

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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IRAQ: HUMBLING THE MIGHTY

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair might believe the US to be almighty but it is fast dawning on sections of the US and British ruling classes that it is not. By September the invasion of Iraq had cost the US \$138bn. The victorious coalition forces of April were looking futile and tarnished by the end of the summer. On 7 September Bush called on Congress for an additional \$87bn and an extra 10,000 foreign troops for 'the war on terrorism'. On cue British Defence Secretary Hoon announced that the first of up to 5,000 British troops were on their way to join the 11,000 British soldiers already in Iraq. Labour's £3bn extra for defence in April's budget will soon be used up. Guns and money are not working and do not exist in inexhaustible supplies. The occupation of Iraq takes place in the context of imperialist crisis and division that magnifies the impact of the Iraqi resistance. On 23 September Bush was forced to return to the United Nations (UN) that he had turned his back on in the spring. **TREVOR RAYNE** reports.

Estimates of Iraqi civilian dead since the start of the invasion range from 8,000 to 10,000 people. Delayed explosions of cluster bombs have killed and maimed approximately 1,000 children. US and British soldiers hold over 5,200 prisoners without

trial. Amnesty International condemned the 'torture and mistreatment' of these prisoners and said that some had been killed in prison by coalition forces. This suffering raises no concerns in US and British ruling circles. It is their inflated budgets

and sagging credibility, falling as the toll of soldiers' lives rises, that strikes doubt into their brains.

On 1 July, 19 US and six British soldiers had been killed in combat since 1 May when President Bush declared victory and the combat over. By 8 August the number of US troops killed was 57, by 21 September the number of US soldiers killed in combat since 1 May was 79 with 11 British soldiers dead. These are the official figures from military sources. Unofficial sources say the US and British military dead from combat and other causes are over 300 with a dozen attacks on coalition forces each day and 250 US soldiers wounded in August alone.

US and British military spokespeople refer to the attackers as 'terrorists', 'Ba'athists', 'Al Qaida' and so on – they probably have little idea of who they are. In August people of Basra fought British troops with stones in protest at fuel and water shortages. The main oil pipeline to Turkey was blown up as was the main water pipeline to Baghdad. The Jordanian embassy

was bombed killing 11 people. On 19 August the UN was attacked in its Baghdad headquarters killing 23 people including Sergio Vieira de Mello, special representative of the UN Secretary General. On 29 August 129 people were killed by a bomb at the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf. Among the dead was a senior Shi'ite Moslem leader, Ayatollah Hakim, who agreed with participation in the US appointed governing council. His brother is one of the nine rotating presidents of the council. Ayatollah Hakim's followers blamed the coalition for letting the attack happen and formed militias in defiance of the ruling US and British Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to patrol Shia areas. The *Financial Times* cautioned, 'The relative quiescence of the Shia after the Anglo-American invasion is the most valuable political capital the occupation forces possess.' On 2 September the Baghdad police academy was blown up killing one officer and wounding 20 others.

Faced with a guerrilla war they cannot tame, the coalition forces

have resorted to their customary terror and mayhem. Men, women and children shot at checkpoints, random shootings out of the back of armoured vehicles, demonstrators gunned down. On 9 August, as people rebelled in Basra, US troops shot dead six Iraqis including a father and three children when they failed to meet a curfew. On 12 September US soldiers killed ten Iraqi police whom the coalition had selected and trained. The police were pursuing a suspect vehicle occupied by 'anti-coalition gunmen'. The US troops continued firing for ninety minutes. These are glimpses of what is happening that made their way into the British press. The *Independent's* Robert Fisk, unable to obtain reliable information on the violence, visited mortuaries. He concluded that in September almost 1,000 Iraqi civilians were being killed each week.

The campaign in Iraq is stretching the US military to its limits. Of 33 US combat brigades 16 are in Iraq and all the rest but three are committed

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Welcome...

No amount of intellectual theorising or sympathy for human suffering can effect change unless it is accompanied by sustained political struggle. It is both possible and our duty to change the world. Readers and supporters of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* know that this understanding motivates our analysis and action. For example, in setting up the Victory to the Intifada (VTI) groups around the country to consistently campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian people and show the British public how it is linked to Zionist brutality, just by shopping in Marks and Spencer department stores.

After three years of the Palestinian uprising, the boycott M&S pickets, like the Intifada itself, continue. Now the right-wing reactionaries, Zionist extremists and British fascists have reared their ugly heads to confront us directly where politics really counts – on the streets. For those in doubt, it is now clear that Zionism is a form of fascism; the Israeli flag alongside the Union Jack, calling on the public to buy Israeli goods, racist ranting against Arabic and Muslim peoples, accusing us of anti-Semitism (see pages 8/9 and page 14).

This confrontation by fascists shows our VTI campaign is succeeding. Our weekly pickets have reached thousands more people than a one-off demonstration can. We have demolished the pro-Zionist propaganda of the British media with our historical knowledge and by providing hard facts that expose Israel as a racist apartheid state with a cruel expansionist logic which can bring no peace or justice for Palestinian people. The fascists have been put on the defensive. We must drive home our attack.

Since the fascists have taken to the streets, the pickets of M&S have grown. This is vital and it must continue. This is a battle between those opposing racist oppression, military domination and imperialist brutality, and those supporting it. By refusing to leave the Palestinian people to struggle in isolation we will win an ideological battle against racism, discrimination and exploitation here in Britain. Our triumph in this battle will help put a brake on the rise of fascism here in Britain. You, the



Union Jack and Israeli flag outside M&S

reader, must join the movement against Zionism/fascism. Help to build a picket outside every M&S in the country! (see page 14 for details).

Through its aggressive imperialist policies and the racism of its domestic policies, the British Labour government is giving sanction to the extreme right wing in Britain. The military destruction and economic rape of underdeveloped countries bolsters racist arrogance inside the imperialist countries. Defeat for the imperialists means defeat for the racists at home. The black power movement in the USA took off when the US army was being hounded through the Vietnamese jungles, despite far superior military power. We must support all forms of resistance to imperialism, because ultimately it is resistance to our own oppressor, the capitalist ruling class.

Solidarity with those fighting imperialism means being part of the international movement. Members of the RCG attended the Anti-imperialist Camp in Italy with other communists and revolutionaries from around the world (see page 10). The main call of the Camp was support for Iraqi resistance to the invasion, resistance which has created a major obstacle in the plans of the US ruling class to dominate the world, with Britain as the junior partner. The arrogant warmongers forgot the lesson of history, that no people will submit to domination without a fight (see pages 1 and 3).

This is clear today throughout Latin America where workers, peasants and indigenous people mobilise against the neo-liberal policies designed to destroy their livelihoods and dignity for the profits of the capitalist elite, which tries to buy up

the world and its people (see page 6). In South Africa, the government's attempts to privatise water, the source of all life, is being combated by the Anti-Privatisation Forum which declares that the collective resistance of the poor 'is both necessary and never-ending for as long as the barbarism of capitalism exists' (see page 7). In Nepal, the People's Liberation Army has called an end to its cease fire following the collapse of talks with the oppressive feudal monarchy. The revolution continues (see page 7).

The war on Iraq has exposed the brutal and parasitic nature of capitalism in crisis, trampling over the world in the quest for profits. Imperialism cannot solve the problems of poverty, disease, illiteracy, civil war and repression suffered by most of the world's people. The underdeveloped countries have begun to demand an end to the systematic robbery of their natural wealth by the rich west. The World Trade Organisation's annual meeting in Cancun, Mexico, collapsed when representatives of poor countries walked out in protest at neo-liberal policies which trap them in underdevelopment (see page 6).

The imperialists resort to greater repression to keep this resistance in check. In the last two years, the US has intensified its campaign to destroy the Cuban revolution. It is the right and the duty of the Cuban people to take whatever measures are necessary to prevent the poisoning of its socialist system (see page 11). We salute the Cuban measures to combat imperialist machinations just as we salute the resistance in Iraq and Palestine.

We also salute the resistance to repression, racism and exploitation here in Britain; the struggle for human rights and dignity of those incarcerated in prisons and special hospitals (see page 13), against police murder, against racist immigration legislation (see page 16), and the struggle against the privatisation of the NHS and our education system (see page 4).

Doing nothing means supporting the brutality of capitalism. Don't be a bystander. Be a nuisance! Join the resistance, keep doing things and keep coming back, bigger, better and more confident! Join the RCG!

Hutton Inquiry into the circumstances of the death of Dr David Kelly

'The dogs have barked... the caravan moves on'

CAROL BRICKLEY

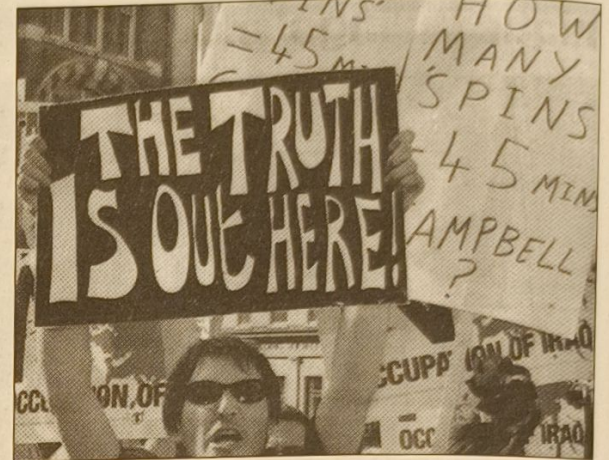
After six weeks of evidence, the publication of more than 900 documents and several millions of pounds spent on fees and expenses, all we can say of the Hutton Inquiry so far is that nothing adds up. Everyone, with the probable exception of the dead scientist's widow and family, has been 'spinning' – 'spinning' is the spin-word for lying. The inquiry into the circumstances of Kelly's death is now over and Hutton has retired to write his report. No one will be shocked by its recommendations when it finally appears in a few weeks time.

It is blatantly obvious why Dr David Kelly died. He made the mistake of talking to the BBC's Andrew Gilligan about his criticisms of the government's September dossier on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He compounded his mistake by owning up and then lying about it. His employers, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the government and Gilligan all added to the pressure. A number of questions, however, do require answers, but the Hutton report is unlikely to provide them.

Throughout the inquiry the government did its best to belittle Dr Kelly and his work. According to Jonathan Sumption QC, appearing for the government, Kelly was 'simply one of many people who were in a position to comment [on the September dossier]'. At other times he was described as a 'middle-ranking official', a 'Walter Mitty character'. According to the MoD, Kelly was 'the author of his own misfortune', 'self-contained', 'difficult to help'. Yet the death of this oh-so-unimportant official necessitated a full-scale judicial inquiry! And if the MoD's support for Kelly was as 'outstanding' as they claimed, why did Kelly kill himself?

In fact, Kelly was a world-renowned expert on biological weapons of mass destruction. He had visited Iraq 37 times as a senior UN inspector. His area of expertise was precisely that covered by the government's infamous September dossier. If Kelly was doubtful about the dossier's use of 'intelligence', and in particular the claim that the Iraqi regime could launch weapons of mass destruction in 45 minutes, then this was serious criticism and should have been treated as such. Instead the government has gone to great lengths to undermine Kelly and his reputation.

Much of the background to the writing of the September dossier is shrouded in mist and e-mails. The process began on 3 September 2002 when the government announced that it would be publishing a new version of an old dossier on Iraq which had appeared in March 2002. In the course of the next three weeks, 'someone' wanted



Demonstrators outside the Hutton Inquiry

the text to be 'as strong as possible', the language to be 'tougher'. 'Our aim should be to convey the impression that things have not been static in Iraq, but that over the past decade he [Saddam Hussein] has been aggressively and relentlessly pursuing WMD.' (e-mail from Daniel Puce of Number 10 press office to Alastair Campbell). Despite this, both John Scarlett of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the MoD have claimed that the dossier was purely an intelligence product. The government has also stated that the dossier was not intended to argue for war on Iraq. This must be a lie. Such a concern for strong language could not have been simply to educate the public. As part of its argument for war, the dubious 45-minute claim was highlighted.

Ownership of the September dossier is being handed round like a hot potato. No government minister, not Geoff Hoon (MoD), nor Jack Straw (Foreign Office), will admit to having any influence on the dossier's production whatsoever. This oh-so-unimportant dossier, produced by no-one in particular for no particular purpose, just happened to be one of two dossiers – both dodgy – produced by this government in the run-up to war on Iraq. But in the published (by Hutton) record of a meeting about the dossier held on 18 September, two days before publication, ownership is very clearly stated to lie, not with Scarlett and the JIC, but with Number 10. The simple truth is that the aim of the dossier was to show Parliament and the public that Saddam Hussein represented a 'clear and current' threat.

Why was the government so affronted by Gilligan's report on the *Today* programme on 29 May? It was not the first time the government had been criticised, but it seemed like the last straw. Hostilities between the press (in particular the BBC) and the Labour government had been a running sore since the early weeks of the war on Iraq when Cabinet Minister John Reid accused the BBC of acting like a 'friend of Baghdad'. There was, Number 10 whined, no moral equivalence between Britain,

the USA, and the Iraqi regime. Jack Straw claimed that '24-hour news actually changes the reality of warfare'. For its part, the BBC pointed out that the Coalition had, for instance, claimed the fall of Um Qasr on nine occasions before it actually happened. By 29 May, almost a month after Bush had declared the 'end' of the war, Blair's government was hyper-sensitive to accusations that no weapons of mass destruction had been found and evidence that its 'intelligence' was ill-founded. Summing up at the Hutton Inquiry, the government's barrister argued that the government had to take Gilligan's report seriously: 'It seems to have been thought that the BBC could shoot off its fireworks and then steal away. The dogs would bark, the caravan would move on'. In truth, Gilligan's report was too close to the truth.

Kelly's confession that he was Gilligan's source was a godsend for the government: it could blame either Gilligan or Kelly. It is clear from the e-mails and from Campbell's diary that there was a conspiracy to expose Kelly's name to the press. Both Campbell and Hoon were gagging to do it because it would 'fuck Gilligan'. The Kelly family lawyer, Jeremy Gompertz QC, summed it up for the Hutton Inquiry: Hoon was a liar and a hypocrite. They didn't need to say anything about Campbell: he was exposed simply as a lout.

As predicted in our last issue, Campbell has fallen on his sword, and Hoon has been groomed for the chop. The government is prepared to blame everyone but itself for what happened, even Dr Kelly's mother.

The dogs have barked and the caravan may have moved on... but the Labour government's problems are unlikely to go away. The Hutton Inquiry may have been a diversion, but there are still no weapons of mass destruction, and the Coalition's own inspectors, the Iraq Survey Group, are about to publish their report confirming this. 1,200 scientists and soldiers can't find anything. Both Bush and Blair are sinking in the opinion polls. Worse still, Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, is writing a book...

website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk
www.revolutionarycommunist.com

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IRAQ: Humbling the almighty



continued from page 1

to strategic reserve activity and operations from Afghanistan to Korea. Senior British defence officials describe British forces as 'overstretched', with troops having less time for training and recuperation between missions. With the US and British strategy of dominating the world and controlling the Middle East's oil supplies at risk from Iraqi resistance, the US government intends to solve the problem by buying the country. As the head of the CPA Paul Bremer put it, '\$87bn is 'ten times more than the US has ever spent in a year on a country.' It is about four times the size of the entire Iraqi economy!

Deluded ideologues

Announcing his request for \$87bn from the US Congress, President Bush said Iraq had become the 'central front' in the war on terror. 'We will do whatever is necessary. We will spend what is necessary to achieve this essential victory in the war on terror.' These are the delusions of a coterie in power that believes itself to be almighty. By September the US Army had drastically cut back patrols in parts of Iraq to try and reduce its casualties. US troops were unable to control the roads in the north of the country. Top US generals told Bush that foreign troops were needed; the US could not deploy any more of its own. Soldiers' families had launched a campaign 'Bring them home now'. Opinion polls showed the US president's popularity waning. Democratic Party leaders took their opportunity: \$87bn is more than the US spends on educational initiatives for its own people, more than it spends on child care. More is to be spent on Iraq's electricity supply than on the US system, it is more than the US spends on homeland security. These and similar refrains reflect serious misgivings among the US ruling class and US people about the costs and conse-

quences of the US bid for world domination or at least the way the Bush administration is managing it.

The US government has been forced back into haggling over the future of Iraq with those it seeks to subordinate: France, Germany, Russia and China. The US wants these countries and others to share the costs of ruling Iraq and to provide troops and a cover of UN legitimacy for the occupation. US and British misfortunes are used by the French and German ruling classes to reassert their interests in the Middle East. Their governments call for a speedy surrender of US and British control of Iraq to the Iraqi governing council. The council, with the help of the UN, would then control decisions on oil revenues, foreign investments and moves towards elections; the CPA would not feature and so the attempt at US and British monopoly in Iraq would end. Elements of the British ruling class want to ally with Europe and not the US. European Union external relations' commissioner Chris Patten said it was vital for the US to hand over power to an Iraqi government as soon as possible. US Secretary of State Powell said a quick transfer of power was 'unrealistic'. Blair will try to negotiate the terms of French and German engagement in Iraq and the timetable for decommissioning the CPA, but he may be brushed aside as irrelevant. Thus far France and Germany have said they are willing to train Iraqi police and not to veto a new US resolution to the UN on the UN's role in Iraq.

Of the \$87bn requested, \$800 million is allocated for coalition forces that cannot afford to deploy their own troops. With the monthly bill to the US of its own troops in Iraq running at \$4bn this suggests that the US is not expecting many takers or that they will come pretty cheap. Noticeably the US and British governments have had some success in deploying troops from 'new Europe': 2,000 from Poland, 2,300 from the Ukraine, 520 from Romania, 300 from the Czech

Republic. Bulgaria and Lithuania have pledged troops. Right-wing European Union governments have also sent forces: 2,800 from Italy, 1,200 from Spain, 1,100 from the Netherlands and 130 from Portugal. Germany has said it will not send troops to Iraq as has India. In October Madrid will host a donor's conference for Iraq. Unless the US and Britain offer up more of the spoils, proceeds are likely to be slender.

The US and British delay in transferring power away from their CPA is to ensure that Iraq is bought and owned by US and British capital before an Iraqi government is formed. Any serious intention to rebuild Iraq would have meant calling in the German, Swiss and French firms that built the power stations and telephone systems in the first place. Siemens' engineers who installed the generating equipment inspected broken turbines and went home. The US government is intent on denying 'old Europe' any contracts in Iraq. On 21 September at the behest of the CPA the governing council announced in Dubai that it was putting up for sale to foreign investors everything from industry to health, and water to electricity, but not oil. The deluded ideologues in the Bush administration believe there will be queues of buyers. But for as long as the armed resistance to occupation in Iraq continues at its current intensity there will either be no buyers or the assets will have to be given away. French and German capital will negotiate their own price with the US for entrance to the fire sale.

Figuring large in these negotiations will be Iraq's \$100bn-plus debt. France, Germany and Russia are among Iraq's main creditors. They believe Iraq's debt should be re-scheduled without write-offs or forgiveness and with interest continuing to accrue and compound. That is, they claim a big share of any future Iraqi oil revenues. These financial vultures may accept debt for equity swaps in which Iraqi assets are

exchanged for debt write-offs. The US government favours a complete write-off freeing up the oil revenues for their own interests. This write-off may be restricted to the principal so that the interest or part of it would still be owed. In July the US Treasury permitted US investors to trade in Iraqi debt. Currently that debt is traded at 30 cents for a dollar of debt. This means that investors expect to recover 30% of the debt. This would be impossible for Iraq to sustain.

Only capitalism can demonstrate such diabolical ingenuity as to turn the ruins of Iraq into a multi-billion dollar casino. Ultimately the division of the spoils will be determined politically and the Iraqi people have every interest in overturning the table and driving the entire deadly circus out of their country.

Remember Vietnam

In Afghanistan the war on terror is faring little better than in Iraq. The US is spending \$900 million a month on its military operations in Afghanistan and \$900 million a year on economic assistance and training the Afghan army. The Taliban has regrouped and is mounting daily attacks on government posts and US and NATO soldiers. In August NATO took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the first time NATO has been deployed outside Europe. On 11 September 2003 two rockets hit close to the NATO camp in Kabul. The ISAF does not venture far from Kabul. US Treasury Secretary

Snow announced on 18 September that Afghanistan was a 'critical priority' and called on other countries to match the US pledge of \$1.2bn in aid for the country. He also announced the first two commercial banking licences to be issued, one going to Britain's Standard Chartered, the other to a fund dominated by the mega-rich Aga Khan. There is little prospect of the US government luring other contributors to Afghanistan.

US military adventures are exacerbating a structural crisis in the US economy. The US budget deficit for this year increased from a forecasted \$300bn to \$450bn. This is before the \$87bn request. The total budget deficit is 4.7% of the US gross domestic product (GDP). The US current account deficit is running at \$529bn or over 5% of GDP. Repeated current account deficits require funding and the US net external debt is now 25% of GDP. US consumer indebtedness is growing twice as fast as incomes. In the past three years the US has lost three million manufacturing jobs, or one in six in the sector. Sections of the US ruling class understand that a day of reckoning may be at hand and that the limited immediate rewards of the military adventures is bringing that day closer.

US and British military planners and their political rulers might care to reflect on the Vietnam War. The US did not lose a major battle but it did lose the war.

Privatising war

They call it 'military outsourcing'; it used to be known as using mercenaries: one in ten of the personnel on the ground in Iraq are privately contracted. US and British firms provide body guards, trainers, pilots, messengers, a whole range of military functions. The Pentagon employs 700,000 personnel through private contractors. The private military industry generates \$100bn annually from operations in over 50 countries.

British armed forces have 18 out of a target of 43 general surgeons, 11 out of 28 orthopaedic surgeons and 195 out of 416 general practitioners (GPs). To close this gap, British Ministry of Defence use of private health care has risen sharply: up 50% to £300,000 a month this year. Oh what a lovely war for private enterprise.



Same old demonstration – same old Labour

On Saturday 27 September FRFI supporters joined the national march organised by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) against the occupations of Iraq and Palestine. The police estimated its size as 15,000, STWC as 100,000. Despite an occupation which has brought increased anarchy and poverty, despite the endless lies from our government, why did only 100,000 come out on 27 September compared to the 1-2 million people who marched in February?

The main responsibility must lie with the STWC's refusal to build a mass movement challenging the Labour government. This was the first national demonstration in six months! Rather than build on the momentum created by the February demonstration, the STWC let the government off the hook.

The key problem is that the STWC leadership is committed to the Labour Party either as members or supporters. The same Labour politicians made the same tired old speeches in Trafalgar Square: George Galloway, Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Benn. Before the demonstration STWC chairperson Andrew Murray said 'The Labour Party has taken a wrong turn and we must bring it back to how it was – the party of peace'. So which 'peaceful' party would that be? The one which helped create Israel? The one which defended apartheid in South Africa? The one which supported the US in Vietnam? The one which handed Vietnam back to French colonialism, and brutally repressed the Malayan freedom struggle? The one which sent troops into Ireland in 1969? Labour has always been a warmongering imperialist party. The STWC leadership pretends otherwise, and therefore will not break with Labour imperialism. That is why it cannot build a mass anti-imperialist movement.

NHS

Fight Labour plans to privatise the NHS

JIM CRAVEN

In September, the Labour government awarded contracts for the next phase of its plans to privatise the National Health Service. Over 30 Diagnostic and Treatment Centres (DTCs) are to be built and run by private firms. The centres are meant to provide fast-track diagnostic tests and routine surgical treatments such as hip replacements and cataract surgery and are expected to be treating more than 250,000 patients by 2005. The contracts were awarded to companies from Britain, United States, Canada and South Africa, though British firms have a stake in most of the successful consortia.

Labour lies obscure threats to health

In announcing the plans, Labour's health secretary, John Reid, persistently claimed he was motivated by the need to prevent patient pain and suffering. This has as little truth in it as some of Labour's earlier assertions about DTCs. Initially, Labour said that DTCs would be for NHS patients only. Now they admit that private patients will be treated as well. In fact, fewer than half of the 250,000 patients will be transferred from NHS hospitals. Labour also promised that DTCs would not be allowed to poach NHS staff. Now they admit that as many as 70% of DTC staff could be seconded from the NHS. How this is supposed to ease staff shortages and enable expansion in the NHS was not explained. Labour had initially said that as a means to 'improve efficiency' (sic), DTCs would compete with

NHS hospitals on an equal basis. Now it emerges that DTCs will be allowed to charge more than NHS hospitals but still be guaranteed a minimum number of patients. Recently three Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in the Oxford area decided not to use the proposed local DTC there, but to continue sending all their patients to the Oxford Eye Hospital. However, they were then forced by the Department of Health to transfer 1,000 of their patients to the DTC thus threatening the viability of specialist equipment, services and jobs at the Oxford hospital.

By such deceptions Labour is steadily passing control of the public health service into private hands without most of the population understanding the devastating consequences it will have on their health care. Labour's plans have nothing to do with improving efficiency, choice and quality in health care. Their purpose is to allow British private health companies and associated construction and service companies to grow big enough to compete in the expanding international health market.

How health became a commodity

There are two main aspects to the privatisation process that will result in the destruction of the public health system and the collapse of reliable and decent health care for the majority of people. First there is the ever-greater expansion of private companies into the public health sector. This alone is bound to reduce facilities and services since private companies demand profits which must be taken from public funds that



'Profit will compete with needs and as the experience of railway privatisation and long-term care shows, universal care, equity of access, and high quality care will be sacrificed.'

would otherwise be spent on health care. It began with the privatisation of non-medical hospital services such as cleaning and catering. Then followed the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), started by the Tories but enthusiastically expanded by Labour. Under PFI private firms are allowed to build hospitals and operate non-clinical services in return for lucrative leaseback contracts from the NHS.

The first wave of PFI hospitals has led to reduced services, a 30% reduction in beds and a 25% reduction in budgets for clinical staff together with further crippling lease costs facing hospitals for the next 20 to 25 years. Health authorities in Greater Manchester recently reported a funding crisis created

by PFI. At present rates they expect to be a staggering £730 million in debt within seven years. In 2000 Labour opened up the NHS to the provision of private clinical as well as non-clinical services. DTCs are part of these. Labour's plans also include the use of spare private hospital capacity, joint private sector ventures with NHS organisations, providing private intermediate care in nursing homes and the community and providing private management to run 'failing' NHS hospitals; the latter in spite of the massive differences in size and complexity between private and NHS hospitals and despite the dismal record of private management brought in to 'failing' schools.

It is the second aspect of Labour's privatisation plans, however, that will finally unravel any remaining threads of a national public health system and allow a rampant free market in people's health. This is the establishment of independent foundation hospitals and trusts together with the decision to allow funds to follow patients. In other words instead of giving health authorities and institutions annual grants to cover all the services they will be paid according to a set of tariffs for each treatment and each patient. Rates paid to the private sector will be higher than those for the NHS. Foundation hospitals will have NHS assets transferred to their ownership but be freed from NHS control. They will be free to set their own terms and conditions for staff, run joint ventures with private companies, borrow for capital investment, generate their own income and retain the proceeds from the sale of hospital land and other non-core assets. The only obligation on foundation hospitals will be financial – not to lose money. There will be no obligation to provide a full range of services and no obligation to serve everyone in a local community. They will compete with private providers and be driven by the same priorities – not health, but costs and profits. Essentially they will be indistinguishable from private concerns. Indeed, in order to raise finance for new equipment and wards, foundation hospitals could contract out the running of part or all of the hospital, including clinical services, to the private sector or even sell the whole hospital and lease it back. In effect this would be an extension of PFI.

Pursuit of profit will corrupt health

Given the only obligation on foundation hospitals will be to make money and that they will be competing with private providers, the trend will be for such hospitals to concentrate on those routine treatments and low-risk patients that are most easily dealt with and provide the most profit. Complex and risky treatments will be difficult to get or not provided at all, except for those able to pay.

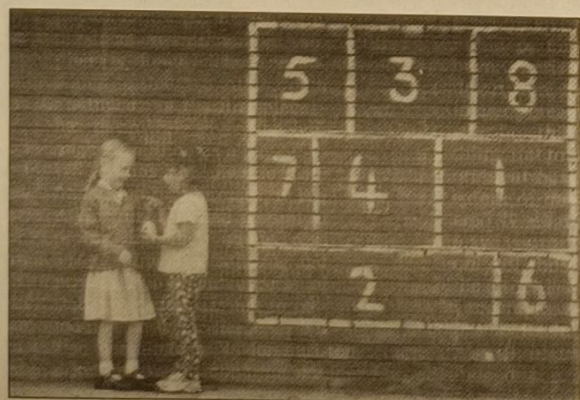
The old, the frail and the chronically ill will be given short shrift. Hospitals will redefine illnesses and treatments to maximise tariffs or put them outside the scope of the NHS so as to claim private fees. They will cut the time patients have to recover in hospital so that recovery risks and costs are pushed onto social services or the patients themselves. New streams of revenue will be exploited such as ever greater charges for non-medical services like parking, catering and telephones for patients, staff and visitors. Huge inequalities will emerge as hospitals with higher land asset values and a healthier client base in affluent districts leave behind sink hospitals serving poor and working class areas. This system is being extended to primary care. Under their new contracts, GPs will be paid to provide only a core of basic services, the rest will be optional, with a system of tariffs and open to competition with private providers. It is clear that GP practices will soon go the same way as NHS hospitals.

Back to the 1930s

The NHS is rapidly moving towards the health system of the United States where major operations are rushed and patients with serious conditions hastily discharged, where low-risk patients are carefully selected and the costs and risks of care are displaced to the patient, where private hospitals inflate charges and doctors check the size of a patient's wallet before checking their pulse, where millions of people cannot afford health insurance and so have access only to the most basic health care.

The days of universal access to a full range of NHS treatment are numbered. As Professor Allyson Pollock of the Public Health Policy Unit has said, 'Profit will compete with needs and as the experience of railway privatisation and long-term care shows, universal care, equity of access to services, and high quality care will be sacrificed. Health care will be a lottery decided at local level and there will be a return to the fear and uncertainty that were part and parcel of life before the NHS'.

Education notes



Hitting the wall?

A recent headline in the *Times Educational Supplement* announced 'Primary Sats results hit wall' meaning that the national test results for 11-year-olds have stayed the same for

the fourth year running with 75% reaching level 4 in English and 73% in maths. Government targets are 85% and 78%. So what 'wall' is being hit? Is it a wall of bad teachers and failing schools or is it, as we have re-

peatedly said in FRFI, the wall of poverty and class? While private school students collected GCSEs 'like Boy Scouts collect badges' (Eton head), poor students increasingly failed to get the grades. The results show that under Labour there is an increasingly polarised school system, confirming the findings of the *Education and Child Poverty Report* published earlier this year (End Child Poverty Group, March 2003). This describes Britain as having one of the greatest class divides in education in the industrialised world and states that by age 16, poorer children are one third as likely to get good GCSEs as their wealthier peers. Britain ranks 24th out of 29 OECD (leading industrial) countries for the proportion of 19-year-olds still in education. Endless testing and competition between

schools for funding may have produced the desired result of disciplining parents, pupils and teachers alike, but it results in a lack of decent basic educational provision for all. That 25% of students leave secondary school with no GCSEs shows that the poor need decent schooling, not a regime of examinations.

Fraud

There are billions of pounds sloshing around in the education fund, much of which the Labour government has earmarked for private businesses. In the course of one year nearly £100 million was siphoned off in abuse and fraud from the government's flagship adult training scheme, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). It was easy enough to set up as a 'training provider', hire an office with a couple of computers, enrol students on a part-time basis and claim government funds. It was even easier to invent the students and claim the fees: 60 investigations into

charges of fraud are now taking place. But the money's gone and no one, including the Department for Education and Skills (DES) will be called to account. On the contrary, Capita, the private company that managed the ILAs has just been awarded a £48.4 million a year contract to administer a new education allowance.

Cut and run

When is a five-year contract not a contract? When it's privatisation. WS Atkins has dumped a £100 million education contract with the London Borough of Southwark after just two years because it was not making profits fast enough. Like many other inner city boroughs, Southwark had congratulated itself in 2000 on being unable to provide a decent service to its schools. It therefore announced with pride that it was transferring the management of education services in a flagship deal with WS Atkins. Business is business however,

and WS Atkins could not cut staff and wages fast enough to make the profit it was looking for. Southwark has called in another firm, CEA, which runs Islington Education, to take 'care' of education until another supplier is found. The DES – which foisted WS Atkins onto Southwark in the first place – has meanwhile given the borough £2 million as a pay-off to WS Atkins. Meanwhile City traders are so impressed by WS Atkins' hard-headed pursuit of profits that their shares rose 5%. Continued outsourcing and privatisation of all aspects of state education has led to ballooning costs for the state but also booming profits for business. The examination firms that run the secondary sector now charge schools £228 million a year. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) may sound like a government office but is in fact an NGO given £197 million a year to hire private organisations to do inspections.

Susan Davidson

Ireland:

Repression, violence, segregation – the realities of the sectarian state

PAUL MALLON

The peace process, which has been in continual crisis since the 1998 signing of the Good Friday Agreement, has faltered once again, as devolved power to Stormont remains suspended. Direct rule from London has been in place since the British government directly intervened and suspended the devolved institutions in December 2002. Divisions within Unionism remain unresolved, and at present the anti-agreement Unionists hold the majority within both the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party. Elections are also suspended as the result would favour the anti-agreement Unionist camp and thus unravel the whole agreement. Sinn Féin has responded by retreating to the 1969 Nationalist demand of the basic right to vote. The British and Irish governments and the pro-agreement parties now have to seek ways to get the peace process back on track.

Throughout the summer, Loyalist mobs and death squad paramilitaries have continued a daily terror campaign against Nationalists. On 16 September Loyalists placed bombs inside the grounds of two Roman Catholic schools in County Derry: one was St Mary's High

in Limavady, the other was discovered 10 miles away at St Patrick's College, Dungiven. Both devices were live and primed to explode. Sectarian attacks on Nationalists are daily as Loyalism continues its war on the Nationalist population. Loyalists have subjected Catholic families living in the Deepark Road area in North Belfast to what can only be described as a pogrom. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has refused to act, and to date has arrested no one in connection with these ongoing attacks. This comes as no surprise to Nationalists given that the PSNI is merely a rebadged version of the old sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Far from undermining the nature of the sectarian state the Good Friday Agreement has furthered institutional sectarianism and discrimination against Catholics and Nationalists. The social deprivation/poverty map reflects the sectarian character of the Northern statelet with almost 80% of the top 50 most deprived wards in the North being Catholic. According to the 2001 population census, unemployment rates for Catholics remain 1.8 times higher than Protestants. Tony Kennedy, Chief Executive of the charity Cooperation Ireland* says in the Irish Times of 26 August that

'there are more peace walls five years into our "peace process" than there were when the Agreement was signed, while surveys show that increasing numbers of people are living in segregated estates'. Yet Sinn Féin remains wedded to solving these problems within the framework of the failed and discredited Good Friday Agreement.

The campaign for political status and segregation continues within Maghaberry prison where Republican prisoners have staged rooftop protests and no-wash protests. They have been denied family visits. Political status was removed in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The criminalisation of all forms of resistance to British rule has continued unabated. On 2 July, relatives and supporters of the protesting prisoners held an occupation of the headquarters of the Northern Ireland Prison Service to highlight the political status campaign. Following its reporting of this protest, the online republican news journal *The Blanket* has come under state attack: on 4 July the PSNI raided the home of its editor Anthony McIntyre, seizing computer equipment and other materials. Thirty three jeeps and over 100 officers were involved.

Meanwhile the Irish state has returned to the methods of



Sinn Féin leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness

supergrass show trials, last used against Republicans in the 1980s, when in August the alleged leader of the 'Real IRA', Michael McKevitt was convicted of 'directing terrorism'. The non-jury Special Criminal Court in Dublin sentenced McKevitt to 25 years imprisonment on the evidence of FBI-paid informer David Rupert.

Sinn Féin chairperson Mitchel McLaughlin called for patience within the Republican community: 'we may need to be patient until such a leadership [pro Good Friday Agreement] emerges within Unionism.' On the role of the British government McLaughlin believes 'the hand of history was never more firmly on Tony Blair's shoulders'. On 7 August Sinn Féin

newspaper *An Phoblacht* expressed the opinion that 'the current British Prime Minister is widely recognised as a man prepared to act on his conscience'. Blair has demonstrated with murderous effect to the peoples of the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq that his conscience drives him to be an ardent defender of British imperialism. Any notion that he or British imperialism can play a progressive role in Ireland or be an honest broker should be vehemently opposed. *Cooperation Ireland is an NGO established in 1979 to promote peace in Ireland. It is a registered charity. The main source of income according to its website www.cooperationireland.org is the European Union. Patrons include the British Queen and Mary McAleese, the President of Ireland.

Turkish troops out of Kurdistan!

MEHMET TEKIN

On 4 July, US troops detained some Turkish soldiers in Suleymaniya, a city in northern Iraq, opening a rift between old friends. The US raid targeted a building of the Turkman Front and a nearby Turkish government liaison office. 24 people were arrested, including 11 members of the Turkish Special Forces. US troops beat up the Special Forces soldiers when they tried to talk to them, put plastic bags over their heads, threw them into the street and then onto some trucks. The mighty Turkish army has never been humiliated like this before.

In reprisal for the detentions, Turkey shut the Habur frontier gate, the only crossing between Turkey and Iraq, to lorries carrying supply materials to US troops. It remained open to other traffic, such as lorries carrying United Nations humanitarian aid. The Turkish Special Force was on its way to assassinate the Kurdish Mayor in the oil rich city of Kirkuk and to bomb Iranian and Syrian interests in the region. The aim was to stir up the region as a pretext for sending more troops into south Kurdistan to pursue Turkish interests.

Turkey has enjoyed close ties with the US for a long time because of its geo-strategic importance in the Middle East. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was the only member of NATO in the region; afterwards it remained important because it borders Iraq. However, relations with the US deteriorated after the Turkish Parliament voted against allowing the deployment of 60,000 US troops within Turkey to invade Iraq. This was for fear that the outcome would have been independence for Kurds in northern Iraq. This would inevitably affect the 25 million Kurds who live on the other side of the border (in Turkey). Turkish fascism has always completely denied the existence of a Kurdish people, refusing even to recognise their language: it regards them as Turkish. It has never hesitated to endanger its relationship with imperialism if there has been a threat to its colonisation of Kurdistan.

However, more recently, there have been discussions between Turkey and the US about deploying up to 12,000 Turkish army conscripts in Iraq. Why has there been an apparent change of heart? The reason is straightforward. In return for despatching troops, Turkey is demanding that the US rid the mountains in the far north of Iraq of 5,000 Kurdish guerrillas. For now the US has turned down the deal because it still needs the Iraqi Kurds as allies to its invasion force. The US must avoid a war between Turkey and Kurdish liberation fighters. Down with fascism! Victory to Kurdistan!

Postal workers strike ballot
'The best deal in 10 years?'

'I urge you to vote, and to vote in favour of the deal and against strike action. Take control, it's in your hands! Don't let the activists decide the future for you and your family.'
Allan Leighton, Chairman, Royal Mail.

Nationally, postal workers have voted by 48,038 to 46,391 against strike action over a new pay deal. However in London postal workers have voted overwhelmingly (by 11,417 to 4,316) for regional industrial action in support of increased London weighting. The first strike is due to take place on Wednesday 1 October. Postal worker LUKE CURHAM reports.

Royal Mail describes the deal as a 14.5% pay rise. It forgets to mention all the strings that are attached. All the deal actually guarantees is a 4.5% rise, a 3% rise from October 2003 and a 1.5% rise from 5 April 2004. The rest is based on whether we meet our local targets. The deal therefore takes power away from the union as pay will be fixed on a local and not a national basis. On London weighting, Royal Mail claims that its offer of an increase of £300 per annum takes postal workers towards the top of the London weighting league. The reality is that Royal Mail has included £721.24 of existing monies (RRIS) for inner London and £848.12 for outer London to make the figures look better. Allan Leighton described it as the best deal in ten years and said that a strike would be 'commercial suicide'. Royal Mail management claims it cannot

afford to give postal workers any more money, and has also insisted that 30,000 jobs must go to pay for the deal, ignoring the big wages and bonuses they themselves receive. For example:

- Allan Leighton's basic pay is £180,000 per year plus bonuses for working just two days a week. This works out at £2,000 per day.
- Both Elmar Toime and Adam Crozier (assistant chairmen) earn in the region of £500,000 per year, with bonuses on top.
- Adam Crozier recently received a £57,400 bonus for two months' work. In addition Elmar Toime received a bonus of £40,000 for just one month's work.
- Royal Mail's reports and accounts show the total remuneration for directors has increased by more than two and a half times since last year from £873,000 to £2.25 million.



Over the last couple of weeks the union has done well with keeping us informed about the negotiations with Royal Mail through letters. But when I first heard about being balloted for strike action it was through the news on TV and not through our union rep. In fact, I'm sure Allan Leighton would like our union rep as we haven't had any union meetings or been informed by him what is happening.

Recently, in a local newspaper in Harrow, two postmen said 'the only certainty at the moment is the uncertainty that we feel'. I've also heard postal workers saying they were going to vote 'no' due to the fact they feel that the union is not adequately representing their needs and a few are considering leaving the union altogether. At a time like this we need a strong union, which in Harrow we definitely don't have.

Community wardens: policing on the cheap

TOM BRUCE

The defence of ruling class interests by bourgeois cops is rapidly being supplemented by an underpaid, minimally trained force of community and street wardens.

On 11 June 2003 David Blunkett announced steps to further 'decentralise' the police. This will involve moving responsibility for the maintenance of social order 'into the community' and the further development of the 'two tier' system of law enforcement, employing Community Wardens to deal with 'incivilities', and police for more serious crimes. There are currently 662 wardens operating in Britain and the north of Ireland, some of whom have as little as one week's training.

Despite its rhetoric about facilitating 'more positive dialogues' between the police and local residents, the *Clifton Report*, released in 2002, makes clear that the actual role of wardens is to control young working class people. They would move young people on from playing football in the street, track down young people riding quad bikes, and report vandalism of school buildings. The report concludes the warden would be a 'reliable middle man', or woman, for the police.

In Middlesbrough, where young people's anger against the state has been expressed in attacks on fire engines, community wardens have been employed as a kind of soft-touch crowd control, their local knowledge of where young people live being used to curb dissent.

Meanwhile, Swindon local authorities have been employing people as young as ten to act as 'Junior Wardens'. In exchange for their assistance as the 'eyes and ears' of the police, these young people are given 'rewards' such as free tickets to football matches and free use of public transport. It is a direct attempt to co-opt young people from the most exploited sections of society.

In many areas of Britain, wardens are being supplemented by a third tier of the policing system, Community Support Officers. These fulfil a role somewhere between police and community wardens. They have as little as five weeks' training and are therefore less expensive than the police, but have more powers than community wardens: they can give on-the-spot fines for minor offences, and confiscate alcohol from people under eighteen and cigarettes from people under sixteen. Social control on the cheap is here to stay.

Venezuela:

Chavez champions 'the condemned of the earth'

ALVARO MICHAELS

Now that the electoral commission has rejected the demand from Venezuela's rich for a mid-term recall referendum, President Chavez has declared he will run again for President in 2006.

Up to two million supporters heard his declaration on 23 August. Following the defeated coup of April 2002, Chavez has again warned the anti-government Mayor of Caracas against using the city police to provoke violence at demonstrations and has ordered the army to seize the pro-opposition TV stations at the slightest indication of coup-like activities. Chavez also condemned the Colombian government for providing the head of the coup, Pedro Carmona, with sanctuary.

Ignored by the British press, ex-president Perez (1974-79 and 1989-93), a key promoter of the April 2002 coup attempt from his exile in the US and Dominican Republic, sings ever louder threats of bloody reaction. He wanted to use the Organisation of American States to force new elections and openly declares that new attempts to overthrow Chavez are in preparation. Perez helped create the Latin American Committee of the International Socialists (a talking shop centred on European establishment parties)

and claims that Chavez is mad, wanting to support the Colombian guerrillas and the indigenous population of Ecuador in creating an 'insurreccional front'. (The Supreme Court rejected the request by two Accion Democratica depu-



ties for a declaration of 'mental incapacity' against Chavez). Perez states, 'I'm not on the side of violent action but I'm convinced that Chavez can only be removed by violence.' 'Venezuelan society used to live in great harmony (sic!), with its problems of democracy and poverty, but in harmony. Chavez has provoked hatred between classes and this will be the

gravest problem when we get away from Chavez.'

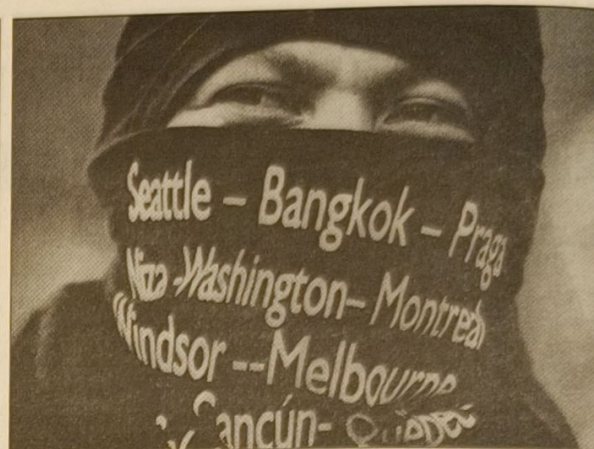
This disgusting rubbish, typical of pro-imperialists, declares the legitimate leaders of the poor as the cause of class conflict rather than being strugglers against oppression. This common lie becomes the 'justification' for assassination. The Venezuelan press (*El Universal* and *Reporte*) frequently insults and actually argues for the killing of the President! On 19 September a bomb exploded opposite the Miraflores Presidential Palace while Chavez was inside but he was unharmed. To take the suspected bomber into custody, Venezuelan police and National Guard officers had to fight a gun

battle with reactionary police and former army officers dismissed after participating in the April 2002 coup.

Even the Spanish Ambassador, Emilio Menendez del Valle, has publicly stated that there is nothing other than a generalised class struggle in Venezuela, a country where poverty and class divisions have accumulated over the last 25

years since the failure of the guerrilla movement of the 1970s. He states that it is those who have nothing to lose who are supporting President Chavez, 'the condemned of the earth'. The 'Chavistas', supporters of the President's party, are commonly dismissed by the media as 'lumpen', 'negroes', 'simpletons', 'uneducated', as must be, therefore, Chavez himself.

President Chavez is aware of the need to press his ideas at an international level. On 26 July 2002 at the second South American summit in Guayaquil, Ecuador, with 12 states represented, President Chavez called for a new 'IMF' and a new 'OPEC' for Latin America. He proposed an International Humanitarian Fund, with a percentage of the external debt of 'our countries, which would not have to follow the principles of neo-liberalism, which impose borrowing conditions with interest at times impossible to pay.' He also proposed a type of 'Petro-America', a multi-state, oil gas and energy enterprise. He warned of the danger of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and called for an integration of the south to face North America, to prevent the disintegration of the small states through their integration by the large states. These arguments aim to block negotiations for the FTAA treaty and with the World Trade Organisation. Not surprising then that his security service has unearthed yet another assassination plot, causing the cancellation of his forthcoming trip to the United Nations. He was to give a speech in Harlem, address the UN in New York and visit Houston, Texas. He told international journalists on 18 September, 'We have proof of the CIA's clandestine activities in Venezuela.'



World Trade Organisation ends with a walk out

ED SCRIVENS

In September Mexico's Caribbean Cancun resort became a microcosm of the world as representatives of the 146 member nations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) sipped champagne in air-conditioned luxury separated from the surrounding protesters and shantytowns by the usual police and high fences. This is a world in which the wealthiest 5% of the population 'earns' 114 times as much as the poorest 5% while the 500 richest people have amassed \$1.54 trillion. This is more than the combined income of the poorest 3 billion people.

Despite all the security and diplomacy and much wrangling Cancun ended as Seattle did in an embarrassing debacle. Negotiations on tariffs and trade collapsed without any agreement as the imperialist powers demanded concessions that even their neo-colonies could not accept.

Previous WTO summits had been dominated by the European Union and United States. At Cancun a third bloc of 21 underdeveloped countries led by Brazil, China and India emerged, preventing a simple EU-US deal. These nations had three main demands. Firstly they wanted the imperialist countries to cut the tariffs that discourage the import of products from the underdeveloped world.

Secondly they wanted the EU, USA and Japan to reduce the agricultural subsidies that allow their farmers to sell their food more cheaply than imports from the oppressed nations.

Thirdly they demanded an end to export subsidies that have led to cheap western foodstuffs flooding world markets at prices far below the cost of production, bankrupting growers in the oppressed nations. The EU and USA for their parts wanted oppressed nations to cut their tariffs and to further open public services to the private sector and invite foreign companies to bid for them on the same terms as local companies. This would inevitably mean their economies being further bought up by imperialism given the size and productivity of the big multinationals. Together the US, EU and Canada had proposed that Kenya reduce its tariffs by 80%

while the EU would cut its by 28% and the US by just 24%. Kenya said 'no' and since WTO decisions have to be reached by a unanimous agreement, the summit failed. Some now doubt that the WTO can continue to operate as a serious system. The EU and US have already indicat-

Bangladesh paid a tariff of 14% to the US for its exports while Britain paid no more than 1%.

Britain taxed imports from Uruguay and Sri Lanka at eight times the rate of those from the US.

ed that they will proceed with bilateral deals in which they can exert greater pressure on individual oppressed nations outside the multilateral framework of the WTO.

A new Oxfam report shows that the poorer a country is the higher the rate of tax it must pay to export its products to the imperialist nations. For example Bangladesh paid a tariff of 14% to the US for its exports while Britain paid no more than 1%. Britain taxed imports from Uruguay and Sri Lanka at eight times the rate of those from the US. In addition escalating tariffs are imposed on products at each stage of processing. The EU and US do not tax cocoa bean imports but have a tariff of up to 14% by the time these beans have been processed into chocolate. As a result underdeveloped countries manufacture just 5% of the world's chocolate though they grow more than 90% of its cocoa - yet another ingenious means the imperialists have devised for under-developing the oppressed nations and squeezing their populations. ■

Argentina:

Kirchner under pressure

ALVARO MICHAELS

With 60% of the population living below the poverty line, the intense squeeze on the poor and lower middle classes in Argentina leaves little room for manoeuvre by new President Kirchner who is attempting to regroup the Argentinean bourgeoisie. Since May he has sought favour with the US ruling class by releasing evidence on anti-Zionist bombings in August 1994 which killed 86 Argentineans. At the same time he has removed 58 generals in order to weaken US 'coup capacity'. He then raised domestic support by revoking the 1986/7 laws granting immunity to 1,100 military and police for kidnapping, torture, murder and other crimes committed during the dictatorship.

This follows years of determined campaigns by families, democratic and human rights workers, recently including 'escraches': demonstrating outside and painting the houses and cars of these freed criminals. To clean up the image of the establishment Kirchner promised to clear out corrupt judges.

Since the 1930s, the military and political establishment

have acted with impunity. Now ex-dictator Videla, freed in 1990 by President Menem from a life imprisonment sentence imposed in 1985 (for 66 murders, 306 kidnaps, 93 tortures and 26 counts of theft), is under arrest for theft of babies born in his concentration camps after the 1976 coup. Trials of other such criminals will now be held in Argentina, thus preventing extradition and trials abroad, for example in Spain (so suiting both governments).

After weeks of publicly berating the IMF for lending money to his predecessors, on 9 September Kirchner refused to make a \$2.9bn payment to the IMF, forcing the IMF to renegotiate a \$21bn debt refinancing deal with various lenders, including itself. The IMF (supported by the European Union) has dropped its demands that privatised utilities must be paid an astonishing \$20bn 'compensation' for the government's refusal to allow tariffs to rise after the peso devaluation, and that the banks should be similarly compensated for devaluation losses. Spanish Telefonica alone demanded \$3.8bn. These demands showed absolutely clearly who the IMF works for.

The IMF has seen the limits to the Argentinean state's ability

to squeeze the poor and middle classes, and has heeded Kirchner's advice. At the end of September Kirchner demanded a 75% write down of the \$87bn in private debts defaulted upon in 2001. But even this would still leave public debt at 90% of gross domestic product. The unemployed militants and trade unions have agreed to give Kirchner some months to implement his miserable \$3bn public works projects and further define his social policies. He has to negotiate such concessions through opportunists in the trade unions if he is to prevent further and, for the government, potentially disastrous unrest amongst the workers and middle classes.

Constant pressure by foreign investors, for example Spain's Repsol-YPF (vital for the petroleum and gas extraction industries), and Endesa, for guarantees of security for their capital in Argentina determines the behaviour of Argentinean leaders. The multi-national construction company Dragados has threatened to move its investments to Brazil and Mexico if 'economic reforms' are not made.

Much has been learned by workers' organisation in the last five years through insurrection,



rebellion, factory occupations, strikes and blockades. Kirchner now has to stop these lessons being used to form a new coherent political opposition. He has been able to rely on the system of hand-outs to the poor using the municipal governments usually run by his party allies the Peronists, alongside the usual legal and police actions against the organisations of the poor. He will hope to see the complete collapse of the recent pickets' movements, as happened with the earliest, founding pickets. These were Tanto Cutral-Co of 1996 and Tartagal from 1997, which were dissolved when the Menem government provided sufficient funds to create employment schemes. ■

Nepal: ceasefire ends – revolution continues



ANDREW ALEXANDER

In the last issue of FRFI we reported on the current ceasefire and negotiations between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) and the monarchical reactionary regime of Nepal (FRFI 174 'Communist revolution on top of the world'). The seven-month ceasefire finally broke down on 27 August and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has now resumed its armed struggle.

The CPN(M) sat for three rounds of talks with the Royal Regime, concluding on 17-19 August 2003. The CPN(M) proposed a three-point plan: the convening of a round-table conference, the election of a Constituent Assembly and the formation of an interim government. This was to be the basis for replacing the feudal autocratic monarchy backed by the reactionary Royal Nepal Army (RNA).

In response the government brought forward its own 'Concept for forward-looking reforms in the state system'. This was an empty package of measures contrived to undermine any substantial concrete change. This closed the door on the possibility of a negotiated political settlement.

Imperialist intervention

These political decisions were not just the product of the Nepalese government. They have been influenced by Western im-

perialism, and by the US in particular. The US made sure that King Gyanendra and the RNA were brutal in their dealings with the CPN(M). At the very start of the third round of negotiations on 17 August the RNA brutally massacred 19 political activists at Doramba in eastern Nepal, an event which precipitated the end of the ceasefire.

The US has also sought support from the neo-fascist BJP government in India to help deal with the 'Maoist spectre'. Christina Rocca, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, on a visit to India on 11 September 2003 said: 'The US and India can help Nepal defeat the ruthless Maoist rebels', continuing: 'India's historic, cultural and social ties with Nepal continue to make it the most important outside influence on events in that country'. The Indian government has so far been warm to the idea of co-operation, seeing intervention in Nepal as in line with its own expansionist interests.

Armed struggle

The Nepalese workers and peasants are increasingly siding with the CPN(M) though. This has been demonstrated by mass rallies of hundreds of thousands across the country and by recent polls that put the CPN(M) and its leadership much ahead of all the political parties and their leaders in the country.

Military actions have also taken place across the country on

an increasingly frequent and effective level. Dozens of guerrilla actions have taken place in almost all of the 75 districts of the country in the form of sabotage, ambushes and commando raids. The campaign has targeted not just the army but also the government hierarchy. On 28 August, Colonel Kiran Basnet, the highest ranking military officer to have been targeted so far, was killed in Kathmandu in broad daylight. The same day the head propagandist of the RNA was also shot and wounded. The next day, Devendra Raj Kandel, an ex-Minister of State for Home Affairs who gained notoriety for his outrageous remark, 'Come with a bag full of Maoists' heads and go with a bag full of money', was also shot and seriously wounded. At the same time, over 10 million rupees were captured from government-owned commercial banks in Tulsiapur and Chitwan, located just a few hundred metres away from RNA barracks. On 7 September there was a major confrontation between the PLA and a 150-strong RNA force in Korchawang (Rolpa province) which resulted in the retreat of the RNA.

However, these successes have brought further brutal repression from the government. It has been killing dozens of unarmed civilians and political activists in fake military encounters. An inquiry by the National Human Rights Commission into the 17 August massacre corroborated this. The response of course from imperialist leaders such as Bush and Blair has been to turn a blind eye to such atrocities and to denounce the just armed struggle against the military as 'terrorist'. For our part we side completely with the risen people of Nepal. Victory to the Nepalese revolution!

Quotes in this report were taken from the Maoist Information Bulletin No 4, publication of the CPN(M).

South Africa: struggle against water privatisation

DALE T MCKINLEY

Greetings, once again, from the Anti-Privatisation Forum. Below is an update on the struggle against pre-paid water meters in the community of Phiri, Soweto that is being waged by the community with the active support of the APF and its affiliate, the SECC.

After holding a mass meeting and door-to-door campaign, more than 1,000 Phiri residents marched to the Soweto offices of the Metropolitan Council on 20 September, despite the march having been banned by the police. It succeeded in increasing awareness and support for the struggle against Johannesburg Water's Operation *Gcin amanzi* and the fight against privatisation of basic services as well as support for the comrades who had been arrested and gaoled for resisting. Those comrades appeared in court and, after being gaoled for two weeks on the grounds that

they were a direct threat to public security, our legal defence team succeeded in getting bail.

In an indication of the state's zealotry in trying to contain the struggle, the bail amounts were all over R1,000 each and the bail conditions include a ban on coming within 500m of the council offices and the operations of Johannesburg Water as well as a ban on attending or addressing any meeting to do with Operation *Gcin amanzi*. All the comrades are due to appear in court again on 7 October.

Over the last week, the emergent coalition against water privatisation has been working hard to mobilise support for the struggles in Phiri and in laying the groundwork for legal challenges to Johannesburg Water as well as to the installation of pre-paid meters in South Africa. Plans are well under way, with the active assistance of the Freedom of Expression Institute, for a longer-term legal challenge to

the constitutionality of pre-paid meters.

The APF would like to thank all those South African and international organisations that have already pledged their solidarity and active support. We have also begun to receive financial support in response to our appeal for legal defence funds and we hope that this will continue.

We want to emphasise that the struggles in Phiri are but part of a much larger struggle that is taking place across South Africa against the neo-liberal policies of the ANC government over land, education, healthcare, water, electricity and housing. The repression being meted out will not halt the struggle for basic human dignity and rights of the poor in Phiri and across South Africa. Such collective resistance is both necessary and never-ending for as long as the barbarism of capitalism exists. On behalf of the APF and the Coalition against Water Privatisation

An unholy alliance

■ 51 Documents: Zionist collaboration with the Nazis, edited by Lenni Brenner, Barricade Books 2002

The alliance between Zionists and British fascists against the pro-Palestinian pickets of Marks and Spencer exposes a relationship that actually has a long history. The political ideology of Zionism is inherently racist and Zionist leaders have consistently appealed to anti-Semites to further their political aims.

Lenni Brenner's new book, *51 Documents: Zionist collaboration with the Nazis*, presents articles, letters and official records, many written by Zionists, from the founding father of political Zionism Theodor Herzl, to Chaim Weizmann and the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), to Vladimir Jabotinsky and his Revisionist followers. Together, these provide valuable insights into Zionism's racist nationalism, one which shares a 'kinship' (the chosen words of the

against assimilation by drawing on social Darwinist assertions of white supremacy.

Lenni Brenner is an American socialist from a Jewish background. He was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s in New York and subsequently became a historian and critic of Zionism and the Israeli state. He wrote *The iron wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir*, a must-read for anyone who wants to truly understand the ideology and shameful history of the neo-fascism of the so-called 'Revisionists'.

The book contains many interesting pieces. There is arch-racist Winston Churchill, writing that there are good Jews and bad Jews: the former are Zionists, the latter are Bolsheviks. Chaim Weizmann, who later became Israel's first president, advises Arthur Balfour in 1914 that 'we too are in agreement with the Jewish anti-Semites' (p22).

Then there is the Ha'avara

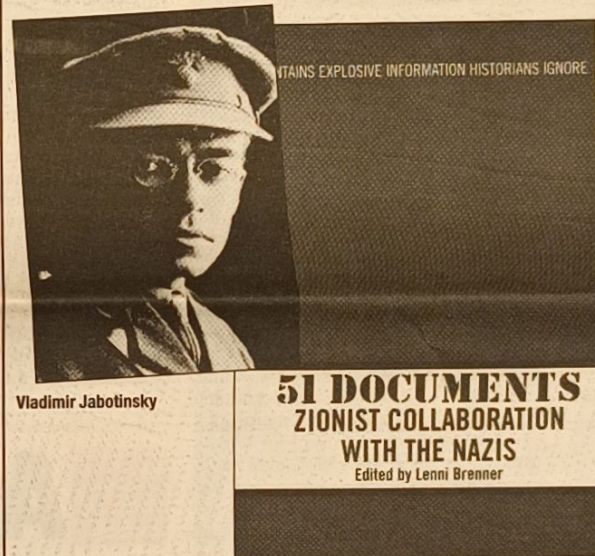
actually providing the Nazi government with new markets via the Transfer Agreement, through which the Germans received twice as much as they would have received had they sold the same goods to another country. Rabbi Dr Joachim Prinz sums up the Zionist approach to the Nazis in the 1930s: 'The [German] government announced very solemnly that there was no country in the world which tried to solve the Jewish problem as seriously as did Germany. Solution of the Jewish question? It was our Zionist dream! We never denied the existence of the Jewish question! Dissimilation? It was our own appeal!' (p100).

Other documents reveal that in 1943, Yitzhak Greunbaum who headed the WZO's wartime Palestine Rescue Committee, refused to use the Palestine Foundation Fund to save Jews in the Diaspora: 'Zionism is above all'. He wrote: 'In Eretz Israel... we were lucky that, instead of us, the victims were Jews from Russia, Jews from Latvia and Lithuania, Jews from Eastern Poland and Rumania. They were the victims and their numbers most certainly were hundreds of thousands. And articles written in those days about these horrors were certainly received by sighs, but no conclusions were drawn...' (p202).

In 1941 the Stern Gang, a splinter group from the Revisionist military organisation Irgur Zvei Leumi, presented a document to the Nazis in which they offered to 'actively take part in the war on Germany's side' and maintain and strengthen a 'future German position of power in the Near East' (p301). The Irgur Zvei Leumi described itself as 'closely related to the totalitarian movements of Europe in its ideology and structure'.

The documents chosen by Lenni Brenner eliminate all illusions that Zionists are acting or have ever acted in the interests of Jews. They are traitors not only to Jews but to all humanity. It is essential to understand this to appreciate the abhorrence of the Israeli state: violent, racist expansionist, and led by terrorists for over five decades.

Fiona Donovan



Vladimir Jabotinsky

51 DOCUMENTS
ZIONIST COLLABORATION
WITH THE NAZIS
Edited by Lenni Brenner

pro-Zionist American Jewish Congress in 1936, p96) with the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini. Zionist writers themselves referred to 'Jews' as a 'race' long before the Nazis and from an early stage developed their arguments

Transfer Agreement with the Nazis, which was concerned with exporting German Jewish wealth to Palestine rather than helping Jews fight against Nazi oppression. The WZO refused to join the boycott of German goods,

Marianas in combat

■ Tete Puebla and the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon in Cuba's Revolutionary War 1956-58, edited by Mary-Alice Waters, Pathfinder 2003, £9

This lengthy interview with Tete Puebla, now a brigadier general in Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces, highlights the struggle of Cuban women before the revolution and provides a powerful insight into how they won the right to take part in combat and play a major role in Cuba's revolutionary war.

Tete tells the story of how she and many other women joined with the rebel army as teachers and to help in the hospitals. Women were also responsible for transporting weaponry and other necessities. 'Sometimes we'd pretend to be pregnant. Nobody would touch the belly of a pregnant woman. But what we were carrying were bullets,

messages, dynamite, medicine and money.'

Fidel's proposal to create a women's platoon was initially opposed by the majority of his staff who asked why the women should have weapons when there was a shortage of arms amongst the men. Fidel's reply to this was 'they are better fighters, more disciplined', and the platoon was formed. Tete describes what happened when these women first went into battle and won support from comrades who had previously opposed their presence on the battlefield.

After the fall of Batista's regime, women began to organise themselves and took part in the building of a new society. They founded the Federation of Cuban Women in 1960 and took part in the campaign to eradicate illiteracy.

This book also contains a

number of short speeches by Fidel on the issue of equality and women's rights: 'All the young women I see here with their dresses draped in the red and black colours of the July 26 movement, I ask you to learn how to handle weapons.' And 'A people whose women fight alongside men – that people is invincible'.

This book is a must for anyone who wishes to learn about the sexual equality that was born through the revolution. The formation of the women's platoon represented a double liberation for women, who had been deeply oppressed before this time. The foundations on which the revolution was built, equality, the wishes of the people, and putting people before profit are still being built upon in Cuba today.

Heather Keating

Palestine

End of the road map?

The fall of Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas has dealt a significant blow to US/Israeli plans. The Zionists and their imperialist allies had hoped that the new PA government would achieve what three years of Zionist war had failed to deliver: a military defeat of the Palestinian resistance. To this end they did their best to foster a civil war between the PA and the Intifada. But the Zionists had destroyed the infrastructure that was essential to any PA-led war against the liberation movement. All that Abbas could secure from the resistance was a three-month ceasefire agreement; once the Zionists saw that he could not crush the 'terrorists', they resumed their assassination campaign. The inevitable result was the end of the ceasefire; and with it, what little credibility Abbas had started out with. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

The end of Abbas was also the end of President Bush's road map to peace. Now the US and its Zionist allies will have to find a different way of securing the defeat of the Palestinian people. One proposal is a US-led occupation of the West Bank and Gaza under the aegis of the United Nations. This may acquire more credibility, given US concerns about the Sharon government's threat to expel or kill Arafat, an action which would immeasurably compound the problems they already face in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The end of the ceasefire

The Palestinian ceasefire agreed on 29 June was already shaky when we reported on it at the end of July in FRFI 174. The Zionist occupation forces had not reciprocated at all, but had continued to build settlements, seize land for the Apartheid Wall on the West Bank, hold thousands of political prisoners and fire daily into Rafah and Khan Yunis refugee camps in Gaza. On 8 August, in a calculated attempt to bring the ceasefire to an end, Israeli occupation forces killed four Palestinians, two Hamas members and two civilians, in an attack on Askar refugee camp near Nablus on the West Bank. With the failure of this provocation, they organised a second attack less than a week later when they resumed their assassination campaign, murdering Islamic Jihad activist Mohamed Sidar in Hebron. This time there was a response. On 19 August Raed Mesk, a Hebron teacher, carried out an unauthorised suicide attack in Jerusalem: 20 were killed. Mesk had been a personal friend of Sidar and of a Hebron Hamas leader, Abdullah Kawasmeh, assassinated three months earlier.

This gave the Zionists the excuse they had pushed for. On 20 August, Apache helicopters launched a missile attack on a car in Gaza, killing Hamas political leader Ismael Abu Shanab and two of his aides. The following day all factions of the resistance declared an end to the ceasefire. 100,000 attended the funeral for Abu Shanab in Gaza. Within 48 hours, another missile strike killed four Hamas militants. By the end of August, eight assassination attempts had left 19 dead and dozens injured. The Zionists had now decreed that

political as well as military leaders were legitimate targets. Within three hours of Abbas' resignation on 6 September the occupation forces struck again, attempting unsuccessfully to assassinate Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin. This was followed by two Hamas suicide attacks, one which killed seven Israeli soldiers outside a barracks, and another which killed six civilians in a Jerusalem café. On 9 September, Israeli tanks shelled a Hebron apartment block killing two more Hamas members and a 12-year-old boy; the next day a rocket attack on the Gaza home of Hamas spokesperson Mahmoud Zahar killed his son and a bodyguard.

Eliminating the resistance

The purpose of the Israelis' renewed onslaught was not only the liquidation of Hamas, according to commentator Ze'ev Sternhell in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, since the Israeli government knows that 'every liquidated individual will have a replacement.' Instead, he explains, the Israeli government are not just fighting terrorism, since 'their strategic goal is not a peace based on compromise, but the total submission of the Palestinians.' He concludes that 'from their point of view, the war will not end until the day when the Palestinians accept unquestioningly Israel's rule in the territories. The government leadership is composed of clear-eyed, cold-tempered people. They are waging a political war, a clear-cut war of choice, which is the continuation of the policy of occupation and smashing of the territories to the point of preventing any possibility that a sovereign state will be able to exist there.'

The shoes of murdered resistance leaders will indeed be swiftly filled by replacements. On 16 September, the occupation forces announced that an undercover unit had 'eliminated' the 'head of the Hamas military wing in Hebron', Ahmed Bader. Yet only three months earlier on 22 June they had claimed the same achievement with the assassination of Abdullah Kawasmeh. Previous 'heads of the Hamas military wing in Hebron' they claim to have killed or arrested include:

- Ali Alan, assassinated 18 March 2003
- Abdel Halek Natshe, arrested 28 August 2002
- Jail Jadallaj, killed in a missile attack in November 2002

In addition they have arrested hundreds of alleged Hebron Hamas members – 130 in one day alone. Yet still the resistance in the city continues. As radical Zionist Gideon Levy complained 'What hasn't Israel tried? Liquidations, defoliation, mass arrests, demolition of homes, road-blocks everywhere, a terrifying security barrier – but none of these actions has been victorious over terrorism.'

Despite the bravado of the Sharon government, and the repeated declarations of Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz that the resistance is on the ropes, there are signs of a crisis in Zionist politics. Former Knesset speaker Avraham Burg writes despairingly (*The Guardian* 15 September) 'the Israeli nation today rests on a scaffolding of corruption and on foundations of oppression and injustice... we live in a thunderously failed reality.' He describes the dehumanising effects of the occupation on Israeli society: 'We have grown accustomed to ignoring the suffering of the women at the road-blocks. No wonder we don't hear the cries of the abused woman living next door, or the single mother struggling to support her children in dignity. We don't even bother to count the women murdered by their husbands.'

Israeli economy faces crisis

One reason for the loss of confidence is the state of the Zionist economy,

which continues to contract under the impact of both the Intifada and a depression in the high technology world market. This has forced the Sharon government to implement an austerity budget with deep cuts of \$2.2bn in public sector spending for 2004. Shaul Mofaz complained that the cuts meant that the Israeli air force would not be able to afford training flights; on the other hand, its proposals also sparked a number of demonstrations led by women opposing the social care cuts. Meanwhile the number of jobs has fallen by 3.5% in the past year in the high technology sector on which the Israeli economy is highly dependent.

Some relief has now come with President Bush's release of \$9bn loans guaranteed until September 2006. This is five times the aid given for the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan; it demonstrates the absolute commitment of US imperialism to its most favoured client state. The close-

ness of the alliance was shown once again on 16 September when the US vetoed a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning the decision of the Israeli cabinet on 8 September to 'remove' Yasser Arafat. This was the 34th time since 1967 that the US had exercised its UN veto in defence of the Zionist state.

The UN debate followed a statement by the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explaining that the cabinet decision meant that 'killing (Arafat) is definitely one of the options', although an alternative would be to treat him like a 'prisoner in a dungeon'. But despite the use of its veto, the US is opposed to Arafat's removal because of its incalculable consequences within the Middle East and specifically for its increasingly disastrous occupation of Iraq. Hence there is now a foreign policy debate about the US taking a much more direct role in settling the Palestinian 'problem'. One suggestion comes from

An activist visits the Palestinian Occupied Territories

Kosar Saira Nzeribe is an active supporter of the Marks and Spencer picket in Manchester. In August she visited Palestine for three weeks. Below is her report.

On my arrival, I went on a training course run by the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). When we had finished, we were told that Palestinians in the village of Mas'ah near Qalqilya needed our help to stop the Apartheid Wall being built through their homes. The following day, 3 August, 20 of us travelled to join the peace camp in the village.

Mas'ah – between the Apartheid Wall and the settlers

When we arrived there were already protesters from many countries – internationals – and a few Israelis. Bulldozers started work at approximately 7am, about 20 meters from the nearest house which belonged to Manira A'amer. The Israeli military

and police were called to evict the activists. Palestinians, internationals and Israelis linked arms around the property as the owner of the house and representatives of the National Committee Against the Wall, ISM, and Israeli peace organisations held a press conference. Because the activists and the media were present, construction was halted for the day. The contractors told the protesters that there would be no construction on the A'amer property for two months – what liars they turned out to be!

Our peace camp was situated on Manira A'amer's family's property. They had been told that the small animal shed attached to their house would be demolished to make way for the Wall, which would run immediately in front of their house. Directly behind them is the illegal Israeli Elkana settlement. The settlers did not want the Wall next to them, and their wishes mattered more than those of Manira A'amer. The result is that the A'amers will be completely trapped between the Apartheid Wall and the settlers. The family has been told that

they will only be permitted to enter and leave their home three times a day through a gate controlled by Israeli security forces and that no visitors will be allowed inside their house.

The story of Nazeeth Shalabi

Nazeeth Shalabi showed us the area where the Wall is being built. 95% of his land had been stolen in May for the Wall. Like other Palestinian villages, Mas'ah is already surrounded by mounds of earth and rock that prevent any vehicle from entering or leaving the village; 98% of its land will end up on the opposite side of the Wall. A father of seven children, Nazeeth realised that losing his land would mean a death sentence for him and his family. With no land, no way to leave the village, or means to make a living in it, how could he feed his family? Nazeeth worked 16 hours per day, and had walked barefoot in his olive grove since the age of five. He could not contain his sorrow, frustration and anger. He told his wife 'don't wait for me – I have days, perhaps weeks, till the bulldozers erase my

VICTORY TO THE INTIFADA



Caterpillar bulldozer at Mas'ah ready to demolish Palestinian homes

Martin Indyk in Foreign Affairs that the US secure a UN mandate to lead an international force into Gaza and the West Bank, placing the occupied territories under US trusteeship. Indyk was ambassador to Israel in 1995-97 and 2000-01 and has long been one of the most active leaders of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. His proposal rests on a number of assumptions: that the road map will fail; that Sharon will be unable to crush Palestinian resistance; and that any strategy Sharon devises anyway will be too risky for US interests. The key

component of his proposal are that combined US, British, Canadian and Australian forces under US command are deployed in those areas of the West Bank and Gaza under nominal PA control. This would not be a peace-keeping force, but one made up of special forces to go after the resistance and to dismantle its infrastructure; it will have Israeli logistic and intelligence support. Having eliminated the resistance, the US occupation force will then supervise elections and reconstruction, and help implement the final agreement. Fanciful though the

entire plan might seem, it is a measure of the concern that the US has at the continued failure of Sharon to destroy the Intifada.

Whatever the problems that Palestinian resistance poses for US/Zionist policy, the cruelty and oppression of the occupation continues. On the evening of 6 September, 17-year-old Mohamed Al Husni was shot in the legs as he walked past a Gaza military post. The occupation forces prevented an ambulance from attending him; every time he made a move they shot at him again. He was left unattended overnight; he was found dead the next day his whole body riddled with bullets fired overnight. He was the 470th child killed by the occupation forces since the start of the Intifada; over 100 were under ten years old; 156 had been shot directly in the head or neck.

Despite his austerity budget, Sharon has announced that his government will accelerate construction of the Apartheid Wall. The Wall now surrounds Qalqilya on three sides, cutting it off from its hinterland of 34 villages. With an 80% unemployment rate in the town, the predicted depopulation is starting to take place. Six hundred out of 1,800 shops have closed, and 4,000 people have left the town. In March, occupation forces demolished 80 shops in the village of Nazlet north of Tulkarm to make way for the Wall. On 22 August the army returned with 24 armoured bulldozers and 5,000 troops to demolish the remaining 100 shops with all their contents.

The Palestinian resistance faces serious challenges. How will it prevent the completion of the Wall? How will it deal with the Palestinian Authority and its policy of capitulation to the occupation? How will it defend Yasser Arafat against any attempt to remove him from Ramallah? It is clear that the appointment of Ahmed Qureih on 7 September as the new PA Prime Minister will not affect matters. The expectations of the US and Zionists remain the same: just prior to his

appointment, US State Department official Richard Boucher declared that 'Whoever becomes the new Palestinian prime minister, we're looking to see if he has the commitment, authority and resources to move forward on the road map. At this juncture that means principally...taking control of the security situation and acting against groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.' Whatever then the tactics the US/Zionists employ, they are agreed on one thing: the Intifada must be destroyed together with the hopes of the Palestinian people.

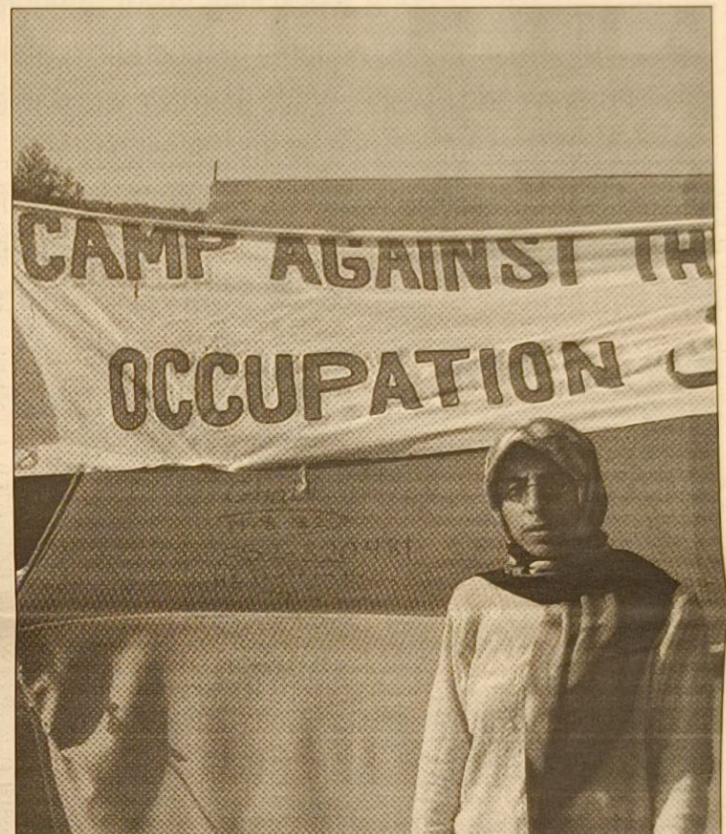
**Stop the land seizures!
Stop the closures!
Stop the Apartheid Wall!
Victory to the Palestinian people!**

Edward Said

As we go to press we have learned of the death of Edward Said.

There was no more eloquent scourge of Zionist racism, and US imperialist support. From the moment Arafat signed the Oslo Agreement Said exposed the dreadful capitulation of Palestinian interests this represented. His articles in publications like *Al Ahrar* were required reading for anyone who supports the struggle of the Palestinian people for freedom and justice.

Our next issue will include a fuller assessment of his political position when we analyse three years of the Intifada.



Kosar at Mas'ah peace camp

olive trees. I want to spend this time in the grove.'

He set out for his grove to be with his olive trees for as long as he could. The story of Nazeeh started going around in the village, through the road blocks, to international peace activists. People started to visit him, then they stayed and within a few days a little tent was erected in the grove. Very soon the tent turned out to be the tent against the occupation. The camp was then moved to the A'amer family's land.

On our second day at Mas'ah, on 4 August, Shabaq, the secret service, and the army came with M16 rifles in their hands and demanded to see our passports. They also came with camcorders and started filming us. No one showed their passports. I was worried they would think I was a Palestinian and go for me. Instead, they arrested two Israeli peace activists; just as the army was about to drive them away one of them shouted 'they are going to bulldoze today!' They were released after a few hours and banned from entering the camp for 15 days. We met to decide what we would do to protect the A'amers' property.

Ariel police station

At 6.30am the next day the border police arrived again and told everybody to leave. We decided to sit in a circle with arms and legs linked. They shouted and took a young Israeli man first and then began to drag away the rest of us. I found it frightening not knowing what they might do as they grabbed you from behind. We were pulled away, some people were beaten, punched, choked and kicked: the ISM Summer Co-ordinator sustained four broken ribs. I was dragged off by a

number of soldiers. I closed my eyes, as I didn't want to see who or how many. When I opened them I saw that one of the soldiers was a woman. I asked her how she could watch Palestinian children become prisoners in their own home. I told her I had a seven-year-old son whom I had left in England to support the Palestinians against unjust actions like these. She looked uncomfortable but replied in racist terms 'you don't know these people, they are murderers, they killed my best friend.' A large male soldier told me to get up. He was itching to beat me up, but for some reason the woman soldier blocked his way and asked him to give her time to sort me out. She stopped him from beating me up and got me into the waiting coach. As the coach left, we saw the side of the property being bulldozed to the ground.

Forty seven of us were detained. We were taken to the notorious Ariel police station. A few weeks earlier four ISM people had been arrested, detained and beaten there; the only Muslim, a Canadian, was beaten to near unconsciousness separately by five police officers in the interrogation suite. We heard Nazeeh Shalabi had also been arrested. When we saw our lawyers there was no confidentiality: the soldiers stood next to them while we asked questions and they provided the answers. We were kept in the yard of the police station in the August heat of over 100 degrees for a number of hours and then taken inside.

We spent the night in the station. A soldier with an M16 rifle stopped me from going to the toilet. I pushed his M16 to one side to pass. The soldier was angry and said 'I am God, if you do that again I will kill you'. To this I

responded 'you can kill me, but you are not God'. Then he gave me more abuse and laughed. We were bailed the next morning on condition that we would not enter the West Bank otherwise we would be fined and deported.

A few days after this, I went to the Al Aqsa mosque where we had a meeting and some of us agreed to break our bail conditions. I went to Tulkarm, where the ISM had a camp in a village called Deir Al Ghusun by the Apartheid Wall. Next day I spoke to a couple of farmers, who had had their land seized for the Wall: Mohammad Badair, who had lost 250 dunums of olive trees, and Jamal Esmail, who had lost 22 dunums. They told me that the Israeli government use an old Ottoman Empire law which allows the state of Israel to seize land if it is not worked for three years. Now that their land is on the other side of the Apartheid Wall they are certain that they will lose it because they will not be let through the gates.

Jamal also told me about the daily struggles people face, in this case just to buy a bolt! He told me how it took him three days to buy a small part for his tractor. He had to travel to Nablus. He faced many checkpoints, and at one particular one he was told to take his top off, kneel and was made to endure this for eight hours. He wasn't allowed water, to use the toilet or to get off his knees.

Women detainees and their conditions

I met Nawal Attar, 45 years of age. On 23 July 2002, she was at Al Bidan Valley check-point near Nablus on her way to see a doctor. Soldiers became suspicious when she rang her female friend on her mobile phone about the

doctor she was planning to see. She protested and tried to explain who she was talking to and why, but the soldiers took her away in the jeep. At the police station, they checked her bag for identification documents. They told her she would be imprisoned for the rest of her life unless she co-operated; they threatened to kill her if she did not confess.

She was transferred to prison where she found young women between the ages of 18-25 on hunger strike. She joined them for four days, but came off it because she became very ill. The young women remained on their hunger strike for 19 days. On the fifth day she was taken, blindfolded, to the interrogation room, where she was questioned. After this, she was sent to another prison near Jenin called Jalama. She was kept in the political prisoners' section. There were four women in the cell with her to begin with and then two more women joined them. These two women had been on a hunger strike, and as punishment they were made to sleep on the concrete floor without a mattress or any covers for one month. They had been protesting against the conditions of the prison. Nawal told me that they were let out of the cell for half an hour per day and they were not allowed visitors. The hunger strikers achieved one of their aims: after they ended the prisoners were let out for three hours a day.

The refugees in Tulkarm

I met Mrs Dameeri, a 76-year-old woman who lives in Tulkarm refugee

camp whose family had 120 dunums of land near Haifa. She remembered in 1948 a Palestinian local leader telling the local people they should leave after news of the massacre at Deir Yassin. Four days later they took what they could. They lived for seven or eight years in a tent. One of her grandsons, a 15-year-old, had four bullet wounds, sustained on four different occasions - one in the hand, one on his face, one in the stomach and one on his leg. He was still smiling as we spoke and he bought me an ice cream. I asked what impact having been shot four times had had on him, he said 'I still throw stones at the tanks and always will'.

Conclusion

My visit left me with a complete hatred for the Zionists. Whenever I hear the word 'Israel' I think of words like apartheid, ethnic cleansing, violence, prison, hatred, fascism. No one I spoke to trusted the US or the British, and they certainly didn't trust Mahmoud Abbas, so it's no surprise he's gone now! The Palestinian people I met had a dignity, grace, patience, intelligence, strength and generosity that I have not experienced very often in my life.

Most of all I want to say to the world: wake up, do you know we have an apartheid state called Israel, and that Palestine is the biggest open prison in the world? We have to take action now by supporting a boycott of Israeli goods, and supporting the boycott of Marks and Spencer.

FRFI at the Anti-Imperialist Camp: which way for the anti-imperialist struggle?

At the beginning of September a delegation of eight members of the Revolutionary Communist Group travelled to Assisi in Italy to take part in the Anti-imperialist Camp, a week long event attended by communist, revolutionary, progressive and national democratic organisations from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. While there we were able to talk to and interview a number of revolutionaries from Palestine, Iraq, the Philippines, Nepal, Morocco and Venezuela who have been in the front line of the struggle against imperialism and for socialism, to learn about these struggles and take part in political debates. **ED SCRIVENS** reports.

The most intense debate that took place was one between ourselves and the organisers of the camp, the International Leninist Current (ILC) over the nature of imperialism in the present period. Two fundamentally different ways of analysing the world emerged. The ILC argues that the European imperialist powers, in particular France and Germany, are too weak to compete with the USA and have therefore been absorbed into US imperialism to produce one united imperialist system that they have labelled 'Americanism'. They do not agree with the widespread view that 'globalisation' spells the end of the nation state, but for them 'the US will continue to exist as a nation, but others can't work as nations any more'. There will be only the American Empire. 'The imperialist bourgeoisie from other countries are completely integrated into the US, leading to one international ruling class.'

However for us the period since the collapse of the USSR and the socialist bloc has been one of a return to the classic features of imperialism defined by Lenin as a system in which the different imperialist powers tend towards conflict over markets, resources, outlets for the export of capital and ultimately profits. The post-1945 world order was a unique period in which inter-imperialist rivalries abated. It was based on three essential points. First, the ruined economies of defeated and devastated Germany and Japan were rebuilt with US capital. Second, the crushing of the working class movement by fascism before the war led to exceptionally high profits in the post-war period which could be shared out by the imperialists. Third, the victory of the USSR in the war and the subsequent rise of a large socialist bloc forced the weaker imperialist powers to unite under the leadership of the USA against their common enemy, the socialist system.

The phenomenal profits of the immediate post-war period have long gone as the rate of profit has fallen to a fraction of what it was, leading to increasing contradictions between the imperialist powers since the mid-1970s. It is now no longer a case of sharing out the profits but of the different powers attempting to secure their own prosperity and shoving their losses on to other rival powers.



Members of the Revolutionary Communist Group at the Anti-Imperialist Camp in Assisi

With the fall of the socialist bloc the post-1945 world order has been breaking down as the lack of a powerful common enemy has enabled pre-existing economic contradictions to break out into open rivalries.

The outputs of the USA and the European Union (EU) are now fairly evenly matched at 31.5% and 26% of world output respectively in 2001. By 2004, with the extension of the EU by ten member states, the combined economies of the EU will match that of the USA and their population will exceed the USA's. The EU's share of total foreign investment is now 52.5% of the world total, nearly two and a half times that of the USA. Foreign investment is the export of capital overseas in search of extra profits, in other words, imperialism. The figures demonstrate the strength of EU imperialism as an independent force. From 1980-2001, US total of world investment has halved while that of the EU has grown by 25%. US capital is losing ground to the capital of the EU. The economic weakness of US imperialism is striking and despite the overwhelming dominance of the US military, its military aggressiveness must be seen in this context. It is not a sign of strength but of vulnerability. The US government uses its military supremacy, built up in the long years of the Cold War, in an attempt to defend its world domination from increasingly powerful economic competitors in the EU.

FRFI has consistently argued that this was one of the key reasons for the US and British invasions of Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and most recently of Iraq when the rift between Britain and the USA on the one hand and France and Germany on the other was out in the open.

Marxist theory is not simply a way of understanding the world but is a guide to practical action. Hence theoretical differences are not an irrelevant academic diversion but lead to differences in practice, and can profoundly affect our political work and tactics. For this reason, despite a desire for an international anti-imperialist coalition, we could not endorse the declaration of the Anti-Imperialist Camp; a call to struggle against the 'American Empire'. We object to a slogan which overlooks the difference between the USA as a country and the American continent, from the Andes to the Caribbean. As communists we oppose and will fight US imperialism but as communists in Europe, we must fight the imperialist bourgeoisies of our own countries.

To shout out against the 'American Empire' or even US imperialism, without confronting British imperialism on the streets of Britain means pandering to populism. This is a tactic of social democracy, refusing to confront the British Labour government, and explains the failure of the anti-war movement despite its enormous size. Its mis-leaders pretended that it was the USA's (Bush's) war and

not Britain's (Blair's) and therefore avoided confronting the British government or the Labour Party. Even more dangerously, the tactic proposed by the ILC in a time of increasing inter-imperialist rivalries can lead to illusions in one or other imperialist power, such as the alleged 'humanitarianism' of French or German imperialism for opposing the war on Iraq. The ultimate logic of this argument leads to the position of social chauvinism, supporting one imperialist power against another when each is as brutal and exploitative as the other. We must oppose imperialism as a world economic system, as the highest stage of capitalism.

Iraq

Iraq was the central theme of the 2003 Anti-Imperialist Camp, which launched a campaign for material support for the resistance to the occupation forces. FRFI spoke to two participants in the Iraqi struggle: Jihad, a Palestinian student in Baghdad and Awni Al Kalemji of the Iraqi Patriotic Coalition.

Jihad was studying hotel management at a university in Baghdad. When the war started he decided to stay and fight because, he said: 'We know the great danger of imperialism, not just in Iraq but for the whole world...the Zionist invasion of Palestine and the American aggression against Iraq, is the same - same kind of weapons, same techniques, same policies...so we decided to stay there and participate in this war, for the sake of freedom for humankind, not just for Iraqis or Palestinians.' Jihad joined the battle against the US army at the airport of Baghdad.

Jihad was arrested by US troops. 'I was in my house, with no guns, nothing to indicate that I was in the resistance, and I had documents to prove I was a student in the university. This did not matter to the Americans. They just wanted to catch anyone.'

He was first held overnight in an outdoor tennis court, handcuffed without food or water, left to sleep on the wet floor. 'Then they moved us to the airport, with around another 60 prisoners. Some of them were old men, around 70-80 years old, some of them were minors under 18, most of those were around 14-15 years old, some of them were mentally ill. We stayed in the airport for two days. There were three small rooms, three by three metres and in each room there was 20 prisoners. So you couldn't even lay down to sleep, you had to sit.'

Jihad was shifted through four more places of detention in Baghdad, Nasiriya and Um Qasar, all with insufficient food and medical care. In two other camps the captives were forced to sleep outdoors on the sand with the scorpions and snakes.

After 50 days of these conditions, Jihad was processed by a military tribunal without any legal representation, where the judge was eating potato chips and drinking Coca-Cola. The court's decision was that Jihad was a civilian, held in US custody for attempting a 'belligerent act'. 'I asked what do they mean when they say belligerent act. They told me it's a wide concept. It can be because you fought against the Americans, or maybe you are a thief, a rapist, a killer, a criminal, or maybe it's for just being in Iraq when you shouldn't be.' Jihad was released near Basra and given just \$5 to get back to Baghdad.

Awni Al Kalemji represented the Iraqi Patriotic Coalition, an alliance of seven parties formed in the 1970s to struggle against the regime of Saddam Hussein by every means including armed struggle. He told us that at the moment, although the Iraqi people are resisting the occupation in many places, there is no real co-ordination between the resistance groups in the different towns and regions. For this reason the Iraqi Patriotic Coalition is returning from exile in Europe to Iraq in an attempt to provide co-ordination and leadership. Awni Al Kalemji himself was held under house arrest for two weeks and had his house searched in Denmark during the war.

Philippines

FRFI spoke to Rio Mondelo of Bayan from the Philippines. Bayan is made up of militant workers' unions, federations of the peasantry, women, indigenous peoples as well as migrant Filipinos and organisations around 1.5 million members. Rio told us that Bayan is a legal and open part of the National Democratic Front. 'The NDF was established by the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1973 to be the united front formation of the revolutionary organisations. It is now composed of 14 underground revolutionary armed organisations which include the CPP, the New People's Army, women's, youth and professional underground organisations, we even have the organisation of indigenous people and they have their own army. And course the Moro people are also represented.'

One concrete example of the colonial relations between the Philippines and the United States is the mutual defence treaty. Of course there is a lopsidedness to this treaty because if the Philippines is attacked the USA can help but if the USA is attacked the Philippines has no capacity to help because it is so poor. One of the provisions of the treaty is for the US to provide training for Filipino soldiers. In 1991 the Filipino Senate was forced to close the two big US bases but now the treaty allows US troops to be stationed in any part of the country without building a base.

Last year a Bayan international solidarity delegation visited the southern Philippines where 1,000 US troops had arrived. Under the treaty they are not allowed to carry out any type of combat. However the delegation established that a Moro civilian who had been shot in his own home had been injured by US troops. This incident severely embarrassed President Gloria Arroyo and the US State Department. The next month the State Department reacted by banning the CPP, its founder Professor Jose Maria Sison and the NPA.

Sison is a refugee in the Netherlands, but after being placed on the US list of alleged terrorists the Dutch government followed suit. This is a very serious move because Professor Sison is the theoretician of the Filipino left and 'the ultimate objective of the US is to be able to extradite him so they can imprison him indefinitely by falsely accusing him of a crime'. After having labelled him a terrorist their other option is his physical assassination. For this reason Bayan is supporting a campaign for the removal of Professor Sison, the CPP and the NPA from the EU's list of alleged terrorists and for the defence of Sison's democratic rights.

The US and the Cuban 'dissidents'

At the time of the clampdown, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque held a press conference attended by media from 22 countries, which conclusively exposed the US plot to organise mercenaries to overthrow the Cuban government and install a pro-US regime in its place. The criminal evidence produced included photographs, videos, notes of payment, publications, receipts of money transactions and the testimony of several Cuban security agents working inside these groups. Despite this, the media have deliberately ignored or distorted these facts, helping cover up for the Bush administration.

Since then a book has been published to further prove that those arrested were mercenaries who collaborated for years with US intelligence and Miami-based terrorist groups. *Los Disidentes* (The Dissidents), by Cuban journalists Rosa Miriam Elizalde and Luis Baez reproduces detailed interviews with the 12 Cuban agents who had infiltrated the so-called 'dissident' groups and whose real identity emerged during the trials. Those described in the bourgeois press as 'independent' journalists, human rights activists and other 'legitimate' advocates for change were in reality all participants in imperialist operations to defeat the Cuban Revolution. 'No country in the world tolerates or labels domestic citizens paid by and working for a foreign power to act for its imperial interests as "dissidents",' (Petras).

Fomenting subversion

The book reveals how the 'independent' journalists to whom USIS opened its doors, offered 24-hour passes and the use of computers, free internet and printers, had no professional qualifications or experience. To make up for their lack of writing skills, training courses and workshops were facilitated on USIS premises, advised by USIS press officers. These paid hacks wrote to order, producing a stream of anti-socialist propaganda for the international press, aimed at justifying the criminal blockade. Cuban state security agent Octavio, who rose to be head of the 'Independent Press Association', explained how it produces misinformation for Miami website Cubanet.

The clampdown by the Cuban government in April 2003 on US-backed subversion forced a clear demarcation between Cuba's real friends and its enemies. Alongside the usual right-wing ideologues, the furor has seen even some 'progressive' intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Susan Sontag line up behind the US administration to condemn the imprisonment of counter-revolutionaries and the execution of three hijackers. In Britain, commentators such as Joan Smith of the *Independent* poured anti-communist vitriol on Cuba, describing how 'dissidents' and 'independent' journalists were being locked up by a repressive, brutal state when all they wanted was 'freedom'. Former CIA agent Philip Agee is nearer the mark when he points out that, given the US's activities within Cuba, 'so-called independent journalists, independent librarians and civil rights activists are not, nor were they ever, independent in any sense whatsoever.' Responding to 'left' critics of Cuba in a Canadian journal in August, James Petras has pointed out that the proper term is 'paid functionaries of the US government, paid to implement the goals of the Helms-Burton Act...under the guidance and direction of James Cason, head of the US Interests Section [USIS] in Havana'.

JUANJO RIVAS reports.

Cubanet is to receive \$833,000 from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) this year.

Made-up stories about human rights violations and deliberate distortions were exchanged for significant sums of money, allowing these 'independent' journalists to live in comfort for years. For instance, the well-known reactionary Elizardo Sanchez Santa-Cruz was given a handout of \$200,000 directly from the US to share with his colleagues, \$50,000 via a Spanish Ministry of External Relations' cooperation agency and \$24,495 from the Norwegian embassy in Mexico on 28 January 2002 (increased to \$26,074 a year later), in gratitude for fomenting subversion in Cuba.

USIS also set about encouraging the formation of a new 'Liberal Democrat' Party, as well as an anti-communist trade union – without much success, given the weakness and rivalry for the bribes among the mercenaries.

At the same time, while reinforcing the official blockade on the island, the CIA has been providing medical supplies to counter-revolutionaries, via its NGO associates, to set up 'independent' pharmacies. The aim is to build a parallel society, undermining the universal provision of education and health and setting up the basis for an alternative private system. To this end, the US Interests

Section has successfully encouraged its counterparts in the Spanish, Swedish and Czech embassies to take a similar line, in clear breach of diplomatic protocol.

Improving old tactics

These are familiar tactics. Throughout the last 50 years the CIA has used similar techniques to impose regime change by toppling governments. Alongside sponsoring terrorism, other covert operations such as bribing and co-opting journalists have proved an effective means of dividing and destroying those who oppose US domination, whether in Guyana in 1964, or the CIA trade union operations in Brazil in 1963. So successful were CIA operations in Brazil that they were replicated ten years later in Chile.

Then, in 1974, a popular movement overthrew the fascist regime in Portugal, and communists with left-wing military officers took charge. At that time the Portuguese social democrats were a tiny minority living in exile, but they received at least \$10 million channelled through a US foundation, plus extra funds from the CIA. Thanks to this supportive push the social democrats came back, built a party overnight, carried out an expensive campaign, took power and relegated the left to the sidelines.

In the late 1970s the growing strength of revolutionary movements



James Cason on the extreme left

in countries such as Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Nicaragua brought Republicans and Democrats together to establish the American Political Foundation to subsidise foreign operations through US NGOs.

In the 1980s under the Reagan administration the subversive role of non-governmental and voluntary organisations was developed further in relation to Cuba. The key players were the CIA, USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), created in November 1983. The NED's non-governmental status provides the fiction that the money supplied is 'private' rather than from the US government, and it has become a 'mega-conduit' to fund the same array of non-governmental organisations that the CIA had funded secretly. Not surprisingly the violent right-wing Cuban American National Foundation was one of the first beneficiaries of the NED funds, receiving \$390,000 for counter-revolutionary activities from 1983 to 1988.

Reagan's programme of targeting civil society had a huge success in Poland, where the combined efforts of the CIA, NED and the Vatican sponsored the reactionary trade union Solidarity, providing it not only with money but intelligence information, computers, printing equipment, TVs, and even radio and television transmitters. This led the trade union to transform itself into a political party, taking control of the government in 1989.

Cuba defends itself

In May 2001 Senator Jesse Helms introduced legislation to provide \$100 million to repeat in Cuba the 'successes' in Poland. On 20 May 2002 George Bush announced his 'Initiative for a new Cuba', mentioning again the Polish example, and promising direct assistance to 'help to build Cuban civil society' leading to a 'new government' in the country. The USAID programmes from 1996 to 2001 disbursed \$12 million to 22 NGOs, all

apparently based in the US, mostly in Miami. The budget for these sinister plans jumped to \$5 million in 2002 and is to increase to \$6 million in 2003, showing a tripling of funds since Bush seized power. Alongside appointing Miami Cubans to high office in his administration, this strategy is also a pay-back to the Cuban mafia for its decisive role in the fraudulent presidential elections.

Chief of the US Interests Section in Havana and CIA member James Cason orchestrated operations, contacting mercenaries, hosting meetings at his own residence and securing the flow of money.

Despite USAID claims that its NGOs can't provide cash to Cubans directly, over \$100,000 in cash was found in the possession of the 75 mostly unemployed mercenaries who went on trial. As Philip Agee says 'anyone who thinks they are prisoners of conscience, persecuted for their ideas or speech or victims of repression, simply fails to see them properly as instruments of a US government that has declared revolutionary Cuba its enemy'.

What government in the world could fail to act against such a threat? Cuba has laws to protect its sovereignty that criminalise the distribution of US propaganda that supports the illegal blockade or undermines the Cuban government – and it used them. The US has underestimated the unity and ideological strength of the country, where ordinary Cubans volunteer as security agents to defeat imperialist attack. *The Dissidents* shows the sacrifice such Cubans made to penetrate the network, posing as counter-revolutionaries, suffering the bitterness or even rejection of families and communities. When their role was revealed at the April trials, popular celebrations greeted these courageous and often anonymous comrades who work in the shadows against the imperialism that threatens their homeland.

US steps up aggression

The execution of three Cuban hijackers in April 2003 needs to be understood in the context of the rapid escalation of subversive activity by the US administration.

- **2001** US propaganda claims that Cuba is planning electronic warfare against communications in the US; that a Chinese ship loaded with weapons is heading for Cuba; that Cuba is developing a research programme for biological weapons. James Cason, later head of the United States Interests Section (USIS) in Cuba, claims at a conference on national security that Cuba had failed to offer condolences or support after the attack on the World Trade Centre. Cuba had been in fact amongst the first to do so.

- **August 2002** Five people hijack

a boat in Pinar del Rio. US releases hijackers.

- **September 2002** Cason arrives in Cuba with the aim of 'speeding up the process towards a democratic Cuba'. He offers his residence and USIS for the counter-revolutionaries to meet with foreign diplomats. He begins to meet regularly with counter-revolutionary leaders.

- **October 2002** Cason tours Cuba, visiting counter-revolutionaries. He holds a working meeting for a project for an 'Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society in Cuba'.

- **November 2002** Cason visits ex-convict Oscar Elias Biscet Gonzalez, who receives prize directly from President Bush. Sentenced for actions carried out for Cuban American terrorist

foundation, Gonzalez had been released five days earlier. Meeting at Cason's residence between counter-revolutionaries and a visiting US delegation. A Cuban plane is hijacked and taken to the US. The US releases the hijackers and sells the plane. Meeting at USIS to discuss making contact with petty criminal elements. Further tours of Cuba to meet counter-revolutionary grouplets with view to setting up single party of counter-revolution.

- **December 2002** Cason hosts function for counter-revolutionaries to meet diplomatic representatives from the UK, the Czech Republic, Poland, Greece and Chile.

- **January 2003** Cason tours Cuba, taking material supplies to counter-revolutionary grouplets and establishes con-

tact with religious sector. Cason announces his '6,000 miles' plan of systematic tours throughout the country. A boat is hijacked and taken to the US. Cuba requests the return of the hijackers. The US releases them.

- **February 2003** A Cuban border patrol boat is hijacked and taken to the US. Hijackers are not charged. Counter-revolutionaries meet visiting US cultural delegation at Cason's residence. Cason calls on other diplomatic missions based in Havana to follow the example of the USIS. Brothers to the Rescue beams an illegal television broadcast into Cuba. Miami 5, gaoled in the US, consigned to the punishment block.

- **March 2003** Meetings with counter-revolutionary ringleaders at Cason's residence continue, now almost daily. Cuba makes formal protest to Cason over his violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Protocol. Cuba publicly exposes subversive actions of USIS and

Cason through Cuban media. 70 counter-revolutionaries are arrested for mercenary activities in the service of a foreign power. A Cuban plane is hijacked and flown to Miami. The hijackers hold knives to passengers' throats. US refuses to return plane. US re-inforces blockade. USAID announces \$1m aid to the University of Miami's Cuba Transition Project. US publishes a world human rights report condemning Cuba and supporting internal subversion.

- **April 2003** A plane is hijacked. The hijacker holds a grenade and demands fuel to fly to the US. There, the hijacker is released. Five people attack a soldier, seize his rifle and attempt to hijack a plane. Cuba estimates that a further 29 hijacking plans have been foiled. A Cuban ferry is hijacked. Eleven hijackers, armed with knives, demand a boat and threaten to throw hostages overboard. They are captured, tried, sentenced and three are executed.

SSP debate concludes

In this issue, we conclude the debate on the nature of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) that was started by Ben Courtice in response to an analysis of its performance in the Scottish parliamentary elections published in FRFI 173. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we will return to the debate when we have further concrete evidence of the role the SSP plays over the coming months

In defence of the SSP

After reading Michael MacGregor (FRFI 173) and Paul Mallon (FRFI 174) on the SSP I feel that I, as an SSP member, must respond and separate fact from fiction.

Michael says that 'the fact is that at no point in the election contest did the SSP campaign on the principled basis of demanding a no vote for the Labour imperialists.'

What the SSP did do is stand in every first-past-the-post seat (except against Jean Turner (hospital campaigner), Dennis Cavanagh (Independent) and John McCallion (Labour), and in every list seat, plus a large number of council seats. We called on the electorate not to vote for any of the big business parties (Labour, SNP, Lib Dems, Tories). Our propaganda also made clear that to vote Labour was to endorse their war-mongering. In an electoral contest, and that is what Michael was talking about, I would call that opposing Labour. With regard to John McCallion (an extremely prominent anti-war campaigner), the local branch decided at the last minute, by one vote, to stand down (which constitutionally they are allowed to do) in his favour. It was not a popular decision within the SSP.

Interestingly, if FRFI members in Dundee had remained inside the SSP (they were in its precursor the Scottish Socialist Alliance) the vote would have gone the other way.

With regard to the anti-war movement in Scotland, the SSP was the backbone of this movement and outside of the Muslim community provided the main organisers. Tommy Sheridan and other party spokespersons made clear on national television and elsewhere that we were opposed to the war on Iraq, regardless of what the UN said, even if it reduced our vote to zero. Allan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan repeated this at both of our public election rallies in Edinburgh. I was there.

Further, the Lothian Muslim Voting Committee distributed thousands of leaflets explicitly calling for a first vote for the SNP and a second (proportional) vote for the Scottish Socialist Party. In the Lothians Colin Fox of the SSP was elected on the second vote despite stiff opposition from Margo MacDonald (ex-SNP) and the Greens. Similarly, Michael says that 'a pre-election FBU poll in Scotland showed that only 1% of members would vote

Labour as compared to 63% in 1999.'

What he fails to mention is that the same poll said that twenty-odd per cent were going to vote for the SSP. Why? Because of the concrete solidarity (money, picket line reinforcements, support in our paper) delivered by ordinary SSP members all over Scotland. In short, to write comments like 'the refusal of the SSP to take up the challenge of Labour' or 'the SSP's endorsement of Labour' is in my opinion to bend the truth beyond all recognition. Finally, Michael, as you know, the SSP, and Tommy Sheridan in particular, have stated repeatedly that they do not believe that there exists a parliamentary road to socialism.

Turning to Paul's response to Ben Courtice, he repeats the arguments about the SSP not breaking from Labour and not being anti-imperialist which I have dealt with above. He goes on to say that '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...could be used towards such an end, but only in the context of building a

principled anti-imperialist working class movement outside parliament'.

I couldn't agree more, that's what we are trying to do. I also agree that the SSP doesn't yet have the stature of the Black Panthers but we are less than five years old. It is true that the SSP is weak on its understanding of Irish Republicanism and Loyalism as the invitation to Billy Hutchinson to Socialism 2000, three years ago, showed. The SSP is still learning and changing. For example I can think of two former Militant full-timers, still prominent in the SSP, who now go on the annual Edinburgh James Connolly March. Similarly, in the only ever vote on whether or not the SSP supports revolutionary Cuba, the pro-Cubans won. And who is the SSP's most prominent supporter of Cuba? Tommy Sheridan.

The vast majority of Scottish Socialists of every stripe are now in the SSP. It is a growing party of the working class. Its anti-imperialism would be strengthened if FRFI supporters joined as an open faction. I appeal to you to do so.

Bob Goupillot, Republican Communist Platform of the SSP (personal capacity)

Letter from Ben Courtice

Thank you for giving so much consideration to the issues in my letter. However the grave charges you have laid against the SSP are in my eyes yet to be proven. In his article, comrade Mallon recites the same criticisms as comrade MacGregor's initial article, plus historical considerations on the British left's weaknesses, and the electoral abstention of much of the working class.

Did the SSP organise against the Iraq war? Mallon admits that it did oppose 'war for oil'. According to their website, they continue to 'organise solidarity campaigns with struggle in Palestine, Colombia and Afghanistan - all important elements of the anti-imperialist struggle'.

The SSP appears to oppose Labour by providing an alternative to vote for. I am unclear whether Dundee represents the entrenched views of the whole party, or was an exception. The SSP election manifesto is critical of the current bourgeois parliamentary system and talks

of 'the pro-big business consensus of the establishment parties'. Which would appear to include Labour.

It seems that, however softly they may have said it, the SSP are in fact anti-Labour. They are also, in fact, committed to the anti-war movement. This is concretely anti-imperialist.

Electoral abstention by part of the working class may represent cynicism about bourgeois parliaments, but I find this translates into apathy as readily as rebellion. FRFI may choose to focus on this section of the class, but to rigidly condemn real or perceived failings of the SSP, rather than offering a critical engagement, would seem to build unnecessary barriers between FRFI and another potentially important section of the movement. I would have thought that each might have something to learn from the other.

Comradely

Ben Courtice
Melbourne, Australia



Glasgow demonstration against the war, February 2003

Did the SSP oppose Labour imperialism?

We completely agree on the need to build a 'principled anti-imperialist working class movement outside parliament'. We further contend that without this, there will be no possibility of a struggle for socialism. That is why we were more than interested in the conduct of socialists during this recent election.

Voting took place while the Labour government was engaged in an imperialist war against the people of Iraq. The response of the socialist left to this specific development was critical. Wherever they were campaigning, on the streets or for parliamentary seats, they were presented with an opportunity to rally thousands in the popular anti-war movement against the imperialist Labour Party. Imagine the effect of a large, organised socialist force using the election, amongst many other tactics, to disrupt and destroy the

influence of the Labour Party: to link its murderous attack on the Iraqi people with its disgusting racism here and its ruthless advocacy of the multinationals' neoliberal global agenda which is impoverishing millions and threatening environmental catastrophe. Such an intervention would have called on the anti-war youth, many of whom were excluded by age from the voting charade, to get out to the Labour Party surgeries, meetings, offices and phoney election rallies to express their righteous anger at Blair and his loathsome crew. It would have confronted his MPs as representatives of a party that has always used terror and bombs to defend British imperialism. Such a development could only have been based on complete and explicit opposition to voting Labour at the election, that is - no vote for Labour imperialists!

That would have been anti-imperialist politics, working class politics, socialist politics in action. Instead what we got from the SSP was name-calling - 'Blair is a poodle'!

Does Bob agree or disagree that the basis for any intervention in that election should have been explicit opposition to any vote for Labour? He does not provide evidence to disprove our statement that at no time during the election did the SSP campaign on the principled basis of a 'no' vote for Labour imperialists. He cites the fact that the SSP stood in every constituency and called on people not to vote for 'big business parties'. To stand in every first-past-the-post seat in a bourgeois parliamentary election in which the SNP, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives also stand is not opposing Labour at all. This is the nonsense of parliamentarianism,

where all challenges and opposition conducted by ruling class rules are phoney. Yes, Labour is a party of 'big business', but it was more specifically the party of big bombing; they were actually doing the imperialists' business at the time!

Any electoral intervention by socialists in such elections should be on the basis of maximising the politics, not the vote, so when Bob tells us that Sheridan and McCombes publicly stated that they were prepared to risk the SSP's vote being reduced to zero we do not dispute that this was so. But this risk was assessed on the basis of the SSP opposing any UN-backed bombing of Iraq. Given that at the time popular anti-war feeling was massive, and the likelihood of a UN mandate very distant, this was a hardly taking a heroic and principled risk.

What Sheridan and Mc-

Combes were not prepared to risk was losing votes, particularly list votes from Labour constituency voters unhappy with the war but not that unhappy that they would want a Labour defeat, yet who could make a protest vote for the SSP through proportional representation. The SSP were not prepared to lose such voters and the electoral set-up allowed such two-way voting. That is why, as we stated, that Sheridan's eve of poll 'appeal to Labour voters' was not to ditch the imperialist party but to vote as they liked as long as they supported the SSP with their second vote. Sheridan should have told Labour voters and members that they were condoning the bombing. A socialist intervention would have disregarded all risk of losing votes by confronting head-on the murderous racism and imperialism of the Labour Party.

Comrade Bob is concerned that we did not mention the statements of the Lothian Muslim Voting Committee and members of the FBU which called for support for the SSP. He misses the point that these groups were absolutely explicit in their refusal to vote Labour. The Scottish Socialist Party itself was unable to match such a clear and specific rejection of Labour. Bob ends up arguing that somehow the totality, the aggregate of statements and positions and actions of the SSP, from standing for the Scottish Parliament, to defending socialist Cuba, proves their anti-imperialist and socialist credentials. It is the other way around: these credentials were undermined by the SSP's refusal to advocate no vote for Labour imperialists.

Michael MacGregor

Lifting the lid on SPECIAL HOSPITALS

The Inquiry had heard evidence that patients were systematically beaten, sexually assaulted, raped, tortured and killed by the staff. Crimes covered up by successive governments, Labour and Tory alike. Such treatment is a matter of course in all Britain's four Special Hospitals – Rampton, Broadmoor, Ashworth and Carstairs (Scotland) as it has always been in all closed institutions. You read on occasion of old folk beaten, neglected and sexually assaulted in residential homes. Ditto children in care. Violence against prisoners by prison staff... No-one then can feign surprise that psychiatric patients receive their share of brutality. You've only to remember that the Prison Officers Association was born in Broadmoor to get the picture.

The difference is that society takes exception to children and old people being abused, and periodically makes some effort to uncover such abuse and bring a few token prosecutions. Prisoners are less blessed by the fruits of society's conscience. And mental patients not at all.

For decades people had tried through the courts and the occasional sympathetic journalist to expose the atrocities committed in the Specials, but with little success. In the 1970s and 1980s, even the digging up of patients murdered and buried in the grounds of Rampton and Broadmoor failed to raise enough outrage to force their closure.

Numerous inquiries have exposed the culture of institutionalised brutality, misogyny and racism, and Blom-Cooper reported on the Specials also being home grounds for neo-Nazis and recruiting grounds for the National Front. He called for the closure of the institutions, or, failing that, for the creation of a new and modern-day culture. For the first time, patients would have human rights, dignity – and protection from the atrocities that had been their lot since Victorian times.

It's impossible to convey how hard won these reforms were. It really took decades. It took many people a great deal of hard work, and cost others a great deal of suffering. Blowing the whistle in such an environment will cost you dearly as an employee. As a patient, with no rights and no protection, it can cost you your life.

To expose a culture wherein helpless human beings are chained to hot radiators for hours, even days, to burn; are stripped naked, pinned down and beaten till they can no longer scream; and sat on till they stop breathing and die... that is one thing. But to expose the fact that government has always known the full extent of these crimes and has covered it all up time and again is to leave yourself alone to the mercy, not only of those criminals committing the atrocities, but of a frightened and vengeful government determined to protect itself.

Still, in 1993, these reforms were indeed won. Blom-Cooper called for open accountability at all levels, and patients to be given not only an environment safe from abuse, but which would also be treatment based. Treatment has never been a priority in the Specials, and the very idea that one could treat and heal people in such an environment is, of course, absurd.

What Blom-Cooper could not do,

For the past 25 years FRFI has consistently covered the struggle of prisoners in British gaols to expose and confront the brutality meted out against them. Even more brutal and vicious during this period has been the treatment of mental patients in the so-called 'Special Hospitals'. In 1993 Louis Blom-Cooper QC published the report of his inquiry into the mistreatment of patients at Ashworth Special Hospital, recommending over 90 reforms to the system. In 1997, before all Blom-Cooper's recommendations had been put in place, the government began the Fallon Inquiry and followed this in 2000 with the Tilt Report. These two reports resulted in a complete reversal of all Blom-Cooper had attempted, with the consequence that Special Hospitals are now more backward and brutal than ever. **COLIN** reports on the struggle of mental patients.

however, was sack the entire Special Hospital workforce and start again. The rot would stay.

And resentful rot it now was. No longer could these misogynist, racist, violent, raping, torturing, murdering neo-Nazis parade in their uniforms, nor abuse patients quite so blatantly. The hardliners therefore set about undermining the reforms and blocked change at every turn. Every recommendation had to be fought through in a process that took years, and was never completed.

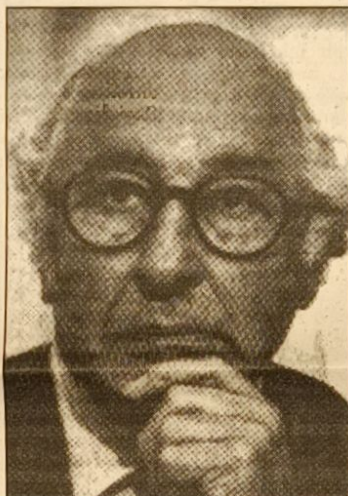
The struggle of people suffering from psychiatric illness to simply be recognised as human beings goes back to the days of Bedlam and before. Whereas many other cultures fully accept people who are ill, industrialised countries have long come to prefer locking them away out of sight and mind, and asking no questions thereafter.

I was introduced to the system in 1990 by way of Ashworth. On my first day I saw one patient having his face smashed repeatedly against the concrete floor; another being dragged by the hair by two 'nurses' into a strip cell where he was beaten so badly he didn't emerge for nearly a week, and sundry other examples of professional care which variously left the patients battered, bruised, humiliated and frightened.

I learned quickly enough that such violence, accompanied by hetero and homosexual rape and numerous forms of torture, was the norm. When I spoke out against it, calling in lawyers and instructing them to call in the police and the press, I found myself on the end of the so-called nurses' boots. At bang-up each night they would pile into my cell and give me plenty, threaten my family and my life. I am not one to back away from a fight, no matter what my fear, and it came as a relief to them and me when the opportunity arose to boot me out into another unit on the site.

It was here that I learned I wasn't the only one fighting but that there was already a public inquiry being fought for by some of the inmates. It was also here that I and a couple of mates extended that inquiry to cover the whole of Ashworth by noisily reporting the systematic torture of a patient whose only crime was to hit back those 'nurses' who hit him. His name was Geoffrey Steele and you can find the photographs of his battered body in Blom-Cooper's report.

It would take chapters to describe the events following our disclosures – the way the torturers scuttled away and hid in the grounds like the cowards they are every time a lawyer or



Louis Blom-Cooper

investigator came round; the way they always ganged up on the weaker witnesses after bang-up; the threats and intimidation that went on to silence those who would speak out, including some few staff, who had for their reward their cars paint-stripped, tyres slashed, house windows put through, petrol poured through their letter-boxes.

The net result was that, although Blom-Cooper got his reforms on the agenda, no prosecutions were ever made, nor were any of those with blood on their hands sacked, so the ship sailed on with the same old crew and the guilty got away with murder. Again.

More insulting was that, with Ashworth's management decimated, positions were opened up which would allow these people into upper management, setting the scene for the downfall of all Blom-Cooper had set about achieving.

However, one of Blom-Cooper's recommendations, that patients should have means to be heard, opened the way for the formation of patients' councils and magazines. For us in Ashworth these two concessions would provide for the first time the means by which we could gather evidence of brutality and corruption and disseminate it across the country. Organisations such as MIND, SANE and Survivors Speak Out, MPs, bishops and lords all got regular updates of what was going on in Ashworth. As I ran the magazine, and the patients' council shared my office, we could at last act effectively as a way of getting patients' screams heard. Which of course put us in the firing line.

Our office also provided a way for the small minority of disenchanted staff to speak up anonymously. Notes would appear, or one of us would be pulled aside and told quietly of the latest beating or rape.

And the beatings did continue. Normally of those who were too ill or impaired to speak up for themselves. Or so ill and so long exposed to such treatment as to accept it as normal.

The rapes continued too. Most people in the Specials have been victims of violence, brutality and rape. Women in these places are usually there because of the sexual abuse they suffered in childhood and their teens. Often they have been abused for so long that they too accept it as a normal part of their lives, a fact fully exploited by their new rapists, the psychiatrists and 'nurses', who exercise complete control over them. And if a woman does resist, there are always drugs to shut her up. Few speak out – they are too frightened or they know they will just be ignored because they are, after all, mental patients.

It was clear from the outset to us on the magazine and council that we would all end up doing many more years for our efforts. People are sent to the Specials without limit of time and, prison transfers aside, the average stay is probably around 20 years (though many have done 30, 40, 50 years). All that is required to keep you there is a psychiatrist's word that you may one day present a danger to yourself or to others. Argue with that. Therefore your sentence is easily increased should you make yourself unpopular by exposing the crimes of the very people who determine it.

And many gave their lives in this struggle:

- **Chris** – confined to solitary for months on end, with the usual kickings, adulterated food and general abuse, he spoke out at every opportunity, eventually attracting Channel 4 to make the documentary *They call us nutters*, for which he was never forgiven. Drugged out of his head by shrinks, imprisoned in solitary and brutalised by staff, knowing he'd never be free, Chris finally killed himself.

- **Terry** – warm, loving and generous, her childhood and teens one long horror story of horrendous sexual abuse, which continued at the hands of her so-called carers in Ashworth, she played a brave part in exposing the sufferings of female patients. Finally, she was put up for discharge, but her shrink blocked the move, told her he intended keeping her imprisoned for years to come and persecuted her,

until she too killed herself.

- **Bob** – another childhood rape and abuse victim, who spent his life behind bars, fighting the system for justice, he died of a massive heart attack aged 37, as a result of the drugs forced on him.

- **Rob** – was simply beaten and suffocated to death. Provoked until he lost his rag, they piled on top of him, pinned him down, stuck a needleful of tranquis into him and sat on his chest for 20 minutes.

Others of us fared better inasmuch as we didn't die. Instead we were harassed, threatened, intimidated, scorned, singled out, stitched up, bounced from ward to ward, assaulted – and of course written up as dangerous or subversive to prevent our discharge or transfer. The magazine was censored, blocked, raided and finally shut down. The council was ignored, by-passed, its members threatened, and finally it was disbanded.

People continue to be tormented, falsely imprisoned, brutalised, beaten, raped, driven to suicide, poisoned, suffocated and beaten to death. And the government and press continue to demonise mental patients. No-one counts the dead. And no-one seems to care. Those of us who have survived will continue to shout about our experiences, to expose the truth about the Specials and to offer our solidarity and support to those still incarcerated in them.

Prisoners to see Cat A reports

On 1 September the High Court ruled that high security Category A prisoners have a right under the Data Protection Act to obtain copies of the reports used to determine whether they should have their status lowered to Category B.

The challenge was brought by Alan Lord, sentenced to life imprisonment in 1981, who has been kept in top security conditions in revenge for his participation in the 1990 uprising at Strangeways prison in Manchester.

Category A prisoners are housed in a small number of prisons, never told when they are to be transferred, their movements and actions recorded, their visitors vetted by the police, and subject to countless other restrictions.

Every year each Category A prisoner's status is reviewed either by the faceless 'Category A Committee' – mainly governors of high security prisons – or the even more faceless 'Category A Team' – civil servants who just rubber-stamp prison staff recommendations.

To put their case to the Committee/Team, prisoners received only a 'gist' (summary) of their reports; previous legal attempts to get the full reports having failed. In Alan Lord's case, the judge found that the gist did not summarise the reports. While three of the six reports did say Alan should remain Category A, one gave no opinion, and two said he should be Category B. Yet the gist was written as though all agreed he should stay Category A. The judge described the system as Kafkaesque and ruled that Alan should be provided with the reports in full.

This means that in future, prisoners will receive the full reports, unless the Prison Service can genuinely argue that the information would compromise security if disclosed. And some prisoners, including Alan himself, have suddenly been re-classified as Category B!

Copies of the judgment are available from the Prisoners Advice Service, Unit 210 Hatton Square, 16 Baldwins Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ.

Fascists defend Marks and Spencer

Since the start of the Intifada three years ago, FRFI has held regular pickets of Marks and Spencer up and down the country. In Manchester they have been weekly on Saturday since November 2000. Later pickets followed in London. Such has been the success in London of this boycott campaign in getting the message over about Zionist terror, that a motley alliance of fascists and Zionists have started a counter-protest to our weekly Thursday evening pickets of Marble Arch M&S. On 4 September, FRFI supporters arrived to find a dozen or so Zionists from the Betar movement attempting to persuade people to buy Israeli goods. We established our picket to a hail of abuse from the Zionists and their British fascist organiser who paraded up and down the pavement with the Union flag. The following week, we returned in strength: at its peak our 80 supporters dwarfed the Zionists' contingent, gaining huge support from shoppers. When challenged, one of their supporters acknowledged there were BNP members on their counter-protest, saying 'they are better friends to us than you are'. This was doubtless a reference to their principal spokesperson who clearly had a solid grounding in BNP traditions, frequently waving a Union Jack, chanting 'UVF, UVF' in our direction, demanding to know whether we supported the Irish Republican movement and expressing virulent hatred of our communist standpoint. In between he attempted to whip up anti-Muslim hatred. Other BNP supporters threatened picketers, and sought to get the police to move us away.

By the fourth week, British fascists and Zionists had been joined by others, including Hindu BJP supporters and Sikh



VTI picket outside M&S Marble Arch, London, 25 September 2003

chauvinists. Their counter-protest has become an international fascist convention! With the support of members of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Muslim Public Affairs Committee and International Solidarity Movement, we have energised our picket to the extent that M&S must be regretting Betar's decision to take to the streets. For three weeks we have had over 50 supporters, with a stall and placards; many shoppers have joined the picket. Despite their noise, the Zionists get very little support. One old woman stopped to argue with them; as they crowded round her she whacked one of the fascists with her stick! Our mobilisation has started to attract new forces who can see that what we are doing is having an effect; people have volunteered to set up a similar picket in South London. Meantime the police don't know what to do. On one picket they suddenly disappeared – it looked like they were setting us up for the fascists to attack us. On another, they stopped us and the fascists from using megaphones. But our supporters kept up a ringing barrage

of slogan chanting louder than the megaphones – the Zionists could not match us. More recently the police threatened the entire picket with arrest because we were stood outside an M&S entrance. But they could not close us down! Betar and their international fascist allies have thrown down a challenge to anti-imperialists and supporters of Palestine. Come and join us! We are making a difference! We will not be moved!

In Manchester, Zionist abuse has been a constant feature of the Saturday M&S pickets. But it is the City Council which has been our most determined opponent. On 6 January two picketers will face a total of eight charges of having an unlicensed stall and illegal display of placards. In the meantime another picketer is facing a charge under the Public Order Act following a complaint by an M&S security guard. In fact the guard was the aggressor, attacking one of the protesters outside the store. To mark the third anniversary of the Intifada and the picket, we are organising a 'Market Street Intifada' on Saturday 11 October. This will

be a rolling picket/leafleting of shops along Market Street that profit from the brutal Israeli occupation. There will be an Oxford Street Intifada on the same day in London, another in Durham and one in Glasgow as part of the Day of Action to boycott Israeli goods

Betar – what it is and what it stands for

Betar in Israel is now the youth wing of the ruling Likud Party. Its goal is the establishment of Eretz Israel – a Zionist state from the Nile to the Euphrates. The organisation was set up by the leader of the fascist 'Revisionist' wing of Zionism, Vladimir Jabotinsky, in 1923. Its website does not hide its ideological connection with Jabotinsky, printing in full his political tract, *Betar Ideology*.

Jabotinsky was a racist. In 1914, he wrote: 'the source of national feeling...lies in a man's blood...in his racial-physical type, and in that alone.' He described Zionist settlement in Palestine as colonisation, and wrote 'colonisation can have only one goal. For the Palestinian Arabs this goal is inadmissible. This is in the nature of things. To change that nature is impossible'. The consequence? 'Zionist colonisation, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonisation can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population – an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.' In other words, Zionism could only establish itself in Palestine through the violent expulsion of the Palestinians.

To this end, Jabotinsky founded Irgun as an underground wing of Betar. In 1937 and 1938 Irgun organised bombing campaigns targeting Palestinian civilians, killing over 100. Its most infamous deed was the slaughter at Deir Yassin when on 9 May 1948 an Irgun force under Menachem Begin, later Israeli prime minister, butchered 254 Palestinian civilians, men, women and children. This event, more than any other, precipitated the Nakbah when 750,000 Palestinians fled their homes.

Today, Betar-Likud oppose any form of Palestinian state; many of their supporters call for the expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank. Historically, they supported apart-

heid South Africa and sold arms and nuclear technology to the white racists. Today they are courting favour with the Hindu chauvinist BJP government of India, again by selling arms. Jabotinsky collaborated for several years in the mid 1930s with Mussolini, receiving aid to set up a Betar naval squadron in Italy. Zionist recruits sang the fascist anthem *Giovinezza* at its 1936 opening. Jabotinsky publicly defended Italian fascism as 'at least an ideology of racial equality'; in turn, Mussolini told the Chief Rabbi of Rome 'For Zionism to succeed you need to have a Jewish state...The person who really understands that is your fascist Jabotinsky'. His political descendants today carry on that tradition of collaboration with fascism.

(Much of this information is drawn from publications by Lenni Brenner – see review p7.)

EVENTS

LONDON

Victory to the Intifada! Boycott M&S! Picket of Marble Arch Marks and Spencer. Every Thursday evening 6-8pm. Nearest tubes Bond Street/Marble Arch

Saturday 4 October: Picket of M&S Brixton 12-2pm (opposite Brixton tube).

Saturday 11 October: Oxford Street Intifada: National Day of Action to boycott Israeli goods. Actions against M&S, Caterpillar, Starbucks and Selfridges. Meet 12pm outside M&S Marble Arch.

Wednesday 15 October: **Victory to the Intifada campaign meeting: The Al Aqsa Intifada three years on.** 7pm, Room G1, LSE 20 Kingsway, Holborn WC2. Nearest tube: Holborn. For further details phone 020 7837 1688 or email victoryintifada@hotmail.com

MANCHESTER

Saturday 11 October: Market Street Intifada. Assemble 12pm outside Marks and Spencer, Market Street. Weekly Saturday pickets of M&S, 12pm Market Street M&S.

For more details, contact victory_intifada@hotmail.com or phone 07816 547066.

Sunday 2 November: FRFI anti-imperialist forum. 2pm, Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, City Centre. For more details contact manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com

MIDLANDS

For further details, contact 07949 256477

DURHAM

Weekly Saturday pickets of M&S, 11.30am-2.30pm Silver Street M&S. **Saturday 11 October: Silver Street Intifada.** Action on Silver Street in support of the Palestinian people. Meet Silver Street M&S 12pm. For further details contact 07813 073 846.

GLASGOW

11 October: Sauchiehall Street Intifada – M&S 12-2pm Next picket 25 November 12-2pm. For further details of this and other FRFI activities in Scotland contact 07779 785 529 or email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Rock around the Blockade round-up

www.ratb.org.uk

Be active with RATB, the struggle of the Cuban people is our struggle.

Victory to the Cuban Revolution!
Together, another world is possible!



Anti-Imperialist Camp in Assisi

RATB supporters led a forum on Cuba at the Assisi Anti-Imperialist Camp (see p10) alongside Roberto Rodriguez, representative of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples. Rodriguez gave an introduction explaining the history of the Cuban people's struggle against US imperialist plans of annexation. Representatives from RATB spoke about the acts of sabotage and terrorism promoted by the US against the Revolution, and the efforts of right-wing Mafia groups, CIA and Bacardi to fund and sponsor mercenaries within the island, hoping to undermine socialism from within.

Cuban journalists visit Marx's grave in London

In late August two Cuban journalists, Rosa Miriam Elizalde (co-author of *Los Disidentes*, see p11) and Dora Pineiro, visited London and RATB had

the pleasure of spending time with them researching Marx's 30-years work and life in the city. Members of RATB guided the Cubans to the house where Karl Marx lived between 1851 and 1856 at Dean Street, Soho, to Frederick Engels' house at Regents Park Road and the last residence of Marx at Maitland Park, where he died on April 1883. Rosa and Dora also visited Highbury cemetery where Marx is buried.

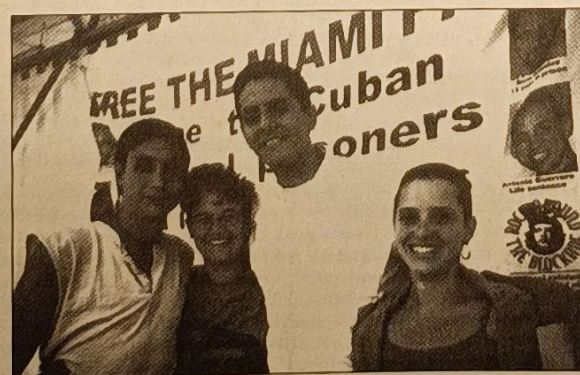
Rosa Miriam Elizalde writes for the Cuban youth paper *Juventud Rebelde* and today works with Dora Pineiro on the websites www.antiterroristas.co (coordinating campaigns to free the Cuban political prisoners in US gaols) and www.cubadebate.co (forum of debate on Cuban issues).

Join Rock around the Blockade

We urge readers who are not already members to join RATB. Membership costs £10 (waged), £4 (low-waged) or £2

(unwaged/student) for a year and you will regularly receive the Viva Cuba newsletter and updates on our events and meetings and have the opportunity to make a real contribution to our work.

Join our new egroup Viva Cuba-subscribe@yahoo.co.uk to be part of our discussions. You will receive articles and can contribute articles and views to the group.



Rock around the Blockade activists with Cuban comrade Roberto Rodriguez in Assisi

Forthcoming events

Keep your eye on our website to be up to date with all political developments and events: www.ratb.org.uk

LONDON EVENTS

Next street stall: Saturday 4 October from 12-2pm at Camden in NW1 (meet outside Camden Town tube station). All welcome.

Meeting: Tuesday 28 October, 7.30pm. Discussion on Guantanamo – human rights in Cuba vs the US at London School of Economics, Room S75, Houghton Street WC2 (nearest tube Holborn).

The following meeting will be on Wednesday 26 November, same venue and time, we will show a film on US terrorism and the Miami 5 – Cuban political prisoners in the USA.

AN EVENING TO COMMEMORATE

Che

LIVE MUSIC AND POETRY SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER 8pm

36 years ago Che Guevara was murdered in Bolivia. His legacy lives on as a revolutionary and a Marxist. Celebrate his life with live music, poetry and readings – upstairs at the Yorkshire Gray, on the corner of Gray's Inn Road and Theobalds Road, WC1 (nearest tubes Chancery Lane and Holborn, buses: 253, 38, 55, 19) All welcome. Donation at door.

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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FRFI 'excellent' on trade unions

Received the paper this morning. Thought this issue was particularly good. Please give my congratulations to the comrade who wrote the article on the imperialist trade unions. I really enjoyed that one.

LIAM O'RUAIRC
Belfast

Just a comment about your paper. It was an excellent piece on trade unions etc; my views have changed radically on them and many points close to my own mind and experiences were put across.

MARK (by e-mail)

LETTERS write to
FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk
website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com and www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

Fernando Gonzalez Llort, prisoner of imperialism

Friends from Rock around the Blockade.

My deepest gratitude for your committed solidarity with Cuba, especially in these days in which the European Union seems to have decided to align itself with the United States government in its foreign policy towards my country.

My appreciation also for your continuing efforts in the political campaign on behalf of us five Cuban political prisoners in US gaols.

The truth about our case is reaching an increasing number of people around the world. Solidarity is growing and strengthening, and it will be that solidarity that will have the last word.

We'll keep standing firm alongside our revolutionary people and you, our friends, certain that victory and the future belong to the people.

Hasta la victoria siempre!

FERNANDO GONZALEZ LLORT
(Ruben Campa)
FCI Oxford, Wisconsin, USA

SWP and Labour imperialism

In September George Galloway spoke at the miners' welfare club in Deal. His description of the Labour government's cynical duplicity was very good. But he put the following question to the audience: should he be joining others like Corbyn and Benn in their attempt to reconquer the Labour Party, which would be an Everest to climb, or should he be looking to build another mass working class party, which would also be an Everest to climb?

A few questions were taken at the end: a long statement from the Socialist Party, which ended in a call for a mass party and a call from some SWPers for him to join the SWP. A CPB member and RMT shop steward called on him not to lose faith in the Labour Party, nor to untie the knot with the trade unions.

I said I had no faith in the Labour Party or its elitist parliament, but this was not solely because of its recent war aggression, but also its long historical commitment to imperialism and oppression. I cited the willingness of Labour politicians to co-operate with the Loyalist death squads in the Six Counties as just one other recent example of Labour infamy.

This clearly did not go down well with the SWP at the next table.

In defence of anarchism

Thanks for reviewing the *No war but the class war* pamphlet. That's actually the title, the publisher was the Kate Sharpley Library.

Unlike some Marxists, we are not bound to venerate like holy writ everything written by the nineteenth-century greats. If Proudhon, before there was an anarchist movement, wrote some rubbish, we feel free to write off

what does not help us achieve a free society. Fortunately, anarchists have enough knowledge of their history to know that the dispute within the First International was more about Marx's 'honourable and principled' plans for absolute control than the Paris Commune.

We would not expect a communist publication to offer anything but a critical view, but

your reviewer, in calling the Makhnovists a 'band of brigands who also carried out pogroms against Jewish communities in the Ukraine' is falling back on a long tradition of Stalinist lies. Can he provide any historical references which will stand up, or was the 'school of falsification' headline a Freudian slip?

ANNA KEY
Kate Sharpley Library, London

Anarchist school of falsification revisited

Anna Key's dismissal of my criticism of Proudhon is not good enough. I wasn't criticising eccentric behaviour or opinions. My complaint is against his political programme, which pandered to the backwardness of the French and Swiss peasantry and artisans, instead of challenging it. He was attacked at the time by, amongst others, the French woman novelist and socialist Georges Sand. Many anarchists like Ms Key accuse Marx of being 'authoritarian' and hold up the male chauvinist Proudhon as being the embodiment of personal freedom.

David Reed wrote an excellent article in FRFI 93, February/March 1990 on the First International. Ms Key is correct when she points out that the faction fight was conducted around narrow organisational matters. However, behind it was an attack on Marx by British pro-capitalist union leaders. They objected to Marx's defence of the Commune in *The Civil War in France*. This was the official statement of the First

International on the Commune. The anarchists formed an alliance with these right-wingers against Marx and class-conscious workers. The anarchist leader Bakunin wasn't present, as he had been expelled from the First International for what I will politely call financial irregularities. All the minutes and documents are in the public domain.

Ms Key wants references on the Makhnovists carrying out anti-Jewish pogroms during the Russian civil war. There are several, but I will give you two. EH Carr refers to it in his history of the civil war. Also, the anarchist historian Paul Avrich mentions it in his work *The anarchists in the Russian Revolution*. My description of the 20,000 Makhnovists as brigands is fair and accurate – they lived off plunder.

In her pamphlet, Key reprinted Makhnovist propaganda, calling on Red Army troops to desert whilst they were defending the fledgling Soviet socialist state from an imperialist invasion. She

presented this as an example of anti-militarism! It was an act of war.

That is what I mean by 'falsification'. Key's anarchist politics are exposed for what they are: radical liberalism, with no class content whatsoever.

Unlike Makhno and Key, some anarchists in the civil war did have class principles, recognised the class line and did not cross it. In his account, the anarchist Avrich informs us that there was 'a small army of anarchists who took up the weapons against the Whites during the civil war'. At FRFI we honour these revolutionaries. Lenin himself in August 1919 described these 'Soviet anarchists', as they were known, as 'our best comrades and friends'.

I always find it amusing to be called a Stalinist by anarchists. Stalin promoted the doctrine of 'socialism in one country'. Many anarchists better that by thinking it can be done in one village. Perhaps Ms Key is closer to Stalin than I am?

JIMMY GERMAN

Lincoln Labour Councillors close city swimming pool

On 12 August 2003, Lincoln City Labour Council effectively closed the swimming pool at the City School and Community College to the public.

Only two of the councillors voted against the closure, despite large-scale opposition in the Lincoln area.

When local people attempted to set up a Save Our Swimming Pool (SOS) campaign, they were denied the use of community facilities to even hold a meeting. So a meeting was organised on the

car park of a local football club attended by several hundred angry residents and supporters.

When the ruling Labour group realised they faced massive opposition, they threatened members of the local Residents' Association. One wheelchair user was told he could lose his support from local Social Services!

Despite intimidation, 4,500 people signed a petition and sent letters of objection. The many concerns raised about health and safety were ignored. There is

already a problem of local youngsters swimming in local canals and rivers risking drowning and infectious diseases.

Instead councillors endorsed the decision to withdraw funding for the swimming pool.

Labour has proved yet again their ruthlessness, denying the public the cheap and affordable facilities they deserve and require.

ROBERT REDFORD
Lincoln

Trouble at HMP Woodhill

On Wednesday 16 July at HMP Woodhill's Close Supervision Centre (CSC) A wing, six prisoners were refused exercise due to alleged 'inclement' weather. The weather was hot enough to fry the screws alive, so you don't have to be a genius to imagine the in-cell temperatures of A wing – the lowest tier within Woodhill's CSC.

The prison officers' mentality was, in my opinion, fanatical and beyond comprehension, given the oppressive heat and refusal to allow the small relief of exercise to A wing, the only thing they have to break through the monotony.

What followed during the heat of that night speaks volumes. Four A wing residents demonstrated their dissatisfaction at having exercise refused. Four cells were completely destroyed, observation panels smashed through, light fittings wrecked, stainless steel sinks ripped out and used to knock

window panels out.

During the night faeces were thrown through the smashed observation panels into the adjudication room. Piping was dismantled from the stainless steel sinks, causing major flooding.

The Multi squad came into A wing super-seg on Thursday 17 July, banging their shields. Scott Napier took a bad kicking resulting in an alleged fractured jaw. Willie Miskimmin's assault resulted in bruising to his eyes and a split nose. Robbie Stewart was viciously attacked, then transported to HMP Full Sutton segregation unit. Ray Gilbert was ghosted to Long Lartin segregation unit.

Scott Napier went to Milton Keynes General Hospital to have his jaw X-rayed and I understand that while he was there he was again assaulted. The screw who I understand assaulted him the day before did it again despite Scott having complained about the officer the first time.

GLENN WRIGHT
HMP Woodhill

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.*

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 020 7837 1688. Website:
<http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk>

Platform Film Productions The Human Shields

A film about the journey of peace activists who travelled from London to Baghdad in January 2003 in a bid to avert war, the support they found along the way and the disturbing realities they discovered in a country on the brink of invasion.

Hundreds of other 'human shields' were inspired to go to Iraq, and many stayed as US bombs began to drop. What difference did they make?

Film available on DV/Beta SP, 50 mins. £11.75 including postage and packing. For full list of films available contact Platform Films on 07973 278956 or e-mail: platform.films@virgin.net

PATRICK CAREY
Deal

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Racist Britain

Close Dungavel! Stop deportations!

On 8 September thousands of protesters gathered outside Dungavel detention centre in Scotland to demand its immediate closure.

Families are locked into the former prison, run by Premier Detention Services, and have to get permission to visit the centre shop. One mother was fined her entire weekly allowance of £3.50 for taking a cereal biscuit back to her room to her child. Children have limited access to play areas and education facilities are completely inadequate. They are not permitted to attend local schools and there is one teacher for one composite class.

The Scottish Parliament debated the future of Dungavel on 11 September; however a decision had already been taken in June by the Labour-run Scottish Executive and the Home Office to massively expand the centre.

Labour murderers

On 28 August, 30-year-old refugee Israfil Shiri walked into the offices of Refugee Action in Manchester, poured petrol over himself and set himself alight. He suffered 80% burns and died after five days on a life support machine. His killers are without doubt this callous, inhuman, racist, Labour government.

Israfil had fled political persecution in Iran. A year ago his asylum claim was rejected; after that he was refused benefits, refused treatment for a serious medical condition, and made homeless. Unable, under Labour's racist immigration laws, to work, Israfil was destitute and desperate.

More information from ncadc-north-west @ncadc.org.uk / 0161 740 8206.

Government wins right to starve asylum seekers

On 17 September the Home Office successfully appealed against an earlier judgement which had ruled unlawful its policy of denying all financial and material support to asylum seekers who do not register their claims immediately upon arrival in this country. The government now has the legal right to leave a vulnerable group of people entirely destitute. Further legal challenges are expected, together with protests by those denied benefits. Many asylum seekers are forced to sleep rough and throughout August a group of asylum seekers openly slept out in south London, keeping together both for safety and to publicise their situation.

Sylvester Inquest – cop changes story

The inquest into the death of Roger Sylvester heard a police officer dramatically change his story. Roger, a black council worker, was arrested in Tottenham, London, in January 1999 and taken naked and handcuffed to hospital, where he was 'restrained' by eight policemen.

In the witness box, PC John Anderson (now promoted to sergeant) retracted a report made on the night of the incident, a statement to a police doctor and a statement to Essex Police, who investigated on behalf of the Police Complaints Authority.

The police claim that although Roger was handcuffed he was in the recovery position. Under cross-examination Anderson realised that his statement – 'I was kneeling on his upper legs' – made this unlikely, so he changed his story.

Another officer, PC Steedman, gave an account of Roger's death which, under cross-questioning, also cast doubt on the police story. He said that while being restrained Roger managed to lift his head 18 inches off the ground before losing consciousness. Barrister Ian McDonald suggested this could not have been possible if he was lying on his side.

Michael MacGregor, Bob Shepherd, Jim Wills and Nicki Jameson

Brent East by-election

Poll turns against Labour Socialist Alliance turns against justice

Labour canvassers faced hostility and anger during the recent Brent East by-election. Many former Labour voters declared they could no longer support a party which had launched an illegal war in Iraq and wants to bring in private investment in hospitals and education. In a massive rejection of Labour's policies, its 13,047 majority was overturned by the Liberals, with 8,158 votes to Labour's 7,040. The turnout was just 36%. Brent East is a socially and racially mixed area with a large Irish and immigrant population.

There was a total lack of enthusiasm and ideas from all the establishment parties. The single event to enliven a dull campaign was the candidature of Kelly McBride, a working class mother from North Belfast. Kelly travelled to London to pursue justice for her brother Peter, who was murdered by the British Army at the age of 18.

Kelly explained her reasons for standing: 'I don't expect to win... but... I hope to win justice. If a major can be expelled for cheating in a game show, why should convicted

murderers be kept in the army, and even promoted? My brother Peter was unarmed, posed no threat, but was shot in the back. The courts convicted the two soldiers who shot him of murder. But [they] remain in the army.' One of Peter McBride's killers has since been promoted while fighting in Labour's war in Iraq.

In a deliberate manoeuvre to undermine the McBride campaign, Eamonn McCann, a Derry-based supporter of the Socialist Alliance, spoke in Brent a few days before the election. He claimed that the best

way to support the McBride campaign was not to vote for Kelly McBride, but for Socialist Alliance:

'Kelly McBride has made it clear that she has not entered the election [to win]... but to focus public attention on the scandal of Peter's murder and particularly on the actions of the British military and political authorities in condoning his murder. This she has achieved. The important thing now is to ensure that after the election there will be a political force with enhanced credibility left behind in Brent East...'

Yet if Kelly had not stood, Socialist Alliance would never have mentioned her brother's murder. It is more interested in building alliances with so-called Labour left MPs than exposing the true nature of British rule in Ireland or building support for those fighting British oppression among working class people in Brent.

John Hume, ex-leader of the SDLP, is another dubious 'supporter' of the McBride family; he urged Irish voters in Brent East to vote Labour because

its candidate had agreed to meet Kelly McBride after the election. Kelly says she has had lots of meetings with Labour politicians but has never seen any action from them.

Kelly McBride told FRFI she had received fantastic support from working class people in Brent of all nationalities, who were disgusted that her brother's killers were promoted for doing Blair's dirty work in Iraq. Kelly seemed amused by the interventions of John Hume and others: 'Why are these big politicians interested in a wee working class woman from Belfast?' Maybe it's because Peter McBride's story shows the true nature of the British state and its contempt for working class lives.

Jim O'Rourke

Kelly McBride got 189 votes. Socialist Alliance got 361.

The McBride campaign can be contacted on 07966 703137 or www.serve.com/pfc/mcbride

No justice for Yarl's Wood detainees

On 15 August Henry Momodou and Behar Limani were convicted of violent disorder and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. They had been charged with participating in the uprising at the Yarl's Wood Detention Centre on 14 February 2002, in which the centre was wrecked and large parts of it burned to the ground.

Aliane Ahmed and Nassem Moustafa had earlier pleaded guilty to playing minor parts in the disturbance. The remaining seven defendants were acquitted. This did not prevent six of them being immediately re-arrested and detained under immigration law, and, in one case, summarily deported.

Yarl's Wood opened in Autumn 2001 to house 900 people awaiting deportation. It was built in a hurry and on the cheap. Despite advice from the Fire Service, no sprinkler system was installed and, according to evidence at the trial, during the revolt the walls shook visibly. Custodial staff had little training and even less understanding of the situation of the people they were employed to warehouse.

On 14 February a woman detainee was refused permission to attend church. She protested and was forcibly restrained by Group 4 guards. Other detainees, already angry at their imprisonment and treatment, came to her aid and the incident escalated into a full-scale uprising.

Following the revolt and the fire there has been massive wrangling between Bedfordshire police and Group 4. Initially, the police treated Group 4 as a potential criminal suspect; however Group 4 is now suing the police for £96m compensation under the 1886 Riot Damages Act.

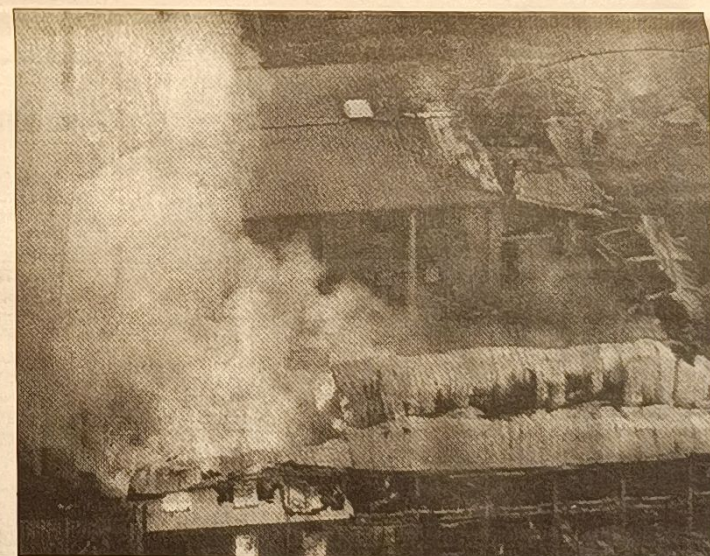
Shielded by the use of private con-

tractors to run the government's immigration prisons, Home Secretary David Blunkett was free to concentrate on ensuring that no blame was attached to his immigration policies. His task was to characterise the detainees as ungratefully vandalising their luxury home, rather than taking a desperate stand against a vindictive, racist system. In this he had the full support of the right-wing media. Since the Yarl's Wood revolt, there has been a daily stream of racist propaganda in newspapers and on TV, portraying asylum seekers as public enemy number one.

It is therefore small wonder that the Yarl's Wood jury contained two members who think all asylum seekers are scoundrels. Their overt prejudice and the fact that the judge, when alerted to it, did not stop the trial, is likely to be central to the appeals of Henry Momodou and Behar Limani.

However, even a prejudiced jury could not convict the other defendants, despite Group 4 spending vast sums on 'courtroom skills' training for prosecution witnesses and the state ensuring that many potential defence witnesses were deported and/or rendered untraceable.

Prisons Ombudsman, Stephen Shaw, is currently conducting the government inquiry into the events at Yarl's Wood. Despite calls by campaigners for it to be public, the inquiry is to be held behind closed



Yarl's Wood detention centre on fire in February 2002

doors. Although Shaw describes the investigation as 'an over-arching one, concerned with context and principles, as well as the events themselves', his official remit is clearly limited to examining the events and their immediate causes. He is then charged with making recommendations designed to prevent 'any further recurrence in the IND custodial estate in relation to contracts and agreements with service providers, the operation of removal centres, building design and construction, and any other matters considered relevant.'

The inquiry may therefore possibly stretch to considering the effect the government's plans to drastically reduce legal aid for immigrants and cut back on rights to appeal will have on the number of men, women and children herded into such places in the future. But the 'principles' under consideration will not include the principle of whether it is ever right to

imprison asylum seekers or the questions of why there are refugees and what they are fleeing. However 'joined up' the Labour government claims to be, the inquiry into Yarl's Wood will never be allowed to join up the fire there to the fires in Kosovo, Iraq or Afghanistan, which are among the countries currently producing the bulk of asylum applicants to Britain.

Yarl's Wood is about to reopen. The first occupants will be 60 single women – by 2005 it is planned to be holding 400 families awaiting deportation.

Nicki Jameson

Contact the Campaign Against Arbitrary Detentions at Yarl's Wood at sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk or telephone 07786 517 379

Send letters of solidarity to Henry Momodou, Behar Limani, and Aliane Ahmed, at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, Du Cane Road, London W12 0AE.