

# **socialist VOICE**



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## **Stop the War**



**Long live the resistance of the  
Palestinian people**

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**INSIDE: Argentina, Spain, Local Elections, Andy Shannon**

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# socialist VOICE

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## What is the International Socialist League?

The ISL strives to assist the working class to build a world international party that can unite common people of the world in a struggle for socialism. That will entail the abolition of the present rule of the planet by the powerful transnational capitalist companies who with their ruthless greed for profit are the central threat to the present and the future well being of the masses of common people of the world and a threat to the earth itself.

The ISL is a section of the International Workers League (fourth international). In its statutes our international organisation says:

The purpose of the International Workers League is to overcome the crisis of leadership of the workers' movement and build a Fourth International with mass influence.

The IWL does not claim to be the revolutionary leadership of the world proletariat, but its existence implies that the crisis of the Fourth International has not been solved. However, it constitutes the only internationally centralised world organisation struggling for these aims.

The IWL affirms that the crisis of revolutionary leadership will be solved in the course of mobilising the masses by means of mergers and fusions with other tendencies and organisations that, given the interests of the masses, may join the struggle against the counter-revolutionary apparatuses.

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# Hands Off Palestine

**"It is terrible - horrible - what is going on here; they are not only killing people with guns they are starving them and strangling their society. It is not a war against terrorism; it is a war against people. This is war about who has the biggest muscles. They are making a concentration camp out of the West Bank - it is a hard word - but they are destroying everything, the economy and the infrastructure."**

— Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker, a Belgian parliamentarian quoted in the Observer, 7 April 2002.

The Israel army has conducted a brutal and ruthless offensive on Palestine, with an overwhelming array of military weapons, terrorising more than a million Palestinians in half a dozen cities and destroying homes and hospitals.

Bush issues his hypocritical statement to his ally Sharon telling him to hold his offensive, but his venom, is directed against the Palestinians. When US secretary of State Colin Powell arrived in Israel the US had dropped any mention of Israeli withdrawal, instead Sharon says that they will continue the war against Palestinian "terrorism" — the killing of Palestinian men, women and children. And Powell and Sharon gleam at each other.

The governments of the US and New Labour in Britain and most of the press, turn reality upside down. The suffering victim becomes the aggressor! The Israeli occupying force — despite the condemnation of UN resolutions not worth the paper they are written on — becomes the suffering victim.

The Sharon government, Bush and Blair want the world to believe that the Israeli crushing of the civil population, the imprisoning of men between 15 and 55 years, the summary executions of 'suspects', humiliating of prisoners and mistreating of the wounded, are all 'defensive' actions.

Sharon, intensified the attack in order to create as much destruction and terror in Palestine, in as short a time as possible. Meanwhile International Amnesty has accused the USA of maintaining the supply of ultra-modern weapons to Israel knowing perfectly well that they are being used against civilians.

Robert Fisk, writing on 8 April asked, "So why should Mr Sharon stop now? If Mr Bush wants to rein in his reckless ally, why doesn't he ask Mr

Sharon a few questions? Why doesn't he ask what has happened to the more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners who have disappeared into Israel's hands over the past two weeks? What happened, for example, to the five men, blindfolded and

trussed up like chickens whom I discovered in the Jewish settlement of Psagot? What happened to the masses of young men I saw being taken in a bus with its windows wired over, a bus that made its way around Jerusalem and headed west on the Tel Aviv highway. How many of these young men are now being tortured either in interrogation centres or in the Russian Compound, the main torture compound in West Jerusalem

The United Nations is doing the same over Palestine as they did in Iraq, trying to pose as peacemakers while siding with the aggressor. In this way Kofi Annan, the US secretary general can express concern without having to do anything. In fact nothing reveals more clearly the nature of the UN than the Palestinian struggle. Israel has broken UN resolution after resolution with impunity while Iraq is strangled for breaking one.

The present escalation of Israeli attacks is a direct result of Bush's 'war on terrorism'

But as Jamal Abu Samhandanah, a leader of the popular resistance committees said (Observer 24 February): "We all agree (with Hamas and Fatah) the Intifada will continue until Israel withdraws to the 1967 lines, a Palestinian state is established and refugees have the right to return to their homes (in what was pre 1948 Mandate Palestine but is now Israel.) As a refugee the right of return is more important to me than Jerusalem." He added, "Arafat can believe in the American dream if he wants to, but for us and for the Palestinian people the dream



# Palestine

is over. It's as dead as Oslo."

At the end of March many reports indicated that the military occupation has created a situation where families are going without electricity and water supplies and are running out of food.

The Gaza Strip has an area of 360 sq. kilometres, in which live 1.2 million Palestinians, three quarters of whom are refugees. However 146 sq. kilometres, 40% of the available land, is occupied by 6,000 settlers and 20,000 Israeli troops. In addition the Israelis have 40 military checkpoints in the supposedly independent Palestinian territory. A similar situation exists on the West Bank where Israeli settlements have been relentlessly encroaching on Palestinian land. Add to this the daily incursions by the Israeli army, armed with every modern weapon, killing and maiming men women and children, systematically destroying homes, destroying factories, destroying plantations, destroying crops, destroying, in fact, the means of existence of the Palestinian people. The avowed and clear intentions of Zionists like Sharon were a Bantustan. Now it is extermination.

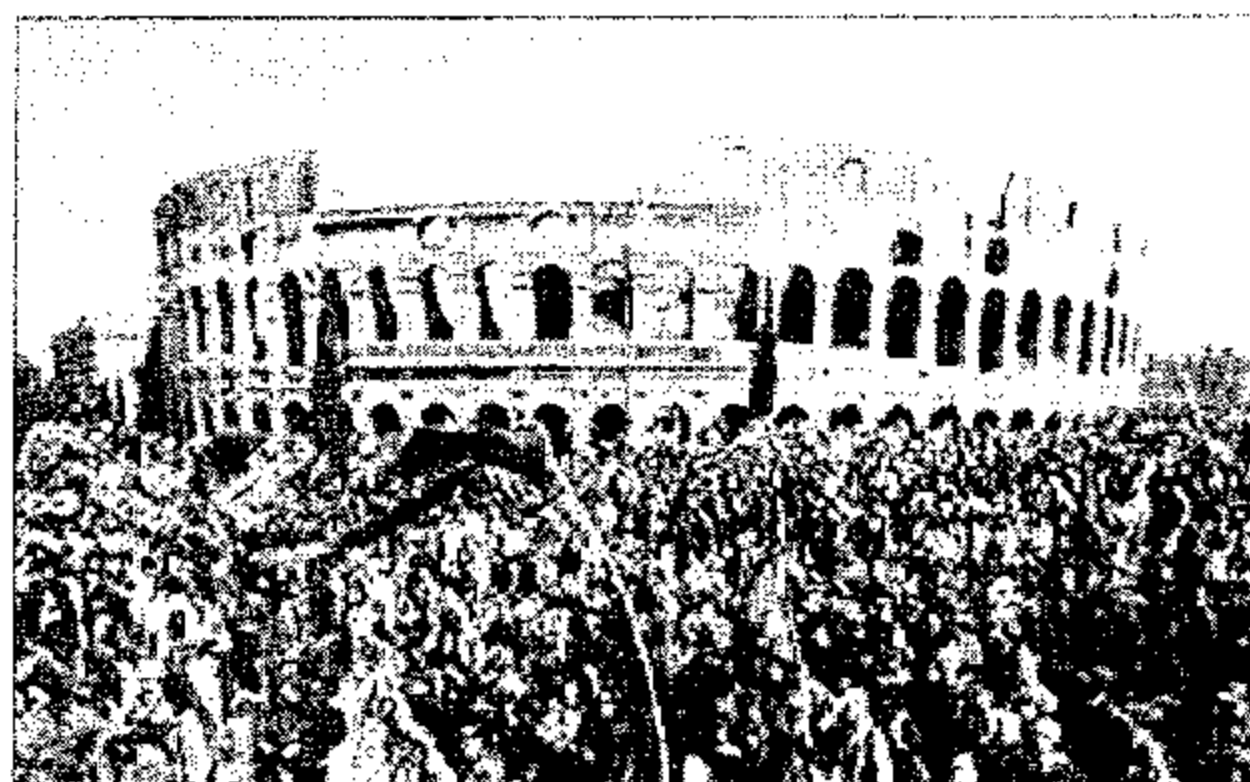
Israel could only have created this situation in Palestine with the strong support of the USA. Their involvement in Israel runs to 3 billion dollars a year.

The slogan on a demonstration in Italy that grew to 50,000 people is important: **defend Palestinians and Jews against Sharon**. The Zionist state is completely interwoven with the US imperialism. Any move to free the Israeli State of such control would be met with fierce repression from the US and the Israeli army and intelligence services.

Those who are against the demand for a united and secular Palestine offer the most unrealistic solution and it is an evasion of international socialist principles. The real issues over two states in Palestine is whether we start with socialist principles and the reality of the divisions in the Middle East. Both Arabs and Jews each have historical roots in the area. Their divisions were actually developed by Imperialism and deliberately encouraged in the past to help its domination of the area. Two states is unrealistic and an impossible solution. Neither would be viable. Israel can only continue its existence and its domination, economically, including its control of water, with US assistance and with its rulers acting as a base for US imperialism in the area.

Today the most decisive and over-riding division in the whole area is that between the war drive of American Imperialism, which is seeking to terrorise the area.

The link between Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan is very strong. It is linked by the drive of the US for control and that control can only be achieved by military means. For the moment that war drive is



**Demonstration in Rome in support of Palestine**

concentrated on Palestine. While it prepares for war against Iraq, because of its oil, the US is now placed in a position where it cannot allow the defeat of Israel. Any weakening of their attack on Palestinians could create more problems for the US than if the massacre continues. That is why Powell was all smiles with Sharon because Sharon paves the way to Iraq and the control over oil.

They both hope that the immediate war drive against the Palestinians will crush the Palestinians for decades if not for good. How wrong they are. There are millions of Arabs in Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and of course Iraq who are demonstrating against Bush, Sharon and their own governments demanding they go to the assistance now of the Palestinians.

A truly remarkable pan-Arab and international movement is beginning in the middle of all the Arab bloodshed; it is the task of Marxists to assist that movement. We are for joining a united alliance with all those people, Jews, Arabs, peoples of all lands who want to agitate and demonstrate to stop the Sharon government's brutal terrorism against Palestinians. To fight for the future means facing the difficulties and contradictions in building a principled international movement of struggle.

**Demand the immediate and unconditional retreat of all of the Israeli troops and the settlers and Israeli establishments of the occupied territories.**

**Freedom for all the Palestinian political prisoners and of the leadership of the PLO.**

**Full support for the initiatives of solidarity for the Palestinian such as international delegations to visit the occupied territories, the universities etc.**

**For the Right to Palestinian self-determination.**

**Weapons, food and medicines to Palestine!**

# US goes to War

by the editor

During March, many commentators wrote about the world situation as if the US were at war with the world. It is. Part of the strategy of the US government is precisely that: to wage a war on the small nations, people and workers of this world, if not directly then indirectly as in Palestine.

In an article *Deeds Speak Louder than Words*, 28 March 1999, Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times*: "For globalization to work, America must not be afraid to act as the almighty superpower that it is ... the hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist—McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the U.S. Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps." (Friedman repeats the argument in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 50.)

After unleashing terror-bombing on the Afghanistan population **the US announced to a fearful world how the 'crusade against terrorism' was to be extended. The Washington Post reported that 61 countries were on the list to be dealt with as harbourers of 'evil'.**

Last November a report by the academically respected Brookings Institute headed: "Nasty, Brutish and Long: America's War on Terrorism," stated that "This war is not like the one against Iraq a decade ago, when the United States and its allies had a clear territorial objective that could be swiftly achieved. It was also not like the war in Kosovo in 1999 in which the Serbs relented after 78 days of bombing Yugoslavia and NATO suffered no combat deaths. And, while the attacks on New York and Washington immediately brought to mind memories of Pearl Harbour, the United State's campaign against terrorism will not be America's effort to force Japan's unconditional surrender ... Like the fight against Soviet communism, today's campaign against terrorism is likely to be nasty, brutish and long. Because of the diverse nature of the threat, the United States has no clear vision of when or how the war will end."

Then, in March, came the news that left no doubt that we were in the third *World War* with the revelation that the US military-capitalist rulers were building their tactics for future attacks on the use of

nuclear weapons and had plans for their possible use of against China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Libya and Syria.

Indeed, Richard Norton-Taylor, in the *Guardian* on 12 March, wrote that the B61-11, so-called 'low yield' nuclear bomb, had been deployed in Europe since 1997. He also quoted the Washington-based project for Social Responsibility as saying "an attack on Saddam Hussein's presidential bunker in Baghdad with a B61 II bomb could cause upwards of 20,000 deaths."

On the eve of the week-end in which the Pentagon's plans were leaked, the *Guardian* front page appeared with a headline: "*From Suez to the Pacific: US expands its presence across the Globe.*" The article said that US soldiers, sailors and airmen "are now established in places where they never before had a presence. **The aim is to provide platforms from which to launch attacks on any group perceived by George Bush to be a danger to the US.**"

## Nature of the war

War does not come about just as the result of a particular event, such as the bombing of New York; it is a product of the basic world-wide relations of capitalist-imperialist exploitation.

The great speed at which events have taken place testifies to the enormity of world tensions that are below the surface. Long before New York there was an expanding division of the world as hundreds of millions of people were steadily being driven deeper into disaster, misery and poverty by the operation of the trans-nationals and the international institutions of imperialism. As the International Socialist League stated at the beginning of the war, this is an international civil war; a war which continues the politics of the exploiters of the world, who have worsened conditions in all the continents but particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The struggle for oil has played a major part in the conflicts in Afghanistan. "A trans-Afghan pipeline would undermine Russia's control of energy prices from Central Asia", said Michael Griffen in *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*. In the book, he shows how the US under Clinton trimmed its opposition to the Taliban to gain an advantage in oil politics. At the time Clinton was

## Comment

carrying out this policy in a "high-stake game of snakes and ladders. Bush, Clinton's successor was effectively already in the picture as a son of a man with close ties to the oil company Unocal, which wanted to put a pipeline across Afghanistan."

Ever since President Bush announced his \$45bn increase in military spending and gave notice to Iraq, Iran and North Korea that they had "better get their house in order" or face what he called the "justice of this nation", it has become ever clearer that the US is not primarily engaged in a war against terrorism at all.

As Seamus Milne wrote in *the Guardian*, 14 February, "The extent of America's power is unprecedented in human history. The latest increases will take its military spending to 40% of the worldwide total, larger than the arms budgets of the next 19 states put together. No previous military empire — from the Roman to the British — had anything like this preponderance, let alone America's global reach."

At the end of the Gulf War, George Bush proclaimed a New World Order; it was a proclamation that expressed the sentiment of the US ruling class that they had swept away or frightened off obstacles to the expansion of their world interests. Less than a decade later, George Bush jr. on 13 September 13, 2001, made a declaration of *world war* that signified that the interests of by far the greatest military and economic power in the world could not be preserved without a world regime that ensured that its capitalist interests would dominate in every corner of the globe.

Bush's war is a war against the poor, oppressed, and suffering masses in the world. It is the *continuation* of the politics of imperialism in the former colonial world where imperialism was forced to give political independence but continued to extract its tribute.

If not stopped, Bush's and Blair's Third World War will be the bloodiest in history. The last World War ended with the greatest terrorist act that the world has ever seen and it was committed by US imperialism: the nuclear holocausts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, cities with a total population of 600,000. Before the atom bombing, Japan was already suing for peace. That atrocious act was committed as a warning to Russia and as an experiment to *test* the affects of nuclear weapons on real live human beings. **The Gulf War also ended with terrorist acts. What was the pounding that the defeated soldiers of Iraq were subjected to on the Basra road? Peaceful subjugation? Collateral damage?**

The well known phrase, Barbarism or Socialism,

has never been more true. Serious questions face the working class organisations throughout the world. There needs to be an international front of workers and the left to stop the economic and military drive to war against us all. Without the mobilisation of their strength it is inevitable that this war must continuously expand, whatever the contradictions in imperialism. It is the responsibility of the working class and the youth to lead this fight and in Britain to oppose Blair and stop his support for war and Bush.



Basra Road

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## A letter from Palestine

I went back home to Ramallah on the 29th of March (just after they reoccupied Ramallah) and I came back a few days ago. The things I've seen there are even worse than they appear on the news. People are just sitting at home doing nothing but watch the news all day. And there is no news but massacres and killings. I am amazed at the world's (leaders) silence in the face of all this breaking of international human rights laws and killing.

Bush's attitude of 100% support for Israel from the moment he took office should be condemned by everyone, and it's humiliating for the international organisation including UN security council to have Israel, backed by the US, ignore every single resolution that has ever been brought out.

VERY hypocritical when they're talking about war on Iraq that they're not even considering economic sanction on Israel. I don't understand how they can ever justify a war against Iraq under these circumstances, or are politicians so damn blind?

Rami Khatib

# Diary of an insurrection

Elizabeth Rolazo, our correspondent in Buenos Aires continues her reports on the growing revolutionary crisis in Argentina

13 February

## PEOPLE'S POWER

To a superficial observer, things in Argentina are quite stagnant at the moment. Not that there are no more demonstrations or parading sessions. These have become part of the daily landscape. But that is precisely it, every Friday there are about 30,000 people in Plaza de Mayo in the centre of Buenos Aires, not to mention countless rallies in different cities towns and villages all over the country. On the remaining days of the week there are minor demonstrations of every kind. People demanding that the judges of the Supreme Court go, not satisfied that they are currently on trial for all kinds of crimes, with corruption heading the list. They know that those who judge the judges still belong to the ill-famed 'political class'. Spontaneous groups of small savings accounts holders, after hopefully trying to get back the dollars they had deposited in different banks, get so frustrated that they kick the doors of the banks. Most banks look like Medieval forts because of all the protection they have had to put around the doors and windows. Piqueteros proclaiming the virtues of peaceful protest tend to grow fewer and hardly Gandhi-like attitudes no longer seemed to shock anyone. But that is only the veneer. You have to dive deeper to see the hot lava simmering below, preparing a new explosion. The new thing is that the 'Argentinazo', as this revolution-

ary process is called, has passed the point of no return: a struggle for power has started.

Let us not imagine soviet like organisations cropping up all over the place. That is far from true. What is true is this: slowly, fighting against all kinds of antibodies implanted by the bourgeoisie, hesitatingly, combining - often clumsily - all kinds of uneven developments tiny particles of what might be the future dual power begin to drift together. And that happens basically through two channels, the Piqueteros and the Popular or People's Assemblies.

The first to appear was the piqueteros movement and, logically enough, it was there that the first attempt was made to get the protest to spawn a body where decisions could be taken, a programme could be worked out from which a kind of parallel government could emerge. The piqueteros went as far as organising two congresses and the second one produced a preliminary programme and a resolution to hold soon a third congress to develop the programme and plan future action. Unfortunately, the official leadership of the movement, in a quick though not very deep process of bureaucratisation started manipulating in order to prevent the third congress taking place. Only a minority tendency kept on with the idea of calling a congress and a more complete programme. This is to take place mid-February.

The second channel comprised the People's Assemblies, which were born out of the Cacerolazo

movement. As most of the things in this process, they started spontaneously. A friend of mine described it like this:

"I started going to the Cacerolazos near home all alone. My family thought I was crazy to go with the baby but they did not offer to baby sit, so I just kept on going. Then some of them would recognise me when I was shopping and would say hello to me and ask if I was coming to the next demo. I was quite surprised for I have been living here for quite a few years now and I barely knew my next-door neighbour, now all of a sudden I knew dozens of people. And we said that there was a need to organise things better. So far, there has been no repression in the smaller cacerolazos in the parishes, but of course we knew about what had happened in Plaza de Mayo and how those three youth were shot in Floresta. So we started thinking about what should be done in a case like that. We learned how to march but keep an eye on the one who is marching next to you in case he is an infiltrated agent provocateur. (Here I couldn't help smiling at this kind of expression coming from someone who but a few days ago thought that decent people stayed out of politics). Then we decided to meet between the cacerolazos to exchange ideas. Some young men, obviously left wing activists, came over. Some of them were rather bossy and obnoxious, but some were very helpful and this is how we started meeting on a regular basis. One of the things that now we know for sure is this: we have ousted three presidents with all their ministers, we have modified the structure of the Parliament, we are sending judges to be tried. We know exactly what we do not want and we are fast in getting



# Argentina

rid of it. It is about time we made up our mind about what we do want and how we can get it."

Soon dozens and more such gatherings started taking place. Not even the menacing name of People's assemblies frightened people away... well... not many. And the existence of these assemblies modified the profile of the central cacerolazos. Last Friday it was properly organised columns that marched on to Plaza de Mayo - not just the old type *mama, papa* and the *perambulator*, though these were there too. Each neighbourhood gathered in their local assembly and voted whether they wanted to go to the centralised action or not. If they did (which was more often than not) they would carry banners saying "People's Assembly" and the name of the Parish they belonged to. Some of them have the slogan of the day painted on the banners. Surprisingly many had inscriptions against the IMF and demanding the non-payment of the foreign debt.

There is a gap between two different trends: the unemployed and poor workers forming the *piqueteros* and the impoverished middle class in the People's Assemblies. Each one looks askance at the other.

The *piqueteros* say: "They are brave and fighting now, but as soon as the government gives them their money back, they will snub you just the way they used to do before."

The people of the assemblies say: "The *piqueteros* are dominated by unscrupulous leaders who use them as voting fodder for candidates who will cheat them as they always have."

There might be a grain of truth in both statements, but this grain is used with the obvious intention of preventing the two trends from arriving at any kind of unity,



which would be disastrous for the defenders of the status quo. The first, timid steps, however, are taken in the opposite direction too. Last Monday, the *piqueteros* marched from La Matanza to the Plaza de Mayo. It was a long march and they had set off at dawn. When they reached the outskirts of the capital, members of the People's Assembly of Liniers were waiting for them with breakfast. It was a very simple breakfast consisting only of a cup of mate and a piece of bread each. But it was the first swallow. During the Friday central *cacerolazo*, a column of *piqueteros* marched together with the middle class demonstrators.

## 16 March

### United we stand...

If there is something that this revolutionary process has never lacked it is courage, determination, flair, and a very specific type of bitter humour. For example, when the police rushed to protect the banks from angry demonstrators, the chant went up: "Lo sabía, lo sabía, /a los chorros los cuida la policía"

(I knew it, I knew it. The cops look after the crooks).

What this process has been in dire need of is organisation and leadership. Fortunately, slowly but surely steps are taken to get out of this penury. People who just walked out to beat on their pans and caused what many consider to be the biggest revolutionary outburst in the history of this country have now formed territorial organisations known as People's Assemblies. The *piqueteros* have gone through several reorganisations (some of the original leaders have joined the ranks of the negotiating bureaucrats) and have just held a two day rally to which the Assemblies and the most combative trade unions were invited. The engineering workers of the Greater Buenos Aires are planning a march on Buenos Aires and the teachers, traditionally one of the most combative trade unions, are about to march in - not just as individuals, but as an organised force. So are the students. The confluence of the Assemblies, the *piqueteros*, the engineering workers and the teacher/student movement may prove explosive, so forces are moving already to



prevent it.

A friend of mine lives in one of those very respectable middle class neighbourhoods which has the now very questionable honour of being the place where the President's residence is. Only a couple of months ago she would have laughed if anybody had told her that she would sit on the street in front of that residence, together with a couple hundred neighbours and discuss passionately the need to join the piqueteros, and yet this is precisely what has happened. I asked her to comment on this unexpected change in her life and this is what she said:

"At first, I used to go to Plaza de Mayo and the media did the summoning. Then a neighbour told me that the pans were sounding in front of the gates of the President's residence, only within a walking distance from my home. I was there when de la Rúa fell and I found myself embracing absolute strangers and we all jumped up and down and we shouted, 'now, the others have to go, too. A scapegoat is not enough.' And then somebody said: 'So that's it. He went. Others will go. But somebody must govern. What now?' We looked at each other and then the words just tumbled out of my mouth: 'Why not let the piqueteros govern?'"

"To my surprise some even nodded and said, 'why not? They could not possibly make a worse mess of things than all these Harvard graduates did'"

"The first Assembly meeting somebody came and distributed sheets of paper with some points for the new programme. Many of these points were very good such as:

- + Out with the Supreme Court... Any factual reduction of salaries and pensions is to be con-

sidered unconstitutional (...)

- + Against the nationalisation of private debts (This refers to the practice of the state taking over the debts of failing private businesses)

- + Nationalisation of the banking system

- Non payment of the fraudulent and illegitimate foreign debt

- + Jail and confiscation of all goods for Menem, Cavallo, de la Rúa and all the corrupt delinquents who carried out the privatisation and estranged all our country

- Increase of the budget for education and public health

- + Solidarity with the workers of the (local) Hospital (Currently on strike)

- Co ordination with the remaining People's Assemblies, ... and many others

"The assembly also voted commissions to be formed to carry out tasks. It was decided that the chairman of each gathering of the Assembly would be elected on the spot. Well, this idea of Chair was rather funny, because the meetings take place in the middle of the street.

"That sounds like plain sailing towards revolution". I commented "and you know that these things just do not exist. We once believed that the rough sailing could be avoided, and we paid a high price for our naiveness."

"Of course it is not plain sailing", my friend replied. "We have had information that there have been attempts at repression against similar assemblies in San Isidro, Merlo and other places and immediately all the neighbouring assemblies rallied in the threatened position and beat the pans in the town hall, but so far the big danger has not come from the police or the bullies. (Obviously most of us are aware that repres-



sion will come sooner or later. If the assemblies join in a co-ordination and this co-ordinating body joins the co-ordination of the piqueteros and the main trade unions, we shall be in the presence of an embryo of a soviet-like organisation. And this is what the establishment cannot afford to let happen. But the trend is in that direction: of the over a hundred Assemblies functioning in the Greater Buenos Aires alone, about 70 are in a more or less close touch with a sort of multi-assembly functioning every Sunday in the Centenario park in the Federal Capital and which has already been "exposed" in the media as having been "dominated by left-wing militants". Obviously from that to a near-centralised organisation there is still a long walk.) The great danger comes from those neighbours who come in and try and channel all the rich discussion into totally unproductive channels."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll give you an example. One of the commissions was proudly titled Commission for Political Reflection and its alleged aim was very good: to get common people to discuss the points of programme and so not only exercise the real people's power but also

# Argentina

increase awareness of the fact that politics is not a taboo but something you cannot get away from even if you abstain from being a member of a political party. That even this abstention is a political fact. We had those initial points to start with, so discussion was supposed to be easy. I decided to join *this* commission.

"I was rather disappointed with the first meeting. There had been a lot of grumbling against the 'left-wing militants who always try to invade you with their ideology'. When the second meeting was driving to an end with exactly the same agenda and exactly the same outcome I thought this was a bit too much. I reminded those present that the following day there would be an Assembly meeting, and we would be the only commission unable to inform about what we had been discussing. I also told them that I had so far been extremely patient and respectful of other people's opinions when tons of bullshit was being said about the left wingers, but time has come to demand at least the same respect for my standpoint. Just stop to think. Who was the first one to warn you all that the foreign debt was illegal, a fraud and would lead us to bankruptcy? We were. Who was the one who told you not to vote Menem or de la Rúa? We did. Who wanted to make us shut up for ever? The military in the first place but also their civilian followers who pursued the same end with different means! And why? Because we knew and we shouted out loud that the dictatorship was necessary in order to be able to impose an economic plan that would be the beginning of a long road back to a colonial status and that the 'democratic' governments who came after had already pledged their loyalty to the same scheme. And quite frankly, right now, I think you would prefer me

not say out loud what interests are being defended with this new version of the anti-left campaign.

"To cut a long story short, the third meeting ran very much along the same lines and what is more they decided that they needn't bother to inform the Assembly about any conclusions, for

the commission was no longer a commission but a group and groups were under no obligation to report to anybody. We agreed that at least this information should be socialised with the remaining neighbours, but they simply failed to report. So I did. What is more, I submitted to the Assembly's consideration the characterisation that this was not just another product of the much advertised lack of awareness in the minds of masses. This was part of a serious political project to demobilise the Assemblies by leading them into useless and time consuming discussions about everything that is human or divine and keep them away from activities that might really challenge the status quo. The authors of this project rallied mainly in a political party known as ARI (Acción por una República e Iguales. Under this misleading name and through a virulent campaign exposing corruption (something everybody knew about, but coming from members of Parliament, it was quite an event) this party obtained a considerable support from the disappointed supporters of de la Rúa who had at his time made a similar campaign and won the presidency out of which he was ousted by the combination of strikes and cacerolazos during



Workers' demonstration

the December days that shook the country... and at least a segment of the world.) In spite of the fact that in my opinion ARI is as much part of the establishment as the Peronists or the Radicals, I welcome the grassroots of this party to our Assemblies, for they still have to make an experience that would perhaps allow them to make a better choice next time.

"As from that moment on I became a controversial figure: the ARI and their followers hate me openly but all the others started looking up to me so I really started looking forward to my branch meeting where I would discuss the steps to be taken next. The immediate next step is to summon a new commission for political discussion and start working seriously. One of the points I think we ought to discuss is this: how long will it be before the establishment counterattacks and what means of defence can we summon before this happens? Some young Anarchists, who jokingly started calling me Rose (for Luxemburg), are also willing to discuss this. This poses a big challenge. And scares the hell out of me. Time has come to start earnestly fighting for the leadership of a small fringe of the most vibrant toiling masses I have ever seen.

# Blair in a spin

**By Martin Ralph - Martin is standing as a Socialist Alliance candidate in Liverpool in the local elections**

The moderniser, the reformer, the spinner par excellence could be spinning his way out of the Labour leadership. Blair kick started the transfer of areas of social provision into privatisation where the Tories did not dare go. Opposition is building to war against Iraq and to the handing over of the control of pensions to the oh 'so reliable' stock market and the privatisation of health, education and welfare with its consequent casualisation, increasing disease, unemployment and attacks on minorities.

On 25 March the War against Postal workers was announced with the revealing of the intention of the Post Office management to get rid of 40,000 jobs, the same day it was announced by Byers that was going to give way to the share holders of Railtrack.

No wonder the Guardian of 23 March could write: "More than 130 MPs have shown their dismay at the latest turn of political events - well before this week's Guardian/ICM poll halved Labour's lead from 17% to 9% - by signing a Commons motion against military action in Iraq. They include a number of Gordon Brown's supporters."

Also in March, the information has crept through that the war in Afghanistan did not solve any of the Afghans problems. On the contrary the war continues, the number refugees increases and the US gets on with its business of oil. So what does Blair do? Increases military support. The war against Iraq is not getting support in Europe or in the Middle East, and it is not getting support in Britain. So what does Blair do? Commits Britain to the US war aims.

On South America last year Blair congratulated the then Argentine President on his success. A semi-insurrection overthrew him. In Europe he warns to Jose Maria Aznar, Spanish Prime Minister, as at least 250,000 demonstrate against his policies in Barcelona. He is the best of friends with Italy's Silvio Berlusconi who has just managed to provoke, on 24 March, two million people onto the streets (according to the union leaders organising the protest) against giving the bosses even more rights to sack workers.

Capitalism will use Blair until he is all used up. If workers take their lead from Spain and Italy and build on the streets a national movement against

war and privatisation and include all the related issues, that could be sooner rather than later.

In Britain living standards for most workers and their families have fallen much lower than many other countries in Europe. But none of the establishment wants to talk about it. The gap between the highest and lowest paid widened (again) in 2000. Wages of the highest ten per cent of full-time employees rose by 7.6 per cent, whilst the lowest increased by only 4.3 per cent.

But those figures hide the highest fat cat payments and say nothing of the wages of casual and unemployed workers. One third of a million over 18 year olds earn less than the minimum wage.

Pensions are a major concern for a great number of working people, but not for the highest paid. A Labour Research survey (Labour Research, March 2002) found in total 255 directors currently expecting a pension worth £100,000 a year. Information from the same magazine showed that women workers are still facing major inequality at work: "The situation for part-time women workers (who account for 44 per cent of women in employment) is far worse, with the divide between the average hourly pay of part-time women and full time men increasing slightly, according to the latest figures, to 41 per cent." Meanwhile a book called *Poverty Bites, Food, Health and Poor Families* explains that an NHS plan, published in 2000, emphasised the need to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables, yet one in 20 parents cannot afford to provide fruit at least once a day, while one in 50 children do not get three meals a day.

The poverty facing students and the vicious attack on asylum seekers adds to the picture that the vast majority voted for Labour to end sleaze, privatisation and the increasing inequality between rich and poor but got more of the same plus Blair's willingness to spend and spend to wage war against even poorer people than those that live in England.

A programme for the unions

The response of the Communication Workers Union to the attacks on jobs should be to call for a national movement against privatisation, sacking and cuts and in defence of public services and to seek to develop a programme that links the users and the workers. Such a programme must demand na-

## Britain

tionalisation, an end to the anti-trade union laws and workers and community control of the main industries and services. At the Socialist Alliance National Conference on the political fund and fighting privatisation Mark Serwotka, president elect of the CPS (Civil and Public Services union) quite correctly spoke of a national movement against privatisation and war. He said the perspective must be to unite the struggles and in so doing there must be the desire to win every struggle no matter how small in order to win the big ones and to build a movement.

Now there can and should be a united front movement with the unions and communities to organise action. The May Day rally in London has been called against war and privatisation and this call needs to be extended and developed. The strategies of the unions must be to open their doors to the unem-

ployed, the youth and others. It must seek a class movement that also links directly to the union and community movements in Europe. There is already an active linking by some sections of the unions in France, Spain and Italy. At the heart of this must be the discussion on how public services can be run for the benefit of all those who built them, run them and use them. To place public services under the tutelage of a corrupt parliament will solve nothing. Workers and users control with accountability and openness is a key question.

The Socialist Alliance Conference was a success because a movement is developing in the unions, with the teachers strike in London, the recent strikes of railway and underground workers and others. An alternative can be built and there will be a fight on the political fund but this movement has to be built in the struggles taking place from the bottom.

### Vote Socialist Alliance

The Socialist Alliance is standing candidates in the local elections through out the country.

In Liverpool, the Alliance Candidates are:

**Ian Foulkes:**

I am a Firefighter and have lived in Arundel Ward with my wife and family for 20 years. I stood in this ward as a Socialist Labour Party candidate in 1998 and won 6.3% of the vote pushing the Tories into fourth place. I am now standing as part of the Socialist Alliance, which has brought together a variety of Socialist Parties and organisations.

At present I am Brigade Chair of Merseyside Fire Brigades Union. I am proud to have helped lead last years strike in defence of the Fire Service in Merseyside and believe that trade unions can provide, together with the local community, a strong defence against attacks on public services.

**Lesley Mahmood:**

Once again the people of Anfield and surrounding areas are being used as guinea pigs for another experiment - this time on our children's schools. We have already suffered the run down of our area while Liverpool Football Club, Housing Associations and the City Council wanted large-scale demolition of the area behind our backs.

Only protests from the residents stopped that plan, we are still waiting for the regeneration of the area including the park and sports facilities.

Massive opposition from parents has halted the plans by the Lib Democrat council and the New Labour government to demolish the Anfield & Breckfield schools, to be replaced by one giant school run independently.

**Mark O'Brien, Socialist Workers Party:**

Locally, instead of proper investment into our communities we are seeing piecemeal spending by non-government bodies, which is benefiting businesses rather than local people. Instead of re-introducing much needed local services we are seeing conference centres and business parks being built in the Riverside area. Instead of area improvement we are seeing high rise luxury flats going up, blocking our views of the river.

Our schools desperately need proper government funding. Instead we have been given an Education Action Zone. Around 60 private businesses are involved in this. They are not even companies normally involved in providing educational services. They include the Alliance and Leicester, MacDonald's and Wendy's Kitchen! These companies do not have our children's educational welfare at heart.

**Martin Ralph, International Socialist League:**

The council is boasting of the money it has obtained for schools, which do need better facilities, such as in Broad Green Comprehensive. Residents have not been fully involved with the plan. Lib Dem councillors have broken their promises.

Liverpool City Council has or is doing the same thing to Parks and Gardens, Cleansing, Street Lighting, Street Engineers etc; they are being taken over by another private company, Enterprise plc. Each service will suffer: workers will suffer with their health, safety, wages and pensions.

Liverpool City Council has cut Home Care since the 4 March. This is illegal if the agreed care plan and provision has been altered or cut without a proper re assessment of a person's care needs.

# Life and times of Andy Shannon

An appreciation by Martin Ralph

Andy Shannon was born in North Manchester and lived there most of his life. He was an agitator who loved to perform. Communist struggle was the natural place for him.

One could sense by the way he talked the risks he made and the way he talked that he had a rich experience of life and struggle.

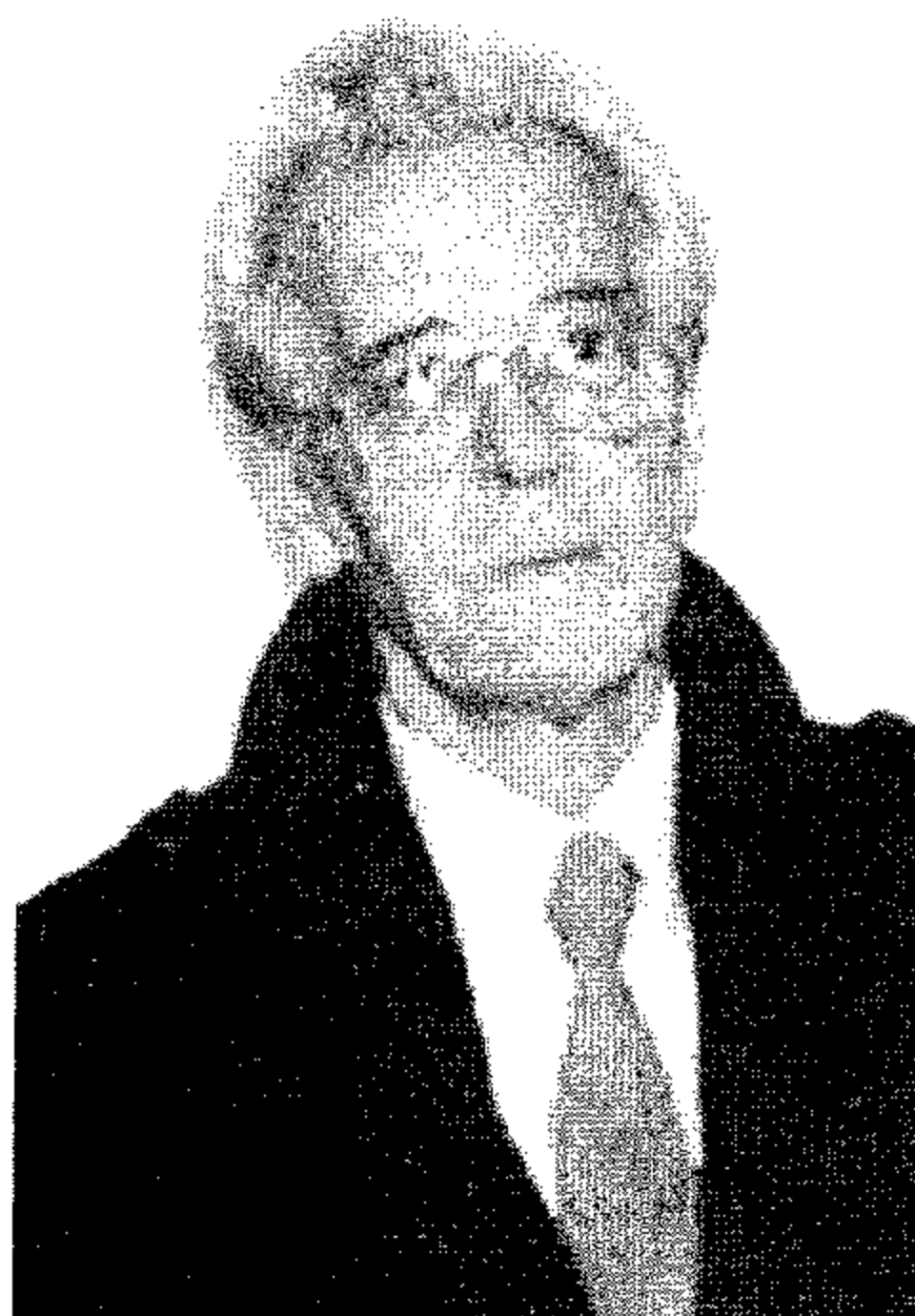
Andy used to work in the cleaning department of Manchester City Council, he used to talk about the fights he had as a member and campaigner of the Transport and General Workers Union against the council and his union's leadership. He would relate a story of his fight in 1974 to organise solidarity action for the 1974 Liverpool refuse collectors' and cleansing workers' strike amongst the council workers in Manchester.

As a result of his campaigning, particularly for the rights of people living in the working class district of Collyhurst - when he retired, he became a full time people's and workers' representative activist - Andy had a special relationship with the Middleton and North Manchester Guardian. On December 2000, the paper wrote: 'While most people like to relax when they reach retirement age Andy Shannon turned his home (a one bedroom retirement flat) into a headquarters that has launched numerous campaigns. ...'

Andy came to the fore in North Manchester with the rise of the Thatcher Government and in particular with the Poll Tax. He was one of the first to take up the legal questions that arose out of the rebellion. He also fought to take the fight outwards into the rest of the country and even to Europe.

His strengths fitted the needs of the mass movement in the early 1990s. While his background was in the Labour Party and the trade unions, he was very much at home in the volatile anti-Poll Tax movement.

The largest class struggle since the 1984-85 miners' strike - the fight against the Poll Tax was a new type of struggle. It built itself from the bottom up. The Labour and trade union leadership had moved further to the right and away from the working class. Of course, active socialists and trade unionists were involved, but the power of the movement came from the community based anti-poll tax unions where millions of people were prepared to break the law,



and make all kinds of demonstrations, occupy the council buildings, the law courts, stop the bailiffs, and make all kinds of legal challenges to the courts. Andy was in his element!

Five months after the introduction of the Poll Tax in England and Wales, according to the Times at the time, ten million were not paying the tax. In 1990 the battle for enforcement began. The tactic at the beginning was to call on people not to pay and when summonsed to go to court and fight it out for as long as possible. The courts began to get clogged up with the number of people turning up, plus there were days when someone had mysteriously used super-glue in the locks of the court doors!

In November 1989 the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax was formed at a conference held in Manchester attended by some 2,000 people. It was held in Manchester because of the strength of the movement in Greater Manchester.

In 1990 the North West Anti Poll Tax Forum was formed to support the movement against the Labour Party leadership, to support the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign, and the fight against the attacks on Council services. At the January conference Andy Shannon put the following motion from the Collyhurst Tenants Association calling for support for a lobby of the NEC of the Labour party in February:

'Considering the NEC has said that it will not support people breaking the law and it has been shown time and again that the courts, with the compliance of local councils, have broken the law by using the courts as a threat, not allowing Mackenzie's friends, and falsely imprisoning non-payers, we demand a

## Obituary

vigorous and open campaign by the NEC and the Labour Party against such law breakers.

"We think the only way to stop the courts and councils breaking the law is to immediately repeal the Poll Tax, but only the mass movement and the various organisations of the working class can force the repeal of the Poll Tax. We therefore call on the NEC to stop the witch-hunts of Labour Party activists. A fully democratic movement is the best guarantee of victory."

There was a very lively discussion. Workers still harboured illusions that the Labour Party would carry through a fight against the Tories, and so some thought a lobby would just divert the anger from the Tories to Labour. But the resolution was carried, and the NEC was lobbied.

A small but representative group from the North West Anti Poll Tax Forum went to London, joined by the Camden Trades Council and London Fight the Poll Tax.

Celia Ralph, who was on the lobby, recently described what happened:

"They would not let us into the Labour Party headquarters at Walworth Road, and no one going into the building would support us. Andy somehow got in the building and in the process he arranged a meeting with Dennis Skinner in the House of Parliament. At the same time, Tony O'Brien from Southwark UCATT and the Hazards Campaign was lobbying the Labour Party, so we held a joint meeting in a pub, where the discussion turned on the need to stand against Labour.

"We did not get Skinner to support anything that day. But the people we were with, who thought that the Labour left would support their demands, were very shocked."

Out of this experience they were more determined to stand against Councils including Labour and they did so in Stoke, Bolton, Salford and elsewhere.

Andy stood as Independent Labour against Graham Stringer, the leader of Manchester Council. Andy stood against the proposed rent increases, the cuts in services and jobs and the Poll Tax. He opposed the introduction of water meters, saying this was "an attempt by the water authority to make even more profit out of people's basic needs, this, at a time, when dysentery is on the increase in Manchester". He also opposed the vicious attacks on adult education, the "crude community care" and the forcing into trusts of old people's home.

Stringer, the council leader, was elected, but only 21 per cent of the electorate voted, and his 1,000 votes represented a 50 per cent reduction. Andy got 267 votes.

These first moves for working class political rep-

resentation did not come from the majority of the left groups. Many today perhaps do not realise how this question came up quite naturally from the mass movement against the Poll Tax. Andy did not have illusions that a new workers' party would be born and grow quickly, but he had a perspective of how such a party should be built.

He said: "If there are those among you who believe as I do that a party must be born by the people and for the people and that we must be the administrators and not the masters, then the time is now to form an independent party and bring together those people who have been betrayed by the very system that has treated them with contempt. A party must be born out of struggle and the lessons learnt. We cannot reap the harvest of success if we fail to plant the seeds of the independent party. Your children and your children's children are the future of this country and it is to them we have a responsibility to provide a stable corner stone for them to build on."

It took another few years for the left to begin the first embryos of the Socialist Alliance and to begin to consider the need for a new party of workers. That a party has to be born of the struggle of workers and is therefore a party that has to turn to the tasks of the working class and prove itself in their struggles. Ten years later this idea is still not yet in the fore front of the minds of most of those groups now involved in the Socialist Alliance.

Sometime in the 1990s Andy formed a musical group called "Gerryiatrics and Their Pace Makers", which aimed to put new life into the community through music!

Towards the end he was involved in fighting the sell-off of the Council housing stock in Langley, and he won a fight for the reinstatement of the Post Office near where he lived.

At Andy's funeral a woman who knew Andy ended her contributions by saying, "when you are in the centre of Manchester and a pigeon flies overhead and drops its shit on the Manchester City Council - that will be Andy."





## Fusion in Spain

**Last month we reported that the PRT (Workers Revolutionary Party - Spanish section of the LIT) and the IR (Revolutionary Left) had begun a process of fusion and said that we would be publishing part of their joint thesis. Below are some extracts.**

### Europe

The EU reflects the high degree of economic unification of the continent and the rising necessity to eliminate barriers and national regulations. But, at the same time, it shows the inability of European capitalism to achieve it.

The enlargement is the main current objective. This aim is a gigantic operation of recolonisation for the benefit of the big German multinational corporations.

There is another important recolonisation: the proposal for an area of free trade around the Mediterranean, including Morocco and Algeria.

The development of this project, that theoretically should culminate in 2010, will mean the opening of frontiers in the countries of North Africa to European goods and the rise of huge sectors of agriculture and small scale production.

With the recession, European capitalism is forced to attack workers. Fighting in the 'anti-terrorist front' of Bush, it takes antidemocratic measures against the immigrant population and the dissident movements. However, the working class is far from the demoralized. The mobilizations of public sector workers in France, German engineering workers for salary improvements and Italian workers against Berlusconi's labour reform point to a strong resistance to the plans of capital.

### The anti-capitalist movement:

One of the main characteristics of the movement is its emergence outside of the official left. Its existence depends on the poor reputation and the crisis of the official left. The leaders of the social democratic parties appear to have the radical youth as part of the new electorate. The main unions are equally rejected by the youth, the new activists and the Communist Parties. In addition and in the tow of the social democratic parties, the contradictions of the movement are shown by the fact that it does not have an electoral reflection, although the electoral strength of the extreme French left (Lutte Ouvrière and LCR) is also part of the political radicalisation from the bottom, as, to a lesser degree, is that of the

Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Party in Ireland, the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales and the Left Block in Portugal.

### Spanish Capitalism

Spanish capitalism continues as an imperialism of a second rank. It is this secondary role of Spanish capitalism in the European brotherhood, together with the enormous concentration of its imperialistic interests in Latin America that makes the Aznar government look for a "special relationship" with its American master. This situation is expressed in its role in Plan Colombia (the plan for control of the region by the US); its unconditional support for the star wars of Bush, against German and French reticence; the particular servility of Aznar before the US after 11 September and its alignment with the IMF, especially in the crisis of Argentina.

### The United Left

The leadership of IU (United Left, in which the PRT and IR exist as tendencies), is entirely pro imperialist. Instead of demanding the government annuls the Argentinian debt the IU requests that "it deploy international initiatives for... a conventional abolition of the Argentinian foreign debt. Instead of joining with the workers and the Argentinian left in their demand for the nationalization of the banks and the privatised companies, the leadership of the IU requests Aznar to demand of the Spanish corporations in Argentina that they don't hinder the ending of the crisis and are committed to the future of the country".

The reorganization of the labour movement in Spain will come from the entrance into struggle of the new generation of workers. From this process will it be able to face the tremendous dispersion that characterizes the forces to the left of the Spanish Communist Party.

The features of the situation show what the axes of class struggle will be in next period: The labour movement will have to face a strong employer offensive. Our axes will be the defence of freedoms; the fight against privatisations, labour deregulation and the sackings; solidarity with Argentina and other people that fight against the imperialistic recolonisation. The mobilization against institutional racism and government attacks on the rights of immigrant workers will be another axes.

Another of the big focus of internationalist solidarity will be against the genocidist aggression from Israel against the Palestinian people and in solidarity with the Intifada, for a democratic, secular and non racist state of Palestine.

*The full text (in Spanish) is available on request*

# One more good step

Patricia Bonilha gives her impression of Porto Alegre

Just a few days before the beginning of the second World Social Forum, a good friend of mine told me that the meeting was going to be "just a huge left wing party". He did not believe that serious issues would be addressed.

The first day a colorful sea of people armed with placards, pots and pans (a clear result of Argentines' influence) were stoically announcing their hopes. Many different languages could be heard, but there was one only dream: an alternative world, of justice and equality.

On the second day, the amount of conferences, lectures, workshops, interviews and seminars were exhausting. But it was just the beginning.

A marathon of activities was established every day and time put aside for eating was minimal.

However, the most important thing was that there we were: over 55,000 people from 131 countries, 4,200 organizations representing every conceivable religion, philosophy, party, idea, language and culture. There we were, sharing ideas, voicing our demands, discussing and recognizing prejudices, pointing out problems, swapping experiences, discovering similarities and trying to find better ways for living together in the world. But above all else we agreed with the slogan: "Another world is possible."

The volume of issues seemed endless. All the subjects had space and everyone could get the latest information about everything. The main hall of the university became a stage for all sorts of protests. Genetically modified food, Argentina's impoverishment and chaos, the landless, Palestine, the media, external debts, Zimbabwe, abortion, homosexuality, FTAA (Free

Trade Area of the Americas), South Africa, the ethical limits of science, the Kyoto Agreement... and a host of other issues. The summit was remarkable for the amount of consensus. It revealed that diversity brings about unity. The world is very different and it is only the unity of this diversity, which brings strength to the mass movement.

It was a very important moment for Latin America, with an election due in Brazil, and at a time when the US was still bombing Afghanistan. This was a reaffirmation of the anti-globalization movement opposing the multinationals and their search of profit. A collective consciousness was created. In the air, a claim for ethical values, an affirmation of a culture of equality, inclusion and a balanced world. A demand to change the current order. A recognition that peace is only possible with social justice. These were what you could see in each face in Porto Alegre.

How wrong my friend was. I had not gone to a superficial and directionless party. I left (almost without taking advantages of the cultural program, unfortunately) with my head full of thoughts. I felt I was not alone. I felt much stronger. And the conviction that another world has to be urgently built, a place capable of embracing diversity with justice. This was shaking me to the core.

Meanwhile, the world's powerful politicians, corporate executives and financial authorities were at the World Economic Forum of Davos, this year in the United States of America, discussing how much more wealth they would appropriate, which country would be their next victim to pay for their luxurious life styles.

# Lula follows Blair

Laercio Pereira

The Workers Party of Brazil (WP) is going through the biggest crisis in its history. It offered recently a Liberal Party Senator, Jose de Alencar, the position of vice-presidential candidate in the elections to be held in October. Alencar used to be the president of the Industrial Federation of the State of Minas Gerais. He supported the military coup in 1964, he opposes the rural workers fighting for land and defended the corrupt president of the Central Bank of Brazil, Arminio Fraga, a liberal and friend of the current President, Cardoso.

The WP and Lula are for class collaboration and the rank and file of the WP are rebelling against this position. When Jose de Alencar said "I am the boss that Brazil needs" the leader of the Popular Federation Movement said: "If he is to be the vice-president, the worker that Brazil needs will be left out".

## Uniting the Socialists

The PSTU (United Socialist Workers Party of Brazil, International Workers League-FL) is standing Ze Maria (who is also the General Secretary of an engineering union) as their candidate for Presidential elections. He is calling for a "Front of Workers" and an anti-imperialist plan to break with FTAA and the IMF, which means, no payment of the foreign debt, nationalisation of the privatised enterprises; nationalisation of financial system and the defence of Workers' interests.

The PSTU says that, if Lula and the WP break with the bourgeoisie and assume an anti-imperialist plan, it will withdraw its candidature.