

FIGHT RACISM!

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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IRAQ



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IMPERIALIST PLANS FALL APART

Writing on the Middle East and the Caucasus in *FRFI* 142 (April 1998) we said, 'the USA must use violence, sooner rather than later, if its position as the dominant imperial power is not to be undermined'. Six years later the *Financial Times* carries the headline 'US asks private groups to ease bullet shortage'. The US defence contractor General Dynamics proposed a solution, 'pulling together several small bullet suppliers - including Winchester, a unit of Olin Corporation; Israel Military Industries; and Canada's SNC Technologies - to meet the army's gap. "We're using so much ammunition in Iraq there isn't enough capacity around" said Eric Hugel, a defence industry analyst at Stephens Inc. "They have to go internationally".' (*Financial Times*, 27 May 2004). **TREVOR RAYNE** reports.

The Iraqi interim government drafted in at the end of June is not working and for all the bullets fired by US and British troops they are not winning. The terrain that the US and British

states have taken is not subdued and they cannot govern it. In fact, they are losing that terrain.

In a tape timed to coincide with the third anniversary of 11 September, Bin Laden's associate Al Zawahri said, 'southern and eastern Afghanistan have completely become an open field for the mujahedeens... The Americans are huddled in their trenches refusing to confront the holy warriors despite the holy warriors shelling, shooting and cutting the routes around them.' The US has lost 135 soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Bin Laden has not been captured. Elections scheduled for October are implausible with much of Afghanistan out of government control and reports of people making multiple registrations to vote.

The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff said in early September that it would be months before the US and Iraqi security forces would be able to take back cities such as Falluja and Ramadi. About half a dozen Iraqi cities plus Sadr City in Baghdad, with a population of two million people, are described as 'no-go areas' for the occupation armies and interim government forces. They are no go areas in the sense that Falluja and Najaf were no-go areas in April this year: the occupation armies could only take them by flattening them and this is politically unacceptable. The US and British states will use the interim government and the media to open the political space to launch all-out assaults on these centres of resistance.

On 7 September the number of US



Al Sadr supporters protesting against an attack on the main mosque in Kufa

fatalities in action in Iraq exceeded 1,000, with the Pentagon admitting to 7,000 wounded. Many of these soldiers would have died from their wounds in the Korean and Vietnam wars through the loss of one or all of their limbs. US troops are now being attacked on average 60 times a day, up 20% on the average for the three months before the 'transfer' to the interim government. The Brookings Institute puts the number of attacks on foreign forces in Iraq at 400 in February and a record 1,500 in August. US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld said that this increase was to be expected as the proposed January elections for a Constituent Assembly approached. Previously Rumsfeld had said that the increase in attacks was to be expected as the transfer of sovereignty to the interim government approached. Rumsfeld is attempting to conceal that the resistance is a gathering force. He conceded that the January elections may well exclude

parts of Iraq where there were 'greater challenges'.

The trend of US casualties in Iraq is rising; it tripled from August 2003 to August 2004 when 63 were killed. The numbers of US military killed in each month since the 'transfer of sovereignty' in June 2004 exceeds the number killed that month: 42 killed in June, 54 in July and 63 in August. British military deaths are put at 66. British forces are strategically stationed close to the main Iraqi oil terminals. British casualties can be expected to increase.

US estimates of the numbers of the resistance fighters have grown from 5,000 at the end of 2003 to 20,000 today. Numbers of US troops serving in Iraq have increased from 115,000 to 140,000 today. US estimates of the number of interim government forces have fallen from 200,000 to 95,000.

As in the 1920s when the British RAF bombed and strafed Iraqi villages, today the USAF depends on

aerial bombardment, targeting cities and locations otherwise impenetrable to US forces, for example Falluja, which the US bombs almost every day. The US claims it is killing 'insurgents' but Iraqis show us pictures of dead and injured children and civilians. Iraqi deaths from these attacks run into the hundreds each week. The use of 2,000 pound bombs and missiles in densely populated areas inevitably kills many people. The Iraqi death toll is estimated to be 12,000 to 14,000 civilians and 7,000 to 10,000 soldiers. However, using just mainstream British press reports I counted close to 300 dead in the week to 18 September. Iraq's ministry of health says 3,186 civilians were killed either by US-led forces or in 'terrorist attacks' between 5 April 2004 and 12 September. We hear nothing of the cancer deaths which will follow in the aftermath of the initial US and British assault when depleted uranium shells were used.

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Welcome...

'The capitalist Eden fits my description of hell. To destroy it will require cooperation and communion between our related parts; communion between colony and colony, nation and nation. The common bond will be the desire to humble the oppressor, the need to destroy capitalist man and his terrible, ugly machine...[there is] the desperate need for coordination against Amerikan fascism... International coordination is the key to defeating this thing that must expand to live.'

George Jackson, writing from Soledad Prison, 17 April 1970. Jackson was murdered by a prison guard in San Quentin prison on 21 August 1971.

Imperialism is a system. It is the concentration of capital and its expansion overseas. It is the exploitation of humanity and nature for profit. It is capitalist man's terrible, ugly machine that must expand to live. Imperialism is not a political party, an election manifesto or a presidential candidate – it is the economic system these politicians represent. Electing George Bush or John Kerry (see page 9) or Tony Blair is electing a representative to protect the interests of capital and clear the way for further brutal exploitation, oppression and war. In this way, we are connected to the horror and destruction wreaked by the imperialist system. When we resist capitalist man at home, we are uniting in a common bond with the victims of imperialism in the desire to humble the oppressor.

When the Stop the War Coalition was rolled out in Britain, excited social democrats exclaimed that this movement would match the anti-Vietnam war movement in strength. There were many years of bloodshed and imperialist violence leaving millions of Vietnamese dead before the anti-Vietnam war movement in the US and Europe became a significant force. We cannot allow this to happen with Iraq. So where is the anti-war movement today? In the US the anti-war movement is radicalising

into an anti-imperialist movement and is heckling the great presidential election show (see page 3). But where is the opposition in Britain? Where is our anger? 'Not in my name' was the anti-war movement's slogan. But now the demonstrations have stopped and the imperialist plunder goes on...in our name.

Every day we see this terrible, ugly machine operating in Iraq where the occupation force drops 2,000 pound bombs and missiles into densely populated areas, leaving piles of civilians as twisted corpses. Where is our anger? The Iraqi people resist imperialist occupation alone. Driven by the desire to humble the oppressor the Iraqi resistance fighters are now estimated at 20,000 (see front page and page 3).

Where is our anger at the massacre and humiliation of Palestinians by the brutal Israeli state? The public is told that the issue is too complex to take sides and that the blame lies equally. Between mid-March and the end of August this year there were no suicide attacks against Israelis so this was referred to as 'a period of calm'. In reality, during this 'lull' in violence 436 Palestinians were killed, 73 of them children, compared to 30 Israeli deaths. Clearly, both sides are not equal. Israel has the third mightiest military force in the world – Palestinians do not even have an army to resist the illegal occupation of their land. Israeli snipers carry out death sentences on Palestinian children for throwing stones at bulldozers the size of houses that come to demolish their homes (see page 5).

Where is our anger? And where is the support for the campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada? We face weekly harassment from Zionist and fascist thugs, the local council and complicit police (see page 14). Where is the Stop the War Coalition?

Imperialism is wreaking havoc across the globe, not just in the Middle East. In Africa, a continent that has been bled dry by colonialism and imperialism over 400 years, capitalist man is sharpening his claws, drawing blood from a

land rich with oil and minerals needed for western industry and communications (see page 10). The result is truly terrible and ugly. A new imperialist race for Africa has unleashed the dogs of war (see page 4).

Plunder of Africa becomes increasingly frenzied given the resistance to imperialism in Latin America. In Venezuela the unity of the poor and oppressed majority and the revolutionary vanguard of the Bolivarian Revolution, led by President Hugo Chavez, recorded a historic victory. In mid-August they roundly defeated a referendum called by Venezuela's vicious capitalist class to demand Chavez's removal from office (see page 8).

Following the victory in Venezuela, the poor and oppressed of Bolivia took to the streets demanding the nationalisation of their natural gas and petroleum resources and an end to imperialist plunder (see page 6).

The Latin American revolutionaries look to socialist Cuba as a beacon of hope. Despite increased aggression from the US and severe hurricane damage, Cuba continues to strengthen the gains of the Revolution (see page 7).

And what is there to say of resistance to capitalism/imperialism in Britain; while our prisons are bursting with working class and black people (see page 13), while Asian youth suffer a 300 percent increase in police harassment and immigrants are branded terrorists by a racist sensationalist press (see page 16), while travellers and Roma gypsies are criminalised (see page 16), while the NHS is sold to the highest bidder (see page 12), and where women's right to choose is under attack (see page 16)? Where is our anger? We need to unite with the oppressed of the world, fighting back against capitalism's ugly machine to humble our oppressor. We need to start today.

Don't just get angry, get active! Join FRFI! Send your contributions – written and financial:

**Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism
BCM Box 5909
London WC1N 3XX**

Zionists fuel racism in France

All kinds of manipulation by politicians and the media are being used to stigmatise France's Arab and Muslim community, preventing them from being accepted as a part of society.

On 9 July 2004 a young woman claimed six Africans, including three North Africans, had attacked her and her 13-month-old baby girl on a Parisian train. She claimed they took her bag, stole the money and found an ID Card with an address in the 16th district of Paris on it. That part of Paris being mainly occupied by members of the upper class, they allegedly branded her as Jewish. And then, according to the so-called victim, the nightmare began: they allegedly abused her with anti-Semitic words, tore up her shirt and trousers with a knife and drew swastikas all over her body – this in front of other passengers, who did nothing. She explained to the police how, once the train stopped, the young men escaped, but not without throwing her baby from the pram onto the platform first.

It took just a few hours for this story to generate condemnation from all political parties and stigmatise the Arab-Muslim community, specifically those from North Africa. That minority was depicted as anti-Semitic, violent, alienated and a dangerous threat to the Republic.

Many people took advantage of that story to perpetuate the equation used by Zionists that anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are the same. The President of the Representative Council of Jewish Organisations in France rushed to criticise imams; the Israeli ambassador proclaimed that there are 1.8 million Muslim extremists in France; Julien Dray, spokesperson for the French Socialist Party, blamed Oumma.com. This is one of the very few websites on which French Muslims can express themselves – that is when Zionists do not manage to overload the servers. The Minister of Education even linked the story to the issue of the veil!

More emphasis was put on the ethnic origin of the alleged perpetrators than on the act itself – an act that obviously anyone would have condemned, had any of it been true. Instead, it transpired the young woman had mental health problems and the story was a figment of her imagination.

This is not the only manipulation of this sort that has occurred in France.

The 'Harry Potter Affair' was a scandal around a Zionist organisation that organised a showing of the movie Harry Potter for Jewish children. A small group of people opposed to the ideology of the organisation protested and were branded as anti-Semitic by all the French media, none of whom explained that the money was being raised to finance an Israeli settlement.

On 3 January 2004, Rabbi Gabriel Farhi said he had been stabbed in the belly while inside the synagogue. Needless to say that everybody immediately jumped to the conclusion this was an anti-Semitic action perpetrated by a Muslim. However, it is now thought by the police that a right-wing Jewish organisation carried out the attack specifically to incriminate the French Arab-Muslim community.



The 'Gagny Affair' concerned the burning down of a small warehouse next to a Jewish school. Journalists looking for a scoop had no qualms about claiming it was part of the school or calling it a classroom, despite being perfectly aware that this was not true. Not a single shred of evidence supporting the theory of an anti-Semitic attack has ever been found, and investigators have only managed to link the fire to an insurance fraud. Nonetheless, several politicians directly accused the Muslim community and the media used the story again and again. The result was that the morning after the fire the government created an inter-ministerial commission against anti-Semitism. The fact that the anti-Semitic character of the fire has never been established has been completely ignored!

We could also point to the pathetic efforts of Axel Moise, President of the Zionist Federation in France, to falsely accuse the Muslim community of anti-Semitism by sending himself anti-Semitic letters. He was eventually charged and convicted for this.

The scare stories are numerous and are always picked up on by both the media and the politicians. For the last few months there have been many terrorist attacks on shops, restaurants and houses belonging to members of the Arab-Muslim community of Corsica. The media has not considered these explosions and murders to be important and no political mobilisation against those racist and Islamophobic attacks has ever taken place, with the exception of a small protest on 18 September at which no political group, except the Communist Party, was present.

The MRAP (Movement against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples) does not even have figures for the number of racist attacks against North Africans or Muslims. However, we know that in Corsica as much as on the continent, the incidence of racist attacks against Muslims and Arabs is growing very fast, especially since the events of 11 September 2001.

Anti-Semitism, like any other form of racism, has to be taken seriously. It is outrageous to witness political organisations and associations exploiting anti-Semitism to further their own agenda, which includes keeping the Arab-Muslim community in France in a state of permanent exclusion and guaranteeing support for Zionism. There is no hierarchy of racism – either we condemn all forms of racism or we don't. In France, it seems that we don't...

Halima Djedid

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

FRFI fund

We continue to need your generous donations

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 campaign tirelessly in support of the Palestinian Intifada. We work with all those who want to build a new movement which genuinely represents the interests of the working class and oppressed. In this, your financial support remains vital. Please continue to dig deep!

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IRAQ

IMPERIALIST PLANS FALL APART

continued from page 1

The resistance

Resistance from among the Sunni population is Ba'athist, nationalist and Islamic. Shia resistance is led by the cleric Moqtada Al Sadr and the Mahdi militia. Noticeably, in August the number of attacks on occupying forces by Shias are thought to have exceeded those launched by Sunnis. During the three-week US siege of Najaf approximately 400 civilians were killed and 2,500 wounded. At least 10 US soldiers were killed.

Ayatollah Sistani and other leading clerics remained silent throughout the three-week siege, thereby tacitly endorsing the US and interim government attack on Al Sadr's forces. Sistani and the interim government are supported by the middle classes, wealthier and better-educated Iraqis. Sistani had an operation in Britain then returned to Iraq from London, landing in British-controlled Basra. The Mahdi militia is supported by poor Shia and poor Sunni alike. At the end of August, when Al Sadr and the militia agreed to stop fighting and transfer control of Najaf to Sistani and his associates, fighting flared up between the Mahdi militia and US troops in Sadr City. This continues today. Al Sadr's representatives demanded that US forces keep out of Sadr City and they did not.

So the resistance does have a definite class component. The Al Sadr supporters are described as more 'nationalist' than Sistani and those around the interim government. What this means is that the poor, the working class tend towards being more anti-imperialist than the middle class and the bourgeoisie.

The economy

Oil exports and supplies of cooking oil and electricity are not improving. During August attacks on oil installations left Iraq's oil exports at their lowest level for a year. Oil exports were one million barrels per day in August compared to 1.8 million barrels per day in March and April. There are no prospects of France, Germany, Russia and others forgiving Iraq's foreign debt when there are no prospects of a compensatory share of the oil revenues or a share that is too risky. Similarly, there are no prospects for NATO or other foreign troop assistance to the US and Britain when there are no prospects of getting a share of the oil wealth.

Faced with the disaster that is the war on Iraq the UN Secretary General managed to summon up the courage to declare the war illegal (18 months too late) and the *Financial Times* editorial of 10 September declared, 'Time to consider Iraq withdrawal.' The FBI and CIA have exposed an Israeli spy ring inside the Pentagon. These developments reflect serious doubts in the US and British ruling classes. Nevertheless, the US and British governments show no sign of relinquishing what they hope will be lucrative prizes in Iraq and the Middle East.

There are two factors to consider. Firstly, the fragmented state of the resistance, which may contribute to a fragmented Iraq, and its lack of a clear anti-imperialist programme based on

the working class and oppressed. This may mean the resistance is insufficient and does not mobilise enough forces to dislodge the imperialist forces. Secondly, the relative weakness of the opposition to the war in the US and Britain. The two factors are combined: the stronger the anti-war movement in the US and Britain the easier it will be for the Iraqi resistance to drive the occupation armies out.

The war has cost the US over \$120 billion over the past year and the US death toll keeps rising. However, it is not apparently sufficient, as yet, to provoke sustained opposition to the war and a movement on the streets as developed against the Vietnam War. US military death statistics reveal that over half of those killed since President Bush declared Mission Accomplished on 1 May 2003 are aged between 18 and 24 years. Of total US fatalities 70% are of white people, 13% are black people, 12% Hispanic and 2% Asian and indigenous Americans. There is no great dis-

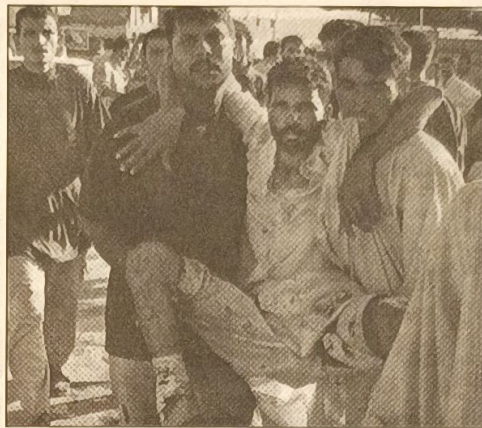
proportion of black and Hispanic fatalities in the war compared to the composition of the total US population, unlike in the Vietnam War.

The US army is not a conscript army as it was in Vietnam. Then black soldiers and returning US soldiers were a key part of the growth of opposition to the US war in Vietnam. However, we can expect families of soldiers currently serving in Iraq to be central to any growth in opposition to the occupation war. Many of the families of British soldiers killed in Iraq have spoken against the war.

Any opposition to the war will be fuelled by the worsening economic and social conditions in the US. President Bush has presided over the greatest loss of US jobs since the 1930s Great Depression. In the US the number of people pushed into poverty was 1.3 million in 2003. The number of people living in poverty is 36 million; one in eight. 35 million people are described as 'food insecure', that is they are hungry and 45 million peo-

ple have no health insurance, up 1.4 million in 2003. Median annual US income per capita has fallen by \$1,511 since Bush became President.

Writing in the *Financial Times* Martin Woolf states 'Let us be blunt about it. America is now on the comfortable path to ruin' (18 August 2004). The US current account deficit has reached an annual rate of \$600 billion (over 5% of the US economy). US foreign debt is \$2.5 trillion, this means massive transfers of US income abroad. The US budget deficit is also almost 5% of the economy – and growing. It can only be reversed by cuts in spending and more tax revenue. Ultimately, US capitalism must attack the US working class and fight ever more ferociously to defend its position as the world's dominant power. The bellicose Labour Prime Minister Blair declared the intention of the British government to fight the wars to come alongside US imperialism before the US Congress in July 2003. He said, '11 September was not



an isolated event, but a tragic prologue, Iraq another act, and many further struggles will be set upon this stage before it's over. There never has been a time when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood.' ■

Hostages in Iraq – liberation or occupation?

In September kidnappers who seized two US citizens and the British engineer Ken Bigley, demanded the release of Iraqi women prisoners or the hostages would be killed.

The only women prisoners that the coalition admitted to holding were two women scientists who were imprisoned for working on the Ba'athist regime's weapons programme.

The two US hostages were murdered but on 22 September the Iraqi interim government Justice Minister said there were plans to release one of the women prisoners held in US custody. The interim government's national security adviser said both women would be released for lack of evidence against them.

The hostage crisis worsened as the US quickly countermanded the Iraqis, stating that the women were under their control – despite the fact that all prisoners of war should have been either released or handed over to Iraqi control as charged criminals. The US said they definitely would not be released and in less than 24 hours the Iraqi interim government had changed its mind. So much for liberation.

As we go to press the ordeal for Ken Bigley and his family continues.

US anti-war movement at the crossroads

The US anti-war movement is currently facing a serious test with the build-up to the presidential elections in November. The main test will be in its ability to maintain an anti-imperialist standpoint and thus a principled position in regard to the elections. September saw a week of protest centred around the ruling Republican Party's National Convention (RNC) in New York. An examination of the forces involved is necessary to measure their effectiveness in building a genuine movement against imperialism.

New York has a history of militant protests. In 1964 Harlem was the scene of the first post-1945 mass urban uprising against racism and police repression. 40 years on, the RNC began on 26 August and marked the beginning of a week that would see dozens of different protests. On the evening of 27 August the monthly 'critical mass' bike ride grew into hundreds. As a taste of things to come the protest was attacked by police and over 260 were arrested. Another protest centred around an 8,000-strong unemployment line.

Two days later saw a climax as 500,000 marched to the RNC at Madison Square Gardens. This day saw countless other demonstrations. Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) Coalition applied for a permit to hold a rally in Central Park – this was refused but ANSWER held the demo anyway in defiance of police orders. This militancy stands in stark contrast to the Stop the War Coalition's behaviour in Britain, where the



San Francisco anti-war demonstration

protest outside the Labour Party Conference in Manchester followed a route devised by the police and the destination was half a mile away from the conference!

On the night of 29 August activists attempting to confront Republican delegates partying on Broadway were attacked by riot police. Those arrested included 25 activists holding a 'kiss-in'. Every time an arrest was attempted, stiff resistance was met. The following day a 'Still We Rise Coalition' march was stopped by police for entering a street without a permit and after militant resistance the police backed down.

Under the auspices of the 'war on terror' New York police and the Bush administration used all the means at their disposal to forestall a militant Seattle-type protest. Their friends in the media endorsed the gross violations of democratic rights and police-

state tactics just as they cheered on US aggression in Iraq. \$75million was spent on one week's 'security'. 30,000 police were deployed and advanced weaponry and crowd control techniques used. By 1 September 1,460 people had been arrested (official figures) but the fact that demonstrations continued all week is a defeat for the government. The Conference itself was heavily guarded but despite this it was infiltrated twice by protesters who managed to get within 15 feet of the stage.

However, there is a visible split in the US anti-war movement between an anti-imperialist wing, led by ANSWER, and liberal reformists, United For Peace and Justice (UFPJ). The latter has pledged support for the idea of a UN-led coalition in Iraq, places much more emphasis on the number of US soldiers killed than Iraqis, and has attempted to prevent the issue of

Palestine being raised at a number of demonstrations. The UFPJ is also leaning towards the opportunistic 'Anyone but Bush' camp in the coming election.

The ANSWER Coalition, unlike its British counterpart, the Stop the War Coalition, has maintained a principled anti-imperialist standpoint. It was formed after 11 September when other groups had refused to continue with previously-planned demonstrations. The fact that ANSWER has broad support from the most oppressed sections of US society, including the Arab-American community, and that it has fought successfully to prevent support for the Intifada being sidelined, is indicative of the Coalition's strength. Its current slogan is 'Iraq, Haiti, Afghanistan, Korea, Philippines, Colombia, Cuba... US OUT! FREE PALESTINE!' and it maintains a stance against both the Republicans and Kerry's Democrats in the presidential election.

The future of the US anti-war movement is at stake unless this anti-imperialist position is maintained. Planned demonstrations include a two-day march for immigrant and labour rights in Los Angeles and Washington on 16 and 17 October called by Latino Movement USA and supported by ANSWER. ANSWER has organised a big protest for 20 January in Washington DC when the elected President will be inaugurated 'demanding from the first day of office, regardless of who is elected: End the occupation of Iraq! Bring the troops home now!'

Louis Brehony

An African enigma

THOMAS ATKINS

Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war
(William Shakespeare)

When the news of the attempted coup in Equatorial Guinea was reported in the British media, we were not told the full truth, which made the account sound like the plot of a novel. Now this truth is coming out and we can piece together what went on, and the riddle is solved.

Equatorial Guinea is a former Spanish colony on the west coast of Africa. Although the majority of the 500,000 inhabitants live in dire poverty, it has among the largest oil reserves in sub-Saharan Africa.

In March, Simon Mann, a British citizen and resident of South Africa, was arrested at Harare airport, Zimbabwe. Mann is an heir to the Watney's brewing fortune, an Old Etonian and a former SAS captain, gunrunner and mercenary. He owns a Channel Island-registered company called Executive Outcomes which has provided mercenary troops to fight in Angola and Sierra Leone. The company has a subsidiary called Sandline which was set up with former Scots Guards Lieutenant Colonel Tim Spicer. Sandline was involved in the 'arms to Sierra Leone' scandal in the 1990s.

When Mann was arrested he was meeting a privately-chartered Boeing 727 which had 66 South African and three Armenian mercenaries on board. Mann has been sentenced to seven years, after pleading guilty to trying to illegally purchase £100,000 worth of small arms. His colleagues got a year for entering



Mark Thatcher – arrested in South Africa

Zimbabwe illegally. In Equatorial Guinea, 19 mercenaries, led by Nick du Toit – an apartheid Special Forces soldier – have been arrested and are on trial. This group was an advance party, carrying out the tasks of a reconnaissance platoon.

The plot was to oust the president, Obiang, and install exiled opposition leader Severo Moto.

Mann is not a military incompetent. He was trained at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and at Stirling Lines, Hereford, the SAS headquarters.

He would know that after striking the initial blow, he could not survive any counterattack unless he had support. That is the puzzle.

But in fact he did have support. On the day the coup was supposed to take place – 8 March – Spanish warships entered Equatorial Guinea territorial waters. On board one ship, according to the New Zealand *Sunday Herald*, were 500 Spanish marines, that is, a battalion. They could have invaded under the cover of 'restoring order'.

Mann has confessed that MI6, the

CIA and Spanish 'intelligence' were a party to the plot. While the Foreign Office is denying any knowledge of the attempted coup, there was a meeting in London at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in February. The subject was the future of Equatorial Guinea. At least one government official was present, along with oil industry representatives. According to the *The Observer*, there was an active discussion about rumours of coup plots.

US oil giant Exxon Mobil has many of the drilling rights in Equatorial

Guinea. The coup would have cemented those rights and given the company an even bigger stake, much to the dismay of French-owned Elf Aquitaine. The French secret service tipped off Pretoria who informed Zimbabwe of Mann's activities. So we also have inter-imperialist rivalries involved.

Crause Steyl, a South Africa-based, top-gun mercenary pilot, has turned state's evidence in South Africa. It was Steyl's brother Neil who was the pilot of the 727. Steyl is a friend of Sir Mark Thatcher, the son of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher invested \$250,000 in the adventure through a company called Triple A and a company owned by Mann called Logo Ltd. Thatcher is claiming that Triple A stands for Air Ambulance Africa. The problem with that is that this is a routine cover story for mercenary helicopter operations in Africa. Thatcher is currently on bail in South Africa awaiting trial or extradition.

On 7 March – the eve of the intended coup – Steyl, in a King Air 200 South African-registered plane flown by a stunt pilot, accompanied president-in-waiting Moto to the Spanish-owned Canary Islands and then flew to Bamako, the capital of Mali, to await news of the coup. The Spanish prime minister at the time was Aznar, a pro-US, extreme right-winger. Aznar and Moto have been friends for over 20 years.

Instead of telling the public what is really going on – that the US and Britain, using Spain as proxy, were involved in a plot to invade yet another oil-rich sovereign state – the media feed us nonsense. Yet again they roll out the 'brutal regime' excuse. Note the word 'regime', signalling to the masses that they don't approve of the government they refer to. There was also racist rubbish about cannibalism. But when the story is traced back, it originates with Moto.

One thing can be guaranteed: any coup-led imperialist intervention would not have improved things for the people. They would have remained dirt poor, in an oil-rich country.

Kurdish national liberation movement at a crossroads

SORES AXFANOZ

The invasion and occupation of Iraq by the US/UK affects the whole of the Middle East, and in particular the Kurdish liberation movement. In southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Massoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jela Talabani have openly collaborated with the US since the first Gulf War and assisted the invasion of Iraq in the hope that southern Kurdistan would become an independent state. However, recent developments in the region raise questions about the future of the liberation struggle in the Turkish-occupied north of Kurdistan. The Kurdish national movement has to decide between continued opposition to the forces of occupation or an attempt at 'partnership' with them.

On 9 August, having previously left the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) the brother of gaoled PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan established a breakaway group, the Patriotic Democratic Party (PWD).

The Kurdish national liberation movement has gone through a bizarre period since the capture of Ocalan in 1999. In that year the PKK unilaterally ceased the armed struggle, however it then ended this ceasefire on 1 June this year. It appears that this move was opposed by Osman Ocalan, who fell out with the guerrilla forces in the moun-



tains of northern Iraq and subsequently sought refuge in the Iraqi city of Mosul together with some other former senior PKK members, including Nizamettin Tas and Kani Yilmaz. (Kani Yilmaz was the European leader of the ERNK, and between 1994 and 1996 was detained in Belmarsh prison in south London, awaiting extradition to Germany. FRFI was involved in the campaign for his release. After a prolonged legal battle, he was extradited; however charges against him in Germany were subsequently dropped and he was granted refugee status there.)

The PKK was set up by Kurdish and Turkish revolutionaries who were inspired by the Cuban and Vietnamese

revolutions. However, as the sole organisation involved in the modern Kurdish national liberation movement the PKK is compelled to embrace a diverse range of groups and political elements from all aspects and classes of Kurdish society.

The PKK came into existence as a party in Fis in the county of Amed (Diyarbakir) on 27 November 1978. Two years later a military coup took place in Turkey and in northern Kurdistan. This coup wiped out all Turkish and Kurdish left organisations other than the PKK. Even though the PKK too lost most of its rank and file, it had succeeded in protecting its leadership by sending them to Syria and Lebanon in

1979. This tactical retreat gave it the chance to regroup and revive itself in the Middle East between 1982 and 1984.

During this period there was also a successful hungerstrike in the prison at Amed. Winning this battle inside the fascist prison system represented a colossal triumph for the PKK and acted as a prelude to the taking up of arms against the Turkish state. The armed struggle was launched in 1984 but it wasn't until 1989 that the PKK became a popular movement in northern Kurdistan.

The armed struggle was interrupted in February 1999 by the capture of Abdullah Ocalan; since then the PKK has endeavoured to alter its strategies and tactics in an attempt to save its leader's life. This approach has involved putting a large amount of political energy into legal challenges in the European Court of Human Rights and changing the name of the party on two occasions.

The PKK has always been led by Abdullah Ocalan, and this continues despite his imprisonment. Likewise, as discussed above, the modern Kurdish national liberation struggle has always and only been led by the PKK. Prior to its formation the last Kurdish uprising was in 1938. What makes Ocalan and the PKK special is that they were able to translate Marxist-Leninist class struggle into guerrilla warfare within the historical and social context of a multi-divided Kurdistan. Successful guerrilla struggle drew substantial support from Kurdish people in the 1990s. As a result the PKK came to include all sections of the political spectrum: communist, socialist, religious, poor peasantry and even the middle classes.

This phenomenon put a heavy burden on the PKK, making it difficult to both continue the struggle, keeping all these disparate forces on board, and maintain its political structure. However, the intensity of the guerrilla struggle prevented middle class opportunism

developing its own independent political expression outside of the PKK. Nonetheless, in 1991-2 the faction that has now broken away first came into existence within the organisation.

After the capture of Abdullah Ocalan by the Turkish state, middle class politicians had more room to manoeuvre and, following the invasion of Iraq by the US, this clique had the perfect opportunity to form itself into a political party. To achieve this it needed to improve its relations with the KDP and PUK in northern Iraq, and wasted no time in doing so, even though these organisations had been notorious throughout their existence for attacking and killing members of other Kurdish parties.

The Kurdish struggle has always suffered greatly from a lack of international support and solidarity. The national liberation movement faces four different occupying states, which oppose one another, but all repress and slaughter the Kurds within their borders. It is not necessarily an oversimplification therefore when the Kurds say they have 'no friends but the mountains'.

On top of this, the demise of the Soviet Union has had an adverse effect on the Kurdish struggle, as it inevitably led to the weakening of Turkish and international left-wing movements. All this makes the Kurdish movement more vulnerable in the face of fascism, imperialism, religious fanaticism and Zionism.

The PKK has had to fight not only Turkish colonial fascism, but also US/EU imperialism and Zionism. This unprecedented military alliance against Kurdish national liberation has rendered the armed struggle unwinnable but this mighty alliance has nonetheless not succeeded in vanquishing the liberation movement. It remains to be seen to what degree current developments in the Middle East will lead to a restructuring of the PKK that precludes the armed struggle.

Zionists step up land grab

Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan may still face opposition in his Likud party and the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), but it now has the tacit support of the Israeli Labour Party, and it will happen. The 7,000 or so Gaza settlers will be offered substantial compensation to vacate the land they stole – up to £280,000, with a bonus if they move early. In the meantime, huge land grabs are underway on the West Bank. On 8 September, Israel's Agriculture Minister Israel Katz announced the seizure of 8,000 acres of land to expand settlements in the Jordan valley. Sharon is now seeking US approval to allow the annexation of the Ariel settlement bloc, Ma'ali Adomim bloc (east of Jerusalem) and Gush Etzion north of Hebron. This would be up to 25% of the West Bank. The annexation of the Ma'ali Adomim bloc which lies between Jericho and Jerusalem would cut off Hebron and Bethlehem regions from Ramallah. Bulldozers are now destroying farms and orchards in the southern West Bank, particularly around Hebron, to build the separation wall.

Whilst Sharon's adviser Dov Weisglass held talks with Colin Powell on 13 September on the annexation plans, moves are being made to clear the Negev, two-thirds of Israeli land mass, of its remaining Bedouin inhabitants to make way for displaced Gaza settlers. 1,000 residents of Atir have been told to leave the village 'vacant, without person, object or animal in the area'. They are not to be offered alternative accommodation since the Zionists claim under a 1965 planning law that they seized the land illegally – though they have farmed the area for generations. This is part of the Negev Development Plan: \$200m set aside to remove the last Bedouin farming communities, 70,000 people in all, from their land (see FRFI 173 for the background).

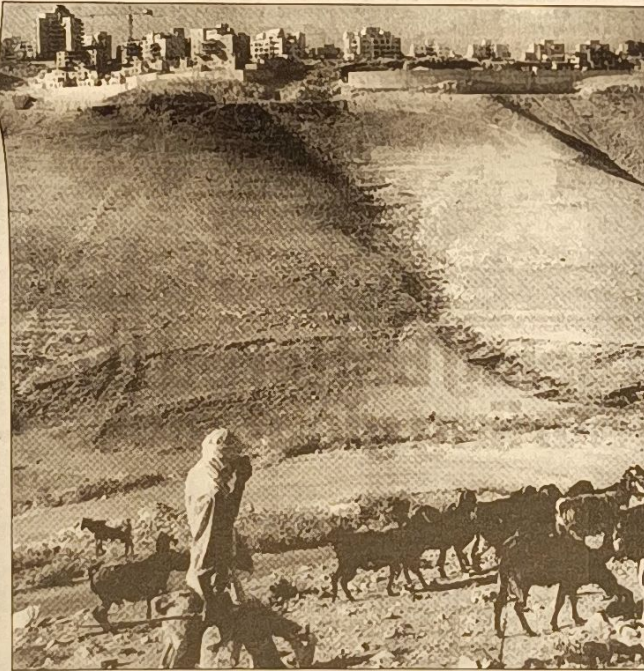
Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan has exposed the treacherous role of various factions of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In the last issue of FRFI we reported on demonstrations in Gaza against PA corruption, and on Ahmed Qureia's resignation as prime minister. Now it is evident that that demonstrations were orchestrated by Mohamed Dahlan, long a US and Zionist favourite within the ranks of the PA and Fatah. Dahlan proclaimed Sharon's plan as a victory for the Palestinian people, a withdrawal like 'the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon' in order to justify his collaboration with it. His attempt to jump on the anti-corruption bandwagon and launch a bid for power failed when Qureia withdrew his resignation. The irony was not lost on many Palestinians: Dahlan has made himself a millionaire by holding a monopoly on petrol imports from Israel into Gaza, a monopoly acquired from his former role as head of Gazan security forces.

Meanwhile, Fatah and PA leaders who had pinned their hopes on the Israeli 'peace camp' signatories of the Geneva Accords (FRFI 176) as a serious opposition to Sharon were to be disappointed. More than half the Israeli signatories of the Accords re-

Four years after the start of the present Intifada, the Zionists are stepping up their land grab in the West Bank. At the same time, they are attempting to expel Bedouin farmers from land they have cultivated for generations in the Negev to make room for more immigrants and settlers that will move out of Gaza. The death toll of Palestinians continues to rise against a back-drop of Zionist sabre-rattling against Syria and Iran. The prospect of military strikes against these countries is very real, as ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

fused to sign a PA statement demanding an end to the occupation as a whole and an end to construction of the separation wall. Instead they argued that the Gaza disengagement plan was a 'dramatic shift in Likud's position' and that the separation wall was a 'preventive measure against Palestinian attacks'. This reaction was proof yet again that Israeli Labour Zionists have no significant differences with Sharon and his Likud party.

killed and 57 injured, almost all of them soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories, according to Israel's Foreign Ministry. Yet this was of no importance for the racist press which showed once again that they care not a jot about the deaths of Palestinians. The Zionists did not wait long before striking back, killing 14 Hamas supporters on 7 September in Gaza, and six fighters and four civilians a week later in attacks on Jenin and Nablus. Nearly 60 Palestinians including a



Bedouins are being forced from their land to make way for Zionist settlements like this one at Ma'ali Adomim.

Throughout, the slaughter of the Palestinian people continued with the usual news blackout in the western media. The Hamas suicide attacks in Beersheba on 31 August drew forth an almost unanimous comment that the bombings had ended 'a period of calm' or a 'lull' in violence since the last suicide attack on 14 March in Ashdod. In this period:

- 436 Palestinians had been killed – as many as the number of Israelis killed in suicide attacks over the past four years;
- 73 of the dead were children;
- 71 had died in illegal assassinations, 23 of them civilian bystanders;
- 2,220 Palestinians had been seriously injured

During that time, 30 Israelis were

dozen children had been killed in the first three weeks of September – yet once again the racist press had lost interest.

More ominously, after the Beersheba attack and the deaths of Hamas fighters in Gaza, Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz declared that the 'terrorist headquarters' were not in Gaza but in Damascus. Colin Powell echoed this when he told the UN Security Council that Syria was 'partially accountable' for the Beersheba attack since it continued to allow Hamas leaders to live in the country. With the likely reference of Iran to the UN Security Council for its alleged nuclear weapons programme, the green light is being given to the Zionists for pre-emptive strikes against either country. The consequence will be a conflagration which will engulf the entire region.



Palestinian prisoners hunger-strike victory

On 3 September, Palestinian prisoners held by the Zionist occupation forces called off their hunger strike, which had lasted nineteen days. There are 7,500 Palestinian prisoners and detainees at present. 4,000 started the hunger-strike on 15 August in protest at their appalling treatment which continually breaches the Fourth Geneva Convention. Key demands included an end to torture, which is endemic; the institution of basic family visiting rights; adequate sanitation and health care; an end to the policy of solitary confinement and an end to the arbitrary fining of prisoners for alleged misdemeanours.

Mass mobilisations took place in both the West Bank and Gaza in support of the prisoners' actions. Related

ives joined in the hunger strike: the mother of one prisoner, Aisha Al Zabeen, died after 13 days. Although the Zionist prison authorities refused to enter into negotiations with the prisoners, they had no choice when it was evident that the hunger-strikers were determined to pursue their demands. Faced with losing control of the prisons and detention centres, the Israeli Prison Service backed down and met the principle demands of the hunger-strike. Time now will tell whether it honours its agreements.

Betar UK loses charity status

Betar, the rabid Zionist group that has been staging counter-protests against the London Victory to the Intifada pickets of Marks and Spencer has had its charitable status withdrawn by the Charity Commission. On 13 January, the Council for Arab-British Understanding complained to the Commission that Betar UK had circulated Robert Kilroy-Silk's infamous racist diatribe against Arab people. The Council followed this up with a further complaint about racist anti-Arab comments on the Betar website. On 5 August, the Charity Commission issued a statement that they found 'that the activities of the charity [Betar] appeared to be in furtherance of a political purpose rather than [a] charitable purpose'. It

also found that Betar had not filed accounts for the past four years with the Commission, nor did it have properly appointed trustees. It announced that it would be investigating whether Betar ever had a charitable purpose.

On 6 August, Betar issued a statement saying that it had 'voluntarily requested to be removed from the register of charities'. However, at the end of September, its website still claimed it was a registered charity in a desperate appeal for donations. Whilst its charitable status might be fraudulent, our opposition to Betar is because of its virulent racism and Zionism. It is not surprising that it has circulated Kilroy-Silk's opinions – they live in the same gutter.

Four years of the Intifada

28 September 2004 marks four years of the current Palestinian Intifada which started when six demonstrators were shot dead on 28 September 2000 protesting against Ariel Sharon's visit to the Haram Al Sharif in Jerusalem the previous day. In these four years:

- 3,590 Palestinians had been killed by the end of September 2004;
- Over 400 of those killed have been children aged 15 or younger;
- 110 adults and 33 newborn babies have died because of denial of medical access through road-blocks or because of total closures;
- 42,022 have been wounded since the start of the Intifada. These injuries are caused by live ammunition, shrapnel from tank shells and missiles, tear gas and so-called rubber bullets, which are in fact metal bullets coated in rubber. 3,000 of those injured will be left permanently disabled including 700 children.
- 6,757 houses have been demolished in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem since the start of the Intifada with 59,107 partly demolished or damaged.
- The 'Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions' (ICAHN) reports

that more than 40,000 Palestinians have lost their homes due to house demolitions over the last four years. In Rafah in the Gaza Strip, 1,500 homes have been demolished making 15,000 Palestinians homeless.

- Up to the beginning of February 2004 the Israelis had demolished 282 schools, closed nine down and turned three, in Hebron, into military bases.
- Israeli forces have uprooted 1.1 million trees, mainly olive and fruit trees. This has forced Palestinian farmers off the land and into poverty. They have also razed 68,011 dunums of Palestinian farmland (17,000 acres or more than 25 square miles).
- The curfews and checkpoints imposed by the occupying Israeli forces have destroyed the Palestinian economy. There has been a 51% drop in the GNP since the start of the Intifada.
- Unemployment rates for Gaza are now 67% and for the West Bank 48%. 75% of Palestinians now live in poverty on less than \$2 a day, the international level of poverty. In Gaza the figure is 84.6%, in the West Bank 57.8%.

Bolivian people on the march

FIONA DONOVAN &
ROBERT CLOUGH

The struggle of the impoverished Bolivian people for control of their lives and resources continues.

On 23 September, tens of thousands commemorated the first eight men, women and children murdered by heavily armed state forces in the Gas War last September/October. The mass uprising was so named because nationalisation of Bolivia's natural gas, its most lucrative and sizeable resource, was central to the people's demands. No one responsible for the murder of 63 civilians during the three weeks' uprising has been brought to justice. Ousted millionaire president Sánchez de Lozada resides alongside other Latin American terrorists in the safety of Miami. Other demands of the uprising included

- An end to neoliberal policies, especially cuts in state welfare and privatisations
- No free trade agreements with the US
- An end to forced coca eradication
- Land reform

Following the Referendum on Gas in July which 60% of the voting population boycotted, President Carlos Mesa has been drawing up a new Law of Hydrocarbons. Repsol, the Spanish oil company that owns 23% of Bolivia's natural gas reserves, was confident that the new law would not affect its interests. However, as a precaution, it threatened Bolivia's Congress with sanctions if it did not toe the line. The company also joined Petrobras (Brazilian), British Petroleum, TotalFinaElf, Enron-Shell and British Gas in ensuring the law did not change their existing contracts or increase

their taxation. Congress's Mixed Commission of Economic Development warned that Mesa's proposed new law will lose the Bolivian state \$US 130 million per year.

Huge demonstrations in August and early September paralysed Bolivia's largest cities. On 25 and 26 August there was a total blockade in La Paz and El Alto as 1.5 million people took to the streets drawn from the poor neighbourhoods, workers and peasant unions, students, small vendors, unemployed, truck drivers and the Landless Movement (MST). Public services maintained a total strike. Cochabamba also saw demonstrations of 100,000. The social organisations leading these protests demanded the complete expropriation of the gas and petroleum from the transnational companies.

On 30 August the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), which had backed Mesa's referendum called for more protests in order to recover some political credibility with the masses. MAS leader Evo Morales demanded that the government annul the 78 contracts in place with foreign oil companies. However, he has been further compromised by the Mesa government's renewed onslaught on coca growers. Violent and savage eradication has been officially expanded and new confrontations have occurred, each time more intense. Coca growers, progressive intellectuals and labour organisations have launched the Campaign for Coca and Sovereignty to legalise the production, consumption and the traditional and industrial use of the coca leaf, and to end forced eradication.

On 1 September the unemployed took to the streets of La Paz and elsewhere to demand work. Hundreds of police assault



ted protesters, dragging them across the ground, beating them and gassing them. 14% of Bolivia's urban labour force is unemployed. Small borrowers, mainly family businesses, have also started a hunger strike to urge the government to rein in micro-credit institutions that are charging extortionate interest rates. MST supporters have also started hunger strikes; its members have faced constant harassment since the organisation was criminalised.

In the poorest areas, popular justice is being meted out to corrupt politicians. In Ayo Ayo, after many warnings, the people executed the village's mayor, Benjamin Altamirano in June. MST members had been occupying unused land belonging to a large landowner in the area since June 2003, supporting themselves from the produce. On 10 August, the Bolivian state regained control of Ayo Ayo, but the movement continues to gain popularity from its policy of land occupation. President Mesa is increasingly isolated, and survives only through the support he gets from Morales. The Bolivian people are on the march. ■

Ireland: ten years of ceasefire, but no nearer justice

PAUL MALLON

Since the May 1998 referendum overwhelmingly endorsed the Good Friday Agreement, the peace process in Ireland has been in near-perpetual crisis. Each crisis has served to wrest further concessions from the Republican movement. Loyalist attacks on the Catholic community have continued. British troop levels remain the same as in January 2002. A new round of political prisoners is incarcerated in British and Irish gaols, this time stripped of political status and isolated from the wider Republican movement. Political power remains with the British government and the Unionists. The Stormont Assembly is currently in its fourth suspension since February 2000.

The Unionists have manufactured every crisis: first over IRA decommissioning, then over verifiable disarmament, and now total disarmament or in other words the disbanding of the IRA. In all these crises the Labour government has supported the Unionists, and they follow a similar cycle. First the Unionists complain about an aspect of IRA decommissioning. Then Adams and Sinn Féin appeal to British imperialism to push the 'peace process' forward. Next the British government backs up the Unionists. Lastly, the Republican movement retreats. A few weeks or months later the pattern repeats itself. After every round, British imperialism and its Unionist allies are in a stronger position. Sinn Féin no longer has the political will to mobilise the nationalist working class in an anti-imperialist campaign against British rule. It



Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin

therefore has only one option left – to appeal to Blair and the Labour government to rein in the Unionists.

Policing

The Good Friday Agreement established the Patten Commission on policing which reported in September 1999 making 175 recommendations. Of these, only 11 have ever been fully implemented, with a further 75 partially dealt with. On 9 September, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Chief Hugh Orde announced the retention of the PSNI full-time reserve in a further breach of Patten Report recommendations. The disbandment of the RUC has been a cosmetic exercise to reassure the Catholic middle class that the overtly sectarian excesses of the past have been curbed. In reality, the PSNI is no different.

The IRA has undertaken several separate acts of decommissioning under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, none of which have ended loyalist intransigence. Now Gerry Adams has paved the way for IRA disband-

ment by stating that 'Republicans need to be prepared to remove the issue of the IRA and of IRA arms as an excuse for Unionists to block political progress in the Six Counties' (*An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 12 August 2004). The Loyalists, however, demand complete surrender.

In October/November 1994, we wrote:

'The struggle is not over. The economic, political and social problems which keep forcing the national struggle on to the political agenda still remain. The Six Counties is a sectarian statelet. British imperialism has not left Ireland. The political prisoners are still in goal. The nationalist working class faces massive economic deprivation and discrimination with unemployment levels more than twice that of the loyalist working class. Should the Sinn Féin leadership be drawn into any proposed "New Ireland" Administration, in the Six Counties or 26 Counties and have conferred on it the status and privilege of bourgeois parliamentarians, it will find itself in conflict with the nationalist working class – those people of no property who have always been a bedrock of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland.' (FRFI 121)

Ten years on this still remains the case. ■

Pat Finucane: cover-up continues

A former police special branch informer has been sentenced to life for the murder of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane. Ken Barrett, was one of two loyalist gunmen who shot Finucane 14 times in his Belfast home in February 1999. Barrett pleaded guilty so that no evidence was presented in court. He will spend little time in prison as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. The murder was at the centre of a 15-year inquiry into collusion between Loyalist paramilitaries and the security forces in the Six Counties. However, the Labour government has refused to establish a public inquiry into the murder, despite the demands of the Finucane family, and have only conceded an internal judicial inquiry. There is too much to hide! ■

Chile: Pinochet gets rich from bloody dictatorship

MARCELO DIAZ

Over the past few weeks the Chilean press has developed a renewed interest in the so-called 'Pinochet Trials' after the *Washington Post* revealed on 15 July this year that the US Senate was investigating the Riggs Bank, suspected of money laundering, and harbouring the loot of dictators and ex-rulers.

Augusto Pinochet, the ex-Chilean dictator, seized power in 1973 after a bloody coup (backed by the CIA) which ousted the legitimately elected President, Salvador Allende. He subjected the Chilean people to 16 years of brutal oppression, where opposition faced assassination, disappearance, torture and exile. In 1998, in response to an extradition appeal from a Spanish judge,

Pinochet was arrested on one of his regular shopping visits to Britain and detained for over a year. He was finally released by Labour Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on the 'humanitarian' grounds that he was old and sick.

The *Washington Post* revealed that the ex-dictator had US\$8 million in six accounts with the Riggs Bank. This discovery sparked investigations in Chile and the US into the origins of the Pinochet family fortunes, which have now been estimated to exceed \$16 million. The ex-general's wife was also found to have been involved in the money-laundering schemes of the dictator while he was in power, setting up phony charities and non-governmental organisations.

Investigations continue, but it is widely accepted that much of the money came from property

scams he ran during his dictatorship. These involved buying and selling of land with huge price differences occurring within hours of consecutive transactions. It was a case of buy cheap, sell dear, pocket the difference. Pinochet's defence alleges that his businesses earned the money from successful legitimate investments. Many of Pinochet's supporters feel betrayed because they organised fundraising campaigns while he was detained in London, when all the time he had plenty of cash stashed away.

After a lengthy legal struggle, Pinochet has been stripped of his immunity, and is presently also on trial for his participation in the 'Condor Operation', which among other things, coordinated the secret police of many South American dictatorships and which involved the detention,



Pinochet and Thatcher during his detention in London

execution or exchange of wanted left-wing activists abroad. His defence lawyers have used every legal trick to prevent the ex-dictator's appearances and interrogation in court, even arguing on humanitarian reasons – if it was good enough for Jack Straw, why not for a Chilean judge?

None of the Pinochet trials

are likely to end in the near future, and most Chileans, now weary of 14 years of post-Pinochet government with few advances in human rights, are convinced that justice will never be achieved.

The slogan 'Pinochet: hurry up and die' just about sums it up. ■

Gay rights in Cuba

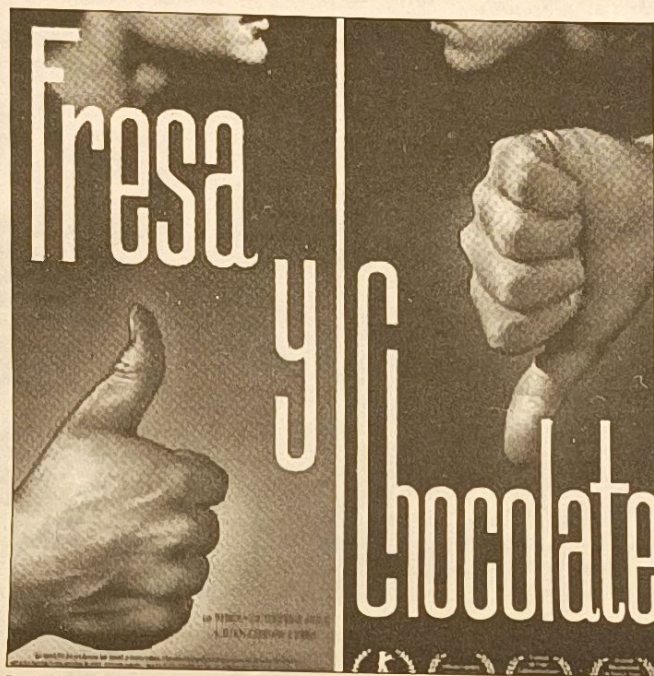
Homophobia exists in Cuba as it does all over the world. But those who assert that widespread repression of homosexuality exists in Cuba rely on statements made in the 1960s when homosexuality was a criminal offence (as it was in Britain). While there have been instances in Cuba in recent times when gays have been subjected to harassment, this has been due to individuals' backward ideas and prejudice. But the idea of Cuba as a repressive regime where gays face constant persecution is constantly brought up by Trotskyists and opportunists in Britain as a stick to beat the Revolution, and needs to be countered, as RICHARD ROQUES shows.

Before the Revolution, when Cuba was an offshore casino and brothel for the idle rich of the US, homosexuality was outlawed. Repression and poverty forced many gay men into prostitution. The anti-homosexual 1930s Public Ostentation Law, remained after the Revolution triumphed. Between 1965 and 1968, homosexual men were amongst those incarcerated in austere Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP), labour camps set up to counter bourgeois and individualistic elements who were resisting the Revolution. The camps were closed down in 1968 following bitter protests to the government by the Cuban Writers and Artists Federation. A year later, meanwhile, in the United States, after years of persecution, homosexuals fought pitched battles with the police after a routine raid in the Stonewall bar.

In 1979 homosexual acts were decriminalised in Cuba (unlike in many capitalist countries; some states in the US retain outdated sodomy laws). In 1987 the offence of 'homosexual acts in public places' was removed from Cuba's penal code. The age of consent for homosexuals in Cuba is 16 years, the same as for heterosexuals. In 1993 sex education workshops on homosexuality were run throughout Cuba to explain that homophobia is a prejudice. At the same time Castro declared:

'I don't consider homosexuality to be a phenomenon of degeneration...[I consider] it to be one of the natural aspects and tendencies of human beings which should be respected. I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals.'

In the same year *Strawberry and Chocolate*, the first Cuban film to deal openly with homosexuality, was hugely popular in Cuba. It was the only film funded by the government that year.



Poster from the award winning film, *Strawberry and Chocolate*

In 1995 the May Day march, one of the most important events in the social and political calendar, was led by drag queens who were cheered along the whole route. Imagine transies at the state opening of parliament or Trooping the Colour. Only one queen at those. And she doesn't salsa.

In 1996 Pablo Milanes, a singer adored by his fellow Cubans, who had himself been incarcerated in a UMAP in the 1960s, dedicated a song about gay men to all Cuban homosexuals. Recently a play produced by El Teatro Sotano ran in Vedado entitled *Muerte en el bosque* (A Death in the Woods). Based on the investigation of the murder of a Havana drag queen, through the investigation of the crime, Cuban attitudes towards and preju-

dices against gays are examined and challenged at every level of society. In December 2000, at the film festival in Havana, easily half of the Latin American films shown had gay themes.

AIDS: Another stick to beat Cuba with

The policy of enforced detention in sanatoria for HIV/AIDS sufferers initially introduced in Cuba was contentious, but an effective way of dealing with a then little-understood and potentially devastating disease. The policy of compulsory quarantine ended ten years ago. Cuba is today in the forefront of the fight against HIV/AIDS – a fact met with deafening silence from Cuba's enemies.

Those diagnosed with HIV are

given an eight-week education and drug support programme in a sanatorium and then have the choice to stay (gay couples live together) or return to their homes. Dr Byron Barksdale, director of US charity Cuban AIDS Projects pointed out that people in the US 'may get five minutes worth of education'. Infection rates in Cuba are 0.1%, the lowest in the region, with 3,200 cases out of a population of 11 million. Anonymous testing is available and most HIV cases are diagnosed within six months of exposure. Cuba now produces generic anti-retroviral treatment. Multinational pharmaceutical companies make fantastic profits out of anti-retroviral drugs and deny them to the poor. In the US people with HIV/AIDS who do not have health insurance are denied the latest drugs. In contrast, Cuba has sent thousands of doctors and nurses to almost every part of the world to help in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. In Botswana, with the highest proportion of people in the world with HIV/AIDS, Cubans work in clinics and hospitals and the Cuban government has offered to train, at no cost, nurses and doctors from other Caribbean countries to fight the pandemic.

In a capitalist society if you are gay and rich and you live in a city, life can be good. But capitalism hasn't abolished homophobia. On 6 October, 1998 in Wyoming, Matthew Shepherd, was tied to a fence and beaten within an inch of his life. He died several days later. He had been beaten up on two previous occasions because he was gay. In one of the attacks his jaw was broken. In the aftermath US organisation The National Youth Advocacy Coalition published *Facts about gay youth* which included the statistics that 80% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people report verbal abuse and 66.7% of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth were threatened/injured with a weapon at school in the past year. Only a few miles from Cuba, gays in Jamaica are regularly murdered, raped and brutalised with the apparent acquiescence of the police and legal system. Assaults on homosexuals are up 15% in Britain from last year. I was queer-bashed in London a few years ago and ended up in casualty. That's what over 40 years of gay rights has achieved under capitalism. Socialist Cuba, meanwhile, has constantly shown itself able to learn from the mistakes of the past; today it has a visible and thriving gay and lesbian community and is moving towards an ever-more tolerant and inclusive society, valuing all its people for their contribution to society, regardless of sexual orientation. ■

CUBA IN BRIEF

Education

Cuba's new school year started on 6 September, after important changes to the educational system. Cuba is launching a high school model with classes of no more than 15 pupils, each with a multi-disciplined teacher. In elementary classes the focus has been on maintaining one teacher to no more than 20 pupils. There will be 350,000 students enrolling this year in higher education centres – 40,000 more than ever before.

Efforts at all educational levels will target the strengthening of household-school relationships, the formation of collective social values in pupils and social discipline and behaviour.

Health

On 11 July, World Population Day, Cuba will be launching a programme prioritising medical care for ante- and post-natal mothers. Cuba continues to have one of the lowest infant mortality rates in Latin America, 6.3 per 1,000 live births. And life expectancy continues to grow: between 1995 and 1998 life expectancy grew from an average of 74.83 to 76.15 years and is expected to continue to rise. Despite Cuba being a third world country, HIV and AIDS is under control with one of the lowest infection rates of 0.1% of the population aged 15- 49 years old.

Hurricane damage

Hurricane Charley caused the collapse of 2,916 buildings and 70,000 homes in the city of Havana and Havana provinces. One person died and five people were injured. Worse casualties were prevented by high levels of organisation and commitment to the safety of the Cuban people. No one was killed by the even more devastating force of Hurricane Ivan a month later, although tobacco plantations were destroyed. Richard Boucher, acting spokesman for the US State Department, issued a statement, saying the US Interests Section in Havana would offer the Cubans a paltry \$50,000, via so-called independent non-governmental Cuban organisations, to help with damage caused by the hurricane. Such organisations are little more than a front for US plots against Cuba. Vice president Carlos Lage made it clear that Cuba had its own resources to confront hurricane damage. In the first week 1,400 homes were repaired. Fidel Castro has said that whatever the damage Cuba will not accept aid from any country that wants to see the overthrow of the Revolution.

Luke Curham

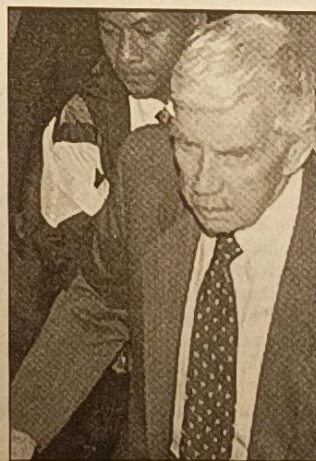
US and Panama collude against Cuba

On 25 August, with just a week left in office, right-wing Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso freed four international terrorists who had attempted to blow up the university amphitheatre where Fidel Castro was speaking in November 2000. While on the one hand pursuing its phony 'war on terrorism', the US has been pulling strings to secure the release of four convicted terrorists with a long history of death squads, assassination plans and torture behind them.

In August 2000, two high-ranking members of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) travelled to El Salvador to meet Posada Carriles, a known terrorist, to plot with him the assassination of Castro during the Iberoamerican Summit in Panama. With their money and fake documents, Posada Carriles travelled to Panama and Honduras to meet Rafael Nodarse, the arms trafficker now sheltering him.

In Costa Rica Carriles selected his accomplices, all known to the FBI. Gaspar Jimenez Escobedo, wanted by

the Mexican police, is the murderer of a Cuban fishing technician; Guillermo Novo Sampol killed Chilean chancellor Orlando Letelier, on orders from Pinochet, and Pedro Remon Rodriguez was the assassin of Cuban diplomat Felix Garcia. All were under the command of Posada, a CIA-trained, long-term terrorist responsible for blowing up a Cuban civil aeroplane in 1976, killing all 73 passengers aboard. Posada escaped, on CIA advice, to El Salvador, from where he directed narcotraffic operations to fund weapons for the US-backed Nicaraguan contras. In January 1994, with funding from CANF, Posada launched a failed assassination attempt on Castro in Honduras. Between 1994 and 1996, he set 44 bombs and plotted two further assassination attempts on Castro. He made a number of subsequent assassination attempts in 1997 and 1998. In a 1998 interview, he admitted that he had recruited Central American mercenaries who, with CANF funding, smuggled 14 bombs in Cuba. Eight exploded and an Italian tourist was killed.



Released terrorist Posada Carriles

On 17 November 2000, he and his accomplices were arrested in Panama carrying over 100lbs of plastic explosives and jailed. Yet this year President Moscoso decided to go above Panamanian law and release the four men,

despite huge demonstrations in Panama protesting against her decision.

While in office, Moscoso introduced unpopular neo-liberal measures in Panama, robbed the country's international development funds and slavishly followed US policies. Her sister is a personal friend of Posada's. The releases took place shortly before Panama's 1 September elections and may have contributed to Moscoso losing to Torrijos, son of the famous left-wing nationalist General Omar Torrijos. He immediately condemned the releases as 'shameful'.

In the run-up to the November presidential elections in the US, George W Bush needs to secure Florida's key exiled community vote and the generous donations from its Cuban-American lobby. Hence its new measures against Cuba and hence the release of the four men – who were received with joy by the reactionary exile community when they flew briefly into Miami on a private jet while the administration turned a blind eye.

Juanjo Rivas

VENEZUELA

Chavez vindicated: massive victory in 'recall' referendum

Despite all the efforts of the US-backed, business-led opposition, President Chavez soundly defeated his opponents' demand for his removal in the recall referendum of 15 August. This is the first in the history of Venezuela. It was the most democratic vote ever conducted in the history of Latin America. Voting took place over 20 hours, with 8.5m voters – 75% of the electoral census – making it the greatest-ever turnout.

Venezuela's customary abstention rate is around 40%. On 16 August, the National Electoral Council calculated from 94.49% of the votes, that 3,576,517 (41.74%) wanted to remove Chavez, and 4,991,483 (58.25%) voted for him to complete his term of office until 10 January 2007 – a majority of over 1.4 million votes. As President Chavez said this was 'a triumph for all the people of Latin America and the Caribbean... who fight against the savage neo-liberalism that Washington wanted to impose on us'. The victory over the opposition was a great victory against 'violence, coup d'états and fascism', it was 'an example to the world'.

Since 1998 the bourgeois opposition has repeatedly tried unsuccessfully to defeat President Chavez. The attempted coup in 2002, the oil sector strike that followed and now the attempt to remove Chavez through the recall vote have all been defeated by the government moving with the working class and oppressed against the ruling class and its middle class supporters. This victory must hearten the Venezuelan masses and encourage them to mobilise and deepen the anti-imperialist social process in their country and Latin America.

With 8,395 voting stations and measures taken to ensure that voters were free from the opposition intimidation seen in previous elections, it was an incontestable victory for all the poor in Venezuela. Of course the opposition, the 'Co-ordinators of Democracy', rejected the results as a 'gigantic fraud', demanding an 'international hearing'. They called a demonstration in the Plaza Altamira, the habitual site of Anti-Chavez protest, where provocateurs killed one and wounded four others, and then accused Chavez (yet again) of assassination! Although the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Carter Centre and other observers agreed with the result, they had to calm their opposition allies by undertaking a further check on polling booths before confirming the result. Cesar Gaviria, outgoing president of the OAS, spoke against the result personally, again revealing his true colours.

The next battle

Writing an explanation of 'What really happened in Venezuela?' in *The*

Economist (4 September 2004), J McCoy, Director of the Carter Centre observer mission, throws mud over this extraordinary success, shamelessly bleating that 'Divisive rhetoric and intimidating tactics from 'Chavistas', and the opposition's still (sic) unsubstantiated claims of fraud, have exacerbated Venezuelans' cynicism towards elections. It will take a huge effort by both sides to restore trust in this fundamental democratic right before next month's election for governors and mayors.' Here is the rub! Between 2000 and 2004, four million newly-registered, mostly young voters have entered the scene. They have ended 40 years of bi-party rule by the wealthy and their corrupt politicians sharing government and booty. Venezuelan students receiving free education and training in Cuba returned to Venezuela to help mobilise the poorest communities and to encourage them to vote: they succeeded.

The enormous enthusiasm shown for politics that are really democratic is what the Carter gang fear. The National Electoral Council (CNE) has chosen 31 October as the date for state and municipal elections – the third delay in this election. The mandate of governors and mayors, as well as representatives in local legislative councils among others, has expired already. Campaigning began on 18 September and will continue until 28 October. The voter registries were open from 4 to 8 September, so citizens who reach the voting age by 31 October can register in time for the upcoming elections. Continued massive voting for Chavez's government and the new constitution will help undermine the regional and local power of the landowners and big business. Of the eight states now run by the opposition, five voted for Chavez in the recall referendum by a wide margin, the three others by smaller margins.

The small opposition parties, Alianza Bravo Pueblo and Un Solo Pueblo have said that they will boycott the regional elections. But unlike the former ruling parties, Accion Democratica and Copei, they have no governor or mayoral posts to lose.

The state and municipal elections

On 17 August President Chavez said he wanted a 'participatory and protagonistic democracy... a true social revolution to return to the people what was taken away, in order to guarantee all Venezuelans their fundamental rights: education, health; on the economic side, to transform the capitalist model into a post-capitalist model, a humanistic, productive, diversified model that generates a situation of equality, consequently social justice and peace.' Nothing could worry the bourgeoisie more, especially the 'global' players!

It is true, for the moment, that the desperate desire by international business for oil price stability means that President Chavez's spectacular victory has moderated their attitude. Oil supplies will not now be interrupted. ABN Amro Asset Management in London declared that international investors wanted him to win. In



President Hugo Chavez

Venezuela banks made net profits of \$842m in the year to August of 2004 from public debt issue. The economy is recovering rapidly from the employers' strikes last year, up 30% in the first quarter of this year. But in truth US capital especially wants ownership of Venezuelan oil – it will be its most important source for the next 40 years, in size and proximity. In addition, it wants all the other resources of the country and the market itself. \$46 billion has been removed from the country this year alone. The fact is that they still want to stop Chavez!

The 'Gaceta de los Negocios' (*Business Gazette*) 17 August called the electoral victory 'disturbing' – 'the weight of the inheritance of Chavez, is the funding of destabilising forces in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and including Argentina.' Oil money 'far from serving to raise the standard of living of the population will be used to export examples and revolutions'. In brief, the capitalists are losing control of oil revenues and fear the example of real democracy! The landowners are threatened! Reduced unemployment would weaken the effect of the reserve army of labour on wages (on top of the new minimum wage). One third of Cuba's oil is sourced from Venezuela. What a fearful example for the oppressed peoples of the world!

The State and Municipal elections present a nightmare for the latifundistas, the large landowners (with over 5,000 hectares) who run so much of Venezuela. Despite their obstruction, over five years about 130,000 families have been settled on more than two million hectares of land. These need a basic rural infrastructure and credits to farm anew. On 29 August Chavez announced that 'the time has arrived to democratise the land in Venezuela... in this new stage of the revolution'. The 2001 Land Laws arising from the Constitution have now to be applied more than 'superficially'. Unproductive land will be expropriated. The President ordered the Unified Armed Forces Command (CUFAN) to provide within two weeks a map of all the large estates in the country to speed up agrarian reform and guarantee the

food production of the country. At the moment 70% of household food is imported. President Chavez asked owners of idle land to sell it to the state and thereby avoid expropriation: 'We are going after idle land to put it to work and promote agricultural activity to make Venezuela an agribusiness country and exporter'.

The challenge for the workers is not only to promote these changes, but also to obstruct capitalistic use of the land, create co-operatives, guarantee crop diversity and food for the poor. At the moment Chavez's Ministry of Food is distributing imported food at subsidised prices. This has to be changed. Polar, the biggest processor of food and drinks in the country and strongly anti-Chavez, will be required to enter discussions on these changes. The Association of Agro-businesses (FEDEAGRO) has rejected discussions. The opposition immediately declared that the government was encouraging 'invasions and attacks on property... instead of protecting the producers, it protects the bandits'. What shameless cynicism! In the state of Zulia alone, governed by Manuel Rosales, an opponent of Chavez, local small peasants and workers have been constantly attacked by paramilitaries who have killed dozens of local workers' leaders in recent years.

New departments of state

The government has begun to change the character of the state. It has created the Ministry of the Popular Economy, to replace the previous Ministry of Social Economy. Headed by Elias Jaua, the former president of the Venezuelan inter-governmental fund for decentralisation (FIDES), it will incorporate the National Institute for Rural Development (INDER), the development bank for micro-finance (FONDEMI), the Woman's Bank, the People's Bank, the Co-operatives Institute (Sunacoop) and the National Institute of Co-operative Education (INCE). A new Ministry of Financing for Development will be created, which will control the National Bank of Development (Bandes), the Industrial Bank of Venezuela (BIV), and the

Development Bank of the Andes (Banfoandes).

\$170 million for the 'Vuelvan Caras' mission has been announced. This is a social programme designed to create employment through community development projects working closely with 2,067 co-operatives. The goal is to work with more than five times that number within three months. There are 287,000 people currently enrolled in the programme and this number should reach 408,000 by the end of September.

The recently created Strategic Nutrition Program (Proal), the Corporation for Autonomous Services (Casa), and the Mercal programme, which sells basic food products at subsidised prices in poor communities, are tackling malnutrition. Seven new 'Supermercales' (local markets) are being introduced across the country (bringing the total to 26), 12 new medium-sized and 95 smaller 'mercales' are also being established to sell food cheaply. In two months time the government will open 1,974 small 'mercales' bringing the number of the smallest discount food stores to 6,423. With 70% of the population of 25 million in poverty (with the same income as in 1958) and 800,000 people in extreme poverty, Chavez also announced the opening of 1,830 new food relief kitchens. This brings the total number of kitchens providing prepared meals for the poor across the country to 2,886.

In an attempt to dismiss him and his determination to redirect resources to the poor, an ideological assault is being made on Chavez. Spending on social projects is denigrated as large bribes for electoral purposes, devoid of economic value, and doomed to undermine the economy once oil prices fall. In fact Chavez aims to reconstitute the land ownership system, create employment there, and to reduce food imports from the USA. In defence of food sovereignty, the President had already announced a complete national ban on genetically modified crops and ended talks with Monsanto.

Alvaro Michaels

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS Coke or Pepsi?

Every four years the United States holds its Presidential Elections. This time everybody knows what the Republican Party Presidential candidate George Bush stands for: arrogant naked imperialist aggression. Some in the United States left are so shocked by Bush and his Neo-Conservative backers, that they argue that Bush is so extreme, so terrible for America and the World, that everyone should close ranks, rally behind another candidate who can defeat him: 'Anyone Is Better Than Bush'. Noam Chomsky, the left intellectual takes this position. So does Michael Moore, the radical filmmaker. So does *The Nation*, a left-liberal magazine similar to the British *New Statesman*.

'Anybody but Bush': the politics of the lesser evil

But will voting for the alternative defend and advance the interests of the working class and oppressed? What are American workers getting if they follow the advice of Moore, the Nation and their friends and vote for John Kerry? Where do Kerry and John Edwards, his Vice-Presidential running mate, stand on the important issues? What is the supposed vital difference that justifies support for Kerry?

Iraq War

Iraq is the most important issue in the United States. Edwards co-sponsored the resolution to attack Iraq:

'Saddam Hussein's regime represents a grave threat to America and our allies, including our vital ally, Israel. ... We know that he has chemical and biological weapons. ... We know that he is doing everything he can to build nuclear weapons, and we know that each day he gets closer to achieving that goal.' (Senate, 10 October 2002)

Kerry voted for Edwards' motion. Earlier he had argued that:

'If Saddam Hussein is unwilling to bend to the international community's already existing order, then he will have invited enforcement, even if that enforcement is mostly at the hands of the United States, a right we retain even if the Security Council fails to act.' *New York Times*, 6 September 2002.

A year later, during a debate at the Congressional Black Caucus Institute, Kerry was asked if he saw the war in Iraq as a mistake, and he replied:

'We need to be successful. People keep asking what's the exit strategy. The exit strategy is victory.' 9 September 2003.

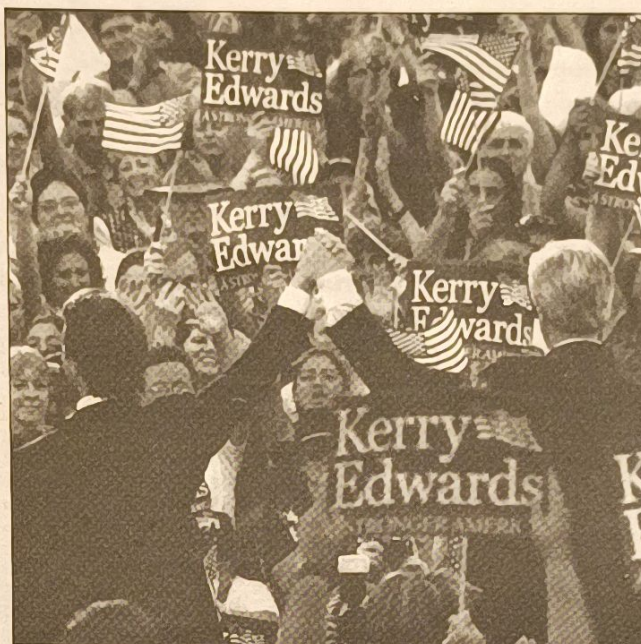
Edwards continued this theme at the recent Democratic Convention: 'we will win this war because of the strength and courage of our own people'. Kerry may believe it was 'the wrong war, at the wrong time, in the wrong place', but he helped start it, and he and Edwards are ready to continue it. They promise to expand America's active duty forces by 40,000 and double the Army's Special Forces capability within four years.

PATRIOT Act

The repressive, anti-democratic PATRIOT Act got the votes of both Kerry and Edwards. According to Edwards: 'the problem with the PATRIOT Act is not the law itself, it's the way it's being administered' (Debate in Columbia SC, 3 May 2003)

Venezuela

Kerry has the same position as Bush on Venezuela. He gave an interview to the Spanish language Univision TV channel on Wednesday 5 May 2004. The Univision network is part of the Cisneros Group of Companies, owned by Gustavo Cisneros, a Venezuelan billionaire of Cuban descent and outspoken Chavez opponent who has been implicated in the April 2002 coup d'état against Chavez. When asked if he considered Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez a dictator, Kerry responded: 'Chavez is fast on the road of becoming exactly that. He is breaking the rules of democracy. I think it is very important for him to



allow that referendum to take place and for this administration and others to put more visibility on what is happening so we can hold him accountable to international standards of behaviour. Democracy is at risk.' Venezuelan democracy will certainly be at risk under a President Kerry.

Cuba

Kerry told WPLG-ABC 10, a Miami TV station: 'I'm pretty tough on Castro, because I think he's running one of the last vestiges of a Stalinist secret police government in the world' (14 March 2004).

Israel

Kerry's top Middle East adviser is former Congressman Mel Levine, a former board member of the ultra-Zionist lobbying operation American Israel Public Affairs Committee. According to Levine 'By every rating and criterion Kerry's votes have shown 100 per cent solid support for Israel'. According to the Kerry campaign position paper on Israel, Kerry believes that:

'...in any final settlement for Israel to remain a Jewish State, Palestinians must settle in a future Palestinian State rather than in Israel, and that in light of demographic realities, a number of settlement blocks will likely become a part of Israel... The security fence is a legitimate act of self defence... long advocated moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem, Israel's indisputable capital... America must guarantee Israel's military superiority ...'

It's all Israel, all the way, not only uncritically, but enthusiastically.

On the Vietnam war

'As a veteran of both the Vietnam War and the Vietnam protest movement, I say to both conservative and liberal misinterpretations of that war that it's time to get over it and recognise it as an exception, not as a ruling example, of the US military engagements of the twentieth century.'

On US imperialism

'It is up to Democrats to understand and prepare for Fourth Generation Warfare - fighting unconventional forces in unconventional ways - so our nation can be better prepared to

wage and win the new war.' Campaign website.

Of course, none of this should be surprising from a man proud to receive a medal for murdering a patriotic Vietnamese teenager defending his country against US imperialism. The only surprising thing is that anyone can pretend to support peace and democracy and support Kerry.

In what possible way are these people any better than Bush? Chomsky argues that on domestic issues Kerry would be better than Bush (*International Socialist Review*, September-October 2004) But this is exactly what was said about Clinton - who promptly destroyed the US welfare system. Republicans were angry with him because he got the credit for carrying out their programme.

Is there an alternative? What about Ralph Nader who is running on a leftish platform? His platform is sometimes confused and some of it may be reactionary. But this is only to be expected: for the last 150 years, US politics has been dominated by the two big bourgeois parties: Republicans and Democrats. These parties represent different factions of the ruling class and have differences over the best policy for US imperialism. They draw their electoral support from different geographical, social, religious and ethnic groups and coalitions. The Democrats get their support from the unions, from sections of the middle class, particularly lawyers, Jews (until recently), blacks and other ethnic minorities and women. The Republicans draw on small business owners, backward sections of the working class, crackpot petit-bourgeois religious fundamentalists, Wall Street financiers and other capitalists.

As events and policies attract and repel support, it is inevitable that sections of the middle class and petit-bourgeoisie will be disappointed and look for an alternative. 'They are a splendid element for politicians, who speculate on their discontent in order to sell them out to one of the big parties afterward', Engels astutely observed.* Typically, they are attracted to a party whose platform attacks the 'big corporations', champions 'ordinary people', attacks 'the power elite'

and proposes radical measures to 'shake up the system' - this is American Populism, which has been an integral feature of US politics for well over a century. Sometimes this is on the right - Ross Perot's Reform Party in 1992, for example, which took votes from the Republicans, allowing Clinton to win. Sometimes it is on the left. Since there is still no significant party based in the working class, radical elements of the petit-bourgeoisie are attracted to platforms like Nader's with its brew of social-democracy, environmentalism, pro-electoral reform politics.

The Democrats' steady rightward march puts increasing distance between themselves and social groups whose support could previously be taken for granted. And into that gap Ralph Nader has stepped, with a leftish-platform which attracts many who are looking for an alternative to the Democratic Party. The Democrats are terrified that Nader will do to them what Ross Perot did to the Republicans in 1992: take votes away from them. (They blame Nader for Gore's defeat in Florida, by some 500 votes. In fact, some 250,000 registered Democrats voted for Bush, far exceeding Nader's paltry 98,000 votes).

So the Democrats, although they deny it, have been trying to undermine Nader's support. In May, the *Village Voice*, a New York magazine, published a racist attack on Nader who is an Arab-American. In an hysterical article: 'Ralph Nader: Suicide Bomber', Harry Levine claimed that: 'In the year 2000, Ralph Nader strapped political dynamite onto himself and walked into one of the closest elections in American history hoping to blow it up'. In recent months, teams of Democratic lawyers have been despatched to every state in an attempt to get Nader off the ballot. So far they have succeeded in Arizona, California, Illinois, Mississippi, New Jersey, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia, often winning on narrow technicalities. Instead of meeting in open political confrontation, the Democrats are trying to prevent voters from exercising their choice. And these are the people Chomsky, Moore and co want us to support: thoroughly pro-imperialist, ready to crush the slightest challenge from the left?

What really scares Moore and the intellectuals of *The Nation* magazine is that Bush shows just how irrelevant and impotent the self-important petit-bourgeois liberal intelligentsia really is. Always ready with smart remarks, repelled by the hard work of building a true alliance with the American working-class, clinging to their own sense of superior insight, their most immediate instinct is to sneer at Bush's intelligence, not at his reactionary imperialist politics, to start a lawsuit in court, not link arms with the working class in its struggles on the streets.

No, the time for electoral games is over. The real challenge to Bush will not come from Kerry and the Democratic Party or Nader, but from many thousands of ordinary working people who are increasingly being drawn into struggle against US imperialism, who will be fighting and organising before, during and long after the election charade is over.

Steve Palmer

*Engels to Sorge, 6 January 1892

Imperialism and Sudan: same oil story

The civil war in oil-rich Darfur, simmering since 1985, escalated into tragedy for millions of people from February 2003 onwards. The conflict is estimated to have killed between 55,000 and 100,000 people and driven up to 1.5 million people from their land. 110,000 people have sought refuge in neighbouring Chad. Whatever is behind the attacks on the people in Darfur, the imperialists, aided by a vapid media and complicit aid agencies, made their own plans long ago, and they did not include averting a humanitarian disaster, preventing genocide or 'providing security for Darfur's people'. Just as they did at the end of the 19th century in the rush for gold and diamonds, in a renewed competitive rush to plunder the oppressed nations of the world for their natural resources, especially oil, the imperialists are intent on neo-colonising and controlling Africa's vast resources. **CHARLES CHINWEIZU** reports.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Sudanese military and government-backed militia (Janjaweed, of Arab descent) have been indiscriminately bombing civilians, destroying villages and conducting brutal raids against African ethnic groups, including routine rape of women and girls and abduction of children. The internal conflict is posed as ethnic strife when the real driving force for the violence which is victimising millions of poor people is the ownership and control of Sudan's oil. Sudan does not manufacture helicopter gunships or fighter bombers – they have been supplied covertly by the US (or directly via clients Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt), Russia and China. Fighting against the government in the south, including in Darfur, are the Islamist Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the 'secular radicals' of the Darfur Liberation Front (now renamed the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M)). The rebels are well armed, mobile, have good intelligence and claim to have popular support. Behind these armed groups are the funds, arms and training provided by Israel, the US, Britain and France who act through neighbouring states.

Kleptomaniacs eye Africa

Africa is enormously rich in the raw materials that imperialism is dependent on, and the parasites are jostling into position for monopolisation, not just of the continent's oil and natural gas supplies, but also of its metal and diamond reserves. Africa's riches include manganese (for steel production), cobalt and chrome (also used in steel manufacture, particularly in aeronautics), vanadium, gold, tungsten, antimony, uranium (for nuclear technology), fluorospar, industrial diamonds and germanium (for semiconductor electronics manufacture). Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire) possess 50% of the world's cobalt reserves. 98% of world chrome reserves are in Zimbabwe and South Africa. 90% of world reserves of transition metals in the platinum group (palladium, platinum, rhodium, ruthenium, osmium and iridium,

used extensively in the pharmaceutical/chemical industries) are in South Africa. Coltan (also known as columbite and a key component in electronic devices such as PlayStations, laptops and mobile phones) is a precious ore found almost exclusively in DRC.

Sudan is wealthy in mineral resources such as gold, uranium and chromium, and discovered vast untapped natural gas and oil reserves perhaps as large as Saudi Arabia's in 1978. Sudan only began exporting oil in October 2000, mostly to China. Containment of China, especially its energy supplies, has long been a key policy ambition of the US. African oil reserves are estimated at 100 billion barrels or 10% of world reserves. Output has increased by 36% in 10 years compared with 16% for the rest of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa already produces more (4m barrels/day) than Venezuela, Iran and Mexico combined, and is the source of approximately 20% of US oil imports, expected to rise to 25% by 2015. Additionally, vast untapped reserves (estimated at 24 billion barrels) were discovered in the Gulf of Guinea archipelago in 1994-95. This is shared by São Tomé and Príncipe, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, DRC, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville and Nigeria – all oil producers.

Inter-imperialist rivalries

As the strongest imperialist nation, control of this strategically important region can help the US to stay ahead of its European rivals. With continuing resistance to US imperialism in the Middle East led by the Palestinians and Iraqis, the US needs Africa's riches to ensure its economic survival. African oil is of 'national strategic interest' to the US as it 'tends to be of high quality and low in sulphur, giving it a growing market share for refining centres on the east coast of the US' (US Vice President, Dick Cheney, May 2002). It takes about two weeks to transport this oil from Africa to the US compared with six weeks for oil from the Gulf. The US aims to control key markets in energy and other strategic resources, to establish unimpeded transport of raw materials to the US by military force if necessary.

A key Pentagon strategy is to sta-

tion thousands of rapid deployment and semi-permanent troops in and around the horn of Africa (Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia) and throughout West Africa. Two oil routes are at the centre of US plans: the Chad-Cameroon pipeline in the west, and Sudan's Hegleg-Port Sudan (Red Sea) pipeline. Chad, a French neo-colony, also has oil, and there is talk of building a pipeline from Chad to Sudan. France has announced it will deploy 200 troops, previously 'training Chadian forces in peacekeeping duties' to 'secure the Chadian side of the border' with Sudan. In May 2003, a permanent US command base with 2,000 troops was established at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, a desert country with no apparent resources or strategic importance except for its position near the Sudanese pipeline. It juts out into a small maritime zone through which 25% of all world oil production passes.

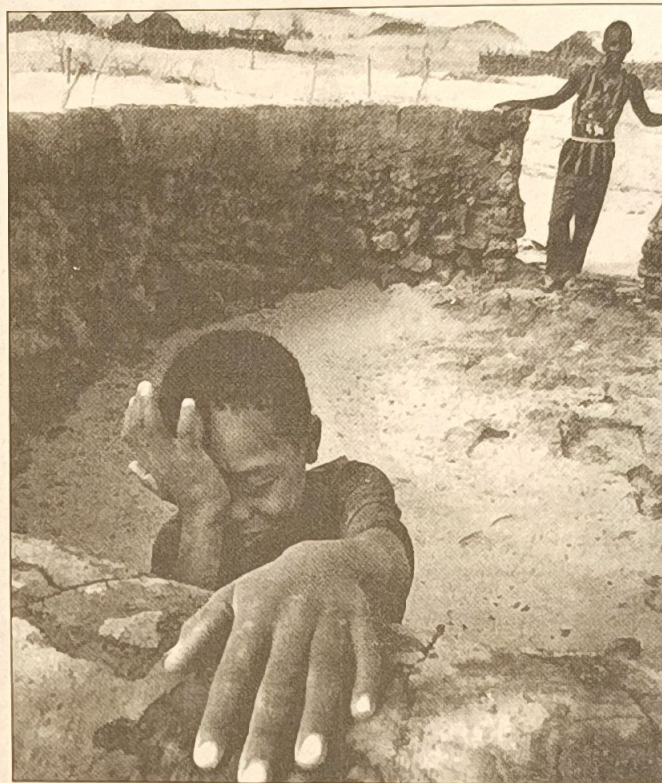
Equatorial Guinea is among Africa's five biggest oil producers. In 2002 it was revealed that two-thirds of its oil concessions had been awarded to US companies with close ties to the Bush administration. Keen not to be left out, in March 2004 Britain and Spain funded a failed coup attempt, led by racist, apartheid-era thugs with links to the CIA, MI6, the Thatcher family and Texan oil operators (see page 4). Britain is now a net importer of natural gas and oil and sections of the British establishment freely admit that this is the real reason they have courted Libya and invaded Iraq.

Since the defeat of the US incursion into Somalia 1992-94, the US has put in place a number of training programmes for African army officers. These are co-ordinated by the US Army's European command (US-Eucom). Techniques learned from US operations in Latin America and Vietnam and Laos are passed on to African armies. Recent visits to Africa by President Bush, Colin Powell and US-Eucom deputy commander General Wald are intended to further bind African states to US imperial power.

Racism and the Darfur crisis

On 30 July 2004, the UN Security Council adopted US-drafted resolution 1556, calling on Sudan to 'end the fighting' in Darfur, or face 'economic and diplomatic measures' in this 'the world's worst humanitarian crisis'. Sudan was given 30 days to 'rein in' and 'disarm the Janjaweed Arab militia' blamed for terrorising the people in an 'orgy of murder, mutilation, burning and rape' (*The Independent*, 8 August). The Sudanese government, despite numerous reports to the contrary, claimed the real casualty figure from Darfur's civil war 'doesn't exceed 5,000', but said it would comply.

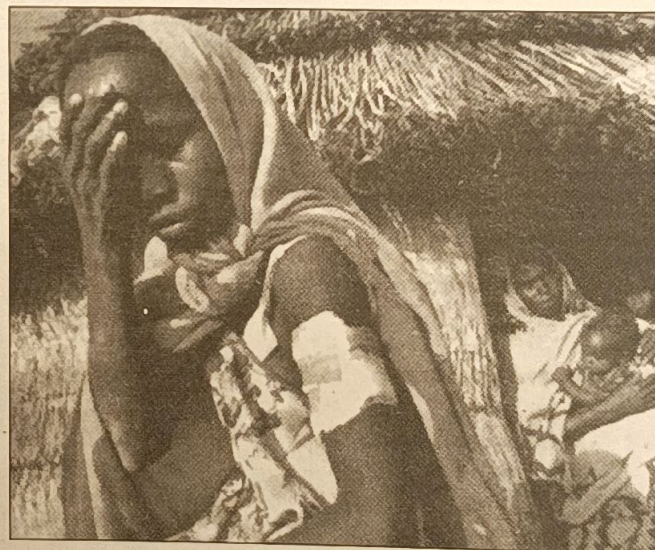
The 30-day deadline was simply a prelude to the inevitable. On 9 September, US Secretary of State Colin



Powell declared the situation in Darfur amounted to 'genocide'. Foreign Office minister Chris Mullins agreed 'it may well be genocide' although it 'hasn't been demonstrated yet'. Indeed, Pieter Feith, an adviser to the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana, had found 'no evidence of genocide' after a trip to western Sudan. Nonetheless, Britain and the US are pushing the UN Security Council for an international commission to investigate, and a second UN resolution calling for punitive measures including sanctions against Sudan's 'petroleum sector'. The EU has already imposed sanctions and is calling for a greater presence of 'military observers' from the African Union (AU).

Africa. This racism, that denies essential medicines to black Africans, passes without mention, but the racism we are supposed to notice is the politically useful one of Arabs against blacks. Racism is in fact the culture of imperialism: 'anti-terror' raids, hijab bans, Islamophobia and racial discrimination at every level of society in the US and Britain.

What the people of Darfur need are not more imperialist troops or their proxies, but an end to the system that denies them medicines, funds both sides in wars, fosters divisions and racism, trains and arms terrorists and torturers, and supports slavery – all for profit. They need the destruction of imperialism.



While this global manoeuvring goes on, most victims of Darfur's civil war will die of starvation, malnutrition and diseases such as cholera, malaria, hepatitis and diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases. None of the US's 'generous aid' was intended to help the 2.2 million black Africans who died of AIDS or the three million who contracted HIV in 2003 alone. USAID administrator Andrew Natsios claimed there was no point providing anti-AIDS medication as 'Africans don't know what western time is'. Despite the fact that most of those in need of medicines live in Africa, only 1% of the world's drug market is based in

Material for this article was drawn from various sources, including: Hanns W. Maull, *Raw Materials, Energy and Western Security*, 1984, Macmillan; Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, 1969, Pantheon Books (Random House); Jean-Christophe Servant, 'The new Gulf oil states', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 8 January 2003; Jamie Wilson et al. *The Guardian*, 26 August and 10 September 2004; Declan Walsh, *The Independent*, 16 March 2004; Paul Lashmar, *The Independent*, 14 March 2004; Pierre Abramovici, 'United States: the new scramble for Africa' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 8 July 2004.

Discontent in the desert kingdom

Over the past two years Saudi Arabia has been rocked by numerous bombings and attacks by groups aligned to Al Qaida, in particular on 12 May 2003 when 35 foreign workers were killed in a compound in Riyadh, and on 29 May 2004 when militants attacked a similar housing compound in Khobar, killing 22. Many journalists have also been targeted including BBC correspondent Frank Gardner and cameraman Simon Cumbers, who were shot in a drive-by shooting on 14 July 2004 (though there is circumstantial evidence that Gardner, an ex-soldier and expert on Al Qaida, was an MI5 agent). Cumbers died and Gardner was seriously injured. These attacks however represent only the fringe of what is a wider discontent at the deterioration of the Saudi economy and the absolutist monarchic rule of the Al Sauds – a dynasty that has ruled brutally for over 70 years.

Historically the ruling Al Saud family (which in its extended form is now believed to have as many as 20,000 members) has always managed to unite when its rule has been under threat. But divisions are now opening between the old guard led by King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah and some of the younger generation over how best to deal with calls for reforms and the poverty and anger in Saudi society at large. An increase in the price of world oil has strengthened the Saudi current-account surplus and has pushed the Saudi stock exchange up to a record high, but the increasing income from oil has gone to maintaining the obscene opulence of the Al Sauds and not to Saudi society at large. A whole bourgeois business layer has been disenfranchised and left out of this huge wealth, and it is from here that antagonisms are most notably arising and spreading down to the increasingly impoverished working class. Since 1980 real income per head has fallen by as much as 50% and unemployment has risen to around 20% – some estimates claim as high as 30%.

An estimated 15-20,000 Saudis fought for imperialism against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and it was Saudi Arabia, fulfilling a role which the imperialist countries could not afford to play directly, that helped instigate a terrorist uprising against the democratic revolution in Afghanistan. It was the presence of Saudis on Afghani soil and the financial and military funding and training of the Taliban regime that exposed Saudi Arabia as not just an ultra-reactionary defender of imperialism but also an attack-dog for imperialist interests. It was a role that many Saudis bitterly believe they have not been rewarded for fulfilling.

Anger from the worsening economic conditions has been fuelled by the imperialist occupation of Iraq which in turn has been manipulated by the Islamists. Half the Saudi population are women who, though they 'make up half the university intake, have only 6% of jobs and few rights in society' (*The Economist*, 6 May 2004). Shias and non-Islamic labourers from the Far East constitute a significant proportion of the country's inhabitants and the majority of the industrial workforce. None of these

To date Venezuela, a country going through a revolutionary democratic process, is believed to have the world's third largest oil reserves. Iraq is believed to have the second largest reserves of oil and is currently the most unstable country in the world. Within this context imperialism is having to rely on its old ally Saudi Arabia – the world's largest oil producer – more than ever. But the oil-rich kingdom is itself facing turmoil, as Andrew Alexander reports.



The aftermath of bombings in the US/Saudi business quarter in Riyadh

groups, let alone a large portion of Saudi national workers, have anything to gain from another deeply repressive and reactionary regime. However, there is no sign yet of a democratic and progressive opposition emerging.

Recent calls for political reform and better human rights were sparked by an unprecedented rally in Riyadh just after a conference by the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent (itself an unusual event) in October 2003, which led to over 270 arrests. It was these calls, as much as the kidnappings and bombings of Westerners, that are a cause of anxiety for imperialism and the Al Sauds. Some imperialist analysts claim there need not be such cause for concern, stating that Saudi Arabia can no longer have the same economic clout on the world's economy that it had in the 1970s. They argue that use of alternative energy sources, new discoveries of oil fields from Alaska to the Caspian and an increase in output from Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union have had the combined effect of making the world less reliant on the Saudis. This is nonsense. Imperialism needs Saudi oil as it is dependent on a stable supply of oil – the movement of peoples and goods cannot exist without it. A rapid fall in supply leading to a significant price rise will have a knock-on effect that could exacerbate global capitalist crisis. Not only does Saudi Arabia have the largest reserves of oil; it is also a swing producer. 'Unlike

other countries, the Saudis keep several million barrels per day (bpd) of idle capacity on hand for emergencies (that is they deliberately hold back on what they could immediately drill). This spare capacity allows the Saudis to moderate oil-price spikes. They have done precisely this at various times: during the Iran-Iraq war, when output from both countries was disrupted; during and after the first Gulf war in 1991, when output from Iraq and Kuwait was lost; and last year when civil strife in Venezuela and Nigeria curbed output from both countries on the eve of last year's invasion of Iraq (which itself disrupted Iraqi output)' (*The Economist*, 27 May 2004).

Losing control of this huge power and influence is of immense concern to imperialism. The markets are based on confidence and speculation which are intrinsically linked to stability, something that was demonstrated with the Khobar compound massacre which occurred on a Saturday. Come Sunday, the Saudi government immediately announced new security measures, further arrests of 'militants' and reassurances regarding the safety of foreign workers. At the same time they also called an Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) meeting where discussion would be focused on increasing production. All this was done with the purpose of calming the reaction just hours before Wall Street was due to begin trading

on Monday. With the price of a barrel of crude now at a 20 year high, it may only take the symbolic lighting of one Saudi pipeline to trigger a global economic meltdown.

However, despite the attacks which have taken place, imperialism is hesitant about exerting too much pressure on their friends the Al Sauds. It does not matter to the US that 15 of the 19 hijackers on 11 September were Saudi. The 'war on terrorism' is a front for an imperialist war of terror against those who do not share imperialism's interests. This was why the Bush administration attacked Afghanistan and Iraq, not Saudi Arabia, as the Al Sauds

family who funded George W Bush's venture into oil in Texas in the 1970s and continued to do so up to the 11 September attacks. In fact, on 11 September itself, George Bush Sr was in a business meeting in Washington with one of Osama Bin Laden's brothers!*

The interests and investments of the US ruling class in Saudi Arabia and vice-versa are immense and the two states have made it perfectly clear that these interests will not be threatened.

The same close links are enjoyed by Britain. Little fuss was made by the British state when a Briton, Ron Jones, was arrested on 5 February 2001 and tortured in relation to some of the bomb blasts in the kingdom, so that the Saudis didn't have to admit they had a problem with 'home-grown' terrorism. Similarly, five British workers were arrested and subsequently tortured on alcohol related charges in January 2001. British imperialism does not care about systematic human rights abuses such as lashings, stonings and hangings, even if such acts are meted out against its own citizens, as long as the country committing such abuses is an ally. The British ruling class, like the US, did not wish to rock the boat and has its own links and networks with the Al Sauds to deal with such unfortunate 'situations' when they arise. The reason is not just to maintain the oil links – Britain has the fourth biggest market for Saudi oil – but to sustain the lucrative arms sales that Britain has with the Kingdom. Britain is the world's second largest military exporter and Saudi Arabia is its biggest client. The mammoth Al Yamamah deal struck in 1986 was Britain's biggest-ever export agreement, supplying Tornado, Hawk and other aircraft and support systems, and has been worth over £17bn in sales to date. BAE Systems alone employs more than 2,500 people in Saudi Arabia. (BBC News Online).

It is difficult to see at the moment exactly where the more democratic forces to the parasitic rule of the Al Sauds will come from. Presently there are no unions or workers affiliations and women in the vast majority of cases are not allowed in the workplace or to create their own affiliations or groups. Any dissent is brutally dealt with by lengthy prison sentences, torture or public executions, and socialist organisations are banned. Amnesty International cites the Saudi regime as one of the most secretive and brutal in



President Bush with Crown Prince Abdullah

unlike Saddam, still rule in US imperialist interests. The joint House/Senate investigation into the 11 September attacks says the White House blacked out 28 pages of the report that dealt with purported links between the Saudis and the hijackers. (*The Independent*, 7 September 2004). It is not difficult to see why anything detrimental to Saudi Arabia is being covered up. The hypocrisy concerning the 'war on terrorism' in general and the war against Iraq in particular is highlighted by the closeness between the US and Saudi Arabia and most notably demonstrated by the business relationships of the Bush and the Bin Laden families. It was the Bin Laden

the world today where 'once someone is caught in the web of the criminal justice system, there is only one guaranteed outcome – their basic human rights will be violated' (Amnesty International). It is this record of brutal human rights violations, as well as its roles in Afghanistan and in the first Gulf war against Iraq that has exposed Saudi Arabia for what it actually is – a willing and brutal servant of imperialism. ■

* For more details of the extensive links between the Bush and Bin Laden families see *The House of Bush, House of Saud – the secret relationship between the world's two most powerful dynasties* by Craig Unger, 2004.

Health for sale

■ **NHS plc: the Privatisation of Our Health Care**, Allyson M Pollock, Verso 2004, 271 pages, £15.99.

Allyson Pollock, a public health doctor, is Professor of Health Policy and Health Services Research at University College London. Her book is a powerful and clear description of how a system of health care provision in Britain through the National Health Service (NHS) is being systematically destroyed. Initially, she argues, this occurred covertly through severe underfunding and now it continues overtly with the introduction of the internal market and private-public partnership – the complete abandonment of the NHS founding principles.

Nothing better sums up the state of the NHS today, she argues at the start of the book, than the people who run it. A significant proportion of the senior managers are people with no training or experience in public health or the principles of health care delivery – arts graduates, ex-army officers and people who want a change from private enterprise. There are virtually no doctors or nurses or public health specialists in these posts.

The book examines the reasons why the Labour government has been able to move so fast in the direction of privatisation over the last seven years, and exposes the role of the companies and corporations who have moved their exploitative practices into health care. It shows why privatised health care delivery is more expensive than a state-funded service and devotes several chapters to specific sectors of health care provision, such as hospital services (which account for two thirds of health spending), primary care and long-term elderly care.

The early years of the NHS

Allyson Pollock argues that some of the founding principles of the NHS

were compromised from the very start. In the post Second World War years Aneurin Bevan (Labour health secretary) was unable to persuade the Treasury to buy out general practitioner (GP) surgeries and so GPs remained self-employed small businesses, as did dentists, opticians and community pharmacists. While hospitals were nationalised, community health services, preventative services, child health and public health and ambulance services remained the responsibility of local government, though NHS funded. The existence of independent contractors was a weakness that was to be exploited (from 1980 onwards) in the dismantling to come. The most serious of Bevan's compromises, however, was the retention of private practice. NHS legislation, that private care was never to be given at the expense of NHS care, has never been strictly enforced.

Labour extols the market

The NHS was very economical to run prior to 1980. There was little invoicing (only private patients and external suppliers) and no bill payments. By the late 1970s, the NHS was the most cost effective health service in the world – but it was already being labelled unaffordable as the economic crisis hit home.

In 1991 the Conservative government in Britain opened the internal market in the NHS and brushed aside the costs both in money and loss of universality and equity. The internal market forced hospitals to supplement income from commercial retail rentals and private patients. This led to hospital foyers becoming the shopping malls we see today and the contracting out of hospital car parking and television and telephone patient services: it is now more expensive to park at the new out of town Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Royal Infirmary in

Edinburgh than to park at Edinburgh airport; the use of television costs inpatients an average of £16 per week – one fifth of the basic pension.

Allyson Pollock's book shows that the Labour party became dedicated to destroying the NHS, with the end of comprehensiveness, universality and equity. The newly elected 1997 Labour government continued a savage squeeze on public services by staying within the spending limits laid down by the Conservatives for two years. It began to denigrate existing public services and to extol the imaginary superiority of the market-based services in other countries. Simultaneously, it silenced internal critics, dismissed scientific evidence and discredited, marginalised and intimidated anyone brave enough to show people what was happening (including Allyson Pollock).

When the Labour party took office in 1997, there were no Private Finance Initiative (PFI) hospital building contracts finalised. Within months, the first wave had been signed. PFI was paid for by major cuts in clinical budgets and the largest programme of service closures in the history of the NHS. Paying back the debt and the interest and the shareholder's profits rests with the hospital trust. The money comes out of the annual budget for patient care and is paid back over a 30 to 60 year period. Allyson Pollock points out that PFI is more expensive than government procurement of funds because the private sector cannot borrow as cheaply as the government can and it has to generate profit. For example in Dartford and Gravesham PFI, the initial cost to build the new PFI hospital was set at £94 million but ended up being £115 million. The cost of servicing this capital rose from six percent of the annual budget to 32 percent. PFI completely undermines any planning for the health needs of the local population. The first

wave of PFI hospital deals led to an average reduction of 30 percent in beds and in some cases a 25 percent cut in the salaries budget, mainly for nursing staff.

Companies and corporations line their pockets

The NHS has an annual turnover of £74 billion, which provides corporations and companies with lucrative new openings thanks to the Labour government's strategy of privatisation and public-private partnership (PPP).

Companies involved in PFI and PPP include Balfour Beatty, Tarmac, Jarvis and Siemens. They can expect to get 12-20 percent of the hospital's annual income for 30 or more years. Large legal and accounting firms are now lining their pockets with fees paid out of NHS funds.

Public expenditure data do not reveal how much NHS money is being diverted out of clinical care and into the private sector. Some companies' profitability and stock market positions depend entirely on their relationship with the NHS.

Allyson Pollock argues that Labour's appointment of mainly young male policy advisers to number 10 and 11 and other offices of cabinet ministers is about the receptiveness of this generation to market ideology, thus making these areas of government full of people from policy think-tanks sponsored by and networked into industry. Added with this is the Labour government's use of people from the private sector on secondment to the civil service, creating a 'revolving door' between public and private

ALLYSON M POLLOCK



The Privatisation of Our Health Care

spheres. For instance, Robert Osborn, seconded from Tarmac Construction Company who headed the PFI unit in the NHS. Richard Granger, 37, former management consultant to Deloitte and Touche, was appointed director general of NHS information technology at £250,000 per year. The book gives many further shocking examples, including, after leaving the cabinet, former health secretary Alan Milburn's £30,000 advisory role to Bridgepoint – a venture capital firm involved in financing private health care firms moving into the NHS.

Health care is moving further and further away from being a right to being a commodity. Similarly the initial aim of the NHS in Britain, that there should be no link between service and payment in the minds of the giver or the recipient, is receding. Allyson Pollock's research and writing is a brilliant exposé of the post war governments in Britain, be they Conservative or Labour. It contains invaluable information and deserves as wide an audience as possible. *Hannah Callier*

Motorcycle diaries of a revolutionary

■ **The Motorcycle Diaries** (15) (Walter Salles, 2004) On general release.

The Motorcycle Diaries is a collection of diary entries and letters written by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara while he travelled through South America for eight months with his friend Alberto Granado. When they set off from Buenos Aires in January 1952, Che was aged 23, a medical student close to graduation. Alberto was 29, working in a hospital in Cordoba, Argentina.

As well as recording their journey, Che's diary gives an insight into his life, personality and his cultural background. Most importantly Che's narrative shows 'the extraordinary change which takes place in him as he discovers South America, gets right into its very heart and develops a growing sense of South American identity which makes him a precursor of the new history of America'. (Introduction to *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Verso, 1995)

The film of *The Motorcycle Diaries* is not a documentary but a story inspired by the Argentinians' experiences. The pair travelled through Argentina, Chile and Peru, under the scorching sun and into freezing snows. They passed through Patagonia, crossing the Andes and the Atacama Desert, entering the Amazon Basin and finally reaching the San Pablo leper colony, near Iquitos in Peru, where they worked for three weeks.



Gael Garcia plays Che and Rodrigo de la Serna is Alberto. The acting is hard to criticise, partly because 80% of the cast are not actors, but poor and indigenous people revealing the reality of their lives. No amount of stage makeup can create the sallow look of those who have suffered a lifetime of poverty and exploitation. Director Walter Salles explained: 'In

places like Cuzco or Machu Picchu, for example, we encouraged the actors to mingle with the people they met, as Alberto and Ernesto could have done 50 years ago. This purely improvisational material was then blended with the more structured screenplay by Jose Rivera.' Around 20% of the film's scenes come from this improvised material. Several people who

played lepers in the film had been patients at the actual leper colony.

The cinematography draws inspiration from South America's beautiful natural landscape. The same is true of the soundtrack. As the journey takes us from one country to the next, so too do the instruments and styles which inspire the music. The scripting and dialogue is human and emotional, free

from the empty dramatics or clichés we are so used to in mainstream film.

The film was made with the support of Che's family and the Che Guevara Study Centre in Havana. Where Che's notes left mysteries, Alberto himself, now 82 years old and living in Cuba, guided the filmmakers, visiting the crew on location.

Perhaps most significant is the scene where Che decides to celebrate his birthday with the people from the leper colony, who are separated from the doctors' and nurses' living quarters by the Amazon River. Che swims across in the middle of the night in a powerful show of courage and compassion. This incident may not have taken place on Che's birthday, but it did take place, and it took him two hours to swim across the perilous Amazon. This event symbolises Che's decision to take the side of the poor and oppressed, even at risk to his own life.

The inequality and misery in Latin America is worse today than it was during Che's first insights.

As a piece of entertainment, this film gets top marks. As a piece of art, it is also wonderful. As an insight into early revolutionary thinking *The Motorcycle Diaries* shows us that being affected by injustice is perhaps the first step of every revolutionary. We can all share part of that.

Ehthesham Haque

Her Majesty's Pleasure

In the last issue we reported on the economic and political background to mass imprisonment in the United States, where a staggering two million people are behind bars and another five million on probation or parole. This article looks at Britain, where the last decade has seen a massive rise in imprisonment. In both countries it seems clear that over the last 25 years successive governments have accepted that to protect the privileges of their middle class supporters, they need to keep a sizeable section of the working class behind bars. NICKI JAMESON reports.

On 3 September 2004 the prison population of England and Wales was 74,776. This is equivalent to 143 out of every 100,000 people – the highest rate of imprisonment in western Europe.

A further 3,509 people are on 'home detention curfew', having been released from prison to be monitored by electronic tagging for the last few months of their sentences. Another 200,000 are under the supervision of the probation service: 70% serving 'community sentences' and 30% having been released from prison sentences on parole or other forms of post-imprisonment licence. Even without taking into consideration people on bail awaiting trial with curfews, residence and other conditions, or those detained in immigration detention centres or psychiatric institutions, this adds up to some 278,000 people who are subject to imprisonment, probation or parole of some form or another. This is equivalent to 533 out of every 100,000 citizens of England and Wales or one person in every 187.

Thatcher's war on the working class

In 1901 the average prison population was 15,900 – equivalent to 49 out of 100,000. With various fluctuations and an average rise of 800 per year (males only) continuously from 1946, it had reached 40,000 by 1971.

In 1979 the Conservative Party won the general election and Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. She announced there was 'no such thing as society' and made it clear she was declaring war on the working class. In her first five years she took on the trade unions, most notably the miners (1984-5), and the Irish Republican movement (1979-81). She attacked 'municipal socialist' local councils, capped rates, sold off council houses and prepared for the introduction of the poll tax. The gap between rich and poor began to widen: between 1979 and 1989 the income of the poorest tenth of people fell 6% while that of the richest tenth rose by 46%.

Not surprisingly there was resistance in the shape of strikes, demonstrations and the inner-city uprisings of 1980, 1981 and 1985. The IRA tried unsuccessfully to wipe Thatcher and her Cabinet out at Brighton in 1984.

Just as the police in the US was caught off-guard by the resistance it faced at Watts in 1965 (see FRFI 180), the British police was taken aback in 1981 when it came up against the wrath of the people on the streets in Brixton and other inner-city areas. Turning to the occupying army in the north of Ireland for guidance, the police began, on the one hand, tooling up, obtaining more and better weaponry, armour and communications systems, and, on the other, implementing 'soft' policing techniques, gathering 'low-

grade' intelligence and co-opting community leaders.

An almost inevitable consequence of widening inequality and increasing police power was a rise in imprisonment. However, at this stage it was more a spin-off from punitive policies than a policy in itself and the prison system was not ready for a really massive hike in numbers. Most prisons had been constructed in Victorian times, were already overcrowded and insanitary and were controlled by the vicious thugs of the Prison Officers Association.

Between 1986 and 1991 the prison population was reduced from 46,800 to 44,800 by a series of emergency measures as the government was forced to respond to chronic overcrowding in the decaying prisons. These interventions came too late to prevent massive unrest, repeated rioting and the historic uprising of prisoners throughout the system in 1990.

That uprising, which began at Strangeways prison Manchester on 1 April 1990, marked the turning point in British penal history in the same way the heroic actions of prisoners at Attica in 1971 did in the US. Beneath



a thin veneer of concern at the dreadful conditions exposed by the protests, the government made preparations to ensure it would never lose control again.

For a brief period politicians were compelled to state publicly that imprisonment should be a last resort. However preparation was underway for a policy in complete opposition to this sentiment. New, modern, high-security, electronically-locking prisons were commissioned, including, for the first time, privately financed ones, amidst endless debate about how much carrot and how much stick would make the new regimes most effective.

The temporary fall in prison numbers was quickly reversed and from 1993 onwards lip-service to liberalism was replaced by the virulent 'prison works' campaign led by then Home Secretary and current Tory leader Michael Howard. All subsequent Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries of both parties have campaigned with increasing fervour for more punishment and incarceration. This is despite the fact that as far as cutting crime goes, prison clearly does not 'work'. If it did, the US would be the safest and most crime-free country in the world.

Labour continues the war

The Labour Party swept to victory in the 1997 general election, reaping the fruits of the discontent with prolonged Tory rule. However, Labour's main pre-election pledge was 'more of the same'. No change to Tory spending plans; no repeal of any repressive laws implemented over the previous 18 years. In fact Blair would do better, go further, interfere where even the Conservatives had not dared. As Larry Elliot, one of the few honest commentators at the time, wrote in *The Guardian* '[having decided that it will not regulate the markets] New Labour will regulate the people instead, imposing a panoply of social controls to ensure that the problems caused by uncontrollable unregulated economy – crime, juvenile delinquency, family breakdown – don't threaten the comfortable lifestyles of its new middle class constituency.'

A 2004 Institute of Public Policy Research report shows that since 1997 the rich have continued to get richer. The richest 1% of the population increased its share of national income from around 6% in 1980 to 13% in 1999. Between 1990 and 2000 the percentage of wealth held by the wealthiest 10% of the population increased from 47% to 54%.

Policing this unequal society involves large amounts of money and large amounts of rhetoric. While the real aim is to protect the ruling and middle classes and their privilege, it must constantly appear as if new 'anti-crime' measures are universal and aimed at the protection of all.

In November 1999 Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw announced: 'a crusade against crime... five year targets... for the reduction of vehicle crime, of burglary and of robbery... the biggest ever investment in public CCTV security systems and a new ring-fenced crime fighting fund part of which will be used to enable forces to recruit, train and pay 5,000 new officers'.

Shaw parroted the pop criminology used to justify the New York-style 'zero tolerance/quality of life' policing of William Bratton and Rudy Giuliani: 'there is now very clear evidence that a failure to nip disorder and anti-social behaviour in the bud, to repair



Above and left: Protesting prisoners on the roof at Strangeways prison.

PHOTOS BY GED MURRAY

vandalised windows or keep truants in school, can lead directly to more serious offences and higher crime rates'.

By March 2004 Straw's successor, David Blunkett, could announce with pride that 'police numbers in England and Wales have reached a new all time high of 138,000 – an increase of 11,000 since 1997... They take the total number of the extended police family to more than 212,000, including 3,346 community support officers (CSOs), 11,037 special constables and 63,000 police staff'.

The result of the importation of the 'zero tolerance approach' has been the proliferation of laws against 'anti-social behaviour'. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were first introduced in 1998. Between 1999 and 2003, 1,911 were issued against individuals in England and Wales. The latest legislation allows the police blanket powers to disperse or ban groups of people from designated areas. Breaching any of these orders can lead to imprisonment.

The ability of the state to lock up vast numbers of people without bringing criminal charges will mean imprisonment becomes even more a 'normal' part of the lives of large sections of the working class.

Routine imprisonment is already the experience of the black working class, and can be clearly linked to institutionalised racism and lack of opportunity in education or employment. Between 1998 and 2002 the number of black and minority ethnic people entering prison in England and Wales increased by 37% – more than eight times the increase in white prisoners. Black pupils are four to six times more likely to be excluded from school than white pupils are, although no more likely to truant than other pupils. In 1998, 5.8% of white people of working age were unemployed but among the minority ethnic community it was more than double at 13%.

Behind bars

Within the prison system, all those who argued after Strangeways over how much carrot and how much stick should be used on prisoners have had the opportunity to promote their own pet projects. Psychologists, psychiatrists, probation officers, career governors and criminologists have formulated 'offending behaviour programmes', 'privilege schemes', special unit regimes and management strategies. Armies of civil servants endlessly produce new directives. Perhaps the single contentious pledge made by Labour prior to 1997 – not to privatise the prison system – has been reversed and all new prisons are now built and run by private companies.

Some prison officers have been co-opted into the psychobabble approach, and now exercise power by writing parole reports, sentence plans and behaviour warnings. Good reports can reduce a prisoner's sentence by years while adverse ones can ensure no parole is granted and the time is served in the worst conditions. Other prison officers have simply carried on in the old way, ruling the roost by violence, as is confirmed by the never-ending revelations of assault and victimisation at Wormwood Scrubs, Wandsworth, Parkhurst, Full Sutton and Frankland prisons, to name just a few.

Since the massive protests of 1990 there has been only sporadic resistance, and the instances which do occur, often within segregation units where prisoners forced to the limit by the naked brutality that goes on out of sight fight back by any means at their disposal, are often not publicised. FRFI will continue to support all resistance by prisoners to the conditions of incarceration and to make the link between the brutalising of prisoners and the wholesale attack on the working class perpetrated by British governments during the last 25 years.

It is now four years since the second Intifada erupted in Palestine in response to Israeli oppression, occupation and provocation. It is also four years since RCG/Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI) help set up the boycott pickets of Marks and Spencer (M&S) and the Victory to the Intifada group (VTI). M&S has supported the Zionist project since the 1920s.

Zionists claim that the foundation of Israel was a necessary measure against racism and ethnic cleansing. However, in 1941, when the Nazis introduced their *final solution* for extermination of the Jewish people, Lord Marcus Sieff, M&S Chairman, advocated ethnic cleansing of the Arab population of Palestine. This racist hypocrisy has always been at the heart of the Zionist project and remains so today, as protesters from VTI and FRFI have recently seen across the country.

Over the summer in Manchester, groups of Zionist thugs and British fascists who support them, attempted to intimidate VTI protesters off the streets. These attacks followed attempts by the local council and police to harass picketers into giving up. In late July, two Manchester picketers lost an appeal against trumped up charges of highway obstruction and have to pay costs of £1,100. We were also forced to move our campaign stall from outside M&S where it has been for four years.

Two days after the court case, on 31 July, police imposed conditions under Section 14 of the Public Order Act to limit the number of protesters and to serve the Zionists by moving us out of view of M&S. For the next five weeks our Saturday pickets continued with a good turnout, while a small rabble of Zionists stood around hurling racist insults, provocative abuse and taking photos, all to no avail. Our determination forced concessions from the police and an almost full return to the front of M&S.

On 11 September, right-wing extremists again mobilised a 70-strong turnout against us, opportunistically using the anniversary of the US tragedy for their own racist ends, blaming the Muslim population of Britain for the terrorist attacks in Madrid and the school massacre in Beslan, and linking the VTI picket with terrorism. With police supervision, they had set up a stall in the place where we had been forbidden by court to do so!

Our own regular stall was trapped in a police cordon allowing the fascists to surround us. We faced more racist abuse (see letters, page 15) against both black and Jewish comrades who were picked out for harassment. A Jewish picketer was threatened with physical violence against him and his family. The police showed their loyalty, threatening to arrest us for 'racism' when handing out our leaflets and threatening to impose Section 14

conditions. The picketers unanimously refused to abide by the order. We staged a sit down with linked arms to resist and the police backed down.

The following Saturday a small group of Zionists turned out to celebrate the atrocious acts committed against Palestinian refugees 22 years ago at Sabra and Shatilla.

In London, police have shown the same pro-Zionist attitude, ignoring provocation by the fascist counter-picketers, who chant 'Nazi scum off our streets' at us! On 19 August, police arrested a long-standing Palestinian campaigner. Exposing the systemic racism of the British police, the comrade was thrown to the pavement and sat on by six police officers, among them the Inspector who covered the comrade's mouth. Angry protesters and passers-by surrounded the police, demanding our comrade be allowed to breathe and chanting 'racist police off our streets'. The picket then marched to the police station and protested for his release. The comrade will appear in court in late October.

The Thursday evening pickets in London have sustained a good turnout, lively atmosphere and receive a positive response from the public. Nearly every Saturday there are stalls outside local M&S stores around London, also demanding imperialist hands off the Middle East and an end to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. Every month the LSE FRFI stu-



Police and Zionists attack the picket outside M&S in Manchester

dent society hosts an educational meeting which alternates between discussions of Palestine and the Middle East, and Cuba and Latin America. September's talk and discussion was about the second Intifada. There are also monthly campaign meetings for VTI. The next project is a VTI information pack, covering issues from M&S links to Zionism to the life under occupation in Palestine.

Regular stalls of M&S continue on Saturday's in Dundee and Glasgow and FRFI joined the Big Blockade of Faslane Naval Base in early August, to point out where the weapons of mass destruction are really held. FRFI held a meeting about the Venezuela Bolivarian Revolution, with the documentary *The revolution will not be televised*, followed by a lively discussion. Elsewhere in the country, in

August FRFI comrades in Canterbury held a stall outside M&S followed by a meeting to discuss imperialism and capitalism. In Durham comrades supported a protest against deaths of women prisoners outside Durham's Newton Hall prison.

FRFI university student societies now exist at LSE and North London Metropolitan in London, Salford in Manchester and Strathclyde in Glasgow.

Events

CANTERBURY

Saturday 2 October:
Stall outside M&S, The Parade, 12-2pm, followed by meeting on Zionism and the Palestinian Intifada, 3.30pm. Phone for details: 07821 175 397

DURHAM

For information about pickets of M&S in Silver Street call: 07813 073 846

LONDON

Every Thursday:
Picket of M&S, Oxford Street (Marble Arch End), 6-8pm, Street stalls every Saturday, 12-3pm.
Wednesday 3 November:
discussion about Palestine, 7pm,

London School of Economics.

Wednesday 17 November:
FRFI/VTI campaign meeting, 7pm, London School of Economics. For details email: victoryintifada@hotmail.com or call: 020 7837 1688. To contact LSE FRFI society email: frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Every Saturday:
Picket of M&S, Market St, Manchester City Centre, 12-3pm.
Sunday 3 October:
FRFI anti-imperialist forum 'Che Guevara - the legacy of a revolutionary', 2pm at Cross Street Chapel. For more information on these and other activities email:

manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com
To contact Salford University FRFI society email: salfordfrfi@hotmail.com

MIDLANDS

For information on activities email midlandsrfg@hotmail.com

SCOTLAND

Thursday 7 October:
Injustice - deaths in police custody and the struggle for justice by the families of victims. Video and discussion, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow. For information on Saturday stalls and pickets call: 07779 785 529 or email: frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Rock around the Blockade round-up

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

Venezuelan referendum – a victory for all anti-imperialists

The victory for the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela in the referendum on 15 August is not felt only within Venezuela, but is of huge significance to the Cuban Revolution and the whole of the revolutionary movements in Latin America. With 58.25 percent of the vote, the Venezuelan people ratified President Hugo Chavez and the revolutionary process.

Rock around the Blockade was involved with the **Hands off Venezuela** campaign in organising a week of action in solidarity with Venezuela in the lead-up to the referendum, culminating with a march and rally outside the US Embassy in London on 15 August.

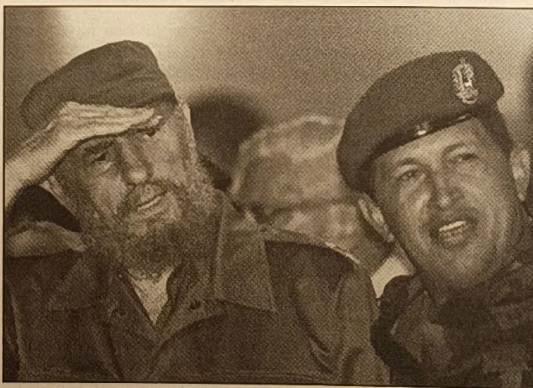
During the week there were meetings, musical events and film showings. Rock around the Blockade members spoke alongside Socialist Appeal at a meeting focusing on the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America and the Caribbean. We also co-hosted a meeting with the Global Women's Strike on the topic of 'Creating a caring economy'. The Global Women's Strike had been present at the referendum and spoke of the palpable enthu-

siasm among the Venezuelan people and their commitment to continue building the Bolivarian Revolution. Rock around the Blockade used data from Cuba on health, education, literacy, the Battle of Ideas, youth, older people, gay people and people with disabilities to illustrate how a socialist society is able to care for its inhabitants, their quality of life and their future. We also used the Cuban example to show how only by basing itself absolutely on the interests of the vast mass of the population can a revolution withstand the inevitable attempts of imperialism to destroy it. There was a lively debate about the importance of socialists and progressives in this country offering unconditional support to all those fighting imperialism by any means around the world.

Following our intervention at the SWP's **Marxism 2004** in July, where we challenged SWP Cuba 'expert' Mike Gonzalez over his reactionary book, *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution*, we have continued to dog his steps around the country. We will not allow lies and distortions about Cuba's revolutionary his-

tory to go unchallenged (see review of his book in FRFI 180).

In Glasgow, RATB activists went to Mike Gonzalez's book launch at Borders bookstore. Ignoring the catcalls and groans from assembled SWP stooges, the comrades asked Gonzalez to back up his assertions about a lack of democracy in Cuba. Bizarrely Gonzalez claimed that his book was not about Cuba! At another meeting, again attended by RATB supporters, he complained that we follow him around the country to denounce him. We are glad he's got the message. At the Scottish Socialist Party's 'Socialism 2004' weekend event in early September, in a 'debate' with a speaker from Scottish Medical Aid for Cuba, Gonzalez again demonstrated his skill at evading and distorting any real discussion on Cuba. Fellow SWP members, dismissed those who support the ideas of Che as '16-year-olds'. At a London meeting following this, clearly irritated by Rock around the Blockade comparing his stance on Cuba to that of the CIA, Mike Gonzalez stated plaintively: 'I do not receive regular payments from the CIA!' 'Only intermittent



Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez

ones, then?' quipped a voice from the audience...

RATB welcomes people of all ages at our events and is raising money for a sound system for the Union of Young Communists in Cuba, to take out with a brigade in 2005.

In September, another Rebel Music fundraising club night of hip hop, break beats and reggae was held in London at Electrowerkz at the Angel. An excellent new flyer for publicity, a good line up including our usual London performers plus a crew

of working-class youngsters who travelled down from Toxteth, Liverpool to show solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and rap about their own lives. The night was both enjoyable and successful. The next ones planned are October in Manchester, November in Glasgow and December in London. Get on our mailing list to be kept informed - they are not to be missed!

London will also be holding a week of activities around the anniversary of Che Guevara's

death in combat. This includes a stall with petitioning at Camden on Saturday 2 October, 12-2pm, meet outside Camden Town tube, a meeting on Wednesday 8 October at London School of Economics WC2 at 7pm and an evening of live music, poetry and politics on Saturday 9 October at the Yorkshire Grey pub, on the corner of Grays Inn Road and Theobalds Road WC1 from 8pm onwards. All welcome at all events.

Join our egroup for regular up to the minute news and views from and about Cuba by emailing <viva_cuba_subscribe@yahoo.groups.com> and join RATB by sending a cheque made payable to Rock around the Blockade for £10, £4 or £2, then you will receive our newsletter and will be contributing to our work.

Get active and get involved - the US blockade, the tightening imperialist noose, the effects of the hurricane and above all the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people all mean that Cuba, now more than ever, needs our support.

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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Capitalism destroys the environment

In September Prime Minister Blair said global warming 'has become alarming and is simply unsustainable in the long term'. It was not a matter of adjustments: 'I mean a challenge so far-reaching in its impact and irreversible in its destructive power, that it alters radically human existence... I mean in the lifetime of my children and possibly my own'.

Earlier this year the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration stated that if China continues on its current path of industrialisation then sustainable development is not possible. Liang Congjie, a leading Chinese environmentalist, said, 'If the Chinese wanted to live like Americans, we would need the resources of four worlds to do so'. Capitalism offers no hope for the future.

In its ceaseless circuits of buying and selling, capital must expand or perish. At the same time, capital must drive down the costs of production to enhance profits. These two conditions of capital necessitate the destruction of the environment and are primarily responsible for the threat facing us today. All talk of stopping global warming and protecting the environment and so on is nonsense unless capitalism is stopped and replaced by a society directed by needs and not profits: socialism.

TREVOR RAYNE
Southeast London

After 14 years we have been forced to raise the price of FRFI to 80p. In the New Year subscription prices will be raised to reflect this increase.

The new size of FRFI is due to a change of printer.

LETTERS

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

FRFI unveils the truth

I received your August/September issue which, as usual, I have read with most interest. I would like to congratulate Helen Yaffe on her excellent review of Mike Gonzalez's *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution*. Having read before about the content of Mr Gonzalez's book, it is very encouraging to see that the truth

has been, once again, unveiled on your pages.

On behalf of Rene, Ramon, Antonio, Fernando and myself, I would like to reiterate our profound gratitude to our brothers and sisters of the Revolutionary Communist Group, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, *Viva Cuba* and *Rock around the Blockade* for your

continual and tireless solidarity with Cuba and the Cuban Five.

Hasta la victoria siempre!

GERARDO HERNANDEZ NORDELO
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US Penitentiary-Lompoc, 3901
Klein Blvd, Lompoc, CA 93436,
USA

Racist Zionists

Over the last year, I have been involved in the picket of Marks and Spencer here in Manchester. During this time the picket has been subjected to a barrage of physical and verbal intimidation and racist abuse by Zionists, defending Israel, 'the only democracy in the Middle East'. Far from defending Jews from racism, they have, instead, singled out Jewish members of the picket in particular for vitriol. Threatening to go around to their homes and 'sort them out', the Zionists shout racist abuse in

Yiddish, threaten their families - 'Your mum will be saying the Kaddish [Jewish prayer for the dead] soon', call them 'Judas', 'defenders of suicide bombers' and 'terrorists'. Through the Zionist paper, *The Jewish Telegraph*, they also publicise their addresses, regularly. The Zionists also attack Muslims on the picket, calling one a 'wog' and a 'Paki', telling another to 'shave her beard' and 'go back to Pakistan', as well as the usual 'you are all terrorists'. As a black man, I have never gone more than

a fortnight without being told by Zionists to 'go back to where you came from', and to 'stop hiding your racism behind your skin'. Other abuses directed at members of the picket include homophobic abuse: 'You like it up your ****, don't you?' etc; 'If I was as ugly as you, love, I'd blow myself up as well', 'Fatty', 'Kill all the Palestinians', etc. There can be no doubt that the Zionists are racist, homophobic, sexist thugs.

PETER APIAMBO
Bury

journalist was allowed by police to come inside the cordon and make notes on what our placards said. Later on another policeman laughed and joked with an anti-Semitic Zionist who was shouting abuse at a Jewish comrade including threats against his 80-year-old mother and explicit threats in Hebrew. Another officer stood and watched while a Nigerian picketer was told by Zionists to 'stop hiding your racism behind your black skin'. Previous pickets have seen an

Asian picketer called a 'wog' by Zionists; black comrades told to 'go home'; disgusting comments made about the physical appearance of picketers; and other such racist slander from the Zionists, all while the police watched or turned a blind eye. If this doesn't show police support for the fascist ideology of Zionism I don't know what does.

C GONZALO
Manchester

Irish POWs fight for their human rights

Irish Republican prisoners at Maghaberry prison in Lisburn are being held in conditions that contravene their basic human rights, says former prisoner Diana McGlinchey of the newly founded Irish Republican Prisoners' Welfare Group.

In March 2004 the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) finally conceded to demands by Republican prisoners and their families for physical separation from Loyalist prisoners, following repeated physical attacks and intimidation. £19 million was then spent on two separate wings at Maghaberry - one for Loyalists, another for Republicans. However, conditions in the Republican wing quickly made it obvious that the demand for separation had been translated into an enforced regime

of clinical isolation and punishment.

Diana McGlinchey described the conditions: 'The money spent has been devoted solely to security and control. The wing is full of CCTV cameras. If there is any type of incident, including minor verbal ones, the panic button is hit and the wing is completely sealed down.'

Republican prisoners are locked down 23 hours a day and have to endure almost total isolation, a lack of recreation, education, little or no association, and constant, aggressive strip-searching. One prisoner was strip-searched 13 times in one day. Prisoners' mail is constantly delayed for weeks at a time and the incidence of harassment of visitors is increasing constantly.

The NIPS is treating even the most basic facilities as privileges,

using them as a stick to make Republicans fall into line and attempting to renege on agreements regarding the nature of the regime in the segregated Republican wing. Prisoners who have complained about this have been punished and victimised. Diana believes that the prison authorities are trying to create a crisis in the separate Republican wing to justify their initial opposition to it.

Apart from the Irish Republican Prisoners' Welfare Group and their immediate families and friends, Republican prisoners in Maghaberry have no means of political support and representation. They have invariably been ignored and ostracised by Sinn Fein, which in its craven compliance with the so-

Return to Algeria

Touche down at the airport in Algiers city was somewhat strange. To think I left that country 12 years ago and have never been since. Apart from seeing family, I was also interested in finding out what progress the country had made, if any.

To find an economy in crisis and unemployment at an all time high was hard to believe. It is only when you see it that it hits you. But with so much construction such as new buildings, roads and bridges it got me thinking, who are they for? There is so much movement with trucks transporting goods and material between cities.

The new building for the Ministry of Finance occupies the space of at least two football stadiums. The new roads and bridges leading into the city are for military transport. All of it is part of a system to support the elite. The class system is like nothing I have ever seen.

Even places like the beachhead where France invaded Algeria in 1830 hadn't become symbols for the struggle of the people, but instead had been converted into complexes for military personnel and hotels for the bourgeoisie.

Every day the news is about what the President has done. The centre of the city was hit the hardest by the earthquake and every day there is talk of progress but nothing is done. It has been years since the earthquake hit and the survivors are still living in huts. Even when there was no space for everyone the authorities housed the rest on the outskirts of the city in pretty much what looked like cabins. It's the first thing you see going into and out of the city. Apparently, the president had done all he could!

Statues and walls dedicated to the War of Independence, 1954 to 1962, are everywhere as a reminder of what the country achieved. But what I won't forget is graffiti on a wall which read 'In 1962 we may have won our independence but since then we have lost our freedoms'.

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria no longer belongs to the people nor is it democratic but more of a victim of something it can't control, the virus of capitalism.

BADIS YOUSIF
London

called peace process has completely washed its hands of those who have refused to sell out or abandon the struggle.

With the Republican leadership 'on side', the British state has wiped out all of the rights and concessions won by Irish Republican prisoners during the long, hard, bitter years of the 1980s and is again brutalising and abusing those who will not cease the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland.

JOHN BOWDEN
HMP Saughton

Stop political assassinations in Colombia!

The headlines were quite normal for a country accustomed to waking up to news of killings and deaths: 'Three guerrilla members killed in confrontation with the Army in Arauca'. However, this news article was different. The three alleged guerrilla combatants who had been killed were well-known and highly respected trade unionists, and the official account of an 'armed confrontation' between the trade unionists and the Army was being disputed by witnesses of the incident.

The incident did not receive much coverage until the National Prosecutor's Office investigation into the killings actually led to the capture and prosecution of three

Army officers and a civilian for the murder of three innocent, unarmed workers. This prosecution marked a milestone in a country where human rights are abused every day and where 70% of the population fears for their lives, while the government has failed repeatedly to bring about a peaceful end to the conflict.

This failure has been exacerbated by the current administration of Uribe Velez, who clearly favours dialogue with right-wing paramilitary groups. However, when the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia offered to hold talks to negotiate humanitarian exchange of military prisoners

on both sides, the government was quick to rule out any talks with 'terrorists'.

This clear double standard and contradictory roadmap to peace occurs against a backdrop of the most callous repression of opposition voices in Colombia. One such voice is that of Carlos Lozano, an elected Representative to the lower chamber of Parliament and editor of the respected weekly newspaper *Voz*. He has accused the Uribe administration of the indiscriminate killing of left-wing and human rights activists and for providing a green light for killings by right-wing paramilitaries. At the time of writing, leaders of the Colombian left were denouncing

the existence of a 'Red Dragon' Operation, which would involve the killing of the most important figures in the opposition. Names on the list included the Mayor of Bogotá Luis Garzon, Carlos Lozano, and the sociologist Alfredo Correa de Andreis among many others. Although the operation has been dismissed as a publicity stunt, Correa de Andreis has already fallen victim to the conflict. No one has been formally accused of his murder. Nor is it likely that anyone will be. His words of hope and strength will be dearly missed.

EUCLIDES MONTES
London

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 020 7837 1688.

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<http://www.rcgrfi.easynet.co.uk>



Roma and their families are persecuted all over Europe

Defend travellers – stop ethnic cleansing

'About 100 riot police and 40 bailiffs arrived at 8am on 26 January at Meadowlands, near Chelmsford. They smashed and kicked everything up. My two-year-old was hysterical. I was pregnant with my fourth child... They towed my three-bedroom mobile home off the site and put it on the road... a few days later it was set alight. All the children's toys and clothes were in there. I've lost everything. My mother is a Romany Gypsy and my father's an Irish Traveller.'

Over the summer, 26 Roma Gypsies and Travellers were evicted from the Paynes Lane site, also in Essex. 700 Roma living at Dale Farm near Basildon face eviction next May. It is nothing less than ethnic cleansing. The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolished the statutory duty on local authorities to provide sites for Roma and Travellers. Even before the Act, many local authorities had closed down sites in response to anti-Roma hostility. Speaking on radio in 1999 when he was Labour's Home Secretary, Jack Straw said there was 'too much toleration of travellers, and we want to see the police and local authorities cracking down' on those 'living on the margins of society'.

The June 2004 election of three BNP councillors in Epping Forest marked an intensification of racism against the traveller community in Essex. In its manifesto, the BNP explicitly targeted Roma: 'BNP councillors will press for the power to immediately evict Travellers/Gypsies from private or council lands.' Throughout Europe, Romany and travelling communities are increasingly persecuted and attacked. The same thing is happening here.

Laurie Mitchell

Terror raids escalate

On 20 September Home Secretary David Blunkett suddenly and inexplicably ordered the release of 'D', one of the 17 foreign nationals certified as terrorist suspects under the post-11 September 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA). Twelve other men are still being indefinitely detained without trial in high security prisons, two have left the country 'voluntarily', one is out on bail with stringent conditions; another won a successful appeal against his detention.

The detainees are held on the basis of secret intelligence reports, revealed neither to them nor to their legal representatives. In August they unsuccessfully challenged their detention in a case in which the judgement plumbs new depths of disregard for human rights. The detainees claimed that testimony against them appeared to come from false confessions extracted under torture from detainees at the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay. They contested that as such it should not be put to the Special Immigration Appeals Court, which is responsible for rubber-stamping their detention. The court ruled that information extracted under torture is admissible in a British court, even if British officials were

present at the time, provided they did not do the actual torturing.

Between September 2001 and June 2004, 609 people were arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 and the ATCSA. However these arrests and detentions have led to just 15 convictions to date. Contrary to the press hype just three of those convicted are Muslims. The majority of the remainder are white and either Irish or Scottish. They include three Republicans and four loyalists who would have been convicted under the pre-existing anti-Irish PTA.

Since 2001 there has been a huge across-the-board increase in stop-and-searches under anti-terrorist legislation, however the increase is sharpest



Raids under anti-terror legislation have escalated along with stop and search

for Asians amongst whom it has increased by 302% (from 744 in 2001-02 to 2,989 in 2002-03). Among black people it increased by 230% (from 529 to 1,745) and white people by

118% (from 6,629 to 14,429).

Arrests and raids continue. The usual pattern is one of massive publicity surrounding arrests and searches, including the releasing by the police of names, addresses, nationalities and other personal information. Suspects are then detained for up to 14 days, questioned and, in the majority of cases, either released without charge or handed over to ordinary police officers to be charged with petty criminal offences, or to the immigration service. Their families suffer intense media interest while they are detained, frequently followed by a combination of racial harassment and ostracisation.

On 3 August, 13 men were arrested on suspicion of terrorist related offences. Three were released without charge; one charged with a criminal offence. Eight have been charged with offences under the Terrorism Act. On 7 September four men were arrested in Southampton under the Terrorism Act. At the time of going to press there is no indication as to whether they have been charged or released.

Nicki Jameson

Abortion: defend women's right to choose

Front pages showing a 12-week old foetus sucking its thumb, appearing to smile and all but dancing a jig in the womb; a legal challenge to doctors who aborted a 20-week-old foetus with a cleft palate; another 'miracle' baby thriving at 22 weeks' gestation – this is the emotional and meretricious climate in which the government is to review the 1967 Abortion Act, with a view to revising the time limit from the current 24 weeks to 22. CAT WIENER reports.

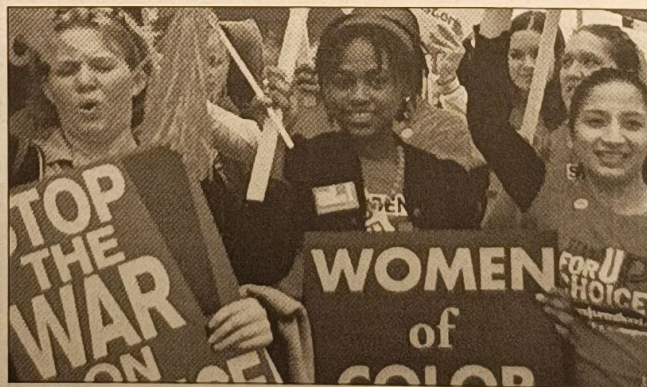
The review is needed, we are told, because medical advances mean an increasing number of premature babies are now viable at 24 weeks, albeit with high rates of brain damage or disability. Although only around 2% of the 180,000 abortions performed in Britain each year are carried out after 20 weeks, attacking 'late' abortions has always been a favoured tactic of the anti-choice movement. What has long been missing from the 'pro-choice' response has been a clear championing of abortion as a right, available free and on demand, for all women, irrespective of individual reasons.

The corollary is to fight for conditions where women, in particular working class women, have a real choice about reproduction: that is, where contraception is free, safe and accessible, where free, quality child-care is available around the clock and where having children does not condemn women to low-paid, temporary, part-time work or eking out a living on benefits. In a society where women with children – especially single mothers – make up the poorest strata, condemning one in three children in Britain to grow up in poverty, it is no wonder that one in three women will at some point in her life have an abortion. This, coupled with lack of adequate housing or play facilities for children means that in reality choice exists only for the middle classes, who have always been able to pay for nannies, nannies, cleaners and so on – or

NHS abortion services mean 25% of women in England and Wales end up having to go private.

But the biggest failure of the pro-choice campaign has been, since 1990 when the time limit was reduced from 28 weeks to 24, to accept foetal viability as the ultimate determinant of the right to abortion. Those who accept this argument ultimately place the rights of a conglomeration of cells over the rights of women.

In Parliament, it took a Con-



March for Women's Lives

to opt for terminations in private clinics, whatever the legal status of abortion. Before the 1967 Act, the majority of women who died in their hundreds from botched backstreet or self-inflicted abortions or were maimed and criminalised, were poor working class women.

The Abortion Act itself remains only a partial victory. Its provisions were never extended to the north of Ireland. Nor does it confer an automatic right to abortion, even in cases of rape. Two medical practitioners are needed to certify that pregnancy poses a greater risk to the physical or mental health of a woman than a termination. Anti-abortion GPs, uncooperative consultants, NHS waiting lists of up to two months and inadequate funding of

servative MP, Teresa Gorman, to point out that those who oppose abortion 'regard women as little more than flower pots in which future generations of children...are reared. Time and time again, we hear people pay lip-service to a woman's rights in this, yet when it comes down to it they legislate to give priority to the rights of the foetus that she carries. Whatever time limit they come up with...their motivation is to prevent a woman from controlling her fertility'.

Labour has refused to permit parliamentary debate on the issue, after making it clear during its 1997 election campaign that it would not be the party of choice. When in 1998 a New Labour MP indicated she would table a bill to allow abortion on request in

early pregnancy, she was persuaded by senior Labour politicians not to. Blair himself is opposed to abortion.

Anti-abortionists are, fundamentally, anti-women. They hide behind talk of 'morality' and 'the balance of human rights', but their concerns are restricted to those of the 'unborn child', the foetus. And yet it is groups like this that campaign vociferously against adequate sex education, contraception and fertility treatment. One has only to look to the United States for more extreme examples, fuelled by far-right Christian fundamentalism. On his first day in office in January 2001, George W Bush reimposed Reagan's Global Gag rule on women worldwide. This policy restricts organisations that receive USAID funds for family planning programmes using their own, non-US funds to provide legal abortion services or indeed any abortion information whatsoever, including in some cases contraception. It is estimated that lack of funds for global birth control programmes resulted in 52 million unwanted pregnancies last year. Yet the US is quite happy to maim, murder and starve real live children the world over. In the US itself, funding for family planning has been slashed; the federal courts are being stacked with anti-abortion nominees. Attorney General John Ashcroft is trying to force through a ban on partial-birth late abortions, and the state is gearing up for a Supreme Court challenge to *Roe v Wade*, the landmark ruling that legalised abortion in the US. These are the same people who oppose state programmes to guarantee prenatal care and nutrition programmes for pregnant women and supported the cutting of welfare payments to women who have more than one child. Moreover, so great is their commitment to the sanctity of human life that in the last 25 years there have been over 80,000 acts of violence against abortion clinics including seven murders.

But, vitally, in the United States, women are organising to defend their rights. On 25 April 2004, more than a million people took part in a March for Women's Lives in Washington. We need to learn from them and organise too, around some basic rights: free and safe contraception, free abortion on demand and free, accessible, 24-hour childcare would be a good place to start.