

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 174 August/September 2003

(unwaged 30p) 50p



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price
£1

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PALESTINE: FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

The decision of the Palestinian resistance organisations to agree to a temporary and conditional truce with the Zionist state marks a new phase in the Intifada, one which holds potential danger for the Palestinian people. On the one hand, it may allow a regroupment of the resistance and the further isolation of the treacherous Palestinian Authority (PA) government of Mahmoud Abbas. On the other, it may provide an opportunity for Abbas with his imperialist and Zionist supporters to split the liberation movement and railroad through the Bush 'roadmap'. One thing is certain: the Zionists have not responded to the ceasefire in any meaningful way; they continue to build settlements, seize land for the apartheid wall on the West Bank, and hold thousands of political prisoners. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

The PA and the resistance forces had been negotiating a ceasefire for many months. Each time they were close to agreement the Zionists would organise some act of provocation. This time was to be no exception. The backdrop was the Aqaba summit in the first week in June where President Bush sought to lend authority to his roadmap by meeting with Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas himself was only too keen to demonstrate his and the PA's commitment to the roadmap. His speech on 4 June, with its call for the abandon-

ment of the Intifada and his reference to terrorism, incensed all wings of the resistance. Abdel-Aziz Al Rantisi of Hamas declared that Abbas 'through giving up the right of resistance and calling it terrorism, gave the green light to Sharon and his army'. The Al Aqsa Brigades wing of Fatah denounced Abbas' failure to demand the release of political prisoners, particularly that of Marwan Barghouti, or to call for an end to the siege of Arafat in his Ramallah headquarters. The following Sunday Abbas was supposed

to meet Hamas leaders in Gaza; in the end he did not go because his safety could not be guaranteed.

Zionist intent was demonstrated immediately following the end of the summit when occupation forces assassinated two Hamas leaders near Tulkarm on 7 June. The following day, fighters from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Brigades jointly attacked an Israeli military post in Gaza, killing four soldiers. The three freedom fighters also died in the gun battle. On 10 June, Zionist helicopter gunships fired rockets at a car in which Hamas leader Al Rantisi was travelling in Gaza. Although Al Rantisi escaped with minor injuries, three civilians were killed. Later that day another Zionist rocket attack on Jablaya in Gaza killed three members of the same family including a 16-year-old girl. The following day Hamas responded as everyone expected: a suicide attack in Jerusalem killed 17. Zionist missile attacks on Gaza followed: 11 were killed on 11 June, including Hamas leader Tito Massoud, and eight more on 12 June, including another Hamas leader, Yasser Taha, together with his wife and three-year-old daughter. The

same day the Zionist cabinet announced it would target Hamas political leaders. Announcing that it would respond in kind, Hamas spokesperson Ismael Haniyah said that the Zionists 'have been fighting Hamas for many years and Hamas has grown stronger and stronger... we will strike against the occupation as long as it continues to exist on our national soil'. Meanwhile the US weighed in on the side of the Zionists. White House spokesperson Ari Fleischer declared that 'the issue is not Israel, the issue is not the Palestinian Authority, the issue is the terrorists who are killing in an attempt to stop the peace process. The issue is Hamas, the terrorists are Hamas'. However, this statement ignored the seven assassination attempts on Hamas leaders in a five-day period, and the death of more than 40 Palestinian civilians in the week after the Al Aqaba summit.

With the Zionists demanding that the PA take action to 'dismantle' Hamas and thereby initiate civil war amongst the Palestinian people, negotiations on a ceasefire took on a renewed importance. Whilst the PA demanded that any ceasefire by the

resistance be unconditional, the resistance organisations were not prepared to follow this path to surrender. As Al Rantisi put it, 'Israel and her guardian ally, the US, are trying to impose on us a ceasefire that is worse than a surrender. We won't accept that. They want us to stop the resistance, but make no clear commitment to stopping Jewish terror and Nazi-like brutality against our people'. Meanwhile Zionist provocation followed provocation. On 25 June, Sharon told his ministers to ignore the settlement freeze stipulated by the roadmap: 'It is possible to build in the settlements, but people should not talk about it, and dance around every time a building permit is given. They should build without talking'. At the same meeting the cabinet rejected attempts to obtain a ceasefire saying that Abbas should 'accept the responsibility to carry out serious counter-terrorist actions against the terrorist organisations'. Two days earlier, a Zionist death squad had assassinated Hamas leader Al Qawasmeh in Hebron and arrested 130

continued on page 3

Welcome...

The storm of 'shock and awe' may have ended, but instead of calm the world has been gripped by uncertainty. The lightning strike delivered by British and US forces on Iraq has been replaced by low intensity war. Satellite and computer information systems remain relatively ineffective when Iraqi intelligence is passed from house to house and urban guerrilla warfare picks off members of the invading armies day after day.

Already the US government is spending \$3.9 billion a month in Iraq, about twice the sum anticipated. And it's not as if the US government has money to burn. Iraqi resistance has meant that investment on war has not yet yielded the benefits which the US and Britain expected. The oil companies, Exxon, Shell and BP may be itching to get control of Iraqi oil, but they are too afraid to enter such an uncertain and hostile environment (see page 8). The US government's budget deficit (spending over their income) is soaring to \$455 billion and the increasingly fragile state of the US economy is another serious source of uncertainty. After a \$200 billion tax cut to the rich, the Bush administration has launched a war on the poor at home to provide the funds for its war on the poor abroad. Already, one in five people in the US under 65 has no health insurance, and now what little provision is available to assist the poor is under attack (see page 7). New immigration legislation will officially award immigrants with the status of little more than slave labourers (see page 6).

Bush is not the only warmonger facing uncertainty. Prime Minister Blair may have grinned his way through accusations that his government 'sexed up' the dossier on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but the death of chief scientist Dr David Kelly at the MoD wiped the smirk off his face. The whole bitter row between Blair's unelected cronies, like Alastair Campbell, and the BBC has revealed cracks within the British ruling class. At the same time it has so consumed the mass media that no one remembers the elusive weapons of mass destruc-



PLA women guerrillas in Nepal

tion which have failed to show up in Iraq (see page 9).

In this world of uncertainty there is one reality of which we can be sure. Wherever there is oppression and exploitation, there will be those who fight for freedom and justice. Wherever there is imperialism, there will be resistance, from Palestine to Colombia, from Nepal to Cuba.

In Palestine, despite the imposition by the US of the so-called roadmap to peace, and the cease-fire called by the liberation movement, the only certainty is that without justice for the Palestinian people, the Intifada (uprising) will continue (see pages 1 and 3). As Ahmad Saadat, general secretary of the PFLP, has explained, any peace deal that does not include the right of return for Palestinian people forcibly removed from their land by Zionists, will never create peace in the Middle East (see page 3).

In Nepal, where the people are among the poorest in the world, the 234-year feudal monarchy is under serious attack by the communist-led People's Liberation Army, which now controls 80% of the country. President Bush recently gave \$20 million in military aid to the Nepalese regime under the guise of fighting terrorism, but it is the example of the PLA organising the people to set up schools and hospitals in the rural areas of Nepal that the US really fears (see page 6).

In Colombia resistance to poverty, exploitation and oppression is certain to continue despite Plan Colombia which sees massive US military aid to the fascist govern-

ment of President Uribe. In return for imperialist funds, Uribe has put Colombia up for sale to capitalist corporations (see page 16).

Bush's hit-list of countries in the 'axis of evil' is part of his attempt to create a world of fear and uncertainty, to force the world's people into submission to the rule of capitalist might. Nowhere is resistance to imperialism and militarism stronger than in Cuba. Black US political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal has described the US as launching verbal bombs at Cuba, in order to warm up the world to the idea of military attack, following the procedure used in the war on Iraq. Mumia defends the recent measures taken in Cuba to combat the counter-revolutionaries organised and directed by the US government and the right-wing Miami Mafia to undermine Cuban socialism (see page 5).

Resistance to imperialism challenges us to take sides. It is not acceptable to take up the pose of proudly 'independent' (and theoretically abstract) socialism at a time of crisis for capitalism and suffering for the world's poor majority. The critical critics will end up supporting the oppressors just as George Orwell did (see page 12) in the past and Professor Mike Gonzalez of the SWP does now (see page 14).

What form of resistance to imperialism should socialists take in Britain? In this issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* we take up the discussion about the role of socialists in parliamentary politics with an Australian comrade in relation to the Scottish Socialist Party's recent gains in the local elections (see page 10).

As Che Guevara said during the Vietnam war: 'There are no borders in this struggle to the death. We cannot be indifferent to what happens anywhere in the world, because a victory by any country over imperialism is our victory, just as any country's defeat is a defeat for all of us.'

Join the Revolutionary Communist Group to fight imperialism from within the belly of the beast. Fight for a better world.

Don't just get angry, get active!

IMPERIALISM AND WAR

Imperialists try to intensify pressure on Iran

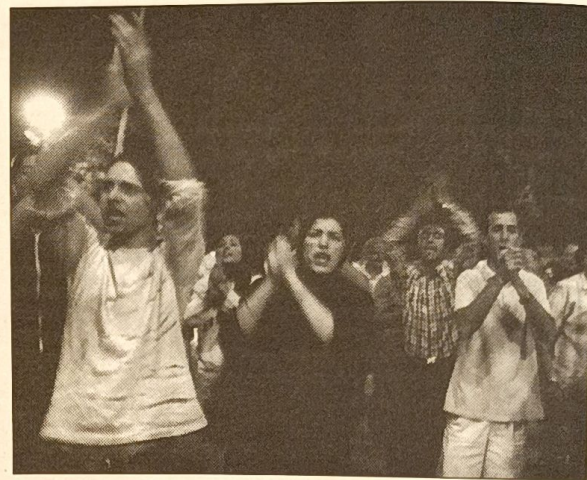
BOB SHEPHERD & LOUIS BREHONY

During a recent trip to Tehran, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw continued to ratchet up imperialist pressure on the Iranian regime, calling on it to agree by September to sign the 'additional protocol' demanded by the June meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This would give inspectors from the IAEA greater rights to conduct snap inspections of so-called suspect sites. Failure to meet this deadline would, according to Straw, jeopardise a European Union trade and co-operation agreement currently being negotiated. His visit came shortly after widespread student protests had taken place against the regime in Iran.

The student demonstrations had begun on 10 June at Tehran University in opposition to the privatisation of the university system but had quickly taken on an anti-regime character. The protests were militant, violently confronting the forces of the state, the police and Hezbollah (religious militia of the government) and spreading to at least eight other major cities. Slogans on the demonstrations included 'Down with the Islamic Republic of Iran', 'Death to Khamenei' (the main religious leader within Iran), 'Death to Khatami' (the reformist President) and 'Death to Rafsanjani' (the hard-line ex-president of Iran). All accounts of the protests point to the fact that many others joined the students on the streets. The Tehran Chief of Police told the media that of the 520 protesters arrested by 22 June, 'only ten of them are students, the rest are ruffians!' Student leaders said though that more than half of those in custody were students, and 18 of them were women.

Support for the demonstrations also came from satellite TV stations based in Los Angeles in the US, run by Iranian exiles, primarily supporters of the Shah who fled Iran after the revolution of 1979. Los Angeles is home to the biggest Iranian community outside Iran and the base for TV stations broadcasting into Iran. Satellite dishes are illegal in Iran but this does not stop the rich middle class in Tehran from receiving the broadcasts. On 15 July, US General Paul Vallely stated on the right-wing news channel Fox News that 'We are trying to influence the protests with our satellite transmissions over there' (emphasis added). He also said that Iran was a threat to US allies in the region, specifically Israel and Saudi Arabia. Blair and Bush have also expressed their support for the protests, the latter calling the demonstrations, 'the beginning of the people expressing themselves towards a free Iran'.

The student protests represent a growing disillusionment with President Khatami, who was elected in 1997 on a plat-



Students demonstrate in Tehran

form of reforming the Islamic state and has always had a base of support in the universities. He used student protests in 1999 to strengthen his position, even though they were brutally suppressed by Hezbollah. This time one of the slogans has been 'Protection or resignation - that is our final word'. For the students and their allies to take the movement forward in the interests of the mass of the Iranian people, the poor and oppressed, they will have to have a clear anti-imperialist position in opposition to the voices of the US exiles and their rich Tehran followers.

Iran's nuclear programme

On 2 June, the imperialist G8 conference issued a statement that 'we recognise that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery poses a threat to us all... Together with the spread of international terrorism, it is the pre-eminent threat to international security'. It added that 'we will not ignore the proliferation implications of Iran's advanced nuclear programme. We stress the full importance of Iran's full compliance with its obligation under the Non Proliferation Treaty' - that is, not to develop nuclear weapons.

The 1979 Islamic government inherited two partially-completed nuclear reactors at Bushehr supplied by Germany to the Shah regime as well as a nuclear research base. The power reactors were damaged severely in the 1980-88 war with Iraq but nuclear research continued, augmented by a new research centre in Tehran, under the supervision of the IAEA and the US, which supplied an extra nuclear reactor. In 1995, however, the Clinton administration imposed an absolute ban on trade with Iran to 'prevent its support for terrorism and pursuing weapons of mass destruction'.

In 1997 newly-elected President Mohammed Khatami took steps to improve US-Iran relations. Subsequently, in early 2000, the US relaxed its sanctions, but not before it had demanded further reductions in the price of Iranian oil. Iran continued to try to improve rela-

tions with the US, for instance by supporting military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite this, some Washington officials have in the last two years accused Iran of supporting Al Qaida, ignoring the fact that, according to Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Salih, Iran has extradited six Al Qaida militants to Yemen.

IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei reported to the IAEA June meeting that 'Iran has failed to meet its obligations under its safeguard agreement with respect to the reporting of nuclear material... The number of failures by Iran to report the nuclear material, facilities and activities in question in a timely manner as it is obliged to do... is a matter of concern'. In response the US, supported by Britain, Australia and Canada, pushed for a resolution that called for 'unconditional and comprehensive inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities by the IAEA'. When this failed to get a majority, the IAEA called on Iran to sign the 'additional protocol'.

El Baradei has now met with President Khatami and other Iranian officials and agreed that senior IAEA experts would remain in Iran to discuss outstanding technical issues. However, in a move which has alarmed both the US and Israel, Iran recently tested a Shahab-3 missile. Its range of 810 miles would enable it to reach Tel Aviv. In a fit of imperialist hypocrisy, Blair and Sharon expressed their joint 'concern' at this development. The fact is that Israel has perhaps 200 nuclear warheads is well-known, together with missiles that can fire these warheads 1,500 miles - but the imperialists do not question the Zionists' right to own such weapons of mass destruction.

The student demonstrations may have died down for the moment. But the Islamic regime is clearly incapable of meeting the demands of the students, and the imperialists will exploit this to put even more pressure on the Iranian government. However, given their problems in Iraq, they will be in no hurry to repeat such a military adventure.

website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk
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PALESTINE: FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

continued from page 1

in a sweep through the city. Meanwhile Zionist 'goodwill' gestures had been shown to be completely bogus. An agreement to dismantle ten settlement outposts was met with a great fanfare: within days they had all been re-established and others built besides.

Yet the resistance finally agreed to a ceasefire on 29 June. Why was this? Firstly, the resistance acknowledged the very difficult international situation following the end of the onslaught on Iraq. Hamas states: 'What happened in Iraq sends a clear American message to the Arab and Palestinian arenas namely that whoever stands in the face of American policy and determination will be wiped out...the message also warns resistance factions that there is no use in persisting in resistance and confronting the Zionist-American project in the region and Palestine and that there is no longer any real backer to those factions'. This means that 'through imposing the roadmap, the American administration with the participation of the Zionist entity wish to invest in the Arab weakness and ineffectiveness in a bid to halt Palestinian resistance and quell the Al Aqsa Intifada'. Secondly, the Palestinian comprador bourgeoisie is determined, with US and Zionist support, to eliminate the resistance altogether. Hamas, in common with the rest of the resistance, has no illusions as to the character of the Mahmoud Abbas government. Yet the resistance has avoided as far as possible direct confrontation with the PA, aware of how this could develop into civil war and disaster for the Palestinian people. Instead, the resistance has decided to put Abbas on the spot: either deliver what the roadmap promises will follow with the end of violence, or step aside.

A ceasefire was therefore inevitable and, despite its rhetoric, this time the Zionists decided not to obstruct it and to allow Marwan Barghouti to broker negotiations from gaol between Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Brigades on the one hand, and the PA on the other. On 29 June, Hamas and Islamic Jihad agreed to a three months' truce conditional on an end to all Zionist aggression, including incursions and assassinations. Their demands also included an end to the siege of Arafat, the release of all political prisoners, a halt to the encroachment on Islamic and Christian holy sites, and an end to housing demolition and land destruction. Fatah declared a six months' truce the following day, additionally demanding an immediate halt to settlement construction and the building of the separation wall. The PFLP decided not to be party to the truce but announced it would not breach the consensus.

Since the ceasefire

As the resistance expected, the ceasefire has exposed once again the treachery of the Zionists and the PA. Firstly, there has been no end to Zionist closures of the major cities on the West Bank. Land seizures continue, as does settlement activity. The bulldozers — 50 of them at any one time — continue to build the separation wall. There has been no significant release of political prisoners (see box). Marwan Barghouti has just received an extra six months' solitary



Arafat remains under siege

confinement. Arafat remains under siege: on 12 July, the Zionist Chief of Staff Moshe Yalon said that Arafat should either be killed or banished. Other incidents in breach of the ceasefire include:

- **1 July:** Israeli troops entered Tulkarm and killed Nimr Al Jayoushi; two days later they assassinated Mahmoud Shawwar in Qalandiya;
- **4 July:** An invasion of Jenin resulted in several arrests. The next day, approximately 100 dunums of agricultural land were confiscated from the residents of Bakka Ash-Sharkiya and a curfew was imposed on Hebron. North of Jenin, in Marj Bin Amer, Israeli troops destroyed a water network in addition to razing arable land;
- **7 July:** Seven men were arrested during an invasion into Qabatiya. Troops also invaded Ramallah and arrested two people, and two more in Harbatha Al Misbah near Ramallah;
- **8 July:** In Hebron settlers, protected by soldiers, took over a house and confiscated five dunums of Palestinian land for settlement expansion;
- **9 July:** Burkin near Jenin was invaded and in the ensuing shooting a Palestinian was killed and others arrested. In Jenin four international peace activists were arrested in a demonstration against the confiscation of more Palestinian land in the area;
- **10 July:** Six people were arrested in Nablus; six more were arrested in Durra near Hebron.
- **12 & 13 July:** Two Palestinian women were wounded by gunfire in Khan Yunis in separate incidents;
- **20 July:** Israeli occupation forces confiscated 283 dunum of land south-east of Khan Yunis and effectively annexed it to the Morag settlement.

The focus of resistance activity has been to secure the release of the nearly 6,000 political prisoners who are currently held by the Zionists. The PA has been forced to take up their cause by huge demonstrations that have taken place in both Gaza and the West Bank — yet its efforts to secure any concessions from the Zionists have proved fruitless. Although the media made great play

of the release of 121 prisoners on 3 June before the Aqaba summit, 100 of them were administrative detainees whose detention orders had less than 19 days to run, and a further 20 had been held without charge or detention order. This meant that only one political prisoner was released! Although the Zionists say they will release a further 350, 215 of them are on illegal detention orders, and no prisoners are included whom the Zionists claim have 'Jewish blood on their hands'. Zionist Transport Minister Avigdor Lieberman called for Palestinian prisoners to be drowned in the Dead Sea: none of his colleagues rebuked him for this. On 7 July, 900 prisoners supported an appeal to the PA not to accept any distinction between those who had shed Zionist blood and those who hadn't: 'How about the thousands of Israelis who murdered Palestinians, including women and children? Is Jewish blood more precious than our blood?' They also demanded to be recognised as prisoners of war.

Meanwhile, emboldened by the truce, PA security minister Mohammed Dahlan is offering \$6,000 for each rifle surrendered by the resistance and a similar amount as bounty to freedom fighters who join the PA security forces. He has received \$50m from the US and EU for this purpose. In addition, the PA has started to search for and seize resistance weapons. This is leading to further confrontations. Two members of PA 'death squads' were badly injured in a clash with Popular Resistance Committee (PRC) volunteers in Gaza. The incident followed an attack on Mohammed Al-Simiri, a member of the Qassam Brigades who was shot in the leg and then beaten up; he has since lost an arm. Hamas this time was able to prevent a more violent confrontation between PRC and PA security forces. On 18 July, members of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades kidnapped the PA governor of Jenin, Haider Ershaid, after accusing him of sending 'gangsters' to assassinate one of their members. A Fatah statement the previous week had accused Ershaid of corruption and of stealing money allocated to martyrs' families. This political divide was also evident in Bethlehem, where the Fatah movement attacked the rector of the

PFLP on the two-state solution

On 20 May 2003, the radical US journal *Fightback!* published an interview with the general secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Ahmad Saadat. Saadat is illegally held in Jericho in joint US-British custody. In the course of the interview Saadat spoke of the right of return of Palestinian refugees and the impossibility of a two-state solution:

'The right of return for the Palestinian refugees is a legitimate and central Palestinian right, and the most important part of the Palestinian liberation scheme. When the PFLP insists on its commitment to the right of return, it simply insists on its commitment to the Palestinian national agenda that was approved in numerous meetings of the Palestine National Council.

Furthermore, the upholding of the right of return is not, as some intellectuals and academics have argued, an impractical position, representing an inability to understand political realities and the composition of local, regional and international forces.

On the contrary, this commitment to the right of return is the by-product of a scientific and objective assessment and reading of the historical struggle between the Palestinian national liberation movement and the Zionist colonial movement. Any solution that ignores the right of return as a basis for a permanent peace between the Palestinians and the Jewish settlers who forcibly expelled the indigenous people of Palestine and colonised the land may produce short periods of quiet and calm, but will not eliminate the objective conditions that produce the



conflict between our people and the Zionist movement. (...)

Some have argued that the current reality is pushing towards a two-state solution — an Israeli state next to a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders. Of course, this solution involves ignoring the right of return, or replacing it with reparations.

We in the PFLP argue that forcing such a solution on the Palestinian people will not end the struggle. The two-state solution that is based on the racist notion of "a national, homogeneous Jewish state" totally disregards the fact that over 1.3 million Palestinians — 20% of the entire population — live inside "Israel". This will continue to permit the causes of conflict to remain inside Israel. Therefore, the solution based on two states is a myth.

Our people's quest, like any other people, is a democratic and free society. This democratic state — the only state form that can produce social and economic development — cannot be led or dominated by the parasitic and comprador bourgeoisie, but by a unity of the popular forces that share structural interests in national independence, return to the homeland, popular democracy and economic development. This is, simply, our view in the PFLP, and the view of the national, democratic liberation movement.

Fightback! magazine is available at <http://www.fightbacknews.org>

Al Quds University, Sirri Nesseiba, who has proposed in a paper co-written with a former Zionist intelligence official that the right of return for Palestinian refugees be renounced as part of a final settlement. On 25 July, Palestinian prisoners from all parts of the resistance condemned a statement by Fatah leader Sufyan Abu Zaida who agreed on Zionist television that Palestinian prisoners who had blood on their hands should not be released.

In early July the PA conducted a poll which found that 91% of Palestinians expect the Zionists to undermine the truce; nearly a quarter of those surveyed were against it anyway, more than those who thought it would be a success. With the PA failing to get the Zionists to deliver, the truce is already in difficulty less than a month after its declaration. On 15 July, Abu Haid, an Islamic Jihad commander in Gaza declared 'We are still exercising patience and allowing a chance but we could not continue enduring on a unilateral basis. We did not table our initiative to extricate Israel from its security, military and economic ordeals...we tell the Zionists that if they wish to safeguard their citizens' lives then they have to accept our conditions and the first and foremost is freedom for our prisoners'. The Hamas and Al Aqsa Brigades position is no different: 'We will not allow ourselves to be deceived again. We learned many lessons from the bitter experience of the Oslo years. We shall not fall into the same trap twice' said Al Rantisi, also in mid July. The future of the ceasefire remains very uncertain, and the possibility of confrontation between the liberation movement and the PA is very real. *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* stands with those who continue to fight the Zionist occupation.

**Free all political prisoners!
End the land seizures, End the closures!
Victory to the Intifada!**

Palestinian political prisoners

According to official Zionist figures, as of 8 July:

- 5,892 Palestinian prisoners are being held in Israeli prisons or detention camps. Of these, 351 are children under the age of 18, some 35 are under 14, 75 are women, and 433 have been held since before the Oslo agreements.
- To date, only 1,461 have been put on trial, whilst 786 are under administrative detention. This means that they have not been charged with any crime — illegal under international law. Detention orders may last up to six months and can be renewed without limitation. Hence Khalid Jaradat has been held continuously in this way for 12 years.
- Approximately one in five Palestinians have been detained at one time or another; 8,500 were arrested alone during February-March 2002. 2,000 children have been detained since the start of the Intifada.

Asylum

Free the Ay Family!

NICKI JAMESON

As FRFI goes to press, the Kurdish Ay family, who have been detained by the British immigration authorities for a year, are awaiting the hearing of the final legal challenge to the decision to deport them to Germany.

The case in the House of Lords will centre on how much the courts should defer to the Home Office when it comes to deciding how far the aim of preserving a 'strong immigration policy' should be allowed to override the right to family life, as described in Article 8 (1) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Clearly Home Secretary David Blunkett, who is instructing the government's lawyers in this case personally, would like the courts to rule that he has the right to deport anyone he wants to regardless of the effect on their family life. Although the judgement is unlikely to say this in so many words, recent immigration case law has increased the right of the Home Office to make its own decisions on whether its interference with human rights is 'proportionate', and has decreased the power of the courts to overturn decisions and substitute their own assessment of the facts of the case.

Behind this legal gobbledygook are the real life figures of Yurdugul Ay and her four children: Beriwan (14), Newroz (13), Dilovan (12) and Medya (8). A year ago they were removed from their adopted home in Gravesend in Kent, and sent to the other end of Britain to the Dungavel Detention Centre in Scotland. The children were taken from their friends and their school and imprisoned, forced to pursue their education as best they can from within the detention centre. At the same time, their father, Salih Ay, was deported to Germany, and from there straight to Turkey. Salih and Yurdugul had fled Turkey in 1988, where, as supporters of the Kurdish nationalist movement, they were persecuted by the racist Turkish state. They



Dungavel detention centre

settled in Germany, where their children were born. The children speak Kurdish, German and English, but not Turkish. In 1999, fearing the German state was about to send them to Turkey, the Ay family were forced to flee again and sought refuge in Britain.

The Ay family's treatment by the British government is appalling, and no amount of legal argument can ever cover this up. Four children from eight to 14 years old have been imprisoned for the past year for no crime whatsoever, and, when the 'legal process' finally runs out, will face the prospect of forcible deportation to a country they do not know, whose language they do not speak, where people of their ethnic origin, speaking their language, have been ruthlessly persecuted for decades.

Members of the Scottish Parliament have criticised the conditions in Dungavel and the detention of children there. But this criticism does not go far enough. No asylum seekers should be detained or imprisoned. It is not a crime to flee oppression and seek sanctuary in another country. No one should be faced with deportation to a country where they fear persecution, whether this deportation takes place via a so-called 'safe country' or not.

All immigration laws made

in capitalist countries are by their very nature racist and class-based, and are designed to permit those people needed by capitalism into the country, while keeping out anyone who is not of use, whether they have been persecuted or not. Not one of the series of legal challenges in the Ay family's case has at any stage been able to confront the ruling class consensus that a 'strong immigration policy' is an absolute necessity and perfectly legitimate grounds for interfering with the rights of children to live with their parents in a safe environment, free from fear, and to be educated and cared for. That argument has already been lost in the courts and can only be won back on the streets, by campaigning at a grassroots level against all detentions and deportations, and against Britain's disgusting, racist immigration laws.

The Ay Family campaign can be contacted c/o National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 131 Camberwell Rd, London SE5 0HF; tel: 020 7701 5197; or at Haringey Kurdish Community Centre on 020 8880 1804. Letters of protest about the family's detention and treatment can be sent to Home Secretary David Blunkett or to the Minister for Nationality and Immigration, Beverley Hughes, at the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT or faxed on 020 7273 3965. (Quote Home Office reference APX/99/953.)

Scotland

Sectarianism in Scotland

MARK SUIBHNE

On 17 June Glasgow City Council set the ground for an attack on political freedom of speech outside Glasgow's four main football stadiums. Under new street traders' licensing conditions the sale of items containing any 'design, insignia or words which have a political, racial, religious or sectarian content' will be banned. The catch-all ban was concealed in an apparent clampdown on sectarianism. In reality, as subsequent actions of the City Council show, it is an attack on all forms of progressive politics.

There exists in Scotland a significant antipathy towards Catholicism. This is linked to a deep-rooted intolerance of Irish culture. The division is mirrored in Scottish football, where supporters of the two dominant teams, Celtic and Rangers (the Old Firm), are divided politically and religiously. Celtic was originally set up by Marist priests as a charity in order to raise money for the poverty-stricken Irish community in the East End of Glasgow. As a result it has always claimed the allegiance of descendants of this community and Scottish Catholics in general. At the other end of the city, Rangers was until the early 1990s an exclusively Protestant club, which refused to employ Catholics on or off the pitch. Irish politics are ex-

pressed in these divisions with Celtic fans supporting the Republican movement, and Rangers' identifying with Ulster Loyalism. Both sets of fans have been involved in violent clashes for most of their history so that some lazy commentators have suggested that sectarianism is merely a by-product of Glasgow's football culture. Such crass analysis is designed to let the real culprits off the hook. Sectarianism in Scotland has always been a top-down phenomenon. With church leaders, the legal profession and senior police officers all getting in on the act, 'Scotland's secret shame' was a subject no one dared to touch.

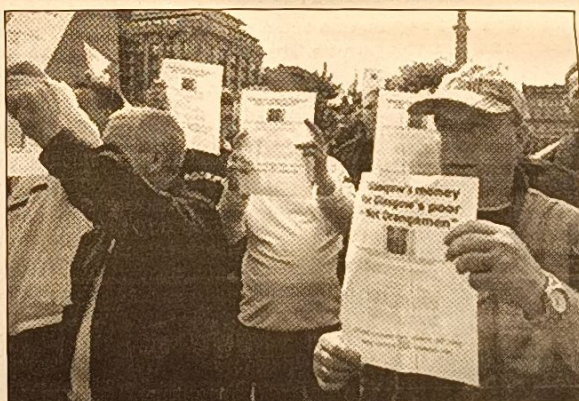
In the mid 1990s, this all changed when the Chief Executive of Glasgow Celtic Football Club, Fergus McCann, launched the 'Boys Against Bigotry' campaign. Celtic supporters accused the club of attacking their Irish political roots and handing the media a new stick with which to beat them and the Irish community in general. But Celtic had done wonders for their image as far as their shareholders were concerned, and in doing so had set a new precedent. More were sure to follow in this dishonest trend, and Cara Henderson certainly did.

After her friend Mark Scott was murdered in a brutal sectarian attack, the privately educated young woman from an affluent suburb of Glasgow got

concern, and clarification was not on their agenda. In one of the new 'exclusion zones' outside Celtic Park, there can be bought flags and scarves proclaiming support for Irish Republicanism. From scarves bearing the name of James Connolly to tributes to the 'H Block martyrs' (the ten Republicans who died on hunger strike in 1981) there are many items on sale which could be deemed 'political'. It is almost certain that such items will be included in the ban. It is not so clear if scarves calling on Scotland to 'rise up and be a nation again' will be banned from Hampden, the national stadium, or slogans of British imperialism such as 'Rule Britannia' from Ibrox. Outside Ibrox and Hampden, retail giant Asda has large supermarkets: will the music of artists like John Lennon or The Clash be banned, or magazines such as *The Economist* and *Private Eye* be taken off the shelves due to their 'political content'?

The whole issue is farcically unclear, and cannot possibly be handled fairly. The second largest political party in Scotland is the Scottish National Party. The SNP has been known to leaflet Hampden in the past, as has the Scottish Socialist Party. Palestinian solidarity groups have been active around Celtic Park where they raise money for medical aid to Palestine by selling green and white kaffieh to largely sympathetic supporters. There is a political fanzine *Tiofaidh*. Ar ló, written by Celtic supporters, which 'endorses the political strategy of Sinn Féin'. FRFI is also sold outside football grounds. With the convenor of Glasgow City Council's licensing committee stating that unlicensed traders will also be targeted, such legitimate political activity is under serious threat. More serious is the threat that all Glasgow could soon be covered under the new conditions.

What gives the lie to the City Council's concern about sectarianism was its award of a civic reception to the Orange Order on 23 July. Sectarian bigots from all over the world were in Glasgow for the Orange Council of the World Triennial meeting which took place on 25 July. Members of the Scottish Irish community called a picket to highlight the council's hypocrisy. FRFI alone of the Scottish left attended. Protesters held up placards stating 'Not in my name' and 'Glasgow's money for Glasgow's poor'. Glasgow contains 78% of Scotland's most deprived areas with 42% of the city's population living in an area of deprivation. A Glasgow male has a life expectancy of five years less than his Edinburgh counterpart. In a recent league table showing the UK's ten poorest parliamentary constituencies, the first three and the seventh are in Glasgow. Of the 20 most deprived council wards in Scotland, 16 are in the city. This did not prevent the Labour council from splashing out to reward an international band of bigots and showing that sectarianism is alive and well in the Scottish Labour Party.



Demonstration against the civic reception for the Orange Council of the World Triennial meeting

Extradition

One-way extradition to the USA

NICKI JAMESON

At the end of March David Blunkett paid a four-day visit to the US, during which time he signed a new extradition treaty, publicly described as having the purpose of 'simplifying transatlantic extradition rules'.

In practice the new treaty means that a British citizen or resident wanted in the US can be extradited with no evidence needing to be produced of any case against him or her. The States can simply say 'we want that person', and he or she will be arrested and dispatched. To head off a possible outcry, Blunkett made clear that there

would still be a block on sending British citizens to face the death penalty. What was not made clear, however, was that the new treaty is not two-way traffic. Due to constitutional protections, US citizens wanted in Britain will still have to have the case made out against them prior to extradition.

Lotfi Raissi, an Algerian commercial pilot resident in London, was arrested by the British authorities after 11 September 2001 on the basis that the US believed he helped train the pilots who flew the planes into the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. There was no evidence against Mr Raissi, and after seven months

uncertainty, five of which were spent incarcerated in top security Belmarsh prison, the court released him. Following his court appearance, Mr Raissi demanded an apology from both the US and British governments and threatened legal action if they did not provide it.

Under the new rules, he would have been treated even worse, and instead of languishing in Belmarsh, would have been sent off to a similarly secure prison in the US, to await a show trial, possibly without access to legal representation or full knowledge of the charges against him. This fate might still await him, as the new treaty has the power to be

implemented retrospectively.

There was virtually no publicity at the time this treaty was actually signed, in contrast to the public fanfare that greeted the signing of the US/EU Extradition Treaty in early July. Presumably the British government does not want to draw attention to the fact that, although most European countries have reciprocal arrangements with one another that allow extradition without prima facie evidence, no European country other than Britain was prepared to put its name to a one-sided deal whereby the US could spirit away its citizens and residents to face the legal lynching that is 'US justice'.

herself a degree at Oxford University before returning and setting up anti-sectarian group Nil by Mouth. The campaign, described as 'naïve' by the more genuine, grassroots Campaign Against Sectarian Attacks, was fronted by Cara herself. Praised for her bravery in tackling the issue, Cara and friends were awarded huge grants from the Lottery, both Old Firm clubs and both churches. The campaign, however, was nothing more than a soundbite provider for the Scottish media. Within a few years Cara gave it all up to go back-packing around the world.

Glasgow council's ban gives powers to Strathclyde Police to decide what is and what is not 'political, racial, religious or sectarian'. The council has offered no indication as to what guidance, if any, they will give to the police. Of the 12 councillors on the licensing committee, only two have responded to e-mails and letters expressing

EU steps up hostility to Cuba

On 5 June, the European Union published a communiqué outlining a series of punitive measures against Cuba. This followed months of escalating hostility, initiated in April by Spain's request for the EU to postpone indefinitely any consideration of Cuba's application to join the Cotonou Convention, a trade agreement between the EU on the one hand and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries on the other. Cuba's application had been made with the unanimous backing of the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries.

The EU did not even bother to directly inform Cuba of its most recent measures – the Cubans were left to learn of them via the foreign press. In its declaration, 'the EU laments that the Cuban authorities have ended their de facto moratorium on the death penalty'. In other words, the EU condemns Cuba's act of self-defence against US-backed terrorist attacks while keeping silent, for example, about the 71 executions that took place in the United States last year or the hundreds of prisoners, including Europeans, the US is holding, in violation of human rights, in the illegally occupied Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

Four measures have been announced so far:

- To limit bilateral high-level government visits: However, in the last five years not one EU head of state has visited Cuba and only two of its 15 foreign ministers have done so. Other visits were cancelled to avoid upsetting Washington, such as the planned trip of Britain's then Minister of Energy, Brian Wilson, in May. Meanwhile, in 2002 alone, 663 high-level delegations from the rest of the world visited Cuba.

- To reduce the participation of member states in cultural events: This shameful policy victimises artists, intellectuals and ordinary people, both European and Cuban, by depriving them of positive cultural exchanges. Once more Spain led by example, cancelling its delegation's participation in Cuba's 'Traces of Spain' festival.

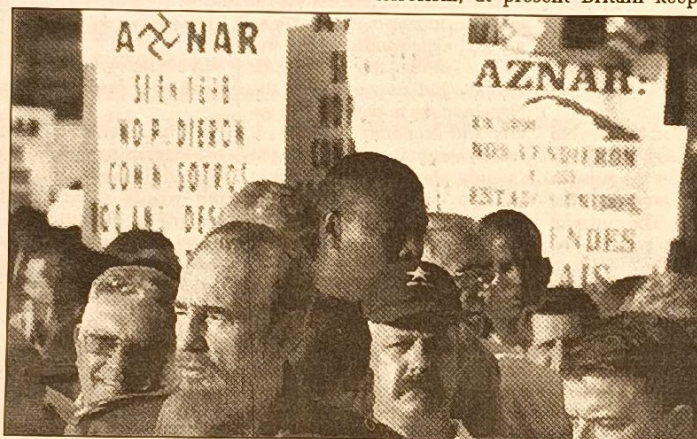
- To invite Cuban dissidents to national holiday celebrations: This is a first step towards turning European embassies in Cuba into allies of the US Interests Section's subversive work. The Spanish embassy has openly done so, failing to meet its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Meanwhile, the UK ambassador in Havana invited well-paid opposition figures to the Queen's birthday party in London in April.

- Re-examine the EU Common Position on Cuba: This will further intensify anti-Cuban policies introduced in 1996 to limit credit and finance to Cuba during the Special Period. That initiative, forced through by Spanish Prime Minister Aznar, resulted in the EU joining the US over the Helms-Burton Act, which tightened the US blockade.

The Italian government has already suspended development aid of almost 40 million euros. The French and German governments have also announced a review of economic cooperation.

It's not surprising that Spain, despite major investment in Cuban joint ventures, is leading EU hostilities against the Cuban Revolution. Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar is a right-wing, passionately anti-communist ideologue who since Nov-

ember 1995 has maintained excellent political and personal relations with the Cuban American National Foundation, is aware of its plans of sabotage, gives it financial support and through the Spanish media promotes propaganda against Cuba.



Fidel Castro with demonstrators against the role President Aznar is playing in the attack on Cuba

Aznar represents a section of the Spanish ruling class which sees its economic interest as lying in alliance with the USA. After the disputes over the war on Iraq between the main imperialist powers, the US and Europe, led by Germany and France – 'Old Europe', as Donald Rumsfeld called them – the Cuban issue is seen as a convenient way to cool down the increasing rivalry. Spain and Italy play an important role in encouraging the EU to join in the US government's attacks against Cuba, as proof, in the words of Cuba's foreign ministry, 'of their contrition and repentance over the differences that arose over the war in Iraq.'

The British ruling class is divided on the issue. On the one hand, those sections represented by Blair and the Labour Party are keen to use the issue to display their fervent loyalty to US foreign policy. In a debate in the House of Lords on 26 June, Baroness Crawley, speaking for the government, firmly refused to comment on the subversive activities of the US Special Interests Section in Havana and dismissed evidence of the so-called dissidents' actions as 'conspiracy theories'. Cuba's potential would remain 'unfulfilled' until 'its political and economic systems are reformed'. She later added: 'The EU calls for freedom of assembly and expression, free media and economy and freedom for all political parties.'

On the other hand, Britain has been looking to increase its influence within Cuba through development aid and joint ventures. At a time when its neighbours are so clearly allying themselves to US policy, British capitalism is seeking to carve out an important role for itself in pressuring Cuba to adopt capitalist reforms. In the debate, British Lord Moynihan called for 'increased co-operation through business activity'

'the hope that free enterprise in business could have an effect in the long run' to force Cuba to open its markets and resources to international plunder.

Juanjo Rivas

Mumia Abu-Jamal defends Cuba

Self-defence is no offence

Once again the Bush administration, speaking through a complacent media, is launching verbal bombs at a foreign country. This time it's Cuba.

In this age of media megamergers and sole superpower status, the media sometimes is a safe signal of underlying public policy. In other words, word wars sometimes become shooting wars...Therefore, while the media is most often used as a megaphone to amplify and project the voices of the wealthy and politically powerful, rarely does this same media honestly inform Americans of contemporary history.

Because of this, millions of Americans lack the context through which to analyse and understand the basis for confrontation between states. They're conditioned by the press to look at complex political and social issues through the lens of simplistic personalities. Therefore we speak of 'Castro's Cuba' in the same breath as 'Saddam's Iraq'.

This is silliness. Conflicts between states are not personal, they're economic. The US supported a brutal Batista dictatorship there for almost a decade before Cuban rebels drove the regime out. The US, which loves to boast about its 'human rights campaign', has supported the most brutal butchers and dictators in the world...

What is a human right? The right to an education? In the United States, over 20 million people are functionally illiterate. Higher education is available for those who can afford it, but for millions of people college is far too expensive. In Cuba, the right to an education is free, from Kindergarten to a doctoral degree.

Education for millions of children in American inner cities is a scandal...Buildings are literally falling down. Windows are broken. Teachers are ill-paid and badly prepared. For millions of children in the wealth-

est nation on earth, education is an unobtainable illusion.

What about the human right to health care? In the US you can obtain excellent health care if you can afford it. Cuba, meanwhile, boasts the largest number of doctors per capita on earth. They provide medical care to people all around the world. Indeed, there are more Cuban doctors working in other countries than the UN's World Health Organisation. Millions of men, women and children in this country have no medical insurance and no real prospect for decent medical care.

And what about the human right of freedom? When the racist regime in South Africa was waging terrorist attacks on the so-called frontline states in the region...Cuba sent her soldiers thousands of miles to fight the South Africans and stop them at Cuito Cuanavale. That battle proved a turning point, and paved the way for the demise of the apartheid government, the unbanning of the African National Congress and the freedom of Dr Nelson Mandela.

Whom did the US support during this conflict? The racist government in South Africa. Where was American concern for the human rights of millions of Africans, both inside and outside South Africa?

That said, this commentator opposes the use of the death penalty. It is barbaric and oppressive. But there is a world of difference between how the Americans have used it, as a legalised form of lynching, and how Cuba has used it to resist US economic, political and media terrorism. The US uses it to repress, Cuba uses it in self-defence. The US uses it to preserve white privilege, Cuba to survive as a state against US aggression.

Mumia Abu Jamal, former Black Panther, is a political prisoner on Death Row in the USA

US forced to back down on hijacks

Cuba's determined stand against hijackings and illegal immigration, which have been actively fomented by the US, is paying off.

The most recent hijacking on 15 July of a Gaviota 16 vessel with passengers aboard was resolved swiftly and diplomatically by both countries. In an unprecedented move, the US authorities stopped the boat and handed it back to Cuba's border patrol on 17 July. On 20 July, after Cuba informed the US authorities that it would 'use the legal resources within its reach to exercise clemency' in sentencing, the hijacker was returned to Cuba to face trial. Next

day, James Cason, head of the US Interests Section in Havana and arch-enemy of Cuba, took the equally unusual step of issuing a statement assuring would-be hijackers that if they succeeded in reaching the United States they could expect to be detained, receive lengthy sentences if found guilty, and become ineligible for residence in the United States.

The US has also hurriedly brought to trial on 10 July Adermis Wilson Gonzales, who hijacked an AN-24 Cubana plane carrying 51 passengers on 31 March this year. Wilson now faces a minimum 20-year sentence.

Cuba has welcomed these latest

moves, calling them 'a valuable contribution by the US authorities to combating vessel and aircraft hijackings for illegal emigration with the use of violence and force...that have cost so many lives.' The very real threat posed by hijackings had been horrifically demonstrated only days before, when three armed hijackers took over a fishing ship on 14 July and threatened to kill their hostages. A 10-year-old boy was shot in the head before the hijackers appear to have turned their guns on each other, leaving two dead and the third seriously wounded by the time Cuban authorities boarded the ship.

Cuba's response to hijackings, including the execution of three convicted hijackers in April, has forced the US – if only temporarily – to halt this part at least of its illegal and subversive work.

Cat Wiener

Cuba develops HIV treatment

The Global Fund to fight AIDS was set up by the UN in 2001 to raise \$10 billion per year from rich countries to subsidise treatment for the poor – it has so far only received pledges for \$3.2 billion. The bullying tactics of the pharmaceutical industry, intent on profit at all human cost, and their battle against countries producing their own generic brands of medicine, is the main barrier to these drugs being available and affordable.

Thanks to early action, education and social awareness, Cuba has the lowest number of people with HIV/AIDS in Latin America – 0.05%

of 15-49 year olds. Despite the economic difficulties of the Special Period, Cuba has prioritised the development of their biotechnological industry and now Novatec Laboratories of Cuba are manufacturing the anti-retroviral drugs used in triple therapy treatment, currently producing five anti-retrovirals and working to raise that figure to 13. They are currently producing all the drugs needed to treat the 500 Cubans who require them and are aiming this year to produce enough for 1,500 people. Cuban-produced medication used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS is already being used in Paraguay and

Venezuela and registration procedures are underway in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Vietnam and Guinea.

True to Cuba's socialist principles, all those in Cuba with HIV/AIDS receive drug treatment completely free of charge. The idea of making a profit out of health is anathema to Cuban revolutionaries. The contrast with the millions in oppressed nations facing an early death from AIDS and the steady elimination of their families, communities and whole populations is stark.

Hannah Caller



Communist revolution on top of the world

ANDREW ALEXANDER

The workers and peasants of Nepal are on the road to victory against the 234-year-old rule of the reactionary feudal monarchy. The seven-year insurgency of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), under the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)), now controls over 80% of the country. It has control of all 75 districts, confining the government to the larger cities. Throughout the districts the CPN(M) has established elected people's committees that are coordinated at the central level by United Revolutionary People's Council. In January of this year the PLA was set to take the capital Kathmandu but instead offered to enter into talks with the Nepalese government both so that the revolution could reach its natural conclusion without any more bloodshed and also to avoid the immediate wrath of the United States.

This popular war is now entering a crucial stage, one described by Mao as 'the most trying period but also the most pivotal one'. The CPN(M) brought to the negotiating table some very modest reforms such as a guarantee of education, an accountable, elected government free from foreign meddling and the dissolution of the monarchy. None of these have been met, not even the last point

which should have been easy considering that Prince Dipendra shot dead most of his family two years ago. But though individuals may die the system runs deep and lives on.

Since last October King Gyanendra has seized executive power by dissolving the Council of Ministers and has appointed a new pro-monarchy Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. This has caused a split amongst the Nepalese ruling elite about how best to deal with the insurgency. Some would like to see more conciliatory moves towards the CPN(M) in the hope of defusing the uprising by attempting to incorporate 'revolutionary' elements into the parliamentary system. This has not happened, partly due to the general unwillingness of the government for dialogue and partly due to the absence of an opportunist trend in the CPN(M).

President Bush recently granted \$20m in military aid to the Nepalese government claiming that Nepal has 'conditions that Al Qaida would find favourable in its search for safe havens'. The US government has also added the CPN(M) to its list of 37 so-called 'terrorist organisations'.

The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) has now been equipped with the latest in rifle and tank technology. Furthermore the RNA has instituted terror tactics. Recently the government has initiated a medical outreach programme as a front to terrorise

the rural population and to gain intelligence. RNA soldiers go into a village under the guise of being doctors carrying little more than aspirin. They interrogate the inhabitants about the whereabouts of PLA fighters, what they look like, etc. 4,000 civilians have been killed in the last year alone.

This number is minimal, though, compared with the number who die each year from starvation and disease. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with amongst the lowest life expectancy and literacy rates anywhere. The CPN(M) has, in conjunction with the PLA, made huge strides in overturning the suffering and inequality that the feudalistic government has created. The people have become active in political decision-making at the local level through their committees, schools have been built and women have been encouraged to take a more important role in all spheres of life, including fighting in the revolution itself.

Such genuine democracy is an anathema to US and British imperialism. At the height of the people's war Britain, a long-time beneficiary of cheap Nepalese Gurkha mercenaries, hosted an international consortium that included the USA, Russia, China, India, Australia and several European countries with a view to aiding Gyanendra in defeating the CPN(M). Shortly afterwards the British Minister for Trade Mick O'Brien under-

lined Labour's role in defending British imperialism when he declared that 'the Maoists will not be allowed to win'.

Why do the US and British governments consider such a poor country as Nepal to be a threat? Why expend so much time, money and energy against the revolution?

There are two main answers. First, even though Nepal itself is not an economic or military threat to western imperialism, the revolution is an ideological threat. As Cuba poses an alternative in Latin America to destructive neo-liberal policies, so the Nepalese revolution represents a similar alternative to its neighbours – in particular India.

In fact if we are to understand western interference in Nepal it is in its relation to India that we must turn. The government of India has in recent years become increasingly reactionary and expansionist in nature. Because of this, the vast majority of the Indian people, like the Nepalese, are in deepening poverty and economic crisis. As a result a significant communist (mainly Maoist) movement has begun to develop. If the working class of India were to see the achievements of its small neighbour's revolution, this would encourage their movement. This would be a big problem for the imperialist countries. Nepal is a feudal country with a population of only 23m and with few resources. India on the other hand is a capitalist country, a population of 1,000 million, with a relatively highly developed infrastructure and industry, many natural resources and a huge labour force.

There is also another important reason why the US in particular would like Nepal under its control, and that is China. Nepal borders the Tibetan plateau and for it to be under Washington's thumb would help cement its geo-political position against its biggest potential economic threat. As with Afghanistan and North Korea, Nepal has ended up in the middle of the US's attempts to encircle China.

The Nepalese revolution has shown the way forward for the world's oppressed and in an internationalist spirit of solidarity the CPN(M), in direct defiance of imperialism, has declared its intention to plant the red flag on Mount Everest as a beacon of hope, of socialism, of revolution on top of the world for all humanity to see.

'A legalised form of slavery' US guest worker proposal



DALTON HILLIARD

'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.'

An immigration reform proposal gaining ground in the United States would embrace the words inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty – provided that the masses remain poor and tired and do not huddle in the country for long.

The Border Security and Immigration Reform Act of 2003, proposed to the US Congress in July by Republican Senator John Cornyn of Texas, would create what is euphemistically being called a 'guest worker' programme: undocumented immigrants would be permitted three one-year stints of low-wage servitude in the United States, before being forced back to their countries of origin.

The proposal contains no general amnesty for current resident immigrants, as President George W Bush promised during his campaign for the presidency. Guest workers will have no opportunity for naturalisation or permanent residency.

While assaulting the interests of immigrants and the working class, the guest worker proposal strikes an elegant balance between two currents of reaction: on one side, the racist aspiration to close the US borders to brown and black people, and on the other, the dependence of domestic capital for profitability on unorganised, inexpensive immigrant labour.

Under the 'guest worker' plan, racists need not worry about the 'browning of America', because the roads to citizenship or permanent residency are explicitly closed. Concerns about dark skinned evil-doers are soothed, since the newly created Department of Homeland Security will 'keep tabs' on guest workers by requiring them to reapply annually and demonstrate 'good behaviour' to maintain their status.

Primarily, however, the proposed legislation is a gift to the sector of domestic capital that depends on cheap immigrant labour to sustain profitability. The huddled masses, as Senator Cornyn points out, 'make a tremendous contribution to our economy...The United States depends on the labour that these immigrants provide.' From the perspective of profitability, the less 'these immigrants' are paid, the more 'tremendous' their contribution will be. There are approximately 10 million undocumented immigrants in the

United States, the most oppressed segment of the working class, making up close to 8% of the total US labour force and accounting for extraordinary profits for the corporate sector.

The representatives of domestic capital, in particular the service industries, have long been pushing for 'guest worker' legislation, to increase the nation's supply of cheap labour, while undermining a recent trend toward unionisation among immigrants. As David Bacon of *The Nation* has argued, 'Immigration laws have less to do with who gets in than with their working conditions when they get here.' The three-year limitation on 'guest workers' is intended to create a permanent source of temporary workers, who will be prevented from settling or developing the lasting relationships and communities that are crucial to successful organising. The legislation has been designed as a counter-attack to the recent, and partially successful, drives of some unions to organise undocumented workers. For those immigrants who do attempt to organise during their stay as guest workers, the proposal's annual reapplication and 'good behaviour' requirements will provide wide latitude to the state for punishment by deportation.

When immigration reform was originally proposed during the 2000 presidential election, the 'guest worker' provision was one portion – capital's portion – of a wider and more balanced plan, which was to include a significant concession to the increasingly important Latino vote: a general amnesty for undocumented residents, the first such amnesty since 1986, when three million immigrants were legalised. The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the deepening economic crisis, however, have changed the political landscape, making the guest worker proposal politically feasible, but not any sop to the Latino vote.

'It seems to me like a legalised form of slavery,' observed Mario Brito, an organiser of undocumented immigrants in Houston, Texas. In that regard, the new proposal finds itself at home with a long history in the United States of the ruling class welcoming the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, on terms calculated to profit from their exploitation. As in the past, there is one known remedy: organising among the most oppressed segments of the working class to oppose the interests of capital and the capitalist state.

Ireland:

Direct rule and prison struggle

BOB SHEPHERD

As British imperialism continues its direct rule over the north of Ireland, the hopes and dreams the middle class invested in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) seem light years away.

Sinn Féin continues to call for the Labour government to set a date for elections to the Assembly while the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), Sinn Féin's erstwhile partners in the peace process, are virtually split down the middle over whether to continue their limited commitment to the process. Three

UUP MPs, Martin Smyth, Jeffrey Donaldson and David Burnside have resigned the party whip in the House of Commons over the issue. Smyth is the party president and Donaldson the vice-president. David Trimble's attempts to expel them from the party were blocked by a legal challenge.

At the present time, anti-agreement Unionists are in the ascendancy and would certainly claim a majority of the Unionist vote if elections to the Assembly were held now. In the present political situation direct rule seems to be the only option for British imperialism.

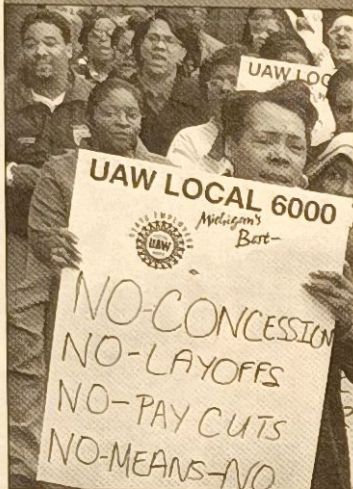
The political impasse that the GFA has reached has not stopped the Northern Ireland Office and Paul Murphy, the Secretary of State, from continuing with their criminalisation policy against Republican prisoners sentenced after the implementation of the GFA.

This policy, which denies the political character of their offences, involves an attempt in Maghaberry Gaol to force the integration of Republican, Loyalist and non-political prisoners within the same wing. This came to a head on 27 June when the prison authorities attempted to put Republican

prisoners in the same cells as Loyalists. Prisoners staged a 24-hour roof top protest against prison conditions and started fires in one of the wings.

The response of the prisoners to continuing abuse and degrading treatment has been to escalate their protests. Relatives have said that prisoners have wrecked their cells and that some have smeared excrement on their cell walls.

All those who oppose British imperialism's continued occupation of the north of Ireland should support the campaign of Republican prisoners at Maghaberry for political status.



State employees protest against cuts in Michigan

US imperialists make poor pay for crisis and war

This is the hopeless unpredictability and anarchy of a crisis-ridden capitalism. Budget priorities are to pay for imperialist war and repression and to line the pockets of the wealthy. The cost of terrorising legislation was \$37 billion in 2002, and estimated at \$92 billion for 2003. Some \$400 billion in expected revenue evaporated due to the recession which cut tax receipts. The other \$375 billion went to the wealthy and to pay for imperialist adventures: \$200 billion handed out in tax cuts to the rich – about \$35,000 each; some \$90 billion to pay for the attack on Iraq, with the remaining \$85 billion divided between increased budget for the Pentagon, some crumbs of temporary unemployment benefits and assistance to the states.

Who is going to pay for this? Part of the money comes from increasing borrowing – taxing Americans in the future and creating further problems for US capitalism. But that's not the only way. With the economy going nowhere, an imperialist war whose monthly costs have doubled, and the huge budget deficit, the Bush administration has launched a war of massive proportions on the poor to help pay for all this.

This involves directly rolling back workers' gains to help increase profits and weaken resistance to reorganisation and restructuring. The Bush administration has redefined workers' eligibility for overtime pay to exclude some eight million workers. Health and safety regulations protecting workers have been drastically revised. The only direct assistance to prevent unemployment has been given where Republican votes are at stake, such as in the steel industry.

Federal government cuts

Another prong of the attack undermines various government programmes in health, education and welfare. Part of the administration's solution is to convert federal programmes from automatic entitlement to 'block grant' programmes: under current federal legislation money must be available to spend on the programmes and nothing else. In contrast, 'block grant' is handed over to the states to spend as they wish over seven years. The danger is that the money will be abused or squandered.

The US has no national health service. 44 million people, about 20% of the population under 65, have no health insurance. These people only get health care when they are sick enough to drag themselves to hospital emergency rooms to wait for many hours. They have no preventive health care. For example, the first time a poor or immigrant pregnant woman will see a doctor is when she delivers, with no prenatal care at all. This is the background to the Bush administration's cuts, which target those on the borderline of the health-care system.

The Veteran's Administration (VA) provides free health care to millions of ex-servicemen and women, invariably from the working class. The VA bud-

As US imperialism continues its war against the Iraqi people, back at home it is waging a war against workers, the unemployed and those in poverty. The unemployment rate is 6.4%, the highest since 1994. The Federal Reserve Bank has lowered the federal funds rate to 1% – the lowest for 45 years. At the same time borrowing is at extraordinary levels. It is estimated that the federal government deficit will climb to \$455 billion, compared with a forecast surplus of \$334 billion, just two years ago. STEVE PALMER reports.



Sacramento, California: All across the USA there have been demonstrations against public sector cuts

et is being reduced, leading to cuts at the VA hospitals. The Bush administration's budget included a 7.7% increase (to \$27.5 billion) for VA medical care. However, the budget increase is based on fee increases of a \$250 annual enrolment fee for veterans earning \$24,000 annually or more, and increased outpatient primary care and prescription charges for higher income veterans. It is also based on limiting access to services. Cuts directed at middle income veterans include: denying at least 360,000 veterans access to health care; \$250 annual premiums; increased pharmacy co-payments; increased (30%) primary care co-payments; and increased waiting time for a first medical appointment. According to Veterans of Foreign Wars (equivalent of British Legion), more than \$2 billion is needed to meet the basic level of quality health care.

There are only two general federal health programmes: Medicare, for the elderly; and Medicaid, a means-tested entitlement programme financed by the states and the federal government, that provides long-term medical coverage for about 47 million poorer people. The Medicare budget is being cut by \$300 billion over the next ten years, and doctors are threatening to drop recipients from their rolls because the new payments will not cover their costs. The Medicaid budget is now \$256 billion and accounts for 43 per cent of all grant funds transferred from the federal government to the states. Medicaid is being combined with the Children's Health Insurance programme and the Disproportionate Share Hospital programme, which subsidises hospitals with disproportionate numbers of Medicaid patients and uninsured patients. This is going

to pit the elderly and the young against each other in the competition for health services. While undocumented migrants are usually excluded from these programmes, some states have gone even further: in Colorado, even legal immigrants are being blocked from Medicaid.

The 'Head Start' early child development programme for preschool children in low-income families is also being cut over to block grant. After-school programmes lose \$400 million. Schools in the 'No Child Left Behind' programme will have to qualify for funds by satisfying 'standardised testing', forcing children to leap through the testing hoops, at the expense of developing creative skills and abilities. Naturally it will be the schools with a high proportion of black and immigrant children who will have difficulty with the culturally-biased tests and suffer the sanctions.

State budget cuts

On top of the federal budget deficit, the 50 states face combined budget deficits of approximately \$100 billion. The shortfall represents 15-18% of total state spending. During the 1990s states used the temporarily increased revenues from the bubble economy to finance long-term tax cuts. In addition, the Bush administration's terrorising legislation puts significant responsibility for homeland repression onto the states: this includes \$5 billion additional spending, diversion of police from other duties, and salaries paid to state employees in the National Guard who were called up. Since most states have to balance their budgets, unlike the federal government, these handouts to the rich and better-off, and the burden of paying for

imperialist adventures have to be financed by attacks on poor and working people. State reserve funds have been decimated, so the two routes out will be to increase taxes on working people, and to cut public services.

Fifteen states have increased sales taxes, which hit poorer people hardest. 'Sin taxes' – cigarettes, tobacco and alcohol – are also being increased in 14 states. In Alaska and Michigan motor fuel taxes are going up. With limited public transport, these expenses naturally hit working people hardest. But there are only slim pickings to be made by shaking down poor people. So cuts are the major source of funds.

Hundreds of thousands of people have already lost Medicaid coverage due to state budget cuts; with the next round of cuts, this will rise to 1.7 million. The Medicaid budget cuts reduce various health benefits – such as prescription drugs and dental, vision, home health care or mental health services – for substantial numbers of people who still qualify for the programme. In addition, a number of states are proposing to shift costs to people covered, by raising co-payments, even though many have incomes below the poverty line. A number of states are proposing to reduce or freeze payment rates for health care providers, including hospitals, physicians, and nursing homes. The cuts in reimbursement rates are exceptionally deep and may affect quality of care and encourage providers to stop treating Medicaid patients altogether. In a majority of states, these cuts are on top of substantial Medicaid budget cuts last year.

Social services are being cut. Many states are cutting childcare subsidies for poor and low income working families, making it difficult for parents, especially single parents, to remain in work. Some 23 states have reduced access to affordable childcare by tightening eligibility, increasing charges and other measures. More states are planning childcare cuts for 2004.

Elementary and secondary education is being cut viciously. California, Missouri, Oklahoma and Oregon have cut state school spending in the middle of the school year, laying off thousands of teachers. Further cuts by 18 states are anticipated, which will result in further dismissals, school closures and shortened school years. It is typical for schools to hold bake sales, but at one school the desperation runs so deep that parents at the Family School in Oregon are selling blood plasma to raise the money needed to keep one teacher. 'The sweat and tears are not enough – now it's got to be blood, too' said parent Catherine Flynn-Purvis.

In higher education, most states have cut spending on colleges and universities. As with public schools, this has led to academic layoffs, axed classes and tuition hikes of between 10% and 39% in some states.

Even the police are not exempt: hundreds of California Highway Patrol officers are being cut, but only in 'soft' areas – road safety education, drunk driving campaigns. Yet at the

same time that California education is being cut back, the prison budget will receive a 3% increase. The California prison guards union has given Democratic Governor Gray Davis \$1m for his re-election fund.

So where, you ask, is the fight back? The Democratic presidential candidates murmur their dismay, as they spend their time in 'focus groups', Town Hall meetings and volunteer coffee mornings in pursuit of support and votes – they are far too busy to bother with the poor and working people they claim to defend.

The traditional organised labour movement, the US labour aristocracy, is even worse. It is clear that the only fightback the AFL-CIO, the US equivalent of the TUC, is supporting is within narrow electoral limits. Fresh from supporting the war against Iraq, John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, instinctively channels fighting energy into vote hustling, and diverts open opposition into deal-cutting with the very politicians who have betrayed the working class for decades: 'The more we inform members about the choices elected leaders are making today, the better equipped members will be to make their own choice in the voting booth next year.' This includes lobbying 'US representatives and senators, with visits and thousands of letters, faxes and e-mails...and tens of thousands of postcard ballots.' You can see the bosses quaking in their shoes already(!) Clearly the US ruling class has nothing to fear from labour 'leaders' like these.

Yet everywhere resistance is sprouting at the community level: school students, teachers and parents organising in Oakland, California and a bus boycott against price hikes in Baltimore, Maryland are examples of small-scale local actions initiated by individual union locals (branches) and community organisations. The political way to make these struggles effective has been shown by the 4 July independence day rally at the new Constitution Center in Philadelphia against the war 'at home and abroad' – 'We are determined to stop the never-ending series of wars in the various forms it is taking against people here and abroad. We stand with people everywhere struggling for a world which values people over profits. We stand in solidarity with people living under oppression and occupation who have nothing to celebrate on this day.' Bush was supposed to open the centre but was too scared to face the anger of the people he attacks and scuttled off to a military base to issue more lies and bluster. The AFL-CIO leadership, busy faxing and writing its emails, was nowhere to be seen, of course. Only by resisting attempts to channel resistance into the dead-end of the polling booths, only by connecting the struggle against imperialism with the resistance to attacks on poor and working people and by engaging actively in struggle will these attacks be defeated.

This article includes material from a speech by Leilana Dowell at the ANSWER Teach-in, San Francisco.

■ 'The United States has a strategy based on arithmetic. They question the computers, add and subtract, extract square roots, and then go into action. But arithmetical strategy doesn't work here. If it did they would have already exterminated us. With their planes, for example. Of course they thought they could bring us to heel by dumping billions (of tonnes) of explosives on us. Because as I told you they figure everything in billions, billions of dollars. They don't reckon on the spirit of a people fighting for what they know is right, to save their country from invaders.'

Vietnamese General Giap, 1969

■ 'The captive Iraqi boy who was asked why he fought so overwhelming a foe merely muttered: "It's my country". The answer was worth a dozen Tomahawks.'

The Times, 23 March 2003.

Iraq and Afghanistan

Imperialists wage low intensity war

It was three months from 'shock and awe' to an indefinite extension of US troops' term of stay in Iraq. The lightning strike has given way to low intensity war. US and British technological superiority is replaced by 'low tech' urban guerrilla war. Satellite and computer information systems remain relatively ineffective when Iraqi intelligence is passed from house to house and family to family. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

The scale of US and British weaponry and the speed of its deployment, combining overwhelming force and precision timing, quickly dispersed their targets in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US and British armies occupied territories when the digital battles were won. Whatever happened on the digital battlefield, resistance on the ground continues. The US and International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in Afghanistan is down to 11,000 soldiers, many of whom are based in Kabul. The rest of the country has reverted to regional warlord control and the Taliban and Al Qaida have regrouped. In Iraq 145,000 US and 11,000 British troops are under daily attack. When Prime Minister Blair visited British soldiers in Basra on 29 May his reception was described as 'eerily silent'. Foreign Secretary Straw's planned armoured motorcade into Baghdad on 2 July was abandoned in favour of a helicopter gun-ship for security reasons. The US and British governments have asked over 30 countries for help with patrolling Iraq. The usual answer is 'No, thank you'. Iraqi resistance attacks are increasing as US and British troop morale falls and soldiers get homesick.

The US and British ruling classes can live with this for as long as they are achieving their objectives and domestic political opposition is contained. For the US ruling class the prime objective was to move, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to assert regional and global domination over potential rivals. It intends to do this by controlling oil supplies and transport routes and establishing military bases and political power from the Middle East to the borders of China. It further seeks profits from Iraqi oil and control over the Iraqi and Middle Eastern economies. For the British ruling class the alliance with the US allows it to 'punch above its weight' in the world compared to France, Germany and Japan. It does this in order to increase its share of the global plunder.

Thus far the US and British ruling classes are relatively satisfied with their achievements; they have their bases and Iraqi oil. The stakes are high and they are in this for the long haul. Nevertheless, the resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan prevents them from securing their positions. They never had any

intention of significant investment in Afghanistan but they sought a subdued region and now face organised and armed opposition in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They were greedy for Iraqi oil and privatised Iraqi assets; now these projects cannot proceed amid growing armed resistance.

In the US and Britain the growing toll on the occupation forces in Iraq adds to anxieties over the consequences of the strategy of global domination. US Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy described US soldiers 'serving as policemen in what seems to be a shooting gallery'. In the lands of the sound bite people are liable to become impatient when their President and Prime Minister warn of wars going on for years to come. Already the US government is spending \$3.9 billion a month in Iraq, about twice what was anticipated. The US budget deficit is soaring to \$455 billion and welfare spending at home is being cut.

Most of the soldiers who do the fighting are from the working classes. For young African-American males the army offers a better chance of education and training than any other institution. African-Americans aged between 18 and 24 years make up 14% of this age group in the USA, but almost 22% of the military. It was the revolt of African-Americans against a system that both sent them to Vietnam and racially oppressed them at home, combined with the resistance of the Vietnamese people, which finally forced the US out of Vietnam. Neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is a Vietnam militarily or politically. There is no popular communist leadership, there are no Soviet or Chinese allies to supply the resistance, but the Iraqi and Afghan people recognise the illegal and predatory motives of the occupiers: a spectre is forming in the brains of the US and British warmongers. That is why now is precisely the time for us to mobilise and demand the withdrawal of all British troops from Iraq and the Middle East.

No exit from Iraq

By the start of July, 25 Coalition troops, including six British soldiers, had been killed since President Bush declared the main combat over on 1 May. On 2 July Bush said, 'My answer is bring them on. We've got the force necessary to deal with the security situation.' By 26 July, 48 Coalition troops had been

killed by snipers, mortar bombs, rocket-propelled grenades etc. Bush was under-estimating the enemy. US soldiers are being picked off at a rate of one a day. During June three oil pipelines were successfully attacked, exposing the limitations of the occupation forces and striking at the heart of the imperialists' plans. Baghdad airport, occupied by US forces, is under nightly sniper fire.

The British Army has turned to its experience in the north of Ireland to guide its operations in Iraq. Early in the occupation of southern Iraq Lieutenant-Colonel Howes, commanding officer of the Royal Marines' 42 Commando, said, 'Ultimately you have to have men on the ground. We have 30 years' experience in doing this'. The second most senior police officer in the occupied north of Ireland has been drafted in to train an Iraqi police force. The media presentation of a supposedly subtle British policing operation will fool no one. On 24 June six British

military policemen were killed and at least five Iraqis with them at Majar al-Kabir. Later that same day eight British soldiers were injured, three seriously, when a patrol south of Majar was ambushed and a helicopter sent to help them was fired on. Previously British troops had raided homes in Majar accompanied by dogs. They kicked down doors, searching for weapons, a child was struck with a rifle butt and a pregnant woman was shot. The British soldiers shot an ambulance driver coming to help the injured.

In one week in mid-June US troops claimed to have killed over 100 guerrillas. On 14-15 June 4,000 US soldiers raided Thuluyia, a village north of Baghdad, and took over 400 prisoners. In Falluja US soldiers have shot dead more than 20 Iraqi civilians and lost three of their own troops. US soldiers have been conducting Israeli-style punitive demolitions of the family homes of those allegedly fighting the occupation forces. Both the US and British forces study and learn from the Israeli army's occupation of Palestine. At the beginning of July the British Ministry of Defence admitted it had no idea what had happened to 4,000 Iraqi captives the British Army handed over to US forces.

Alongside the customary brutality of the 'counter-insurgency operations', the occupation forces are seeking to cultivate a reliable network of Iraqis willing to assist the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the US and British military. Its function is

nothing to do with bringing democracy to Iraq and everything to do with trying to isolate the resistance, inform on it and bring legitimacy to the occupation. In Falluja and elsewhere the US has resorted to offering contracts and money to clan leaders and sheiks. On 22 July, Uday and Qusay Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein's sons, were killed in an overwhelming display of US firepower. No prisoners were taken and their bodies were put on display, as befits a barbaric war. In July the CPA set up a governing council consisting mainly of representatives of organisations associated with the US and Britain before the occupation. It is formally subordinate to the US- and British-led CPA. Any authority it obtains will correspond to the extent that it conforms with US and British governments' wishes.

Large scale development of Iraq's oil will cost over \$40 billion and require the likes of Exxon, Shell and BP. However, these companies have delayed sending representatives into Iraq because of the security situation. Citibank and the HSBC bank are lining up to restructure the banking system and the British company De La Rue's share prices rose 9% on news that it would print Iraq's new money. At the moment the main British beneficiaries from Iraq are the private security firms hired to protect the CPA's Iraqi allies.

Afghanistan

Twenty months ago when the Taliban

The incidental death of a weapons inspector

On 7 July the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FASC) published its report on 'The decision to go to war in Iraq'. Commissioned by Parliament, the FASC had inquired into 'whether the Foreign Office had presented accurate and complete information to Parliament in the period leading up to the decision to go to war in Iraq'. This is what passes, in the British Parliament, for in-depth investigation into the farago of lies which constituted the government's 'intelligence reports' leading to war with Iraq. The FASC reached its lamentable conclusions by a whisker of the chairman's casting vote: that neither the Foreign Secretary, nor the Prime Minister, nor his 'Special Adviser' Alastair Campbell (nor indeed anyone now or ever associated with the Labour Party) had ever misled Parliament. Everyone else was deeply sceptical. The questions looked set to run and run...until a decoy was intro-

duced. Meet Dr David Kelly.

That may be the last you will hear in the media of the FASC's Ninth Report of the Session 2002-3. But its conclusions, fudged though they are, are very revealing of government turpitude. The government only published two 'intelligence' dossiers in the lead up to the war in Iraq: both of them deserving the 'dodgy' epithet attached to them. Most people would think such a history of 'dodginess' significant.

In September 2002, Jack Straw (incidentally, flanked at the press conference to unveil it by none other than Dr David Kelly) published a dossier alleging that Saddam Hussein was on the verge of producing nuclear weapons, had attempted to buy yellow cake uranium from Niger, and could launch weapons of mass destruction at 45 minutes notice. There was, in fact, no evidence that Iraq had a nuclear weapons programme at all. The Niger allegations were based on crudely

forged documents (see 'Lies, damn lies and more lies', FRFI 173) and the 45-minute strike capability was simply a lie. A lie that found its way into the dossier's foreword, was repeated in Parliament by the Prime Minister and then appeared in US President George Bush's State of the Union speech. This lie served its purpose; going to war was an urgent matter that could not wait for pettifoggery in the United Nations Security Council or adherence to international law. Saddam Hussein had to be stopped.

The loyal FASC would not go so far as to call the dossier a lie. They did, however, think that the 45-minute strike capability claim should not have been included in the foreword, and reflected that it was 'very odd' that the government could not substantiate its claim to have 'other evidence' for the Niger uranium allegation.

The second dossier, published in February 2003, turned out to be a pla-



The Prime Minister, Guantanamo Bay detainees and the rule of law

When Prime Minister Tony Blair addressed the US Congress on 17 July, he spelled out the grounds for the 'special relationship' between the British and US ruling classes. These grounds are common beliefs, common goals and the defence of freedom. '...because all nations that are free value that freedom, will defend it absolutely, but have no wish to trample on the freedom of others'. The ruling class has comforted itself with such illusions for a very long time. Writing on the English Constitution in the late nineteenth century, AV Dicey defined the 'rule of law':

'We mean in the first place, that no man is punishable or can be lawfully made to suffer in body or goods except for a distinct breach of law established in the ordinary legal manner before the ordinary courts of the land. In this sense the rule of law is contrasted with every system of government based on the exercise by persons in authority of wide, arbitrary, or discretionary powers of constraint.'

English law is littered with such fine notions and this one is said to be the most important: but at times when bourgeois rule is under threat, or British imperialism is challenged, the extension of such notions of 'freedom' and 'equality before the law' to the working class and oppressed becomes dangerous. Universality is quickly dispensed with. This has always been the case for British imperialism: from Asia to Africa to Ireland. The British have derogated from the terms of international treaties, breached human rights and introduced repressive legislation specifically to deal with Irish Republicans. 'Being Irish means you're guilty' expresses exactly the abandonment of the rule of law for anyone engaged in the struggle for Irish self-determination. By such means the Birmingham 6 and the Guildford 4 served long prison sentences despite their innocence. By such means the Irish were demonised.

Now the British ruling class is at it again – once more under the leadership of the British Labour Party.

More than 650 prisoners are held by the US in appalling conditions in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba: some of them are children. They are not accorded any rights under international law and have been left in a legal limbo for the last eighteen months. By any international standards their detention constitutes torture. They are barely allowed contact with their families, they cannot appoint their own lawyers. They are interrogated (including by MI6) without legal representation.

least), but that had ceased to be an issue.

Within a day of the publication of the FASC report, the MoD announced that it had found the mole and offered enough hints to ensure that the press could identify him as Dr David Kelly, Chief Scientific Officer at the MoD, senior adviser to the proliferation and arms control secretariat and to the Foreign Office's non proliferation department. He had also been a senior UNSCOM inspector in Iraq from 1994 to 1999. The MoD now threw him to the hyenas.

Despite the fact that the FASC had already published its report, it summoned Dr Kelly to give evidence on 15

July. Once again they did Campbell's dirty work: attempting to refute Gilligan's claim. All the failed-politicians-turned-bullies that inhabit Select Committees, turned their fire on Kelly. This was 'the high court of Parliament and Kelly must answer': was he Gilligan's main source? He said he thought not. Blair demanded that the BBC name their source. Blair-loyalist Ben Bradshaw, clearly at home with Star Chamber tactics, announced that until proved otherwise Dr Kelly would be guilty. On 18 July David Kelly was found dead.

The BBC and Gilligan then revealed that Kelly was indeed the main source. This immediately let the Government



At the press conference following Tony Blair's speech before the US Congress, President George Bush summed it up: 'these are bad people'. 'Let me just say, these were illegal combatants. They were picked up off the battlefield, aliens aiding and abetting the Taliban.' (In fact this was not true of either Begg or Abbasi). Bourgeois law is reduced to its brutal essence; the presumption of guilt if you are associated with opposition to bourgeois rule.

The announcement that they will be the first to be tried was made shortly before Blair's appearance in Washington: 163 MPs signed a Commons motion calling for repatriation. After 18 months apparent inaction, the British Labour government made a diversionary flurry of concern. Tony Blair was said to have persuaded George Bush to negotiate on the proposed trial arrangements to ensure that they complied with international law. There was some talk of repatriation for trial in Britain. This 'special influence' was to be the dividend of the Coalition.

What nonsense! It has been reported that the US offered, a year ago, to repatriate the two men if Britain would guarantee they would stand trial. This was rejected by Home Secretary David Blunkett, because he was not certain the CPS would consider it had sufficient evidence to press charges. The

British government had been, in fact, in prolonged talks with the US defence department about the mechanics of the trials even before details of the trial procedures became public. Ruth Wedgwood, an adviser to the US Department of Defense, wrote in the *Financial Times* (10 July 2003): 'From the chatter of certain British ministers, one might think this [trial procedure] was a great surprise. In fact the US has been consulting with the British government for months'.

Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, was sent to Washington to broker a deal on 21 July. In fact he was bartering the detainees' human rights. He came back with fool's gold: assurances

that there will be no death penalty for the British detainees and they may be allowed to appoint their own lawyers as long as they don't see all the evidence. This is a far cry from international law. If there is not enough evidence to convict these detainees in 'ordinary courts of law' in an 'ordinary legal manner', then they should be free. Anything short of this is a breach of their human rights: it is prejudice, not justice.

Just a little reminder of Tony Blair's fine beliefs before the US Congress:

'The spread of freedom is the best security for the free. It is our last line of defence and our first line of attack. And just as the terrorist seeks to divide humanity in hate, so we have to unify it around an idea. And that idea is liberty.'

APPLAUSE

'We must find the strength to fight for this idea and the compassion to make it universal.'

'Abraham Lincoln said: "Those that deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves".'

'And this is the sense of justice that makes moral the love of liberty.'

The more this man pontificates about 'liberty', the more urgent is the task of opposing his vile hypocrisy and that of his disgusting party. Carol Brickley

off the hook. Blair was able to breathe again: either Dr Kelly had lied to the Select Committee, or Gilligan had. The government could either blame the BBC or a dead man. A judicial inquiry could safely be called into the circumstances of Dr Kelly's death. Everyone can respectfully vow to behave better and carry on behaving as they always have. For the time being the gambit has worked. Geoff Hoon may lose his job, and Campbell may follow, but no one is paying any more attention to those weapons of mass destruction that have failed to show up in the Iraqi desert.

Carol Brickley

were evicted from Kabul the US and British governments said they would 'not forget' Afghanistan this time. This time would be unlike a decade earlier when, together with their allies, they forced the Soviet Army out and let an assortment of cut-throats rule the country until the Taliban gained control. This June the Afghan finance minister visited Prime Minister Blair to issue a reminder: the money needed to rebuild the country was running out and a further \$15 billion was needed. He said, 'the international community has given us the lowest amount of per capita assistance of any post-conflict country'. Afghanistan was promised \$5 billion in 2002 but has received only \$1.8 billion so far. President Karzai threatened to resign unless regional warlords paid more money to the central government.

With elections scheduled for next year the interim government could not claim one major infrastructure repair project undertaken since the Taliban's removal. The US has now agreed to increase its support for the repair of the Kandahar to Kabul road. However, US aid is planned to fall from \$1 billion in 2002 to \$321 million in 2004. Afghanistan's economy has returned to dependence on opium production and in June a bumper harvest was recorded: up ten-fold since the last year of the Taliban in 2001.

Central government in Kabul remains weak and US spending is divided between it and the regional warlords who helped the US and British forces

evict the Taliban. Between them the warlords can muster 100,000 armed men while the central government has an emerging 5,000 strong National Army.

The Taliban have regrouped in southern and eastern Afghanistan. In early June 49 people were killed in a gun battle near Kandahar between Taliban and pro-government militia. On 7 June a 'suicide bomber', thought to be Al Qaida killed four German soldiers and wounded 25 others in Kabul. Attacks on ISAF troops are increasing, including on British soldiers. Two Norwegian soldiers were shot and wounded, a hand grenade was thrown into the British military headquarters in Kabul. A remote control bomb exploded close to a Dutch soldier. As Foreign Minister Straw visited Kabul on 30 June, rockets were fired into the city of Jalalabad and a bomb injured 16 worshippers in a mosque in Kandahar.

US forces are making little headway against the Taliban and Al Qaida remaining in Afghanistan nor against those stationed across the border in Pakistan. Mullah Omar and Bin Laden continue to elude their pursuers. Saddam Hussein, for the moment, remains at large. The mounting toll of dead soldiers exposes the folly of imperialism and its project to rule the world. The US ruling class and its willing Labour government ally wade on into the mire. Wherever they tread resistance rises up. At the moment of its greatest might this great beast, this behemoth, has feet of clay.

counter-productive'. In fact it was an embarrassment. It also found that the 'degree of autonomy given to the Iraqi Communications Group chaired by Alastair Campbell and the Coalition Information Centre which reported to him, as well as the lack of procedural accountability, were contributory factors to the affair of the "dodgy dossier"'. For a tame committee this was criticism indeed.

This is all you need to understand why Alastair Campbell blew his top while giving evidence to the FASC inquiry. When in trouble create a diversion. That diversion was Campbell's 'anger' over BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan's claim on the Radio 4 Today programme that an intelligence mole had said the government had 'sexed up' the September dossier knowing that the 45-minute capability claim was dubious. Campbell declared war on the BBC and demanded an apology, aided and abetted by a Prime Minister, 'deeply hurt' at being called a liar, and various ministers in the firing line like Hoon (MoD) and Ben Bradshaw (Environment). Attention was immediately deflected to forcing Gilligan to reveal his source, away from the real issue of government lies in the lead up to the war. Everyone knew that the 45-minute claim was dubious (to say the

garisiered article by an Iraqi exile from *Middle East Review of International Affairs* based on evidence from the first Gulf War, 11 years before, cobbled together with already published reports from *Jane's Weekly*. The production of this 'dossier' was Alastair Campbell's idea.

Campbell was apparently responsible for a committee called 'Iraq Communications Group' and an autonomous group within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office called the Coalition Information Centre (CIC). CIC produced the February dossier at the behest of the Iraq Communications Group, claiming that it was based on 'intelligence'. In fact it was nothing of the sort: it was simply old information and lying propaganda. For instance, where the original author had written about the Iraqi intelligence agency 'aiding opposition groups in hostile regimes', Campbell's committee had changed it to read 'supporting terrorist organisations in hostile regimes'. This dossier was produced without any ministerial oversight, signed off by Campbell, touted around in Washington by Tony Blair, and published to Parliament claiming to be 'compiled from intelligence reports'.

The FASC report found that the February dossier was 'almost wholly

Scottish Socialist Party – impressive advances for the left

Dear comrades

As usual I enjoyed reading the latest FRFI (173). The articles on the rise of racism and the response of the left were particularly interesting, and bear some parallels to experiences here in Australia over the last seven years or so. The far right as both a 'stalking horse' for, and a by-product of, government racism, is a concept that many don't see. A number of Marxist groups in Australia fell into the trap of campaigning against small (and very marginal) groups of neo-Nazis when the One Nation right-populist/racist party was just beginning its three year ascendancy; following that, parts of the left and the vast majority

of the (small-L) liberal swamp focused all their fire on One Nation's crude racism, and meanwhile serious opposition to the government's racist policies towards asylum seekers only really got going in the last three years or so. Serious campaigning for the poor who are being fooled by racist politics is weaker still, even though we are making a start.

But one article irritated me: Michael MacGregor's coverage of the Scottish elections.

The SSP has made impressive advances, and many in Australia have taken a keen interest in its left regroupment strategy, and are interested as to how it has built up such a large base of support (far ahead of any other socialist

group in the UK – or Australia – for a long time). So to hear criticisms of the SSP – where it is fudging the politics, failing to mobilise, etc., is welcome because it is important to have a balanced perspective on something you are considering (in some degree) as a model to emulate.

Unfortunately, MacGregor's piece was long on condemnation and short on evidence. The offences of the SSP he cites don't stack up to his final conclusion that the SSP is 'now completely committed to a parliamentary strategy' and their 'anti-imperialist principles are to be sloughed off whenever it is an electoral necessity' and 'refusal to take up the challenge to Labour'.

The two main offences which MacGregor cites are Tommy Sheridan calling Labour voters to give their second vote to the SSP and failing to stand against one Labour MP (who was anti-war).

If Sheridan *only* called for Labour voters to preference the SSP, then he would be just hanging onto Labour's coat-tails. But from other reading I'm fairly sure that the main thrust of the SSP's campaign was aimed *against* Labour and especially the war on Iraq. Getting second votes was vital for the SSP to get more seats. More seats gives them more credibility as a voice for socialism, however you judge their flaws. Maybe Sheridan made a wrong call, but this

mistake hardly adds up to 'endorsement' of Labour.

On the second point, it would seem fairly understandable to allow an anti-war Labour MP to run (instead of handing the seat to a Tory or SNP possibly?). I'm not saying I support the move; my general instinct would be to run a candidate against Labour, regardless. But explaining why this branch's move was so wrong in a constructive manner would probably be more educational for the readers than simply canning them.

The amount of space MacGregor gave to positively presenting the SSP results is pretty tiny – just the first paragraph. Perhaps the majority of FRFI readers already know

that information, perhaps FRFI just wants to present another side which won't have been heard already. But in the small amount of information given, we can glean that the SSP is in some fashion attacking Labour – even in pure parliamentary terms, the SSP won six seats while Labour lost six.

If Michael MacGregor wants to join the dots together for his readers in this way, he needs to present more evidence. Perhaps in future, FRFI could devote more attention to this?

In solidarity
Ben Courtice
Australia

SSP covers up for Labour imperialism

Ben Courtice raises some important points. Essentially, he is arguing that our criticism of the Scottish Socialist Party's opportunism in relation to electoral gains is not convincing. The article, Courtice believes, is 'long on condemnation and short on evidence'. He can forgive the SSP's 'mistakes' and 'understandable' tactical moves in relation to the British Labour Party because it won them more seats in the Scottish Parliament and this 'gives them more credibility as a voice for socialism'. The SSP has, after all, built up a base of support (in Scotland), which puts it 'far ahead of any other socialist group in the UK – or Australia – for a long time'. Without substantial evidence to the contrary, Courtice is arguing that ends justify means.

We have to be concrete. We are living in an imperialist country, where the British Labour government has played a central role, in its nearly six years of office, in three barbaric, one-sided imperialist wars: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. That is why anti-imperialist politics must be the starting point for any socialist or progressive movement in the present period.

In Britain this means breaking completely with the racist, imperialist British Labour Party. It means building a new movement that fights for the real interests of the working class in this country, while giving unequivocal support to the working class and oppressed peoples fighting imperialism throughout the world. So how do socialists build this new movement? Courtice avoids this critical question.

If this point is accepted then MacGregor's criticism of the

SSP's failure to campaign on a principled basis for a 'no' vote for the Labour imperialists must surely carry a great deal more weight than Courtice is prepared to give it. Sheridan, the leader of the SSP, had actually said: 'I would appeal to Labour voters: even if you want to vote for your local MSP, give us your second vote, as a second vote for Labour would be wasted' (FRFI 173). How does this help to build a socialist movement? He doesn't tell voters that any vote for Labour would be supporting imperialist barbarity – only that a 'second vote' for Labour 'would be wasted'.

Courtice's argument against our position is not only politically weak but also false. He says that from MacGregor's article 'we can glean that the SSP is in some fashion attacking Labour – even in pure parliamentary terms, the SSP won six seats while Labour lost six.' This is false because all six of the SSP seats came from the regional lists on the second vote. The Labour Party only 'lost' seats in the constituency vote, where its share of MSPs fell by six. It actually gained one seat in the regional lists so that its loss overall was, in fact, five seats – not six as reported in FRFI 173. The SSP seats, if anything, could be said to have come from Scottish Nationalists, whose share of regional MSPs fell from 23 to 15. So in no way could the outcome of the election be seen as the SSP 'attacking Labour'. At no stage did the SSP threaten or challenge Labour even in 'pure parliamentary terms', as Courtice states.

Can we accept with Courtice that it was politically 'understandable' for the SSP

not to run in the Dundee constituency to give the sitting anti-war Labour MSP, John McAllion, a clear run for the seat? In a period when the war-mongering of the Labour party is clear to ever-wider sections of the population, there is nothing 'understandable' about refusing to challenge Labour. This is a matter of fundamental principle. Socialists cannot on the one hand reject the Labour Party as a racist and imperialist party and on the other hand actively endorse one of its representatives at election times, even if that representative claims to take an anti-war stance. A principled anti-war stance today would require that any member of the Labour Party leave it and start the long and difficult process of building a socialist movement in this country. The SSP failed to argue this and this tells us something about its political character.

'Vote SSP when you can, Labour when you must' sums up its political intervention. Such a policy undermines the building of a new political movement to challenge imperialism in such a critical historical period and is politically significant in terms of the SSP's relationship to the Labour left. The SSP is an electoral regroupment of the Labour left. This relationship is both an endorsement of Labour and also of the bourgeois parliament as a legitimate forum for building a socialist movement.

We do not oppose socialists entering parliament in certain periods and using it as a platform to spread more widely principled socialist ideas. Indeed the 'minimum programme' of the SSP – abolition of Council Tax, free school



SSP's Tommy Sheridan

meals, a £7.32 minimum wage, a job creating maximum 35-hour week in the public sector, an end to privatisation, and opposition to war for oil – could be used towards such an end, but only in the context of building a principled anti-imperialist working class movement outside parliament. Real struggles to defend the living standards of those under attack will not come through parliament but through the class struggle. Real struggles against war and imperialism have to take place outside parliament on the streets, in communities and workplaces, schools and colleges.

Courtice argues that the SSP's aim was to get elected to the Scottish parliament as 'more seats gives them more credibility as a voice for socialism'. We would ask: credibility with whom? Certainly not the working class – less than half the popu-

lation voted for the Scottish Parliament, with the vast majority of non-voters coming from the poorer sections of the working class. They recognise what it is and who it represents: the privileged sections of the working class and the middle class.

It is possible to have a movement rooted in the working class, which provides school meals, and serious opposition to imperialism as the history of the Black Panther movement in the United States demonstrates. The Black Panthers were able to provide breakfast clubs to thousands and wage a relentless struggle against the US imperialist war on the Vietnamese people. The Black Panther Party was clear in its electoral interventions in that they demonstrated how bourgeois parliament could not defend working class rights. This was based on a principled

position of understanding the nature of imperialism and how it created poverty and attacked living standards both in the oppressed nations and in the imperialist countries themselves. These issues are not mutually exclusive but entirely linked and interdependent.

We are not prepared to give the SSP the benefit of the doubt in this regard given its previous history. Anti-imperialism has always been an *Achilles heel* for this party. Its appalling history in relation to Ireland cannot be simply forgotten. The Irish peace process has stalled the struggle for self-determination. This has allowed the SSP to gloss over the split within sections of the Scottish working class. The Orange (Loyalist) section of the Scottish working class has long played a reactionary role in defending the racism and sectarianism of British imperialism. We should not be surprised at this – the key current within the SSP, the Militant Tendency, owes its political formation not only to the Labour Party but also to the supremacist Loyalist tradition itself. Militant was centrally involved in condemning and undermining the Irish struggle and went as far as to call the Republican Movement 'sectarian' and even 'fascist' at the height of the Irish struggle. This political legacy continues in the modern era. At its 'Socialism 2000' event in Glasgow the SSP invited the Ulster Volunteer Force's reputed 'commander in chief' Billy Hutchison to speak from the platform. The Socialist Workers Party is also a current within the SSP. Like Militant, the SWP supported the Labour government's deployment of troops to the North of Ireland in 1969. Both these political trends openly condemned the Irish people's struggle at the height of Britain's war in Ireland. This history makes it all the more necessary for the SSP to have an uncompromising position against Labour imperialism.

Paul Mallon
Scotland

'Left-wing' trade unions: all mouth and no trousers

In July, the RMT union conference voted to cut contributions to the Labour Party and allow branches to affiliate to other parties. Its general secretary, Bob Crow, who branded the Labour Cabinet as 'war criminals', predicted the union could disaffiliate from Labour within five years. Such is the anger among firefighters that if their union, the FBU, had held a conference this year there would have been strong calls for disaffiliation. The broadcasting union Bectu is already balloting members on such a move. Several of the biggest unions, including TGWU, UNISON, GMB and ASLEF, have agreed to review their Labour Party links and funding. The media talk of a new breed of left-wing trade union leaders, 'the awkward squad', who have captured the leadership in these and other unions, threatening a new age of militancy and conflict with the Labour government. These unions have called a 'council of war' for the autumn. The TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, a Blair supporter, has not been invited.

But what evidence is there that, after years of lothargy and support for Labour's reactionary policies, the trade unions are taking a new stand as fighting organisations of the working class? At its peak in 1979 union membership was more than 13 million. By 1999 it had fallen to 7.3 million and has stagnated at around this level ever since. However, the proportion of employees in trade unions, (union density), has continued to fall from 27.1% in 2000 to 26.6% last year. Union density remained highest among professionals and associated professional and technical staff at 48% and 42% respectively. Those with the highest educational qualifications were also more likely to be in a union. Of those with a degree or equivalent 37% were in unions, as were 44% of those with another higher educational qualification, unchanged from 1999. Within the various spheres of work, union density was highest among public administrators at 59% and education workers at 53%. Together with health workers these three categories accounted for almost half of all trade union members. At the other end of the scale, union density among those with GCSE qualifications or less was around 25%. Manufacturing, which accounted for just 16% of all union members, had a union density of 27%. For sales and customer service staff union density was 13% and among workers in hotels and restaurants just 5%. Whereas around 35% of all workers over 30 years of age were in trade unions this fell to 19% for the 20-29 age group and to just 5% for the under 20s; a further deterioration in figures for young workers since 1999. Workers who have been in post for less than a year (12%) or between one year and two (16%) are also much less likely to be in a union, as are part-time workers (20%) and those in smaller work places of fewer than 25 employees (16%). Union density in the public sector is around 60% while that in the private sector is less than 20%. These figures demonstrate that the unions organise mainly the professional, better-off and white collar workers, especially those working in



the public sector.

On the other hand, workers with few qualifications, the poorest section of the working class, are largely ignored by the unions. This is especially true of those working in new private service industries where pay and conditions are appalling and job security virtually non-existent. If anything, this situation has worsened over the past few years and it seems set to continue. The two unions reporting the greatest increases in membership last year were the National Union of Teachers (9.8%) and the Public and Civil Servants Union (5.2%).

There is no evidence, then, that the unions have made a concerted effort to increase membership over the past few years and in particular to try and organise the poorest, most oppressed sections of the working class. Yet an interim report for the Leverhulme Trust on the Future of Unions in Modern Britain says there are around three million workers in non-unionised workplaces who want to join trade unions and another three million already covered by union collective agreements, who could join if they felt there would be some benefit. The report points out, though, that unions have allowed the 10% wage premium that union membership traditionally brought to be almost completely lost and criticises

the unions for having no clear strategy or organisation for increasing membership.

As another indicator of union activity in pursuit of their members' interests, we could look at the number of working days lost through strike action. There has been some improvement in the last few years from the all-time lows of the late 1990s. In both 2000 and 2001 there were about half a million days lost through strike action. This rose to 1.3 million days in 2002. However, even this amounts to just one in six union members taking just one day's action during the year and needs to be set against the average working days lost each year in the 1970s of 12.7 million and in the 1980s of 7.2 million. Furthermore, figures for the first four months of this year are well down on the previous two years.

Instead of fighting for the fundamental interests of the working class, the unions have become part of the corporate establishment, offering all sorts of sideline perks such as credit cards, holiday discounts and private health schemes and being run like businesses. In 2001/2 their total income increased by 5.2% to £825.5 million, which included nearly £40 million of investment income. This was £14 million more than they spent, leaving them with total funds of £912.1 million. Their assets amounted

to over £1.1 billion, including investments of £443.1 million. Big business indeed, and just like big businesses the unions have been merging. The Leverhulme Report points out, these mergers have been about 'market share unionism' rather than achieving economy of scale to release resources for organising.

It should not surprise us then to find that union leaders pay themselves fat cat salaries. According to the yearly reports submitted between October 2001 and September 2002, for example, the leader of ASLEF took a wages and benefits package of £72,605, the leader of UNISON, took £84,170 and the leader of the AEEU took £109,768. Such typical rewards will no doubt be taken up by all the so-called new breed of union leaders. Can we seriously expect people enjoying such lifestyles to know or care much about those workers struggling to survive on the minimum wage? Can we seriously expect them to lead a fight against a Labour government that protects and extends the imperialist system of exploitation that makes such privileges possible?

At a time when millions of trade union members face poverty pay, growing job insecurity, anxiety over pensions, anger at fat cat salaries, fears about privatisation and the longest working hours in Europe, it would be surprising if these union leaders hadn't come up with some anti-Blair, anti-New Labour rhetoric. They were hardly likely to be elected if they didn't, as Jack Dromey (husband of Harriet Harman), Blair's favoured candidate for the TGWU job, found out to his cost. In fact, with the possible exception of Bob Crow, all these members of the so-called 'awkward squad' favour retaining close ties with the Labour Party. Kevin Curran of the GMB said, 'It's not about walking away from the Party, it's about staying in'. At his union conference in June, UNISON leader Dave Prentiss said, 'We already have a trade union party. It's called the Labour Party... we stay within - fully paid up members'. Derek Simpson of Amicus is solidly behind the link with Labour. Mick Rix of ASLEF actually wants to increase Labour Party contributions. The new leader of TGWU, Tony Woodley, bizarrely described cutting links with Labour as 'a right-wing agenda' and, in a veiled attack on Crow, said, 'It is time to reclaim our party - not walk away from it, as a few on the fringes would argue'.

At the beginning of July several of these union leaders teamed up with members of the Labour Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) of MPs for a 'Save Our Party' conference. The two groups agreed to work together to produce an 'alternative manifesto' and lobby the Labour government. As SCG chairman John McDonnell MP said, 'Unless there is a radical redirection



Billy Hayes

of the government's approach and policies, the Labour Party is at real risk of losing the next election'.

This then is the real intent behind the so-called new militancy. Far from opposing the Labour Party, its vicious anti-working class and anti-trade union policies, the 'new militants' want to save it by winning just enough concessions to maintain the votes of Labour supporters. The key votes for Labour to retain are those of the professional and skilled middle and upper working class, the labour aristocracy, precisely the sector that dominates and is best served by the trade unions. As for the millions of the poorest working class people who choose not to vote for Labour and are excluded from the unions they are dismissed out of hand, as in this contemptuous remark by Billy Hayes, leader of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and another of the 'new militants': 'The weakness of Blairism today shows there is the chance for change if trade unionists play their part in shaping the Labour Party we need. You have to recognise that most working class people, at least those who are politically interested, see Labour as in some sense their party'. Hayes has, no doubt, inherited the last reported pay and benefits package for the leader of the CWU of £99,642 a year.

The one way for unions to gain real clout and become fighting organisations is to organise those sections of the working class that are presently excluded, the millions of poor workers who have little to lose and everything to fight for. This they resolutely refuse to do. Whether or not they are led by 'new militants' and 'the awkward squad', the unions remain tools of the privileged labour aristocracy. The growing anger and desperation of other workers who are inside the unions will sooner or later erupt into action but when it does they must be prepared, as has happened so often before, to be betrayed by their leaders.

Jim Craven

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), as with most of the British left, clings to the notion that the only significant struggle comes from those workers within the labour and trade union movement. In an article in the journal *Links* (January-April 2003), Alex Callinicos, a leading mouthpiece of the SWP, argues that the Labour Party is a capitalist workers' party that 'express[es] workers' resistance to capitalism and seek[s] to contain that resistance within the framework of the system'. The problem, Callinicos says, is that the Labour government is buffered from the revolutionary wrath and fervour of the union rank-and-file by the trade union bureaucracy. Not surprising, therefore, that Callinicos, just like the bourgeois media, seizes upon the militant rhetoric of the new trade union leaders to announce a breakthrough in the class struggle. 'In Britain, for example, a genuine "class-struggle left wing" has emerged in the trade union bureaucracy that is prepared both to oppose war on Iraq on a principled basis and to challenge Blair's neo-liberal economic agenda.' In your dreams, Professor Callinicos!

GEORGE ORWELL and the limits of individualism

George Orwell (1903-1950) is celebrated on the centenary of his birth as the author of two novels that achieved iconic status and sold a million copies each in ten years: the revolution betrayed in *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Big Brother* totalitarianism in *1984* (1948). But his real significance is as the most powerful creator of the myth of English socialism – or rather, the English socialist. He has come to represent the ideal socialist – essentially patriotic and aloof from compromise and commitment, except to his own conscience and moral standards. Indeed, much of Orwell's writing, outside of the two commercially successful novels, is about his own personal integrity. His emphasis on personal and political independence attracts the left-leaning middle class who were largely deprived of influence in British universities during the 18 years of Thatcherite reaction but today have a place in the left-of-centre media.

George Orwell (Eric Blair) was by no means an isolated 'outsider' despite an adventurous and sometimes isolated young manhood. Born in India in 1903 Orwell entered Eton in 1917. Here he became a utopian schoolboy socialist and together with others, including Cyril Connolly, who was to become a leading left writer and editor, fomented the so-called 'Bolshy Election' at Britain's most famous school in 1921. Without going to university, he joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma for seven years, but resigned in 1928, unhappy with the stupidity of colonial administration. His memoir *Burma Days* was published in 1934.

His decision to become a writer was made after living as an indigent worker and he wrote about his experiences of casual poorly-paid work and life in doss-houses and on the streets in *Down and Out in Paris and London* in 1932 (some sources say 1933). Orwell's writing career took off after *Homage to Catalonia*, his account of experiences in the Spanish Civil War in which he was wounded in 1936. Orwell was to remain permanently resentful of Victor Gollancz of the Left Book Club who, under the direction of the British Communist Party rejected his manuscript because it criticised the role of the communists in Spain. The following year Orwell travelled to areas of northern England hit by the economic depression of pre-war Britain. He describes his impressions of life and poverty in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. His characteristic moralising tone imbues the text, embracing the reader in guilt. After a visit to a coal mine he writes without irony, 'It is only very rarely, when I make a definite mental effort, that I connect this coal with that far-off labour in the mines'. And yet this chapter makes not the slightest mention of the mine owners' responsibility for the appalling wages and conditions he observes and the bitter defeat of

the General Strike ten years before when the miners were starved into submission. Instead, throughout his account, Orwell's antagonism is directed against the socialists. He sneers at the communist circles in London who apparently lack his own powers of empathy: 'You and I and the editor of the *Times Lit. Supp.*, and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants – all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground...' (The vitriolic references are to left-leaning poets like Auden and Spender and to Hewlett Johnson, the 'red' Dean of Canterbury). *The Road to Wigan Pier*

honest to be outright "crypto" or fellow-traveller, but reliably pro-Russian on all major issues'.

Special Branch and the CIA appreciated Orwell's already established role as an anti-leftist writer and propagandist. He worked for the BBC Eastern Service from 1940-1943 and, as literary editor of *Tribune*, he contributed a regular page of political and literary commentary called 'As I Please', which included the essay 'England Your England' (1941), an excessive display of patriotic pride in the English qualities of class tolerance, moderation and reasonableness. From 1945 Orwell was *The Observer's* war correspondent and later became a regular contributor to the *Manchester Evening News*. From 1947 he was vice-chair of the Freedom Defence Committee which vetted civil servants for political tendencies in order to exclude Communist Party members, past and present, from office.

In 1949 Orwell sent 38 names from his list to a friend at the Information Research Department (IRD), which was established to combat communist cultural and literary influence and infiltration into trade unions or organisations like the BBC and the National Council for Civil Liberties. What was the purpose of this voluntary intelligence submission to the special branch? After all, the Communist Party's telephones had been tapped for years, the PID (Political Intelligence Department) had rooms in Bush house where the BBC Overseas Service gave them space and most of Orwell's 'names' were

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marks the end of Orwell's utopian socialism and the start of his active hostility to political organisations of the left.

Orwell's anti-communist credentials were well established before the second world war, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact and the consequent change of line by the British Communist Party. His anti-communism pre-dates the Cold War and McCarthy era purges of radicals and the left in the US. He was ripe to serve his own class who were already preparing to contain their anti-fascist ally, the Soviet Union.

In the early 1940s Orwell began to compile lists of people who he suspected of being Communist Party members (agents) and those he described as 'sentimental sympathisers'. There were 135 names in all, each with a code, most with few words of judgment, usually snobbish and personal, and a race category. For example: 'Cedric Dover, Writer (Half-caste) ecologist and journalist. Trained as zoologist, is Eurasian. Main emphasis anti-white (especially anti-USA), but reliably pro-Russian on all major issues. Very dishonest, venal person.' The majority of those named were colleagues, fellow writers and supporters of the *Tribune* left or Labour left like Kingsley Amis, editor of the *New Statesman* ('Too dis-

under surveillance. None of the names would have been new. The list included Charlie Chaplin who had fled to Britain following questioning by the Committee on Un-American Activities and a campaign of what he called 'virulent hatred' directed against him. Following his film about Hitler, *The Great Dictator* 1940, and his speech 'A Second Front Now!' ('On the battlefields of Russia democracy will live or die') in 1942, Charlie Chaplin was publicly targeted in the US by the FBI. George Orwell offered this useless information because he wanted to prove that he was a hard man of the reactionary tendency.

Orwell's publishers claim that he was a free spirit and the social conscience of his age. In reality, while posing as a man of integrity who rejected false creeds, he actually encouraged the British left to embrace the cause of anti-communism. In the end the limits of individualism are determined by the real world. Orwell chose to support the emergence of a post-war settlement in favour of the US and British imperialism and Cold War isolation for the Soviet bloc with its over 20 million war dead. He chose to offer himself up as a model of an English socialist, independent, patriotic, reformist and ultimately, a bourgeois servant of the state.

Susan Davidson

The anarchist school of falsification



■ **Libertarian anti-militarism, then and now, edited by Anna Key. Published by No War but the Class War**

This collection of articles, dating from 1896 to 2002, covers the usual anarchist nonsense on the state and some rabid anti-communism. Ms Key even reproduces an article from the Makhnovists' paper *The Road to Freedom*, which calls on Red Army soldiers to desert. The Makhnovists were a peasant-based military force, led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno, who during the Russian Civil War (1918-21) joined with counter-revolutionary White and imperialist armies against socialist Russia. This band of brigands also carried out pogroms against Jewish communities in the Ukraine.

In an article entitled 'Against war and capitalism' they deny the existence of imperialism. They should try to explain that to the starving masses in Africa or Asia, or war-ravaged Iraq, or blockaded Cuba. The writer of this article – which is dated 2002 and unsigned – claims that anti-imperialists supported the Taliban. This is a lie! The truth is that it was anarchists, with Tony Benn, the Trotskyist SWP, the CIA and the British bourgeoisie, who celebrated the defeat of the progressive government in Afghanistan by the Mujahideen. It was this defeat which paved the way for the murderous, misogynist rule of the Taliban.

In an article called 'Remember the heroes', the anarchist faith in the always elusive progressive bourgeoisie is exposed. They blame the bourgeois democracies for Franco's victory, when the blame, partly, falls closer to home. After all it was anar-

chist leaders who took ministries in the Popular Front (capitalist) Catalan government of Luis Companys, which strengthened Companys, enabling him to muster a counter-revolutionary attack on the Barcelona telephone exchange on 3 May 1937, while it was defended by anarchist and syndicalist rank and file workers!

Because most anarchists have little knowledge of the history and politics of their movement, their leadership – and they do have a leadership, usually an unelected clique – can cloak itself in a revolutionary virtue it does not possess.

The anarchist theoretician Peter Kropotkin took the side of British, French and Russian imperialism in the first inter-imperialist war, along with French syndicalist Leon Jouhaux, against the communist position of 'the main enemy is at home – turn the war into a revolutionary war'. The founder of the anarchist movement Mikhail Bakunin backed the pro-capitalist trade union leaders in the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) against Marx in a faction fight over the latter's honourable and principled defence of the Paris Commune. Bakunin's political forerunner Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was an anti-Semite who backed the racist slave-holding South in the American Civil War. Furthermore, if Ms Key has read Proudhon she will know he was a male chauvinist who was appalled by the idea of female emancipation or sexual fulfilment:

'As for equality in the matter of the sexes, its inevitable consequences are free love, condemnation of marriage, condemnation of womanhood, jealousy and secret hatred of men, and, to crown the system, inextinguishable lechery; such, invariably is the philosophy of the emancipated woman.' (Proudhon, Proudhon)

This pamphlet's contributions come from many different strands of the anarchist movement. Like alchemy it does not work. If you mix base metals together you don't get gold, just a pile of scrap. I myself will stick with Marx and Lenin and under their banner fight imperialism, racism, women's oppression, war and want, and leave the libertarian anarchists to their bistros and salons.

Jimmy German

A world to save

■ **World Rescue, Nares Craig, Housman Bookshop Publications 2002, 52pp, £1.50**

This small and affordable pamphlet aims to become an easy source of reference for those who have taken it upon themselves to put the dire state of our planet at the top of their agenda.

Having lost all faith in the governments of today, Craig cites what appears as almost their desire for the destruction and desertification of developing countries through the use of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its tried and tested plan for destroying the infrastructure of many countries and forcing them to rely on expensive exports that are of no great use to them.

He also mentions the US government's role in being the most prolific producer of emissions of carbon dioxide gas, the main reason behind the crisis of global warming. And, perhaps more disappointingly, the consistent rejection of all environmental treaties, most notably the Kyoto Agreement.

The effects of globalisation and the almost tyrannical rule that the multinational companies seem to have over the world's resources is a recurring theme throughout Craig's pamphlet. From the dramatic increase in trade and investment abroad we have seen a boom in air cargo, with more runways and airports. More ships, coupled with more ports held in strategic locations, and of course, the ever-increasing number of cars and trucks on the road. All these effects from the globalisation of the world's resources have caused even more increases to the amount of CO₂ in our atmosphere.

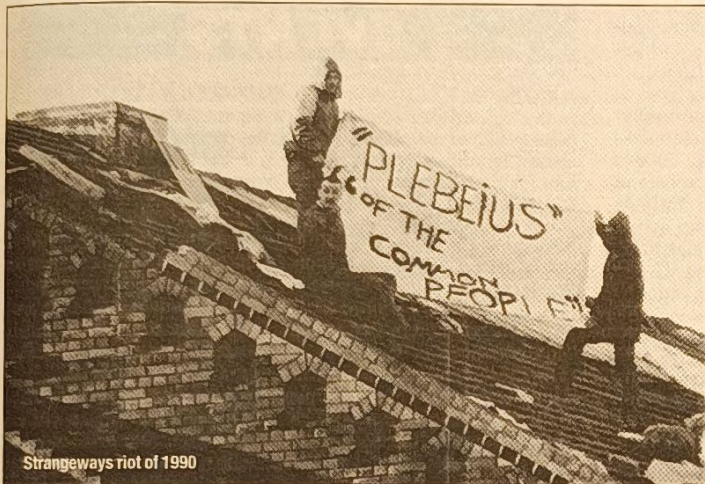
The gravity of Craig's message cannot be overstated and he makes it overwhelmingly clear throughout.

'The crisis confronting our world today can only be compared with that which the dinosaurs faced 65 million years ago. The total extinction of humanity, together with all flora and fauna, has now become a truly real possibility. It would mean nothing less than the end of 3.5 billion years of evolution.'

Lindsay Powell

Confronting the punishment culture

On 11 July the recorded prison population in England and Wales exceeded 74,000 for the first time ever. In the previous four weeks the number of prisoners had risen by 633 to 74,012. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.



Strangeways riot of 1990

In total the prison population has risen by 2,532 in the past year and is 30,000 higher than 10 years ago. At that time Britain already had the highest per capita prison population in Western Europe, at 103 prisoners out of every 100,000 of the total population. This remains the case, with the figure now having risen to 139 per 100,000. More people are gaol'd in England and Wales than in any other western European country and more people are imprisoned per head than in Algeria (111), Egypt (121), Libya (127), Malaysia (121), Burma (118), Turkey (93) or Saudi Arabia (110), and far more than in India (28), Pakistan (51) or Nigeria (34).

Of today's English and Welsh prison population, 10,604 are aged between 15 and 21 years old, 545 of whom are girls. There are 4,059 adult women in prison.

With his usual hypocrisy, Home Secretary David Blunkett is publicly encouraging judges to make greater use of community sentences and curfew orders and saying custody should only be used when strictly necessary. For the second time this year, the number of days out of a short sentence that can be served outside prison with a curfew monitored by an electronic tagging device has been increased, going up first from 60 to 90, and now to 135. However, at the same time, Blunkett is rewriting sentencing law to ensure that harsher sentences will be passed and longer tariffs given to life sentence prisoners (see last two FRFIs).

Commentators sympathetic to the Labour government portray Blunkett's approach as one whereby custody is the last resort for those committing petty crimes but will be used

strictly and punitively against those committing more serious offences. Although it has been statistically proven by the Penal Affairs Consortium that such an approach would in itself result in a steep increase in the prison population, it would be capable of attracting a certain public popularity – understanding towards shop-lifters, people with drug problems, those with disorderly life-styles; ruthless punishment for anyone who commits a violent or sexual offence. However, it is not what is happening.

Instead, custodial sentences are being increasingly used across the spectrum, with a culture of punishment encouraged at every level by politicians, judges and the media. A recent report by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) found that people convicted of minor offences are three times more likely to be jailed for the same offence than in 1991.

There is no sign of this trend being reversed any time in the near future. Almost every measure in the current Criminal Justice Bill is set to increase imprisonment, whether by the direct implementation of longer sentences, or by the indirect increase that will result from the reimprisonment of those who breach the very long and detailed release licences they will be subject to.

And although the system looks to be bursting, the fact that every new gaol is now privately financed means there will always be a strong lobbying body in favour of increased imprisonment. In England, Group 4 currently runs Altcourse, Rye Hill and The Wolds prisons, Premier Prisons run Ashfield, Doncaster, Lowdham Grange and Dovegate, and United Kingdom Detention Services (UKDS) run Forest Bank. In Wales, Securicor runs Parc prison. Two more prisons, one run by UKDS and the other jointly by UKDS and Premier, are due to open at Ashford and Peterborough. These companies will always be happy to compete for

more contracts to imprison more men, women and children, and they also run secure units for children and detention centres for asylum seekers.

However, even with private finance prisons are not being built fast enough to house the growing numbers imprisoned, and it is the same old decaying Victorian prisons that were full to bursting in the late 1980s prior to the Strangeways revolt that are the fullest now. At local prisons, where large numbers of people are remanded in custody by the courts, it is proving increasingly difficult for those awaiting trial to contact their lawyers. Booking a legal visit can take weeks, and when the visit eventually happens, it is likely to be severely limited in time. Booking social visits is even harder and more dispiriting, with the statement in the Prison Rules that remand prisoners can have as many visits as are available rendered meaningless by the impossibility of getting through the booking system or finding an empty slot for the visit.

Where a convicted prisoner then ends up serving their sentence has also degenerated into a farcical lottery. There are prisoners in Swale-side in Kent trying to get to the north-east of England; prisoners in Frankland in Durham whose families are in London; prisoners on the Isle of Wight who get no visits as everyone who could see them is in Birmingham or Manchester and cannot travel. And so on. This has always been the reality for prisoners, as neither the British nor European courts have ever accepted that the 'right to family life' extends to prisoners being located near enough to their families for visits to take place. But it has been possible to negotiate transfers either permanently or for 'accumulated visits'. The more clogged up the system becomes, the more difficult this becomes, both because it is genuinely hard to arrange with so many prisoners, and because prison staff use it as a convenient excuse.

And while staff in the new private prisons are notorious for ignoring prisoners' rights and inventing their own rules, those in the old infamous POA-run prisons, such as Wandsworth or Parkhurst, remain as brutal and bullying as ever. A recent report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons

described Parkhurst as somewhere where prisoners' safety could not be guaranteed, and highlighted their assertions that the gaol is institutionally racist, a claim borne out by a simple examination of the high number of black prisoners detained at any one time in the gaol's massive segregation unit.

Within such a climate, violence and abuse thrive; suicide and self-harm are on the rise. According to another PRT report, a record number of women prisoners have committed suicide in prison this year – with 10 deaths in the first six months of 2003, more than in the whole of 2002.

There have also been 26 attempted suicides and nearly 3,000 reported incidents of self-harm during this period.

A year ago, we wrote: 'Although the 1990 revolt, which began at Strangeways prison in Manchester, was primarily caused by the appalling attitude and brutality of prison staff, there can be no doubt that the overcrowded, insanitary conditions in which prisoners were being held for up to 23 hours a day, for weeks on end, played a major role in fuelling discontent. Since Strangeways, the state has largely kept the prison population subdued through carrot-and-stick measures such as parole and the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme. But with more and more prisoners shoved into the system every week, many of these measures become inoperable, and ultimately irrelevant. The desire for "privileges" cannot be used to divide and rule if there are none to be had and the system can only manage containment.' (FRFI 167 June/July 2002)

At the beginning of June, prisoners at Wealstun, a low security prison in West Yorkshire, took to the rooftop of the gaol, in protest at their exercise and association being cut. Last October saw a major disturbance at Lincoln prison, and in January this year Scottish prisoners at Shotts rose up twice within the space of weeks. While such episodes of resistance are currently sporadic, if the system continues to crowd prisoners in at the rate it is doing, to entirely disregard their need to be located somewhere they can retain family ties, and to trample over their basic rights, another mass uprising on the scale of 1990 may not be far off.

Parkhurst prisoners win compensation for brutality

Years of brutality at HMP Parkhurst have finally been 'officially' recognised by one of the largest compensation pay-outs to prisoners in British history. On 28 June 2003, four ex-Parkhurst prisoners won a total of £79,000 in damages following a High Court hearing of their claims for assault, malicious prosecution and misfeasance in public office. **GEMMA SHANKLIN** reports.

In November 1997 six prisoners, Robert Kakoo, Darren Nash, Paul O'Toole, Tommy O'Rourke, Patrick Petrie, and Michael Trevors were dragged down to the segregation unit at Parkhurst following a violent confrontation with prison staff. The prisoners said this was sparked when a prison officer hit Patrick Petrie over the head with his radio. The others had then been tending to Patrick's injuries and were therefore not in the area where an attack then took place upon three prison officers. However, in the incident that followed, these men were singled out as the ringleaders and forcibly removed from the wing by officers in full riot gear. They were then held in appalling conditions and assaulted and mistreated for up to 17 days. Given that the Chief Inspector of Prisons has recently described Parkhurst as 'institutionally racist' it comes as no surprise that these prisoners are all from minority ethnic groups.

Nash, Kakoo, O'Rourke, Trevors and Petrie were tried at Portsmouth Crown Court in 2000. Each was charged with GBH, two counts of ABH, Violent Disorder and Affray, and most faced automatic life sentences if convicted. After hearing more than six weeks of evidence, the jury only needed a few minutes to decide that the prisoners were not guilty of these trumped up charges.

Petrie, Kakoo, Nash, and Paul O'Toole (who did not stand trial, but was dealt with via the prison's adjudication system/kangaroo court) then sued the Prison Service. The prison staff were no more impressive in the evidence that they gave at the High Court civil hearing than they had been at Portsmouth Crown Court, and the jury reached verdicts that the prison was responsible for maliciously prosecuting Patrick Petrie by falsely alleging he had assaulted three prison officers; that prison officers had punched and/or kicked



Patrick Petrie when they had transferred him from the segregation block at Parkhurst to the block at Albany; and that Petrie, O'Toole, Nash and Kakoo were deliberately mistreated in Parkhurst block where members of staff assaulted them and threw their food at them. The judge characterised this as 'pay back' for the assaults on prison staff. The jury's findings also showed how senior staff and 'inde-

pendent' watchdogs had allowed prison officers' behaviour to go unchecked by ignoring or failing to deal with the numerous complaints made by these prisoners, their families and their solicitors.

The individual members of prison staff who have been identified as responsible for mistreating the prisoners must now be dealt with firmly. They should not be allowed to remain

in Prison Service employment and should face criminal proceedings.

The Prison Service as a whole needs to be subject to a far higher level of independent scrutiny as the current mechanisms are clearly inadequate in preventing the abuse of prisoners by prison officers.

It was the beating of prisoners in segregation that sparked off the Parkhurst riot in 1969, and a European Court action by a prisoner falsely accused of participating in that incident that established prisoners' right of access to the law in such circumstances. It is scandalous that since then there has been so little progress.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE NEWS

Inside

Prisoners on A wing of the Woodhill control unit protested and were beaten by prison staff, following a refusal to allow them out for exercise on one of the hottest days of the year.

Outside

Congratulation to Gary Mills and Tony Poole – finally freed by the Court of Appeal after 14 years of false imprisonment!

No concession to Labour

Socialist Alliance's electoral fiasco on 1 May (see Roundup FRFI 173) has not dimmed the enthusiasm of the left for building an electoral alternative to what it describes as New Labour. In *Socialist Worker*, Lindsay German describes possible models that a 'credible electoral alternative' could take, and after discussing the model of the SSP suggests that 'There's another model – the original Independent Labour Party (ILP) which Marxists were central to founding in 1893 with Keir Hardie. It had Marxists, trade unionists, Christian socialists and was an attempt to bring together the components of what had been a mass movement. It failed partly because it was formed after the high tide of New Unionism in a period of defeats and partly because Hardie held to a form of Christian socialism which lacked political clarity.' Such an assessment glosses over many crucial facts. The founding conference of the ILP rejected the title 'Socialist Labour Party' in favour of the title 'Independent Labour Party' as 'a signal to the Liberals that there were no fundamental political disagreements between the two parties, at least none that might that prevent



Demonstrate to support the Palestinian struggle

them arriving at electoral agreements, open or otherwise'. (Clough, *Labour: A party fit for imperialism* p22). The ILP organised almost exclusively amongst the skilled and better-off sections of the working class and drew its ideology from the Fabians and middle class liberalism – Marxists had no influence. In other words the ILP was to the Liberals what the Socialist Alliance is to the Labour Party today. This might explain why German is now touting it as an example for the SA.

Such an assessment would find support from the Stop the War activists' conference on

18 June which FRFI supporters attended. Tony Benn – like Keir Hardie a committed Christian – gave the keynote speech. No criticisms of the Labour Party were offered; typically, the SWP's John Rees omitted to mention the responsibility of the Labour government for the war on Iraq. Others expressed their racist contempt for the Palestinian people by describing Hamas as the mirror image of Zionism. Nothing here, then, to upset future electoral alliances, or to challenge Labour imperialism. Nor was there on 17 July when FRFI comrades attended a meeting in Newington

Green, North London; Lindsay German described Jeremy Corbyn and George Galloway as 'wonderful' and said that 'without these two MPs the campaign would have been much smaller and had less political clarity'. A very wealthy MP arrived late as usual to milk the adulation of the audience with the staged entrance that is his trademark. George Galloway (estimated minimum annual income £200,000, owner of three houses) then quoted Rosa Luxemburg on socialism against barbarism, but wouldn't answer as to whether his endorsement of this great revolutionary meant we shouldn't vote Labour in the future.

In contrast, FRFI is fighting to build a genuine anti-imperialist movement which makes no concessions to the Labour Party. In London, members of FRFI/Victory to the Intifada group have stepped up action in support of the Palestinian people by reinstating Thursday evening pickets outside Marks & Spencer at Marble Arch. Comrades are organising a day of action, 'Oxford Street Intifada', on Saturday 2 August against all those corporations who support the illegal occupation of Palestine. The day will involve actions, occupations and street meetings to highlight the role of companies such as M&S, Selfridges, Caterpillar and Starbucks. VTI also joined the picket of Downing Street on 21 July when Ariel Sharon met Tony Blair – a convention of war criminals.

In Manchester, weekly pickets of Market Street M&S are attracting more abuse from Zionists. Provocations are regular; one picketer is facing a charge under the Public Order Act whilst others await a court hearing on summonses issued by the City Council. The City Council has also summonsed Stop the War activists; one has been charged with police assault. The *Zionist Jewish Telegraph* has been weighing into the M&S picket; in a recent letter from Israel, a Zionist

who had seen the picket complained that 'public opinion in Britain is so anti-Israel' – so we must be having some impact!

FRFI supporters also contributed to the Northeast Social Forum in Durham at the end of June, speaking on Cuba and Palestine. Meanwhile in London, members at LSE held a very successful public meeting featuring the investigative journalist Greg Palast. Ninety people listened to a lively discussion on corporate corruption and imperialism.

EVENTS

LONDON

FRFI/Victory to the Intifada Group
Saturday 2 August 'Oxford Street Intifada' Day of action and occupations against the main corporate sponsors of Zionism: Marks & Spencer, Caterpillar, Starbucks and Selfridges. Meet at 12 noon outside Marks & Spencer, Oxford Street (Marble Arch end)

Wednesday 20 August

Victory to the Intifada campaign meeting Discussion: Palestine and the Middle East Come and organise anti-imperialist solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada. 7pm, Room G1, London School of Economics, Kingsway, WC2 (Holborn tube)

For more details call 07815 617 746

Pickets of Marks & Spencer, Marble Arch: Every Thursday evening 6 – 8pm

MIDLANDS

For further details, contact
07949 256 477

MANCHESTER

Victory to the Intifada! Picket of Marks & Spencer, Market Street, Manchester City Centre, 12-3pm every Saturday. For more info contact, Victory_Intifada@hotmail.com or phone 07816 547 066

For information on other activities of Manchester RCG over the summer, contact, manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com or phone 07816 547 066.

GLASGOW

FRFI Readers Group meeting: Thursday 28 August, 7.30pm, Govanhall Neighbourhood Community Centre, 6 Daisy Street, Glasgow G42 8JL

FRFI Student Society meeting: Thursday 2 October, 7.30pm. Debates Chamber, Strathclyde University Students Union, John Street Glasgow.

For more details on Scotland FRFI activities and weekly stalls and events call 07779 785 529

Rock around the Blockade round-up

www.ratb.org.uk

RATB challenges SWP lies on Cuba

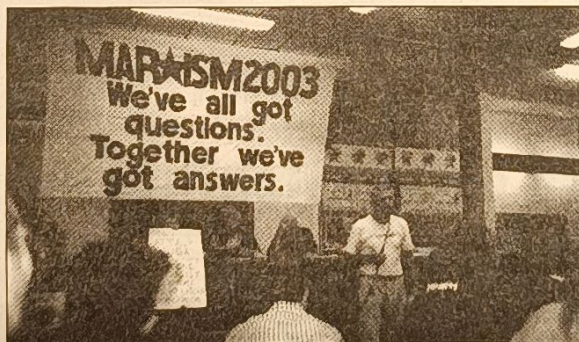
Roll up! Roll up! all you phoney socialists and apologists for imperialism... Time for Marxism 2003, the Socialist Workers' Party's (SWP) annual week-long conference advertised as holding the answers to true socialism. This year Rock around the Blockade challenged two of the orchestrated attacks on Cuba from SWP platforms, a meeting about Cuba and another supposedly about Che Guevara.

RATB knows the SWP's line about the Cuban Revolution; it barely changes no matter how fast reality moves or history disproves it. This year, once again, the SWP demonstrated how close their anti-Cuban views are to the right-wing fascists in Miami linked to the Bush administration, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Professor Mike Gonzalez, the SWP's Cuba 'expert', gives out CANF's website details. The CIA has been fomenting counter-revolutionary organisations in Cuba in order to create the pretext for a US invasion. Gonzalez's spin on the punishment in Cuba of counter-revolutionary CANF and CIA agents served imperialism well.

Without a single mention of the incredible achievements in education, healthcare and all other social welfare indicators, the SWP focuses on recent food-shortages, the existence of dollar shops and prostitution,

and repeats the tired old lies about the Revolution being won by a bunch of middle-class idealists, the Cuban working class being exploited by a privileged elite surrounding the dictator Fidel Castro, and about homosexuals and those with HIV/AIDs being oppressed and incarcerated.

The SWP exploits the public interest in Cuba and Che Guevara to attract hundreds of people to its meetings where they are drip fed these lies. RATB activists were forced, once again, to confront these apologists for imperialism, particularly at this dangerous time when Cuba has been named on the Bush 'axis of evil' hit list. Every time Gonzalez uttered a lie in the Cuba meeting, he was corrected from the floor. An RATB activist spoke about the gains of the Cuban Revolution in the context of Latin America and a world dominated by neo-liberalism, where 30,000 children die everyday from poverty. Another RATB speaker pointed out that Cuba is standing against imperialism and that the Cuban people are armed and will fight to defend the Revolution which they feel is truly their own. Throughout the meeting, an RATB member held up a poster at the front of the hall with a quote from US black political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal, to remind the audience that support for Cuba is not a theoretical or



FRFI activists intervene as SWP's Chris Harman (right) attacks Cuban socialism

abstract question, but a matter of whose side you take in the real world – the capitalist ruling class or the poor and oppressed.

Two days later at the Che Guevara meeting much the same anti-Cuban propaganda was restated by Esme Choonara. An RATB activist pointed out that the SWP regularly holds meetings around the country on Che Guevara in order to attack the Cuban Revolution. She noted that as usual the SWP speaker had failed to mention Che Guevara's important contribution to Marxist economics and the problems of transition to socialism, dismissing him as a middle-class idealist individualist. The comrade stated that the SWP's opposition to the Cuban Revolution stems from their class hostility to the seizure of power in an armed

struggle, by and for the poorest and most oppressed people. The example of the Cuban Revolution is a challenge to the SWP's politics of reformism, gradualism and parliamentarism, which focuses on the trade union movement as the agent of social change. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, the trade union movement was controlled by the state, corrupted and run by gangsters. The Revolution had to be organised outside the official trade unions. Today in Britain, the trade unions are almost as tied to the state as those of Cuba in the 1950s. The SWP refuses to recognise this and break its links with the official labour movement, including the Labour Party, to which most unions pay massive subscriptions. In the anti-war movement the SWP gives platforms to representatives of the imperialist

Labour Party and pro-imperialists, like Charles Kennedy, blocking out the real anti-war and anti-imperialist activists.

We refuse to allow the SWP a free ride with its anti-Cuban lies and we will return to Marxism every year until the SWP abandons its pro-imperialist position on Cuba. If it is serious about discussing Cuba we challenge the SWP to invite a Cuban representative, or someone who supports the Cuban Revolution to debate on a platform with it.

Rock Around the Blockade held a meeting in London about the situation in Venezuela, showing a wonderful documentary made by Irish film makers who happened to be in the presidential palace in Venezuela at the time of the CIA-organised coup against democratically elected President Hugo Chavez. The footage shows how hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans, particularly the poor, took to the streets in anger to demand the return of their kidnapped president and how the mainstream media had manipulated its reporting to distort the world's understanding of events taking place. An interesting discussion followed addressing questions of the necessity of the armed struggle in social change, how socialism can be built and how the enemy is to be defeated.

Ten RATB festival goers pulled pints at this year's Glastonbury Festival in the Worker's Beer Tent. All wages and tips go to the campaign, so cheers! Fundraising continues



on Friday 22 August in London with the next Rebel Music rebellion, conscious club nights with London's best hip-hop, break-beats and reggae DJs and MCs. The musical rebellion takes place at the Electrowerkz, from 9pm-3am. Entry is £3 before 10pm and £5 afterwards. E-mail rebelmusiccuba@hotmail.com for details or see the RATB website: www.ratb.org.uk. Regular stalls are held around the country to defend Cuban socialism and oppose the illegal US blockade.

Next RATB meeting in London:

Wednesday 6 August.
The 26 July Movement and the Cuban Revolution – an introduction 7pm, Room S75, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, WC2. Nearest tube: Holborn.

For meetings and events in your area, contact the campaign on 020 7837 1688 or e-mail us at office@ratb.org.uk

BACARDI BARRED!

Pub chain JD Wetherspoon has replaced anti-Cuban Bacardi white rum at all its bars in protest at the strong-arm tactics employed by Bacardi to maintain a monopoly position. JD Wetherspoon say they want to ensure a variety of choice for their customers – and that includes having the far superior and Cuban Havana Club rum readily available.

CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative – **Join the RCG!**

I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG ☐

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group ☐

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Scottish Socialist Party

I have seen comrade Ben Courtice's letter about Michael MacGregor's article on the Scottish elections in FRFI 173 (see page 10 of this issue).

I assumed that Mike's statement that the SSP is 'now completely committed to a parliamentary strategy' and that their 'anti-imperialist principles are to be sloughed off whenever it is an electoral necessity' to be irony. The problem with irony is that not everyone understands the sarcasm, through no fault of their own. The SSP, from its origins in the British Labour Party, has only ever had a parliamentary strategy and it has never had any anti-imperialist principles.

Ben will understand that the acid test for British socialists is Ireland. Both main components of the SSP, Sheridan's group and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), supported the Labour government sending troops onto the streets of Derry and Belfast in 1969. Even today, after 34 years of oppression and murder, they cannot bring themselves to call for the unconditional withdrawal of British troops. To underscore this reactionary appetite, they invite the Orange fascistic Progressive

Unionist Party onto their platforms, no doubt to secure the Scottish Orange vote!

Ben may not know this, but unlike in Australia, voting in Britain isn't compulsory. Having grasped the fact that voting doesn't change anything, the proletariat doesn't bother. In the English inner-city constituency where I live, only about 27% of the electorate vote. The voters the Labour Party and the SSP are appealing to are the labour aristocracy and the democratic petty bourgeoisie. The Socialist Alliance in England and Wales and the SSP both have an electoral strategy of 'vote socialist if you can, vote Labour if you must' and, in the case of the former, they used it as a slogan. They won't stand against left Labour MPs.

Some of these MPs led chants of 'Vive la France!' on anti-war demos, feeding the illusion that imperialism, albeit in this case the French variety, can be humane. Of course, we know how cruel they can be, as they commit colonial atrocities to the tune of the once-revolutionary battle hymn, the *Marseillaise*.

Prison privatisation 'threat'

In the news recently following highly critical reports by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, in particular of HMP Liverpool, it (Liverpool) has, and I quote word for word, been 'threatened with privatisation'. Key word here being 'threatened'. So prison privatisation, is it a good thing or a bad thing?

Is it a coincidence that since corporate firms have taken over the running of prisons/escorts and have a monopoly on canteens and catering that the prison population has increased? In Amerika it is not uncommon for

firms such as Wackenhut to pressure local authorities into introducing stiffer penalties for things such as throwing litter, to fill up private jails, ensuring a maximum profit.

HMP Liverpool will not be 'privatised' – well, it will, but being frank it will be sold to the highest bidder. As it is the UK's and Europe's largest jail, there will be quite a bidding war over it.

Every new prison now is designated, constructed, managed and financed by private firms under the government's genius solution of the PFI, which was introduced to ensure that the rich

In his 1916 work *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*, Lenin explained: 'The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries etc, makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or a given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this urge and so there is created a bond between imperialism and opportunism... the most dangerous of all in this respect are those (like the Menshevik, Martov) who do not wish to understand that the fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound with the fight against opportunism'.

JIMMY GERMAN
East London

The plight of the Kalahari 'Bushmen'

The African government of Botswana continues to ignore the rights of the Khwe 'Bushmen' to their ancestral lands in the central Kalahari desert.

In 1997, the government evicted about 1,300 'Bushmen' and put them into bleak 'resettlement' camps where they are dependent on government handouts. But hundreds resisted eviction to remain near their ancestors' graves and their numbers have recently been swelled by several families who escaped the camps and made their way back home.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve was created in the 1960s specifically to protect 'Bushman' land, and the people lived there largely unmolested until the mid-1980s, when the Botswana government decided it wanted them out so it could explore freely for diamonds, and offered inducements including the promise of schooling, health care, employment, small plots of land, livestock and cash. But little of this materialised. And at the school in New Xade resettlement camp, pupils have complained of physical and sexual abuse and having their 'Bushman' heritage ridiculed. The few cash handouts have been largely spent in local bars. Traditional activities such as hunting and gathering roots and berries are impossible in the barren landscape surrounding the camp, where the 'Bushmen' are prey to boredom, depression, alcoholism and the violence that results.

Meanwhile, those who stayed put in their ancestral communities inside the reserve face constant intimidation. The government periodically threatens to stop the monthly water delivery on which the 'Bushmen' now depend. It had to be forced by the pressure group Survival to repair the pump on the only borehole when it failed. It also limits hunting – a way of life for the 'Bushmen' for thousands of years – to only three antelope per man per year, citing the need for 'conservation' – despite the fact that herd numbers are increasing. 'Bushman' hunters caught by officials have been beaten, imprisoned and tortured.

The Botswana government is violating international and domestic law in trampling on the human rights of the bushmen. It should immediately recognise the right of the 'Bushmen' to collective ownership of their ancestral lands and allow them to sink new boreholes and freely hunt the game they have always depended upon. Finally, it must provide transport back to the reserve for all those evicted and who now wish to return.

ROBERT REDFORD
Lincoln

Fighting for justice

It has now been almost 18 years since Anita Kirkwood was brutally murdered, and as yet her killers have still not been charged with her murder. No member of the general public, except the police and my defence counsel, know the true story behind her murder.

Because I know and therefore will not accept responsibility for her murder, I will never be given parole. It is a no-win situation.

But I fight on for justice. It's a matter of pride. I will not allow the police to cover their corruption up. The British legal

system is basically flawed and this flaw must be shown to the general public. I am going to do this by putting on the web all the details that the police and my defence counsel withheld from the jury, including the identity of both of Anita's killers.

It has to be exposed, for me and all the other innocent people the Thames Valley police have sent to gaol.

If you believe that your readers have the right to know the truth behind her murder, tell them to check out www.mojuk.org.uk and

you will find the truth behind the cover-up that the police have kept hidden from the general public for so long.

I have known since 1985 who really murdered Anita. The police have known too, because I wrote and told them which police statements and forensic evidence to check out to catch their murderer. I didn't know about the second murderer until 1991, because my own defence team had withheld statements and forensics from me until that date.

TERENCE WILLIAM ALLEN
L55957-D1-19
122a Milton Road, Portsmouth,
Hampshire PO3 6AS

Labour for sale

Why are the trade unions funding New Labour? Surely funding can be left to Lord Sainsbury who virtually 'bought' New Labour singlehandedly?

Historically we find MPs of every party awarding themselves 30%-plus pay increases while simultaneously urging public sector workers to 'show pay restraint' at 3%.

DR DAVID MACDONALD
Lancashire

SWP attacks Cuba

I attended the Socialist Workers Party's Marxism 2003 event and in particular the session on Cuba, and it is obvious that that organisation has got itself into a knot over the issue.

The SWP believes that Cuba is 'state capitalist', but cannot seem to fit the reality of Cuba's remarkable social advances into this theory. So how did Mike Gonzalez get around this tricky fact in his speech? He simply ignored it! He did not once mention one significant gain of the revolution in his whole almost hour-long attack on Cuba. Perhaps if he had

mentioned the fact that Cuba's infant mortality rate is now below 6.5 per thousand live births, that it has more doctors working in Africa and Latin America than any other country, or that they are aiming for every Cuban to reach degree level in education, then people in the audience would have started to wonder just what sort of capitalism it is that supposedly exists in Cuba.

However they do not seem to be honest enough to spell out the logic of their theory and openly call for the overthrow of the

Cuban state. Have no doubt about it, this is what the SWP wishes to see. There could only be one outcome of the Cuban government being overthrown and that is to return Cuba to neo-colonial status run by gangsters and fascists with the Cuban people plunged into the same misery that exists in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the former socialist bloc. This means that the SWP is directly against the interests of the Cuban working class and the workers and peasants of all countries who see Cuba as an example of socialism.

Your comrades' intervention against this anti-communist event was excellent!

ALEX MACLEAY
Humburside

Prison slavery

Thanks to Mark Barnsley for his excellent article in FRFI 173. As he points out, prison slavery is an important part of the Prison Industrial Complex.

On 31 May 2003 US President Bush jr visited the Auschwitz concentration camp installed by the Nazis in the 1930s. Hundreds of thousands of women, men and children were killed there. Bush said that everyone must fight against this kind of evil. He is right! On top of the concentration camp gate the Nazis had put the words 'Arbeit macht frei' (Work makes you free).

I know that I cannot compare the situation of the slaves in the concentration camps with the prison slavery being practised today in Britain, the rest of Europe, the US or wherever. But what kind of mentality do those who use prisoners and their labour have?

I am a prisoner and so I know the situation behind bars. That is why I can tell you that we need a European-wide and worldwide campaign and movement against forced labour. We must join together and fight against the evil perpetuated by the likes of Bush and Blair.

THOMAS MEYER-FALK
C/o JVA-Z3117, Schönbornstr. 32,
D76646 Bruchsal, GERMANY

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit – that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today millions are out of work with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population – the majority women and children – lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.*

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties is subjected to military occupation and brutal repression. *The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.*

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious – low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. It has never defended the interests of the working class. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, immigrants, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. *The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.*

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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Colombia: a long struggle against imperialism

On the third anniversary of Plan Colombia, the pretext of a war against narco-farming is barely maintained. One way or another, the same quantity continues to be grown, to make real money for the wealthy producers in Colombia, and the dealers in the US and Europe. The massive use of chemical sprays simply destroys the lives of the ordinary peasants, driving many of them from the land. Those that hold on are offered inducements to grow export crops instead of much-needed staples. These are subject to speculation and over-supply so that the peasants risk debt and starvation. On 26 June, resistance forced an Administrative Tribunal to order the suspension of aerial fumigation, and, conceding the right of Colombians to enjoy a healthy environment, to order proper studies of the chemicals used. This did not stop Uribe announcing the continuation of such schemes in speeches he made during July.

Plan Colombia involves re-establishing the power of the Colombian state over the entire country, and forcing through privatisation and participation in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In January, US Treasury Secretary John Snow visited Colombia to agree a bilateral free trade pact to push forward the FTAA. Plan Colombia has now been renamed the Andean Anti-narcotic Initiative with \$697 million to spend this year alone. The Initiative aims to get other Latin American states to provide troops to fight in Colombia. Venezuela and Brazil have refused, but the Chilean Government turns a blind eye to many in its armed forces volunteering.

Since his election last August, Uribe has been building up the armed bands that hold his 'modernising' state together, devoting 'much effort to weakening his country's rebel armies' (*The Economist*, 19 July). Amid heavy security, US Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Bogota in December and promised to pour another \$200 million into the military and police forces. The US has more troops in Colombia at this time than it had in Central America during the 1980s, when Washington was intervening in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

In July, the Colombian ambassador to the US announced that 'the fight against terrorism would be the priority' in the next phase of the Plan. He also said US support would be necessary long after the previously suggested reduction in participation by 2006. Now the Colombian government has presented a project for voluntary and obligatory military and social service for women over 18, to start in 2004. European history shows such programmes of social discipline, launched by business in the face of massive unemployment and discontent, to be typically proto-fascist.

The widespread use of paramilitary forces by local and regional land owners is now being replaced by an expanded national army and the creation of new local militias, which will be motivated by the prizes placed on the heads of revolutionaries. The government and the Auto-defensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) began negotiating in December to dissolve the latter's terror gangs. They will be absorbed into the newly expanded military and police forces. On 15 July representatives of many of

Plan Colombia is restructuring the country to meet the demands of US imperialism which needs to plunder the huge natural riches of South America to maintain its global position. Britain and other European powers are keen to join in. Fascist Colombian President Uribe is pressing home the asset-stripping programme of the US. The telecom industry has been privatised and now the state oil industry Ecopetrol is to follow. A referendum in October aims to create a corporate state that will finally end the years of internecine struggle within the ruling class. Meanwhile the state is concentrating its attack on the resistance of the working class and the poor peasantry. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

the AUC gangs signed a ten-point agreement with the government to demobilise. However, five did not, and, with at least 9,000 armed thugs, continue to murder opponents of land reform and privatisation.

All the terrorist gangs continued to operate during the negotiations with army support. They were resisted by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Army of National Liberation (ELN). On 28 December, members of the FARC 24th Front and the ELN wiped out an extreme right wing paramilitary base in San Pablo. During a fierce battle 60 AUC members were killed. In the same month, paramilitaries from the AUC lost more than 150 lives in three separate battles. In February FARC attempted to assassinate Uribe. Now the official military campaign against FARC and the ELN is growing. Uribe refuses to speak to FARC except through the UN, rejects a demilitarised zone to conduct prisoner exchanges and says that if an exchange of prisoners ever takes place, those held by the government must leave the country. FARC is demanding direct talks, the establishment of a negotiation zone and no exile for exchanged prisoners.

Britain's role

On 9 July, Tony Blair hosted an international conference on Colombia, the second in two years. 23 governments from the EU, US and Latin America, together with the World Bank, attended. To maintain its influence Britain has become the second biggest donor of aid to Uribe. In 1995, SAS training and operations in Colombia dating back to 1989 were revealed in Andy McNab's paper-back *Immediate Action*. In 1999 the Foreign Office was forced to admit training Colombian forces in urban warfare and counter guerrilla strategy and 'psychiatry'. Since 1997 Blair has considerably expanded M16 work in the country, whilst between 2001 and 2002, British military exports to Colombia increased by 50%. This has included submarine technology. It is therefore no surprise that Uribe has confidently demanded on 24 April that Nicaragua stop exploration for oil in a disputed zone in the Caribbean Sea covering 50,000 square kilometres, especially given that BP has removed so much oil from Colombia since the early 1990s. Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell has said that 'to deny [Colombian] personnel defence related equipment would allow illegal armed groups (to succeed) and would leave the state unable to uphold law and order. There is concern about the lack of



Demonstration outside Coca Cola distribution centre, Chicago, organised Sinaltrainal. The union is calling for a boycott because of Coca Cola's involvement with AUC.

any police or armed forces presence in much of the country'.

Militarised privatisations: water, telecommunications and oil

Privatisation is central to Uribe's strategy. The privatised Colombian electric companies ISA and ISAGEN have already bought up the electricity grids of Peru and Bolivia, essential infrastructure for the FTAA. On 23 January 2003, Uribe ordered the seizure of the Cali Waste Water Corporation. State security forces surrounded and harassed groups of workers, threatening to kill workers at the company's Colon Plant. Previous attempts to privatise it have failed. On 29 January, more than 5,000 people assembled in the square in front of the Municipal Administration Centre to oppose Uribe's decree. There were two explosions as the demonstration started. In the ensuing commotion, police attacked and arrested the organisers. Later, they also attacked students, workers and members of the community who demanded their release outside the police station. Police threw more explosives at the demonstrators from the Municipal Administration Centre, and shot teargas into the square, dispersing everyone, without a care for the children, pregnant women and

elderly people who were participating in the rally.

Ecopetrol, nationalised in 1951, is also on the way to being privatised; it has been converted into a public limited company as a first step. The company provides 35% of the country's exports and \$2bn revenues to the state each year. It directly employs 7,000 workers and 100,000 indirectly. It represents massive potential shareholder value, with assets of 25bn pesos and liabilities of only 17bn pesos. In preparation, on 20 June, armed police invaded the Barrancabermeja oil refinery port, expelling the workers as shifts changed. 2,000 workers resisted teargas and water cannon. The next day they were violently dispersed after hours of confrontation. The Cartagena refinery was also militarised on 7 June. In Apiay oil field, unionised workers have been prevented from working.

100 oil workers have been murdered and many sacked and gaoled for their resistance to the state-appointed management. Now the state is forcibly handing the industry over to 'real' capitalists whilst reinforcing strict corporate discipline: 'behaviour ... (which) does not meet requirements and attitudes ... (that) do not generate confidence' will be stopped 'by virtue of the powers that the company exercises over its employees'. In the

face of working class resistance, however, the state has now offered negotiations and will allow workers to return if they accept the conversion of Ecopetrol into a private corporation. On 19 June there was a national strike of state employees, with marches throughout the country by workers and students and a further one is being called for 12 August.

The October referendum

Uribe's proposed October referendum seeks to gain support with a single tick to wholesale attacks on the working class and poor. It proposes to dismiss 45,000 federal workers, strip away trade union rights, cut education, impose more taxes on workers whilst freezing wages, social spending and benefits, and reduce the size of Congress. So far the Constitutional Court has felt obliged to kick out four of the proposals and stop the remaining 15 being answered with a single tick! However, it left in the request for full approval of the IMF adjustment programme. The main objectives of this plebiscite are to legitimise the IMF plan, and to be able to enforce it by changing the constitution to allow executive power to override the courts or Congress. A 25% turn-out is all that is necessary to make the proposals law. It is vital, therefore, that all workers boycott the referendum.

International solidarity: boycott Coca-Cola!

Two years ago, Sinaltrainal - Colombia's National Union of Food Industry Workers - filed a case in US courts accusing Coca-Cola and its locally-owned bottlers of using paramilitaries to intimidate and assassinate union organisers. It focused on the murder of Isidro Segundo Gil and the intimidation of five of his co-workers at a bottling plant in Carepa. In March, the judge removed Coca-Cola from the case; Sinaltrainal has appealed.

In December 2002, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark and other supporters of the Colombian union movement attended an international tribunal in Bogota. The event put Coca-Cola bosses on trial for criminal acts against trade unionists in Colombia and began with a national protest at the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Bogota, called by Sinaltrainal, many of whose members have been murdered. The main banner read: 'The people of the US demand justice for the people of Colombia. No to Coca-Cola and no to Plan Colombia'. The protesters chanted 'Who is paying for violence in Colombia? Coca-Cola!' Marching to the US Embassy, chants turned to: 'We don't want to be a colony of the US, we want to be a free and sovereign Colombia' and 'The workers aren't terrorists, US imperialism is the terrorist'. Speakers outlined how in the past 12 years eight Coca-Cola workers have been killed, 48 have been displaced and several exiled. Coca-Cola has a bloody history in Guatemala and India, and more recently in Venezuela.

Aprecio Atiz, president of the union federation CGTD declared that the rulers in Colombia today are assassins. In 2001, of 240 trade unionists assassinated worldwide, 201 were in Colombia. In 2002, the figures were 213 and 184 respectively. Another union speaker said 'For every glass of Coca-Cola that we buy, we are buying a bullet to assassinate a Colombian. We do not believe in consultation with the transnational corporations. Imperialism doesn't just want a little piece of Colombia, it wants the whole country. And it doesn't just want Colombia, it wants all of Latin America. It wants us all to kneel and continue to be exploited'. In solidarity, an international campaign was launched on 24 July to boycott Coca-Cola. FRFI calls on its readers to support this action.

**No to US terrorism in Colombia!
Boycott Coca-Cola!**