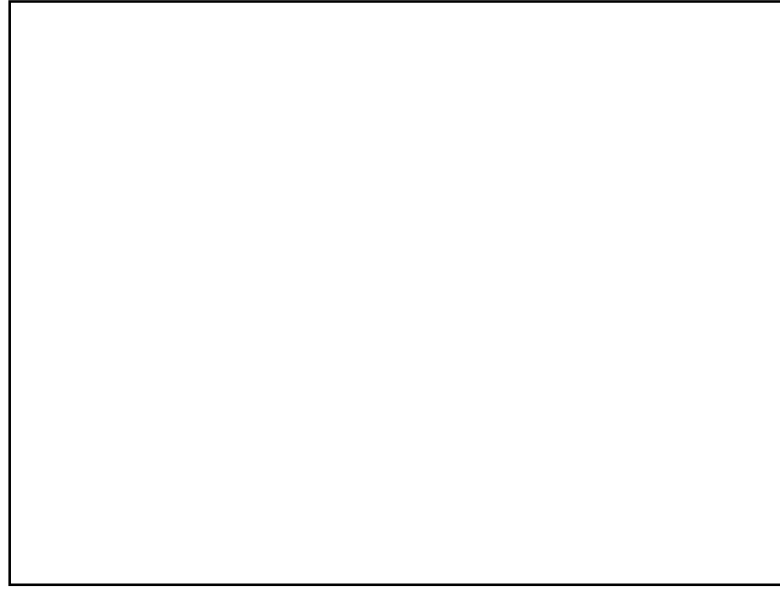
musculo-skeletal disorders, chronic infections, diabetes and other health complaints.

In Japan they have a word, *karoshi*, for death by overwork and a few years ago there was a minor epidemic of it, leading to court cases against bosses. In Britain people rarely die of overwork but thousands suffer breakdowns – physical or mental or both – and end up on the "scrap heap" of incapacity benefit, with their life-expectancy shortened.

Professor Cary Cooper, a stress expert at Lancaster University Management School, claims the risk is not only to those who work over 60 hours a week but affects anyone regularly working over 45 hours. She said: "If you work consistently long hours, over 45 a week every week, it will damage your health, physically and psychologically. In the UK we have the second-longest working hours in the developed world, just behind the States and we now have longer hours than Japan."

An Amicus survey found that one in five workers was put off sex because of long hours and a third said they did not have enough time to spend with their children. Long hours also lead to tiredness, lapses in concentration and higher accident rates.

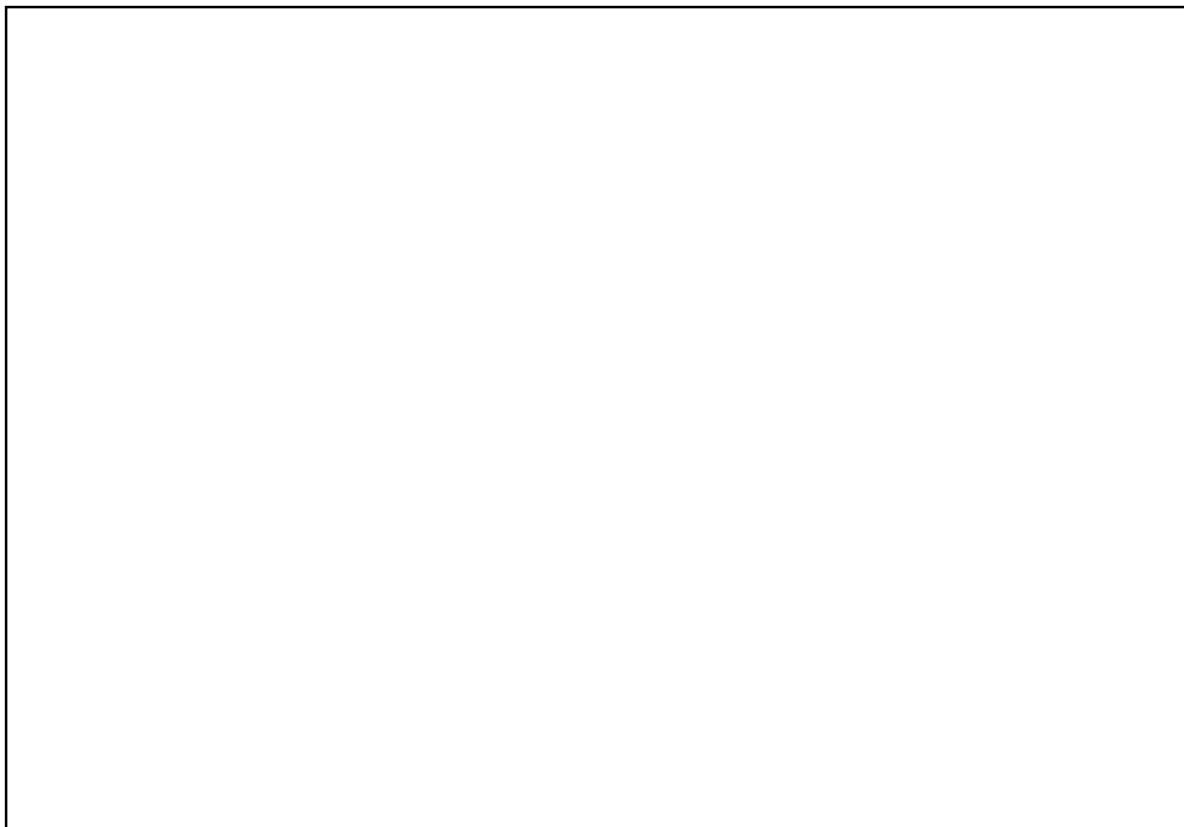
Binge drinking is another product of the long hours culture. When young workers do not have time for leisurely relaxation and recreation they find that hard drinking and drunkenness brings them a few hours respite from



• Above: bailiffs at work - they will soon get the right to force an entry. Below: some capitalists are even more ruthless than others.

the stresses and tensions of endless work. But it does long-term damage to their health and leads to violence and anti-social behaviour.

Another factor in lengthening working hours is the target culture that has invaded many workplaces, where lower and middle management are constantly set new targets to improve performance. Failure to meet targets leaves them vulnerable to sacking so they drive those under them all the harder. And since it is unrealistic to imagine performance can be improved under all circumstances, this culture also encourages corruption, of middle management falsifying figures to make their performance appear better than it is.



The effects of long working hours on our children are also devastating and there is a developing anti-child culture. Once children were seen as the future of the nation and our pride and joy. Winston Churchill, in the middle of the Second World War, spoke of the importance of "putting milk into babies" as a vital investment. Now children are seen as a nuisance, they demand our time and attention and they distract us from work. Childcare is no longer taught in schools and few young adults have grown up with any experience of minding younger siblings. Many are terrified of the responsibility.

Long hours and big debts put many young people off having children at all. We are told that bringing up a child will cost us £180,000. Those who do have children are regarded as self-indulgent and a burden on society. Overweight pregnant mothers are told they are a burden on the NHS. Anyone who takes time off work to look after children is regarded as a selfish slacker.

The rich of course are exempt from this disapproval. And the ruling class does not need to worry about the next generation of workers. There are thousands in Africa, Asia and eastern Europe – fully adult and trained at another country's expense – queuing up to come to Britain to escape the dire poverty and wars that imperialism is imposing on their home countries.

It is not surprising that the recent Unicef report found that Britain's children are the unhappiest in the developed world. The

Unicef report covered six different areas of well-being using 40 separate indicators. In five of the six areas, British children came in the lowest third, making them overall the unhappiest children in the western world. In particular their own assessment of their well-being was very low. This is hardly surprising in a society that regards them only as a nuisance and a burden. It is heartbreaking to compare them to children in socialist countries who are so confident and high achieving because they know their whole community treasures them and takes pride in them.

Britain is one of the few countries around the world that does not celebrate International Children's Day, usually set on 1st June or in late May, though some countries celebrate it at different times.

What can we do to combat this culture of debt, long hours and child neglect? We can call on the trade unions to fight for higher wages but this alone is not enough. The credit companies would probably raise everyone's credit limits and the Treasury and the banks would look upon it as a fresh supply of household deficit spending. This is a problem that has to be fought on many fronts.

Karl Marx said: "Workers of the World Unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains." Now the debt culture is fooling too many workers into working all hours to pay for the use of the chains. It sets workers at odds with their unions in wanting to work long hours.

We must support the trade unions in their fight to defend the 48-hour limit. And we must involve them in discouraging debt, supplying debt counselling and campaigning for the restoration of the social wage – in other words to reverse the privatisation of the last two-and-a-half decades and restore free healthcare and education.

We must support the campaign to restore council housing, which will bring down house prices. We could demand that mortgage payers in serious trouble and facing eviction should have the right to demand that their local authority buy out the house from the mortgage lender by compulsory purchase – at a price that takes into account what has already been paid – and then the family remain in the house as council tenants. And we must call for the restoration of the Rent Act.

We must call for stiffer lending controls, so that banks and finance companies who lend to people they know will struggle to keep up payments cannot pursue their mis-sold loans in the courts. We must definitely call for the restoration of strict gambling controls and oppose the opening of super-casinos.

We must use all our propaganda resources to combat the culture that judges people by the possessions and try to restore a sense of community in the working class. We must also use our resources to remind people that after a socialist revolution, personal and household debts would be abolished overnight. Probably in today's anti-political and cynical culture not many would believe us but it is one benefit a socialist revolution can deliver instantly.

• Left: the struggle has to be fought on many fronts,

Home News

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

As I see all the images of the killing, dying, and disaster that emanate out of Iraq, I can't help but think of my visit in 2000 to that blood-soaked country.

I went at that time to smuggle in badly needed drugs and medical equipment to the overstretched and impoverished hospitals, and I travelled the length and breadth of Iraq.

Despite the fact that our forces were dropping bombs daily, and our sanctions had crippled the economy and brought the population to the brink of starvation, I was treated with unbelievable hospitality and welcomed everywhere I went.

Why? Because I was prepared to come, look and listen to the plight of the Iraqi people. At every hospital, there were doctors and nurses working tirelessly under atrocious conditions. Every school was packed with students, and even though they had very little equipment they showed their artwork and homework books proudly.

Today, Iraq is in flames. Every one of the charitable organisations that helped to sustain Iraq through that difficult period has left. Hospitals are filled with the dead and dying, with very few doctors and medical staff brave enough to continue working.

Schools once filled with pupils now stand empty, and the streets are too dangerous for pupils to venture out.

The disillusioned Iraqi people have now come to realise that the freedom promised by Britain and America was a cruel ploy to gain control of Iraqi oil reserves.

The gesture towards democracy which was foisted on the people turned out to be nothing but a sham.

The only decent thing we can do to mark the 4th anniversary of the illegal war in Iraq is to get our troops out now, and allow the Iraq people to take control of their own lives and travel down their own road to freedom.

Yours Sincerely,

Ray Davies
Vice Chair CND Cymru.

Dear Editor

The problem with Richard Collyer's scenario for the ending of the war in Iraq (*New Worker* 1430 letters) is exposed in his last paragraph.

"Given goodwill..." Richard says. The reality is that one of the main players is rampant US imperialism and its puppets (which include Britain) from whom no goodwill can be expected. They will do what they are forced to do or what they think is in their best interests.

We cannot predict exactly how the resolution of this war will turn out but we must demand that the imperialist forces withdraw unconditionally and allow the Iraqi people to decide their own fate.

Yours comradely,
Ben Johnson,
South London.

Benefit changes

TONY Blair and Work and pensions Secretary John Hutton last week announced their intention to push through big changes in Britain's benefits system before summer - including a new role for the private sector.

Hutton outlined the timetable at a conference that was also addressed by banker David Freud, who carried out a welfare review for the Government.

Freud recommended that large swathes of the Government's employment services should be handed over to the private and voluntary sectors.

The plan is expected to meet opposition from welfare groups and civil service trade unions.

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

Mixed sex wards remain

THE HEALTHCARE Commission last week published conclusive evidence that the Government's claim to have ended the scandal of mixed sex wards in psychiatric hospitals is not true, or at best misleading.

The commission published the results of a census of all mental health establishments in England and Wales that showed 55 per cent of inpatients had to share sleeping accommodation or bathrooms with members of the opposite sex.

Many female patients in psychiatric wards are suffering from the trauma of sexual abuse and are particularly vulnerable, while many of the

male patients have drug or other substance abuse problems.

Last year ministers rejected a report from the National Patient Safety Agency that recorded at least 19 rapes of mental health patients in England and more than 100 other improper sexual incidents in psychiatric units in the previous two years.

Paul Farmer, chief executive of the mental health charity Mind, said: "It is quite staggering how bad the mixed sex wards situation is. The NHS is putting some of the most vulnerable people in some of the most threatening and unpleasant environments."

Care couple parted

A HUNDRED years ago elderly people dreaded having to go into the workhouse when they could no longer look after themselves because it cruelly separated married couples at a time when they were most vulnerable. Fifty years ago state welfare was supposed to have ended all that.

But last week Eric and Better Dunnell found they were to be separated after 60 years of marriage because of Norfolk County Council's elderly care crisis.

The crisis is a combination of severe budget cuts and care home closures combined with a growing number of elderly people needing help.

Mrs Dunnell, 81, suffers from deteriorating dementia

and receives three visits a day from a social workers but she needs a higher level of care. Mr Dunnell, 86 and a war veteran, struggle to look after them both.

Currently they are living in a council flat. Their family cannot afford to put them into a private care home because the Government will fund only Mrs Dunnell. Their daughter, Yvonne Newton, said: "We simply can't split them up after all these years, but there just aren't any options. It's completely shocking."

She added: "I can't believe there are so few options for elderly couples whose needs are different... It seems that if they have no property, nothing to sell themselves, they have no choice."

New Communist Party weekend school

- Building the Party in theory & practice
• The multipolar world?
• Keynes and bourgeois economy
• Bourgeois feminism

14th & 15 April, NCP Party Centre in central London. Limited accommodation available - contact Party centre now. £10 for two days, £5 for one. Starts 9.30am on the Saturday.

FROM THE NEW COMMUNIST PARTY

New technology and the need for socialism

£2 plus 50p P&P.

The case for communism £2 plus 50p P&P.

All in the family by Daphne Liddle, £1 plus 50p P&P (New Worker reprint).

Arab nationalism and the communist movement

by Andy Brooks, £1 plus 50p P&P (New Worker reprint).

NCP Lit. PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ. (cheques to New Worker)

New Worker Supporters' Groups...

New Worker supporters groups exist to support the weekly newspaper of the New Communist Party. Individual membership is £5.00 (8 Euros or \$10) for all or part of the calendar year and every member will receive a New Worker Supporters Group (NWSG) card and a copies of the Internal Bulletin for the year.

Name.....
Address.....
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Diary

- SATURDAY 31 March John4Leader national rally. Supporting John McDonnell for Labour leader. 1-4pm, Shaw Theatre, Euston Rd, London.
SATURDAY 31 March Nkrumah legacy politics series. Nkrumah in North America and Europe. 2pm, Room G52, SOAS, Main Building, Thornhaugh St, London WC1.
SATURDAY 31 March Film & falafel night. 7.30pm, St Matthews, Carver St, Sheffield. PSC.
WEDNESDAY 11 April - 17 April. Birds of War - art exhibition. 10-5pm & 10-4pm Sat-Sun. Candid Arts Gallery, 3 Torrens St, London EC1V. Free.
FRIDAY 13 April and 14 April. Conference: Peace History. Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Rd, London SE1. Details: www.abolishwar.org.uk
SATURDAY 14 April Korea defends independence. Public meeting & social. 3pm, Saklavala Hall, Dominion Rd (off Featherstone Rd), Southall, UB2 5AA. Friends of Korea.
SATURDAY 14 April Nkrumah legacy politics series. Nkrumah in the anti-colonial movement in the Gold Coast until 1957. Room G52, SOAS, Thornhaugh St, Lonon WC1.
THURSDAY 19 April Film: The Iron Wall by Mohammed Alatar. 8pm, St Michael's Church, Macclesfield. PSC.
SATURDAY 21 April Concert for peace. The Galliard Trio. 7.30pm, Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel. Hampstead, London NW3. £8/£6.50. Mana 020 8455 1030.
MONDAY 7 May Politics of the folk revival. Karl Dallas. 7pm, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. £1.00/50p.
THURSDAY 10 May The Spanish Civil War and the Volunteers from Perthshire: words, pictures, song and music. 7.30pm, Perth Museum & Art Gallery.
MONDAY 14 May Do cowards flourish? History of Labour Party cartoons. 7pm, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. £1.00/50p.

On the Web...

- New Worker National - www.newworker.org
NCP Central - www.geocities.com/ncpcentral
London District NCP - http://londoncommunists.blogspot.com/
Brighton NCP - http://brightoncommunists.blogspot.com/
NCP-PCS - www.geocities.ncppcs/pcs1.html

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Monstrous special forces

by Rob Gowland

THE US LEADERSHIP routinely asserts, in defence of its frequent military attacks on other countries or blatant interference in their internal affairs, that these are part of US strategy to defend or even establish democracy. It is a mantra that George W Bush repeats with the zeal of a fanatic. And about the same level of credibility.

On this subject, American writer Chalmers Johnson, in his book *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*, wrote rather cogently: "It should be noted that since 1947, while we [the USA] have used our military power for political and military gain in a long list of countries, in no instance has democratic government come about as a direct result.

"In some important cases, on the other hand, democracy has developed in opposition to our interference — for example, after the collapse of the regime of the CIA-installed Greek colonels in 1974; after the demise of the US-supported fascist dictatorships in Portugal in 1974 and Spain in 1975; after the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986; after the ousting of General Chun Doo-hwan in south Korea in 1987;

and after the ending of 38 years of martial law on the island of Taiwan in the same year. ...

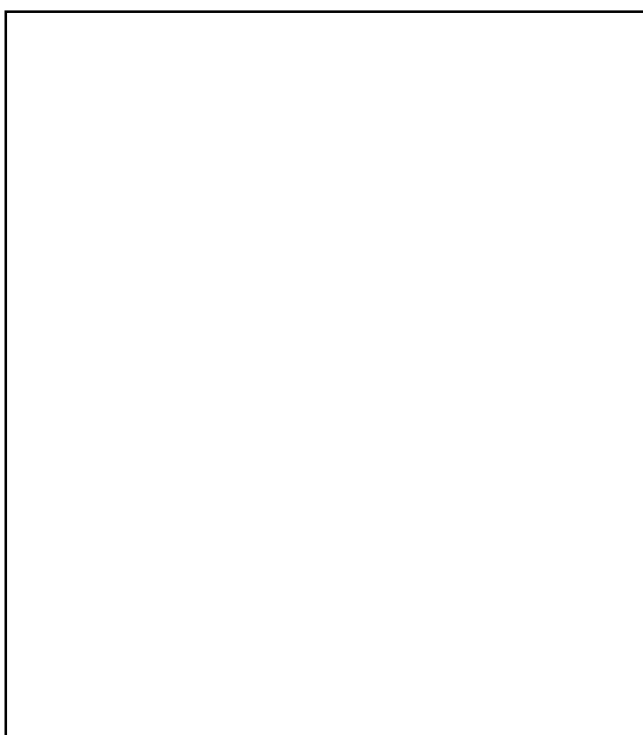
"In addition, for decades we ran one of the most extensive international operations in history against Cuba and Nicaragua because the struggles for national independence had produced outcomes that we did not like."

Elsewhere in the same book, Johnson notes that "the civilisation we are in the process of destroying in Iraq is part of our own heritage. It is also part of the world's patrimony.

"Before our invasion of Afghanistan, we condemned the Taliban for their March 2001 dynamiting of the monumental third-century AD Buddhist statues at Bamiyan. Those two gigantic statues of remarkable historical value and the barbarism involved in their destruction blazed in headlines and horrified commentaries in our country [the United States].

"Today, our own government is guilty of far greater crimes when it comes to the destruction of a whole universe of antiquity, and few here, when they consider Iraqi attitudes toward the American occupation, even take that into consideration."

Ominously, Johnson observes: "But what we do not



• US Special Forces at work in Iraq.

care to remember, others may recall all too well."

Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic was published last year by Metropolitan Books of New York. I have not had the chance to read the whole book, but the passages quoted make it look like a most interesting publication.

I have mentioned on previous occasions the dubious

activities of US "Special Forces" such as Delta Force, whose specialty is conducting clandestine military operations inside countries the United States is not at war with (at least officially).

In Panama, US special forces dressed up in Panama army uniforms and fired on other US forces guarding the Canal Zone in order to provide a pretext for the subse-

quent US invasion.

The members of such a force must be carefully and thoroughly indoctrinated, psychologically programmed so that they will not question the morality of their orders or of the actions they are expected to undertake.

Fanatical, amoral military units are nothing new, of course, but they were elevated to elite status by those connoisseurs of amorality, the Nazis. The pretext for the invasion of Poland was provided by just such a Nazi unit, which fired on German troops guarding the Polish-German border.

For added verisimilitude, they even left behind the body of a Polish anti-fascist, who had been taken from a German prison and shot especially for the occasion.

Such elite commando forces, with their carefully inculcated contempt for international law, are plentiful today. In addition to the US Army's Delta Force, Britain has the SAS (as does Australia), Germany has the KSK, and there are many others.

General Reinhard Gunzel was sacked in 2003 as head of the KSK after he praised an anti-Jewish speech by a right-wing politician. He held up the Nazi

Wehrmacht's Brandenburg division as an "inspiration" for modern

Germany's special forces troops.

The Brandenburg division was formed in 1939. An arm of the intelligence service within the regular Wehrmacht, its soldiers were often disguised as civilians or enemy troops. Its members took part in the invasions of Poland, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Russia and Greece.

Gunzel has co-authored a recently published book *Secret Warriors*, lauding special forces past and present. The missions of the Brandenburgers had been "a legend" among KSK troops, wrote Gunzel.

The book's co-author was Ulrich Wegener, who founded Germany's GSG9 anti-terrorism unit in the 1970s.

Hans-Peter Bartels, a member of the German parliament's Defence Committee, commented that "the picture of the KSK being painted in the book is ... full of contempt for the effeminate world of civilians and for the rest of the army".

But if you create a monster, you should not be surprised if it turns out to be monstrous. Should you?

The Guardian
Australian communist weekly

Communists reject the Treaty of Rome

Common appeal of Communist and Progressive Parties of Europe on the foundation of the European Economic Community (EEC).

THE ROME TREATY for the foundation of the EEC was an option of the main powers and West European monopolist capital. Today, 50 years later, the developments in the European Union vindicate the forces that struggled against its policies, tho had said and still say NO to the Maastricht Treaty, who voice their opposition to the "Constitutional Treaty".

They vindicate all those who today continue to fight against the European Union of big capital — a directorate of the big, neo-liberal and militaristic powers.

The goals trumpeted by the EU's dominant forces, the social democrat, conservative and various right wing forces — namely, the convergence of national economies, employment and improvement of the workers' conditions, more democracy, peace and cooperation on an equal footing — have proved false.

The EU mission is to strengthen the European-based transnational capital and big business in the main European powers, by taking away rights and gains of the workers, expanding its economic power and influence upon policies at the European and state levels, and exploiting new markets and natural resources. This course leads to an increase in social inequality and regional asym-

metries, the spreading of poverty and marginalisation.

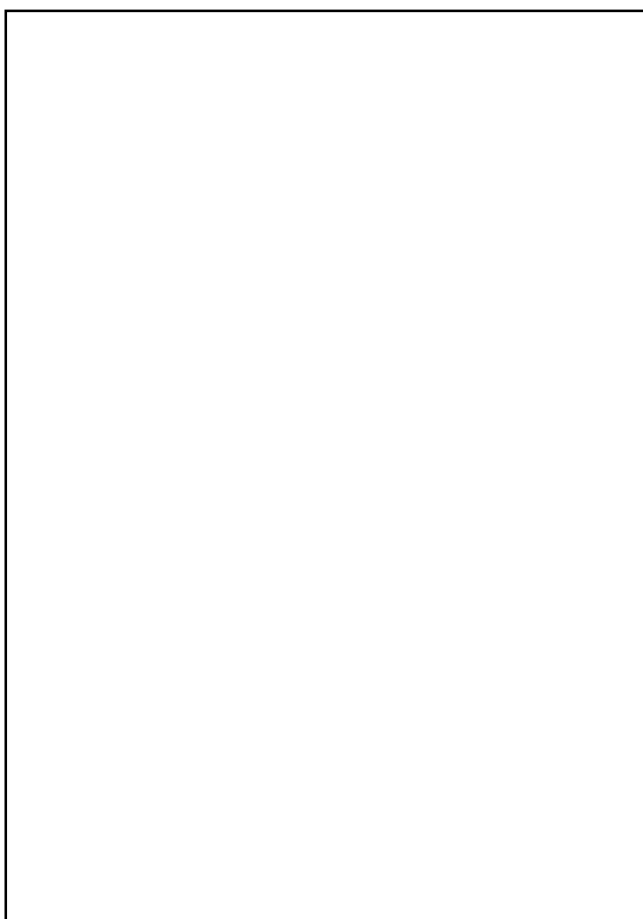
At present there is a growth in attacks against jobs and wages, pensions and social security, labour and union rights. Fundamental rights, such as the right to an education, to healthcare and social security are transformed into commodities and sources of profit for big business. There is growing exploitation, unemployment and precariousness.

At the same time that, through the so-called "Economic Partnership Agreements", unfair trading relations are imposed on some of the poorest countries of the planet, walls are built up for migrants in a fortress Europe.

Family-sized farming and fishing are ruined; self-employed workers and small entrepreneurs in industry, commerce and services are annihilated by the dominance of the financial and large-scale distribution corporations. Democratic rights suffer severe blows.

There is a growth in anti-communism, in some cases sponsored by the governments of European countries, and in others, promoted by the European Union institutions themselves. Prohibitions and persecutions of left-wing, anti-capitalist political forces and popular movements are widespread. Racism and xenophobia are being fomented.

The militarisation of the EU advances, as well as its cooperation with Nato and the US in the imperialist wars namely in Afghanistan and in



Iraq, in the illegal CIA flights, the pressures against socialist Cuba and Bolivarian Venezuela, against countries and peoples that resist. As "requested" by Nato and by the European Commission, military expenditures are rising and there is an ongoing arms race.

The big European capital uses the enlargement of the European Union and of Nato towards the East, as well as

the policies of pressure against sovereign Eastern countries, to pursue its own objectives of political, economic and geo-strategic domination.

The sovereignty and independence of peoples and nations are increasingly undermined. There is a plan to relaunch the "Constitutional Treaty", in spite of its explicit rejection by the French and Dutch peoples.

This global offensive of imperialism is being confronted by promising struggles of the peoples and workers, which we hail.

Our parties will strengthen their cooperation and joint action and will actively contribute to strengthen the working-class organisations and struggles and the anti-imperialist movement, to resist, challenge and fight against the neo-liberal policies and militarism and to reject the "Constitutional Treaty".

We appeal for the creation of alternatives that meet the needs and interests of the people, affirming socialism as the real alternative for the peoples of the European continent. We appeal for the convergence of activities and struggles that, throughout Europe, can pave the way for a Europe of peace, of cooperation among sovereign states, equal in rights, a Europe of employment and true economic and social development: a Europe open to the world, able to develop relations of friendship, fair trade and cooperation with all the countries and peoples of the world, respecting their right to an economic and social development: a Europe that can promote peace internationally and stand for the political resolution of the conflicts.

The Parties:

Workers' Party of Belgium; Workers' Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Communist Party of Britain;

New Communist Party of Britain; The Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) - Cyprus; Socialist Workers' Party of Croatia; Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia - Czech Republic; Communist Party in Denmark; Communist Party of Finland; German Communist Party (DKP); Communist Party of Greece; Hungarian Communist Workers' Party; Communist Party of Ireland; Socialist Party of Latvia; Socialist Party of Lithuania; Communist Party of Luxembourg; Communist Party of Norway; Communist Party of Poland; Portuguese Communist Party; Socialist Alliance Party - Romania; Communist Party of the Russian Federation; Communist Workers' Party of Russia; Communist Party of Spain; Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain; Party of Communists of Cataluña; Communist Party of Turkey; The Party of Labour (EMEP) - Turkey; Communist Party of Ukraine.

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International News

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Sino-Russian friendship blossoms

THREE CHARTERED planes full of Chinese business officials and business people accompanied President Hu Jintao on his Russia visit, which began on Monday.

Trade will dominate Hu's discussions with Russian leaders but part of the agenda includes the launching of the *Year of China* in Russia.

The just-inaugurated *Year of China* and the 2006 *Year of Russia* are two massive projects unprecedented in scope. They are of strategic importance in advancing the two countries' ties.

The *Year of Russia* in China gave millions of Chinese a chance to see a changing Russia. The *Year of China* will present Russia with a far-reaching picture of their big neighbour.

The *Year of China* exhibition just opened, China's largest ever overseas project, includes nearly 200 events including a cultural festival, business forum and investment conference.

The two countries' efforts to make the events all-embracing are a substantial response to what may be the main problem of bilateral relations. Chinese and Russian leaders are well aware that communication is smooth at the top

but insufficient at lower levels.

As a result, trade and investment lag far behind political relations between the two countries.

The inclusiveness of the *Year of Russia* proved effective in building bilateral ties. China and Russia have vast potential in the trade and economic dimension of their relations. Growth is under way. Bilateral trade hit a record high of \$33.4 billion last year. The launching of several large projects in fields including energy and high-tech should lead to increased trade. Their goal of boosting trade volume to \$60 to \$80 billion by 2010 seems attainable.

The mid-term trade and economic cooperation programme for the 2006-10 period, which the two countries are working on, will serve as a blueprint for developing economic ties.

China and Russia are now in the warmest period of bilateral relations. They are regularly exchanging opinions on a wide range of regional and international issues, including the Iranian and Korean peninsula nuclear crises. We look forward to Hu's trip taking bilateral relations to a new level.

China Daily

Adams and Paisley agree on power-sharing



• Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams – a photo many never expected to see.

NORTHERN Ireland's political parties reached a long-awaited agreement Monday on power-sharing in the province, starting on 8th May. The deal was made at a historic meeting between Ian Paisley, head of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin, at Stormont, the seat of Northern Ireland's parliament.

This was the first ever face-to-face meeting between the two sides in the provincial parliament, accompanied by an 11-member delegation from each party.

Irish premier Bertie Ahern said the meeting showed the country was moving "forward from today in an entirely new spirit and with every expectation of success."

He believed the event has the "potential to transform the future of this island (Ireland)."

The Irish prime minister urged all parties in the province to make the best use of the preparatory period now available "to ensure that the new Executive will be able to discharge its responsibilities with full and immediate effect on 8th May."

Paisley pledged, "We must not allow our justified loathing of the horrors and tragedies of the past to become a barrier to create a better and more stable future for our children. In looking to the future, we must never forget those who have suffered during the dark period from which we are, please God, now emerging."

Adams said Sinn Féin will build a new relationship with every party in the province to allow every citizen to share and have equality of ownership of a peaceful, prosperous and just future.

The Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended in October 2002 following allegations of an IRA spy ring at Stormont. These al-

legations were later proved groundless – indeed Sinn Féin had been the victim of British spying. Direct rule by the British government was then imposed.

Adams welcomes agreement

SINN FÉIN President Gerry Adams MP speaking after Monday's meeting between Sinn Féin and the DUP said "The discussions and agreement between our two parties show the potential of what can now be achieved". Gerry Adams said:

"I want to begin my remarks by welcoming the statement by Ian Paisley.

"While it is disappointing that the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement have not been restored today, I believe the agreement reached between Sinn Féin and the DUP, including the unequivocal commitment made by their party Executive and reiterated today, to the restoration of political institutions on 8th May, marks the beginning of a new era of politics on this island.

potential

"The discussions and agreement between our two parties show the potential of what can now be achieved.

"Sinn Féin entered into these discussions in a positive and strategic way strengthened by our recently renewed and increased mandate. I want to once again thank everyone who supports our party.

"In all of the initiatives we have taken in recent times we have been guided by the need to deliver for the people of Ireland. So, in our discussions we have listened very carefully to the position put forward by Ian Paisley and his colleagues.

"The relationships between the people of this island have been marred by centuries of discord, conflict, hurt and tragedy.

"In particular this has been the sad history of orange and green. Sinn Féin is about building a new relationship between orange and green and all the other colours, where every citizen can share and have equality of ownership of a peaceful, prosperous and just future.

"There are still many challenges, many difficulties to be faced. But let us be clear. The basis of the agreement between Sinn Féin and the DUP follows Ian Paisley's unequivocal and welcome commitment to support and participate fully in the political institutions on 8th May.

"In the lead up to restoration, important work has to take place preparing for government. And you have the outline of that also.

"As an immediate step both Sinn Féin and the DUP have asked the British government not to issue the water bills.

"*Tús maith leath na hoibre*. A good start is half the work. The two governments also have other work to do. We are committed to, and today discussed, further engagements with the British Chancellor, with the Irish government, and with others to ensure that the incoming Executive has the best possible resources to fulfil our responsibilities.

"We have all come a very long way in the process of peace making and national reconciliation. We are very conscious of the many people who have suffered. We owe it to them to build the best future possible. It is a time for generosity, a time to be mindful of the common good and of the future of all our people.

"I am pleased to say that collectively we have created the potential to build a new, harmonious and equitable relationship between nationalists and republicans and unionists, as well as the rest of the people of the island of Ireland.

"Sinn Féin will take nothing for granted in the days and weeks ahead but we will do all that we can to ensure a successful outcome and we ask everyone to support us in our efforts."

Sinn Féin

AK Steel lockout ends in union victory

by Martha Grevatt

AK STEEL locked out 2,505 members of the Armco Employees' Independent Federation at the Middletown, Ohio, plant on 26th February 2006. The workers spent the next year on the picket line, enduring hardship and loss but repeatedly rejecting management's "final" offers.

During that time AEIF merged with the Machinists union, hoping the Machinists' multi-union pension plan would make it easier to get AK to retain their defined-benefit pensions. The AK bosses wouldn't budge, however. They insisted on converting to 401K plans, in which a set amount is contributed but the funds invested are at the mercy of the stock market — witness Enron — for employees who are paid by the hour.

Now, after resignations and retirements, the remaining 1,759 members of Machinists Local Lodge 1943 have overwhelmingly ratified a four-and-a-half year contract. The 401K will not be imposed. The workers will keep their traditional pensions. By June every union member will be back to work; by September most of the scabs will be getting their pink slip dismissal notices.

Other highlights of the agreement include raises and quarterly bonuses based on the amount of steel shipped. Setbacks include changes in classification and increased outsourcing that will ultimately cost jobs.

Whatever the shortcomings, workers explain that it was the best they could win, and they say they're relieved the battle is over. It was a tremendous victory that their union was able to push back the pension raiders, especially in this period of widespread attacks on defined benefits. And the fact that a union could win against a hardnosed company with a history of locking out workers—AK locked out members of the United Steel Workers in Mansfield, Ohio, for three-and-a-half years before settling—is encouraging to all unions fighting to save workers' pensions.

Workers World (US)

