

IRAQ: IT'S STILL ABOUT THE OIL

by our Arab Affairs Correspondent

IRAQI resistance fighters have withdrawn from the northern city of Mosul but partisans continued hit-and-run attacks across Baghdad, while Mahdi Army commanders warned that aggressive searches by puppet regime troops in their Sadr City stronghold could jeopardise the fragile truce that ended the fighting in the east of the capital last week.

Muqtada al Sadr is now returning to the political front against his rivals in the Shia hierarchy that dominate the puppet government; underground Baathist leader Izzat Ibrahim al Duri has called on the resistance to keep up the fight. Meanwhile the price of oil hit record levels amid market fears of continuing instability in the region.

Radical cleric Muqtada al Sadr has called on his supporters to mount weekly peaceful protests against a new American security plan that would perpetuate the US occupation. The US proposals would allow American troops to remain in Iraq with the agreement of the venal puppet ad-

ministration. Al Sadr has the support of senior Shia clerics for this saying: "What comforted me are the oral and written edicts, fatwas, which forbid the agreement between the occupation forces of darkness and the Iraqi government".

Though the top Shia clerics refused to publicly be drawn into the recent conflict between the Sadr movement and the Shia-dominated puppet administration, they're behind him on the US "security" plan. Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani has expressed his anger, saying he would not permit the Iraqi government to sign a deal with "US occupiers" as long as he lived. "It is necessary to take action rather than re-



• Resistance attacks leave oil burning near Basra – in the foreground empty ammunition cases.

main helpless," Al Sadr declared demanding that "any agreement brokered with the US be put to a popular referendum" and vowing to gather a million signatures rejecting the deal.

Meanwhile Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (Baath) leader Izzat Ibrahim al Duri has vowed to fight on until the imperi-

alists withdraw, his country. Interviewed by an Egyptian magazine, Saddam Hussein's deputy president said some 120,000 Baathist supporters had been killed in the fighting over the past five years but the resistance would continue "until the total liberation of Iraq". The resistance would negotiate with the Americans

but only if they agreed to withdraw their troops, dismiss their puppets and recognise the Baath Party as "the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people".

The Bush administration is once again claiming its divide and rule tactics have the partisans on the run but this confidence is reflected in the global oil industry.

The price of oil has tripled since the invasion of Iraq, costing the world a staggering \$6 trillion in higher energy prices alone. Oil economist Dr Mamdouh Salameh, who advises both the World Bank and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (Unido), says that the price of oil would now be no more than \$40 a barrel, less than a third of the record \$135 a barrel reached last week, if it had not been for the war of aggression against Iraq.

Dr Salameh, director of the British-based Oil Market Consultancy Service and an authority on Iraq's oil, said it is the only one of the world's biggest producing countries with enough reserves substantially to increase its flow.

Production in eight of the others – the United States, Canada, Iran, Indonesia, Russia, Britain, Norway and Mexico – has peaked, he says, while

China and Saudi Arabia, the remaining two, are nearing the point of decline. Before the war, Saddam Hussein's regime pumped some 3.5 million barrels of oil a day, but this had now fallen to just two million barrels.

Dr Salameh told the all-party parliamentary group on peak oil last month that Iraq had offered the Americans a deal, three years before the war, that would have opened up 10 new giant oil fields on "generous" terms in return for the lifting of sanctions. He said that this would certainly have prevented the steep rise in the price of oil. "But the US had a different idea. It planned to occupy Iraq and annex its oil."

FUND

Our fund and our special appeal have been very disappointing this week; as so often happens a good week is followed by a bad week.

The regular fund took £250.50 this week, bringing the May total so far to just £1,427.75, which is £1,572.25 short of the £3,000 target – less than halfway!

We thank a Surrey comrade for £5 and a Carlisle reader for another £5. A reader sent £15 in memory of Arthur Attwood and we had two other contributions of £5 and £15.50. All the rest came from regular bankers' orders and we thank everyone who has given in whatever way.

The Special Appeal fund this week collected only £30: £25 from a Merseyside supporter and £5 from a south-east London supporter and we thank them both.

This brings our special appeal total to £610 – just over a tenth of the way to our target of £6,000 – a long way to go yet.

Please keep up the momentum of the first week of our Special Appeal – so far we've been able to pay only a couple of the big bills in our in-tray, there are many more to go.

Send whatever you can and mark the envelope either *New Worker* Fund or Special Appeal, both at PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.

Oil crisis sends Brown nuclear

by Daphne Liddle

PRIME Minister Gordon Brown last Wednesday indicated that the Government is likely to increase plans for producing nuclear power in Britain in response to global soaring oil costs.

Last January he gave the go-ahead for a new generation of nuclear power stations to replace ageing plants that are about to be decommissioned.

But on Wednesday evening he said that it was time to be "more ambitious" with nuclear plans, implying new nuclear power stations in places where there have never been any.

He had just come from a meeting with senior oil industry leaders to try to persuade them to increase the supply of oil in Britain and curb the current soaring oil prices.

The rising price of oil is a global problem and

there is little that Brown or the oil industry leaders can do immediately to affect prices in Britain.

The soaring fuel costs last Tuesday provoked hundreds of lorry drivers to drive in slow protest convoys to the centre of London and along the M4 in Wales.

Hauliers say that diesel prices are now over 120 pence a litre and they were calling on Brown to drop plans for a planned two pence increase in fuel tax that was intended as a green measure, to discourage unnecessary use of all motor vehicles.

The road hauliers say the extra cost will drive many road haulage companies out of business. They are calling for a separate rate of tax for "essential users" of heavy goods vehicles.

The convoys came from several directions, converging on central London where their leaders handed in a petition to Number Ten. A few hundred lorry drivers in jug-

ernauts can take up more space in a protest than hundreds of thousands of peace or environmental protesters on foot – and get themselves reported in news bulletins.

Environmental campaigners have been urging Brown to resist this pressure from a wealthy private enterprise lobby that has thrived on the back of the destruction of Britain's freight rail network since the 1960s.

That network should be restored but it cannot be done overnight. Food and other essential goods have to get from A to B and soaring transportation costs add to prices on shop shelves.

The rising food prices impact disproportionately on people with low incomes, though those on middle incomes are also now feeling the pinch.

Brown is in a tight spot but he has had 10 years as Chancellor to put in place policies that would have left Britain less vulnerable on world oil markets – like de-

veloping alternative sources of energy and restoring our public transport system and rebuilding the rail network.

Another factor in rising oil prices is the capitalist practice of speculators playing the markets to make personal fortunes out of the soaring prices – driving costs up as they do so.

The oil industry chiefs have all waxed very rich on the back of the price rises.

In a sensible world profiteers who drive up the prices of essentials to line their own pockets would be dealt with as criminals; oil shortages would have been properly anticipated with improved public transport and alternative sources of energy developed.

But that would require the total removal of the government and system of imperialists and profiteers and its replacement with a socialist government.

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THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

More bad news for Labour

LABOUR'S massive defeat in the Crewe and Nantwich by-election last week clearly shows that "New Labour" is dead in the water and that we're going to get the Tories back in two years time unless the Brown government responds to the demands of working people in time.

Brown's minions are running around blaming their dismal showing on poor local campaigning as if it had nothing to do with them. Other Blairites are plotting behind the scenes to find a new leader who will somehow woo the electorate with communication skills that the Prime Minister apparently lacks.

Well it was a rubbishy campaign. Running around in top hats ridiculing "Tory toffs" is no substitute for class politics – least of all from this Government which has bent over backwards to serve the ruling class and put the entire burden of the current economic crisis on those who can least afford it. It was a childish campaign but not as puerile as the belief that Labour voters are so inherently stupid that they can easily be won back with yet another new face at the helm.

John McDonnell, the chair of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), said: "This leadership speculation is degenerating into farce.

"It is pointless changing leader without changing policies. And it is pointless supporting a coalition to depose the existing leader which comprises all those who have consistently supported the New Labour policies which have brought this crisis upon us".

But many union leaders, including many of those who came to power with the support of broad left factions, argue that open debate could split Labour and speed the way for the Tories.

Make no mistake – a Tory Government would be much worse than Brown's for the unions and the working class as a whole. But the voters who sat on their hands in Crewe and throughout England and Wales in the May local elections didn't do it because they've taken a Freudian dislike to Gordon Brown's dour ways. They did it because they don't like his policies, which differ so little from those of David Cameron and Boris Johnson that the prospect of a Tory come-back now no longer strikes fear amongst the working class – particularly those too young to remember the dark days of Thatcher and Major.

The millions who voted Labour time and time again over the past 10 years have been betrayed by a Government that has led Britain into a criminal war in Iraq and another futile foray into Afghanistan. Working people expected a revitalised Welfare State and a National Health Service and education system worthy of a country whose economy we are told is the fifth largest in the world. What we got was the same Tory package of tax breaks for the rich, privatisations and cuts greased with a few modest reforms and third-rate appeals to "patriotism" that made even the Tories cringe with embarrassment.

The LRC and the centrist Compass group are both calling for an open debate within the Labour Party in the wake of May's disastrous polls to draw up a new programme that could revive the party and restore its credibility amongst its traditional working class supporters. The affiliated unions which now provide virtually all of Labour's funding must play a decisive role in supporting the demands for a new Government agenda focused on the needs and demands of the organised working class.

Making hay

Western economies may be on the verge of collapse, banks overstretched and house prices falling but, as ever in this capitalist system, someone is doing very nicely.

The price of farming land is rocketing as City buyers plough their lucrative bonus money into agricultural land, food prices are rising and the market for bio-fuels is growing.

The average price of arable land rose from £9,929 a hectare in the first half of this year to £10,949 in the second half; that's over 10 per cent in six months.

Land prices are rising in other countries, in particular Denmark and Ireland; arable land in Ireland now fetches •24,000 (£19,000) a hectare.

God fearing

Republican presidential candidate John McCain has been forced to dissociate his campaign from the support of two evangelical preachers he was praising not long ago.

Say no more

He described the Reverend Rod Parsley of the World Harvest Church of Columbus, Ohio, as "one of the truly great leaders in America, a moral compass, a spiritual guide".

He also praised the spiritual guidance of the Reverend John Hagee of Washington, saying: "It's hard to do the Lord's work in the city of Satan.

Since then Parsley has described the Catholic Church as "the whore of the world" and claimed that Hitler and the Holocaust were all part of God's plan to dispel the Jews from Europe back to Israel.

And Hagee has described Islam as "The anti-Christ" and Mohamed as "the mouthpiece of a conspiracy of spiritual evil".

Too early

Zoe Watmough from Horwich, Lancashire has been fined £265 for putting her bins out a few hours early. The single mother was initially

fined £75 when her bin was spotted by council workers.

She refused to pay the fine and was taken to court. Zoe was told she was fined because the council's rules state that bins should not be out before 7.30am on the day of collection in case they are torched by hooligans.

Zoe was fined as she put two bins in the alley behind her home the day before collection day.

Housing market

For most people the housing market is now falling but for royals normal economic trends do not apply. Prince Andrew put his 12-bedroom former home, Sunninghill Park in Ascot, on the market with an upper guide price of £12 million five years ago.

The sale was completed last September for an inflated £15 million and the buyer is Kazakh tycoon Kenes Rakishev, a businessman who is reported to have had dealings with the prince.

Diplomacy

Cherie Blair last week-end spoke at the Hey book festival about women's rights. She spoke of taking Ludmila Putin shopping at Burberry.

"She took all her clothes off and started trying things on right there in the shop. And that meant I had to take my clothes off too and try a few things on. The things you have to do for international diplomacy."

Pay rises

The chief executives of Britain's top companies – those with a market value above £10 billion – have enjoyed pay rises of 30 per cent and more last year – way above the wage rises for workers.

The CEOs of the country's 30 biggest companies had pay increases of 33 per cent while the rest of the nation struggles to cope with the credit crunch, low pay rises and steep cost of living increases.

by Caroline Colebrook

THE GIANT general union Unite has been negotiating to join forces with the American United Steel Workers' union (USW) for just over a year and is now on the brink of merging.

Meanwhile negotiations have just begun for the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) to join them both.

Unite itself was formed just over a year ago by a merger between Amicus and the Transport and General Workers' Union to create Britain's largest union.

Within days of that merger talks began with the USW for a trans-Atlantic merger. Unite and the USW hope to seal that merger by the USW's convention in July, according to newspaper reports.

This agreement would set a precedent in international trade union measures to combat the power of global capitalism.

The combined group would have more than three million members in Britain, the US, Canada and the Caribbean.

The two giant unions held final negotiations last week in London to thrash out the details of the merger.

There are different labour laws in the different countries

Unions go global



• Unite to unite with the USW – seen here in action.

covered by the new trans-Atlantic union but union officials hope that a combined group will increase their bargaining clout in talks with multinational conglomerates.

Union leaders hope the deal will eventually pave the way for the formation of a new umbrella organisation, with a single management structure and leader.

Now Australia's oldest union, the AWU, is in talks with Unite and the USW about the possibility of establishing the first international union since the 1930s.

Giant multinational companies move capital and pro-

duction between countries all around the globe, hoping to find the cheapest workforces and most favourable labour laws. They seek to play off the workers in one country against another. The only answer is international trade union solidarity.

"The globalisation of capital is the biggest challenge we face," the national secretary of the AWU, Paul Howes, said. "So we have to meet it with the globalisation of labour organising."

Howes predicts a formal merger between the AWU, Unite and the USW is about a decade away. But his talks put

the AWU on track to creating the biggest organisation of labour since the Industrial Workers of the World receded as a force in the late 1930s. The US-based Service Employees' International Union, which has 1.9 million members, has also been trying to build a global membership among health-care, security and public sector workers.

Howes said he had recently met Derek Simpson, the joint general secretary of Unite, to discuss extending the AWU's strategic alliance with the Steelworkers to include the British organisation.

He said the AWU had already formed an alliance with the Steelworkers, the National Confederation of Metalworkers in Brazil, Amicus in Britain, the United Mineworkers in South Africa and aluminium workers in Russia to bargain internationally with the aluminium giant, Alcoa.

Labour unions from other regions, including from rapidly emerging economies in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, are also being encouraged to co-operate.

Unite represents employees at some of Britain's biggest companies, including defence firm BAE, Rolls-Royce, brewer Scottish and Newcastle and Scotland's only oil refinery, Grangemouth.

More HSE inspectors

THE GIANT general union Unite last week strongly welcomed the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) announcement that it has recruited 40 more inspectors, but Britain's largest union believes the HSE needs more.

This move will bring the overall number of HSE inspectors to 720. Of the 40 inspectors recruited 10 are construction specialists, bringing the total of HSE construction inspectors dedicated to the industry to 134,

as construction is one of the most dangerous industries where work-related ill health affects a significant number of workers.

Unite national officer Bob Blackman said: "Construction is one of the most dangerous working environments in the land, so it is right that the HSE is placing great emphasis on increased inspection resources.

"This is a positive step to protect workers' health and safety but the HSE needs more inspectors. There must also be a change in enforce-

ment with legally binding health and safety duties on senior managers and company directors as we believe only then will companies take health and safety seriously."

Unite recently gave evidence to a House of Commons select committee and recommends more resources and inspectors for the HSE.

The union also called for heavier penalties for breaches of the law, safety duties on directors and support for trade union appointed safety representatives.

It's the policies!

THE LABOUR Representation Committee last week responded to speculation in the media this weekend about Labour leadership challenges.

John McDonnell MP ruled himself out of running a stalking horse challenge immediately after the recent local elections and has consistently called for a change in policies rather than personalities.

John McDonnell, who chairs the LRC, said: "This leadership speculation is degenerating into farce."

"It is pointless changing leader without changing policies. And it is pointless supporting a coalition to depose the existing leader which comprises all those who have consistently supported the New Labour policies which have brought this crisis upon us."

"I'm calling upon the party to unite around an open policy debate, rather than this swamp of conspiracy and plotting. People should think in the long-term interests of the party and our supporters, rather than short-term personal gain."

The Labour Party National Policy Forum will meet on 24th July. Over the coming weeks, LRC members and supporters will be campaigning for the urgent change needed in party policy.

The LRC Labour Party Liaison Unit has drawn up amendments to the Partnership in Power policy documents on policies ranging from Iraq to council housing to civil liberties.

Legal bills deny justice

SENIOR High Court Judge Mr Justice Sullivan last week called for changes in the legal costs system in environmental cases because ordinary people are being denied the right to challenge decisions affecting their lives.

Sullivan, who has conducted an independent investigation, said that "only the very rich or very poor" can afford to fight environmental schemes imposed by the Government or local authorities.

Currently anyone applying for an injunction is expected to give an undertaking agreeing to meet all parties' costs if they lose.

Unions say 'What about the workers?' as business abandons New Labour

BIG BUSINESS has abandoned the New Labour project and donations from wealthy individuals have dried up in the wake of the cash-for-honours scandal and recent electoral defeats, leaving Labour dependent on the trade unions that founded the party to fight for the workers.

The TUC has responded to the news by saying it is "time to reconfigure the DNA of New Labour".

Labour now gets 90 per cent of its income from the unions, according to a recent report from the Electoral Commission.

The report shows that apart from three bequests and more than £157,000 from the taxpayer, nearly all the £3.1 million raised by the Labour party in the first quarter of this year came from trade unions.

The figures show that, apart from gifts from MPs just 17 individuals gave more than £1,000 to Labour. The biggest individual donation came from former London deputy mayor Nicky Gavron, who gave £22,400.

The five biggest donations, amounting to £1.9 million in total, came from three unions: Unite, Usdaw and the GMB.

The figures also show that Labour is now £17.8 million in debt – more than the total owed by other parliamentary parties. Some of this is repayment of "loans" that came to light in the cash-for-honours scandal – alleged to be a way around the limit on individual donations but which now have to be honoured as genuine loans.

Last Wednesday – on the even of the disastrous Crewe by-election – in a Progress lecture delivered in the House of Commons TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said that an historic fourth term for Labour can still be achieved but only if ministers start conveying a much clearer sense of what a Labour Government stands for.

In What about the Workers? Has the Government Done Enough to Secure Working People's Support for a Fourth Term? – Brendan Barber said there that should be "no retreat to the failures



• Workers protest against their treatment by the giant Starbucks chain.

of the 1970s or 1980s, nor a fall into the trap of a 1,000 policy launches and initiatives."

"Instead," he added, "the Government needs to find the courage once again to make the case for the most enduring Labour values – equality, fairness and social justice."

Barber forgets that the 1970s were a time of strength for the trade unions when wages were rising, working hours being cut and workers took full one-hour or longer dinner breaks for granted as well as tea breaks and workers could leave a job and find another within a day.

fresh start?

Barber welcomed "signs last week of a fresh start in the draft Queen's Speech package and in the decision to right the wrongs of the 10 pence tax debacle."

He said that last week's significant breakthrough on agency workers after six years of deadlock was also "a massive step forward, a hugely symbolic development in the battle to root out unfairness in Britain's workplaces. As the Prime Minister has now recognised, this was a prob-

lem that needed fixing."

Barber also pointed out that Labour "has not been clear about what it wants to be – and where it now wants to go", adding that "the support base that Labour brought together in 1997 needs convincing that the Party is on their side and fairness must once again be asserted."

a heavy price

Barber cited errors the Government has made in its dealings with public servants over pay and the pace of public service reform, saying that this has led to "difficult industrial disputes with public service unions determined to battle hard to defend living standards. Labour is paying a heavy political price as six million public servants sense that the Government, far from being on their side, just sees them as an easy target."

He spoke of the unfairness of the vast profits made by a tiny elite while the majority struggle to cope with the rising cost of living and the disproportionate influence of big business on policies.

In conclusion, Brendan Barber asked how Labour can re-establish itself once again

as a party of equality, fairness and social justice and ask what kind of policy agenda would secure working people's support for an unprecedented fourth term.

"Perhaps the most urgent task facing us all is to address the plight faced by the UK's two million vulnerable workers, trapped in insecure, irregular and low-paid work, exploited by unscrupulous employers and agencies. The TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment recently published its ground-breaking report, establishing not just the scale of the problem we face, but also the fact that so many of the abuses are taking place within the existing legal framework."

But it seems Barber forgot the four most crucial demands for workers in Britain: an immediate end to Tory anti-union laws, which are a breach of internationally recognised human rights; an end to the privatisation of our public assets and reversal of privatisations and the restoration of the link between average earnings and the basic state pension – not to mention an immediate end to Britain's involvement in the illegal invasion of Iraq.

Personal carbon credits?

THE ENVIRONMENTAL Audit Committee last week advised the Government to devise a scheme of personal "carbon credits" as a way of meeting targets for cutting carbon emissions. The MPs recommended that this would be more likely to be effective than imposing taxes for carbon emissions.

Under the scheme people would be given an annual carbon limit for fuel and energy use – which they could exceed by buying credits from those who use less.

Environment minister Hilary Benn said there were practical drawbacks to the plan although it did have "potential".

The committee criticised the Government for shelving the proposal as impractical after a preliminary study.

The MPs acknowledged that many members of the public would oppose the scheme but advised the Government to "be courageous".

In a report, they said: "Persuading the public depends on perceptions of the Government's own commitment to reducing emissions, and of the priority given to climate change in its own decision making."

It added: "Further work is needed before personal carbon trading can be a viable policy option and this must be started urgently, and in earnest."

"In the meantime there is no barrier to the government developing and deploying the policies that will not only prepare the ground for personal carbon trading, but will ensure its effectiveness and acceptance once implemented."

Tory MP Tim Yeo, who chairs the committee, said "green" taxes, such as a petrol tax, cost poor people more because everyone – "billionaires and paupers" – paid the same amount.

"Under the personal carbon trading, someone who perhaps doesn't have an enormous house or swimming pool, someone who doesn't take several holidays in the Caribbean every year, will actually get a cash benefit if they keep a low carbon footprint."

He said it could be administered by the private sector, ... accessed by a "single plastic card".

Boris begins with 'direct attack on poorest Londoners'

NEW LONDON Mayor Boris Johnson began his term in office by scrapping the deal negotiated by Ken Livingstone for cheap Venezuelan oil that was used to subsidise half price travel on London's buses and trams for people on income support.

The deal was to supply the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, with technical information in exchange for the oil and when Livingstone secured the deal as "Crackers" – and described Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez, who has mass popular support, as a "South American dicta-

tor". Now Livingstone has described Johnson's action as "a direct attack on the poorest Londoners".

The cheap fares were supplied in conjunction with the Oyster card scheme and claimants had to re-apply for them every six months.

The existing contract for oil from Venezuela is due to expire in August and Johnson says he will not renew it but he will honour the discount fares for those who apply for renewal up to that point for next six months. After that there will be no more cheap fares.

Livingstone said: "It shows that he is more inter-

ested in pursuing his right-wing ideological agenda than in improving the living standards of the most deprived people in the capital."

Johnson also tried to scrap the London mayoral trade offices in Caracas, China and India but City of London business people pressured him to keep them as vital business contacts.

Johnson has appointed Tim Parker as First Deputy Mayor – a man who made his reputation in the cut-throat world of private equity and has a reputation for axing what he sees as unnecessary tentacles of an organisation in order to save

money. Parker's cost cutting vigour earned him the title "Prince of darkness" from trade unions while he was in charge of companies such as the AA, Kwik-Fit and Clarks.

Johnson and Parker have already abolished *The Londoner* – the mayor's personal newspaper.

One of the first guests Johnson received was New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to swap personnel and ideas.

Boris has boasted that he can save 20 per cent of City Hall's £11 billion budget so Londoners can expect a regime of cuts to services to

match those of the Thatcher era.

Commuters fear that the cuts will affect the current £1 billion-a-year upgrade of the London Underground network and the £16 billion Crossrail project; as Livingstone points out, "Johnson has yet to get to grips with funding problems".

Johnson has also embarked on a "forensic audit", headed by Patience Wheatcroft, of the use of taxpayers' money at the LDA and by the Greater London Authority.

The Labour group has challenged the Mayor to explain: "Why did you not make

the political affiliations of your panel members clear to the public in your official press release?"

The letter also asks Johnson to set out "How much are your Conservative friends and colleagues being paid from taxpayers' money to dig dirt on Ken Livingstone" and questions whether "this is an appropriate use of public funds?"

According to the Mayor's press release the panel includes: "Andrew Gordon, Head of Investigations within the Forensic Services group of PricewaterhouseCoopers, who will act as Independent Expert Advisor to the Panel."

What is the philosophy of Marxism?

An opening given by Peter Hendy to the *New Worker* Supporters' Group meeting in Manchester on 6th March 2008.

Part two

Materialism versus idealism

"THE PHILOSOPHY of Marxism is materialism," wrote Lenin. Philosophy itself fits into two great ideological camps: materialism and idealism. Before we proceed, even these terms need an explanation. To begin with, materialism and idealism have nothing whatsoever in common with their everyday usage, where materialism is associated with material greed and swindling (in short, the morality of present day capitalism) and idealism with high ideals and virtue. Far from it!

Philosophical materialism is the outlook which explains that there is only one material world. There is no heaven or hell. The universe, which is not the creation of a supernatural being, is in the process of constant flux. Human beings are part of nature and evolved from lower forms of life, whose origins sprung from a lifeless planet some 3.6 billion years ago.

With the evolution of life, at a certain stage, came the development of animals with a nervous system and eventually human beings with a large brain. With humans emerged human thought and consciousness. The human brain alone is capable of producing general ideas – in other words thinking. Therefore matter, which existed eternally, existed and still exists independently of the mind and human beings. Things existed long before any awareness of them arose or could have arisen on the part of living organisms.

For materialists there is no consciousness apart from the living brain, which is part of the material body. A mind without a body is an absurdity; matter is not a product of mind but mind itself is the highest product of matter. Ideas are simply a reflection of the independent material world that surrounds us. Things reflected in a mirror do not depend on this reflection for their existence. "All ideas are taken from experience, are reflections – true or distorted – of reality," states Engels. Or, to use the words of Marx, "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."

Marxists do not deny that mind, consciousness, thought, will, feeling or sensation are real. What materialists deny is that the thing called "the mind" exists separately from the body. Mind is not distinct from the body. Thinking is the product of the brain, which is the organ of thought.

Yet this does not mean that our consciousness is a lifeless

mirror of nature. Human beings relate to their surroundings; they are aware of their surroundings and react accordingly. While rooted in material conditions, human beings generalise and think creatively. They in turn change their material surroundings.

On the other hand, philosophical idealism states that the material world is not real but is simply the reflection of the world of ideas. There are different forms of idealism, but all essentially explain that ideas are primary and matter, if it exists at all, secondary. For the idealists, ideas are dis severed from matter, from nature. This is Hegel's conception of the Absolute idea or what amounts to God. Philosophical idealism opens the road, in one way or another, to the defence or support for religion and superstition.

Not only is this outlook false, it is also profoundly conservative, leading to the pessimistic conclusion that we can never understand the "mysterious ways" of the world. Whereas materialism understands that human beings not only observe the real world, but can change it, and in doing so, change themselves.

The materialist outlook has a long history stretching back to the ancient Greeks of Anaxagoras (around 500-428 BC) and Democritus (around 460-370 BC). Only after the reawakening of thought following the demise of the Christian Middle Ages was there a revival of philosophy and natural science. From the 17th century the home of modern materialism was England. "The real progenitor of English materialism was Bacon," wrote Marx.

The materialism of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was then systematised and developed by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), whose ideas were in turn developed by John Locke (1632-1704). The latter already thought it possible that matter could possess the faculty of thinking. It is no accident that these advances in human thought coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie and great advances in science, particularly mechanics, astronomy and medicine.

These great thinkers in turn provided the breakthrough for the brilliant school of French materialists of the 18th century. It was their materialism and rationalism that became the creed of the great French Revolution on 1789. These revolutionary thinkers recognised no external authority; everything from religion to natural science, from society to political institutions, was subjected to the most searching criticism. Reason became the measure of everything.

This materialist philosophy, consistently championed by Holbach (1723-1789) and Helvetius, was a revolutionary philosophy. "The universe is a vast unity of everything that is, everywhere it shows us only matter in movement," states Holbach. "This is all that there is and it displays only an infinite and continuous chain of causes and



actions; some of these causes we know, since they immediately strike our senses; others we do not know since they act on us only by means of consequences, quite remote from first causes."

This rational philosophy was an ideological reflection of the revolutionary bourgeoisie's struggle against the church, the aristocracy and the absolute monarchy. It represented a fierce attack on the ideology of the Old Order. In the end the kingdom of Reason became nothing more than nothing more than the idealised kingdom of the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois property became one of the essential rights of man. The revolutionary materialists paved the way for the new bourgeois society and the domination of new private property forms.

The new materialism, although a revolutionary advance, tended to be very rigid and mechanical. These new philoso-

phers attacked the church and denied the self-sufficiency of the soul and held that man was simply a material body as all other animals and inorganic bodies.

For the French materialists the origin of knowledge – the discovery of objective truth – lay through the action of nature on our senses. The planets and humanity's place within the solar system and nature itself was fixed. For them it was a clockwork world, where everything had its logical static place and where the impulse for movement came from outside.

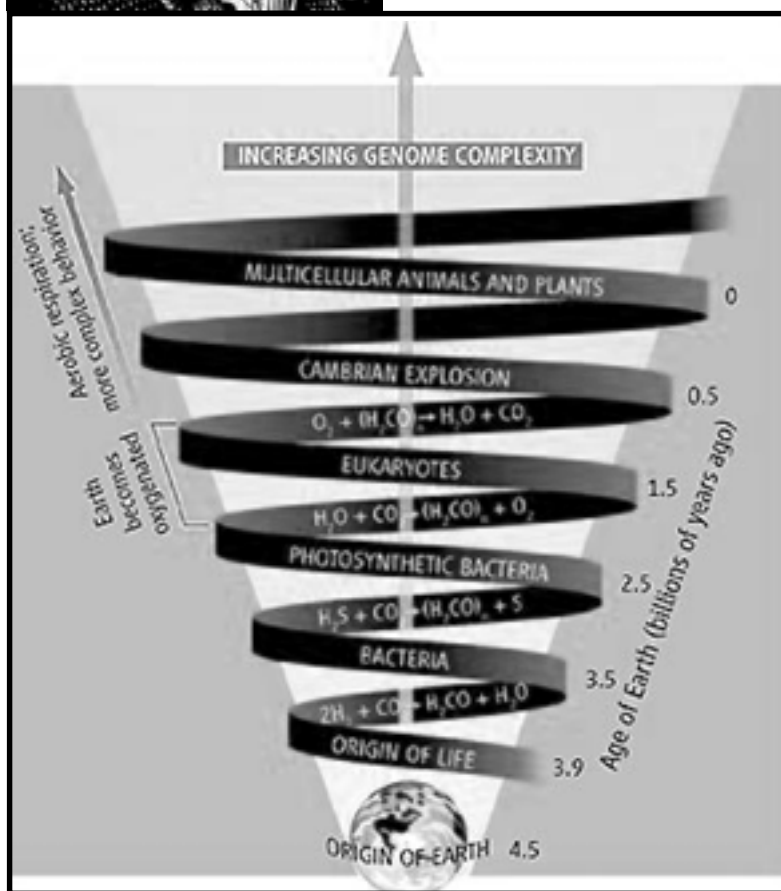
The whole approach, while materialist, was mechanical and failed to grasp the living reality of the world. It could not grasp the universe as a process, as matter undergoing continuous change. This weakness led to the false dichotomy between the material world and the world of ideas. And this dualism opened the door to idealism.

Dialectics and metaphysics

The Marxist view of the world is not only materialist but also dialectical. The dialectical method is simply an attempt to understand more clearly – our real independent world. Dialectics, says Engels in *Anti-Dühring*, "is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought." Put simply, it is the logic of motion.

It is obvious to most people that we do not live in a static world. In fact everything in nature is in a state of constant change. "Motion is the mode of existence of matter," states Engels. "Never, anywhere, has there been matter without motion, nor can there be." The Earth revolves continuously around its axis and in turn itself revolves around the sun. This results in day and night and the different seasons that we experience throughout the year. We are born, grow up, grow old and eventually die. Everything is moving, changing, either rising and developing or declining and dying away. Any equilibrium is only relative and only has meaning in relation to other forms of motion.

"When we consider and reflect upon nature at large or the history of mankind or our own intellectual activity, at first we see the picture of an endless entanglement of relations and reactions, permutations and combinations, in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes comes into being and passes away," says Engels. "We see, therefore, at first the picture as a whole, with it individual parts still more or less kept in the background; we observe the movements, transitions, connections rather than the things that move, combine and are connected. This primitive, naive but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philoso-



Progress and problems for Pakistan's bonded labourers

Free but homeless

by *New Worker* correspondent

THE PROSPECTS for bonded labourers, released from generations of slavery, in the Sindh province of Pakistan are improving after a Christian charity from the United States visited the camps where 30,000 former bonded labourers are now living – free but landless and jobless. The United Nations is also taking more interest in the problem of rehabilitating freed bonded labourers, keeping them supplied with food and, most essential of all, water, while their future is being decided.

But the campaigners and lawyers who are fighting to free the bonded labourers still face daily death threats and trumped up accusations of criminal activity. Recent firebomb attacks on lawyers' offices have resulted in 19 deaths, so the death threats are very real. They are calling for the widest possible publicity for their plight to inhibit the murderous landowners and their thugs.

Mukhtar Rana, a veteran campaigner for trade union rights and against bonded labour, who is now living in exile in London, told the *New Worker* that the charity is planning to buy land for these people to cultivate to support themselves.

But many problems still remain and much more help is needed. The 30,000 now released are a small minority in Pakistan's total of two million bonded labourers.

The new government that came to power earlier this year after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto has vowed to end bonded labour and there is a real prospect of this happening. Previous governments have outlawed bonded labour and then denied its existence. Last year on a visit to Britain President Musharraf – his powers now fast waning after the February elections and mass popular anger at the assassination of Benazir Bhutto – promised he would wage a war on the bonded labour system in Pakistan, and then promoted landowners who owned bonded labour slaves to positions of high office.

Bonded labour has existed in what is now Pakistan since long before the country was partitioned from India. Most of the bonded labourers are Haris, a minority ethnic group within Pakistan who speak a Dravidian language and are Hindus, not Muslims. Hence they are socially isolated from the mainstream Pakistani population and their plight has been ignored by governments since partition.

Bonded labour was outlawed by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in 1992 but the then Sindh High Court dismissed 94 petitions in early 2002 calling for the release of bonded labourers, declaring these to be disputes between landlords and their tenants over debts and a matter to be settled under the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950.

But lawyers have pursued the matter and a study from the Asian



Development Bank confirmed the existence of bonded Haris, especially in districts like Thatta, Badin, Mirpurkhas and Sanghar. This forced the Sindh provincial government to recognise the existence of bonded labour.

"When we started to free the bonded labourers, our members were facing certain death threats from various landowners," Mukhtar Rana told the *New Worker*, "but the former chief justice of Pakistan supported our case against bonded labour and even had one big landlord arrested for the abduction of a family of bonded labourers who had been released.

"Our volunteers waged a campaign for the release of bonded labourers from various landlords and we now have 30,000 free. This is when the problems of providing shelter, food and water for these people. Various charity groups from different countries have helped. A German Christian group established small schools for the children. But their language does not even have a script yet.

"The American press has helped to publicise the cause of the bonded labourers, especially in the Sindh and the United Nations also sent representatives. To our great surprise and happiness a Christian charity came and they have actually started buying land for cultivation for the freed bonded labourers to enable them to grow food to survive."

The current Chief Justice in Pakistan, Iftikar Chaudhry, supports the campaign against bonded labour. Last year this man was removed from office by

• Above: some of the lucky ones, "We are free, we are free!" they chant. Below: this girl is not so lucky, still at work making bricks. Bottom: lawyers on the march.



President Musharraf and arrested on trumped up charge – sparking a series of protests by lawyers which won popular support. Musharraf, who came to power in a military coup, last autumn tried to give his regime a semblance of democratic authority by arranging his election within the parliament dominated by his stooges as President. He even resigned from the military to conform to a constitutional ruling that the military cannot hold legislative power.

But Iftikar Chaudhry and the rest of the judiciary rejected the validity of Musharraf's presidency. Musharraf then re-arrested Chaudhry and the lawyers and declared a state of emergency. During that state of emergency some landlords and their



military allies attacked the camps of the freed bonded labourers.

Musharraf, under heavy domestic and international pressure lifted the state of emergency but kept the Chief Justice and lawyers in prison while he set in motion preparations for the parliamentary elections early this year. For Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto returned from exile to stand in the elections, as did Nawaz Sharif – the prime Minister who was ousted by Musharraf's coup.

During the election campaigns in December two assassination attempts were made against Bhutto and the second succeeded. There was popular outrage and Musharraf's secret service was suspected of allowing it to happen if not being directly involved. In the following elections Musharraf's party was swept from power and annihilated inside the parliament.

The resulting government was a coalition of Bhutto's Peoples Party of Pakistan and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League but already there has been a split. Sharif resigned in protest when the PPP leadership, although releasing Chaudhry and the other lawyers, tried to introduce changes to curtail their terms of office so they would have only a couple of months left before being replaced.

Aslam Rana, a leading volunteer campaigner who is working in the camps of the freed bonded labourers, spoke from Pakistan to the *New Worker*. He said: "Working under the new democratic government we have succeeded in getting a further 1,500 bonded labourers released in March and April, including children, women and young girls. The main difficulty is the question of liberation for these people. But once they are free they are in poverty; we have no resources.

"Government representatives have visited the camps and seen the situation; it is a very critical situation. The Government has helped with the liberation of these people but we need water, the necessities of life; we have no schools, no clinics, nothing is there; people are living hand-to-mouth.

"The American team came and surveyed the camps and they have promised to help. The present situation is very critical; the people are homeless and helpless, lacking all necessities."

He reported that Pakistan MPs are now helping their cause but that their lives – and his own – are in danger.

"I get threats from time to time. I had one today, because we are working successfully. The feudal landlords do not want to lose this struggle; they regard these people as their property and their wealth. I fear the wrath of these men and their thugs. They are also going to the courts and the police accusing us falsely of criminal activity.

"Please print this in you paper and give as much publicity as you can. The more the world's press takes up this issue, the safer we will be. Pass it on as much as you can."

phy, and was first clearly formulated by Heraclites: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away."

"To the metaphysician things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once and for all," states Engels.

Dialectics, on the other hand, comprehends things in their connection, development and motion. As far as Engels was concerned, "Nature is the proof of dialectics."

Here is how Engels described the rich processes of change in his book *The Dialectic of Nature*: "Matter moves in an eternal cycle, completing its trajectory in a period so vast that in comparison with it our earthly year is as nothing; in a cycle in which the period of highest development, namely the period of organic life with its crowning achievement – self-consciousness – is a space just as comparatively minute in the history of life and self-consciousness; in a cycle in which every particular form of the existence of matter – be it the sun or a nebula, a particular animal or animal-species, a chemical combination or decomposition – is equally in transition; in a cycle in which nothing is eternal, except eternally changing, eternally moving matter and the laws of movement and change."

Along with and following the French philosophy of the 18th century arose a new radical German philosophy. The culmination of this philosophy was epitomised by the system of George F Hegel, who had greatly admired the French Revolution. Hegel, although an idealist, was the most encyclopaedic mind of his age. The great contribution of this genius was the rescuing of the dialectical mode of thought originally developed by the ancient Greek philosophers some 2,000 years before.

Hegel systematically outlined the important laws of change and developed the theory of dialectics as an overall philosophy. Marx and Engels regarded his work as the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy.

Marx and Engels deepened and developed philosophical materialism. They developed three broad interconnected laws of dialectics from Hegel's work, each of which is continually at work. These give us the insight into how society develops and what theoretical and practical tasks confront us as revolutionaries seeking to build the forces to overthrow capitalism.

To be continued.

• Top left: Marxism says no mind without a brain – but its not all about mechanical cogs and wheels.

Middle: the great dialectical idealist philosopher George Hegel.

Bottom: an example of the spirit of dialectical materialism?

Home News

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

Appeal of the Communist Youth Union (KSM)

The current situation in the Czech Republic affects ever more profoundly the workers and students. This month several strikes and demonstrations were started, including all sectors - teachers, doctors, sanitary workers, drivers and transport workers.

In the health service the employees are protesting against the privatisation of the hospitals and insurance companies.

The current situation in the healthcare system in the Czech Republic is getting worse hand-in-hand with each step of the so called reform of the current government, composed of the right-wing Civic Democratic Party, Christian Democratic Party and the Greens.

Since 1st January 2008 the free healthcare system for all has become a thing of the past.

The people in the Czech Republic have to pay for everything - doctors' visits,

maternity services, emergency calls and prescriptions. We take these steps as an unacceptable restriction of the basic rights of the people for the free healthcare treatment.

The next step is the proposal of the current government for the privatisation of the hospitals and insurance companies. We are strongly against this step, which is a part of the systematic trend to convert the healthcare system completely into a private sphere and make "good business" out of basic needs.

Last but not least is the so called "restructuralisation" of the system of the hospitals that actually means the dissolution of the unique structure of the healthcare system in the Czech Republic.

We have supported and actively participated in all forms of protest activities like demonstrations, petitions and strikes. We, together with the trade unions, appeal to all the workers and employees for support and participation in the general strike on 24th June to express our clear NO to the liquidation of the healthcare system as well as

other sectors. The strike is a legitimate way of protest for the people to promote their interests.

Veronika Sýkorová
Communist Youth Union (KSM)
Czech Republic

Dear Comrades

Poor Gordon, it becomes ever more obvious he is not Washington's choice. His CIA funded holiday

to the United States back in 1984 is nothing compared to Miliband's two-year Master's course at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (in politics of course). Who paid for it?

David Miliband is clearly the Washington-Langley nominee, so Gordon's days are numbered. But it looks like we'll have a Tory-Lib-Dem "coalition for change" Prime Minister in two years' time.

Mick Kenny
Yorkshire

Cuban reception



Teresita Trujillo from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba welcomed friends of the socialist island at a reception at the Cuban embassy in London last Tuesday which was attended by NCP leader Andy Brooks along with members of the NCP London District.

Banks' rescue cash ended up in bosses' bonuses?

THE GMB general union has called for an inquiry into whether the billions of pounds of taxpayers' money that the Government put up to rescue Northern Rock and other weak banks has been used to fund inflated City bonuses and to fuel speculation in the oil market.

GMB general secretary Paul Kenny last week re-

sponded to official figures showing that City bonuses in the first three months of 2008 amounted to a record £12.6 billion. He said, "There can no longer be any doubt that the multi-millionaire elite who run the City and the financial sector are out of control and divorced from economic realities facing their fellow citizens."

Balpa backs down

THE BRITISH Airline Pilots' Association (Balpa) has withdrawn from its High Court action that was seeking a ruling on its right to strike under Article 43 of the Treaty of Rome

British Airways had invoked this article to block a planned strike in a dispute over BA's plans to outsource pilots' jobs in one of its subsidiaries. Balpa members last February voted overwhelmingly for strike action in protest at the measure that would see pilots employed under worse terms and conditions in the subsidiary

Balpa general secretary

Jim McAuslan said: "After three days in court it became apparent that win, lose or draw we could still face appeal after appeal. Balpa has built financial reserves to take action like this, but we will do so wisely. That is why we have decided to withdraw our request to the court.

"However we shall now be embarking on an EU wide campaign to have European law changed so that there is no longer any doubt that Article 43, which essentially deals with businesses in competition, in no way undermines the right of workers to take strike action."

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

Diary

EVERY Thursday
Petition in support of victimised Unison worker Karen Reissman. 12 noon, outside Colchester Town Hall. Org by Colchester Labour Representation Cttee.

SATURDAY 31 May
No third Runway. Demo at Heathrow, assemble 12 noon. www.campaigncc.org
TUESDAY 3 June
All Saints Gig - live bands. Love Music Hate Racism, Lewes TUC Festival. Lewes, Sussex. Free.

TUESDAY 3 June
Racism, the War on Terror and the Muslim Community. 7pm, Bishopsgate Inst. Bishopsgate, London EC1.
WEDNESDAY 4 June
Stop the War Tour. 7.30pm, The Bordersley Centre, Camphill.

MONDAY 9 June
Berthold Brecht and The Heavenly Four. Stefan Eggerdinger and his film. 7pm, MML, Marx House, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R.
MONDAY 9 June

Woody Guthrie. Music & commentary. 8pm, Lewes Arms, Lewes, Sussex. Lewes TUC Festival.

WEDNESDAY 11 June
In defence of local services. 6.30pm, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton. Lambath Unison.
WEDNESDAY 11 June
Racism and the War on Terror. 7pm, the Hornby Lecture Theatre, Central Library, Town Hall St, Blackburn

THURSDAY 19 June
Robert Tressell. A discussion with John McDonnell MP, Billy Hayes (postal workers), etc. 7pm, The Grange, Lewes, Sussex. Lewes TUC Festival.

SATURDAY 21 June
Sussex and the Spanish Civil War. Prose, poetry & song. Bill Thorneycroft, John Cruddas MP etc.
WEDNESDAY 25 June
Towards a united Ireland. Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin. 7.30pm, London Irish Centre, Murry St, London NW1.

Prison health under-funded

A REPORT published last week by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health and Lincoln University found that mental health services in prisons are not getting the investment they need to provide adequate care.

Researchers found £300 a year is spent per prisoner on mental health care - a third of what is spent on people with severe problems in the community.

The research team also identified regional variations in spending after analysing NHS figures.

Ministers said improvements were needed, but rejected the findings. Responsibility for prison healthcare across England and Wales passed from the Prison Health Service to the NHS in 2006, in order to bring it up to the standards provided to the general population.

Over 90 per cent of prisoners have at least one type of mental health problem, four times the rate in the general population, and the risk of a prisoner committing suicide is seven times higher than normal.

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On Stalin £2 plus 50p P&P. (New Worker reprint).

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

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Crisis at nuclear bomb factory

THE CAMPAIGN for Nuclear Disarmament earlier this month disclosed shocking news of a safety crisis at the Burghfield nuclear bomb factory – part of the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in Berkshire – that happened last December.

The AWE has admitted that it was forced to stop “live nuclear work” because of safety problems – apparently the first time the Ministry of Defence has ever had to stop working on nuclear weapons.

Six years ago the

Government’s Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) found more than 1,000 safety discrepancies but since then the AWE management has failed to address these problems and it is this failure that led to the shut-down.

The information became public in documents release under the Freedom of Information Act, which gives details of the inspectorate’s concerns.

The AWE missed a number of NII deadlines to remedy the problems, but the MoD allowed them to go ahead with regular work anyway,



deeming it to be too necessary to disrupt. But AWE was so slow that in the end the MoD had to call a halt.

According to a recent NII report, “AWE has agreed that no live nuclear work will be carried out until the necessary fixes are in place.”

But, CND reports, Burghfield isn’t the only offender. The report also showed that Aldermaston was included in the inspection process toward the end of last year. Of 59 inspections made, in only two instances were the facilities found to be “good”, 43 were deemed “adequate” and 14 “had potential improvements identified”.

So not only are our nuclear weapons illegal, immoral, a waste of money and utterly useless in meeting any real security needs, we now know their production facilities are dangerous, poorly maintained, and a risk to the workforce and the population as a whole.

• Top: protestors block the road to AWE Burghfield. Left: the plant from the air.



Chinese musicians perform for quake aid

THE NIGHT AFTER the massive quake hit Sichuan province, Chinese violinist Lu Siqing in Beijing called his friend, tenor Dai Yuqiang.

“We should do something for the people there,” Lu said.

The winner of the Paganini Award, an international music accolade, started planning for a concert to raise money for victims of the disaster.

Lu and Dai immediately contacted their friends and, within two hours, about 20 artists, including sopranos Zhang Ye, You Hongfei, Wu Bixia and Zhang Liping, tenor Ding Yi, mezzo-soprano Yin Xiumei and baritone Zhang Haiqing, agreed to join the concert.

With the help of the Beijing Youth Federation and Beijing Music Radio, the charity concert was held at the People’s Liberation Army Opera Theatre on 21st May.

The concert raised about 19.79 million yuan (\$2.83 million), which will be sent to the disaster-hit area through the Beijing Youth Development Foundation.

Sichuan-born tenor Fan Jingma launched the charity concert with Verdi’s *Requiem*.

“The song is for the victims. I was born in Sichuan province and I was lucky that I survived a small earthquake twice. To a specific victim, the disaster is a 100 per cent disaster, while to survivors, it is an accident to be remembered. We should do everything for people suffering there,” said the tenor, who also donated 10,000 yuan to the cause.

Metropolitan Opera tenor Zhang Jianyi got news of the show when he was touring with the China Philharmonic Orchestra in Eu-

rope. He headed to the concert from his flight from Munich. “Chinese people in every corner of the world are concerned about the earthquake. I hope what we do tonight can help people in Sichuan,” Zhang said.

World-renowned pianist Lang Lang was the last to take the stage. He played Chopin’s *Tristesse Etude* for those who were killed in the disaster.

“I was shocked by the news on Monday afternoon and when the organiser of the concert called me, I said ‘yes’ without hesitation,” said the young pianist, who donated 80,000 yuan before the concert.

The day before Lang

Lang attended the press conference held by Beijing Music Radio which chose him as its communication ambassador. At the press conference, he called on people to donate to the earthquake-stricken area. His company, the Columbia Artists Management LLC, will also donate to the cause.

Lang Lang learned to play a Chinese piece *Motherland, My Loving Mother*, especially for the concert. All the singers sang along to Lang Lang and Lu Siqing’s renditions.

The concert concluded with the song *Unity is Power*, performed by all the artists.

China Daily



• Dai Yuqiang on the night.

Even more Bush nonsense

by N Roumieh

LAST WEEK President George W Bush came out with a strange conviction stipulating that only time can heal a chronic conflict like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this respect, Bush has gone as far as 2068 when he expects that “from Cairo to Baghdad and Beirut, people will live in free and independent societies”!

This statement by the neo-conservative President can be added to the list of prophecies and visions he enjoys as part of his political talent. On the other hand, President Bush says he has no magic stick to bring down oil prices. Nevertheless, he has a crystal ball when it comes to Middle East peace. In fact, President Bush’s speech in the

Israeli Knesset has been quite significant. The neo-con politician looked far into the future and painted a rosy picture of the Middle East future where “integration and tolerance prevail by the time Israel celebrates its 120th birthday”. By the year 2068, President Bush predicts, “the Palestinians will have the homeland they long dreamed of and deserved”.

According to the same list of Bush predictions, “oppression will be a distant memory in line with this bold vision”. The Republican President says he intends to use the time he is left in the White House to push forward the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. But Bush’s statements do not outline a way to get there, nor do they clarify how he believes a Palestinian state can be reached by the end of his presidency. So far, the troubled history

of the Republican President shows that he is accustomed to the making of false promises similar to the ones he made six years ago in the framework of his “Road Map” and “a viable Palestinian state living side by side with Israel” by 2005. The praise given to President Bush by his Israeli hosts as a “great friend” was more than he could take. Actually, President Bush burst into tears when he heard the praise.

This is not the first time President Bush has looked far into the future, or claims that the Lord tells him to do this and that. In fact, the Republican President has gone far enough to prove the bankruptcy of his foreign policies and nothing else.

Syria Times

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International News

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'Shameful pogrom'

by our Africa correspondent

GWEDDE MANTASHE, Secretary General of the African National Congress, has condemned the "horrendous attacks on South Africans and foreign nationals... our brothers and sisters from this continent" in South Africa in a statement marking Africa Day, 25th May, when the Organisation of African Unity was created.

Mantashe called the recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks in which 42 people have died a "shameful pogrom" and said that "the same mob that accused people of being criminals acted in the most obscene of criminal ways".

While welcoming the deployment of the National Defence Force to the areas affected by the mob attacks, he urged ANC members to "spring into organised action", support the police, form street committees and "take the streets back from criminals".

Mantashe said overcrowding and poverty has a hand to play in creating resentment, adding that "we have to work hard to ensure that we root out corruption of the nature that robs us of our humanity". In particular he said many people had acquired more than one "RDP house" (housing built under the country's Reconstruction and Development Programme) and then sold them for profit.

"Our policies are not at fault, the policies of the ANC seek to fight poverty and to provide services to the people," Mantashe said. "We have to ensure that we do the job that needs to be done to make delivery efficient and effective."

Let us fight crime and corruption and work together to build this unique nation."

In another statement Julius Malema, President of the ANC Youth League, condemned "those who participate in these criminal activities using the name of the ANC and singing revolutionary songs like *Umshini wami* (Bring me my machine-gun)," and promised that "if any of our members are found to be participating in these activities, we expect our structures to take the harshest possible action against them".

Strike wave sweeps France

by our European Affairs Correspondent

FRANCE'S main trade unions held waves of demonstrations and strikes to protest against the cost of fuel, workers' rights and government plans to change the state pension system last week. Workers are enraged over government plans to make everyone work an extra year before they can claim a full state pension. Hundreds of thousands of people took part in the marches in Paris and at least 126 other cities.

Bernard Thibault, leader of the CGT French trade union federation, warned reactionary President Nicolas Sarkozy not to underestimate public anger over pension reforms. "People's anger is real and we will mobilise them" he declared.

Sarkozy has now backed down on a major plank of his industrial reform policy, undertaking to maintain the 35-hour working week a year after vowing to scrap it. "There will always be a fixed working week and it will be 35 hours," he said on Tuesday. Earlier in the year he called the 35-hour week -- brought in by a Socialist government 10 years ago -- an "economic catastrophe".

Fishing crews in Channel ports including Calais, Dunkirk, Dieppe and Boulogne are continuing their strike, blockading access into the ports. The fishing industry



• French fishermen and dock workers clash with police.

has seen marine diesel prices almost double in six months and they say the increase in diesel fuel costs will push them out of business. The Port of Cherbourg is currently completely blockaded by striking fishermen and women.

As in other Channel ports they have set up barricades with stacks of burning tires ready to push them under any vehicle breaking their blockade. Several dozen masked fishermen dumped more than seven metric tons of fish into a processed food factory in Brittany while others emptied

fish warehouses or set up local road blocks

The French haulage industry has joined the fishermen's protest, leading to some fuel depot blockades and fears of petrol shortages.

There has been a two-day delay getting through Calais, which is open again for the moment although there are rumours that it will be closed again shortly. Dieppe, Le Havre and other ports have been closed and may be blockaded as part of the fishing crews' struggle for a living.

Now the protests are

spreading across Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. French President Nicolas Sarkozy has said he'll look for a cap in fuel sales tax across the European Union. That would need the agreement of all 27 member states and the European Commission has responded negatively saying modifying tax levels on oil products to fight inflation would be sending the wrong message to oil producing countries. "We would be saying that [oil producers] can raise prices and this will be paid for by the taxes of Europeans," said a Commission official.

Marking African Liberation

AFRICAN Liberation Day was being celebrated around the world last weekend. Commemorated every year on 25th May, African Liberation Day, or ALD, traces its origin back to 1958 when African leaders and political activists gathered at the First Conference of Independent African States in Accra, Ghana.

This conference was significant in that it represented the first Pan-African Conference held on African soil. It was also significant in that it represented the collective expression of disgust with the system of colonialism and imperialism that brought so much suffering to African people.

After 500 years of the most brutal suffering known to humanity, the rape of Africa and the subsequent slave trade, which cost Africa more than 100 million of her children, the masses of African people singularly, separately, individually, in small disconnected groupings for centuries had said, "enough!" But in 1958, at the Accra Conference, it was being said in ways that emphasised joint, coordinated and unified action.

This conference gave sharp clarity and definition to Pan-Africanism, the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism. The conference as well laid the foundation and the strategy for the further intensification and coordination of the next stage of the African Revolution, for the liberation of the rest of Africa, and eventual and complete unification.

The Conference called for the founding of African Freedom Day, a day to "mark each year the onward progress of the liberation movement, and to symbolise the determination of the people of Africa to free themselves from foreign domination and exploitation."

Five years later after the First Conference of Independent African States, another historic meeting was held. On 25th May 1963, leaders of 32 independent African states met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to form the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). By then, more than two-thirds of the continent had achieved independence from colonial rule. At this historic meeting, the date of Africa Freedom Day was changed from 15th April to 25th May and Africa Freedom Day was declared African Liberation Day (ALD). African Liberation Day has been held on 25th May in every corner of the world since.

Commemorations were held in Havana over the weekend and the recently concluded Cubadisco cultural programme was dedicated to the music of the African continent, acknowledging the importance of Africa's struggle for liberation.

White House plans attack on Iran?

THE BUSH administration has plans to launch air strikes against Iran within the next two months, according to an informed source quoted by *Asia Times Online*. The report echos other accounts that have recently surfaced in the media in the United States, suggesting that Washington is preparing to attack Tehran.

Two key US senators briefed on the attack planned to go public with their opposition to the move,

according to the source, but their projected *New York Times* op-ed piece has yet to appear.

The source, a retired US career diplomat and former assistant secretary of state still active in the foreign affairs community, speaking anonymously, says that the US plans air strikes against the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and would target the headquarters of the IRGC's elite Quds force.

Targets could include IRGC garrisons in southern and southwestern Iran, near the border with Iraq. American officials have repeatedly claimed Iran is aiding Iraqi resistance fighters. In January 2007, US forces raided the Iranian consulate general in Erbil, Iraq, arresting five staff members, including two Iranian diplomats it held until November.

Last September, the US Senate approved a resolution by a vote of 76-22 urging President George W Bush to declare the IRGC a terrorist organisation. Following this non-binding "Sense of the Senate" resolution, the White House declared sanctions against the Quds Force as a terror-

ist group in October. The Bush administration has also accused Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapons programme, though most intelligence analysts say the programme has been abandoned.

An attack on Iran would fit the Bush administration's declared policy on Iraq. White House officials questioned directly about military action against Iran routinely assert that "all options remain on the table".

limited action

According to *Asia Times Online*, the source said the White House views the proposed air strike as a limited action to punish Iran for its involvement in Iraq. The source, an ambassador during the previous Republican administration of former president George Bush — the father of the current occupant of the White House — did not provide details on the types of weapons to be used in the attack, nor on the precise stage of planning at this time. It is not known whether the White House has already consulted with allies about the air strike,

or if it plans to do so.

Details provided by the administration raised alarm bells on Capitol Hill, according to the source. After receiving secret briefings on the planned air strike, Senator Diane Feinstein, Democrat of California, and Senator Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, said they would write a *New York Times* op-ed piece "within days" to express their opposition. Feinstein is a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee and Lugar is the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee.

The proposed air strikes on Iran would have huge implications for geopolitics and for the ongoing US presidential campaign. Some analysts say that the idea of the attack is to provoke Tehran into retaliating so that Washington can claim "preventive defence" and unleash its full fury against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Others believe it could be a provocation that would provide the excuse for Bush to declare martial law and cancel US presidential elections slated for November.

Radio Havana Cuba

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