

# f future

## FIGHT FOR JOBS GOES GLOBAL

**W**orkers throughout the world are taking determined action against job losses, privatisation and the non-payment of wages as the global slump bites.

In the **United States**, a powerful strike by General Motors workers at the company's biggest plant, in Flint, Michigan, began when management secretly removed new dies from the plant.

By the end of June, 26 out of the 29 GM assembly plants in North America and over 100 parts plants were shut down. About 150,000 workers are out, although only 9,300 are on strike. The Buick City Assembly plant in Flint is due for closure next year, despite record productivity rates.

In **Puerto Rico**, massive armed power has been deployed against pickets outside the state-owned telephone company. The labour movement on the American-dominated Caribbean island is involved in a major confrontation with the government's plans to sell off the company to private investors.

In **Greece**, the New Labour-style Pasok government's drive to join the European single currency has led to a wall of protest from transport and bank workers. Its plan to sell off state companies has been met by a sustained and sometimes violent backlash at Greek ports and Olympic Airways while bank workers stormed a shareholders' meeting to stop its sell-off.

Some 4,000 **South Korean** bank workers are camping out at the Myongdong Cathedral. They are protesting at the loss of 10,000 jobs, due to the government's closure of five banks.

The Korean Federation of Financial Institutions Labour Unions has called a general strike for July 15, unless the government protects the jobs of bank workers.

Strikes have also been called by the Hyundai Motor Workers Union against a plan to lay off over 4,000 workers. (*See back page*)

The new government in **Indonesia** has faced daily demonstrations over workers' rights, food prices, official corruption and the status of East Timor. The army ignored government instructions and

banned demonstrations as the movement that brought down Suharto continues.

The World Bank has warned that 20 million Indonesians stand to lose their jobs and 50 million – one quarter of the population – face returning to poverty because of the economic crisis.

Meanwhile, in **Russia**, striking miners from four regions are camped outside Moscow's White House, determined to stay there until President Yeltsin is impeached or resigns.

Alexei Yegerov, a 26-year-old miner from Vorkuta – a coal mining outpost situated above the Arctic Circle – got his last wages in September 1997. Since then, he has been forced to live off his mother's pension.



Left: Southend FBU members on the demonstration.

Above: Chelmsford firefighters with the threatened turntable ladder

# Essex firefighters strike to defend the service



Essex FBU Secretary Paul Adams

Over 1,000 Essex firefighters have staged a series of strikes in defiance of lock-outs and threats of dismissal, in a bitter struggle against cuts.

They have drawn support from Fire Brigades Union members across the country, who have threatened to strike if any Essex FBU members are suspended or sacked.

A national march through London was backed by delegates from all over away as Strathclyde and Blair.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat joint leadership of the county's fire authority has imposed a budget cut of more than £1.238,000. This involves the loss of up to 10 jobs and the withdrawal of a turntable engine from service.

By the end of June, firefighters had staged 11 strikes against the cuts, with the authority replacing FBU members with

strike-breaking army personnel and equipment.

Although the FBU strikes were only two weeks long, management responded by working out entire shifts in an attempt to end the dispute.

Cost estimates suggest that the fire authority has already spent close on £1m bringing in the Army personnel, lending support to the work by some firefighters who are not on strike one of the FBU's main objectives.

Paul Adams, Essex FBU secretary, told *Workers Weekly*: "The authority only seems interested in smashing the strike rather than reaching a compromise. This is the fourth year we've had to resist cuts and the second year running we have been forced to take industrial action.

"Yet the money is there. The councils in the area between them have £26.5m in reserves and it would only cost council tax

payers an extra 1.5p per week to maintain the service. Now we hear that the fire authority predicts it will underspend by £250,000 this year. So what is this dispute all about?"

After a successful strike ballot, each firefighter was sent a letter at home warning them that they faced the sack if they went on strike. "These are the tactics of war," said Paul Adams.

"Yet despite this threat we have had an automatic response from the members. Not one firefighter has returned to work during the strikes."

He stressed that the strikes were more than about defending jobs and the FBU. "It's about public safety. The loss of a turntable will bring added dangers to us and the public. In the 12 months to January, 21 people died in fires in Essex. The cuts will put more people's lives at risk."

# Market forces threat to New Labour

**N**ew Labour's infatuation with, and support for, the "dynamic market economy" of global capitalism will prove its undoing and create real possibilities for revolutionary social and political change.

The deepening international global slump, which began in Asia, is now impacting on a British economy with its own particular problems in the shape of an overvalued currency, high interest rates and a top-heavy services sector.

As a result, unemployment is growing rapidly in manufacturing and beginning to emerge in the service sector, which lives off the proceeds of real value creation in the production sector.

Britain's trade deficit is the largest since 1990, house sales are falling and business confidence has slumped, leading a Lloyds-TSB economist to say: "If the Asian impact gets any bigger, or if consumer spending slows, we'll have a full recession."

Forget about the "if". Japan, the world's second-largest economy, is staring at financial melt-down because its banks are based on fictitious balance sheets. South Korea, the 11th largest economy, is diving deeper and deeper into slump.

Yet the Blair government's existence and future is tied to the fate of the global capitalist economy. It claims that a partnership with "market forces" will create jobs and prosperity, and even help fund public services like the NHS and education.

The truth is entirely the opposite. Global capitalism is only interested in profit. When its system plunges into crisis, the response is immediate: sackings and the elimination of competitors, be they companies or nations.

As the experience of the slump emerges for millions of people, the fraudulent nature of New Labour will be plain to see. The very market forces we were all supposed to worship will destroy lives and futures.

The naked populism of Blair and his entourage will not save them from the anger of those driven out of work by the very system New Labour champions.

While it is dominated by a handful of multi-nationals and financial institutions, there is no prospect of controlling the global economy and preventing catastrophe.

To establish control over economic forces requires social ownership and the wresting of power away from the hands of those who run the world from their boardrooms, banks and stock exchanges.

That is the challenge *Socialist Future* invites readers to take up by supporting the project for a new party, which is now well under way in different parts of Britain.

*Paul Feldman, Editor*

## Project for a new party

**S**ocialist Future is sponsoring a project for launching a new party in 1998. The need for an alternative to New Labour has become more urgent as disillusionment with the government's policies increases rapidly. To start a discussion about what kind of party is needed, *Socialist Future* has put forward a number of basic principles upon which it would be founded.

- a commitment to socialist principles and the historical achievements of workers and revolutionaries in every country
- a commitment to lead a struggle for power as the only way to end capitalism
- a constitution that places obligations, as well as conferring democratic rights, on its members
- an understanding that Marxism as a living theory to guide political action is

central to the party's work

- a leadership that is decisive, responsive and prepared to develop policies as situations change
- a united front with all those inside and outside the Labour Party who come into conflict with the Blair government
- an agreement that building a new socialist International is the way forward to meet the challenge of global capitalism
- a party programme that appeals to working people, which is based on their having control of economic, social and political life, freeing resources and technology from the profit frenzy.

*Send your views for publication in the next issue to: Socialist Future, PO Box 942, London SW1V 2AR or email: [sfg@sfuture.demon.co.uk](mailto:sfg@sfuture.demon.co.uk)*

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# Eritrea defends its revolution

by Penny Cole

**F**ormer comrades in arms in Eritrea and Ethiopia are now plunged into a territorial war, fighting each other where they formerly united to defeat the brutal regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam.

Commentators from the bourgeois newspapers call the war "crazy" and "inexplicable". "A conflict that borders on the insane" said the *Guardian* (June 16) "How can two of the world's poorest countries go to war over some barren land?" Similar statements were made about the recent nuclear weapons testing by India and Pakistan.

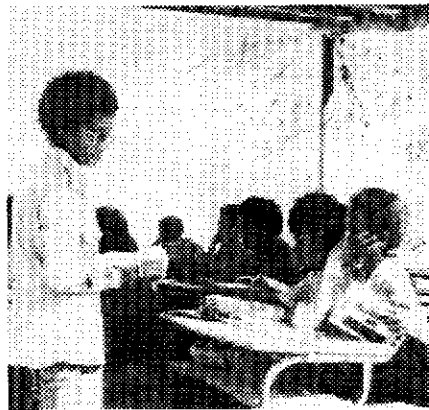
Such clashes can only be understood as a product of the unbearable tension arising from the global economic and financial crisis, which widens the gap between rich and poor individuals and countries and disrupts any attempt at independent development.

The advanced capitalist countries express the same crisis in different forms, as can be seen by the row between France and Germany over control of the new European Bank. When President Chirac of France and Germany's Chancellor Kohl nearly came to blows during a recent EC Summit, that too must have seemed to "border on the insane".

## **Economic hostilities**

After independence in 1993, Eritrea continued to use the Ethiopian currency, the *bir*. Last year it launched its own currency, named the *nakfa* to commemorate martyrs of a great battle during Eritrea's war of independence.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are economically interdependent. Eritrea imports half its food from Ethiopia; landlocked Ethiopia brings in about 70% of its imports through the Eritrean port of Assab. Ethiopia has



Children in an EPLF school - Eritrea, 1985

enjoyed 6% annual growth in recent years – but many of the leading business figures are Eritreans living in Addis.

The new currency altered this economic relationship. The Ethiopian government would not accept the *nakfa*, and said Eritrea must pay for imported goods in dollars. Eritrea said that must work both ways. The resulting stalemate increased tension between the two countries.

Ethiopia intensified a military build-up on the borders, and on May 6, hostilities broke out. A simmering dispute in an area of land known as the Badme triangle led to a number of Eritrean soldiers being shot. The Eritreans responded by taking over the disputed area.

The Ethiopians have carried out air strikes, and hundreds of Eritreans living and working in Ethiopia have been rounded up and herded across the border, or are being held in camps outside Addis. Eritrea is now effectively blockaded, with Ethiopia threatening to fire on planes or ships. The fear of hunger is now present. In the meantime, Ethiopia has gained access to ports in neighbouring Djibouti.

Tigray Radio, voice of the governing group in Ethiopia, vowed on air to march

on the port of Assab. "Ethiopia has 50 million people and no port," the commentator said. "Eritrea has only 3 million and two ports. Why should Ethiopia not have one?" Eritrea responded to this threat to its national sovereignty by a mass mobilisation, taking the town of Zalambessa.

Subsequently, Eritrea has said it will withdraw from Badme provided the area is demilitarised, and a third independent party – either the United Nations or the Organisation of African Unity – makes proposals for resolving the territorial dispute.

**T**he Tigrayan-led government in Addis is using the war to reassert its own authority over the other ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The current anti-Eritrean rhetoric is an opportunistic adaptation to the greater Ethiopian nationalism they themselves were struggling against not so long ago.

As the *Guardian's* David Hurst wrote: "Whatever the rights and wrongs, the conflict can be seen as part of a problem involving the internal dynamics of a disjointed Ethiopian state which does not enjoy the national cohesion of its smaller neighbour."

Sturdily independent, Eritrea has quite rightly refused loans from the International Monetary Fund, and resisted pressure from hostile states like Sudan.

Eritreans asked about the size of their army tend to answer "three million" – which is the size of the population. But the problems facing Eritrea cannot be resolved solely by military means.

The absence of political parties in Eritrea is forcing the very real contradictions in society to emerge instead through ethnic and religious channels,

threatening the unity in diversity which was the EPLF's greatest strength during the liberation struggle.

The Eritrean leadership is rightly concerned about the divisive effects which parties based on religious dogma – of the Christian, Muslim or any other variety – could have on their young nation.

It also has very good reason to be hostile to pseudo-Marxist dogma which was inflicted on the masses of Eritrea and Ethiopia by the Mengistu dictatorship and its Moscow backers.

*Socialist Future* supports completely Eritrean President Afewerki's campaign for a constitution which encourages open political debate. A dogma-free political education is essential in order to find socialist solutions to the present crisis.

An isolated bourgeois road to prosperity and a stable nation state is impossible for any developing country in today's cut-throat global economy. This is especially true for Eritrea and Ethiopia which have emerged from a costly 30-year liberation war, constantly undermined by Stalinism.

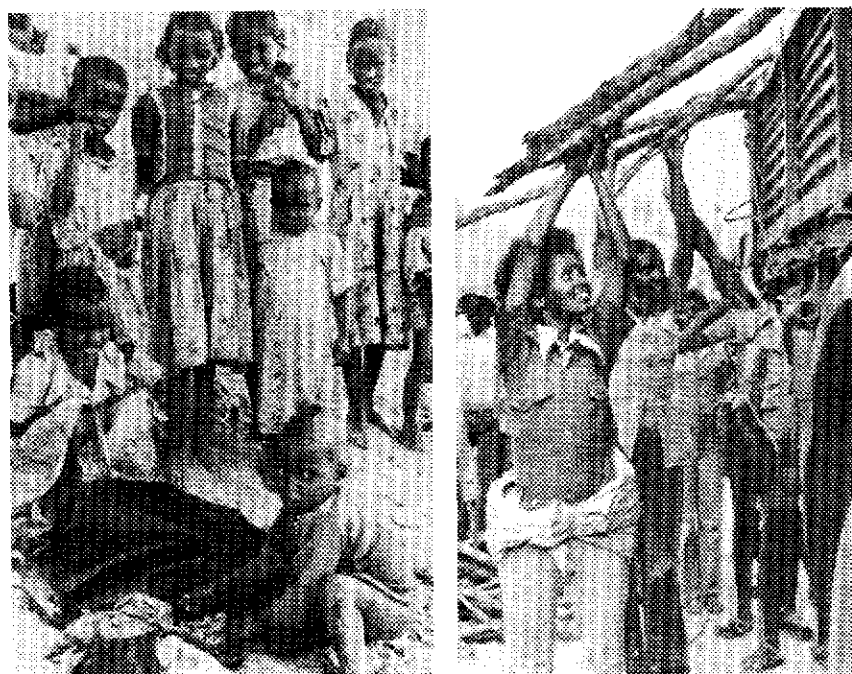
At present, all the peoples of the Horn of Africa desperately need peace to develop their economies. Eritrea does not need any more widows and fatherless children. The current crisis requires urgent assistance and concrete solidarity from the vast wealth of other African countries, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, who achieved political independence decades ago.

The struggle for liberation not only from political control by imperialism but also economic domination by the transnationals, must go on.

The Organisation of African Unity has shown itself to be worse than useless in the Horn of Africa. Because it serves the interests of global companies, such as Shell, De Beers and RTZ first, it has no interest in coming to the aid of countries such as Eritrea which is trying to develop true independence from imperialism.

The current attack on Eritrea is an attempt to destroy the Eritrean revolution which is such an inspiration to the masses throughout Africa.

The national liberation movement must be developed into a pan-African movement for social liberation from the transnationals. It must come to the assistance of the heroic Eritrean people.



*Photographs taken in the 1980s during the national liberation struggles of Eritrea and Tigray: left Eritrean children, right Tigrayan women fighters.*

## The birth of two nations

**T**he country we now call Ethiopia came into being in the 1890s when the Amharan leader Menelik annexed land to the south and east of Addis and the province of Tigray. The Amharans were the majority ethnic group, and they governed Ethiopia in one form or another until 1993.

King Menelik led a fight to prevent further advances by Italy, which had established a colony further north, in Eritrea. With an army made up of Ethiopians and Eritreans, Menelik defeated the Italians at the battle of Adua in 1896. While the Italian advance was halted, Eritrea remained in Italian hands until 1941.

After the war, Menelik's successor Emperor Haile Selassie was returned to power in Ethiopia by the British. He ruthlessly repressed an uprising in Tigray in 1943 with the help of British war planes. The Tigrayan language was suppressed, and the people were forced to speak Amharic in schools and courts. The best land was given to Amharic absentee landlords, and the abuse of the land caused soil erosion, and subsequently terrible famines.

When Haile Selassie was overthrown by the military under Colonel Mengistu in 1974, the Tigrayans hoped for better, but the situation worsened. There was no investment in roads, education or industry – all development was confined to the Amharic majority areas.

Eritrea meanwhile, had been forced into becoming part of Ethiopia through United Nations treachery, and its war of national liberation began. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the popular struggles in Tigray and Eritrea grew in strength, and offered each other mutual support. Tigrayans are one of Eritrea's largest ethnic groups.

In 1993 Mengistu was overthrown and the struggle for national liberation from outside influence succeeded. A Tigrayan-led government took control in Addis and the Eritreans, led by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, claimed their independence. The two countries pledged co-operation and peaceful development, with an open border.

# Paradise lost for Mauritian workers

This year marks the 30th anniversary of independence for the Republic of Mauritius. The island, which lies east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, was a British colony until 1968. It occupies a strategic location between Africa, India and Australia. Some hail Mauritius as an example of the marvels of democracy, but behind the parliamentary facade is a repressive regime of control by the ruling élite. Katherine Harcourt reports from the capital, Port Louis.

In December 1995, a two-party alliance swept to power in Mauritius, capturing every seat in the National Assembly and ending 13 years of rule by Anerood Jugnauth. The alliance between the Labour Party under Navin Ramgoolam and the MMM under Paul Bérenger, however, only lasted one year, and now the Labour Party runs the country on its own.

Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam wants to tailor his country's economy to suit the needs of globalised capital, at the insistence of the International Monetary Fund. Parliament has just agreed a Budget aimed at integrating Mauritius fully into the global economy. This includes privatising state assets such as Mauritius Telecom.

The past five years have seen the local currency, the rupee fall by up to 20% against currencies such as the dollar and the pound. Essential products, including staples such as rice, potatoes and cooking oil, have risen sharply in price. Inflation is presently running at around 6%. The average wage for manual workers is between 1,000-1,800 rupees (£25-£45) for a 40 to 48-hour week.

Few people outside the country are aware that, while there is a parliamentary opposition, real opposition is banned by law. Strikes are illegal, except when authorised by the Prime

Minister, demonstrations are only allowed at the discretion of the Chief of Police, and all abortions are illegal, even if the mother's life is at risk.

Atma Shanto is secretary of the Federation des Travailleurs Unis (FTU or United Workers Federation), founded two decades ago. It represents workers in different private sectors of the economy, such as the hotel, sugar cane, textile and metal industries. Its aim is to protect its members, not only to improve their working conditions, but also their housing and infrastructure problems and it has a growing membership.

Shanto explained to *Socialist Future* how successive legislation in his country has made strikes illegal: "The entire trade union movement, and other organisations in Mauritius, opposed the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) introduced during the late 1970s.

"Five years ago, under the Jugnauth regime, the IRA was changed into the TULRA (Trade Union and Labour Relations Act). This meant that the Prime Minister decides whether a strike is legal or illegal. The trade union movement has rejected this law, because in reality, it means the right to strike does not exist.

"If there is a deadlock between the unions and the employer, the trade union or the employer must declare an 'industrial trade dispute' to the



Atma Shanto, Secretary of the Federation des Travailleurs Unis

Minister of Industrial Relations. Within 21 days the Ministry must arrange a meeting to discuss conciliation. In most cases, the Ministry of Industrial Relations does not succeed in settling the problems. Then the Minister uses his discretion to forward the matter to the Industrial Relations Commission or the Industrial Tribunal."

The ban on strikes has been in effect alongside a five-year wage freeze, Shanto explained: "We have had a wage freeze in every sector of industry – including agriculture, food packaging, textiles, manufacturing and the hotel industry for over five years. There is no price control. Prices are increasing, making things very hard and tough for the population.

"When the Budget was

being prepared by the government, the FTU made several proposals to the Minister of Finance. We asked for a redundancy fund to be legislated, to provide for those who lose their jobs. Unemployment has grown over the past few years, mainly in the industrial sector, due to investors putting money into Madagascar and other parts of the world.

"After losing their jobs, people may be out of work for six months or a year. This creates hardship for their families and especially for their children. There is no unemployment benefit.

"The FTU has proposed that people should get something to survive. But this has not been taken into consideration by the government. The Budget has been passed but there is no provision for the unemployed.

"Unemployment is an acute and immediate problem. We



*Many workers are forced to live in home-made shacks*

don't know exactly how many people are unemployed. Unemployment bureaux have closed down, and people cannot register themselves. I believe there may be 30,000 out of work; others say 60,000 or even much more. This is out of a total workforce of around 400,000.

"People may work for a few days in one place, on a casual basis, especially in private sector enterprises. Many of those who work, do not work all year round, such as sugar cane workers.

"How can people survive? Every day we see a deterioration in social life: crimes, houses being broken into, people losing their belongings. This autumn people will suffer even more. The existing 8% sales tax will be replaced by VAT from

September 7, at a rate of 10%.

"Some foods will be exempted. But cooking gas, electricity, water and telephone charges will all have 10% VAT imposed on them. It will hit people in their pockets. There will be social disorder, the situation will get worse and worse. In September people will see the real situation in the country."

Last month the country's housing crisis flared up into a conflict between squatters, organised mainly by the Muvman Lakaz housing movement, and the Ramgoolam government. In a three-day confrontation, 79 houses were destroyed by bulldozers at Camp Saplon near the capital Port Louis. Women and children at first barred the bulldozers, but by the third day, a force of 120

police (including special riot police) razed the remaining homes. This provoked a riot which blocked the country's main motorway and lasted long into the night.

**T**he operation was so cruel that even some groups of police officers supervising the operation were observed to be weeping. Shanto went to Camp Saplon, on behalf of the FTU, to support the squatters. "These people", he said, "were forced by poverty to occupy Crown Land. Their homes had electricity, water, telephone connected up – all of it completely legal. The government simply sent out bulldozers.

"The decision to destroy the squatters' homes was made by the Minister of Housing and Environment. The Minister of Housing actually made a public declaration that it is the government's policy to evict people."

Shanto believes that the struggle against globalised capital requires new forms of organisation for workers in the Indian Ocean and Africa.

He was a delegate to the World Economic Forum as a workers' representative and has participated in workshops in countries such as Zimbabwe, along with representatives of trade unions from all over world.

"At these gatherings, I launched the idea that we should have a trade union regional platform first of all in Africa. But there has been no response from Africa. It will take some time, more than two or three years, but the situation is so serious, it will lead to acute social problems in parts of Africa, such as we have

already seen in Indonesia and other parts of South East Asia.

"In England, the election of Tony Blair was financed by the private sector, and the trade unions paid money for their own executioner. So he defends the interests of the private sector – the capitalists.

"Here in Mauritius most of the population are aware that all the political parties receive money from the private sector. On May Day, I challenged Bérenger, Jugnauth and the Prime Minister Ramgoolam publicly, to deny that they have taken money from the private sector.

"These people represent the private sector. That is why our fight, our struggle should be against political parties who take money from the private sector.

"During the 1995 election, Ramgoolam and Bérenger shouted from the rooftops that they were allies. Today the Opposition under Bérenger shouts about scandals, pulling skeletons out of the cupboard. Of course they should fulfil their role as an opposition party, to act as a watchdog, but they don't challenge the fundamental policies of the government."

Mauritian trade unions are currently preparing a National Protest Day for October 7, to protest against the imposition of VAT.

In the long-term, Shanto believes that the struggle against the effects of globalisation in his country requires the training of leaders, and to educate them to be conscious of the real situation.

"A new party is necessary that would take a revolutionary road, that will represent the political rights of workers in parliament," he concluded.

# The manic logic of global capitalism

By Robert Knight

**T**he latest estimates of the amount of money traded on the world's foreign exchange markets highlight the extent to which national economies and the governments which supposedly control them are increasingly subject to the globalising tendencies of capitalist production.

The *daily* volume of business on the world's currency markets stood at around \$1,500 billion in 1995, exceeding the *annual* gross domestic product of all but three of the world's economies. The currency speculators shift huge sums around the world in an instant through electronic networks, betting on the ability of national governments to offset the inescapable effects of the declining rate of profit.

In America, for example, during the last 30 years of globalisation and technological change, corporate profits declined in an almost direct relationship with the pace of the technological revolution. In the booming 1960s, profits were typically 11% or 12% of US national income, peaking at 14%. By the 1980s and early 1990s, they had declined to around 8% or 9%, and fell as low as 6%.

The insatiable drive for new sources of profit has created transnational corporations which continuously transfer investment capital from country to country, virtually unchallenged, in search of favourable conditions for production – compliant governments and ever cheaper labour.

During the early 1990s, co-operative alliances were formed rapidly between the American car giant General Motors and Toyota, Isuzu and Suzuki. Ford teamed up with Nissan and Mazda, Chrysler with Honda and Mitsubishi. A similar story

*“The world has reached not only the end of an ideology, but also the beginnings of the next great conflict over the nature of capitalism.”*

unfolded in the electronics industry. Advanced Micro Devices of California entered a joint venture with Fujitsu to make flash-memory chips in Japan and made another deal with the German computer manufacturer Siemens (which itself acquired the Scandinavian company Nixdorf).

Chip manufacturer Intel joined with Sharp, Motorola established co-production facilities with Toshiba and Philips, and even arch-competitors IBM and Apple forged a link. Both the major Japanese conglomerate NEC and the American IBM owned significant parts of the French computer company, Bull. Similar deals were struck in many other industries – not least in telecommunications where companies such as AT&T formed national and international relationships with others involved in cable, telephones, networks and then film-making, publishing, media, broadcasting and entertainment.

At the heart of this merger-mania is the

contradiction which drives and sharpens what William Greider\* terms “the central paradox” of capitalist production. “The basic dynamics of technological innovation – more for less – had the perverse effect of depressing returns per unit of production while simultaneously increasing the new capital required to invest in the new round of innovation. This squeeze left even the largest companies exposed to the threat of weak profits and capital shortages.”

In setting the scene for this highly-recommended 473-page study, Greider acknowledges that “the ghost of Marx hovers over the global landscape, perhaps with a knowing smile. The gross conditions that inspired Marx’s original critique of capitalism in the nineteenth century are present and flourishing again. The world has reached not only the end of an ideology, but also the beginnings of the next great conflict over the nature of capitalism.”

Each of the interrelated consequences of the “central paradox” is revealed through painstaking detailed study, and presented in vivid word-pictures showing how the temporary solution of one problem produces another of much greater proportions:

“The global system is astride a great fault-line: The wondrous new technologies and globalising strategies are able to produce an abundance of goods, but fail to generate the consumer income sufficient to buy them. This is true with or without America’s role as the buyer-debtor, but it becomes even more critical as America’s consumption power erodes further. Shipping high-wage jobs to low-wage economies has obvious, immediate economic benefits. But roughly speaking



it also replaces high-wage consumers with low-wage ones. That exchange is debilitating for the entire system.”

The effects have been seen most dramatically in South-east Asia, both in tumultuous growth and the sudden shock of collapse. There was no miracle or mystery about the average 7% growth per year over two decades achieved in Suharto's Indonesia. It was financed largely through the inflow of foreign capital attracted by the wage policy administered by the Ministry of Manpower. Brutal suppression of trade union activity kept wage levels in Jakarta at approximately 70% of the daily physical requirements. This unsustainable level of repression was necessary to offset the costs to international firms of the corrupt payments they made to the government agencies which effectively controlled access to the supply of already cheap labour. In this way, through enforced depressed wages, the workers paid for their own repression.

Greider's broad and detailed analysis of “the manic logic of global capitalism” reveals both the inner conflicts which give rise to the continuous and rapid revolutions in the realms of technology, economics, national and international politics, and through detailed accounts of personal visits, traces their effects in the lives of individuals who are both subject to these global processes and can become the decisive subjective factor in determining the future course of history.

“On May 10th, 1993, the worst industrial fire in the history of capitalism occurred at a toy factory on the outskirts of Bangkok and was reported on page 25 of the *Washington Post*. The official count was 158 dead, 469 injured, but the actual toll was undoubtedly higher since the four-storey building had collapsed swiftly in the intense heat and many bodies were incinerated. Some of the missing were never found: others fled home to their villages. All but fourteen of the dead were women, most of them young, some as young as thirteen years old.

“Hundreds of the workers had been trapped on upper floors of the burning building, forced to jump from third or fourth-floor windows, since the main exit doors were kept locked by the managers,



*Indonesian students celebrate the overthrow of Suharto*

***“Our wondrous machine, with all its great power and creativity, appears to be running out of control towards some sort of abyss.”***

and the narrow stairways became clogged with trampled bodies or collapsed...The Kader fire might have been more meaningful for Americans if they could have seen the thousands of soot-stained dolls that spilled from the wreckage, macabre litter scattered among the dead. Bugs Bunny, Bart Simpson and the Muppets, Big Bird and other Sesame Street dolls. What the initial news account did not mention was that Kader's Thai factory produced most of its toys for American companies – Toys R Us, Fisher-Price, Hasbro...as well as stuffed toys, slippers and souvenirs for Europe. The

grisly details of what occurred revealed the casual irresponsibility of both companies and governments.”

In the short time since the book's publication, profitability derived from the production of trainers has nose-dived, due largely to market saturation, although some economists try to explain this away as changing fashion.

This drop in profitability comes despite the fall in the production costs in China to less than £1 for a pair that sells for anything up to £100.

“In the factory zone outside Jakarta, the young shoe workers gathered around the table seemed stiff and shy, stealing glances at each other and at me, like embarrassed teenagers not sure they had dressed properly for the occasion.

“This was Sunday afternoon in the dim front room of a small house in the Tangerang district, an hour or so outside Jakarta. The industrial zone was where famous brands like Nike shoes, Arrow shirts and Levi jeans were manufactured, only these young men and women worked [for as little as \$50 dollars a month] in contractor factories with names like Sung Hwa Dunia, Nasa and Hasi.

“We are trying to organise the workers,” said Indera Nababan, the YAKOMA leader who had arranged the session for me. ‘This is a paternalistic culture’, he explained. ‘it teaches the people that all that comes from above is good, that you never raise your voice. Some do resist, but most of the workers are rural girls and unsure of themselves. It's only through experience that they learn they must take their destiny in their own hands.’”

From such small beginnings, within three years, and with the collapse of the South-east Asian economies, the political movement achieved sufficient mass and direction to overthrow the 30-year Suharto dictatorship.

Greider's book examines the revolutionary demands of commerce. His central message is that “our wondrous machine, with all its great power and creativity, appears to be running out of control towards some sort of abyss”.

Unlike many observers he understands that capitalism creates crises by the movement of its own structures. ⇒

# Self-determination for Kosovo Albanians

The desperation of the Milosevic regime, confronting internal opposition, the collapse of the Yugoslav economy and the refugee crisis caused by Serbians fleeing the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, lies behind the present conflict with ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Albanians make up 90% of Kosovo's population, and they have been provoked into an armed struggle against the Serbian state for self-determination. This has erupted after many years of political and economic repression, even before the Milosevic regime ended their very limited autonomy in 1989.

Unlike some of the other

nationalities of former Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Albanians were never given either full republican or autonomous republican status. Kosovo was only classed as an autonomus region of Serbia.

In June 1989 Milosevic turned from Stalinism to Greater Serbian nationalism in a bid to retain power as Titoist Yugoslavia disintegrated around him. He imposed a form of apartheid on Kosovo, to separate Serbs and Albanians. The Albanians were excluded from state institutions and were forced to create their own social structures, hospitals and schools and raise their own taxes to pay for them.

In Kosovo, the Albanians have long been the repressed

majority. In the period after World War II under Tito, the Serbs, like other nationalities, were unable to create a fully proletarian revolutionary socialist leadership.

Full autonomy for the Kosovo Albanians within Serbia would have been the best solution. But the situation today has gone beyond that, although the Americans are trying to impose that solution on both sides. The Greeks, Bulgarian and Macedonian governments are also against full independence. The Albanian government itself is calling on NATO to seal the Yugoslav/Kosovo border with Albania.

American policy seems to be to rein in the Kosovo Liberation Army and put it

under the control of the pacifist president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova and so strangle the armed struggle.

*Socialist Future* calls for:

- The revolutionary socialist overthrow of Milosevic;
- Self-determination for the Kosovo Albanians;
- Any new state structure in Kosovo or Albania must guarantee the rights of Serbs;
- For a new revolutionary socialist International in the Balkan nations;
- Full support to the Serbian mothers who demand their sons should not be sent to Kosovo;
- No support for Nato or imperialist interventions;
- Withdraw NATO troops;
- End all sanctions.

*Continued from previous page*

⇒ "As history confirms, every revolution gradually accumulates its own tensions and instabilities, the unresolved contradictions that deepen and eventually lead it to falter or break down. Likewise, this revolution is steadily creating the predicate for its own collapse. This book roams the world to capture instructive glimpses of the action, but its main purpose is to explore and explain the underlying dynamics of the revolution, the imperatives driving enterprise and finance and leading to great social transformations. These imperatives reveal, in turn, the inherent contradictions that are also propelling the world toward some version of breakdown, the prospect of an economic or political cataclysm of unknowable dimensions."

Greider repeatedly illustrates how the reality of the world economy contradicts the classical free economic theory which guides the actions of the decision-makers in national governments and international agencies such as the World Bank and

*"The central economic problem of our revolutionary era, not so different in nature from the previous industrial revolution, is an excess of supply..."*

International Monetary Fund.

"The central economic problem of our revolutionary era, not so different in nature from the previous industrial revolution, is an excess of supply – the growing, permanent surpluses of goods, labour and productive capacity inevitably generated by technological innovation and the free-running industrial globalisation.

"The supply problem is the core of what drives the destruction and instability – the accumulation of redundant factories as new ones are simultaneously built in emerging markets, the mass unemployment and declining wages, the irregular mercantilist struggles for market entry and shares in the industrial base, the fierce contests that lead to co-operative cartels among competitors and other consequences."

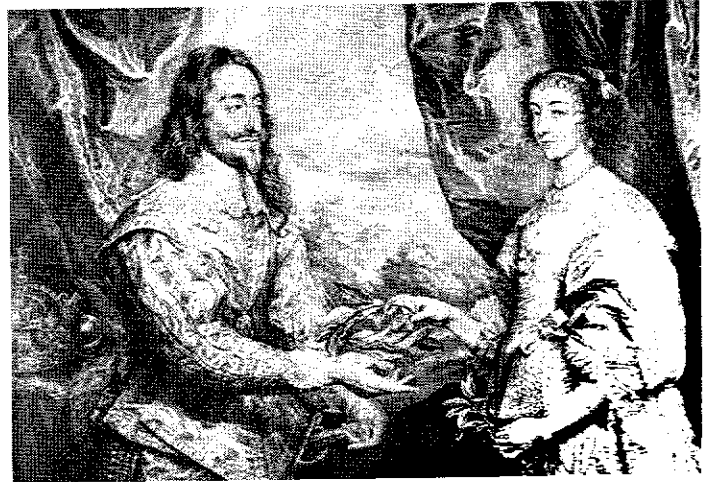
Unlike most commentators who are overawed by the size and complexity of the global crisis, Greider goes beyond the predicted breakdown to consider how a new concept of society can be established.

"The power of global finance includes an extraordinary ability to create its own version of reality and persuade others to believe in it," says Greider. His book is a powerful weapon against its pervasive influence and a valuable inspiration in the struggle to end it.

*\*One World, Ready or Not - the Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* by William Greider, Penguin Books, £9.99

# The English Revolution in prints

by Corinna Lotz



**A**n imposing icon of Queen Elizabeth I in a pearl-studded outfit with a high lace collar, opens the British Museum's display of prints from 17th century England. Not too surprisingly, the first-ever single sheet engraving in this country was in fact of the Virgin Queen.

Through these 214 prints a century of revolution unfolds, in which feudal absolutism was destroyed forever. A rich variety of images – political satire and propaganda, portraits, landscapes, views

of the city of London, aspects of science such as botany, pin-ups and ornaments – were made between 1600 and 1700.

A wave of refugees from the Netherlands first developed engraving techniques in England. Prints were used for anti-Catholic propaganda and during the Civil War. The print as an art form caught on. Engravings and etchings became a major commercial operation by the end of the century. A new technique called mezzotint was invented by John Smith who became an international celebrity.

In this wonderful exhibition we can see the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Senses, and the Seven Liberal Arts. The Four Seasons of the year are shown as quaint figures of men and women. Engravings were used to illustrate books or hung on walls; others were pasted on to wooden plates, on to which cheese and fruit were placed.

Leading figures of the age are depicted in revealing portraits, including Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel; Sir William Walter, a Parliamentary General; Prince Rupert; John Evelyn the famous diarist; revolutionary leader Oliver Cromwell and various Kings and Queens.

After the restoration of the Monarchy, portraits seemed to try to make up in size

and style their forever lost pre-eminence. Huge engravings from the 1670s portray Kings and Dukes as romantic heroes.

As Antony Griffiths of the British Museum writes in the exhibition catalogue: "The middle of the 17th century was a watershed in British history... In politics, the break is marked by the Civil War, the execution of Charles I, and the Commonwealth. The Restoration in 1660 may have seemed to bring back the old order, but the events of 1688 made it abundantly clear that the centre of power had changed decisively.

"Henceforth whoever dominated Parliament would control the country. This was the beginning of the party system and modern politics. These years also saw a scientific, technological and commercial revolution which was symbolised by the establishment of the Royal Society and the Bank of England." *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603-1689*, is on view at the British Museum, London WC1 until 20 September.

## Pictures

Left *Oliver Cromwell with a Page* engraving after Robert Walker (1651-1653); right *Charles I and Henrietta Maria* engraving after a painting by Van Dyck, 1634.

*"It is good that the effort has been made to record the life of Gerry Healy, a revolutionary Marxist who had a massive impact on the working class socialist movement in Britain and internationally."*

Ken Livingstone, MP

### Gerry Healy:

#### *A revolutionary life*

by Corinna Lotz and Paul Feldman

Introduction by Ken Livingstone.

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380 pages paperback.

£13.50 including postage.

Send cheques or postal orders made out to: **Lupus Books** at P.O.Box 942, London SW1V 2AR

# Korean car workers face massive cuts in pay



**H**a Sang Soo sits cross legged on the floor, slowly sips coffee and calmly explains how Kia Motors slashed his earnings by more than two-thirds by cutting out overtime and bonuses. The three-room apartment in Seoul, Korea, is small, but contains a large TV, stereo and two computers – testimony to the relative affluence of unionized Korean auto workers.

Until December of last year, Ha earned 21 million won – the equivalent of \$18,000 per year as an assembly line worker at Kia's factory near Seoul, enough to buy his company's least expensive car with about five months' wages.

But Asia's economic crisis hit Korea hard. Kia went bankrupt and eliminated overtime and all bonus

payments. Today Ha earns just 6.1 million won – the equivalent of \$5,000 per year for a 42-hour work week. Several thousand Kia workers have been laid off with more layoffs expected.

His wife Yoon Hae Kyung used to run a small graphic arts business, but it collapsed because her customers could no longer afford to pay.

"We can't survive on my wages anymore," says Mr. Ha. "We're in debt for the first time in our lives and don't know how we'll get out."

Millions of Korean workers like the Ha family are facing layoffs and poverty as the country undergoes its worst economic crisis since the Korean War.

Unemployment nearly tripled in just three months and may hit 10 per cent this year.

"They think only workers should sacrifice themselves to revive the country."

The Korean government and conglomerates (*chaebols*) are asking that workers bear most of the pain for the crisis by accepting layoffs and pay cuts. "This crisis comes from the government and from the *chaebols*," says Mrs. Yoon. "But they think only workers should sacrifice themselves to revive the country."

At the Daewoo assembly line in Pupyong, south of

Seoul, 9,000 blue-collar workers produce 60 cars an hour in a modern, automated plant. Newly-installed robot welders throw sparks in the air as compacts and subcompacts move down the line.

"There haven't been any layoffs here yet, but everyone is waiting for the other steel-toed shoe to drop."

Korean conglomerates like Daewoo traditionally guarantee lifetime employment. So the country has almost no social safety net to deal with the current crisis. There's no welfare system, no homeless shelters and only six unemployment offices for Seoul, a city of 12 million people.

*This article first appeared in the United Auto Workers of America magazine.*

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