

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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IRAQ: THE FIRES SPREAD

The predicted attack on British interests and civilians came in Istanbul on 20 November killing 30 people, four of them British, and wounding 450 people. Scotland Yard said it was only a matter of time before people in Britain are similarly attacked. Labour Prime Minister Blair, with President Bush at his side, struck a Churchillian pose, 'When something like this happens today, our response is not to flinch or give way or concede one inch. We stand absolutely firm until this job is done – done in Iraq; done elsewhere in the world.' Let us be clear: the British government is leading us from war to war, endangering the lives of millions of people in Britain and around the world in pursuit of selfish, racist, imperialist and ultimately unobtainable goals. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

As US casualties in Iraq mounted and the debacle of the occupation washed against his White House door, Bush announced, 'America will never run'. Run, no, but a brusque quick step, yes. US and British military strategy aims to destroy their opponents' will to fight. A CIA report leaked in November described how the occupation forces could fail in Iraq. On 11

November the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) head Paul Bremer was hastily recalled to Washington. Within a week he was announcing new constitutional arrangements to allow the US and British authorities to hand over administrative powers to Iraqis by the end of June 2004. The US and British governments seek to retain smaller forces in Iraq, housed

in well guarded camps, launching targeted forays against any resistance. This would reduce US and British casualties. As the Iraqi resistance grows this looks a forlorn hope. Missing is the essential ingredient which the US and Britain cannot provide: a legitimate Iraqi government accepted by the Iraqi people.

There were plenty of people and organisations that advised the US government on how it might respond after the 11 September 2001 attacks: you cannot stamp out this fire. That advice was not heeded and the US launched its war on terror chasing ghosts and destroying cities. If the US ruling class was to truly tackle the formations allied to Al Qaida (or for that matter the resistance in Iraq) it would have to divest itself of its existence as an imperialist ruling class. The war on terror and the invasion of Iraq conform to the strategies of the US and British ruling classes. These strategies are not reacting to some external threat; they are predatory, militaristic and racist and will

inevitably provoke resistance under whatever banner it proclaims itself.

With the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union the US ruling class moved quickly to assert its dominant position in the world. It intends to control the world's oil supplies and pipelines in order to prevent the emergence of any potential rival for at least 50 years. Central to this strategy is control over Middle Eastern oil reserves. The latest International Energy Agency report forecasts the Middle East producing 51 million barrels of oil a day by 2030 compared to 21 million today. This will constitute two-thirds of the overall increase in world oil production. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was accompanied by the establishment of US military bases from the Caucasus to the borders of China. Oil routes from the Middle East to China and Japan were secured, Caspian Basin oil and gas supplies brought under US and British control, US forces occupied Russia's southern flank and European fuel supplies were strategically dominated by the US. With US

military spending exceeding that of the next 20 biggest spending powers combined the US ruling class was keen to demonstrate that it could not be resisted. This strategy was formulated in a context of a growing crisis for capitalist accumulation, driving it more desperately in search of markets and raw materials and turning the major capitalist powers against each other.

For the British ruling class the alliance with the US is intended to defend British overseas assets, second only to those of the US, and defend the international status of the City as a centre of international finance. British government willingness to commit British forces to fight overseas is intended to raise the position of British capitalism and influence in the world compared to Germany, France, Japan and other capitalist powers. Britain also has two of the three biggest oil companies in the world (BP and Shell) whose interests shape much foreign policy. With huge trade imbalances and the US current account deficit

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Welcome...

BOUGHT AND SOLD

The ancestors would turn in graves,
Those poor black folk that once
were slaves would wonder
How our souls were sold
And check our strategies.
The empire strikes back and
waves,
Tamed warriors bow on parades,
When they have done what
they've been told
They get their OBEs

Benjamin Zephaniah 2001

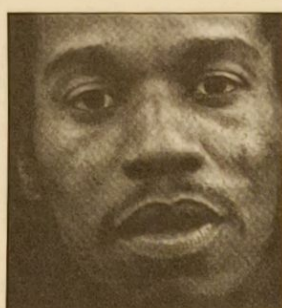
'Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought. I get angry when I hear that word "empire"; it reminds me of slavery, it reminds of thousands of years of brutality, it reminds me of how my forefathers were raped and my forefathers brutalised.'

Benjamin Zephaniah writing in *The Guardian*, 27 November 2003

Typically arrogant and insensitive, in November 2003, Prime Minister Blair proposed black activist and poet Benjamin Zephaniah for the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the Queen's New Year's honours list. Either he has not read Zephaniah's latest poetry book (*Too black, too strong*, 2001) or this was an insulting test of the man's integrity.

The people of the Chagos Islands understand the 'order' of the British empire. These islands, the largest of them Diego Garcia, remain British colonies. In April 1969, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson approved the expulsion of the entire population from the islands to Mauritius to make way for a US strategic military base. Chagossian people have been campaigning for the right to return for 35 years. FRFI spoke to a representative of Chagossians who spent 36 days sleeping outside the Houses of Parliament in October awaiting the High Court decision on a claim for compensation. They lost their case (page 12).

'Independence' for British colonies, the removal of British troops and colonial control of the state, did not end the exploitation and racist oppression of 'Empire'. Imperialism took on new forms; setting up puppet regimes, financial penetration, exploitation of peoples and natural resources by multinational corporations. Now, with the occupation of Iraq, the distinction between old empire and new imperialism seems to have



Benjamin Zephaniah

narrowed. Rivalries between the imperialist nations means that a more hands-on approach is needed to secure healthy profits for the west. What has developed in Iraq in response to the occupation is an anti-imperialist movement which refuses to have the country privatised into a neo-colony of US and British capital (pages 1 and 3).

Revolutionary US academic James Petras argues the need for an international movement to oppose imperialism as a system of power, not just specific imperial policies (the war on Iraq) and institutions (the World Bank). The current anti-war movement in the US and UK is led by social democrats, opportunists who are prepared to dilute the anti-imperialist content of the movement in exchange for an alliance with 'imperial reformers', who generally support imperial power but oppose the particular way or the location in which it manifests itself (pages 8/9). This 'coalition' buys them officially-endorsed platforms for respectable public 'dissent'. The massive popular opposition to the war and occupation of Iraq has created a new political force, but it is led by an old political alliance of social democracy and imperial reformers, none of whom call for the destruction of the Labour Party or the capitalist system it represents.

At the heart of this alliance is George Galloway, a Glasgow MP recently suspended from the Labour Party, an outspoken critic of many Labour policies (page 4). An irreconcilable contradiction lies at the heart of Galloway's politics. His support for the Iraqi resistance, for the Palestinian uprising and socialist Cuba and his understanding of the roots of British imperialism contradict his calls for 'reclaiming the Labour Party' for a return to the 'socialist values'

of old Labour. Tell that to the people of Diego Garcia, evicted by a Labour Prime Minister in the heyday of 'socialist' Labour! Tell that to the Republican prisoners tortured in Ireland when the same Labour government sent in troops (page 6). Tell that to the miners betrayed by the Labour Party, the asylum seekers victimised with Labour's support for immigration policies since the 1960s (page 16). We saw Labour values back in the 1920s, when a British Labour government was the first in the world to use poison gas against civilians; the Iraqi Kurds.

A real anti-imperialist and anti-racist movement must support armed resistance and revolution, from Palestine (page 7) to Bolivia (page 11) to Nepal (page 6) and Cuba (page 10). It must call for the destruction of the capitalist system and its replacement with a society where the means of production are organised by the people, not under the logic of capitalist profit. The Labour Party, old or new, could never do that.

'That's the bad news Ricky, there are more mothers crying', Zephaniah wrote in a poem to Rickia Reel, a young Asian man murdered by racists. Just two years later in October 2003, Zephaniah joined marchers to Downing Street to demand an inquiry into deaths in custody. His cousin Mickey Powell had been beaten and killed by Birmingham police one month earlier. FRFI has attended the United Friends and Family Campaign march every year, and every year brings new families, new grief, new campaigns for justice. The 'unlawful killing' verdict on the murder of Roger Sylvester, however, shows that a community campaigning can achieve results (page 5).

There is a crisis here,
I'm in trouble Ricky,
I think of you every time I'm out in the dark,
When I see pictures of Marx, Lenin Or Gandhi
I wonder what can we do for you,
Every time I look at Malcolm X
Clinging to my bedroom wall
I wonder what means are necessary.

There is a lot to be angry about. Don't just get angry, get active! Send us your contributions - subscribe to FRFI - join us where politics counts, on the streets.

EDUCATION

Selling out - a Labour tradition

Diane Abbott, Labour MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, has defended her decision to send her son to the £10,000-a-year City of London School in a variety of ways: that it was her son's own choice; that other black parents would do the same and many now choose to send their children to be educated in Jamaica. She says that the state system lets down middle-class black boys just as much as it fails black working-class boys and that she has done right by her son.

As the London MP who publicly criticised both the Prime Minister for choosing the selective London Oratory School for his son, and MP Harriet Harman for choosing a grammar school, Abbott claims that while they seek middle-class advantage, she is motivated by the need to remove her son from a racist environment. Other black Labour politicians, including Paul Boateng, have sent their children to private schools, and former Tottenham MP Bernie Grant said, shortly before his death, that he regretted not doing so. But they did not publicly attack those who did. In fact it has been a long-established practice for Labour MPs to buy privileged education. One of the most expensive fee-paying schools in the country, North London Collegiate School, had the daughters of Hugh Gaitskell, Labour Party leader 1955; Douglas Jay, Home Office minister and Anthony Greenwood, Minister for Housing, all at the same time in the late 1950s. So much for Old Labour!

Oh, Ms Abbott!

Bourgeois criticisms of Abbott have mostly come from two points of view. One is that there are many good local secondary schools in the Hackney area which can show improving exam results with dedicated teachers and supportive parents. Brian Sedgmore, MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch, said that by avoiding a state school, Abbott is denying these improvements and 'was effectively telling parents that they had no hope of getting a good state education for their children anywhere in London'.

Other protests have come from those who see the creation of 'sink' schools being accelerated by a boycott by middle-class parents, so that the proportion of children living in poverty (on the free meals list), and with special needs, rises. Since school funding now depends largely on success in the league tables, funding is cut for schools with children in most need. Critics say that when parents of children who often happily attend local, mixed, comprehensive primary schools reject local secondary schools and choose fee-paying or selective education, their choice has a direct impact on others. Working-class children are stigmatised as 'not nice to go to school with' in the words of Ted Wragg professor of education

who rages against the snobbery and prejudices directed against the children of the poor. Added to the disadvantages of poor housing and low pay, he says 'we might as well stamp "leper" on their foreheads'.

Other educationalists say that the deciding factor in the educational segregation of the poor and the middle class is housing, not the middle class opting out of the state system. After all, less than 10% of education in Britain is private, although this is concentrated in some areas. Twenty years ago nine out of ten families moving to social housing were headed by someone in full-time work. Today the figure is just one in four. State housing, in which ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented, is now the last resort of very poor families with children.

The increasing polarisation of schools into 'successful' and 'failing' schools has been accelerated by recruitment from areas of concentrated social deprivation which are largely poor housing estates. By this housing criteria, areas like Hackney which have some of London's most impoverished council estates alongside streets of the most expensive homes in the city, should have a socially mixed intake in local schools. Some do and reach national average exam results. Diane Abbott and her son could easily have chosen one of them. But she claims that white teachers in state schools are racist and we must deduce from this that she thinks white teachers in the private sector are not.

Racism

Diane Abbott who is a leading figure in the Socialist Campaign Group within the Labour Party and chair of the London Schools and the Black Child Annual Conference says she will continue to campaign to improve the school system for black children. She is absolutely correct to say that African-Caribbean children continue to be failed by the state education system. This year Birmingham City Council published figures showing that black boys are excluded from secondary schools more than twice as often as their white counterparts and mixed race children four times more often. This in a city where 43% of the school population comes from minority ethnic groups and where in the next 10 years there will be a non-white majority in schools. In 2001 Birmingham GCSE exam results of five or more A-C grades were as follows for boys: African-Caribbean 17%, Indian 49%, white 39%, Pakistani 31%, Bangladeshi, 27%. For girls: African-Caribbean 34%, Indian 65%, white and Bangladeshi 50% and Pakistani 42%.

Exam results in the top 10% of schools have been improving at nearly three times the rate of the bottom 10%. This is the context in which the authors of a detailed study 'Educational Inequality - Mapping Race, Class and Gender' 2001 concluded that 'African-Caribbean

and Pakistani pupils have drawn least benefit from the rising levels of attainment and the gap between them and their white peers is now bigger than a decade ago'. These same pupils were at an equal level to, or in advance of, their white peers at primary age.

Living on the frontline of poverty in a racist society takes an annual toll on the health, hopes and happiness of black children and their parents. Inequalities of income are compounded by inequalities of schooling, holidays, peace of mind and all the other advantages that contribute to the increased 'achievement' that the better-off section of the working class and the middle class regularly buys for its children.

Cash crisis

Education Secretary Charles Clarke (Highgate School - fees £9,000 a year), who was in charge when the funding crisis hit schools in the 2003 summer holidays, has a good idea. He is bringing in management consultants KPMG to train school heads to 'manage their resources effectively'. This from the man who 'forgot' that schools would have to pay for merit-rise increases from their budgets! The cash crisis cost more than 20,000 job losses and the £120 million of transitional funding for the hardest hit councils will wipe out the next round of merit-rise performance pay for tens of thousands of teachers.

The main attraction of fee-paying schools is the small class size which Charles Clarke experienced in his own school days. When asked what they want from schools, working class parents put a high teacher-pupil ratio at the top of the list. With this government managing schools we can only expect class sizes to rise and teachers to leave the state sector in droves.

Abbott represents all that is rotten in the British Labour Left. Traditionally MPs and their hangers-on arbitrarily pick up good causes at home and abroad, network with elites in business, the arts and the universities, appear on platforms, speak with authority on behalf of minorities, and rummage around between the state and the private sector for the best bargains in services and other provisions for themselves. They use extra-parliamentary campaigns and organisations for their own electoral purposes but are tolerated by the ruling class because their main function is to block and divert the righteous anger of the poor. They seek power but when in power say they are powerless to make a difference because of international business or institutional racism. Anything and everything is shamelessly used as an excuse for doing nothing except having a well-paid career. Diane Abbott should be sent packing even though she has just been re-elected. The political results of her hypocrisy will be to further lower the poll turnout in South Hackney.

Susan Davidson

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

FRFI fund-raising appeal

Help us raise £10,000 for new premises!

This is a crucial period in international politics. FRFI desperately needs extra office space and meeting rooms to expand our campaigning work. We urgently need funding for repairs, to buy equipment and to pay the rising rent. We have to raise £10,000 over the next four months.

FRFI reports on and supports the struggles of the oppressed resisting imperialism throughout the world. It is the only newspaper in Britain to expose the true nature of Labour imperialism. We salute Cuba's struggle to build socialism. We work alongside all those who are building a new movement which genuinely represents the interests of the working class and oppressed.

Your financial support is vital and will make a difference. Please dig deep!

Send your donations payable to Larkin Publications to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

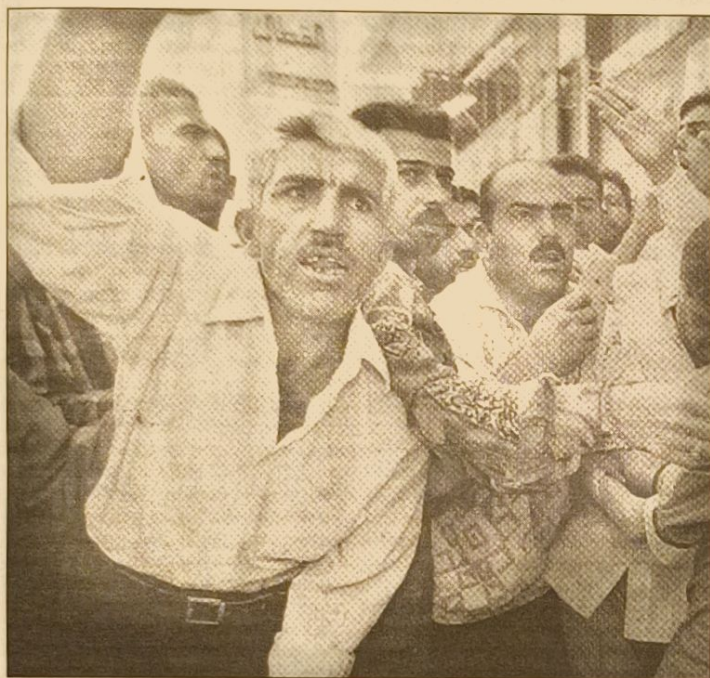
I enclose £100 ☐ £50 ☐ £20 ☐ £10 ☐ £5 ☐ Other £

Name

Address

IRAQ

the fires spread



continued from page 1

running at over \$500 billion, tensions between the US, European Union and China are inevitably growing. The Labour government's attempt to provide a bridge between the US and EU is looking less tenable and the alliance with the US is more exposed as the situation of the occupation forces in Iraq deteriorates.

The US and British ruling classes are committing their forces for big stakes. They cannot afford to be seen to be defeated and turned from their strategies without losing some of their power over the masses of oppressed peoples of the world and without encouraging rival imperialist ruling classes to confront them. The costs of the war are unnerving US and international capitalists: the US dollar continues to decline and foreign investment in the US has fallen steeply. Prospects of a mass sell off of dollars and the collapse of the currency are now discreetly mentioned in the bourgeois financial press.

Whatever its political character, the Iraqi national resistance, by defending the sovereignty of Iraq against the occupation armies, has joined the frontline of the struggle of the oppressed of the world against imperialism. The ferocity of the Iraqi resistance has tied US forces down and prevented the US government proceeding with its plans for overthrowing the governments of Syria and Iran. Indeed, the US now wants Iran to help it out in Iraq through the Shi'ite population. The resistance has also prevented multinational corporations descending to suck profits out of Iraq.

Spreading the fires

Sections of the US and British ruling classes are questioning the conduct of their governments and even the strategies for global domination. The Bush maxim of you are either with us or you are with the terrorists is providing counter-productive and is

spreading the fires. *The Financial Times* reports findings by Control Risks, a UK-based international security consultancy, which says multinational corporations are 'acutely worried' about the business consequences of US foreign policy. 'The company's Risk Map 2004 report describes US foreign policy as "the most important single factor driving the development of global risk."' The number of countries in the report's medium political risk category has risen over the past year from 64 to 81. Those countries in the medium security risk category rose from 58 to 71. These definitions are cautions to international capital against investing and operating in close to half the countries of the world.

On 5 October Israel made its first air strikes on Syria since 1973. It did so in the name of the war on terror. The US government said that Syria was on the side of terrorists and proposed sanctions. President Bush remarked, 'We would be doing the same thing'. France and Germany condemned the Israeli raid. The European Union (EU) said that it opposed efforts to isolate Syria through sanctions: 'The policy of isolating Syria is not the most productive,' said Chris Patten, EU commissioner for external relations. The EU wants to embrace the 'Euro-Mediterranean region' through political-economic agreements. The British Labour government asked all for restraint and to act within the bounds of international law.

Turkey is a strategic ally of the US and Israel and has NATO's second largest army. On 7 October Turkey's parliament voted to send troops to Iraq as requested by the US government. Two weeks previously the US had said it would give Turkey \$8.5 billion to help its International Monetary Fund-sponsored economic programme. Two synagogues were blown up in Istanbul on 15 November, killing 24 people and injuring

146. Five days later the British consulate in Istanbul and the offices of the HSBC bank were blown up.

During the invasion, despite announcing to the world that it would not allow US forces to use its territory to attack Iraq, the Saudi Arabian government allowed US bases to control 2,700 air sorties a day against Iraq. 200 US combat aircraft flew from Saudi air bases attacking Iraq. (Robert Fisk, *The Independent*). On 9 November over 17 people were killed and 120 wounded by a bomb attack on a residential compound for foreign workers in Riyadh.

Iraqi resistance to occupation is inevitable. The international health charity Medact says approximately 9,565 civilians have been killed from the start of the invasion in March to 20 October. Estimates of total Iraqi dead including military casualties range from 22,000 to 55,000. According to the Ministry of Labour 70% of the workforce, 12 million people, is out of work. The CPA has put up for sale all Iraqi state-owned industries except for oil. US companies serving the occupation hire Indian workers. The World Food Programme reckons that 60% of Iraqis depend on the oil-for-food rationing system. The CPA intended to end this system in January but has been forced to extend it until June 2004.

In October the CPA passed Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 37 reducing the highest tax rate to be paid on any individual or corporate income from 45% to 15%. Over 70% of Iraq's population is under 25 years old, their country has seen its income levels fall from those of Spain 25 years ago to close to those of Bangladesh. US forces offer mulahs at the mosques \$2,500 for information leading to arrests. *The London Review of Books* states, 'US troops routinely tie up those they detain, force them to lie on the ground and put bags over their heads.' This systematic humiliation and terrorising of the Iraqi people deserves resistance and a national resistance movement is what the US and British governments have now got.

The growing resistance

Since the Vietnam War the US military has operated on the understanding that the US people will not accept high casualties. On 21 September the number of US troops killed in combat in Iraq since 1 May when President Bush declared victory was 57. By 29 October the toll had reached 116 soldiers' lives, exceeding the 115 US soldiers killed during the invasion. A further 62 US soldiers were killed in the first two weeks of November. These are the US military's own figures. As of 13 November 52 British soldiers had been killed since the invasion began on 20 March, 19 of them since 1 May. The number of attacks on US troops has risen from an average of between 10 to 25 a day in June to 20 to 35 a day in October.

A US military study group based at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas says the US has 69 intelligence teams in Iraq but they produce only 30 reports a day; about a quarter as many as they should produce. There are regular complaints from the US military that

they do not have sufficient competent interpreters. The invasion armies are having to fight a guerrilla war without the prime means of battle: intelligence - they have little idea whom they are fighting.

Resistance forces have combined attacks on prestige and strategic targets with constant harassment of the occupation armies. They are seeking to isolate the US and British forces in Iraq and disrupt their mobility. They target all those who collaborate with the occupation. The following are among the major strikes:

7 August: a truck bomb outside the Jordanian embassy kills 17 people and injures 60.

19 August: a truck bomb outside the UN headquarters in Baghdad kills 22 people including the special envoy.

29 August: a car bomb kills 83 people in Najaf including the Shia cleric Ayatollah Al Hakim.

9 October: suicide bombers kill eight Iraqis at the Baghdad police station. A Spanish intelligence officer is assassinated in Baghdad; (there are 1,250 Spanish troops in Iraq).

12 October: two cars packed with explosives are blown up outside a Baghdad hotel used by the CPA; six people are killed.

14 October: a car bomb is exploded outside the Turkish embassy, killing the bomber and wounding 10 people.

26 October: rockets are fired into the Rashid hotel where US deputy defence secretary Wolfowitz was staying, a US colonel is killed.

27 October: bombs kill 35 people in Baghdad at the Red Cross and three police stations.

2 November: 16 US soldiers are killed when their Chinook helicopter is shot down near Fallujah.

7 November: a US Black Hawk heli-

copter is brought down killing six US troops.

12 November: a suicide bombing kills 19 Italian soldiers at Nasiriya, the largest loss of Italian soldiers' lives in a single incident since the Second World War; (there are 2,400 Italian troops in Iraq).

15 November: two Black Hawk helicopters are downed in Mosul killing 17 US soldiers, the heaviest US loss of life in a single day during the whole campaign.

21 November: 14 rockets are fired at the Palestine and Sheraton hotels in Baghdad used by foreign journalists and overseas business contractors. The oil ministry is also attacked.

29 November: seven Spanish military intelligence officers killed south of Baghdad.

Following the 27 October bombings President Bush said they were a sign of the progress being made by the occupation forces and the desperation of their opponents. After the first US helicopters were brought down on 2 November a resident said, 'This is a new lesson from the resistance, a lesson to the greedy aggressors. They'll never be safe until they get out of our country.'

No one should celebrate this carnage, but responsibility for it lies with the invading armies and the governments that sent them to Iraq. It is the right and duty of the Iraqi people to defend their homeland and to defend the right to govern themselves. How they assert this defence is for the Iraqi people to choose. Our job is to demand the withdrawal of all foreign occupying forces from Iraq and the Middle East and support the resistance of the Iraqi people against their occupation. ■

Turmoil in Georgia: Shevardnadze overthrown

On 23 November the former darling of the West, President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia was forced to resign after three weeks of mass protests against his re-election in a rigged ballot. Tens of thousands of demonstrators had taken to the streets of Tbilisi and on 22 November stormed the parliament building, unopposed by the army or police. Parliamentary speaker Nino Burdzhanadze is now acting president and hopes to hold presidential and parliamentary elections within 45 days.

Shevardnadze became well known as the Soviet foreign minister who with Gorbachev led the USSR to collapse and counter-revolution. Following the break up of the Soviet Union he returned to his native Georgia to become president in 1992. However Georgia, like other former Soviet republics, was too weak to exist independently and became the plaything of foreign powers. Under Shevardnadze Georgia became dependent on US imperialism which provided the country with \$1bn over the last ten years, second only to Israel in per capita aid. Despite this, Georgia fell into ruin as the economy collapsed, electricity supplies frequently failed and the country's once famously fertile agriculture declined. Where socialism had promoted co-operation between the different nationalities within the country, capitalism promoted conflict. Civil war broke out in the early 1990s and Georgia disintegrated, as the national autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia effectively split from Tbilisi under warlords with the encouragement of Russian expansionism. The pro-Russian government of the Adjara region responded by closing its bor-

ders with the rest of Georgia so cutting off rail links to the country's main port Batumi. Following Washington's declaration of the War on Terrorism, US military forces arrived in Georgia and set up base.

It is Georgia's geographical location in the Caucasus that is its misfortune. The country finds itself in the middle of the competition between Russian expansionism to the north and the path of US imperialism's route into the oil-rich Caspian Sea to the east. The US is eager to tap into the immense Caspian oil reserves unhindered by Russia. At the moment oil from Baku in Azerbaijan is exported via Russia. However, with strong US backing, British Petroleum is planning to build an oil pipeline from Baku via Georgia to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, its entire route being in the US sphere of influence.

Civil unrest is not helpful on the route of one of imperialism's lifelines. For some time the US ambassador in Tbilisi Richard Miles had been shamelessly grooming US-trained lawyer Mikhail Saakashvili to succeed Shevardnadze while US officials warned the former president that his days were numbered. US funded pollsters exposed vote rigging by Shevardnadze and US-supported 'non-governmental' organisations helped agitate for his removal. One of Saakashvili's campaigning points is the removal of Russian military bases from Georgia. Imperialism now wants to see the dispute settled. However it is unlikely that calm can remain for long as the people's expectations of a better life will not be fulfilled while Georgia is dependent on the imperialist powers that ruined it.

Ed Scrivens

Will the real King Herod please stand up
Exactly at the right time of year, David Blunkett, Home Secretary, has launched the season of festive consumption with a reminder of the real nature of imperialism, ancient and modern. In his own version of the Massacre of the Innocents, Blunkett is planning to snatch the children of asylum seekers and put them into care 'for their own good', having first made their parents completely destitute. 'I am no King Herod', says Blunkett, but we know the truth. Blunkett is responsible for an unremitting attack on the rights of asylum seekers, including drastic limits on legal aid and rights of appeal, and a tranche of authoritarian, right-wing legislation that would put even a puppet of Imperial Rome to shame.

Biblical alter egos may become popular amongst government ministers: Who is the real Pontius Pilate?

Oh, and talking of clapped-out functionaries, Michael Howard has assumed leadership of the Tory Party. He has had a St Paul-like vision on the Road to Damascus and claims to have become a human being. All the signs of enlightenment are there: in response to Child Snatcher Blunkett's announcements on asylum seekers, Howard pledged to oppose 'this despicable proposal'. In truth, this author of the poll tax has legions of 'despicable proposals' up his own sleeve, but visions never have been that reliable.

Meanwhile back at the real Palace...

In November *Daily Mirror* reporter Ryan Parry managed to infiltrate Buckingham Palace as a footman to the Queen. Apart from claiming the ease with which he could have poisoned the royal cornflakes, the real scoop was that the newspaper, which earlier in the year had claimed to lead the anti-war press, was completely deflected from criticism of Bush, Blair or the occupation of Iraq, by comments about Palace decor. What happened to the 'brave' *Mirror*?

'Tacky taste costs billions', read the *Guardian* headline, referring not to the Palace but to a BBC survey on the housing market. But the royals should beware, their private quarters are lagging behind the average seaside lodging house in interior design.

It looks like the royal servants want quick bonuses, given the poverty of their wages, their living quarters and their instructions to walk only on the outside of the carpets. They should take note that Paul Getty, who died in April, left only £1,000 each to his servants out of an estate worth more than £200 million. Selling your story to the British press looks like an attractive option...

Sodom and Gomorrah

...there is an injunction against revealing what the servants are saying about Prince Charles...

Revelations

Unfortunately the poor have not inherited the earth under New Labour. A Department of Health report published in November showed that middle class people benefit more from the NHS than the poor. 'Affluent achievers' from the professional classes are 40% more likely to get a heart bypass than working class people. Poor people are 20% less likely to get a hip replacement even though they are more likely to need one. A similar report from the National Union of Students showed that poor students bear the greatest burden of debt. We can, however, predict with 100% certainty that none of this will have any effect on any government policy whatsoever.

...And the good news...

Step forward Benjamin Zephaniah, biblical by name, this man is nobody's stooge.

Here's some of his poetry for the New Year and Trevor Phillips:

The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We despairing, they careering.
We want more peace they want more police.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We say sisters and brothers don't fear.
They will do anything for the Mayor.
The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
They're looking for victims and poets to rent.
They represent me without my consent.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
In suits they dither in fear of anarchy.
They take our sufferings and earn a salary.
Steal our souls and make their documentaries.
Inform daily on our community.
Without Black suffering they'd have no jobs.
Without our dead they'd have no office.
Without our tears they'd have no drink.
If they stopped sucking we could get justice.
The coconuts are getting paid.
Men, women and Brixton are being betrayed.

For more see: www.benjaminzephaniah.com

Galloway's new movement going nowhere

George Galloway has been an outspoken critic of many aspects of Labour government policy, in particular, the war on Iraq. In October he was expelled from the Labour Party for allegedly threatening to stand against Labour, inciting British troops to defy orders, inciting Arabs to fight British troops and for backing an anti-war candidate in a local election. Galloway denied all the charges and condemned his hearing as a travesty.

Within a week of his expulsion, George Galloway was spearheading a new movement in alliance with sections of the British left. Galloway said he: 'seeks to unify red, green, anti-war, Muslims and other social constituencies radicalised by the war (on Iraq) in a referendum on Tony Blair'. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) sponsored a series of meetings around the country to launch the new coalition under the portentous title 'British Politics at the Crossroads'. Can this new movement be, as Paul Foot of the SWP claimed, 'a springboard for a new united left that can intervene effectively at every level' and what should be the priorities for a socialist working class movement that genuinely opposes Labour?

George Galloway has been a long-term supporter of socialist Cuba and of the Palestinian people's struggle against Zionist occupation. At times, Galloway has shown he understands that at the root of all these issues is the role of imperialism, that is, the necessity for the major capitalist countries to control ever-greater sections of the world's resources and markets and their willingness to destroy anyone who stands in their way. He recently stated, 'I did support the Soviet Union and I think the disappearance of the Soviet Union is the biggest catastrophe of my life. If there was a Soviet Union today, we should not be having this conversation about plunging into a new war in the Middle East, and the US would not be rampaging around the globe'. Implicit in this statement is the idea that only a movement built on opposition to imperialism itself has any chance of preventing further wars such as that on Iraq.

In such a context, issues like Cuba and Palestine have to be central, for these are key areas of resistance to imperialism's global drive for power. A new movement built on these principles would have been a real step forward. Yet, in launching the new coalition, Galloway made no mention of Cuba or Palestine. Instead, he chose to ally himself with the SWP, a group that has consistently attacked Cuba in the most vicious terms and has attached scant importance to the Palestinian Intifada.

Election not action

So, what does the new movement aim to achieve? Salma Yaqoob, chair of Birmingham Stop the War and a prime mover of the new coalition, claims that it, 'combines the grassroots focus and activism of social movements with an electoral strategy'. It appears, however, that electioneering will be the main activity. In particular, the coalition has its eyes on the European and Greater London Authority elections next June where they hope to win seats through the proportional representation system. Regaining a public platform by winning a seat in the European Parliament will be one of Galloway's main objectives. Filmmaker Ken Loach, another speaker at the inaugural meeting, spelt this out when he said, 'If we fail to develop



Hundreds of thousands demonstrated against Bush on 20 November, but where is the real opposition to the Labour Party?

and move into electoral politics then we campaign, organise, support people in disputes and, come the next election, we hand them over to the Lib. Dems'. George Monbiot, the environmental campaigner, said, 'The challenge on the left is to balance loyalty to our beliefs with an effective political force'. Which suggests he is willing to put principle aside in order to maximise electoral success.

The only on-the-streets activity proposed at the inaugural meetings was support for the anti-Bush demonstration in London, which had already been organised by many of the same people initiating the new coalition - SWP/Stop the War. But, as with previous demonstrations they had organised, the anti-Bush demonstration failed to focus on the underlying politics of what US and British imperialism is trying to achieve, and that it is not just Bush and Blair who need to be opposed but the system they represent.

New movement or old Labour

Opinion within the new coalition appears confused as to its precise attitude to the Labour Party. George Galloway has said: 'Maybe the (election) results will be cathartic within the Labour Party itself, and help to spark the long-heralded - and much to be hoped for - "reclaiming" of the party'. On another occasion he described the idea of reclaiming Labour as 'not promising'. The SWP sees the coalition as a, 'chance for a powerful socialist challenge' and 'a campaigning electoral alternative to New Labour'. George Monbiot merely wants 'something to make Blair frightened'.

What is clear is that no-one in the coalition calls for the destruction of the Labour Party and all it represents. In place of a thorough analysis and rejection of the Labour Party as a whole, the coalition refers to the Labour Party having been 'hijacked' by a 'clique' and an 'inversion' of 'true Labour values'. Monbiot even talks of: 'The Labour Party that we used to turn to when we wanted to see some opposition to imperial wars of aggression, erosion of labour standards, creeping

privatisation of public services and persecution of asylum seekers'. So, which Labour Party would that be? The one that sent British troops into Ireland and tortured Republican prisoners? The one that scabbled on the miners, or the one that has supported every anti-immigration act since the 1960s?

A reactionary movement for the privileged

What can we make of all this? Essentially, the new movement is an attempt to rebuild a coalition between sections of the middle class and the better-off section of the working class - the labour aristocracy. This has been the traditional base of Labour Party support. Increasingly, many of them see their privileges being threatened as, with the deepening economic crisis of capitalism, Labour gives priority to the needs of the imperialist ruling class. They either want to bring pressure on the Labour Party to revert to policies more sympathetic to their needs or to build an electoral alternative. In either case the coalition is not trying to build anything new. It is another attempt to recreate some magic formula of the Labour left.

As recently as July 2003, George Galloway was speaking at the launch of another such movement, the 'Save Our Party' conference, organised by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. Such 'new movements' have huge launches and big conferences but they are a charade. There is no democracy; no questioning, no open debate, no opportunity for alternative voices to be heard. The same political forces, the SWP and the Labour left, put themselves at the head and they go nowhere. Any spark of lively opposition to capitalism and imperialism is snuffed out, as happened to the anti-capitalist movement when the SWP's 'Globalise Resistance' took over.

At present the forces for a new coalition of the middle class and privileged working class are weak. The backbone of the old 'Labour Movement', the trade unions, have almost totally capitulated to collaboration with the ruling class. Galloway and the other organisers of the new movement stress the rise of the new breed of

militant trade union leaders, the so-called 'awkward squad'. But they are proving to be no more awkward than their predecessors (see 'All Mouth and No Trousers' FRFI 174).

The coalition organisers also hope to capitalise on the massive middle class opposition to the war on Iraq. But they failed to do that at the time of the invasion and much of that anger has dissipated now that the middle class realises the war is not leading to any catastrophic destruction of its lifestyle. No other left Labour MP has resigned in protest at Galloway's expulsion or spoken in support of the new coalition. Galloway said the coalition plans 'to support that other labour exile, Ken Livingstone'. But Livingstone has increasingly moved towards compromise with Blair and is more likely to be back in the Labour Party before long. As for the Green Party, they have totally rejected the coalition as an SWP front; essentially an extension of the Socialist Alliance.

Building a revolutionary movement

The time will come when a new coalition of the middle class and labour aristocracy will be necessary. That time will be when the deepening crisis of capitalism prevents a Labour government maintaining their privileges at an acceptable minimum level. However, such a coalition will not be a working-class movement for socialism. On the contrary, it will play the role that middle-class, social democratic movements have always played. It will undermine any genuine workers' movement that arises as the crisis of capitalism deepens. The likes of the SWP and left Labour will play a crucial role in sustaining capitalism rather than destroying it.

The task of socialists is not to aid such a coalition but to build a revolutionary working class movement. At its heart must be opposition to imperialism and its racist ideology. It must take up the cause of all those fighting imperialism throughout the world, whether in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America or Africa. It must defend socialist Cuba. It must defend all those seeking asylum from the ravages of imperialism, whether for political or economic reasons. It must defend the interests of the genuine working class in Britain, not the privileged elite. It must be a democratic movement; a movement of action on the streets that uses elections tactically as a platform for ideas not as an end in itself. Above all, a revolutionary working-class movement will need to understand that the Labour Party is, and always has been, a party of capitalism and imperialism that has consistently betrayed the working class. It must break completely from the Labour Party and the politics it represents rather than build a new movement in its image.

At present the prospects of building an anti-imperialist movement in Britain seem very distant. But things will change. The resistance and victory of those fighting for freedom in the oppressed countries will limit the options for imperialism. The crisis will be felt more and more within the imperialist countries themselves. As the crisis of capitalism deepens more and more of the working class will be thrust deeper into poverty and faced with the prospect of total degradation or fighting back. More and more workers will lose the privileges they have come to expect. More and more of the middle class will be thrust down into the working class and will have to decide whether to pin their hopes on a capitalist revival or whether to help build a new society. Until that time comes, it is the task of socialists to dispel all illusions about 'a return to true Labour values' and build the foundations of an anti-imperialist revolutionary working-class movement in Britain.

Jim Craven

After 17 years of frustration, criminalisation and campaigning, Winston Silcott has been released from prison. It is vital that Winston's story is not written off as a personal struggle to be forgotten with his release. It holds important lessons about how the state will repress black and working class resistance and criminalise individuals to intimidate the movement, and about the importance of unified and principled defence campaigns to demand justice. The Revolutionary Communist Group was involved with the struggle, both for Winston and the community, from the beginning.

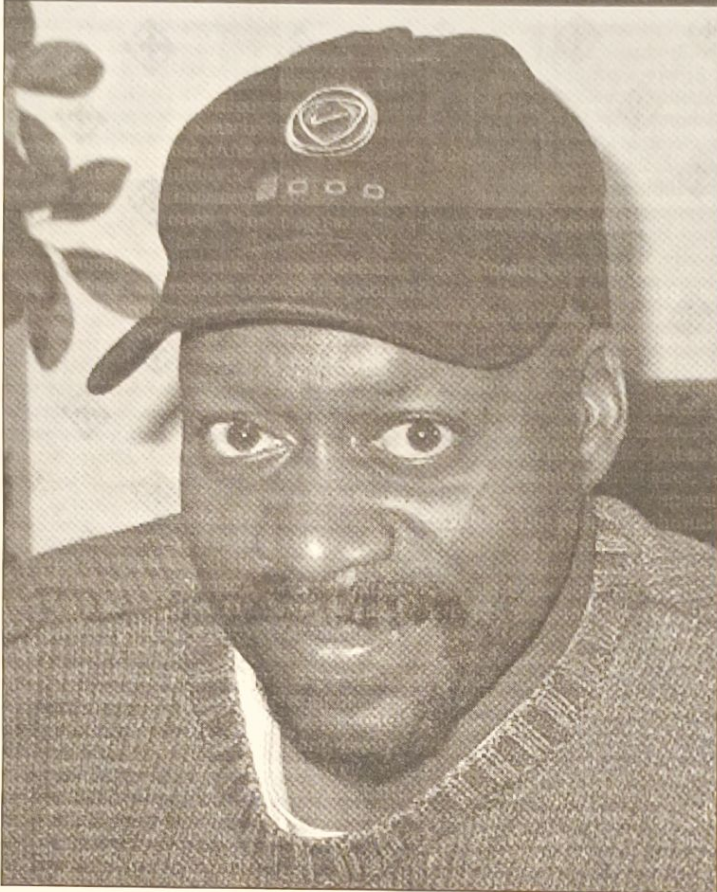
On 6 October 1985, an uprising broke out on Broadwater Farm housing estate in Tottenham, north London, after a mother, Cynthia Jarrett, died during a violent police raid on her home the previous day. The uprising was one of several to erupt in inner-city communities during that year in response to police brutality and poverty. Only the previous week, Cherry Groce had been shot in the back and paralysed in a police raid on her home in Brixton, south London. During the uprising in Tottenham, PC Blakelock was killed. Winston Silcott, who was known as an opponent of racist stop-and-search tactics, was quickly lined up by the police to take the blame for the killing.

As the ashes smouldered, the police laid siege and occupied the estate for two months, in riot gear, with police dogs, helicopters and heavy surveillance day in, day out. Doors were smashed open with pickaxes, homes raided and hundreds of people, including young teenagers, were rounded up for interrogation for days on end, deprived of sleep, clothing and food, threatened and racially and sexually abused by police officers. Several of those arrested were pressured into false confessions naming Winston as guilty of killing the police officer. By February 1986, there had been 210 arrests, but half of those resulted in no charge at all.

Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite were charged with

Winston Silcott:

Free at last



the murder of PC Blakelock. They were pronounced guilty by the media, before being convicted on fabricated evidence

in a trial condemned as unfair by Amnesty International. A campaign for the release of the Tottenham Three was

established and Winston's family and his friend, Delroy Lindo, set up the Winston Silcott Defence Campaign.

Finally, in an appeal in 1991, the Tottenham Three had their murder convictions overturned and were awarded compensation for wrongful imprisonment. Winston, however, was kept in prison for the killing of Anthony Smith, which he has always maintained was self-defence. At the time of the Broadwater Farm uprising, Winston was on bail, awaiting trial on this charge, clearly not considered a risk to society. However, this pending court case was used by the racist British media to criminalise Winston. It is unlikely that Winston would have served so much time for the killing of Anthony Smith had he not been convicted for murdering a police officer, even though that conviction was overturned.

FRFI spoke to Winston about his struggle and his release.

FRFI: Do you see your release as a victory?

Winston Silcott: I don't see it as a victory. The only victory would have been if they had dealt with both cases. You can't entangle both cases and then deal with them as separate entities. Put it this way, if it wasn't for the Smith case, no way would the police have been able to fabricate evidence against me and get away with it. They took over a thousand photographs on the night, no eyewitness evidence, no forensic evidence. The so-called evidence that they used couldn't convict someone in the majority of countries across the world. They were so sure they would get the conviction, because I was out on bail on the other case. And the press behaved with typical racist hysteria.

Why should people join community campaigns for justice?

People can make a difference. There have been a lot of people who have had

individual victories campaigning for things that they believe in or for what is right, but the majority of people seem to cave in and a lot of people give up the fight. That's the truth. The system puts a lot of stumbling blocks in the way to prevent you moving forward or receiving justice. They know more people give up than fight on. They wear you down. The more people that get involved in campaigns, the less confidence for the system because it knows that there is a positive force to be reckoned with. If they can isolate you as individuals it makes their fight easier. The whole system works together, starting with the police, the police get backing from the media, the criminal justice system, then you've got parliament, they all back each other up.

Do you have a message for prisoners?

All I say is to stay strong and if you have a fight, be steadfast and don't give up. What happened to me is nothing new. It has been there for a long time and the system has the patience, the manpower and the resources to play people down. But if people stick to their guns, they will get there in the end.

Do you have a message for our readers?

Years ago I know that FRFI had problems getting the newspaper in to prison. I ask you if you still have problems and you say yes - so nothing has really changed. The prison system is always saying that it is more open and more people-friendly, more willing to be under scrutiny. But all you get is certain officers, they see the paper and are of a different political persuasion and they take it upon themselves to say we are not letting this paper in. Another reason why prison doesn't like FRFI is that you highlight certain prisoners' struggles or what happened in certain prisons and they are anti the paper because you are exposing them and they don't want prisoners knowing what is happening in other prisons.

Finally, I would like to thank FRFI for the support you have given me over the years.

Police continue to murder and maim

Roger Sylvester

On 3 October a packed coroners' court at St Pancras, north London, heard the jury foreman deliver its verdict that Roger Sylvester, a 30-year-old black man, had been unlawfully killed while in police custody.

Roger died. Rupert and Sheila, Roger's mother, have risked bankruptcy in their fight for justice due to legal costs.

Regular readers will know the background to Roger's death, as we have covered the case from the start. On the evening of 11 January 1999 Roger was

their view he was held down for too long and they noted there was a lack of medical attention.

The state has bent over backwards to protect its uniformed thugs. The Metropolitan Police Complaints Bureau began an initial investigation. Following complaints from the family, Essex police took over the investigation. In October 1999 they handed a report to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). In November 2000 the CPS announced that no officers would be prosecuted. In 2001 the family challenged this in the High Court but were told by Lord Chief Justice Woolf to wait for the inquest.

The inquest verdict has forced the state to take a step back. The eight officers have been suspended and the CPS has announced it will review the case.

James Ashley

In a case that is unbelievable, the Chief Constable of Sussex has had to travel to Liverpool to apologise to the family of Jim Ashley, who was shot dead in his bed by Sussex police in 1998. The cop who shot him was acquitted at the Old Bailey after the judge Mrs Justice Rafferty ordered the jury to acquit on the grounds that as the whole force was incompetent an individual officer should not take the blame. That means a cop can break into your home in the early hours, shoot you in your bed and walk free.

The Ashley family is still demanding a public inquiry.

Sherman Thomas

Brixton police wrongly suspected

black teenager Sherman Thomas of stealing a moped. As Sherman stood on the pavement an officer deliberately drove his patrol car at him, knocking him through a brick wall. The young man had been offered a job as a professional basketball player; his leg was broken and he has been crippled. The CPS has refused to bring criminal charges against the officer and until recently the Metropolitan Police refused to bring disciplinary charges. The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) has now intervened, instructing the Met to suspend and discipline the officer. The charge he now faces has a maximum penalty of 13 days' loss of pay.

The local community in Brixton over the last couple of years has demonstrated against police brutality, which has obviously had an effect on the PCA. However it is outrageous that a cop can deliberately maim an innocent teenager and face such a paltry penalty. FRFI supports the family's calls for a full inquiry into deaths in custody and police brutality.

Paul Yorke

On 3 November a 38-year-old black man, Paul Yorke, died in Heathrow police station. He had been arrested the previous day for 'being a prohibited person', having apparently been banned from entering the airport. According to the police, between his arrest on the Sunday night and death in the early hours of the Monday morning, Paul was seen by a forensic medical examiner on at least three occasions and was deemed fit for detention. However, at

7am the police called an ambulance, after he was found to have collapsed in his cell. He was taken to Hillingdon hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The Police Complaints Authority and the Directorate of Professional Standards are investigating Paul Yorke's death. His sister has instructed a solicitor to represent her at the inquest and is trying to get to the bottom of how and why Paul died.

According to the Institute of Race Relations, this is the second such Heathrow police station death. In October 1997, a 67-year-old homeless woman, Melponieni Hagemis, who had been sleeping rough at the airport, was also found dead at Heathrow police station.

Mikey Powell

On 7 September, West Midlands police deliberately ran down 38-year-old Mikey Powell outside his home in Lozells, Birmingham, then attacked him with their batons, beating him to the floor and spraying CS gas in his face. He was taken to Thornhill Road police station, and from there to City Hospital where it is claimed that he died, although relatives suspect he was dead by the time he arrived at the police station.

Mikey's mother had called the police, hoping that they could help to calm down her son who was outside the home in a distressed state, having lost his keys and smashed a window.

On 15 November 500 protesters marched to Thornhill Road police station, demanding justice.

Jim Wills

To contact the campaign tel 07740 083 915 or e-mail: mikeypowell_friends@yahoo.co.uk website: mysite.freemove.com/mikeypowell_friends



March against racism and police brutality in North London

Roger's father Rupert told FRFI: 'We feel pleased with the verdict, it's been a long and hard struggle but we finally got the result that was what we believed all along. For four and a half years we weren't even able to get a death certificate'. He went on to say 'The atmosphere in the court was often electrifying and often family members broke down, but now we know how

arrested outside his home in Tottenham by eight officers and taken to St Ann's Hospital under the Mental Health Act. At the hospital he was restrained in the prone position by six cops. Roger died a week later due to brain damage resulting from a cardiac arrest.

The jury noted that he was held in the same position for 20 minutes and that no attempt was made to alter it. In

Nepalese Revolution advances

ANDREW ALEXANDER

You have a Maoist insurgency that's trying to overthrow the government and this really is the kind of thing that we are fighting against throughout the world.

Colin Powell,
US Secretary of State

The victory would constitute a challenge to the Fukuyama thesis (end of history as clash of ideologies) and the Huntington thesis (clash of civilisations). We'd be back to the old capitalism vs communism discussion, which was supposed to be behind us, all settled, and consigned to the rubbish heap of history!

Gary Leupp, Tufts University

Lodged in the Himalayas between China and India, the loud voice of revolution is being sounded and the imperialists wish no one to hear. Since the ceasefire ended (FRFI 175) the Nepalese people have continued their victories against the monarchy of King Gyanendra, backed by the terrorist Royal Nepal Army (RNA). Virtually all vestiges of the previous bourgeois democratic parliament have been replaced by the monarchy, which struggles to keep control as more arms and land fall to the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Deep fractions have emerged between the king, the RNA hierarchy and Prime Minister Thapa on dealing with the crisis. On 11 November, Lieutenant General Bibek Kumar Shah (military secretary to the king) resigned, following his differences with Thapa. He called for the involvement of political parties to solve the turmoil. A police superintendent also retired amid mass desertions of police to the Maoists. On 15 November, Brigadier General Sagar Bahadur Pandey of the RNA was ambushed and killed south of Kathmandu.

The problem for Gyanendra, Thapa and their imperialist backers is that a political solution is now extremely difficult for them. During the recent ceasefire the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) CPN(M) presented the government with modest proposals; the election of a constituent assembly and the formation of an interim government, which were rejected out of hand. Thus Gyanendra and Thapa were exposed as completely reactionary to the urban middle classes, whilst the Maoists were shown to be interested in dialogue. As a result, segments of the proletariat in Kathmandu have split from the opportunist Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), which had moved towards the ruling party, and sided with the CPN(M). The bourgeoisie and intellectuals have also become less antagonistic to the Maoists since the failed negotiations.

The protracted people's war is now entering its final stage, preparing to take state power, after eight years of revolution. The Maoists started out with knives and pitchforks, devel-

oped fighter teams, village security teams and volunteer units, and have progressed to platoons and well-armed squads controlling almost all of the countryside. These military forces have five essential functions:

- Developing political work (mass political education)
- Organisational work (developing mass organisations)
- Production and construction (growing food grains and solving people's problems)
- Propaganda (putting slogans or posters on walls, and processions, including armed marches with torches)
- Fighting, military actions.

The peasantry has seized local power; feudal culture is being replaced by revolutionary culture. Women are being emancipated from religious and feudal repression, collective and cooperative production has been carried out with volunteer production teams. The people fix goods prices and interest rates.



Maoist rebel leader addresses villagers in the mountains

Many capitalist and imperialist institutions have been driven away and replaced by cooperative financial funds. Economic self-sufficiency is developing, along with the construction of buildings, paths, schools, playgrounds, martyr monuments and gates, bridges, public toilets etc.

The revolution in Nepal is not a religious one nor is it led by opportunists. It is a highly organised and strategic movement mobilising and educating the mass of the Nepalese with a strong class-conscious content. Different groups and interests comprise the revolution, but the vanguard – the CPN(M) and its military wing the PLA – have been highly sophisticated in dealing with the reactionary government, always clear that they are leading an anti-imperialist national liberation struggle. This is because Nepal is economically subservient to India. For example, the ice-glazed Himalayas have given the country the second largest reserves of fresh water in the world, yet the people suffer from constant drought and disease from dirty water as it all gets piped into its southern neighbour. Nepalese men are forced to do hard labour at factories in India for as little as 50 US cents a day and

Nepalese women are forced into prostitution throughout India.

Precisely because it is a popular democratic revolution the Western media has censored it. The genocidal nature of the monarch and the support for the revolution make it difficult to portray the CPN(M) as 'terrorists', even though President Bush has put them on his list of terrorist organisations. No news is therefore the best news for the imperialists until they work out how to deal with the situation.

The US and Britain want to send their own troops in (the US has 300 in the country already, mainly training the RNA), but the risen people of Iraq and Afghanistan are limiting the scope for direct intervention in Nepal. They may use Indian expansionism to represent their interests. India has already been giving assistance to Kathmandu in combating the Maoists, and although Delhi would like to occupy Nepal, it has problems with Maoist insurgents of its own and is not keen to have troops bogged down in Nepal.

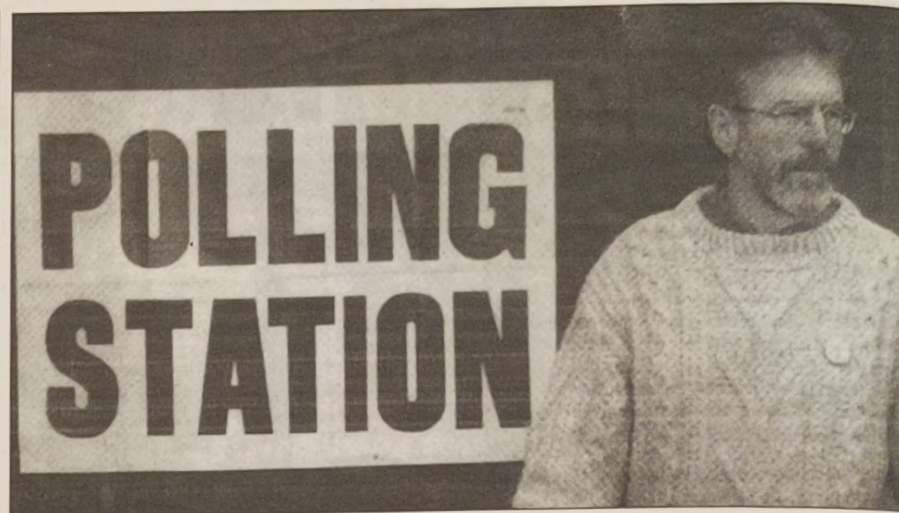
The Chinese too would certainly not tolerate Indian expansionism into Nepal and would likely invade and occupy the north of the country if the Indians were to invade from the south. China must also deal with the 'Maoist problem'. Beijing recently released a state-

ment claiming that it 'didn't wish to see Chairman Mao resurrected in Nepal at present.' A long way from the Long March! A genuine Maoist leadership in Nepal with the fruits it could bring for the people would reveal the true nature of the self-proclaimed 'Maoism' of the Chinese Communist Party – devoid of content.

On 19 November, Radio Nepal announced that China had arrested four Maoists trying to smuggle Chinese pistols and explosives into Nepal from Tibet. This is the first time that Chinese security officials have arrested Nepalese Maoists. The Chinese government repeated that it would cooperate with the Nepalese government in its crackdown on the rebels.

The US, India and China all want an end to the revolution in Nepal, and they all pose the most significant threat to the successful development and survival of the revolution. Yet, paradoxically, it may prove that the pressures they exert on each other create a semi-perpetual stalemate that will allow the revolution to flourish and spread. For their part, the Nepalese people are united and moving forwards and upwards.

Victory to the Nepalese revolution!



Northern Ireland Assembly elections Stalemate for Good Friday Agreement

PAUL MALLON

Elections held on 26 November 2003 to the Northern Ireland Assembly have failed to break the deadlock in the Good Friday Agreement following the suspension of the Stormont Assembly in October 2002. The prospect of Ian Paisley, whose Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) won most seats, as the prospective First Minister, with Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin as his number two, ensures the Executive cannot be restored. As the media focuses on a 'normal' North of Ireland and its electoral process, reality for the nationalist working class is deadly different. Loyalist attacks have continued against Catholics even as talks about talks get underway to break the deadlock. One thing is clear: neither a review of the Good Friday Agreement nor a return to the Stormont Assembly will give any respite to the nationalists on the receiving end of the Loyalist hate mobs.

Enshrined within the Good Friday Agreement is the unionist veto. This means that for the Agreement to work it requires the consent of the majority of Unionists. Prior to the election the majority of Unionist members of the Assembly had supported the Agreement. This is no longer the case now that Ian Paisley's anti-Agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has become the leading Unionist party in the Assembly with 25.7% of first preference votes and winning 30 seats. The DUP increased its vote by 7.5%, but mainly at the expense of other anti-Agreement unionist parties. The pro-Agreement Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) vote actually increased by 1.4% to 22.7%, but it lost one seat, ending up with 27.

Sinn Féin was able to convince enough middle class nationalists to vote for them as they eclipsed the SDLP as the main nationalist party in the north for the first time ever. Sinn Féin's vote increased by

5.9% while the SDLP vote fell by 5%. This gave Sinn Féin 24 seats to the SDLP's 18. The prospect of any return to devolved power in the next period has become almost impossible given the DUP's present position of refusing to share power with Republicans.

The British government announced these elections following the third act of IRA arms decommissioning on 21 October. The Republican movement was once again attempting to reassure Unionism of its commitment to the peace process. Launching Sinn Féin's election manifesto in Belfast on 15 November, Martin McGuinness revealed the extent to which Sinn Féin is dependent on the peace process by calling on Republicans to use their preference votes for other pro-Agreement parties even if they were Unionists! This was an attempt – vain in the end – to bolster the vote of the Ulster Unionist Party and help it defeat the Democratic Unionist Party.

In the election build-up the Loyalist attacks on nationalists continued. They remain largely unreported by a media and political establishment eager to normalise the Six Counties.

On Sunday 16 November, a 37-year-old Catholic man, Paul Denvir, lost an eye after being



Paul Denvir, attacked by Loyalists

viciously attacked by four Loyalists armed with hammers and machetes as he left the Boundary Bar on the Shore Road on the outskirts of North Belfast. The sectarian murder attempt happened at around 11pm, when four Loyalists jumped from a car that pulled up alongside the victim. One of the gang then hit him on the back of the head with a clawhammer. Apart from the loss of his eye, Paul's injuries included a broken jaw and cheekbones, smashed teeth, lacerated chin and serious head injuries. 'It's important to let other people know that there are still those out there prepared to do this, just because I'm a Catholic', Paul said as he recovered.

Then, one week before the election on Thursday 20 November, 21-year-old Catholic James McMahon was severely bludgeoned in a sectarian attack by a Loyalist death squad, dying of his injuries the following day.

A review of the Good Friday Agreement in the next period will attempt to wrest further concessions from Sinn Féin to appease Unionists and the British government. However, the reality of continued Loyalist attacks on nationalists makes further decommissioning by the IRA untenable at this stage.

Already further elections are being mooted as the only way to create the conditions for Stormont rule to return. But elections cannot change the character of Northern Ireland as a sectarian state. Widespread discrimination against Catholics remains. Loyalism continues its war on the nationalist working class. Ian Paisley's election as the prospective First Minister is a symbol of how little has changed in the North in the 35 years since the civil rights movement. Right now Sinn Féin is being exposed as little more than a radical version of the failed and discredited SDLP, politically and physically unable to defend the nationalist working class and tied to the status quo of British imperialist rule in Ireland.

No to imperialist plans for Palestine



Ahmed Qureh

A new government; a new 'peace agreement'; a possible new ceasefire; but the more things seem to change, the more they stay the same for the Palestinian people. The imposition of Ahmed Qureh as a replacement Palestinian Authority (PA) prime minister for Mahmoud Abbas won't change anything: his government draws its members from the same ranks of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation leadership that negotiated the disastrous Oslo agreement in 1993. The recently negotiated Geneva Accords, which are now being offered as an alternative to Ariel Sharon's scorched earth policy, are little more than a make-over of the Camp David offer which Yasser Arafat had to reject in 2000. Finally, negotiations that have restarted with the Palestinian resistance forces, brokered once again by the Egyptian government, are yet another attempt to isolate the fighters from the people in order to comply with the requirements of the Zionists and their imperialist supporters. What is constant is the Zionist terror campaign, as the Israeli state continues in vain to force the Palestinian people to submit to its dictates. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

Qureh's government was finally sworn in on 12 November following a wrangle between Qureh and Arafat over who should be appointed as interior minister and who should therefore have direction of the PA security forces. Presented as a government of national unity, it is anything but. It excludes any representation from the organisations which are leading the Intifada – Hamas, Islamic Jihad, sections of Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Instead its principal members are tainted by their association with the treachery of Oslo and every disaster that has been visited on the Palestinian people since: Saeb Erekat, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Qureh himself. There was no room for anything more than token representation of the younger Fatah leadership, even those who tactically supported the Bush roadmap.

Qureh's first step was to attempt to broker a ceasefire with the resistance movement. Negotiations have been restarted under the aegis of the Egyptian government; the resistance forces have stated clearly that any ceasefire would be conditional on an end to Zionist incursions and its assassination campaign. The failure to defeat the Intifada has created splits within the Israeli ruling class which are being exacerbated by a severe crisis in the Israeli economy. GDP per capita has fallen by 3.3% since 2000. The budget deficit has risen from 3.5% of GNP in 1999 to 6% in 2003; the trade deficit stood at \$4.9bn in the first nine calendar months of 2003, also about 6% of GNP. Production is falling, and unemployment rising towards 10%. The consequence is that every third child lives below the poverty line, and the number of poor families rose from 319,000 in 2001 to 350,000 in 2002. The government's austerity budget for 2004 has slashed social welfare and raised the retirement age from 65 to 67 for men and from 60 to 67 for women.

The crisis has led to a massive outflow of capital and savings: overseas investment in 2003 totalled \$5.06bn in the first nine months. Meanwhile rich Zionists have shown the extent of their patriotic sentiment by holding \$21bn in foreign currency (up 44% since 2000), 27% of it salted away abroad. Such circumstances explain why Sharon has faced increasing criticism for the self-defeating brutality of his handling of the Intifada from within the state itself: four former leaders of Shin Bet, the Zionist intelligence and torture agency, and even the current Israeli army Chief of Staff.

Underscoring Sharon's ruthless-



Examining the 'Apartheid Wall' which is being used to grab land from the Palestinians

ness was the October onslaught on Rafah in the south of Gaza. On 10 October, a massive Israeli army invasion, allegedly in search of tunnels under the Egyptian border, resulted in the deaths of 12 Palestinian civilians, injuries to 100 more and the demolition of 170 houses leaving between 1,500 and 2,000 homeless. The US government expressed its support for the operation on the grounds of 'Israel's need to defend itself'. On 14 October, US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, vetoed a Security Council resolution condemning the Zionist state's decision to extend settlement activity on the West Bank and to continue to construct the Apartheid Wall. The following day, a massive remote-controlled bomb blew up a jeep in a US convoy in Gaza killing a diplomat and two CIA agents. Poetic justice it might have been, but no resistance organisation claimed the operation, and there is circumstantial evidence that it could have been a Zionist operation.

Over the next ten days, repeated incursions into Rafah brought more destruction as the Israeli occupation forces tried to extend their cordon sanitaire around the refugee camp, leaving only its centre standing. On 20 October, the day after a resistance operation killed three Israeli soldiers near Ramallah, a series of missile strikes killed at least 14 people in Gaza and injured over 100. The first missile strike, launched from an F16 fighter bomber, demolished a partly-built house, although its target was suspected to be a Hamas leader who lives nearby. Helicopters launched the other strikes, one of them on Nuseirat refugee camp. Two Hellcat missiles hit a car killing the two occupants. Initial Zionist claims that they were Hamas members were discounted even by the Israeli media. As crowds gathered round to help

the occupants, the Apache helicopter returned and fired a third missile. Six people were killed immediately including a doctor; of the 100 taken to hospital, six more died the following day. It has now emerged that the third missile was a new and hitherto undisclosed weapon. Although there are claims that it might have been tipped with depleted uranium, it is more likely to have possessed a flechette warhead which discharges hundreds of metal fragments when it explodes; their sole purpose is to shred human bodies. This would be consistent with reports that it exploded in the air above the crowd to maximise the spread of the shards.

The resistance forces hit back: a joint Hamas/Jihad ambush in Gaza killed three soldiers for the loss of one guerrilla. Zionist revenge involved yet another war crime: the demolition of three apartment blocks in Gaza, making 2,000 more homeless. The Israeli claim that the blocks were being used to spy on the nearby Netzarim settlement was a particularly transparent lie: the blocks were reserved for members of the Palestinian Preventive Security Forces. The onslaught continued into November: between 6 and 12 November, 17 Palestinians were killed, including six children. Examples of the brutality included:

- **6 November:** An Israeli sniper shot a 40-year-old woman dead as she stood in a window in her home in Nablus; the Israeli army impeded the arrival of an ambulance and searched it on its departure. On the same day soldiers shot dead a 44-year-old engineer returning to Tulkarm from work in Ramallah. That evening in Khan Younis, Gaza, tanks fired three flechette shells killing two and injuring six.

- **7 November:** Tanks and APCs fired shells into Al Maghazi camp, killing

one and injuring five more, destroying five houses. 11-year-old Mahmoud Al Qayed was deliberately shot dead by a squad of Israeli soldiers near Gaza City. The same night, soldiers shot dead two youths attempting to get across the barrier from Beit Hanoun into Israel to seek work. One was 15, the other 17. Their bodies were not recovered until the following day.

- **8 November:** A 16-year-old boy was shot dead in Jenin – no warning was given. Earlier that day during the same incursion another 18-year-old was shot dead.

- **10 November:** 14-year-old Shaid Abu Anza was shot dead during an incursion into Rafah. A further 28 houses were demolished on top of the 170 destroyed in the October invasion.

Whilst Zionist terror continued, Palestinian Authority leaders attempted once more to reach a settlement with the Israeli state. Secret negotiations in Geneva between a delegation led by Yasser Abed Rabbo on the Palestinian side and Yossi Beilin on the Israeli side resulted in an agreement formally signed on 4 November. Although the Israeli delegation had no official status, Beilin had led the initial negotiations in Oslo in 1993; another member was former Labour Party leader Avram Mitzna. They represent a faction of the Israeli ruling class which wants to find a way out of the mess the Zionists are in – although of course at the expense of the Palestinian people.

In practice the Geneva Accords, if enacted, would be a further disaster for the Palestinian people. They are no more than a recycling of the 2000 Camp David negotiations which Arafat had to walk away from. The parties agreed to a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders – although

there would be land transfers to compensate for any settlements left on the West Bank. The Palestinian state would not have full sovereignty – it could not possess a standing army, for instance – and there would be a guaranteed Israeli army presence in the Jordan Valley for at least three years. Most crucially there would be no right of return for Palestinian refugees into Israel.

The Accords cut no ice with the Israeli government: General Sharon refused to receive a copy and attempted to prevent the airing of advertisements in its support. One extreme Knesset member denounced it as treason and demanded the arrest of the members of the Israeli delegation; defence minister Shaul Mofaz described it as 'a grave danger to the security of Israel'. More important was Avram Mitzna's opinion that:

'For the first time in history the Palestinians explicitly and officially recognised the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people forever. They gave up the right of return to the state of Israel and a solid, stable Jewish majority was guaranteed. The Western Wall, the Jewish Quarter (of Jerusalem) and David's Tower will all remain in our hands. The suffocating ring was lifted from over Jerusalem and the entire ring of settlements around it – Givat Zeev, old and new Givon, Maale Adumim, Gush Etzion, Neve Yaacov, Psagat Zeev, French Hill, Ramot, Gilo and Armon Hanatziv will be part of the expanded city, forever. None of the settlers in those areas will have to leave their homes.'

These are homes to the majority of the settlers on the West Bank. Even though the Israeli negotiators were not representing the Israeli government of today, they could do so if the Labour Party is re-elected in the future. And at that point, the PA concessions in the Geneva Accords may well come to haunt the Palestinian people. In the meantime, Sharon will continue to pursue his ambition of a Greater Israel.

The mass of the Palestinian people, recognising the danger, have already signalled rejection of the Geneva Accords in huge demonstrations. *The Independent* (21 November) characterises this as a struggle between Palestinian 'moderates' and 'extremists'; this is part of an attempt to sell the agreement internationally to those who sympathise with the Palestinian people. However, it is not just the fate of Palestinian refugees that the Accords ignore, but also that of the Palestinians and Bedouin who will have to continue to live under Israeli racism. Both populations face continued dispossession; although they constitute 20% of the population of Israel, they now own no more than 3% of the land. As Israel's Education Minister Limor Livnat puts it in supporting government proposals to allow Jewish communities to exclude non-Jews, 'We're involved here in a struggle for the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jews, as opposed to those who want to force us to be a state of all its citizens'. Racism and fascism, these will continue to be the hallmarks of any post-Geneva Israel.

No to imperialist plans for Palestine!

In an important article
Anti-Imperialist Politics:
Class Formation and
Socio-Political Action,

recently published on the radical Mexican website www.rebellion.org, James Petras, the US revolutionary academic, analyses the recent development of anti-imperialist movements in both oppressed and imperialist nations. Whilst he understandably concentrates his attention on Latin America, he also takes into account the development of Iraqi resistance to US/British occupation. As for the development of anti-imperialist movements in imperialist nations, he understandably pays most attention to the US; however, his comments on the US anti-war movement are in many ways applicable to those in other imperialist countries, and to Britain in particular.

James Petras on fighting imperialism

Why should we consider Petras' views on this subject? Firstly, because he has a revolutionary standpoint. Secondly, as we shall see, he develops a clear class analysis of the movements he is analysing. Thirdly, his views are influential particularly amongst Latin American socialists. Fourthly, like FRFI, he stands in complete solidarity with the Cuban revolution. Lastly, the issues he raises are of great political importance for anyone seeking to build a serious anti-racist, anti-imperialist movement in today's conditions.

The starting point of Petras' analysis is that there is no 'single internationally dominant organisation which is fully opposed to imperialism as a system of power. Rather, what predominates is a variety of single-issue movements opposing imperial policies and institutions.'

As examples of 'single issue movements', he cites those in Latin America which oppose the US-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas Agreement (FTAA). In the US itself, it is not so clear cut. Petras says,

'...the anti-globalisation and anti-Iraq, Afghanistan) war campaigning contains both anti-imperialists and "imperial reformers" – groups which generally support US imperial power but oppose the particular way power is exercised, or the specific locations in which it manifests itself. Others oppose the behaviour of the multinational corporations but not the imperial state and system in which they are embedded.'

These movements are:

'...anti-imperialist to the degree that they mobilise popular forces to oppose an important manifestation of imperial expansion, raise popular consciousness about the motives of the US and EU regimes and open the possibility of deepening and extending resistance to imperialism as a system'.

But:

'The potentialities of these single-issue politics are frequently not realised; the struggle over a single issue remains isolated from a general rejection of imperialism, and the victory or defeat of imperial power usually ends the mobilisation.'

He illustrates his point by reference to the anti-Vietnam war movement: once conscription had ended and the US had been defeated, anti-imperialism went into decline – there was no mobilisation in support of Cuba to end the blockade, for instance. He continues:

'The key to identifying the dynamics (forward or backward) of single-issue anti-imperialist movements is politics: the ideology, the leaders and the programs around which the movements are organised. Most of the short-term impacts are the result of the leaders' ideology of pragmatic lowest-denominator politics, focusing exclusively on the most immediate issue (imperial policy) dissociated from imperialism as a system of power, eschewing any political challenge for regime or state power, and accommodating or subordinating the mass movement to opportunist "dissident" politicians from the major imperial parties, who seek to capitalise on the mass protest for electoral purposes.'

Although Petras has the US anti-war movement in his sights, what he says is to great degree applicable to the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) in Britain. Dissident politicians from the major imperial parties – in particular Labour – have repeatedly appeared on Stop the War platforms. The 'lowest common denominator' politics of the campaign allowed the STWC to include the openly imperialist Charles Kennedy, leader of the Liberal Democrats, on to the platform of the 15 February demonstration without any serious challenge. In summary, the STWC has kept the movement in a state of political backwardness and has failed completely to raise the political consciousness of the many hundreds of thousands who have joined the anti-war demonstrations of the past two years.

Continuing his analysis, Petras says:

'single issue anti-imperialist mobilisations, like the anti-globalisation, erupt, extend and then become routine and decline, as they fail to connect political instruments to challenge for power, with popular mass struggles. In the case of the anti-globalisation struggle, the false premises of the ideologues of the movement, the idea of the multinational corporations as autonomous powers divorced from the imperial state, failed to anticipate the imperial wars and colonial occupation. The reorientation of many anti-globalisation activists to the anti-Iraq war movement led to a massive increase in protests on the single issue of the war followed by a collapse after the US conquered and occupied Iraq. No mass movement has emerged to oppose the US colonial regime or support the Iraqi resistance.'

This is a central challenge to socialists and anti-imperialists in the imperial-

ist heartland. We seek the defeat of the occupation forces in Iraq. We therefore have to support the resistance of the Iraqi people, and their right to take up armed struggle against US/British forces. Hence we cannot accept the recent slogan the SWP and STWC have adopted: 'Don't make Iraq another Vietnam'. They view the Vietnam war from the perspective of US imperialism – not from the point of view of the victorious Vietnamese. The most important point about Vietnam for anti-imperialists is that it was a defeat for US imperialism – and that is what we seek for imperialism today in Iraq. Our slogan should therefore be the converse of the STWC's – we do want to see a new Vietnam.

Petras concludes his analysis of movements in the imperialist countries by saying that

'The eruption of single issue mass movements opposed to specific anti-imperialist policies do not necessarily lead to an advancing, radicalising and consequential anti-imperialist movement, unless the movement goes beyond single issues and develops a programme and leadership capable of linking anti-imperialism to system transformation.'

This is the challenge for socialists and anti-imperialists in imperialist countries such as Britain: to extend the politics of the anti-war movement so that it becomes not just an anti-war movement but a movement against imperialism as a whole and British imperialism in particular. This will require a political struggle against those who seek to keep it within its present confines, ones which are acceptable to those 'dissident' politicians of the major imperialist parties.

The emergence of anti-imperialist movements in oppressed nations

Petras is at his most powerful in describing the emergence of anti-imperialist movements in Latin America. He establishes a number of conditions that have stimulated the development of anti-imperialist movements in oppressed countries: colonial invasion and occupation, long-term imperialist military intervention as in Colombia, mass impoverishment as a result of privatisations or unequal trade and investment. Whatever the condition, however, it has its source in imperialist domination, so that resistance has had to take on an anti-imperialist character. Petras is particularly strong in describing how in Latin America 'imperial-induced mass impoverishment, land concentration and peasant displacement has been a key factor igniting rural social move-

ments that have been at the forefront of struggles against ALCA (the Spanish acronym for FTAA). Mechanisms for this have included:

- Undermining small and medium farmers through 'free market' policies that allow the massive influx of subsidised US farm exports;
- Concentrating ownership and displacing poor and landless peasants in favour of agro-export firms which focus on export agriculture;
- Increasing class polarisation by ending constraints on foreign ownership of the land;
- Lowering prices for local produce whilst increasing the costs of credit, driving rural producers into unsustainable debt or bankruptcy.

Whatever the cause, the consequence has been peasant displacement, an increase in the numbers who are landless, and massive rural impoverishment. This has been compounded by targeting communities growing indigenous crops (in particular coca) with 'eradication' programmes which have destroyed the livelihood of millions in Bolivia, Peru and Colombia.

Alongside these rural developments have been wholesale attacks on public sector employees through a combination of privatisations and budget cuts to pay foreign creditors, with millions having lost their jobs and many having wage cuts of up to

40% over the past decade. Petras concludes that 'the end result has been the "proletarianisation" of public sector workers as a result of low income, job insecurity and diminished status' with the consequence that 'imperial policies and institutions have undermined these two pillars of "political stability" for imperial hegemony, small rural property owners and middle-income professionals in the public sector'.

These two social forces – impoverished peasants and public sector workers – have been the core of anti-imperialist movements in Latin America. In contrast the private-sector trade unions have played little role in their development:

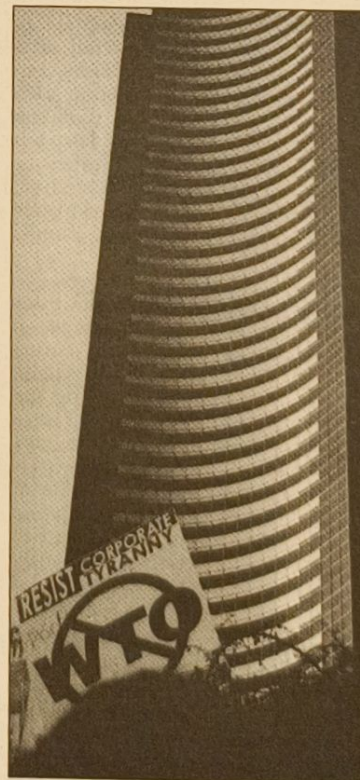
'In fact, the industrial workers and in particular their trade unions have been the least active and least militant component of the anti-imperialist movements...most of the trade union officials have consolidated control and have become closely linked to tripartite pacts with the state and employers, and reject independent class action, let alone active anti-imperialist solidarity.'

Some trade union federations of course have played an openly reactionary role – for instance in Venezuela.

Imperialism has not only re-structured the working class and rural population: it has also transformed the capitalist class in Latin America. It has imposed bankruptcy on hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized locally-owned manufacturers, forcing them out of business with a flood of cheap manufactured imports. The same is happening in retail with foreign-owned department stores and supermarkets displacing local retailers. At the same time, 'imperial policies have created imperial associates' – a completely parasitic layer of lawyers, publicists, consultants and so on, a completely dependent section of the ruling class 'who serve as intermediaries in facilitating lucrative privatisations, state contracts and monopoly market controls.'

Anti-imperialist movements in Latin America are therefore not undifferentiated in their class composition; in their bulk they

'...are made up of wage workers, unemployed and sub-employed in the cities, students and self-employed and particularly of peasants, Indian and subsistence farmers and landless rural workers. There are not undifferentiated "multitudes", rather the participants are organised and/or convoked by class-based social organi-



Demonstration against globalisation in Seattle



sations whose leaders and organisers have "histories" of involvement in class struggle, class politics either in the workplace or neighbourhoods.'

Today's movements differ from those of the past in that there is an absence of any progressive bourgeoisie for the factors cited above 'either as a hegemonic power or as a participant'. In addition, their class foundation has shifted from industrial trade unions to peasant and rural movements.

A crucial point that Petras makes is that the relationship between imperialism and the poor and the oppressed is far more immediate today than in the past:

'Imperial penetration of the nation state...and regime and financial hierarchies means that imperialist classes and local collaborator classes are the initial point of conflict between capital and labour... Imperialism does not merely influence and control the national, economic, cultural and political structures, but it also operates at the macro and micro political and socio-economic levels.'

Hence even very local struggles such as that against privatisation in towns such as Cochabamba in Bolivia immediately take on an anti-imperialist dynamic: after all, it does not take much effort:

'for the popular classes to identify the sources of their adversity when the IMF dictates a S(tructural) A(djustment) P(olicy) which results in lower public funding, loss of public employment and the termination of clinics in the barrios, overcrowded classrooms, teachers' strikes and children begging in the street. Anti-imperialist movements are no longer middle class dominated nationalist movements, they are class-based because imperialism is embedded in everyday work and household survival.'

Hence resistance in Latin America is based on the poor and oppressed, and takes on an almost immediate anti-imperialist character – in contrast to movements in the imperialist countries.

Petras illustrates his general points with a brief assessment of each of the major movements in Latin America where 'the intersection of US imperial expansion and rising popular discontent with declining living standards is

ward politically than those in Latin America. Historically, anti-war movements in the US have had significance only when US military forces were defeated or unable to win and suffered heavy casualties – Vietnam and Korea. Other interventions have elicited little response, or in the case of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, considerable public support for intervention. Iraq seems set to change this;

'[the] large scale popular opposition...and sustained urban guerrilla warfare' has resulted in a significant shift in US public opinion, with nearly half opposed to Bush by the end of August. However, whilst the war on Iraq coincided with increasingly severe attacks on living standards of the US labour force 'there has been little "movement" against imperialism from the working and salaried classes.'

The tactics of movements in the US and Europe differ markedly from those in Latin America. The former focus on the 'Big Event' such as Seattle, Genoa, Davos and so on; they are not rooted in the day-to-day struggles against imperialism which have proved far more successful in sustaining struggles and in educating the local population in Latin America. 'Big Events' like the World Social Forum and its national and municipal offspring do take place in Latin America, but have a symbolic character; and anyway, as Petras notes, the 'WSF has evolved from being a critic of imperialism to a much more ambiguous enterprise, especially as one of its key sponsors, the Workers Party of Brazil, has evolved into a pro-imperialist party.'

The dispute between the SWP and the London Social Forum over arrangements to hold the European Social Forum (ESF) in London endorse this assessment. In a published email exchange between SWP leader Alex Callinicos and a supporter of the London Social Forum, Callinicos defends the need to involve Ken Livingstone in the ESF bid, saying that Livingstone 'did win the mayoral election in 2000 by running to the left of New Labour and he has been

consistent in his public opposition to the war on Iraq.' Yet Livingstone is now set to be welcomed back into New Labour, so we must ask will the SWP will continue to promote him?

According to Petras, the tactics of the 'Big Event' reveals a further difference between movements in the imperialist countries and popular struggles in Latin America:

'Programmatically, Northern movements are a mixture of progressive reformers of imperialism, anti-capitalist radicals and chauvinist protectionist trade unionists, which makes it difficult to concretise ongoing activities.'

This general characterisation of the 'Northern' movement is true of the STWC in Britain, involving as it does an alliance between 'progressive reformers of imperialism' (the left of the Labour Party), anti-capitalist radicals and the 'chauvinist protectionist trade unionists' who tried to prevent a debate on Iraq at the Labour Party conference. Outside of the 'Big Events' the latest of which was the 20 November demonstration against Bush's visit, there has been little of the ongoing activity of the sort that takes place in Latin America. Most scandalously, action in support of the Palestinian resistance has dwindled to almost nothing: 150 people in Trafalgar Square on the 9 November international protest against the Apartheid Wall shows a complete failure to 'concretise ongoing activities'.

Petras is therefore correct to point out that the strategic goals of the bulk of the movements in imperialist countries are profoundly reformist. He goes on to say:

'More significantly there are deep political differences between the Northern and Latin American intellectuals in relationship to imperialist intervention and solidarity with Cuba. US and European "progressive" intellectuals condemned Cuba's arrest of US-financed agents posing as dissidents and the application of capital punishment to terrorists who pirated a Cuban vessel and threatened the lives of its passengers. In Latin America the great majority of anti-imperialist intellectuals and movements declared their solidarity with Cuba, recognising the US funding and control of the "dissidents".'

He continues:

'Northern progressive intellectuals temper their criticism of imperialism with condemnation of Latin American anti-imperialists who don't fit their preconceived model of an opposition...Behind the differing attitudes towards Cuba is a more profound strategic difference – the movements and intellectuals in the US are still mostly tied to the pro-imperial institutions of civil society (the "left wing" of the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO, the pro-imperial, pro-coup trade union confederation) and have always drawn back from supporting successful social revolutions in Latin America.'

This is critical. FRFI has constantly pointed out the ideological significance of Cuban socialism in the struggle against imperialism today. It represents the progressive side in the historic split between communism and social imperialism. Opposition to Cuba within the anti-war movement is at its most virulent in Britain where the SWP condemns Cuba from the perspective of the CIA and Miami exiles. The SWP has chosen which side it is on: the left-wing of 'New Labour' and the bankrupt official trade union leadership rather than revolutionaries in the oppressed nations of the world.

The different political standpoint of the anti-war movements in imperialist

countries is a product of their different class composition. Unlike the movements in Latin America, the movement in the US is made up of 'middle class professionals, students and NGO affiliates' (p30) rather than the dispossessed and impoverished working class. This is equally true for Britain. This means that imperialist exploitation and oppression does not have the same immediacy as it has in Colombia or Bolivia: the relatively privileged conditions of the majority of the working class in the imperialist countries have not yet been significantly undermined. Hence the material conditions for anti-war movements in the imperialist countries to immediately take on an anti-imperialist dynamic have not yet been realised. This is why political education is so important: without it, it will be impossible to raise the political consciousness of those who are now being drawn into struggle for the first time, and the movement will remain politically backward.

Petras, however, is rightly optimistic about the future. He concludes that:

'the class configurations of the anti-imperialist movements, their pre-eminent popular character, and linkage to resistance against overt colonial rule (whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or via the FTAA in Latin America) ensure that the struggle is not likely to be betrayed by defecting bourgeois nationalists. In other words, the class forces involved are those most likely to be prejudiced by the abandonment of the anti-imperialist struggle.'

He points to tactical reversals for imperialism: the failure of the April 2002 coup in Venezuela, the appearance of anti-colonial resistance in Iraq, and the failure of Plan Colombia to defeat FARC/ELN. Finally, he argues that:

'imperial rule is based on class relations and as the resistance grows in the Third World and the human and economic costs in the US and Europe grow, they begin to engender political and social conflicts within and among the imperial powers of the US and Europe and in the not too distant future could result in a unified challenge to imperial power.'

It is this future that socialists have to prepare for. The STWC perspective is too limited for this since it is tailored to the interests of the privileged sections of the working class. Instead we need a genuinely anti-imperialist perspective. This is one based on overt solidarity with the Iraqi resistance and the Palestinian Intifada which challenges those who seek to reduce either to matters of human rights. It is a perspective which will challenge those who want to advance their own electoral interests – whether it be Charles Kennedy on the right, or George Galloway to the left. It will give solidarity to those fighting back against US/British military and political intervention – for instance, in Colombia or Venezuela; and in particular to Cuban socialism. Even if as yet it cannot organise the poorer sections of the working class to any significant degree, it will have to represent their interests, for instance in a struggle against the racist British state. Finally, we need to recognise one crucial element missing from Petras's conclusion – that the proletarianisation of large sections of the middle class and affluent working class will not be confined to the oppressed nations, and that when this happens in the imperialist nations under the impact of a recession, immense possibilities will open up for socialists and anti-imperialists.

Robert Clough

The URL for Petras's article is www.rebellion.org/petras/english/030926petras.pdf

On Cuba

What accounts for Cuba's long-term trajectory as an anti-imperialist country in the face of the overthrow or decay of other left regimes? Basically there are several factors both internal and external. The Cuban regime is the product of a revolutionary process and leadership that destroyed the old state apparatus and has successfully built a sophisticated homeland security organisation to neutralise terrorists and saboteurs. Secondly, Cuba has a large, professional, highly motivated armed forces closely linked to the mass of people, subordinated to the revolutionary leadership and capable of defending Cuba from a frontal invasion from the US (in simulated 'war games' the Pentagon has estimated US casualties in the tens of thousands from a ground invasion of Cuba). Thirdly, the original Cuban revolutionary leadership has been successful in reproducing a new generation of revolutionary cadres and technicians who assuming the reins of power, defend the original social gains of the revolution. Fourthly, the great majority of Cuban workers and farmers are significantly better off than their counterparts in Latin America, and retain social welfare benefits that are not available to the Cuban exiles in the US. Fifthly, the Cuban leadership was successful



in securing favourable trade, military and economic agreements with the USSR and China in order to resist US military attacks and the economic embargo. Subsequently the Cuban leadership was successful in restructuring its economy in the post-Soviet period and developing trade and economic relations with Europe, Asia and Latin America. More recently, it has developed mutually beneficial ties with Venezuela, securing strategic energy sources. Finally, the US policy of unremitting hostility and military threats has undermined any groups in Cuba oriented toward conciliating with imperialism. In other words, anti-imperialism for Cuba is a necessity as well as an ideal.'

179 countries vote against US blockade

'There is no more profound or permanent change than a Revolution' Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque at the UN

On 4 November the UN General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to end the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States. Just three countries opposed the Cuban resolution – the US itself, its Zionist client state Israel, and the tiny Marshall Islands. Two countries abstained – Micronesia and Morocco, although the latter spoke in favour of the anti-blockade resolution. A further seven, including, for obvious reasons, Iraq, were absent. The vote represents a resounding political victory for Cuba on the world stage. JUANJO RIVAS reports.

The debate was opened by the delegate from Mexico, speaking in support of the Cuban resolution. This marks a significant shift in the position of the Mexican government, which in the last two years had aligned itself against Cuba.

In his speech, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque exposed the US blockade of Cuba as 'a crime of genocide, a juridical aberration and a flagrant violation of human rights'. He went on to point out and refute the litany of lies delivered by the US representative Sichan Siv, who had blamed the 'failed economic policies' of Castro, rather than the blockade, for impoverishing the Cuban people. Roque pointed out that Cuban specialists have prepared assessments of the damage caused by the blockade in every field, from health care, education and housing to agriculture, industry and services. Their research states that this US policy alone has provoked \$72 billion in losses, representing an average of \$1.6 billion a year since the Revolution's triumph in 1959. To this must be added aggressions, invasions and over 600 plots to kill the Cuban President. 'How much further would Cuba have reached in its noble work of equality and social justice if it had not had to face this ironclad and merciless blockade in place for more than 40 years?' he asked.

Siv had said the blockade was imposed after the Revolution nationalised US companies without compensation, claimed that Cuba doesn't pay its debts and defended the blockade as a blow for freedom and democracy. He went on to talk about 'brutal repression' in Cuba, calling Fidel Castro a dictator and describing Cuba as 'an evil and dictatorial regime' to which they want to say 'Hasta la vista, baby!'.

Roque pointed out that the US economic war against Cuba started before any nationalisation – and as a matter of record, it was the US itself which refused to discuss compensation. The blockade, he said, was a matter of international concern as it is a unilateral application that affects trade and punishes third countries.

Roque pointed out that the US has no moral authority to talk about human rights – as the barbarity of the extra-judicial US concentration camp in Guantanamo demonstrates. As for calling a president elected with 95% of the vote a 'dictator', Roque argued that in reality it is the United States that wants to impose a world dictatorship.

In calling for an end to the blockade, Roque demanded:

- the repeal of the Helms-Burton and Torricelli Acts, vital parts of the blockade which severely limit Cuba's ability to trade. He cited the bans imposed on sales of sugar, nickel, cigars, seafood and fish, vaccines and biotechnological items, computer programmes and



other Cuban goods, as well as the bans on the acquisition of food and agricultural goods.

- that US citizens be allowed to travel freely to Cuba. Those doing so currently face heavy penalties – most recently a 74-year-old was fined \$8,500 for holidaying in Cuba.
- that the US desist from preventing the free exchange of ideas and the use of dollars in Cuba's commercial transactions.
- that financial institutions be permitted to grant credits to Cuba.
- that frozen assets should be returned to Cuba to prevent Cuban capital from being stolen 'by peddlers of influence and ambitious shysters in Miami'.

He also used the international platform of the UN to demand the return of Guantanamo Naval Base, occupied by the US against Cuba's will, the repeal of the Cuban Adjustment Act (which grants US residence to illegal Cuban migrants) and called for co-operation between the two countries to eliminate the illegal trafficking of immigrants and for the release of the Miami Five:

'The United States must release the five Cubans unjustly imprisoned and prosecute terrorists who are freely walking the streets of Miami.'

And he warned the US that its attempts to destroy the Revolution were doomed to failure: 'Far from giving in, we Cubans are more resolute and independent; far from becoming divided, we have united; far from becoming disheartened we have found fresh strength to defend our sovereignty and our right to freedom.' After ten US administrations trying to defeat, by any means, the Cuban Revolution and its gains, Roque had a message for George Bush from the Cuban people: 'He should be aware that there is no human or natural force that could make the Cubans renounce their dreams of justice and freedom.'

In a sharp rebuff to Bush's comment the month before, that Cuba would not change of its own accord, Roque stated 'Cuba is changing every day; there is no more profound and permanent change than a Revolution'. He received a huge ovation both from the delegates at the UN and from the 5,000 Cubans crammed into the Karl Marx Theatre in Havana who were following the proceedings on a video screen.

REVIEW

Comandante

■ **Comandante**
A film by Oliver Stone

In early October 2003 an Oliver Stone documentary film portraying the Cuban leader Fidel Castro was released in Britain. Whilst the film press called it 'astounding' and 'superb' (*Empire* and *Uncut* magazines), the 'liberal' press were scathing or just censored it.

Stone filmed throughout three days spent with President Castro, from waking to sleeping. Castro turned down Stone's offer to stop the cameras at any point. The result, 90 minutes cut from 72 hours of footage, is an intimate portrayal of the Cuban leader.

The style is typical of Stone, heavily laden with rocky camcorder images of Fidel walking through Havana or around his office, head shots of Castro in conversation with Stone, meshed with black and white

footage of the Revolution. This is accompanied by an almost continuous sombre soundtrack, the final effect being somewhat overdone.

Stone asks the President historical questions covering his relationship with Khrushchev during the missile crisis; his meeting with Nixon; the alleged fall-out with Che Guevara, and the role of Cubans in Vietnam during the war. Stone also confronts Castro with the questions that critics of Cuba pose: about homophobia and racism in Cuba and the question of democracy and freedom. Having seen the Cuban people's love for their President, Stone asks why Castro doesn't call elections to prove his popularity. The President points out that the question was premised with the assumption that there were no elections in Cuba. In reality, he explains, the Cuban electoral process is far more democratic and representative than anywhere in the world,

US steps up war of attrition

On 10 October, the Bush administration launched a new salvo in its war of attrition against Cuba. Despite the fiasco in Iraq, the doctrine of 'regime change' for any country that challenges the imperialist diktat remains alive and well in Washington. In a speech bristling with anti-Cuban rhetoric and disinformation, President Bush announced: 'Clearly, the Castro regime will not change by its own choice, but Cuba must change. So today I'm announcing several new initiatives intended to hasten the arrival of a new, free, democratic Cuba.'

- These measures include:
- Strengthening travel restrictions on US citizens wishing to travel to Cuba. This will include increased inspections of travellers and shipments to and from Cuba and a renewed targeting of those who travel to Cuba via a third country.
 - Deliberate attempts to increase the number of Cuban immigrants to the US by 'informing them of the many routes to safe and legal entry to the US'.
 - Increasing the amount and expanding the distribution to Cuba of Internet-based information and radio transmissions, including a new satellite service to expand the US's reach into Cuba.
 - Establishing a commission to channel assistance 'to a free Cuba to plan for the happy day when Castro's regime is no more and democracy comes to the island'.

This commission is to be chaired by secretary of state Colin Powell and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martinez. Martinez, a Miami-based Cuban immigrant, rose to prominence as a vociferous champion of the Miami relatives of Elian Gonzalez who took Elian on a trip to Disneyland. He was also a co-ordinator of Bush's presidential election campaign in Florida. The commission will investigate further ways of undermining the Cuban state, and will be able to 'draw on experts within our government to plan for Cuba's transition from Stalinist rule to a free and open society, to identify ways to hasten the arrival of that day'.

especially the US.

Comandante is another film that will make Stone few friends among the US ruling class, particularly as the Bush administration lines the Revolution up for further attack. Most moving are the scenes showing Castro walking in Havana unannounced and with no security, and turning up at the Latin American School of Medicine where hundreds of excited young people from across Latin America crowd round to thank him for the opportunity to study free in Cuba. The genuine warmth from his people demonstrates more than anything else how much they support him.

Comandante is a warm and human portrayal of a giant whose struggle has brought him both isolation and immense responsibility, and earned him the admiration of the oppressed around the world.

Andrew Alexander

For good measure, Bush threw in disgraceful and unfounded allegations that the Cuban government was promoting an illicit sex industry. Perhaps he was fondly recalling the days before Cuba's socialist revolution when Havana was indeed little more than an offshore brothel and casino for off-duty US marines. The Cuban government has angrily rebuffed these 'repugnant accusations', citing UN acknowledgement for the measures it has taken to actively protect children, young people and women.

However, this smear follows hard on the heels of another tired and unsubstantiated claim, made on 6 October by US Secretary for Latin America Robert Noriega, that Cuba is manufacturing biological weapons. This ridiculous allegation first surfaced last May, in a desperate attempt by the US administration to link Cuba's name with those of Syria and Libya in its phony 'War against Terrorism'. The administration was forced to hastily backtrack when former President Carter revealed that officials in the White House and intelligence services had admitted to him they had absolutely no evidence to support such a claim.

'Our country is in transition, yes, but in a transition towards more Revolution, towards a more just society, towards a society where men and women can attain the full development only offered by socialism.'

These acts of hostility and their accompanying propaganda undoubtedly endear Bush to the virulently anti-Cuban Miami population whose votes will be so crucial in the 2004 presidential election. But their purpose is even more sinister. The Bush administration hopes that through its blatant and illegal acts of subversion, it may provoke the Cuban government into a response that would give the US an excuse for a military attack, under cover of its War on Terrorism. These are dangerous times for the Cuban Revolution. However, throughout 2002-2003 the US tried a similar tack and was spectacularly wrong-footed by the Cubans' determined response – rounding up US-funded 'dissidents' and executing three brutal hijackers. It will fail again, as a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Granma Internacional*, 19 October 2003) makes clear:

'The transition dreamed of by Bush and his Miami mafia acolytes will never occur in Cuba. Our country is in transition, yes, but in a transition towards more Revolution, towards a more just society, towards a society where men and women can attain the full development only offered by socialism.'

'Nobody should be mistaken, neither our enemies abroad nor their discredited mercenaries. As it has done to date, Cuba has the total capacity and disposition to confront and overcome with intelligence, maturity, determination and courage this or any other extravagances and aggressive escalations on any terrain. Mr Bush should know that, as always, any aggression against our country will founder against the dignity, steadfastness and integrity of the people of Cuba.'

Cat Wiener

Bolivian masses on the march

Sánchez de Lozada was chosen by congress to be president in August 2002 following the election in June in which his coalition did not gain a sufficient majority of votes over Evo Morales and the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) (22% to 20.9% respectively) to take office, despite forming a last minute alliance with the opportunist Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). Sánchez de Lozada is a millionaire businessman who spent much of his life in the US and studied at the University of Chicago. He speaks Spanish with an American accent earning him the popular nickname 'El Gringo'. He directed the neoliberal policies established in Bolivia in 1985 (devised by the Harvard Professor Jeffrey Sachs), which marked Bolivia's increasing subjection to the dictates of the World Bank, IMF and the US. This opened the way for the US to impose the eradication of Bolivia's traditional coca crop, in the 'War on Drugs', a blatant excuse for direct military intervention in the Andean countries since the fall of the dictators at the end of the 1980s.

During Sánchez de Lozada's first presidency from 1993-1997 he brought in the *capitalizaciones* – a series of privatisations including the state airline, railways, electricity, telephone and oil companies and set up institutional structures designed by the IMF, which enabled politicians to be bribed and benefit from privatisations. In 1997 the World Bank offered to forgive \$600 million of debt in exchange for targeted privatisations of the water system. In 1999 a private consortium including Bechtel (who built the Jubilee Line extension in London) took over the water service in Cochabamba, allegedly for free. Huge price increases and constraints followed, compelling the population to revolt and retake the water under local administration in April 2000. Gas, the only resource left, is to be extracted by Pacific LNG (Pan-America, Spanish Repsol-YPF, BP and British Gas), while coca has been almost totally destroyed, in the most part by physical force. Undoubtedly this creates the basis for social outrage of the mainly impoverished and dispossessed indigenous people.

The first major uprising in Bolivia this year started on 13 January after the government failed to meet 15 different demands including the suspension of coca leaf eradication, the re-nationalisation of oil and other privatised companies, the rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the sale of natural gas to the US via Chile. National road blockades started and the east of the country rapidly became paralysed as the main route into Santa Cruz, the third largest city, was cut off. Over 14 days the blockades, marches and demonstrations escalated, supported by the Central Workers Union (COB), the Coordinadora (formed to defend water in 2000), the MAS, miners, peasants, coca growers, teachers, truckers, factory workers, irrigators, university students, the unemployed and senior citizens. On 19 January these groups joined together to form the Peoples' General Staff (EMP). Felipe Quispé, leader of the peasant federation CSUTCB and the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) joined the EMP on 23 January marking the uni-

On 17 October the Bolivian masses finally forced their president to resign after a huge uprising in which nearly 80 protesters were murdered by the Bolivian armed forces. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada presided over the bloodiest 14 months in contemporary Bolivian history. This recent month-long rebellion was the third massive revolt of the Bolivian population this year, the manifestation of the Bolivian people's opposition to imperialist inspired policies. **FIONA DONOVAN, JUANJO RIVAS and LOUIS BREHONY report.**

fication of the different social movements, even though the MIP call for an independent Aymara state based on pre-Colombian rules and traditions. The revolt was suspended three days later when the government agreed to negotiate with the EMP but talks were held up by government insistence on addressing only the issue of coca eradication, thereby trying to split the movement. After 14 continuous days of road blockades 18 people were killed by the army who used tanks and planes, over 200 were wounded and almost a thousand arrested.

New uprisings happened just two weeks later when the government introduced new tax hikes and a cut in social spending. The police joined the demonstrators to demand an increase in pay and fought with weapons against the army. However, the army was deeply divided throughout the crisis concerning the gas issue, creating a powerful contradiction, which manifested again in October. Witnesses reported seeing seven soldiers executed by superiors for refusing to shoot at protesters. This contradiction is the reason for the government not declaring a state of siege in recent events as a section of its repressive forces could turn against the state itself.

In two days in February, 33 people were killed, 26 of them unarmed civilians, and 205 were injured. In many cities the MAS worked with relative success to unify interests and give them an anti-imperialist content. The aim of the EMP was to hold popular debates on the key national issues in order to build a leadership tied to a whole network of grassroots and peasant organisations. However, the dimension of the uprising surpassed the development of such a newly-formed movement and the EMP proved in February not yet ripe to take power.

Revolt over gas privatisation

On 15 September Andean Aymara communities near Lake Titicaca, northwest of Bolivia's capital La Paz, began intense road blockades to express their disgust at the government's agreement with the IMF to push ahead with the sale of gas to the US.

Many different sectors of the Bolivian population are opposed, including sections of the military and police and many groups have been demanding a referendum on the issue, which forced the IMF to fund a \$9 million campaign to change public opinion. Some opposition stems from Bolivia's historical relationship with Chile dating back to the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) when Chile gained territory that had given Bol-



Evo Morales

ivia access to the sea. However, for the majority of Bolivia's population, at least 60% of whom live in poverty (90% in rural areas), the gas represents a vital and last resource of the country, since the wealth of silver, oil, tin and wood has been drained abroad and lined the pockets of a handful of individuals.

On 19 September the National Coordination for the Defence of Gas organised demonstrations that mobilised 50,000 in La Paz and 30,000 in Cochabamba. On 20 September the government sent the military and armed police to rescue several hundred tourists stranded for five days in the road blockades of the northwest. Six Aymara community members were killed, including an eight-year-old girl. This sparked more protests in Aymara communities across the Altiplano.

By 2 October the rebellion had spread across the country. The zone near Lake Titicaca had come under the control of Aymara militias who threatened to surround La Paz. In El Alto, an Aymara city of 750,000 on the edge of La Paz, a civic strike was initiated by the Regional Worker's Union which rapidly paralysed the city and prevented supplies from passing through to La Paz. Market vendors, neighbourhood committees and university students joined the strike and battled the police. Leading writers and intellectuals of Cochabamba joined calls for a new government to defend national sovereignty and revise the laws concerning multinational oil companies.

On 6 October roadblocks began in Chapare, the heavily militarised coca-growing region between Cochabamba and La Paz. As 500 minors joined the demonstrations in El Alto on 9

October a 22-year-old Aymara bricklayer was shot dead by police. This murder prompted the neighbourhood committees to give the police 24 hours to leave their houses and join the uprising or become victims of popular justice. The next day mourners shouted 'Now for sure! Civil war!' and six police officers were arrested on charges of plotting rebellion.

By 11 October, La Paz was experiencing a severe shortage of petrol, food and other supplies. The army moved in to rescue petrol tankers stranded in the blockades and El Alto came under machine gun fire from soldiers, tanks and planes directed by the Minister of Defence Carlos Berzain, who was seen shooting at the crowds from a helicopter. In two days 30 people were killed and over 100 wounded by bullets. More repression followed and the revolt spread to La Paz. All sectors of the rebellion called for Sánchez de Lozada's resignation. The Vice President, Carlos Mesa, publicly announced his disapproval of the government's actions while the US officials stated their support for the democratically elec-

ted president, and involved its intelligence in rescuing the former president Jaime Paz Zamora from the angry masses. Miners managed to cross army lines, breaking into the capital and together with thousands marched to the presidential palace, forcing Sánchez de Lozada and several of his ministers to flee the country on 17 October. Mesa, another millionaire, assumed the presidency and called for a truce.

Towards revolution

Two of the most popular left-wing leaders – Evo Morales (MAS) and Felipe Quispé (United Confederation of Workers and Peasants) are somewhat split in their current approaches. Morales' position is to stop the offensive in order to give the new president a break to see if he is capable of fulfilling the needs of the masses. Quispé, however, has more militancy to his approach, giving the new president 90 days to answer the demands of the indigenous people who make up well over 70% of the population – to renationalise energy sources, to reject the FTAA and to implement other popular demands – or else face a general uprising aimed at taking state power.

The Bolivian people have defeated the plans of the former president but the fight to control their own resources has just begun. The increase in mass popular mobilisation and social conflict is a response to future plans of repression as much as to past and present situations. The response of the US ruling class to the crises of neoliberalism will be re-colonising projects with the immediate goal of privatising lucrative areas of national ownership with continued subsidies to US exporters and further monopolisation of trade.

The Bolivian people's methods of struggle are having a profound response among the masses in Latin America – increasingly disenchanted with seemingly progressive leaders who take the other side once in power. In Bolivia, the fight goes on. ■

Miami Anti-FTAA protests brutally suppressed

On 16 November the trade representatives of every country of the Americas, with the exception of Cuba, met in Miami to finalise the treaty of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The aim of the FTAA is to allow virtually unrestricted access by multinationals into Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean. Opposing this, thousands of demonstrators converged in the city and were met with brutal repression as the US government had provided \$8.5 million for a massive paramilitary attack.

was closed and effectively militarised. Later 62 people holding a peaceful vigil outside Miami-Dade County Jail in support of those detained inside were arrested. While in gaol protestors were sprayed with pepper spray and freezing water and beaten.

The lengths that the US government is prepared to go to in order to force through the FTAA is because of its vital importance to US imperialism in enabling it to further absorb the national economies of the Americas and continue draining profits from



Protestors were attacked by police wielding batons and fired on with rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray. More than 250 were arrested, over 100 treated for injuries and 12 hospitalised including one man in an intensive care unit for head injuries. Small groups leaving the protests were harassed, arrested and beaten and the centre of Miami

them. The brutal treatment of the protestors in Miami was a taste of the 'freedom and democracy' that President Bush is aiming to spread around the world.

For more information and the demands of the anti-FTAA protestors for justice see: www.unitedforpeace.org and www.ftaaimc.org

Diego Garcia: still fighting for justice

BARNABY PROBERT

Last October a group of Indian Ocean islanders, illegally evicted from their homes by the British government more than 30 years ago, lost their High Court claim for compensation and the right to return to the Chagos Islands. Ten members of the Chagossian Group UK spent 36 days sleeping outside the Houses of Parliament to draw attention to the plight of the Chagossian people. FRFI spoke to the group's Secretary, Gabriel Valentin.

The Chagossians are Creole descendants of slaves who were brought to the Chagos Archipelago by the French in 1776 to work on the coconut plantations. After emancipation in 1835, the slaves remained on the islands, which by then were administered by Britain as part of the colony of Mauritius. In 1968 Mauritius gained independence but Britain kept the Chagos so that one of the islands, Diego Garcia, could be leased to the US for the establishment of a strategic military base. The US would pay Britain £5 million, to be deducted from the price of the Polaris nuclear weapons system. The US demanded the removal of over 2,000 Chagossians from Diego Garcia and the surrounding islands. The British had initially claimed that the islands were uninhabited. An earlier choice for the base, Aldabra Island in the Seychelles, had been ruled out because it was a rare tortoise habitat.

From 1965, when Britain and the US began to discuss the base, many Chagossians who had gone to Mauritius for medical treatment were forbidden to return to their islands. 'They would tell you that your island has been sold to the American army,

you cannot return,' explains Gabriel.

In April 1969, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson gave approval for the expulsion of the entire population from the islands. 'Many of my family came over in the deportations from 1971 to 1973. They divided the population into parts. 500 they sent to the Seychelles, 1,500 to Mauritius. They separated mothers in the Seychelles, children in Mauritius.'

Article 9 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that 'no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.' But the British government had no regard for the human rights of the Chagossians, who were dismissed as 'Tarzans and Men Fridays' by Colonial Office official Patrick Wright in a letter to the British mission at the UN.

In the final deportations, some were given just two hours to leave their homes. 'Many people killed themselves because they didn't want to move,' Gabriel said. 'The US military killed all the animals of the Chagossians. About 800 dogs were shot. They also sent animals into a kiln used for drying coconuts.'

For years, British governments maintained the fiction that the Chagossians were mere 'contract labourers' from Mauritius and the Seychelles, rather than people who had inhabited the Chagos for six generations. Birth certificates were destroyed to erase the Chagossians from the public record. 'It was a time of big suffering,' Gabriel recalls, 'because many had no proof of their identity, because birth certificates were burned before the deportation. Most of the deportees arrived in Mauritius without money, because in Chagos they had lived without

money and without technology. They were told they would get money, housing and work on arrival in Mauritius, but when they arrived there, they got nothing. The police would wait for the boat and search one more time for documents. And afterwards the police sent many of these people into a big public garden where they slept in the open for months and months.'

The Chagossians in the capital, Port Louis, who now number about 8,000, have little status. 'If you go to Mauritius you will cry if you see the condition in which these people live,' says Mr Valentin. 'All the hard work is for the Chagossians. When they arrived they had no house and nothing to eat. Many girls became prostitutes. Young boys became robbers.'

The British paid £4 million to the Mauritius government in 1982 towards resettling the islanders. This amounted to about £1,000 per person but individual Chagossians were not able to get the money unless they signed away their right ever to return to Chagos. 'Many Chagossians lost their right because they could not read and did not know the business of the British government,' says Gabriel. This is in flagrant breach of Article 13 of the UN Declaration, which guarantees everybody the right to return to their country. 'Britain and the US apply the racist colonial law, but not the human rights law.'

The experience of the Chagos Archipelago's white former inhabitants has been very different from the black Chagossians. Gabriel believes that some of the white population moved to Australia. Those who settled in Mauritius live comfortable



Diego Garcia: now a runway for waging imperialist war

lives and have no contact with the Creole population.

Gabriel contrasts the British government's attitude towards Diego Garcia with its defence of the Falklands in 1982, which amounted to a £1 million expenditure for each Falkland Islander. 'The difference is simple. Some of the foundations of the British system are colonialist, racist and capitalist. They take decisions without consulting the people. They sit in their offices and write papers. They don't see and feel how people suffer, how people are still in poverty in Port Louis and in the Seychelles.'

Over the last three decades, many Chagossians who have demonstrated for their rights in Mauritius have suffered police brutality and imprisonment. Last year, a small victory was achieved when Chagossians occupied the British High Commission in Port Louis, demanding full British passports. The High Commission called the police, who removed the Chagossians from the building. The Chagossians continued their protest outside the High Commission, refusing to negotiate with the police. They told the police to negotiate with Britain, which evicting them from Chagos. After 25 days British passports were granted, but only to first and second generation exiles. How-

ever, the central demand of the islanders is the right to return. The Blair government continues to oppose any attempt to secure this right in the courts.

In November 2000, the High Court ruled that islanders could return to some outlying islands in Chagos, but not to Diego Garcia. Whitehall, however, declared any return to be 'impractical and inconsistent with the existing defence facilities'.

The October 2003 ruling has dashed hopes of a return to Chagos in the near future. Justice Duncan Ouseley excused the British governments, because despite behaving badly they had not known that their actions were unlawful. The Foreign Office expressed its satisfaction with Justice Ouseley's ruling against compensation and the right to return.

Gabriel's minimum demand is free access to Diego Garcia and the right to return to the other 64 islands. 'We want access to Diego Garcia. We want to return and clean the cemetery, place some flowers there and plant some nice trees. We can't let them destroy our culture and our story. Mauritius is only a paradise for tourists. It's hell for the community. The white people brought the Creoles to slavery. Now the whites have all the land. Where is the land of the slaves?'

REVIEW

Stranger than fiction

■ *Dude, where's my country?* Michael Moore, hardback £17.99, published by Allan Lane, 2003

This rapidly-written book by Michael Moore and his support team was published in the month following the invasion of Iraq by the coalition forces. The speed of its publication reflects the urgency Moore feels about the leadership and, indeed, ownership of the USA today. The title means that the interests of the people of North America have been hijacked by a handful of neo-conservatives around the Bush family. Their greed, militarism and reactionary social values do not reflect those of the majority of the population who, Moore illustrates with a series of independent opinion poll results, are essentially tolerant and liberal on questions of race, gender and wealth distribution.

Michael Moore's *Stupid white men* became an international best-seller with over four million copies sold in 2002-3 and, when his documentary film on gun law *Bowling for Columbine* won an Oscar, he spoke out against the war on Iraq to a worldwide television audience. As

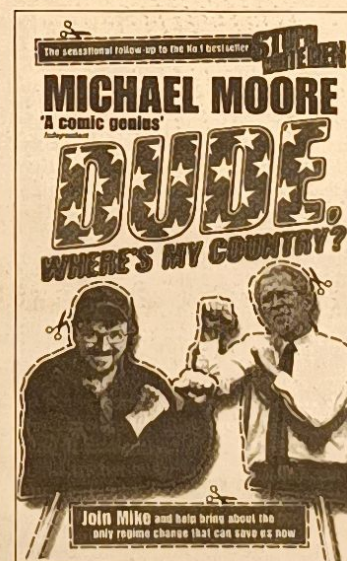
an author, performer, film-maker and television producer Moore has broken through the isolation of progressive forces to win popular acclaim. His work lifts the curtain on the realities of working life for the majority of the people in the USA, the manipulation and control of the media by a handful of owners and the impact of the corporations on domestic and foreign policy. And all this with humour and minutely researched detail.

Dude, where's my country? raises some now familiar questions about the special relationship between the Saudi Arabian elite, the Bin Laden family in particular, and the Bush senior administration. This includes the matter of the protection of nearly 30 members of the Bin Laden family who were flown out of the USA within hours of the 11 September 2001 attack. Moore also documents trading relations with Saddam Hussein's Iraq which include sales of biological and chemical warfare elements since the 1980s.

Much of this has been leaking out in the media as the US death toll rises and the CIA and other elements of the ruling class turn against each other to distance themselves from

responsibility for the war and the failure to make immediate oil profits the prize of conquest. But Moore correctly puts Bush's foreign policy into the context of privatisation and market deregulation combined with strengthening control over world resources. He shows how the Bush regime deliberately builds fear of terrorism and encourages xenophobia to distort and scar everyday perceptions in the USA. The Senate passed the USA Patriot Act, 98 to 1, a month after 11 September 2001 (an actual acronym for 'Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001'). It is essentially a gagging order which allows any investigation of individuals to take place and prohibits anything being said by anyone about such searches on pain of prosecution and detention. An unknown number of people are imprisoned without charge under these Homeland Security measures and it is forbidden to talk about this without being accused of aiding and abetting the enemy. Michael Moore describes all this with energetic fury.

Where the book fails is in the



recipe for change which shows that he may hate the capitalists but he does not understand how capitalism works. In the chapter 'Woo Hoo! I Got Me a Tax Cut!' he describes how, as a result of Bush's tax cuts from 39% to 35%, he gained \$33,000 this year. Last year Moore was a high earner with his successful book and film and is a beneficiary of the tax cuts alongside Dick Cheney, who has a \$85,924 tax cut this year and a promised \$171,850 next year. Bush is not just rewarding his super-rich bud-

dies but is also buying off different layers of society with cash as electoral bait. However no amount of bribing and bullying the population will permanently preserve the capitalist system which is inherently prone to crisis and war. Moore has an under-consumptionist view of the economic problems of capitalism arguing that it is both logical and good for employers to allow unionisation, pay good wages, provide crèche and health facilities for workers because happier employees are more productive and responsible and have money to purchase goods. Equally, spending on decent state schools, clean air and water practices and a less punitive system of drug monitoring would benefit the whole of society by making people healthier, wiser and easing up the prison system. Moore speaks with the voice of common sense, the decent average guy but also in some desperation, even proposing Oprah Winfrey, anybody half-way human, to oppose Bush in the 2004 presidential election.

Dude, where's my country? is a wonderful contribution to the fight against the US regime. Soon to be out in paperback it is highly recommended as a kind of running commentary on this critical moment of history. Packing in a lot of facts and figures Moore shows that 2003 reality is more crazy than the most zany humourist could ever invent.

Susan Davidson

Scottish prison revolt

On 10 October prisoners at Glenochil high security prison in Stirlingshire, staged what was initially a peaceful protest over repressive conditions. The over-reaction of prison staff, however, almost resulted in the death of prisoners and provoked a general mood of unrest that overwhelmed the administration and led to a total lockdown of the gaol.

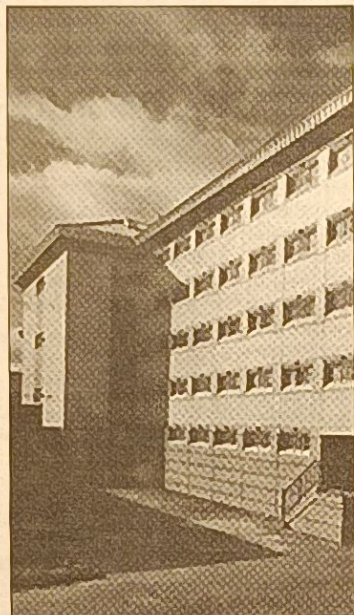
JOHN BOWDEN reports.

Prisoners in C Hall began the protest by draping a large banner between windows and barricading themselves into a section of the cellblock. The banner read 'This is a peaceful protest. Leave our visitors alone, Drew Rutherford.' Rutherford, a senior security screw and hard-line opponent of prisoners' rights, had enforced a 'no physical contact' policy under the guise of combating drugs. As far as prisoners were concerned, screws supervising visits were encouraged to behave in an oppressive and intimidating way and to actively discourage their family and friends from visiting.

The anger over visiting conditions simply brought to a head the general resentment towards an oppressive regime that was failing to meet prisoners' basic needs. For example, financial cutbacks in medical provision have resulted in prisoners being routinely denied treatment and even access to a doctor. In response to complaints, governor Kate Donegan implemented a policy of encouraging prisoners to purchase a growing list of basic medicines from their own money. Poorer prisoners of course are excluded from this mini-privatisation scheme. Medical neglect at the prison is symptomatic of an administrative mentality that views the basic human rights of prisoners as meaningless.

Another source of anger is the ritual of prisoners being made to make their way in single file to workshops along a narrow route (dubbed the 'wall of shame') lined by screws, bearing aggressively down on them. This ritualised intimidation takes place three times a day and is designed to remind prisoners of their powerlessness and weakness.

Soon after prisoners barricaded themselves into C Hall, the administration decided violence was the only response appropriate and sent in the riot squad. An earlier protest in August had ended with prisoners



Glenochil Prison

being attacked and dragged off to the punishment block where the violence against them continued into the early hours of the morning. On this occasion the protesters decided to repel the riot squads by setting fire to their barricade.

As the blaze took hold, the riot squad retreated, and then stood back and did nothing as the fire spread into the cellblock. Eventually, huge flames were even roaring from windows and it became obvious that the entire building was being consumed by fire. Prisoners in the cellblock now began screaming for help as total panic set in. Prisoners in nearby cellblocks that had been locked down were shouting from the windows for the fire brigade to be called and, finally at least an hour after the fire started, the screws summoned fire engines.

The first reaction of the senior fire officer at the scene was to call for body bags, so convinced was he that prisoners had perished in the fire. Once the fire was subdued, screws and firemen entered the building and discovered five unconscious prisoners, two of whom appeared to be close to death. An ambulance was summoned but was kept waiting for over an hour and boxed in by a van full of screws in riot gear. The anger of prisoners in the rest of the prison was palpable.

That evening, the Scottish Prison Service fed a story to the press, claiming the disturbance had been a reaction to a crackdown on drugs in the prison.

The following day, 11 October, prisoners seized control of part of D Hall and systematically wrecked it in solidarity with the prisoners in C Hall. Predictably, Governor Donegan decided to lock down the prison completely in a last ditch attempt to regain control. She claimed her decision was motivated by concern for the personal safety of prisoners and staff. In fact, it was motivated by desperation, anger, and a realisation that her regime had failed.

The Scottish prison system is currently in crisis, with record levels of overcrowding as a result of Scottish Labour's current 'law and order' obsession. In early October the Scottish media produced some scare stories, concerning the 'loss of control' in Scottish prisons, claiming the level of assaults and drug abuse had risen dramatically – the message was clear: it was time to crack down and reassert control.

The selected 'ringleaders' of the Glenochil uprising now face charges of arson, mutiny and endangering life, and face a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Such victimisation and repression will not, however, stem the anger or deter prisoners in Scotland from continuing the struggle. ■

Thessaloniki 7 freed after hunger strike

Seven men arrested, framed and imprisoned in Greece after demonstrating against Fortress Europe at the EU Summit on 21 June 2003 have been released from gaol after a 66-day hunger strike and an international solidarity campaign demanding their release. It is not believed that the hunger strikers' health has been permanently damaged. The Thessaloniki Seven still face trial and cannot leave Greece.

Early on Wednesday 26 November Greek doctors refused an order to force feed the hunger strikers, despite facing homicide charges if the prisoners died. By the afternoon, a council of magistrates, pressured by public opinion, ordered the immediate release of the prisoners on bail.

After being beaten by Greek riot-cops, the seven were fitted up with identical black bags containing axes, hammers and petrol bombs. The charges included making petrol bombs, rioting, arson and insurrection, for which they faced 25 years in gaol. They were refused bail and subject to up to 18 months pre-trial confinement under Greek law.

Simon Chapman, from London, was among the Seven. Photo evidence from the press show Simon's

blue rucksack being replaced with a black one. Greek TV news channel ET3 broadcast footage of the police stitch-up. The judge refused to accept the footage as evidence in the bail application and bail was denied three times over five months. In protest, five of the seven started a hunger strike.

Syrian refugee, Solaiman 'Kastro' Dakdouk, refused food from 21 September. Simon and two Spanish prisoners, Carlos Martin-Martinez and Fernando Perez Gorraiz, joined him two weeks later, followed, in three days by Greek national Spyros Tsitsas. Two Greek minors, Michalis Traikapis and Dimitris Fliouras joined in the final two weeks. They were demanding release on bail and for Kastro to be given asylum in Greece.

The Olympic Games will take place in Greece in summer 2004. The evidence of cops filling bags with petrol bombs has undermined the credibility of the Greek justice system. The international campaign must continue to demand the charges be dropped altogether.

Victory to the Thessaloniki Seven!
Charley Allan

Website:
www.freesimonchapman.org

Letter from Eric Allison

Long-standing readers of FRFI will know that for the last decade or so I've occasionally sounded off on these pages: mainly concerning strokes pulled in the lousier nicks. Six months ago, I applied for the, new post of Prisons Correspondent for *The Guardian*. Somewhat to my surprise, I got the job and started a couple of weeks ago.

I trust that anybody who knows me personally will know exactly whose side I'm on in the war against bad practices in the worst prisons. I now want to assure all prisoners, irrespective of sex, race, nationality or 'nature of offence', that I will be fighting their corner whenever and wherever I can. Write to me, at the address below. Every letter will be answered, in time. (Please remember that I'm on my own.) If I can't help, then I'll pass your problem on to somebody who possibly can – and I'll tell you what I've done.

I'm not into mainstream journalism for the money. (I earned far more from villainy, 20 years ago, than I'm earning now). *The Guardian* is part of a profit-making

media group, but the paper itself has sound, long-standing ideals that I'm proud to be associated with, and profit is not the main driving force. Therefore, I strongly suggest that, if you're going to buy a national daily while you're inside, that you make it *The Guardian*. And keep reading FRFI. This paper has long been the staunchest of friends to prisoners. Certainly, I will be privileged to continue to write for it, if and when I am invited to do so.

Yours in solidarity
Eric Allison

Write to Eric at *The Guardian*,
164 Deansgate,
Manchester M60 2RR
Eric.Allison@guardian.co.uk

Eric was the joint author, with FRFI's Nicki Jameson, of *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, the only book about the prison system's biggest ever revolt (available from Larkin Publications, BCM 5909, London WC1N 3XX price £7.95). The views expressed about *The Guardian* are his own, not those of FRFI.

Prisoners take a stand against conditions in Full Sutton seg unit

On 18 August 2003 Robbie Stewart went on hunger strike at Full Sutton segregation unit. A few days later Keith Pringle arrived from Whitemoor and started a dirty protest over the ridiculously over-the-top security requirements. The next day he was joined in solidarity by Stephen Lawlor. On 26 August Robbie came off hunger strike and joined the dirty protest, as did another prisoner, Harjinder Pooni. All prisoners were asking for a transfer – to anywhere. The screws tried to get us to come off it at first by switching off the water supplies. When food was brought to the cell on paper plates, it was turned face down on the floor and stamped on.

Keith was the first to go – to Wakefield on 5 September. Stephen, an Irish traveller, and Harjinder, an Asian man, were both subjected to almost daily racist abuse by screws. Harjinder was moved between cells every

three to four days and sometimes went periods sleeping on the floor with no blankets, as did Stephen.

On Wednesday 17 September one of the POA fanatics was assaulted by a prisoner who had nothing to do with the protest. This was a huge damage to the screw's ego and almost immediately the beatings happened that day. Phil Simmons, who is mixed race, was attacked and placed in the 'box'. The following morning Harjinder was severely beaten, leaving him barely able to stand up.

Phil went to join the protest and was again beaten. He was then put in a body-belt and sent to Frankland. Two days later Michael Stone was beaten on the exercise yard after speaking out over the treatment we were receiving. On Monday 22 September Robbie Stewart was sent to Woodhill. At that time none of the three on the protest had had food or fluids all weekend. There were two

left on the protest then, and at the end of the week Stephen was found unconscious in his cell. He was taken to York hospital, suffering from dehydration and malnutrition. The following morning, Harjinder was also found unconscious. He was also taken to hospital for the same reason.

On return to Full Sutton seg they continued the protest. The doctor then declared Harjinder unfit for segregation and took him on the wing, where he went on hunger strike. Stephen was later sent to Altcourse. Harjinder was taken to the hospital wing on his hunger strike where the governor told him there was no way he would meet his demands, despite giving in to the three others' demands.

Harjinder is now in contact with solicitors and attempting to get some kind of investigations into the attacks down the seg and the racist abuse.

Robert Stewart

Lincoln Prison mutiny charges

Twenty-four men have been charged with prison mutiny following the Lincoln prison uprising in October 2002. Twelve are still in prison, while the remainder have been released. FRFI sends solidarity greetings to them all and asks readers to send cards and messages of support to those still inside:

Michael Westwood,
HMP Lowdham Grange,
Nottingham, NG14 7DA

Neil Dunn, HMP Rye Hill,
Willoughby, Rugby, Warwickshire,
CV23 8SZ

John Richard Lambert, Adam Steven Pidduck, Gavin Errol Collins, HMP Nottingham, Perry Road, Nottingham, NG5 3AG

Paul Bogle, HMP Dovegate, Uttoxeter, Staffs, ST14 8XR

Jason Robert Bush and Ian McBeth, HMP Doncaster, Marshgate, Doncaster, DN5 8UX

Alan Brown, Peter Anthony McCabe, Gary Desmond Oldham, HMP Hull, Hedon Road, Hull, HU9 5LS

Benjamin Lee Daws, HMP Leicester, Welford Road, Leicester, LE2 7AJ

Fighting Zionism, Fighting Racism

Writing in *The Guardian* (29 November), Emanuele Ottolenghi, a Zionist academic at Oxford University says that 'Israel's advocates do not want to gag critics by brandishing the bogeyman of anti-semitism'. He lies of course; this is the first recourse of Sharon's government when faced with criticism, and is echoed by the Betar/Likud fascists who organise counter-demonstrations to FRFI/Victory to the Intifada pickets of Marks and Spencer in Oxford Street in London. Ottolenghi is outraged at the equation of Zionism with racism, yet in his defence of the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state remains silent on the precondition for its establishment: the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians. There is no reason why middle-class Jews in imperialist countries such as Britain should be any less racist than their gentile counterparts – but they demand respectability for their views because they call their racism Zionism. The Betar-Likud counter-demonstrators express every vile *Daily Mail* prejudice imaginable – hatred for Arabs, Muslims, asylum seekers, the unemployed, the poor and the left. They are always looking for a fight, telling us 'we know where you live – we will come and get you'. During the picket on 27 November, two Zionist demonstrators stopped a 15-year-old VTI supporter and threatened him: 'You're with those Arabs, aren't you? We're going to fuck you up and cut you up. We know where you live.'

Ottolenghi recycles the fiction that 'Zionism reversed Jewish historical passivity to persecution'. Quite the opposite: Zionism rejected any possibility of defeating anti-semitism: it therefore never



Demonstrators on the VTI picket outside Marks & Spencers in Oxford Street, London

sought to fight either anti-semitism or the rise of fascism. Indeed, Betar founder Vladimir Jabotinsky collaborated with Italian fascist leader Mussolini to realise his racist dreams. In apartheid South Africa, all Zionist organisations including Betar supported white supremacy. Betar recently sent us a letter threatening to sue us unless we withdrew the allegation that BNP supporters were on their picket. We did so with two provisos: first, one of their picketers informed us that the BNP was involved, and second, politically it makes not one jot of difference since we regard their political standpoint as racist and our picketers are regularly insulted and intimidated with racist threats by their supporters. We do not regard them as a 'Jewish' organisation, but as a Zionist organisation.

The confrontation with Zionist fascists has galvanised the Marble Arch pickets. 40-50 regularly attend; Muslim Public Affairs Committee continues to work alongside FRFI in building for each week's event. More

recently we have spread the pickets across London, holding lively events outside M&S branches in Camden, Brixton and Ilford. The support we have received from the public shows that it is possible to build effective solidarity with the Palestinian people. VTI continues to organise regular and well-attended education meetings which help educate activists about the history of Zionism and the racist character of the Israeli state.

In Manchester, pickets outside Market Street M&S continue every Saturday. At the beginning of October picketers gained a victory over M&S when a charge of assault on an M&S security guard was dropped because the guard did not turn up to court. The next court case on 8 January is the culmination of the Manchester City Council's attempt to get rid of the picket.

Two supporters face a total of eight summonses directed against our right to have a campaign stall and to display placards outside M&S. This is a direct attack by the city's Labour council against the picket and in

defence of Zionism.

In Durham M&S pickets have taken place every Saturday for some months. Several have been threatened by National Front supporters; on 22 November the local NF goon told picketers to keep away the following Saturday as the NF would be doing a paper sale then. In dreadful weather on the morning of 29 November, 40 people drawn from FRFI, human rights and anti-racist organisations assembled outside M&S and along Silver Street with a variety of stalls to await the NF. No sign of them! Idle threat or not, the event showed that open and democratic campaigning provided an effective response to the NF in their North East stronghold. After the picket, 15-20 people attended a meeting on how to organise in the future against the threat from racists and fascists. Further actions were planned and telephone trees for urgent mobilisations were sorted out.

On 11 October, supporters held mobile Intifada protests in Durham, Glasgow, Manchester and London Oxford Street which together involved well over 100 people picketing outside M&S stores, Starbucks or shops selling Caterpillar footwear or Israeli goods. The protestors used street theatre to get their message across and, as ever, got a good response from the public. FRFI/VTI were also active on 9 November demonstrations against the Apartheid Wall organised by the International Solidarity Movement. The main event in Trafalgar Square had a disappointing attendance – no more than 150 people with no PSC banner.

Throughout the country RCG/FRFI members and supporters have continued street activities against the occupation of Iraq

and in support of the resistance. We have also attended meetings against the occupation of Iraq and in support of George Galloway's new political initiative. However, the lack of democracy on the left means that there has been little chance of debating a real anti-imperialist standpoint in these forums.

• ISM volunteer Tom Hurdall, 22, shot by the Israeli Defence force and in a coma, is now in intensive care in London. To add insult to injury, the cheque paid by the Israeli government to Tom's family to cover part of the repatriation costs, bounced when it was presented at the bank.

EVENTS

LONDON

All meetings at LSE, Houghton Street WC2, nearest tube Holborn. For more details and information tel: 020 7837 1688 or e-mail victoryintifada@hotmail.com

Ethnic cleansing in Palestine
Wednesday 10 December
S75 St Clements Building 7pm

45 years of the Cuban Revolution
Wednesday 14 January 7pm

The revolution in Nepal
Wednesday 21 January 7pm

Palestine in the context of the current Middle East crisis
Wednesday 28 January 7pm

Every Saturday 12-2pm join us on a stall for petitioning, leafleting and selling FRFI. Ring for details of venue.

Victory to the Intifada: Picket of Marble Arch Marks and Spencer.
Every Thursday evening 6-8pm except 25 December and 1 January.
Boycott M&S! Nearest tubes Bond Street/Marble Arch

Oxford Street Boycott Israeli Goods Day: Saturday 20 December, 12-2pm Picket outside two M&S stores in Oxford Street: Marble Arch and Oxford Circus.

MANCHESTER

Market Street Xmas Intifada
Saturday 20 December. Assemble 12pm M&S Market Street.

Picket M&S: Every Saturday 12pm Market Street

Defend the Right to Protest!

Defend the M&S Picket!
Picket Manchester City Magistrates Court, Crown Square, 9am Thursday 8 January.

For further information contact, victory_intifada@hotmail.com 07816 547066

For details of Salford University FRFI Society, contact, salfordfrfi@hotmail.com

MIDLANDS

For further details, contact 0794 925 6477

DURHAM

Next pickets of M&S in Silver Street: Saturday 13 December and Saturday 17 January both 11.30am-2.30pm.

For further details contact 07813 073 846 or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

SCOTLAND

Glasgow
Saturday M&S pickets in Sauchiehall Street: 20 December, 10 January and 7 February, all at 12-2pm.

FRFI public meeting on Palestine: 1pm Tuesday 10 February, Level 6, Strathclyde Students Union, John Street.

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 office@ratb.org.uk www.ratb.org.uk

Defend the Cuban Revolution

September and October have been busy months for Rock around the Blockade, with regular street stalls, petitioning and leafleting, monthly meetings to discuss the issues of Cuba and their relevance to the current state of the world, a commemorative evening for Che Guevara to mark the 36th anniversary of his death in combat and the production of the latest *Viva Cuba!* newsletter.

The night for Che Guevara was an evening with music, poetry, readings and speeches. Many people crowded into the packed room to hear political singer/songwriters from the Chagos Islands who have been dumped in Britain and now face homelessness despite their British passports; music and dance from a Kurdish troupe from the Halkevî Centre; a string quartet,

a revolutionary Spanish guitarist and a duo guitar and vocals who stunned the crowd with a magnificent song about Che Guevara and the struggle against imperialism. A raffle and generous donations raised money for the work of Rock around the Blockade. RATB hopes to hold a similar evening in January to mark the 45th anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution.

The September meeting was about human rights in Cuba versus the USA/Britain with discussion about Guantanamo Bay. The speakers gave a history of the US illegal occupation of Guantanamo Bay as part of the US war on Cuba; they contrasted the revolutionary nature of Cuba's province of Guantanamo with the barbarity of the US concentration camp in Guantanamo

Bay where prisoners are held without trial or charge, interrogated and tortured in flagrant breach of international law. The crimes carried out in Guantanamo as part of the US's so-called War on Terrorism against the inmates of Guantanamo Bay has met with barely a bleat of protest from Britain in defence of its own citizens held there. Hardly surprising, while Britain carries out its own racist war via the Terrorism Act and the Asylum and Immigration laws.

Our October meeting, 'Who are the terrorists?', focused on the Miami 5 with a video showing. Over the last two months the US has been intensifying the blockade, with speeches by US president George Bush condemning Cuba and announcing more stringent measures against the island. The Bush adminis-

tration is more and more overtly linked to the Miami anti-Cuban counter-revolutionary community. At the same time, the EU has begun to operate its own blockade of Cuba. This is an attack on socialism. This is part of the war on terrorism with British and US imperialist hypocrisy able on the one hand to condemn Cuba, which is delivering education, healthcare, culture and a safe future to all its people, and on the other hand to undertake a brutal, violent war on oppressed nations which ensures that people have no access to health care, education, cultural facilities and have as their future a world of uncertainty, poverty, disease and early death.

In this context the annual vote at the United Nations yielded the biggest ever vote

against the US blockade of Cuba. However, as usual, the US used its veto on the Security Council, which allowed the three countries who voted for the blockade (USA, Israel and the Marshall Islands) to overturn the vote.

Rock around the Blockade will be taking a brigade to Cuba in 2005, offering a further sound system to the Union of Young Communists for their use in rural areas for political and recreational purposes. The brigade will visit one of the less well off provinces and allow brigadistas the opportunity of seeing Cuban society at first hand and discussing with people from all walks of life. Those on the brigade will be chosen from amongst the activists in RATB – so get involved now! Defending the Cuban Revolution is part and parcel of the fight against capitalism and imperialism and for a better world for all of us. Their struggle is our struggle and our struggle is necessary for their survival. Let's make Cuba relevant to people in the anti-



war movement by showing that in order to be effective, the anti-war movement must be anti-imperialist and must begin to build a socialist movement in Britain.

Join RATB by sending a cheque or postal order for £10 (waged), £4 (low waged) or £2 (unwaged, student, pensioner) – you will receive a newsletter regularly and be kept up to date with all events. We will send you information about the Miami 5 and Boycott Bacardi campaign.

Join our e-group (write to viva_cuba@yahoo.com) and be part of receiving regular bulletins and contributing to a discussion of recent articles about and from Cuba.

Come to our events and meetings! Get involved! Get active!

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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Self defence

When Israel attacked and bombed Syria, George Bush lamely said that 'every country has a right to defend itself'.

By this reasoning the Iraqis have every right to not only attack US and UK soldiers but the UK and US itself. The *Independent* on Sunday revealed US troops bulldozing orchards as a means of 'collective punishment of farmers in central Iraq'. This Israeli-style attack is what US occupation of Iraq means.

DAVID MACDONALD
Lancashire

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

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

Working family tax credit – the reality

When the Labour government introduced the Working Family Tax Credit, (WFTC), its stated aim was to get people with dependants off Income Support and into paid employment. Low wages would be boosted by WFTC, guaranteeing that those who came off Income Support to take a low-paid job would be better off financially. What the government didn't tell people is that once your earnings go above Income Support, you have a responsibility to pay a percentage of your Housing Benefit and Council Tax. Any change in your family's circumstances lead to a minefield of bureaucracy and incompetence that can lead to stress, debt and eviction.

An example is the case of a single parent with two dependants aged 16 and 17 living at home. Housing Benefit and Council Tax are not affected while they are under 18 and unemployed but as soon as they find a job or go on Job Seeker's

Allowance, the Housing Benefit office has to be told.

The parent has to inform WFTC to be reassessed and tell Housing Benefit so this can be reassessed. Housing Benefit insist on documentary proof of new income from WFTC and dependants' earnings. WFTC then send new amount payable. Full rent is payable until the proof arrives. This process can take weeks.

This nightmare can easily escalate out of control. If while this change of circumstances is being dealt with there is another change, such as a wage rise or extra days' work for the parent, again WFTC and Housing Benefit must be informed for benefits to be reassessed. Again the claimant has to gather all the documentary evidence to be sent to the relevant departments. This longwinded process extends the period of full rent being paid by the claimant, as the system is incapable of keeping up with the changes in

circumstances. The claimant's Housing Benefit is never the same one month to the next, leading to massive debts over a period of time. All correspondence between the claimant and Housing Benefit and WFTC is now done by phone, there is now no local office to call in. The claimant has to pay for all photocopying and postage.

Any subsequent change of circumstance of the three people involved sets this bureaucratic nightmare off again. Even though the Housing Benefit know their system is dragging thousands on WFTC into debt it still issues eviction notices to people for huge amounts of unpaid rent, a substantial percentage of which the claimants are entitled to in benefit. So much for the Labour government's plans for 'improving' the lives of the poorest sections of the working class.

KEVIN CLARKE
Manchester

US prison activist to be released

I'm writing to let you know that on 16 December 2003 I'll be getting out of prison after almost 17 years. Most of that time I have received FRFI, which I found informative and useful for my political development and education. If FRFI is available on the internet, I will be a regular reader there. I will be continuing as the editor of *Prison Legal News* after my release. At some point I hope to travel to England and meet you, as well as the other comrades I have met over the years.

In struggle

PAUL WRIGHT
PO Box 7001,
Monroe WA 98272, US

Labour racism

Minister for Europe Denis MacShane's statement that 'It is time for the elected and community leaders of British Muslims to make a choice: it is the British way – based on political dialogue and non-violent protests – or it is the way of the terrorists, against which the whole democratic world is now uniting' represented a rabid racist attack on the Muslim population of Britain and was an insult to his own Asian constituents in Rotherham. How fitting that he should now be president of the Fabian Society, founded by Beatrice and Sidney Webb who, writing in defence of the British Empire in 1917 on behalf of the Labour Party, referred to the 'moral claims upon us of the non-adult races'.

JIM CROMPTON
Liverpool

Mandatory drug testing under fire

A test case due to go before a district judge within the next few months could spell disaster for the Prison Service, and may well mean that the whole Mandatory Drug Testing (MDT) system will have to be revised.

Gary Staggs was charged under Prison Rule 51 for failing to provide an unadulterated sample of urine for testing. The grounds for the charge were that his sample was deemed by Medscreen Laboratories to be 'inconsistent with human urine', and the level of creatinine in it fell below the currently designated cut-off point.

The Independent Adjudicator took the unusual step of allowing Staggs' solicitors to call and cross-examine a scientist from Medscreen, the company

contracted by the Prison Service to carry out tests on prisoners' urine samples. The case was adjourned for this to be arranged.

Eminent toxicologist Professor Forrest, of the University of Sheffield, is expected to argue that studies have shown that it is possible for urine to have a creatinine level well below the current cut-off point.

The knock-on effect of this could mean that literally of hundreds of adjudications would have to be re-examined.

In a separate case before an Independent Adjudicator it was found that a prisoner had not disobeyed a lawful order by failing to produce a sample for urine testing. The Adjudicator heard that after four hours the prisoner had not managed to

produce a sample, although he had tried to do so on several occasions.

Provisions exist to allow the prisoner an extra hour if the staff believe s/he is genuinely experiencing difficulties. In this case, even with the extra hour the prisoner was unable to produce the sample and, as a matter of routine, was placed on report. The Adjudicator concluded that since the prisoner had tried to produce a sample on several occasions and staff had given him the extra hour in the belief he was experiencing genuine difficulties, he had obeyed the order as far as he was able to.

JOHN SHELLEY
HMP Whitmoor

Repressive prisons in Spain

Spain – a great place for holidays or retirement? Wrong. Franco may be dead but the poorer Spanish people still cower beneath his over-present shadow.

There's no social security system for them, and no money equals no food. Poor people here live in abandoned houses with no sanitation. Illiteracy is high, encouraged even. Uneducated people don't read newspapers or write letters of protest. They sign anything put in front of them, often with just an X, with no idea what they've signed. Meanwhile, the Spanish state is building ever-more prisons to lock them up as they are forced to steal to feed

their children.

The Spanish legal system is nepotistic and corrupt. It's guilty until proven innocent and as the courts don't order investigations, and lawyers are just another screw in the fascist machine, proving your innocence is difficult. Even if you appeal, you are forbidden to speak. Worse still are the clandestine appeals where the defendant may not appear and often even the lawyer only sends in a written appeal.

It is possible to be remanded in custody for four years before trial. Up to two years is commonplace. Bail is difficult to obtain, and can cost thousands of pounds.

Spanish prisons have bad conditions, incessant violations of human rights, threats of reprisals for speaking out, a heart-wrenching lack of hope or vision for the future. How do I know? I'm writing from a prison cell. Six years ago I called the Guardia Civil to a crime that had occurred in my home in my provable absence. Subsequently my husband-to-be died. There was no investigation. I was brutalised by the Guardia Civil, threatened at gunpoint and knife-point. I've been through every legal process in Spain and seen the incompetence and corruption for myself. I've seen so many prisons. I'm moved around because I'm still fighting to prove my innocence and am deemed to be subversive. I have a sentence of 11

years. By the time it is complete, I'll be 59. I am appealing to Strasbourg, where my lawyers are citing 78 violations of my rights. What happened to me could happen to anyone, and it does. I am not the only victim of Spanish fascism.

The only way to defeat fascism is by standing up to it and not being afraid. I would say to anyone who suffers oppression, anyone who suffers violations of their rights by the police, courts or prisons, to do something. Whatever organisations are available, use them. The biggest failure in life is not trying.

SUSI GOOCH
MOD Mujeres, Penitenciera Villena,
Alicante, Spain

Squatters' rights under attack

Under the European Convention on Human Rights, everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life and his home. In this country, the Homelessness Act 2002 lays a duty on local housing authorities to formulate a homelessness strategy and take responsibility for the allocation of housing accommodation.

Why then, are the residents of St Agnes Place (SAP), in south London, being evicted from their homes? These houses are public property. As stated above, Lambeth council has a legal obligation to house its homeless residents. Yet that same council is now making these people

homeless.

SAP's story is one of a self sustained, pro-active community who throughout the last 30 years of housing and homelessness crisis have created a grassroots alternative solution to the problem.

In 1976 the houses were compulsorily purchased by Lambeth council. They were condemned for demolition with a view to redeveloping the area. Community activists at the time occupied the derelict properties with the rationale that properties were desperately needed to house the increasing number of homeless people in the area where there is a huge shortage of

affordable housing.

For the next three years, in the face of council intimidation, lying, bullying, wrecking and criminal damage, the residents resisted eviction and demolition. In 1979, having wasted nearly £2 million, Lambeth council finally conceded defeat.

Since then the residents have, out of their own resources and initiative, preserved, rebuilt and maintained the street that was condemned and wrecked by Lambeth Council.

As a result SAP has, for over a quarter of a century provided a home to hundreds of people. It has been a life-line for individuals, families and travellers alike, all of whom would have been homeless otherwise. Where the council has

failed in its duty to house people, St Agnes Place has succeeded.

The council want to change this. Having shown no interest in the welfare of SAP since 1979 they are now trying to evict the residents again. The estimated £550,000 of taxpayers' money already wasted on legal fees to prove title will now increase as Lambeth spend thousands more, if not millions, to physically evict the 200 residents.

The eviction of SAP must be resisted. This community, cost effective, self-sufficient and proactive, highlights what can be achieved when people think for themselves and come together to provide an alternative solution to a previously 'insoluble' problem.

SAP supporter
www.stagnesplace.org

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
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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

The latest measures, announced in time for the Queen's Speech, involve once again the withdrawal of welfare benefit. Benefits have already been withdrawn from would-be refugees who cannot prove they claimed asylum immediately on arrival in this country and from those who registered a claim but refused to then be 'dispersed' to far-flung parts of the UK, away from relatives or community support. Now it is asylum applicants whose initial claim has failed and who are awaiting appeal who are being targeted.

As soon as an asylum application has been rejected, the applicant will be 'offered' a flight back to their country of origin. If they don't accept this, all benefits will be withdrawn in an attempt to starve them into leaving. The government has a statutory legal obligation to not permit children to be destitute, and its cynical way of fulfilling this whilst putting yet more pressure on parents to take their whole family and leave the country, will be to force the children of failed asylum seekers into care. They will then be permitted to remain until they reach the age of 18, when they will be forcibly deported.

The government has already engineered a situation whereby the refusal of state support to asylum seekers (under the now infamous Section 55 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act) can only be challenged through the courts on an individual basis. On 25 October a High Court judge lambasted Home Secretary David Blunkett for claiming he had no power to provide emergency accommodation for destitute asylum seekers, after a meeting of 18 judges expressed extreme concern about the flood of 'avoidable' claims. The court is dealing with up to 60 challenges per week and in about 90% of cases grants emergency assistance pending a full hearing. There is a backlog of

Blunkett attacks refugee families

On 24 October the Home Office announced it will be granting indefinite leave to remain to 15,000 refugee families who have been in Britain for more than three years. However this was not the reversal of years of progressively more vicious attacks on immigrants by successive governments, but simply a pragmatic clearing of the decks prior to the introduction of yet more attacks, particularly on families who arrived later than those covered by the amnesty. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.



Home Secretary Blunkett: 'fighting racism' with more racism

800 such applications, which constitutes approximately half the total workload of the High Court.

Having created this situation where refugees have to take legal action if they want to eat, the govern-

ment now plans to restrict access to legal advice. This is publicly touted as a clampdown on 'unscrupulous immigration lawyers', of whom there are indeed plenty; however the real aim is not to prevent asylum seekers

getting bad legal advice, but to prevent them getting any advice at all.

Other anti-immigrant measures likely to be implemented in this session of parliament include reducing the number of appeals allowed against failed asylum applications, speeding up deportation of those who have previously claimed asylum in a third 'safe' country, and creating a criminal offence of arriving in Britain without travel documents.

This last measure has already been tried and failed in a different form. The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act made it a criminal offence to use forged documents. In 1999 this was successfully challenged on the basis it was incompatible with Article 31 of the UN Convention on Refugees, which states asylum seekers should not be penalised for entering a country illegally. By this time up to 5,000 people had been imprisoned for the offence. Many are now seeking compensation and the bill for this could run into millions. In October a Kosovan couple was awarded £130,600 damages for loss of liberty, conditions of imprisonment, false imprisonment, injury to feelings and post-traumatic stress disorder. Once again, it is the government, not refugees, which is responsible for the creation of a huge legal bill to be paid by the taxpayer.

The government appears confident that those who arrive with no documents, or who have destroyed the documents they did possess, are not protected by the UN Convention, and can therefore be criminalised. It remains to be seen whether this too will be reversed and yet more compensation paid out for wrongful imprisonment.

Blunkett defended his plans in *The Guardian* of 27 November, ap-

pealing to the paper's liberal readership on the basis that tightening up immigration controls was 'good news for the left', as it reduces the 'ammunition... for the extreme right to fire'. 'If Labour ducks the challenges of security, migration and criminality, it hands power to the right-wingers who promise more authoritarian certainties.' In other words, the way to fight racism is by being a better-organised and cleverer racist.

This is the same old social fascist argument Labour has been using repeatedly over the last few years. On the one hand, Blunkett, and before him Jack Straw, have focussed on the xenophobic readers of the *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, feeding the prejudices of the very people who might be most attracted to vote for far right parties. At the same time, they have maintained Labour's appeal to the liberal intelligentsia by playing on *Guardian* and *Independent* readers' fears of a rise in overt right-wing militancy, and emphasising the government's commitment to the limited 'managed migration' of skilled key-workers – a reactionary concept in itself, as it drains resources from poor countries to service the needs of rich ones.

Blunkett's idea of 'good news for the left' could not be further from ours. Good news is not that Britain has managed to drastically cut the number of people seeking sanctuary here and stepped up the speed with which those whose asylum claims it rejects are deported. Good news would be an amnesty for all families and individuals seeking asylum here, the full restoration of benefits, an end to imprisonment and criminalisation of asylum seekers... Good news would be an end to all immigration controls and the overthrow of this racist Labour government. ■

British police, racist police

At the end of October 2003, the BBC broadcast yet another documentary exposing racism in the British police. Although it contained no surprises, for the terminally naive it was the first 'hard evidence' of police racism. CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

The *Secret Policeman* featured undercover journalist Mark Daly who had joined Greater Manchester Police (GMP) in January as a trainee at the Bruche national training centre in Warrington, Cheshire, where he led a double life for about seven months. During his time as a probationary constable he secretly filmed eight [out of 18] recruits expressing racist views such as that of PC Rob Pulling: 'A dog that is born in a barn is still a dog. A Paki born in Britain is still a fucking Paki.'

Pulling had earlier fantasised about running Asians over with a train, and had then fashioned himself a Ku Klux Klan-style hood from a pillowcase, and laughed: 'Shall we go next door [where the only Asian recruit was staying] and go [he made a stabbing movement]: "have that"? Other statements included: [Stephen Lawrence] fucking deserved it and his

mum and dad are a fucking pair of spongers'; '[Hitler] had the right idea, but he went about it the wrong way, mate'; 'He's a Paki and I'm stopping him 'cos I'm fucking English. If you did not discriminate you would be a shit copper'; 'Asians... Truthfully? Fuck them all off. I'll admit it, I'm a racist bastard. I don't mind black people. Asians? No.'

Government ministers' and senior police chiefs' response to the broadcast was predictable and familiar: damage limitation. The PCs concerned were either suspended or resigned. GMP launched a criminal investigation and every GMP officer was to get 'advice and information on how to conduct themselves' [sic]. A spokesman stated that the 'acceptance levels of racism in the police was zero.' Chief constables from every police force in England and Wales wrote to *The Guardian*, claim-

ing there was 'no room in the police service for any one with racist attitudes', and that they would 'not allow the core professional values of integrity, respect for diversity, compassion for others and commitment to public services to be tarnished by any individual seeking to join the service while not sharing those values'.

GMP Chief Constable Michael Todd wrote a 'hard-hitting' article in the local press, reminding us that the GMP had a 'comprehensive' race equality scheme and was 'the first in the country to appoint a race and diversity officer'. He declared himself 'disgusted', while his deputy Alan Green, was 'shocked, sickened, ashamed and saddened'. Sir John Stevens, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, was 'absolutely appalled' and had 'never seen that type of racism in 41 years in the force'. (He should go to the canteen more often.) Home Sec-

retary David Blunkett said the revelations were 'horrendous' and Home Office minister and local MP Hazel Blears was 'quite shocked.' Indeed 'shock waves were sent through the country', according to the media.

After the usual wailing and expressions of shock, a familiar message began to emerge: only a 'very small number' of police officers are racist and they have 'let [the police] down'; the police have 'robustly tackled racism in the service for many years'. Officers were 'horrified' and suspected that 'right-wing extremists' were 'infiltrating' the force, which was determined to 'root them out'. These asinine comments about 'infiltration' were repeated by some senior black officers, wheeled out for Operation Damage Control. The police showed their determination to 'root out' racism earlier in August, when they arrested the journalist Mark Daly. His home was raided and many items seized, including his notes, which had the names of the racist recruits. He was questioned for 20 hours, released on bail, and charged with deception to obtain pecuniary advantage – falsely obtaining his salary of around £14,000 – and criminal

damage to a police vest, by hiding a camera in it.

The police then launched a 'full-scale' investigation into every case handled by Daly during his four weeks as a trainee, including identifying all people he had come into contact with 'to establish how this may affect them'. Needless to say, there was no inquiry to identify people the racist recruits had come into contact with, and how they might have been affected.

A police spokesman called the BBC's actions 'indefensible', another claimed it was 'unethical journalism' and 'reprehensible behaviour' which may have 'breached people's human rights'. Daly had 'undermined the work of the police and... failed to act with integrity'; Chief Constable Todd deplored 'the BBC's outrageous waste of public funds'. David Blunkett called the BBC's actions a 'stunt'. He changed his tune after he saw the programme and apologised for his 'mistake', but later asked the BBC to 'examine its conscience'.

Perhaps the 'disgraced' PC Andy Hall of GMP spoke the real truth when he said: 'police are racist, mate, police are racist'. Yes, mate, we know. ■