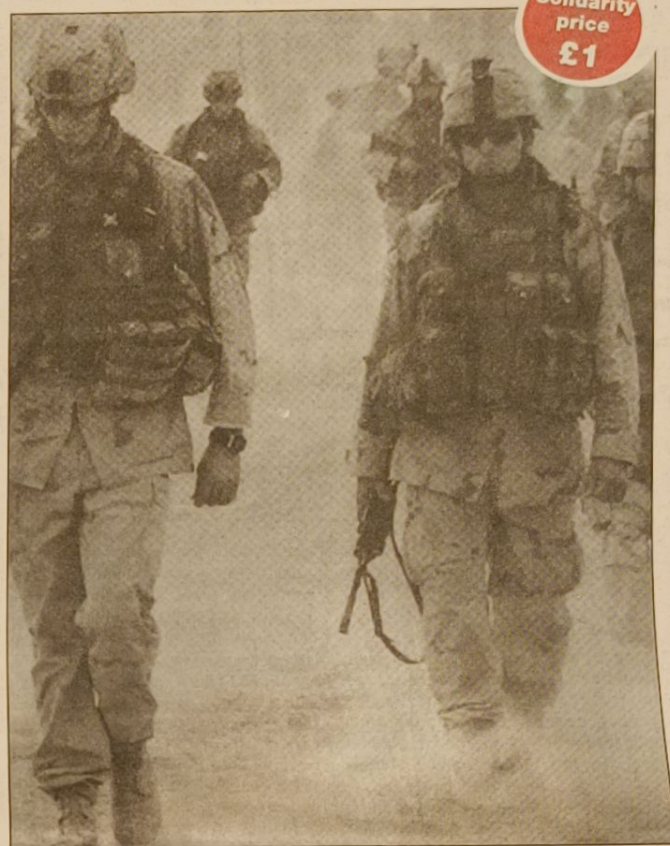


FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group Number 182 December 2004/January 2005

(unwaged 50p) 80p

BLITZING FALLUJAH FITTING UP IRAQ FOR DEMOCRACY



What was done to Fallujah was done in the name of democracy and the war on terrorism. The Spanish conquistadors put millions of lives to the sword and flame in the name of Christianity. The British Empire declared civilisation from atop a mountain of corpses. In the names of democracy, Christianity and civilisation US military depravity in Fallujah compares with the Nazis extinguishing towns and villages for race and Fatherland. The British Army and the British Labour government were complicit in this murder of a city. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

On 15 October US forces established a 'dynamic cordon' around Fallujah. That same day they detained Fallujah's chief negotiator. Fallujah was then subjected to aerial, heavy artillery and tank bombardment, missiles were fired from helicopter gunships and AC-130 aircraft, firing 1,800 rounds a minute, strafed the city. Before the 7 November ground assault Sergeant Major Carlton W Kent addressed his marines: 'You're all in the process of making history. This is another Hue City in the making. I have no doubt, if we do get the word, that each and every one of you is going to do what you have always done - kick some butt'. Vietnamese national liberation forces occupied Hue during the January 1968 Tet Offensive. It was re-captured by the US and their South Vietnam allies the following month. The Under Secretary of the US Air Force stated in a March 1968 memo, Hue is 'a devastated and prostrate city. Eighty per cent of the buildings have been reduced to rubble, and in the smashed ruins lay 2,000 dead civilians... Three quarters of the city's people were rendered homeless and looting was widespread, members of the ARVN (US-backed South Vietnamese troops)

being the worst offenders.' One US officer memorably explained, 'In order to save the city we had to destroy it.' This was the US agenda for Fallujah.

The existence of 'no-go areas' like Fallujah was a hole in the armour of US global domination. The myth of US invincibility is exposed to challenge in Iraq. With the rebellion against the US and British occupation gathering and coalition plans in tatters, a victory had to be demonstrated. In 1857 the British Empire was confronted with the Indian Mutiny. Earl Clarendon observed, 'We have never before played for so great a stake, and the whole world is watching how we conduct the game upon which our national honour and our prestige and position among nations depend... a large proportion of the spectators devoutly hope that we may lose this game, and that England may henceforward take rank as a second or third-rate power, and it is therefore all the more incumbent upon us to win it.'

In the *New York Post* Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters (retired) recasts Clarendon's message, 'We need to demonstrate that the US military cannot be deterred or defeated. If that means destruction, we must accept the

price. Most of Fallujah's residents - those who wish to live in peace - have already fled. Those who remain have made their choice. We need to pursue the terrorists remorselessly... That means killing... our goal should be to target the terrorists and insurgents so forcefully that few survive to raise their hands in surrender. We don't need more complaints about our treatment of prisoners from the global forces of appeasement. We need terrorists dead in the dust. And the world needs to see their corpses. Even if Fallujah has to go the way of Carthage, reduced to shards, the price will be worth it. We need to demonstrate our strength of will to the world, to show that there is only one possible

result when madmen take on America.' (4 November 2004, cited by Kameran Shafi in Pakistan's *Daily Times*).

US Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld said, 'Innocent civilians... have all the guidance they need as to how they can avoid getting into trouble... civilians in Fallujah had been warned'. Between 60,000 and 100,000 civilians remained in Fallujah, approximately 200,000 others had fled. Days before the assault the US military reduced its estimate of 'insurgents in Fallujah from over 5,000 to 1,200'.

Coinciding with the assault on Fallujah the interim government announced martial law across much of Iraq and put Baghdad under night curfew. US troops entering Fallujah first

occupied a hospital on the grounds that it was 'a centre of propaganda'. In April the hospital reported 600 civilians killed by the US attack on the city. Another hospital and three clinics were also destroyed. Twenty doctors were reported killed in one of the clinics. Operation Phantom Fury was launched at the height of Ramadan and mosques were shelled. The deliberate targeting of hospitals, clinics and mosques is intended to demoralise the

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'That means killing... our goal should be to target the terrorists and insurgents so forcefully that few survive to raise their hands in surrender. We don't need more complaints about our treatment of prisoners from the global forces of appeasement. We need terrorists dead in the dust. And the world needs to see their corpses. Even if Fallujah has to go the way of Carthage, reduced to shards, the price will be worth it.'

(Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters, *New York Post*, 4 November 2004)

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**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

**THE SHAPE OF
WARS TO COME**
STOP THE SLAUGHTER

**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**
**STAND UP
YOUR RIGHTS**

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**FIGHT RACISM!
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**1000 DAYS
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**100 YEARS
AMY**

**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

**LABOUR'S
THIRD WAY**
**BUILDING A
POLICE STATE**

**FIGHT RACISM!
FIGHT IMPERIALISM!**

**HANDS OFF IRAQ
STOP LABOUR WARMONGERS**

25

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! is 25 years old

David Yaffe sums up its contribution to
the struggle for socialism in Britain

Our newspaper Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI) is 25 years old. The name of our newspaper is itself a political statement. It declares that fighting racism and imperialism must be at the heart of any socialist movement in imperialist Britain. It is a position that has directed the political theory and practice of the Revolutionary Communist Group for over 25 years.

From our first issue in November-December 1979, a consistent revolutionary anti-imperialist standpoint has determined the political content of FRFI. The core positions have not significantly changed but have been expanded and made more concrete as political experience and practice has forced us to develop them. The political outcome of struggles has often been different to what we had wanted and expected. The optimistic outcome that we fought for has frequently been set back by the opportunist forces mobilised against any militant working class or anti-imperialist movement. We have confronted such developments and learned the hard lessons from them for future struggles, as can be seen from the pages of FRFI.

What are these core positions? First and foremost, at the most general level, we are Marxists and materialists. The capitalist system, by restricting production to the narrow limits of profit making, is a crisis ridden system. It can never satisfy the basic needs of the vast majority of humanity. Capitalism necessarily turns into imperialism, a worldwide system of brutal exploitation of the oppressed nations by a small number of rich, powerful capitalist nations – with the majority of the world's population living in poverty while a small minority squanders unprecedented wealth. As a result, capitalism creates the seeds of its own destruction, forces from among the working class and oppressed which have an interest in overthrowing it and replacing it by socialism – a system which organises the production of wealth on a socially organised basis.

Our understanding of capitalism allowed us to recognise from the beginning that globalisation was not a new stage of capitalism but a return to those unstable features of capitalism which characterised imperialism before the First Imperialist War. There has been a frenetic international expansion of capital which has had devastating consequences for the vast majority of humanity. Far from being a beacon of unhindered capitalist development, as many left intellectuals have maintained, globalisation is a sign of economic decay and increasing instability in a world of obscene and growing inequality. It has led to wars and will inevitably bring resistance and revolution.

FRFI is published in the oldest imperialist country. The imperialist character of Britain has been decisive in determining British economic and political developments. Britain is still a major imperialist power, second only to the United States. The high monopoly profits that a small number of imperialist nations derive from the super-exploitation of oppressed nations makes it economically possible to create privileged sections of workers in imperialist countries. These workers, a labour aristocracy, constitute the social basis of opportunism.

Imperialism creates a split in the working class. The upper stratum of the working class now dominates the British labour movement and ties it to imperialism – the economic foundation of its status and privileges. The labour aristocracy expresses itself politically through the Labour Party and it controls the trade union movement. FRFI has always regarded the Labour Party as a racist, imperialist party. Alone of the main publications of the British left, FRFI called on workers not to vote Labour in the 1979 elections and has consistently argued this position over 25 years. FRFI was able to point out what the Blair Labour government would be like well before the 1997 election. Seven years of an openly racist, imperialist and warmongering Labour government have underlined the fact that no anti-imperialist or socialist movement can be built unless the British left makes a fundamental and irrevocable break with the British Labour Party.

Imperialism is at the root of racism in the world today. Racism is the form that national oppression takes in the imperialist country. The imperialist nations brutally exploit and impoverish the oppressed nations then erect a barrier to keep out immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers fleeing from the resulting war and poverty. FRFI has always opposed all immigration controls and the RCG has played a central role in many anti-racist and anti-deportation campaigns from the Earlington Family Defence Campaign against police brutality in Islington, North London in 1980, through the

four-year-long Manchester-based anti-deportation Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign in the 1980s, to the anti-racist marches in Haringey, North London in 2001.

At the time of our first issue British imperialism faced a growing political and economic crisis. This found expression in the war in Ireland, the assault on the liberation movement in Zimbabwe, British support for the racist government in South Africa, the racist offensive against black people in this country and attacks on working class living standards, in particular the offensive against the public sector. In all these cases it was the oppressed masses and poorer sections of the working class who were bearing the brunt of the attack and who were fighting back and resisting. From these developments we drew certain important political lessons which are guiding our political practice today.

Precisely because of the daily experience of their lives in Britain, of British state brutality and repression, of poverty wages and unemployment, the oppressed sections of the working class will have few illusions about the character of the British capitalist state or imperialist governments, whether Labour, Tory or Liberal. They are therefore the key to the development of an anti-imperialist movement and socialist movement in Britain. Their struggles can begin to unify the working class against racism and imperialism and against the pro-imperialist, anti-working class sections of the British labour movement. FRFI has made this point consistently over 25 years; building a movement against

the brutal occupation of Ireland throughout the 1980s in alliance with Irish workers in Britain; demanding an end to British support for the racist apartheid state in alliance with black workers and immigrants in the 1980s; calling for British imperialism out of the Gulf in alliance with Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Palestinian and Asian workers in the 1990s and in the attempt to build an anti-imperialist current in the anti-war movement to bring British troops out of Iraq today.

The British imperialist state fears the success of liberation movements in oppressed nations. Its economic position and political credibility in the world would be severely weakened if it could not maintain its domination over them. The resistance movements in the oppressed nations are weakening imperialism; an anti-imperialist movement in this country in unity with these struggles can deal a decisive blow against British imperialism. That is why FRFI has always given complete and unconditional support to the liberation movements fighting imperialism and we have supported their right to defend themselves by any means necessary. We stand by our record on Ireland, on Southern Africa, on Palestine and Iraq.

Through our work in solidarity with Irish prisoners we came to support the struggles for the rights of other prisoners. Every issue of FRFI since the early 1980s has carried a Prisoners Fightback page and our principled work on this issue is unique on the British left.

One area where our position has significantly developed was in rela-

tion to our support for the socialist countries. We had no illusions about the reactionary nature of the imperialist-backed Solidarnosc movement in Poland, and we understood the devastating effect that the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe would have on the international working class movement, the oppressed nations and the vast majority of people in the Soviet Union. FRFI argued in autumn 1990 that far from moderating imperialism's predatory character, the collapse of the socialist bloc would remove all restraints on imperialism's drive to carve up and divide the world. FRFI has consistently supported the socialist revolution in Cuba and has reported on the concrete measures that the Cuban Communist Party has taken in building and advancing socialism at home, on the leading role it has played in opposing US imperialism and on its exemplary internationalism towards the oppressed nations impoverished by imperialism.

Finally from our first issue we argued that the main organisations of what we called the British petit bourgeois left, including the Communist Party (now dissolved), Militant (dissolved), the International Marxist Group (dissolved) and the SWP, were a major obstacle to the building of an anti-imperialist movement based on the working class and oppressed in this country. In issue after issue we showed how these organisations consistently attacked the resistance of the oppressed, whether liberation movements taking up arms to defend themselves, black youth fighting police on the streets of British cities with stones and petrol bombs, miners' hit squads dealing with scabs breaking the strike with police protection or poll tax protestors defending themselves against police violence. Apart from the Communist Party, whose demise followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, these organisations or their offshoots have consistently attacked the socialist countries, including Cuba, supported Solidarnosc in Poland, the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the collapse of Soviet bloc countries.

While attacking all these forces for not being 'socialist' enough they have refused to break with the racist, imperialist Labour Party and called for a vote for the Labour Party in General Election after General Election. They have one standard for the oppressed and another for themselves and their imperialist allies. Little wonder that over the last 25 years, every attempt to build an anti-imperialist movement has been thwarted by these forces, most recently demonstrated through the devastating failure of the Stop the War Movement in Britain. We have to break from the reactionary politics of these left organisations.

These then are the lessons drawn from 25 years of political campaigning around FRFI. If they are learned and acted upon then we can move forward to build a socialist movement that the working class so desperately needs in this country.

What you can do in Britain is not only read FRFI, but also join us in building an anti-imperialist/anti-capitalist movement that will place us alongside all those forces fighting imperialism and building socialism internationally.

25th Anniversary FRFI fighting fund

Every donation counts!

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is a fighting 25 years old. Alone on the left, it has fought Labour racism and imperialism. Alone on the left, it has stood in solidarity with the Irish freedom struggle. It has organised with those fighting state racism. Alone on the left it has given a voice to those fighting the rotten racist prison system. Now there is a rising tide of anti-imperialist struggle – in Palestine, Iraq, throughout Latin America. Imperialism faces a huge crisis. Labour old and new is exposed as the party of war. We need to develop FRFI to give a voice to those who are fighting back here in Britain, for those who will have no truck with Labour. For this we need your contributions. Please help us raise £10,000 over the next four months so that we can carry on the struggle against racism and imperialism.

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

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Storm breaks over Ukraine

TREVOR RAYNE

US Secretary of State Powell, British Foreign Secretary Straw and European Commission President Barroso swiftly took the side of the demonstrators in Kiev, protesting at the declaration of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich as winner of Ukraine's 21 November presidential elections. Powell said the US did not accept the results of the election and warned of the consequences if the Ukrainian government did not act quickly. Russian president Putin congratulated Yanukovich before the results were announced. Powell visited the Ukraine during the election campaign and Putin visited twice to support Yanukovich. Writing in *The Guardian* (25 November 2004) Timothy Garton Ash declared for the demonstrators and said that Ukraine was on 'the front line of the forward march of freedom'. As we go to press the Supreme Court has suspended the result of the election.

Powell, Straw and Barroso support opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko is a former head of the National Bank of Ukraine and his associates include those who benefited from

the privatisation of Ukraine's industry. Yushchenko wants closer ties with the European Union (EU) and an open market economy. He said he wants Ukraine's troops withdrawn from Iraq. Yanukovich seeks closer relations with Russia and received strong support from Ukraine's Russian population, located mainly in the east of the country. The industrial workers and miners of the east see in the former German Democratic Republic what Yushchenko's programme offers them: unemployment and poverty.

In 1999, as NATO attacked Yugoslavia, Ukraine's parliament voted for the return of nuclear weapons to Ukraine. Ukraine abandoned nuclear weapons after US President Clinton's government gave assurances that the future of Europe would be based on European institutions and law. The attack on Yugoslavia demonstrated this to be a lie. The US used its military power to exploit the weakness of Russia and assert US power in Europe. The Balkans war was viewed as a prelude to the struggle for control of Ukraine.

As the biggest European country, other than Russia, and with 50 million people, the Ukraine occupies a strategic position in Eurasia. For the US ruling class control over Ukraine would both increase US influence over



Thousands demonstrate in Kiev

Europe and further weaken Russian influence in Eurasia. It would threaten the further disintegration of Russia. In 1998 US strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski said that any democratic movement in the Ukraine to form a security pact with Russia would lead the US to attempt a coup d'état: 'In such a case, when the West would have to choose between a democratic or an independent Ukraine, strategic interests – not democratic considerations – must determine the Western stance.' On 24 November Brzezinski said 'If Ukrainian democracy fails then Russian imperial visions are rewarded.' The US government must tell Russia 'baldly', but in private, that it could not have a 'free ride' in Ukraine.

For the Russian government Ukraine must be bound politically and economically to Russia if Russia is to recover the influence it lost to the US in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in the 1990s.

The US spent \$14 million on

the Ukraine election. It drafted in teams trained in US electoral mass marketing techniques: consultants, image handlers, pollsters, focus groups etc. Such teams successfully contributed to the removal of Slobodan Milosevic from government in Yugoslavia in 2000 and Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia in 2003. (Ian Traynor, *The Guardian*, 26 November 2004). Georgian president Saakashvili used his first anniversary address to encourage his Ukrainian 'sisters and brothers'. Georgia now hosts US troops. The Ukrainian opposition asked Lech Walesa, from Poland's Solidarnosc, to mediate in the electoral dispute.

The Ukrainian people are lured by the prospect of EU membership and life-styles that imperialist global plunder affords if they ally with the EU and US. But it is not democracy and freedom that are on offer. Their anger at the corrupt Ukrainian state is justified, but the imperialists have calculated that it will lead them into a trap.

Côte d'Ivoire: French imperialism runs amok

CHARLES CHINWEZU

On 4 November 2004 the Ivorian air force began bombing rebel-held positions in the centre and north of the country. On 6 November it killed nine French 'peacekeepers' and a US 'aid-worker' at a military base in Bouaké. France, with over 4,000 troops already in the country under a UN mandate, then destroyed the tiny Ivorian air force of two jets and five helicopters as they lay on the tarmac. 'You do not kill French soldiers with impunity', explained French prime minister Raffarin.

French military seized the airport and deployed 50 armoured vehicles in the vicinity of the President Laurent Gbagbo's Abidjan residence. French soldiers fired into the air, surrounded the presidential mansion and placed barbed wire between them and thousands of Ivorian people who heeded radio appeals to protect their head of state. Strategic bridges were seized and armoured vehicles protected roadblocks from military bases to the airport. At the Hotel Ivoire, commandeered as a military base, French officials held talks with Ivorian army chief of staff, General Doue, while outside French helicopters continued to bomb Abidjan.

On 9 November, French

troops opened fire on thousands of demonstrators killing at least ten people. By 10 November, over 50 people had been killed by French troops and over 1,000 injured, with impunity. The UN, EU and US supported this barbarity. Using the pretext of evacuating ex-patriot citizens, foreign troops, including 300 British soldiers and Gurkhas, were sent to Côte d'Ivoire. HMS *Albion* was ordered to Abidjan.

In Côte d'Ivoire on a pretext of acting as a buffer between the government forces and the rebels the French forces may now decide it is time to replace President Gbagbo with a compliant army officer. Such is the motto of French imperialism: 'Flatter the president, fund the opposition, then arm the rebels.'

Amid the usual media misinformation, 'African chaos', 'ethnic rivalries', racist stereotypes about 'rampaging mobs' and 'hordes' and lies about 'many European women' being raped (*The Guardian*, 12 November 2004), Britain, Spain, Italy and Belgium invaded Côte d'Ivoire. Not one European civilian was killed in all the 'savagery violence'. There are now 10,000 heavily armed French and UN troops in Côte d'Ivoire to protect their interests not just in the world's largest cocoa producer (with 43% of world supply) but throughout oil-rich West Africa.

Ireland: pressure on Republicans to end crisis

PAUL MALLON

Commenting on the crisis in the Irish peace process in February 2002, we argued that: 'The reality... is that the Ulster Unionist Party and the British government have manoeuvred the IRA into a position where nothing short of a significant statement from the IRA on disbandment will restore the devolved institutions. The Republican movement is once again being compelled to save the peace process.'

Since then Sinn Féin has grown, electorally surpassing the SDLP as the main nationalist party in the north, second only in size to the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party, now the main voice of unionism. Unionism and British imperialism, with Irish government complicity, have engineered the present crisis in the peace process. The focus of recent talks has been IRA decommissioning weapons and disbandment. Sinn Féin's key concerns are dilution of the Good Friday Agreement and the position surrounding ministerial authority in any future assembly and the north-south institutions.

The Republican movement has attempted to convince its supporters of the need for further IRA arms decommissioning and eventual disbandment. Sinn Féin president, Gerry Adams stated 'Republicans need to be prepared



The UFF in Belfast

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).

This Republican position is compromised as nationalists continue to come under attack from loyalists. In 2003 there were 160 separate incidents carried out by loyalists, including 54 pipe and petrol bomb attacks, a number of shooting incidents, 43 serious physical attacks on people as well as attacks on Catholic homes, schools and churches. The intimidation campaign against Catholics living near the loyalist Sandy Row continues with numerous attacks on residents of a Catholic and ethnic origin. In Derry the UDA and UVF issued a joint threat against nationalists and later carried out

a series of attacks on Catholic homes and a Catholic taxi driver. Homes in the Republican Bogside were attacked on 9 October 2004. Security forces made no arrests or intervention in an area saturated with British intelligence and military posts.

To intimidate the nationalist community the UDA issued a statement on 14 October declaring that they had drawn an 'Orange line' around all protestant areas throughout the Six Counties.

In this context the Labour government formally recognised the phoney ceasefire of the leading loyalist terror group the UDA and its front the UFF. On the very morning of Paul Murphy's 15 November House of Commons speech outlining the new government position, the UDA carried out an attack on an SDLP councillor in Larne.

European Social Forum – playground for opportunists

HANNAH CALLER & BILL BOLLOTEN

The concept of a European Social Forum grew out of the first Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2000, which aimed to bring together people interested in collectively voicing their opposition to the ideology represented by imperialists, neo-liberals and proponents of capitalism at the annual World Economic Forum. The third ESF took place in London in October this year.

The slogan of the ESF is 'Another world is possible' – of that there is no doubt. From a world without poverty, illiteracy, torture, racism, sexism, homophobia, war, environmental destruction, towards one with social justice, human rights, democracy and ecological responsibility. A world run in the interests of humans not profit – a socialist world.

Up to 20,000 people attended the London ESF, participating in a wide range of meetings and activities. The real lessons of the event, however, are not ones that will be learned from any of the speakers, but from studying the way in which the 'left' trade unions and the ubiquitous and iniquitous Socialist Workers Party (SWP) sabotaged support for real struggles and tried to

cover up for collaborators with imperialist warmongering.

TGWU stop march

While delegates milled around the two ESF venues talking about changing the world, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) leafleted to tell them not to attend a march in support of low-paid cleaners in Canary Wharf financial district whose annual salary, £8,000, is similar to the bankers' hourly rate. A speaker at the alternative meeting organised by *SchNews* announced that for the first time in years of TGWU membership he had received an urgent email – insisting that on no account he join this demonstration! The spineless TGWU had pulled out after a legal injunction earlier that week. In the end 150 people listened to speeches at Canary Wharf.

Stop the War Coalition shares platform with Iraqi collaborator

One of the main speakers at the ESF plenary session on 'End the occupation of Iraq' was the General Secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), Subhi Al Mashadani. An angry crowd of demonstrators assembled including Iraqis and Kurds opposed to the occupation, determined that under no circumstances would Mashadani be allowed to speak. They occupied

the central aisle of the meeting, chanting 'Mashadani, you have blood on your hands!'

Many people at the meeting were perplexed and angry, yet what Subhi Al Mashadani represents and why he was invited to the ESF was obscured from most of those present. Here are some of the facts:

- The IFTU was the only trade union grouping recognised by Bremer, Bush's consul in Iraq. It is the only one officially recognised by the interim government and gets backing from the occupation authorities.
- The IFTU does not campaign against the occupation within Iraq and attacks those resisting occupation as terrorists. It does not campaign against the US bombardment of Iraqi cities and civilian populations.
- The IFTU openly backed Blair's attempt to get puppet interim government leader Ayad Allawi to speak at the Labour Party Conference. UK IFTU representative Abdullah Muhsin spoke at the Conference, pleading with delegates not to support a motion calling for the early withdrawal of British forces from Iraq. Muhsin wrote an open letter to trade union delegates, stating that this 'would be bad for my country, and would play into the hands of the extremists'. The motion was dropped.

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Manchester M&S picket: why we are not anti-Jewish

The picket of Marks & Spencer in Manchester has faced a barrage of attacks over the past few months: Zionists, the police, Labour councillors. The accusation is that the picket is racist because it is anti-Jewish. As usual, the exact opposite is the truth. The only people who have attacked Jews have been the Zionists: Jewish people and Muslims who support the picket are constantly racially abused. The police ignore the Zionists' taunts and the Labour councillors want to ban the picket. They have been aided and abetted by the left: the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), CND, Stop the War Coalition who will not help to defend the picket. Nonetheless, the picket continues every Saturday with widespread support.

The Zionists are out in force about once a month. On 30 October around 80 of them attempted to disrupt the picket using whistles and sirens. Like all middle class reactionaries, they are revolting misogynists, hurling vile sexual abuse at women picketers; they also targeted a disabled supporter. They reserve their physical threats for Jewish supporters of the M&S picket. Forewarned of their mobilisation, we asked the SWP/ Stop the War, CND and the PSC to advertise the picket on their e-groups. All three refused.

The police are hand in glove with the Zionists. They have constantly threatened us with Section 14 of the Public Order Act, especially when we try to use a megaphone. On 20 November, they allowed the Zionists to take over a pitch that they, the police, had agreed would be ours. They have ignored the targeting of our Jewish supporters. Whereas they allow the Zionists to wander all over the place, the police constantly try to keep us restricted to one small area and limit our ability to get public support.

In November, for a second time, Manchester Council debated a Lib-Dem motion on the right to protest in the city centre. The debate focused on the M&S picket. Labour councillors opposed the picket. Cllr Pat Kearney, Labour chairman of the council social strategy committee claim-

ed that 'the city has been a proud champion of human rights, what we had outside Marks and Spencer was a howling, scowling faction shouting the most vile and repulsive chants at anyone Jewish'. Richard Leese, leader of the Council then said 'Do the Lib-Dems support people on the streets being openly, violently and abusively anti-Semitic? Do we tolerate people that attack others in that way? We do not'. These councillors are at one with the most right-wing Zionists in arguing that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are one and the same. The truth is that the only abuse of Jewish people comes from the Zionists, and is directed at Jews who support our picket. We will be holding pickets of these Labour councillors' surgeries to expose their lying support for Israeli terror.

Marks and Spencer: links to Israel exposed
Many on the left pretend that Marks & Spencer's dealings with Israel are no different from other supermarkets such as Tesco's. This is to excuse their opposition to the Boycott Marks & Spencer campaign. However, on 13 November, in an article by Linda Grant, *The Guardian* exposed Marks and Spencer's shady dealings with the Zionist state: 'The Gush Katif settlements even have their own ethnic minorities: foreign workers from Thailand

and the Philippines who, at the time of the first Intifada, were brought in to replace Palestinian workers in the hothouses which grow organic produce such as tomatoes, green peppers, lettuce and houseplants they say is bound for Marks and Spencer.'

On 9 December, M&S Chief Executive Stuart Rose is one of three guests of honour at the annual dinner of the British-Israel Chamber of Commerce (B-ICC). The other two are the Israeli Ambassador and the British Ambassador to Israel. M&S is one of a handful of British 'core' members of the B-ICC, and far away the largest. This event confirms M&S's 'longstanding support of the State of Israel and close links with its leaders' (Judith Bevan: *The rise and fall of Marks & Spencer*, 2001, p167). FRFI will be ensuring that there is a noisy picket of the event – come and join us! 6pm, Thursday 9 December, Millennium Hotel, Grosvenor Square, London.

Heather Keating

STOP PRESS

Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable Michael Todd wants to ban the M&S picket between 29 November and 3 January. He has sent a letter to the picket organiser telling us that we have to demonstrate in the Manchester Peace Garden – half a mile from Market Street M&S! We might as well be outside Old Trafford! Even then he says we can have no more than 20 people present. He says this is because of the Christmas crowds – but there has never been a problem over the last four years. He claims that this will 'facilitate your right to freedom of speech under article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights'. This is sheer deceit and underlines Manchester police support for the Zionists. It is the first step in getting the picket shifted altogether, and we will resist this. Our right is to be outside M&S supporting the Palestinian people.

'The unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable'

– Oscar Wilde

After a merry chase through English parliamentary procedure, hunting with dogs was finally banned by Act of Parliament on 18 November. Prime Minister Blair tried a final decoy to delay the ban until after the general election (he will need their votes), but with no luck. The horn has been sounded Tally-ho! The hunters are pledged to disrupt the nation, the general election and all things foreign (ie urban) until they get their way and are able to pursue small animals across the countryside and tear them to pieces for pleasure once more (more endearing are their badges encribed 'Bollocks to Blair').

But contrary to Countryside Alliance and pro-hunting claims, according to a Mori Poll published in *The Guardian* on 18 December 2001, 83% of people in the UK think hunting is cruel, unnecessary or unacceptable. In a Gallup poll for the *Daily Telegraph* in 1997, 77% of rural dwellers disapproved of fox hunting.

The Act will outlaw the cruel and barbaric killing of animals for pleasure. Other blood 'sports' which involve cruelty to animals, such as hare coursing, badger baiting, cock fighting and dog fighting, were outlawed long ago. The pro-hunters claim that their pastime is not cruel and helps to rid the countryside of predatory pests which kill farm animals like lambs and chickens. In fact foxes feed mainly on rabbits and rats – a benefit to farmers. There are estimated to be 250,000 adult foxes in the UK, producing about 400,000 cubs a year, most of which will die in their first year of life. Humans kill about 400,000 foxes a year so a ban on fox hunting, which kills about 20,000 a year at most, will have little impact on the numbers.

Far worse than their disgusting pleasures, however, are the claims of the pro-hunting, landed elite that they are the guardians and custodians of the English landscape, who know best how to protect English heritage. The landowners have successfully harnessed a general feeling of grievance in rural areas as a result of a crisis in farming in order to defend their wealth, power and privilege. They shamelessly portray themselves as defenders of working people's jobs, homes and futures.



The United Kingdom consists of 60 million acres. 41 million of these are designated 'agricultural land'. 15 million acres are considered 'waste' and consist of forests, rivers, mountains and are predominantly owned by the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence. That leaves four million acres for 'urban plot'. Of this total 60 million acres, 69% is owned by 0.6% of the population. That means that 158,000 families own 41 million acres and 24 million families live on four million acres. According to current figures, land is more fairly distributed in Brazil than in the Britain.

English landowners have consistently damaged the English countryside in favour of profits and subsidies. They have persistently destroyed wildlife habitats like woodland and hedgerows. Their gamekeepers trap and poison birds of prey to protect their pheasants (for profitable shoots), and their sheep are dipped in noxious chemicals which poison farmworkers, rivers and fish. Conservators and guardians they are not!

Estimates vary as to the number of people who are employed directly in hunting. The Cam-

paign for Rural Rights, launched by the Countryside Alliance in 1997, claims that 160,000 full and part-time jobs will be lost as a result of the ban. Research by the Produce Studies Group showed that the ban would threaten at least 16,000 jobs in hunting and associated trades and activities – 70% of them in rural areas. Independent research by Dr Neil Ward of the University of Newcastle found that fewer than 1,000 full-time jobs are directly linked to hunting.

If the hunting lobby were seriously concerned about the future of workers in the countryside (and they never have been before), then there are many other possible leisure activities which would involve many more people in work and participation than the rather select band who go hunting. And therein lies the rub! They don't actually want to attract *hoi polloi*, the ordinary people, in any numbers to enjoy rural pursuits. They expect our sympathy for their civil liberty to chase freely over the countryside in pursuit of foxes, but don't any of us dare to go for a walk across their land!

Barnaby Mitchell

Education Notes

Labour is an enthusiastic supporter of the Public Finance Initiative (PFI). It argues that PFI is a quick and effective way of providing transport, health facilities and schooling to under-resourced areas and is better and less costly than state provision. Now from all over the country reports are coming in of shoddy, late and over-priced PFI construction work. One recent example is Haverstock Secondary School in Camden where the start of term was delayed by three weeks because the private development company failed to complete the new buildings on time. Japanese contractors Kajima blamed a challenging construction timetable and bad weather for the delay in its £21 million contract. Similar delays have held up PFI work on the

borough's Swiss Cottage swimming baths and sports facilities which have been closed all over the summer. Camden councillors are 'disappointed' and 'frustrated' because they were given repeated assurance by Kajima that the project would be completed on schedule and say that Kajima face escalating financial penalties. Camden should wait till they are billed for the final debt!

Tomlinson to the rescue

The result of opening up schools to privatisation is an awful mess with accusations of cheating and lowered qualifications as the rate of excellent exam results rises. Inevitably another 'reform' was announced following the revelation that one exam board gave A grades at A level for 45% marks.

But the real scandal is the continuing 25% of pupils who leave school with few, if any, academic qualifications, a close correlation to the number of children who live in poverty. This quarter of all school pupils, concentrated in some poor areas up to 70% of the age group, who are alienated from school and make little or no effort to pass exams are targeted by the Tomlinson Report on education for 14-19-year-olds. The report argues for practical, work-based activities, ending the very British problem of the distinction between academic and vocational education. All students should have a mixture of vocational, basic skills and academic courses the Tomlinson Report suggests, until the parting of the ways at A level. So building studies, hair and beauty, child-care and sports should be available to all from the age of 14, although we know that the private schools and permitted specialist schools are not and never have been tied to this or any national curriculum.

Susan Davidson

Why is Labour privatising health?

Labour policy towards the National Health Service has now become quite clear: it is to progressively privatise health care provision whilst funding it through taxation, or, more accurately, national insurance. As the privatised system gets more and more expensive, so eligibility for services will be undermined, and individuals expected to pay their own way. More and more tiers will appear in the system, with the working class and poor losing out along the way. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

Labour has promised significant increases in the level of spending on health. Between 1999/2000 and 2007/08, real NHS expenditure will rise from £40.3bn to £90.2bn, with annual increases ranging between 5.3 and 8.9%. NHS spending will rise from 6.6% of GDP in 2002/03 to 8.2% in 2007/08. As we shall see, these rises are essential if Labour is to ensure a viable future for privatised provision of health care, and at the same time meet the needs of the middle class and better-off sections of the working class who cannot afford private health insurance.

Why privatise?

A nationally-funded, nationalised health service is proven to be the most efficient model for delivering health services, even within capitalism. So why turn to a model which is going to be less efficient and more expensive? Because health workers in a nationalised system do not produce surplus value, the source of profit in a capitalist system. However, in conditions of deepening crisis, capital constantly has to seek out new opportunities for the production of surplus value. What was previously the most rational and cost-effective arrangement for organising health services now becomes a barrier to capitalism desperate for new sources of profit. With this comes the ideology that private sector provision is better than public, and the champions of that ideology – the new highly-paid NHS managers.

Nor can this be separated from the growth of inter-imperialist rivalries. As we pointed out more than three years ago, Labour 'is acting as the executive agent of the City and British monopolies which are seeking to force the sale of public utilities and services throughout the world in an attempt to find new sources of profits.' (FRFI 161, June-July 2001). This, we argued, was why Labour was then pushing for the final agreement on Gats, the General Agreement on Trade in Services: 'Gats requires the privatisation of all public services, excludes only those government services which are "not in competition with (private) service suppliers". But of course thanks to Labour, nearly every public service in Britain now competes with private services'. As privatising water, electricity and gas created British multinationals able to compete on a world stage when countries were forced under neoliberalism to privatise these utilities, so privatising health care provision within Britain will foster conditions in which British companies are able to take advantage of the drive to privatise health care internationally.

However, all things being equal, a privatised system will always be more expensive than nationalised health provision, because:

- it has to produce a profit;



Alan Milburn, former Labour Secretary of State for Health, an enthusiastic supporter of private health care provision. After resigning, he joined Bridgepoint Capital as a £30,000 per year consultant. Bridgepoint Capital part owns Alliance Medical, which rents radiology scanners to the NHS. He has now rejoined the Government to run Labour's general election campaign.

- it can only run if it has an adequate infrastructure to support the costing and billing of health care, and then processing payments as well;
- it is less able to manage the risk associated high-cost cases, a risk that can be spread across an entire nationalised system.

Labour is preparing the ground for this more expensive system by not only increasing the funding, but also by restricting eligibility for services, particularly for that section of the population which is of no further use to capital – the elderly.

The Tories start...

The break-up of the NHS into a plethora of competing hospitals and primary care institutions is not something that Labour could achieve overnight without serious destabilisation. In fact it is a process that started with 'market-testing' and the contracting out of ancillary services in the 1980s. The outcome was predictable: slashed wages and appalling conditions for the workers, and a sharp deterioration in the cleanliness of hospitals which has contributed to the rise of infection rates today, particularly of MRSA. The number of ancillary staff directly employed by the NHS fell from 260,000 in 1981 to 120,000 in 1994. At the same time the Tories took the first steps towards ending NHS provision in certain areas of care: optician services, dental care and long-term inpatient care for the frail elderly and those suffering from chronic illnesses (Allyson Pollock, *NHS plc*, pp38-39). Poor dental health and poverty are directly related: it was the

demand for decent dental care and gynaecological services which led to early overspending when the NHS was set up in 1948. The Tory cap on dental spending meant that by 1999, patients were paying for more than half of dental treatment, and only a third of all dentists were providing NHS care.

The ending of long-term care for the elderly had an even more dramatic effect. Patients were shifted out of NHS beds into local authority or voluntary-sector homes. At the same time spending on social services was capped whilst new Department of Social Security rules only funded people staying in voluntary sector or for-profit homes. Local authorities had every incentive therefore to close their own homes or sell them off. In 1979, only 16% of residential care homes had been for-profit; by 2003, 69% of all beds were in the for-profit sector. At the same time, restrictions on the provision of domiciliary services such as 'meals on wheels' meant that large numbers of elderly people could no longer support themselves at home. One estimate is that 27% more people had moved into care in 1991 than would have been the case if 1981 levels of domiciliary provision had been sustained (Pollock, p168). Private provision of long-term care is now an industry worth nearly £7bn a year.

The next step was the Tories' introduction of GP fund-holding and the internal market in 1991. Over the next six years, the NHS lurched from crisis to crisis as health authorities tried to manage the system by restricting access to care, and hospital trusts

closed wards and theatres at year-end to control over-spending. Severe spending limits in the late 1990s exacerbated the problem; matters were made worse when Labour committed itself to keep to those limits for two years after winning the election in 1997. By the end of 1998, Labour had brought the NHS to its knees.

Labour accelerates...

Labour came to office pledging to keep within Tory spending limits, yet it accelerated the use of Private Funding Initiative (PFI) to pay for new hospital developments, and over the next seven years most of its principal policy initiatives were geared towards the establishment of an internal market for health care provision:

- **The enormous extension of PFI.** By 2001, there were already 67 hospital PFI schemes. Already the costs of funding the 30 to 60 years contracts had become apparent, requiring cuts of 25% of clinical staff and a 30% reduction in the number of beds. Much PFI hospital construction breaches rules on the minimum space between beds, thereby undermining efforts at controlling infection. PFI has now been extended into primary care through so-called LIFT schemes which aggregate community and GP premises into 'bundles' which then become substantial developments in their own right. There were 42 such schemes by 2003, with many more in the pipeline.
- **The establishment of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs).** These became purchasers of hospital care, and deliv-

ers of primary care services as a new sort of internal market emerged.

- **The renegotiation of the GP contract.** GPs used to have a national contract with the Secretary of State. Now they contract with the local PCT. They are required to deliver a core range of services; other services are defined as 'additional' (such as out-of-hours) or 'enhanced'. The upshot is that PCTs can now franchise these services, and so open up primary care services to commercial operation.

- **The introduction of Payment by Results (PBR) for hospital services.** Under this system, which will come into full effect in April 2005, a national tariff will be set for almost all non-emergency operations. This turns them into commodities which can be bought from anywhere – especially from the private sector.

- **Foundation Trusts.** The prime duty of Foundation hospitals will be to function 'efficiently, effectively and economically'. They will have unlimited powers to enter into joint ventures with the private sector whether to raise money or provide clinical services; they can also set their own pay rates. They will essentially become commercial operations.

- **Patient choice.** New rules require each GP to offer private sector as well as NHS options for patients being referred for hospital care;

- **The NHS Improvement Plan.** This envisages that the private sector will be performing at least 10% of all elective operations by 2008; other publications envisage up to 15%. Already the so-called independent (ie, privately-run) treatment centres, 27 of which have been tendered, will have a budget of £2bn.

The utter cynicism of this policy was revealed when Labour rejected a Royal Commission's recommendation that the state fund nursing care for those in residential homes. Blair dismissed the needs of this vulnerable section of the population, telling the House of Commons: 'We have chosen not to introduce free personal care because it would cost about £1bn, and we believe the money would be better spent elsewhere.'

Labour's policy then is quite clear: it is embarking on a massive privatisation exercise in response to the crisis of capitalist profitability. The increase in NHS funding has two purposes:

- To make sure that there is an adequate level of service to meet the needs of the middle class and the better-off sections of the working class;
- To pay the extra cost of a privatised system which will necessarily be more expensive than the nationalised one it replaces.

In the years to come, we will see more and more how the profitability requirements of the private sector will ride rough-shod over the needs of the working class.

Death of Arafat: Imperialism aims to destroy the Intifada

The death of Yasser Arafat on 10 November in a French military hospital has given imperialism a further opportunity to attack and undermine the Intifada, as BOB SHEPHERD reports.

From the moment that a severely ill Arafat left his compound in Ramallah en route to the hospital in France, the media were circling like vultures, eagerly predicting his death and the 'opportunities that this would open up for the Palestinians and the peace process'. By this they meant that his death would allow representatives of the Palestinian ruling class to assume the mantle of power and take the final steps to confront the Palestinian resistance: leaders such as former Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and the current Prime Minister, Ahmed Qurei. Abbas has become a millionaire from his corrupt dealings; when prime minister he branded the Intifada as 'terrorist'. Qurei's family is connected with a construction business involved in building the separation wall on the West Bank. These are the sort of leaders that imperialism favours.

However, with his death, an opportunity has opened up for the Palestinian ruling class to consummate its alliance with imperialism and Zionism. As Bush put it in his joint press conference with Blair at the White House on 12 November, 'the months ahead offer a new opportunity to make progress toward a lasting peace...I look forward to working with the Palestinian leadership that is committed to fighting terror and committed to the cause of democratic reform'.

Within hours of Arafat's death, Mahmoud Abbas had been elected chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). He is also, in all practical terms, running the Fatah movement as its new leader, Farouk Kadoumi, refuses to return to Palestine from Tunisia because of his opposition to the Oslo agreements. The election for a new President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is sched-

able to declare victory without it being undermined by open Israeli interference.

Opposition to Abbas will come from some independent candidates who will be standing on anti-corruption platforms, a joint candidate from an alliance of leftist parties which includes both the Popular Front and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. There was speculation that Marwan Barghouti, currently serving five life sentences in an Israeli jail, would stand. He would have had much popular support because of his leadership of the Intifada in the West Bank prior to his detention. However, he is also a prominent member of Fatah and the bourgeois leadership pulled out all the stops to prevent him from putting himself forward. Following a visit by Palestinian minister Kadura Fares, Barghouti stood aside and appealed to Palestinians to support Abbas.

All the Palestinian resistance groups are united in expressing their opposition to 'inter-faction' fighting in the election period. However, the Palestinian bourgeoisie clearly understands this to mean that the working class and oppressed should give up their resistance and allow the ruling class to conclude a shabby deal with the Zionists. The Intifada is under threat. We must redouble our solidarity efforts.

Sharon's Gaza 'pull out'

On 26 October the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) voted in favour of Sharon's disengagement plan from the Gaza strip. This was carried through only with the support of the Israeli Labour Party as Sharon's Likud party split down the middle with almost half its MKs voting against. The plan supposedly agrees to the evacuation of the settlers and the dismantling of the settlements from the Gaza strip and from four small settlements in the West Bank in the summer of 2005.

However things are never as they seem when the actions of the Zionists are examined. For a start the vote on 26 October was not a vote on beginning the actual demolition of the settlements, it was just a preliminary

not last, that they wouldn't leave us alone, wouldn't get off our case. Time was not on our side. There was international erosion, internal erosion. Domestically, in the meantime everything was collapsing. The economy was stagnant and the Geneva Initiative had gained broad support. And then we were hit with the letters of officers and letters of pilots and commandos [letters refusing to serve in the occupied territories].

Weissglas makes the political aims of the 'disengagement plan' clear: 'the disengagement supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will be not be a political process with the Palestinians'. 'Disengagement', when it comes, will create in the Gaza strip a vast prison camp for the Palestinians, one where the Israelis will control the borders, the air-space and the sea. The response of the Zionists to any act of Palestinian resistance will be similar if not worse than the destruction caused in the so-called 'Days of Penitence' operation which left over 100 Palestinians dead in Gaza.

Operation 'Days of Penitence'

On 28 September the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) swept into northern Gaza, an area which includes Jabalia refugee camp and Beit Hanoun, for Operation 'Days of Penitence'. Up to 100,000 people were put under siege by a force which included around 200 armoured vehicles. Over the next 17 days the IDF remained in control of this area and when they eventually withdrew they left at least 107 Palestinian dead and 431 injured. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) produced a report on 16 October which detailed the carnage, destruction and terror the Zionists had inflicted.

Most of the casualties were caused by tank shells and helicopter missiles fired into densely-populated areas. Of the 107 reported dead at the time of the report, 27 were aged 18 or under. This includes nine school children aged 15 and under. Two schoolteachers were also killed. During the occupation at least 91 homes were destroyed and 101 damaged. This affected a total of 1,508 Palestinians, with 675 being made homeless. The majority of homes destroyed were in Jabalia refugee camp with over 90% of those made homeless already refugees. This was the most intense house demolition operation in northern Gaza since the start of the Intifada.

The report makes the point that in the same period as this destruction was taking place in northern Gaza, IDF house demolitions left 482 people homeless in Rafah. In 2004 an average of 1,360 Gazans per month or 45 people a day have been made homeless by such wanton destruction. The Zionist operation also left a total of 19 public and commercial premises destroyed, including a mosque, and a further 16 damaged, including school buildings and other mosques. The report details some of the damage to schools:

'Tank shells and bullets were fired at schools destroying walls and classrooms, windows and window frames and leaving blackboards pitted with holes. Bulldozers destroyed boundary walls. A resident school attendant's shelter was also demolished. Furniture was damaged and equipment including computers, fax machines, fans and stationery was looted. The cost of repairing the UNRWA schools will be close to \$100,000.'

Large tracts of agricultural land, in particular olive groves and citrus trees, were flattened in the Beit Hanoun district. The IDF also destroyed 30 greenhouses. Since the Intifada began in September 2000 the Israelis have destroyed over 50% of all arable land in Beit Hanoun. Nothing will change with an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza: they will continue to undertake such operations with complete impunity.



Thousands gathered in Ramallah for Arafat's funeral

Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad refuse to enter candidates in an election held under the auspices of the Oslo agreements. However a prominent Hamas leader in the West Bank, Hasan Yousef, just released from Israeli prison, issued a statement saying that Hamas might decide to support an independent candidate who supported national interests such as the right of return. Hamas's real concern, though, is for there to be general elections: presidential, legislative and municipal. As Hamas's Gaza leader Mahmoud Zahhar put it, 'True national unity begins at the grassroots level, we must respect our people's rights to freely choose their representatives'. Hamas is gearing up to participate in local elections and would like them sooner rather than later.

Meanwhile Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Shallah said that his movement was not ready to participate in a Palestinian Authority (PA) that was based on the Oslo agreements but 'we are prepared to discuss any other formula grouping the PA and the Palestinian factions over common grounds'. He went on to say that Islamic Jihad was prepared to join the PLO if it is restructured on a 'new democratic and struggle basis'.

stage and the whole issue will come back to the Knesset at the end of March 2005. No compensation will be paid out to any settler wanting to get out of Gaza until that vote takes place in March. In the meantime building and development of settlements in Gaza can continue to ensure 'support for the needs of daily life'. The road to the final dismantling of the settlements and the exodus of the settlers will be long and tortuous and with Sharon attempting to get as much political capital as possible out of it.

Dov Weissglas, Sharon's senior adviser made clear what lies behind the Gaza 'disengagement plan' in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* at the beginning of October: 'The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process...When you freeze that process you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem'. Asked why the plan had been conceived he said 'Because in the fall of 2003 we understood that everything was stuck. And although by the way the Americans read the situation the blame fell on the Palestinians not on us, Arik (Sharon) grasped that this state of affairs could



For the majority of the Palestinian people, Arafat represented their national resistance, despite his treachery when he signed the 1993 Oslo peace agreement. As a bourgeois politician he was astute enough to realise that the resistance of the Palestinian working class and oppressed set limits on the extent of his capitulation. Hence he could not sign the Camp David proposals in 2000: he would have forfeited all support from the masses. Whilst he remained in power, the Palestinian bourgeoisie was prevented from pursuing its policy of complete surrender to Zionism.

uled to take place on 9 January 2005 with Abbas the favoured candidate of the Fatah movement and the overwhelming favourite to win.

For the election to take place in any meaningful way the Palestinian leadership is calling for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the main population centres, the lifting of roadblocks to allow the free movement of candidates and voters, and the right of Palestinians in East Jerusalem to vote. Sharon is under pressure from US imperialism to make some concessions, since it wants Abbas to be

BLITZING FALLUJAH FITTING UP IRAQ FOR DEMOCRACY

Rivals manoeuvre

The purpose of the Iraq war is geo-strategic: a war for global domination by the US ruling class with its British ruling class allies. Control over territory, oil and oil transshipment routes is essential for the US ruling class to retain domination over potential rivals Europe, Russia, Japan and China. This is in a context of diminishing oil and gas resources and increasing and competing demand for those resources by the rival powers. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and a perceived weakening of US control over the Middle East, the US ruling class has mobilised militarily and ideologically to be the main beneficiary of the disintegration of the Soviet state and to reinforce its power in the Middle East. The US presidential election was a victory for US nationalism, which in an oppressor state is necessarily predatory and racist. For the US ruling class it has no choice other than to mobilise because international capitalism is in crisis and it must fight to survive.

This October the energy consultant group Wood Mackenzie reported that in the past three years the ten biggest oil companies spent more on exploration than the value of the reserves they discovered. In 2003 they spent a combined \$8 billion to yield discoveries worth less than \$4 billion. Exploration spending fell from \$11 billion in 1998 to \$8 billion in 2003. However, spending on developing existing reserves rose from \$34.6 billion in 1998 to a record \$49.5 billion in 2003. New resources are proving harder to find, while existing resources are being more rapidly exhausted.

Also in October the International Energy Agency forecasts the world's greater dependency on Middle Eastern oil. Global demand for oil will rise from 82.4 million barrels per day in 2004 to 121 million barrels per day in 2030, a 50% increase. The Oil Producing and Exporting Countries' (OPEC) share of world oil supplies will rise from 35% to over 50% by 2030. Oil trade between producer and consumer countries will double. 'Most of that additional trade will have to pass through vital choke-points, sharply increasing the possibilities of supply disruption.' With oil prices between \$40-50 a barrel the scramble for oil is accelerating and with it the fight for territory and power. Imperialism is a struggle between the great powers to divide and redivide the world.

Between them Iraq and Saudi Arabia hold close to one third of known oil reserves. The US and British ruling classes cannot renounce control over this resource. In August this year Royal Dutch Shell and BP bid for the right to advise the Iraqi interim government on how to develop the Kirkuk and Rumail oil fields. Approximately 60 British companies are currently working in Iraq with business worth \$2.6 billion. 1,850 UK citizens are registered as working there.

In January Libya will launch a 'road-show' offering up its oil reserves to bids from multinational corporations. In the Caspian Basin it is said of David Woodward, head of BP Amoco in Azerbaijan, that he is as powerful as the ruling Aliyev family; 'If we pull out of Baku, the country

would collapse overnight,' according to a BP spokesperson.

BP has recently announced that together with its Russian partner Rosneft it has found oil near Sakhalin, an island north of Japan. China is competing with Japan for Siberian oil. This November Japan identified a Chinese nuclear submarine in Japanese waters, leading the Japanese foreign minister to demand an apology from the Chinese government. China has begun a gas project in the sea close to Japan and the Japanese government fears that China might take reserves claimed by Japan. With the Afghanistan war the US has established military bases from the Caucasus through Central Asia up to China's western border. China, Europe and Russia have no intention of allowing themselves to be made dependent on the US ruling class.

The China National Petroleum Corporation has invested an estimated \$40 billion in overseas energy development since 2000. China has opposed UN sanctions on Sudan. For the past six years China has been the Sudanese government's main backer, bought 70% of Sudan's exports, serviced its \$20 billion debt and supplied the government with many of its weapons. China's oil imports have grown 35% this year; between them Sudan and Iran supply 20% of China's oil imports. China is building a 600 mile \$2 billion oil pipeline across Burma, thereby avoiding the choke-point of the Malacca Straits. China is developing Gwadar Port in Pakistan from which it hopes to bring oil and gas from the Gulf through a pipeline over the Karakoram Pass to Xinjiang Province. In September 2003 China tested a prototype new jet fighter, the Xiao Long FC1, jointly produced with Pakistan and intended to rival the US F-16. Seeking Saudi Arabian oil, China has provided Saudi Arabia with access to China's market and supplies of weapons, including ballistic missiles that the US and Europe have refused to sell to Saudi Arabia.

In response the US, Israel and India are forming a military axis. In September 2003 Sharon's visit to India was the first by an Israeli Prime Minister to that country. The US government gave permission for Israel to

sell its Phalcon early warning radar system to India. Israel intends to sell India its Arrow ballistic missile system. October 2003 saw the largest ever Indo-US naval exercise. India and Sri Lanka have recently signed a defence pact; the US Navy has designs on Trincomalee, a deep-water port in the Tamil region. India is competing with China for oil resources. It has invested \$1.5 billion in Sudan and is considering building a pipeline across Burma and another from Iran to India via Pakistan. On 17 November the US government announced the biggest arms sale to Pakistan in over 14 years, worth \$1.2 billion, including surveillance aircraft and missiles.

Across Africa the French state is sparring with the US. This July the French government announced a new military pact with Algeria involving weapons, training and intelligence. In October the European Union (EU) and Syria signed an association agreement giving Syria greater access to European markets. However, the US state imposed a trade embargo on Syria earlier this year, calling the country an 'unusual and extraordinary threat,' citing the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. France is edging Syria to remove its troops from Lebanon and seeks to re-establish the Middle East role it lost after the Second World War.

The US threatened to use a 25 November meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency to refer Iran to the UN Security Council. US bellicosity was thwarted a week before the meeting when France, Germany and Britain (EU3) reached an agreement with the Iranian government for Iran to voluntarily suspend uranium enrichment. The US State Department said 'verification and sustainability' were key. US Secretary of State Powell accused Iran of developing a missile capable of delivering a nuclear bomb.

A dwindling coalition

This is the context of growing inter-imperialist rivalry in which the 'coalition of the willing' is dwindling and the British Labour government volunteered the Black Watch regiment to help with the attack on Fallujah. In September President Bush asked the

United Nations to help the coalition forces in Iraq. His request was rejected and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the war was illegal. In November the Netherlands and Hungary announced they were pulling their troops out of Iraq by March 2005. Ten states have either already pulled their forces out or announced their intention to do so. Prime Minister Blair rang the leader of Hungary's centre-right opposition party to ask them to vote to keep Hungary's forces in Iraq. His plea was rejected. US General James Jones, Nato's top military commander, said that ten Nato member countries were refusing to send troops to Iraq for a training mission and that this threatened the mission and the 'cohesion of the alliance'. The US has complained that France and Germany have forbidden staff stationed at Nato headquarters to participate in Iraq missions, breaching the Nato treaty requiring officers assigned to it to be subordinate to Nato and not national government command.

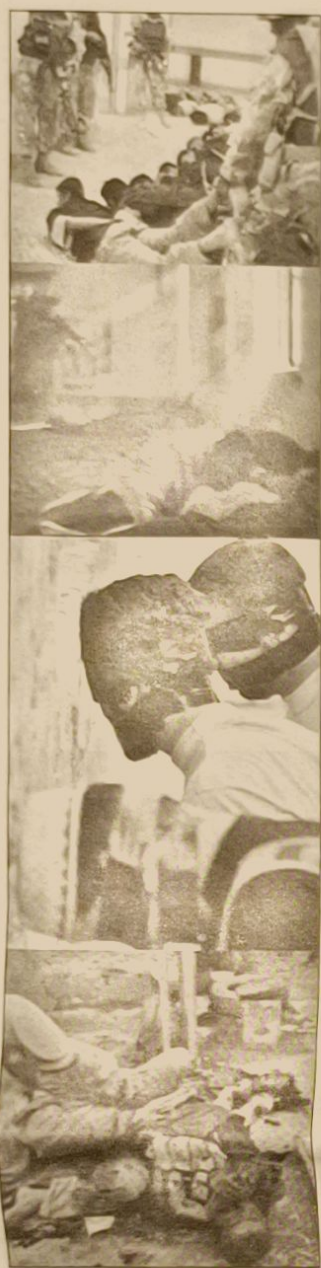
It is entirely in keeping with the Labour government's willingness to deploy British forces on dangerous missions that the Black Watch regiment was sent to central Iraq. Prime Minister Blair proposed sending ground troops in to Serbia in 1999 and dispatched British soldiers in to Afghanistan's Tora Bora mountains when the US asked for help in 2001. British military commanders twice refused US requests to send troops to the Baghdad area. The current commander of the Black Watch sent an e-mail in which he said, 'I hope the government knows what it has got itself into. I'm not sure they fully appreciate the risks.' The Black Watch arrived at Camp Dogwood on 28 October and came under mortar attack the following day. The attacks continue. Five British soldiers have been killed as a result of the posting so far, including a Fijian soldier serving with the Black Watch, one of over 2,000 Fijians in British regiments.

A British military report on the incidence of mental health problems among the troops records that in the year from March 2003 460 soldiers were treated for problems and 52 diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. A reason given for the high incidence of illness is a lack of belief in the justice of the war. Seventeen US soldiers are under investigation for refusing to undertake a convoy; they called it a 'suicide mission'. Five hundred Iraqi recruits are reported to have refused to take part in the attack on Fallujah. The fighting in Iraq is now more intense than at any time since the March 2003 invasion. During the first three days of the ground attack on Fallujah more US soldiers were reported killed across Iraq than in

continued on page 8



Iraqis clear the dead from the streets of Fallujah



continued from page 1

population and the resistance, to demonstrate that the occupation forces will act without restraint and destroy the will to resist.

After 12 days the US claimed to have killed 1,200 resistance fighters and taken 1,052 prisoners. Broadcast film footage showed how wounded prisoners were shot – not allowed 'to raise their hands in surrender'. It is estimated that 51 US soldiers were killed and 400 wounded. As yet there is no reliable estimate for civilian casualties. After 10 days one Red Cross official suggested up to 800 civilians were dead. Eye-witness accounts talk of there being 'very little of the town now, everywhere there are buildings which have been destroyed'. 'Mosques are in ruins... rubble and human remains litter the empty street.' US troops arrest males aged 15 to 45 who attempt to leave the city. There is no power or water, little food and no medicine and no surgeons. Coalition film crews show food and medicine distribution centres but people are afraid of being killed by snipers if they venture out. People are forced to drink dirty water and children are dying.

Before the assault all attempts by Fallujah's representatives to reach a settlement were rejected by the interim government who insisted that Fallujah hand over Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. The representatives repeated that Al Zarqawi was not in Fallujah. With US troops claiming victory they admitted that Al Zarqawi was not in Fallujah. This was the pre-meditated murder of a city before the eyes of the world.

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Fallujah. The US military suffered 77 deaths in September. On 2 October total US dead in Iraq was 1,056, by 21 November this had risen to 1,227 dead.

The US and British states need every ally they can get. All the more disgraceful then that the British Trade Union Congress and Labour Party voted this Autumn for extending the military occupation and thereby offered the murder of Fallujah a shred of legitimacy.

Divide and rule

Key to the US and British strategy is the proposed 30 January 2005 election. It is being used to try and divide and buy off potential opponents. In Sadr City in Baghdad, scene of fierce resistance to the occupation forces at the time of the April attack on Fallujah, a US spokesperson explains their tactics as 'engagement with community leaders along with precision targeted strikes.' They seek to engage as many political forces as possible with the electoral process and attack those that refuse. On 7 November, as the ground attack on Fallujah began, it was announced that some followers of Muqtada Al Sadr would join a Shia list of candidates sponsored by Ayatollah Al Sistani. Al Sadr's supporters had been apportioned a minimum of 12% of the 275 parliamentary seats. This 12% is part of 52% of seats allocated to religious-based political movements. Of these, two thirds are set aside for three Shia parties. These are divide and rule elections. With the guerrilla war escalating, the Coalition forces are trying to confine combat to Sunni areas. Some of Al Sadr's supporters denounced any elections held under US occupation and conducted armed resistance.

The occupation forces' most reliable ally has been the Kurds, who have proved to be the most willing fighters alongside the US troops. The Kurds retain relative autonomy in northern Iraq. Delegates of the oil-rich Shia southern provinces met in the summer to discuss setting up an autonomous region. Imperialism may calculate that partition of Iraq offers a way for them to dominate the country and control its resources.

This year's US military spending of \$437 billion is 50% higher than in 2001. It is exacerbating already soaring government and trade debts. For the US there will come a day of reckoning. Military force is no mere act of will, but depends upon the production of weapons, and this depends upon production in general (Engels). US manufacturing output in the 1960s at the time of the Vietnam War constituted 27% of the economy and provided 24% of employment. In 2003

manufacturing amounted to 13.8% of gross domestic product and 10.5% of employment. The US industrial base is shrinking and with it the manufacturing and engineering capacity to achieve military domination of the world. New rivals will emerge. 'Some new (European Union) states are large arms producers and exporters. The EU is now home to more than 400 companies in 23 countries manufacturing small arms and light weapons – hardly less than the US.' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2004.

The tragedy of Iraq

On 29 October the scientific journal the *Lancet* estimated that 100,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the US and British invasion. 84% of the deaths were attributed to the occupation forces, of which 95% were due to air attacks and artillery, the majority of the victims being women and children. The British Labour government moved quickly to cast doubt on the report and received the support of much of the media. On 18 November the Lloyd Inquiry confirmed the existence of Gulf War Syndrome among British troops and acknowledged the use of Depleted Uranium (DU) as a likely cause. 340 tons of DU were dropped on Iraq in 1991 and even more has been used in the current war. Incidences of malignancy in children in the Basra area have more than trebled since 1990 and leukaemia follows the same trend. 'In 2003 *The Christian Science Monitor* measured radiation levels in Baghdad 1,000 to 1,900 times higher than normal, adding that in this year's war on Iraq, the Pentagon used its radioactive arsenal mainly in the urban centres, rather than in desert battlefields as in '91.' (CND Press Release). CND calls the use of DU 'nuclear war by the back door.'

But part of the tragedy of Iraq and the horror of Fallujah is the feeble opposition to the war in Britain and the US. All those who remain in the Labour Party sustain this government and are thereby complicit in the slaughter in Iraq.

'We are in Vietnam to fulfil one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. We will stand in Vietnam.' Less than a decade after US President Johnson uttered these words US forces withdrew from Vietnam. They never lost a major military battle but received a terrific political defeat. The savagery of the US colossus will not destroy the will of the Iraqi people to resist. Somewhere in the ruins of Fallujah, in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra they are fashioning the weapons and devising the tactics that will drive the invaders from Iraq. ■

Afghanistan – an imperialist democracy

The US and British governments proclaimed another victory for democracy with the election of their man Hamid Karzai as President in October. Recently visiting Afghanistan the writer Charles Glass reports that more districts are falling to the Taliban each month. 'US forces controlled only three of the eleven districts of Zabul...In Uruzgan province...the Taliban ran four of the 14 districts. All the southern provinces near Pakistan – Hillmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Paktika and Paktya – have become Taliban havens.' Osama bin Laden's number two, Ayman Al Zawahiri, said of the US in Iraq and Afghanistan that if they continue to fight 'they will bleed to death' but 'if they withdraw they will lose everything'. (Charles Glass, *The London Review of Books*, 18 November 2004)

In the north of Afghanistan the US allows the warlords to rule through extortion, customs' duties on borders and opium sales. The US State Department admits that opium cultivation is now at an all-time record. In 2001 Prime Minister Blair said that the invasion of Afghanistan would remove both the Taliban and the opium trade. The British government has provided £70 million over three years to fight a trade worth \$2.8 billion a year to Afghanistan. This November the British Home Office said that 95% of heroin in Britain comes from Afghanistan.

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Guns, Gays and God BUSH WINS ANOTHER TERM

2 November 2004 will be remembered as the day the petit-bourgeois intellectual, middle-class and celebrity Left in the United States pathetically, finally and completely exhausted its bankrupt political strategy. It will take some years for it to become apparent but this Presidential election marked the exhaustion of the political strategy which the Democratic Party has been following for the last half-century, as STEVE PALMER reports from the US.



Anguished Democrats see their hope extinguished

Under the rallying cry 'Anybody but Bush', anyone who dared advance a radical alternative was smacked down. An army of Democratic lawyers – who today are bleating and whining about 'Republican electoral fraud'! – chased third-party candidate Ralph Nader across the United States to prevent his name appearing on the ballot. The AFL-CIO trade union federation ordered its affiliates to withdraw support from the Million Worker March against unemployment, racism and the crisis of US imperialism. They rallied their efforts behind John Kerry, their ideal representative, a liberal intellectual, conveniently a simultaneous war resister and a war hero. Although a millionaire, Kerry was the ideal candidate: the political personification of the petit-bourgeoisie, trapped between the two major classes of capitalist society and all the time, clinging to the coat-tails of the ruling class, terrified of falling into the working class. A leader ready to follow wherever he thought the electorate was moving, who stood by his principles while repeatedly changing them, someone who was consistently inconsistent:

- A man who voted for the war, then said it was wrong then insisted he would vote the same way if he had known there were no weapons of mass destruction!
- A man who loudly announced that he would ensure 'workers' rights' by renegotiating the same trade agreements he voted for over the last decade!
- A man who criticised the Zionist wall – and then calls it an act of self-defence!

Here was the ideal candidate for the selfish, latte-lapping liberal middle-class: here it seemed was Bush's intellectual superior. Did he not deserve to

win? The only threat seemed to come from Nader.

What the liberals forgot was that political fights are not won on points for eloquence but by whoever delivers the knockout punch in the political ring. Like a floundering fish, fed to a shark, Kerry was chewed up and spat out by the Republican electoral machine. Karl Rove, a superb, brutal and utterly ruthless campaign strategist with an eye for important tactical details, engineered Kerry's crushing defeat. How?

Electoral fights in the United States are largely fought out through the television screen, political mailings and hired political campaigners. Reaching back to the past Rove took the radical step of mobilising volunteers – now there's a lesson for the Left! Months ago he chose to use the issues of 'Guns, gays and God' to excite and energise the Republican base amongst right-wing Christians. Seizing on recent attempts to win marriage rights for gays, legal challenges to the mention of 'God' in the oath of allegiance and the ever-present threat of 'gun controls', the Republicans created excitement amongst their most fervent supporters. With a sense of urgency, mission and dedication, these Republican cadres patiently visited prospective supporters to convince them to come out and vote for Bush. While paid Democratic campaigners would visit prospects once to satisfy their allocated quota; Republican volunteers, on a mission, would visit and call once, twice, three, four or more times. The dedication and hard work paid off: more Republican voters turned out than Democrats and Rove had his victory.

The next morning the liberals were reeling in despair from the knockout blow. An immediate torrent of allegations of electoral fraud flooded across

the internet. A humorous Canadian website, offering to find spouses for progressive Americans was overwhelmed. The Canadian Department of Immigration website was hit by 179,000 visitors on that Wednesday morning: twice the previous one day record. Everywhere the middle-class sought escape: into fantastic conspiracy theories or to another country.

What happened here? While Kerry's confusionism and Rove's ruthlessness combined to ensure a Republican victory, the cause of this defeat lay much deeper. The Democratic Party underwent massive change in the 1960s when it started to abandon its white southern political base by hitching a ride on the back of the black civil rights insurrection and anti-war movement. Somehow it managed to embrace the contradictory programs of Northern lawyers, black radicals, youthful idealists, traditional trade unionists and the semi-aristocratic Southern patricians. Struggles moved off the streets and into the courts where they have largely stayed ever since. The inability of capitalism to simultaneously satisfy all – perhaps any – of these groups with their often contradictory demands meant that this coalition was doomed to fall apart sooner or later. The radicals evolved into comfortable opportunists; the traditional labour aristocracy shrank as manufacturing industries moved out of the country; the traditional Southerners switched allegiance to the Republicans; the lawyers were left in charge of the whole termite-ridden political machine and the poor and oppressed were left where they had always been. Even as political battles were won in the courtroom, the basis for support was slipping away, being corrupted or becoming demoralised. Until, finally, the whole rotten process exhausted itself on 2 November.

Poverty and Unemployment ELECTION IGNORES THE WORKING CLASS

Immediately the recriminations started: some Democratic Party leaders decided that the lesson of the election was to continue to move even further to the right. The 'anybody-but-Bush' bunch now blamed the party for moving too far to the right – the very direction they helped push it. And through it all, the liberal intelligentsia continued to voice its sense of superiority by contrast with the supposedly uneducated, unsophisticated Bush supporters. Liberal columnist Ted Rall wrote:

'We eat better, travel more, dress better, watch cooler movies, earn better salaries, meet more interesting people, listen to better music and know more about what's going on in the world'.

Better too, it should be said, not only than Bush supporters, but also than billions of people in the US and in the oppressed nations who are poor, illiterate and far from stupid. But the poor and oppressed are the furthest from the minds of the liberal left as they now pack their bags to flee the country.

What does this mean? What happens next? There has been speculation amongst liberals that, now that George Bush cannot stand for re-election, he is freed of obligations to the party right wing and will pursue more moderate policies. Quite why he should lean in a progressive direction rather than a reactionary one, was not explained. In fact President Bush is preparing more attacks on the poor and oppressed. His program is likely to be even more reactionary: a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, further attacks on working people, big tax handouts to the rich, more wars, lies and deceit.

Is this fascism? The word 'fascism' is casually used by the left to describe anything vaguely repressive, from a parking ticket onwards. In fact, fascism is a reactionary political movement used to crush real threats to capitalist power. At this time, there is no such threat: the liberal left are just ineffectual empty windbags. Why should the US ruling class resort to fascism when it has no need of it?

In fact, as we have seen, there is no real evidence of serious shift to the right: the Republicans won through a more aggressively organized campaign, not on a swell of public support.

While liberals panicked and fled, others have to stand their ground and fight. Obviously, the hapless Democratic Party offers no hope for the poor and oppressed, for the working people of the United States. Unlike the liberals, they cannot flee the country or cry into their cappuccinos: they have no choice but to fight. The fight will have to move out of the courtrooms – the liberals' home turf – onto the streets and into the communities. Undocumented immigrant service workers are being forced into struggle against capitalism: a major hotel workers strike is underway on the west coast. These, with black and other minority communities represent the forces of the future. Further bitter battles lie ahead – over the threatened constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, for abortion rights, against the inevitably intensified attacks on the working class demanded by crisis-ridden capitalism. Over all hangs the imperialist war against the people of Iraq, which will inevitably grow in depth and intensity. Anti-war sentiment is strong. With the election out of the way, the US left needs to seize the opportunity to build a strong anti-war movement, rooted amongst the poor and oppressed, a movement which can lay the groundwork and set the direction and example for the other struggles which will inevitably take place.

The US election was irrelevant to the needs of the poor and working people in the United States. Questions of poverty, hunger, health, education and work were swept under the carpet by both presidential candidates, as JIM CRAVEN reports.

Poor and homeless

There are in the United States three and a half million homeless people either living on the streets or in shelters. The numbers increased by 13% in 2002 and 19% in 2003. President Bush plans to cut housing subsidies. (All statistics in this article are taken from official figures. The reality is undoubtedly far bleaker.)

One in eight of the US population (12.5%) lives in poverty. That's nearly 36 million people and includes over 12 million children. An extra 4.3 million people have fallen into poverty since Bush arrived. The average earnings for the poorest 20% are \$12,000 a year; equivalent to a rate of £3.30 an hour for a 40 hour week. Included in the poorest 20% of the population are more than half of all black and Hispanic children and their old people over 65 years. The income tax cuts made by the Bush administration accelerated the widening gap between rich and poor. For those in the poorest 20% the cuts were worth about \$2 a week. For those in the richest 20% they were worth \$800 a week. The tax benefit to the top 1% alone would have been enough to ensure two years' health care for every US citizen.

Health if you can pay

There are 45 million people in the United States who have no health insurance cover. That's around one in six of the population. There are a further 26 million people who only have cover for part of the year. It has been estimated that around 100,000 people in the United States die every year through lack of health care benefits.

The average family health care costs are greater than the annual income of the poorest quarter of the population. There are two government health assistance schemes. Medicare is a national federally funded scheme open to all old people but it is a contributory scheme that does not cover all the costs of health care. On average, an old person will still have to find around \$1,000 a year. Over a third of old people in the United States have reported that they have to cut back on food in order to pay for their medications. Medicaid, for the poor and chronically sick, is a fantastically complicated system. Many poor US citizens on Medicaid have no idea what they are entitled to. They put up with lesser illnesses rather than seek help and throw themselves on the mercy of the system when they are seriously ill. Those on Medicaid will also still be faced with potential bills for some treatments.

The point is not that millions of Americans have no health care at all but that health care for many more millions, including those with health insurance, is a constant source of anxiety.

Even the terminally ill suffer. Around 40% of them have trouble paying for medication.

The chance of serious illness is worse for black people than whites. The overall infant mortality rate in the United States is around 6.9 deaths per thousand live births but for the children of black mothers it is 13.6 – almost twice as high. The overall result is a life expectancy of over five years less for black people than for whites. The most common cause of death for young black males is murder.

Unemployment and poverty pay

In Bush's first two years over two and a half million jobs were lost and the unemployment rate doubled. In January 2004 there were 14.7 million people who could not get full-time work, almost 10% of the workforce. Even though a recovery in the US economy has been officially underway for over two years the number of people without work is still increasing. Nearly a quarter of the unemployed have been out of work for more than 27 weeks.

In the last four years manufacturing employment has fallen from 17 million to 14 million. Skilled, secure and better-paid jobs are being replaced by low-paid, part-time and temporary work under poor conditions and with few if any benefits.

Seven million workers now receive the minimum wage or less. The US minimum wage presently stands at \$5.15 an hour (about £2.86). For a 40-hour week this would pay \$3,500 a year less than the poverty level for a family of three. To try and earn a living wage US workers now work longer hours than those in any other advanced capitalist country.

Middle class under threat?

We could add many other problems for the working class, such as the crisis in the education system, the more than two million mainly working class people (half of them black) in prisons or the high attempted suicide rate amongst teenagers. Millions of US workers live their entire lives perpetually surrounded by misery. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that the converse is also true – that the rest of the US population live comfortable and secure lives, safely isolated from these threats. The social safety net for Americans is even weaker than in Britain. It is very easy for a middle class family in the United States to fall into poverty.

An important factor that has added considerably to the insecurity threatening the better off workers and the middle class is the enormous level of debt they have incurred. US citizens

**Finally, a
Christian
fighting evil.
Thank you,
George Bush**



have been spending like there is no tomorrow; buying more and more cheap imported goods, particularly from China and elsewhere in the Far East. It is large amounts of this money that is coming back into the United States to fund the loans for personal consumption and to finance the record Federal debt. The total consumer and mortgage debt in the United States now stands at over \$12 trillion and rising. On average, 12% of incomes are spent on servicing personal debt. This money has been borrowed on the basis of record low interest rates. If interest rates rise, many US families will find themselves in serious economic trouble. Personal bankruptcy is already at record levels.

No solution for ruling class

The situation is untenable but every possible solution would exacerbate another part of the problem. For instance, one way to ease the trade deficit would be to devalue the dollar. A rapid devaluation could trigger a currency crisis. Those holding US dollar debt would start to call in the loans, which might then force the US to increase interest rates to keep the loans attractive. This in turn would have a disastrous effect on those Americans balancing on the brink with large personal debts.

Another urgent necessity is to cut the budget deficit. In 2000 Bush inherited a projected budget surplus. There is now a massive budget deficit, projected to be \$450 billion next year. Both Bush and Kerry promised to half the deficit during the next term. This could be tackled by increasing taxes but Bush isn't going to do this. On the

contrary one of his election promises was to make permanent the tax cuts he introduced in his first term and just days before the election he announced an extra \$145 billion corporate tax break. If he is not going to increase government income then he will have to cut public spending. This year the military budget increased by 7% to \$700 billion. Far from cutting this, Bush is to ask for an extra \$70 billion for the war on Iraq. So, any public spending cuts are likely to fall on education, health and social security. He has already announced his intention of privatising the state pension scheme and other parts of social security are likely to follow. Once again it will be the working class that bears the brunt of the attacks.

Working class must fight back

Around half the US adult population chose not to vote or were excluded from the elections. We can assume that many, maybe most of them felt the whole process was irrelevant to their concerns. Many millions in the US suffer constantly from poverty, homelessness, ill health and unemployment. Many millions more get by but live with constant anxiety about health, jobs, education and racism. Large sections of the middle class who presently have a comfortable life could find themselves alongside the working class as a result of the debt they hold and the growing threat of unemployment. The US economy is in serious difficulties. The objective circumstances are ripening for the rebirth of a working class movement in the United States.

Cuba reclaims its monetary sovereignty

On 25 October 2004, Cuba announced a new law, Resolution 80, stating that from 8 November cash in US dollars (USD) would no longer be accepted in domestic commerce. This will be substituted by the peso convertible, a currency printed and controlled by the Cuban National Bank. The announcement was made by President Fidel Castro during the 'Round Table', a daily, live television programme to discuss national issues. HELEN YAFFE reports from Cuba.

On 15 November, at another Round Table discussion, Fidel Castro declared that the task had been simple, successful and had popular support, and that it was one of the most important measures taken in recent years. Only a socialist country, said Fidel, could achieve such a measure. Thus Cuba has reclaimed its monetary sovereignty and has become the first country in the world to de-dollarise.

The USD began circulating in 1993, during the most austere years of the Special Period. Dollar decriminalisation was seen as a necessary evil to undermine the informal dollar market, the result of widespread scarcities. In this objective it was successful. The USD coexisted with the national currency, the national peso, the currency of the Cuban people. Within two years the value of the national peso rose against the USD from around 150 pesos for \$1, to around 25 pesos for \$1. With the increase in tourism and the remittances sent from Cubans resident in the United States, the USD circulated widely in Cuba.

In 1994 the Cuban government introduced the peso convertible, a currency with equal value to the USD, in an effort to limit the physical presence of the Yankee green-back. Cuba had three circulating currencies; the USD, the peso convertible (equal to USD) and the national peso (stabilising around 25=\$1). In 2002, as conditions improved, the USD coin was removed from circulation. From July 2003 inter-firm transactions in Cuba were carried out in peso convertible only and the process of de-dollarisation began.

Resolution 80: a response to recent US attacks

In May 2004 the US Federal Reserve imposed a fine of \$100,000 on the largest bank in Switzerland (USB) for transferring USD notes to Cuba. The Miami Mafia and right-wing press alleged that Cuba was laundering \$3.9 billion with the Swiss bank.

On 8 June the Cuban government responded with a detailed account of Cuba's operations with foreign banks in *Granma*, paper of the Cuban Communist Party, stating that 'the ultra-right wing of the Bush administration is taking steps clearly aimed at blocking the income our country obtains from tourism and other services, and reducing to zero the possibility that Cubans living in the United States can send remittances to their relatives in Cuba by using the most

On 23 July, Juan Zárate, the US Treasury Undersecretary responsible for the fight against financing terrorism, announced an investigation into 'possible links between "US bodies and persons" and the \$3.9 billion that Cuba infiltrated into the international banking system using a Federal Reserve program'.

On 9 October, Daniel W Fisk, undersecretary for Western Hemispheric Affairs at the US State Department boasted about the Bush administration's determination to destroy the Cuban Revolution: 'our strategy is to identify long-ignored revenue streams for the Castro regime and then move to de-

Resolution 80 does not criminalise the USD in Cuba. Cubans are free to hold USD in cash or in bank deposits and can withdraw either currency with no tax.

Immediate benefits for Cuban economy

Cubans had two weeks to change any quantity of USD into peso convertible with no charge and no record of their identity being taken. Banks carried out conversions exclusively from 12 noon and opened during the weekends to allow time for everyone to convert their currency. Exchange bureaus were set up in shops and offices throughout the country. Within days, all Cubans understood the provisions of the new law and the reasons why it was necessary. An advice line was set up. The conversion has not been financially detrimental to Cubans and the vast majority fully support the move.

The original deadline for conversion was postponed until 15 November because of the level of demand. By 16 November 2,580,068 conversion transactions had been carried out, without a single incident and absolutely no panic. Since then a 10% charge has been imposed for converting USD into peso convertible, a tax which reflects the risk to Cuba of using the USD cash in international transactions. This effectively lowers the value of the USD by 10% against the peso convertible. As no movement of actual cash is involved in credit or debit card transactions, no charge is imposed. There is no charge to convert peso convertible into USD. There is no charge for converting euros, sterling, Canadian dollars or Swiss francs into the peso convertible. Tourists from those countries account for 80% of all visitors.

The 10% tax on dollar conversion will encourage Cubans abroad to send remittances in currencies other than the USD, thus decreasing the US government's ability to obstruct and monitor remittances sent from the US.

The conversion to the peso convertible also undermines the flow of cash from US government agencies and the Miami Mafia to counter-revolutionaries in Cuba. In April 2003, 77 counter-revolutionaries were arrested carrying thousands of dollars in cash channelled via the US Special Interests Section in Havana.

Resolution 80 gives the Cuban government greater control over national finances. They can monitor the quantity of peso convertible printed and circulating, which will assist development plans and social expenditure. Since the announcement, the amount deposited in existing and newly

corruption, speculation and financial fraud are as common and as daily as hunger and the destruction of the environment'.

'...this new victory reaffirms our fullest convictions that there is no obstacle in the world or any aggression that our people and our Revolution, which are definitively the same, will not be capable of taking on successfully.'

US vetoes Cuba's UN victory

On 28 October, following an inspiring speech by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, 179 nations voted at the United Nations in favour of ending the US blockade of Cuba. Just four countries voted against the resolution: the US, Israel, the Marshall Islands and Palau. Micronesia was the only country to abstain.

However, this resounding moral victory will make little difference, except to show how isolated the US position has become. This is the 13th year that Cuba has won the UN vote yet, as in every previous year, it has been overturned by the United States, using its right of veto on the Security Council.

The US can always count on Israel's unconditional support – a small price to pay for US imperialism's massive military, economic and political support for Zionism. But the US is forced to rely on bribery and regional influence to secure any other support – the only allies it was able to buy off this year were the tiny Marshall Islands (70,000 inhabitants) and Palau (20,000 inhabitants), two of the newest UN members. Both are totally dependent on the US. Recently the US turned one atoll in the region into a practice target for inter-continental ballistic missiles. Easy pickings for this international playground bully, indeed.

The US blockade of Cuba leads to annual losses of more than \$1.8 billion for Cuba. Pérez Roque gave concrete examples of the effects of the blockade and what more Cuban society could provide if it were not in place, such as building new homes, providing all families with gas to cook on and preventing power blackouts.

End the illegal US blockade of Cuba!
Hannah Callier

No culture, please, we're Yankees

The lumpen bureaucrats of the US Treasury and State Departments are refusing to grant a licence to a group in the US that is seeking to restore the Hemingway museum in Havana. The museum, housed in the crumbling villa that was US author Ernest Hemingway's home and was bequeathed to the Cuban people by his widow, contains his 9,000-volume library, including many first editions, manuscripts, letters and personal belongings. It is now in danger of collapse. A group of Americans, including Hemingway's grandson and US actors Lauren Bacall and James Gandolfini have applied for a licence for a feasibility study on restoring the house. However, the US administration prefers to see a cultural and historical site demolished rather than, under any circumstances, do something which might 'promote tourism to Cuba'.



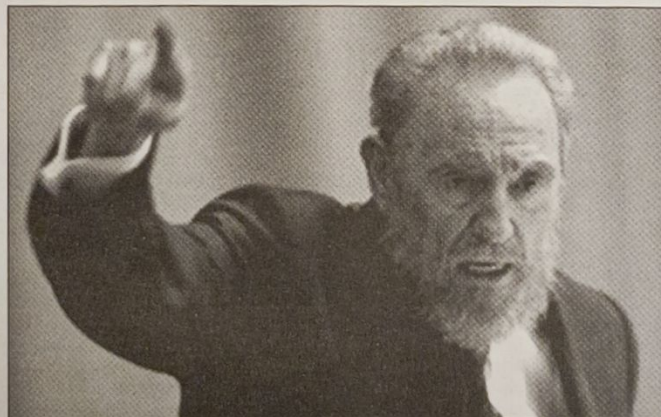
Cubans queue to change dollars into the peso convertible

evil, devious, hypocritical method imaginable: simply by preventing Cuba from making deposits in foreign banks of the dollars it obtains from sales in hard currency shops, from activities related to tourism and from other trade services. Thus, Cuba would not be able to use these dollars to buy medicines or food or to import the stock needed...

'These actions are even more outrageous if one takes into account the fact that the only reason tourists who visit Cuba must use cash is that the Yankee blockade does not allow them to use credit cards or travellers' cheques issued by US banks and other financial institutions that control this market... [The] persecutions and threats, which hang permanently over those who send money from the United States to their relatives in Cuba, means that they often prefer to send cash, so there is no paper trail that could make them liable to persecution from US authorities and to the violent behaviour of the terrorists who live in Miami'.

The Miami Mafia escalated the hysteria about the Swiss bank account, explicitly threatening all financial institutions which deal with Cuba. On 3 June, *El Nuevo Herald* raged that 'this money laundering scandal shows that Cuba is a safe haven for money from terrorists and embezzlers'. In a press conference on 22 June, rabidly anti-Cuban Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said: 'I am shocked that a bank which was given the extremely important responsibility of distributing the new American money should violate our country's regulations concerning a state identified as a terrorist state.'

grade them. For example, tourism... over a full calendar year, we estimate a net annual loss to the regime of some \$375 million – and that's just from reduced travel. When factoring in the decline in all revenue flows, we estimate we will have denied the regime at least half a billion dollars that Castro would have used to support his security and intelligence apparatus.'



Daniel Fisk announced the establishment of a Cuban Assets Targeting Group to investigate and stop hard currency flows into and out of Cuba. This group has 27 members, more than the group set up to pursue the assets of Osama Bin Laden.

Resolution 80 is the Revolution's response to the establishment of the Cuban Assets Targeting Group. In the same week that Resolution 80 was announced, the Bush administration froze the US assets of SERCUBA, a company that facilitates remittances to be sent to Cuba from the US.

opened savings accounts is greater than the sum deposited throughout the previous 10 years, giving the Cuban economy more funds for investment.

Francisco Soberon Valdes, President of the Cuban National Bank said that the peso convertible would generate confidence and credibility, as the currency 'of a country, whose economy, without external help and under a ferocious blockade by the most powerful country in the world, has been capable of sustaining the most successful system of health and education in the Third World... in a world where

A new stage in the revolutionary process

Further major victories for President Chavez's ruling coalition were made in the regional (state and mayoral) elections on 31 October. This follows the historic rejection, in the 15 August referendum, of an opposition demand that Chavez be recalled from office. The Bolivarian movement won in 20 of the 22 states where elections were held, including the Miranda State governorship and the office of Metropolitan Mayor, both of which were active against President Chavez in the defeated 2002 coup. It took hold of an additional 50 municipalities. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

In its bitter frustration, the opposition has again turned to violence. State Prosecutor Danilo Anderson was killed by a bomb in his jeep on 18 November. Amongst other cases, he had pressed charges against six agents of the Caracas metropolitan police for killings during the defeated coup. He was prominent in an investigation into nearly 400 activists who supported the coup, and was preparing a case against army officers – some accused of bombings in Caracas and now sheltering in the terrorist bolt-hole Florida – who had declared themselves in open rebellion against President Chavez.

Regional elections

Previously the government held 15 out of 23 states. The opposition controlled eight states, Metropolitan Caracas and some 220 municipalities out of 335. In fact in the 2000 elections the Chavista Platform won 17 states, but two of the governors abused their mandate and joined the opposition. These manipulators have now been democratically removed. The government thereby gained five governorships and now holds 21 of 23. It increased its control of the town halls to 270 of the 334. In two states, Carabobo and Yaracuy, defeated governors rejected the results. Government troops were dispatched to ensure an orderly transition. As Chavez said: 'The leaders of the revolution have to be as open as doves and as astute as snakes, to understand and defend it on whatever ground'. 'The Office for Transition', funded by the US gov-

ernment to finance the opposition to Chavez and located in the US Embassy in Caracas, is no doubt a little upset! The money that the US Congress-funded National Endowment for Democracy delivers to government opponents in Venezuela, would be quite illegal in the USA if conducted by a foreign government! It is illegal to 'solicit international intervention' in Venezuela and recipients of this US blood money are now facing trial.

On 5 December, recall referenda for nine opposition deputies will be held, called for by Chavistas, who originally called for 35 deputies to be voted on. Since only three of these have pro-government substitutes – the others having an anti-government or no alternative – the government could only gain three new deputies. Nevertheless, since the government and its allies have only 87 out of 165 deputies in the National Assembly, the additional three, if elected, are important. The simple majority is 84 votes.

For five years, the opposition governors and mayors have obstructed, legally and illegally, the government's reform programme. Now Chavez must not only extend the popular social programmes in subsidised food, training, free education and health care, but meet very serious challenges in breaking up and replacing the old state system.

Transforming the administration

On 13/14 November the mayors, governors elect, ministers and senior military officers met in Caracas to discuss the Bolivarian Revolution: New Stage,

New Strategic Map. A key objective was to discuss the transformation of the country through full participation. 'Popular participation is the foundation of this revolution,' said Chavez. Ali Rodriguez, president of the state-owned oil company PDVSA, had said elsewhere that: 'The main obstacle is the administrative structure of the state'. Last April he said: 'we have a revolutionary government but we still don't have a revolutionary state'. Thus Chavez insists 'this new stage has to be characterised by more rapid advances and successes in changing the economic model'.

At this meeting they discussed democratising communications – bringing popular communication centres to every part of the country, creating an anti-corruption task force, the civil-military alliance, the private sector, poverty, popular participation in the creation of budgets, the social economy and international relations. Concrete plans are to be presented in Congress in the New Year.

The previous election campaigns (eight including the August 'Recall' referendum), the experience of the attempted coup of 2002, the old PDVSA managers' strike 2003, followed by the recall referendum campaign, created a mass of new working class and poor peasant activity in support of the government. Assemblies of citizens, Bolivarian circles, parent campaigns to open schools, motorcycle couriers, groups defending state property from attacks, petroleum convoy escorts, and other activities, have seen new levels of working class self-consciousness. A 'Positive Middle

Class' movement also developed to support the government. The government created 'Missions' to support those in the poorest and most neglected sectors, creating a sense of hope and direction. Food distribution, housing, education and health groups were set up. Already the 'Barrio Adentro' programme has provided free health care to 15 million people, strongly supported by Cuban volunteers. In housing projects this led to a new relation between the people and the military. These 'Missions' had to be set up outside of the existing ministries. Now these ministries are being restructured and new ones are being set up. The government is discussing with the banks a project to build 80,000 low-cost houses for the poor.

The MVR (Fifth Republic Movement) and its Congressional allies, created electoral battle units (UBEs) to politicise the poor and to win the recent elections. These units, composed of 'inexperienced' supporters, spontaneously organised themselves where they worked and not necessarily the electoral district where they lived. They allowed many thousands of supporters to act independently, regardless of the quality or existence of MVR local leaders. This real grass-roots movement is to be converted into Endogenous Battle Units (again, UBEs) dedicated to fighting poverty. Chavez has stated 'poverty cannot be eliminated if we do not give power to the people', but it was of course the people who gave power to Chavez, both electorally and in forcing the military to defeat the attempted

coup from within its own ranks. It is his six million voting supporters who are setting the agenda, whilst he remains responsible for guiding it to success.

A high level of abstention (55%) marked the regional election results and although this is typical for regional elections it presents the governing coalition with a challenge before the next set of elections. It is now official policy to promote representatives of the people to stand as local councillors in the mayoral elections on 25 February 2005, to deepen the revolution from the base upwards. Social controls and audits will be exercised to combat corruption and inefficiency from then onwards. There are also national parliamentary elections due in December 2005. To develop the democratic procedures all electoral contests will include primaries in future, including for the 2006 presidential elections.

The economy

The 2003 sabotage campaign – 'lock out' – by the management of the old PDVSA between December 2002 and March 2003, aimed at forcing President Chavez out, cost the country some \$10bn. Last year \$2.2bn debts were paid on time and \$2.5bn bonds have just been re-purchased. By July this year, production was normal, despite the opposition's lies, at 3.1m barrels per day (bpd) – slightly above its OPEC quota. Refining capacity is at 1.17m bpd. The government recuperated because of the intense effort of the ordinary workers, retired technicians and sympathetic consultants. Now two of the 11 PDVSA directors are workers, and new 'steering committees' are being constructed to contribute to the embryonic self-management system.

On 7 November Venezuela signed a new oil-supply agreement with Cuba. This is linked to a strategic plan for Latin American state-run energy sector integration, proposed by Venezuela on 29 October at the 34th Meeting of Experts of Latin American Energy Organisation (OLADE).

The investigation into Danilo Anderson's assassination led to a shoot-out in Caracas. The lawyer son of former legislative representative Lopez killed a police officer and wounded two others. A large cache of weapons and bomb-making material was found, along with manuals and photos that show the suspected assassin was trained at US mercenary schools.

Those who believe that the opposition has 'gifted' the government with opportunities to press forward the Venezuelan revolution want to see 'luck' as an explanation. In fact the government of President Chavez has defeated immense threats from imperialism through its discipline and the continuous participation of the Venezuelan working class in constructing a socialist future. ■

NO A LA
INTERVENCION DE BUSH



URUGUAY

TRICK OR TREAT?

On Halloween, 31 October, Tabaré Vázquez and his Frente Amplio-Encuentro Progresista coalition gained an overwhelming victory in the Uruguayan general election, receiving over 50% of the vote and taking an absolute majority both in the Senate and the House of Deputies.

The victory of the Frente Amplio is partly due to the great workers' movements that have recently staged six general strikes. It also follows a referendum victory that prevented the privatisation of the national oil company (Ancap). Many Uruguayans used the general election to punish the right wing for their negligent and corrupt capitalist policies, particularly after the August 2002 banking crisis when the economy contracted by 11%.

However, the programme of the coalition – including all sorts of socialists as

well as members of the former guerrilla movement, the Tupamaros, is far from anti-capitalist: it does not advocate agrarian reforms, or freezing foreign debt repayments, let alone the nationalisation of industry. Although he does not take office until next March, Tabaré Vázquez has spelled out the political direction of his government. He stated that he will be careful with public expenditure, favour job creation and will fight poverty by pushing for better income distribution.

Foreign debt has climbed to US\$13bn,

equivalent to 114% of GDP. 27% of the economically active population are either unemployed or underemployed. The outgoing government agreed on an economic programme with the IMF which requires the repayment of US\$1.884bn in 2005 and another US\$1.970bn in 2006. Yet the *Miami Herald* reported the former Tupamaro leader and newly elected Senator of the Frente Amplio, José Mujica, saying, 'We are not big enough to challenge the IMF. The relationship between Uruguay and the Fund is good, and we intend to keep it

that way.'

The president elect and his economic minister have vowed to keep to all agreements made by the previous governments. Vázquez even travelled in August and met President Bush, representatives of US banks and Wall Street investors to reassure them.

As a demonstration of support for neo-liberal policies, Vázquez initially proposed Enrique Iglesias, boss of the Inter-American Development Bank and architect of the policies that have devastated Latin America, as finance

minister. Iglesias declined and another favourite of international capitalists, Danilo Astori, stepped in. Mujica explained the ambitions of the Frente Amplio: 'what we need to do is make capitalism more decent' and 'nowadays revolution is to give the people a plate of food'. Such words from an ex-guerrilla fighter show what the Frente Amplio government is likely to be: a cosmetic change to make capitalism more 'user friendly', steering the workers away from their only true alternative: socialism.

Marcelo Diaz

Gott's Cuba: a pessimistic swansong

■ **Cuba: a new history** by Richard Gott, Yale University Press 2004, £18.99

Gott's new history of Cuba is painted on a broad canvas, encompassing 400-odd years of history in 325 pages, from Cuba's pre-Columbian Indian settlements to the 21st century, taking in Spanish colonialism, British occupation, slave rebellions, piracy, US neocolonialism and the complex internecine political faction-fighting that ensued, as well as the Revolution and the following 45 years. This is a well-researched, erudite epic that is valuable for locating key events in Cuba's history against an international political and economic background.

Nonetheless, the book is fundamentally flawed by Gott's refusal to understand the dynamic of a socialist revolution or to explain any post-revolutionary developments in those terms. He sees Cuba's proclamation of socialism as simply a necessary sop to the Soviet Union to ensure economic and political support; Castro's famous 'I am and always have been a Marxist-Leninist' is dismissed as an opportunist move to ingratiate himself with Brezhnev.

Gott allows his own liberal concepts to mar a very good section on how the struggle against slavery and racism in Cuba was inextricably bound up with the struggle for independence, particularly after the black revolt in Haiti. The white elite perpetually raised the spectre of a 'black republic' if Cuba ever achieved independence as an argument for annexation with the slave-owning south of the United States; white immigration

was encouraged and black uprisings severely repressed. The struggles against Spanish colonialism of the late 19th century were dependent on the slaves and 'free blacks' who made up the ragged Mambisi armies of the national liberation struggle. But then Gott goes on to suggest that the lingering racism of a white elite still lay at the heart of the revolutionary government because it was lukewarm on the issue of black separatism; he quotes black US novelist Alice Walker's disappointment at finding young black Cubans in 1977 taking 'no special pride in being black'. 'The more we insisted on calling ourselves black Americans, the more distant and confused they grew'. He might have done better to quote former Black Panther Assata Shakur who understands that 'revolution is a process, so I was not that shocked to find sexism had not totally disappeared in Cuba, nor had racism, but that...the revolution was totally committed to struggling against racism and sexism in all their forms...Cuba has the social system that will eventually wipe out racism.'

Similarly, Gott writes powerfully about Cuba's revolutionary internationalism, particularly its support for the struggle in Angola and the victory at Cuito Cuanavale which turned the tide against apartheid in South Africa. He is frank and, I think, fair, about the more vexed issue of Cuban support in Ethiopia. Yet he is unable to link this outstanding international solidarity with any common principles about the Revolution. When writing about the struggles in Chile and Nicaragua in the 1970s, he makes unsubstantiated claims that Castro gave only reluctant

support to these events, perceiving them as a challenge to his status in the region. He is dismissive about Castro's suggestion that Allende needed urgently to arm the workers, suggesting Castro did not understand the realities of the situation.

was among the top five countries in Latin America...The introduction of universal health care is often considered one of the great triumphs of the Revolution. Yet pre-Revolutionary Cuba was not backward in its provision of medical services... and so on. This may have been true for the urbanised elite, but the rural majority had an income at the time of \$91.25 per annum – an eighth of that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the US. A third of the workforce was unemployed or underemployed, 43% were illiterate, life expectancy was 59 years and infant mortality was 60 per 1,000 births. Why does Gott seek to gloss this reality? Is it so that he does not have to trumpet the achievements of post-revolutionary Cuba? Beyond

1991, now 6.2), old people's homes, community organisations, democratic participation, a sense of hope and social justice – socialism itself?

After the early 'ardour' he describes in his prologue, his Cuban Revolution becomes a lifeless, inflexible, tired and essentially failed experiment, whose people are 'tired of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps'. Castro, variously described as a 'Spanish-style general', 'dinosaur' and 'ageing rock star' 'may have performed his last great revolutionary service to his country... by surrendering to the inevitable and by reintroducing Cubans to the seductions of capitalism very gradually'.

The epilogue, a bleakly pessimistic swansong for a society Gott sees as already 'post-Castro' says more about



Gott's epilogue says more about his own political cynicism than Cuban society. Cuba stands as a beacon against imperialist war, destitution and brutality

But where this book really falls down is in its mealy-mouthed and grudging attitude to the achievements of the Cuban Revolution. In fact, from Gott's descriptions, it is frankly surprising that more people did not hop on the first boat to Miami. 'Cuba was not a poor country in 1959, with down-trodden people rebelling against their state of backwardness', Gott writes. 'It was relatively well-off... On a range of other socio-economic indicators – urbanisation, literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy – Cuba

qualified approval for the 1960 Literacy Campaign he has little to say about Cuba's education or health systems after that, even during the Special Period when spending on health and education was ring-fenced. When commenting on Cuba's survival post 1991, unlike the socialist countries of eastern Europe, Gott writes: 'The Cubans had more to defend – their history, their sense of their own identity and their *amour propre*'. How about their schools and hospitals, infant mortality rate of 7.2 per 1,000 live births (in

Gott's own political cynicism than Cuban society. Perhaps if Gott could have taken one eye off his liberal audience long enough to write about Cuba's Battle of Ideas, its infinite flexibility and willingness to admit to mistakes and build for the future, its proclaiming of a vision for a better world and its exorcism of capitalism in every international venue, the voice it continues to offer today for those opposed to imperialist war, destitution and brutality, he might be a bit more cheerful.

Cat Wiener

Principles of black struggle in the US

■ **Revolutionary Integration: A Marxist analysis of African American liberation**, Richard Fraser and Tom Boot, with introduction by Guerry Hoddersen, Red Letter Press 2004, \$17.95

The first half of this book, 'Dialectics of Black Liberation', written by Richard Fraser for the 1963 USA National convention of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) at a time of increasing black struggle, calls for 'revolutionary integration'. The SWP refused a proper debate so in 1966 Fraser and others set up the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP).

The second half, 'Revolutionary Integration: yesterday and today' by Tom Boot, was adopted by the 1982 National Convention of the FSP. It reviews the black struggle and the left in the previous 17 years and confirms the correctness of the revolutionary integration principle.

Fraser claims 'revolutionary integration' as a socialist principle, in opposition to black separatism. Historically, US left organisations had supported black separatism, seeing African Americans as an 'oppressed nation' with the 'right to self-determination'. The FSP makes the claim that in 1963 and again in 1982 the SWP failed to develop a political stand on the question of black liberation and the silence led to opportunist practice.

The opposite position to black separatism is 'integrationism'. This is the view that the black people of the US are an integral part of the population



Civil rights march, 1963

and indeed may claim to have contributed more to the wealth of the nation through slavery and cheap labour. As such they have the right to just treatment before the law and equal opportunities in health, education, housing and all social areas.

In the 1960s the US left tended to view 'integration' as the platform of the opportunist and middle class elements in the civil rights struggle. The older established National Association for the Advancement of Coloured people (NAACP) was described as 'assimilationist' and Dr Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Church movement as 'reformist'. In 1963 the FSP argued for a perspective of 'revolutionary integration' in which the

struggle against the oppression of African Americans should challenge US capitalism head on. The challenge from the black masses for equality and justice was a revolutionary demand and one that the white working class must make common cause with.

So far, so true. And yet the FSP remains tied to the Trotskyist view that the socialist revolution is the task of the organised working class to which other concerns, such as sexism, racism, student rights, and peasant struggles, must be subsumed. That US organised labour is now and has been for most of the past, reactionary, racist, sexist, and corrupt is explained by the 'aristocracy' of union leadership rather than the material interests of the

union membership. One of the tasks of the black movement is to 'profoundly stimulate' the labour movement into struggle.

'Only northern labour has the power to paralyse the ability of the government to intervene against the southern revolution. And since the southern Black movement cannot wait until northern labour sheds its passivity and bureaucratic leadership, it must proceed to shake up and spur northern labour into life'. (p18)

By 1982 it was evident that US organised labour was unable to defend even the most basic workers' rights in the period of Reaganite reaction. Why and how this happened is not addressed here. Instead there is a short survey of black movements of the previous 17 years including Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, Stokely Carmichael and the slogan of Black Power. There are also brief summaries of left groups including the Communist Workers Party (CWP) who had five members murdered by Klan/FBI agents in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1979. Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! organised a national speaking tour of Britain for the CWP at that time. It is significant and probably sectarian that there is no mention of black CPUSA communist Harry Haywood whose brilliant autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*, was published in 1978, or of George Jackson's great contribution to questions of the state and black liberation.

In 1982 the FSP and its sister party

Radical Women held the view that revolutionary integration depends upon 'the dialectics of sexual revolution: the vitality of the Black lesbian/gay sector is the catalyst for restoring the entire Black movement to the revolutionary path!' (p171) It may well be that in 1982 black socialist feminists were leading the struggle – but he fails to make a convincing argument that this experience is a general principle.

These are two interesting and contemporary accounts of an extraordinary phase of US history, the Civil Rights movement and its aftermath, by comrades involved in that struggle. However, this is no Marxist analysis and programmatic demands are compounded in an altogether sloppy way.

Why is it being reissued now? The conditions of the black African American population are relatively worse today than 24 years ago. In 1980 there were 600,000 prisoners in the USA, today there are 2.1 million. Young African Americans are more than six times more likely to be imprisoned than young white offenders. The most prominent gain of the Civil Rights movement, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which guaranteed millions of African Americans electoral franchise, is being gradually repealed by state restrictions barring ex-felons from voting. In Alabama and Florida 31% of all black men are permanently disenfranchised.

Guerry Hoddersen writes in the introduction of 'the need to keep faith with those that went before, learn from their mistakes and press on'. Never was that task so urgent as today.

Susan Davidson

Out of sight but in our minds

Segregation units are prisons within prisons – the places where the most unchecked brutality is meted out to prisoners. In recent years conditions in high security segregation units have deteriorated, and the use of long-term segregation as a control mechanism has increased. FRFI asked some of our readers in gaol to send us their views and experiences. We welcome further contributions.

Frankland

On 31 January 2005 the inquest will open into the death of Paul Day, who died in Frankland segregation unit on 2 October 2002. This inquest is expected to reveal damning details of the conditions in the seg at that time. Paul Day's family is still appealing for anyone who knows anything about events in the run-up to Paul's death to come forward.*

For the two months before Paul Day died there had been repeated dirty protests by segregation unit prisoners in response to the conditions in the block. Prison staff had retaliated by contaminating the protesters' food, limiting the amount of water they were allowed and threatening them with physical violence. Yet when prisoner Keith Pringle allegedly threatened an officer in return, he was charged with a criminal offence of making threats to kill. His trial was expected to expose conditions in the segregation unit; however unfortunately Keith was persuaded that if he pleaded guilty he would not get extra time added onto his already lengthy prison term. This turned out to be a false promise and he received an additional three-year sentence.

In April 2004 Stephen Lloyd died in Frankland segregation unit. The solicitor representing his family is also appealing for witnesses.

Alan Porter has been in segregation at Frankland for 14 months. He sent this contribution to FRFI:

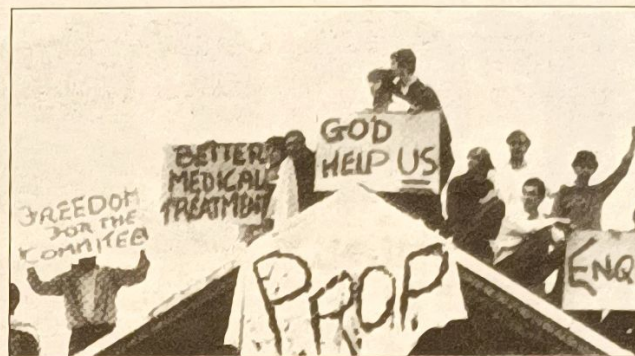
This is about a 73-year-old man who I am unable to name because of prison security. I'm writing about humanity and respect. In every gaol you will see signs saying you will be treated with humanity and respect. At present I'm in Frankland block with this man who has been between the hospital and the block so many times he has now refused to leave the block and go back to the hospital, because he knows next time the hospital needs a space, it'll be back to the block. This may not sound so terrible but he is 73 years old and in extremely poor health after years of protest to highlight his unlawful conviction. When arrested, the police tried to kill him with an illegal shoot-to-kill policy. Then he was refused a proper trial with no legal representation; then they changed the law for his appeal.

He's spent 17 years in gaol. Much of this time has been spent on dirty protests, hunger strikes or other protests to try to have this miscarriage of justice brought to light. All the protest over the years has taken a toll on his health. He has not eaten a meal in this block and has been here since the start of October, and is now very frail. He is existing on oxo-cubes and sweet, black coffee. Although this is extremely detrimental to his health, this is a protest against the treatment he has had from the hospital here. He's in such a state of mind that he believes

he has nothing left to live for and is prepared to starve to death and die in gaol as he knows he'll never be released alive.

[FRFI recognises and salutes our old friend and comrade Ronnie Easterbrook.]

they do not go far enough and offer little comfort to those languishing in the blocks. CCTV has been installed across most of the high security segregation units, but it seems that when attacks take place the particular camera that would have captured the scene is conveniently out of order or,



The spirit of prison protests from the 1970s and 80s must be recreated if the abuse and cruelty in segregation units is to be stopped

that thinks for yourself you will be in problems because a lot of the ways they want you to adapt do not make sense.

The people that work in segregation units in the dispersal system for the most part fit a certain criteria. They seem to be sexist, racist automatons and they all read The Sun.

Full Sutton

In 1994 FRFI was involved in a campaign initiated by prisoners in Full Sutton to expose the brutal regime in the segregation unit. Ten years on Full Sutton's segregation unit still has an

the segregation units of all the high security prisons in England, writes:

Prior to about 1994, serious mental and physical abuse in segregation in the long-term dispersal system was relatively rare, basically because those administering the segregation knew only too well the extent of solidarity among long-term prisoners; ill-treatment of prisoners in segregation units at Parkhurst, Gartree and Hull having provoked major uprisings.

During the late 1990s, and largely as a gradual reaction to the Strange-ways revolt, a vicious screwing down of regimes took place. The brutalisation of perceived ringleaders and 'subversives' became a necessary part of the strategy. Segregation units in gaols like Long Lartin and Full Sutton were turned into brutal control units designed to actively intimidate and subdue the prisoners on every level. The destruction of solidarity and organisation among long-term prisoners generally and a change in the social and political climate beyond the walls encouraged the screws running the seg units to believe that their actions would never be questioned, challenged or avenged.

Serious brutality against prisoners is now routine in segregation in gaols like Full Sutton, Frankland and Long Lartin, and all levels of staff – screws, governors, doctors, boards of visitors etc – collude and co-operate with the sadists directly inflicting the violence. The conspiracy of silence extends from the Home Office and Prison Service to middle class prison reform organisations who accept that exceptional measures are sometimes justified when dealing with 'control problem' prisoners.

The single factor capable of stopping the brutality is of course solidarity and unity among prisoners themselves. In summer 1976 long-term prisoners at Hull rose up against the ill-treatment of one prisoner in the segregation unit. For days they demonstrated on the roof, erecting banners and displaying their solidarity to the media and world outside. They made it clear that an injury inflicted on one of them was an injury to all. That spirit of Hull must be recreated if the abuse and cruelty prevailing in many segregation units is to be stopped.

* Any reader with relevant information about this or any of the deaths concerned should contact Inquest at 89-93 Fonthill Road London N4 3JH; 020 7263 1111

Campaign against deaths of women prisoners continues

On 18 November Pauline Campbell mounted her 11th demonstration against the deaths of women prisoners. Pauline, whose own daughter Sarah died of an overdose in Styal prison in 2003, has pledged to demonstrate outside the prison every time a woman dies. There have been 13 deaths so far this year. Katherine Jones, a 19-year-old remand prisoner, died on 15 October at Brockhill prison, Worcestershire.

The prison gate at Brockhill was blockaded for half an hour but there were no arrests. At other prisons Pauline has been arrested for refusing to move out of the way of prison vans attempting to enter the gaols. Following her arrest at Holloway prison, London, on 27 May while highlighting the death of Heather Waite, Pauline was charged with obstructing the highway. After a number of pre-trial reviews, the charge was dis-



missed without a full hearing. However she still faces a trial in Rochdale on 17-18 February 2005, for obstructing the highway outside Buckley Hall prison on 18 June in protest against the death of Rebecca Smith at that prison on 1 June.

At Styal, where Sarah died, six

women died in the space of 12 months. A recent inquest into the death of Anna Baker in November 2002 concluded that the prison was, 'inadequate' at assessing her needs, and the drug detoxification programme she was placed on was 'inappropriate and insufficient'.

worse still, switched off. Since most attacks take place in the confines of a prisoner's cell, the cameras prove absolutely useless in any case.

There is also a new image – the 'Blocks' have been given a lick of paint to cover the bloodstained walls and there is even a statement of purpose. Instead of segregation units we now have Security, Care and Control Units (SCCUs) – suggesting a more caring role. Underneath though, there is a machine that is incapable of change, where beatings, intimidation and mental torture will continue to be the order of the day.

Whitemoor

Reports currently coming out of the Whitemoor segregation unit are of a climate of sustained verbal racist abuse against black prisoners. Leroy Smith writes:

The ideology behind segregation is, I presume, to subdue people and get them to do what they are told, when they are told. So if you are someone

Long Lartin

In February 2004 Anwar Islam was found dead in Long Lartin segregation unit. As we go to press at least one prisoner there is on a dirty protest. Long Lartin seg is infamous for holding prisoners for lengthy periods of time 'awaiting transfer'; with little or no attempt to actually transfer them to anywhere. John Shelley writes from Long Lartin:

Ten years ago, punishment blocks (as they were then known) did exactly what they said on the tin – punished prisoners. In later years this type of physical and mental punishment would be the subject of some high profile criminal trials; however and although the surface has finally been scratched, the gouge was not deep enough to blow the whole thing wide open.

A decade on and, as far as the high security estate goes, little has changed. New measures have been put in place to guard inmates against the attacks, the type of which were the subject of the Wormwood Scrubs trials, but

appalling reputation. In March 2004 Arif Hussain died there in horrific circumstances, apparently after a bag of drugs he had swallowed exploded in his stomach while he was being kept in a cell with no water, supposedly being 'observed' but according to witnesses, simply being taunted and abused for a week.

John Bowden, now at HMP Saughton, Scotland, who has served time in

Your right to receive FRFI

As we have pointed out many times before on this page, FRFI will always take seriously any attempts by the prison authorities to prevent our paper reaching readers in prison. So when we heard that Full Sutton prison's security department had prevented Scott Napier from receiving the latest issue on the grounds that some of the articles were 'unsavoury' we immediately gave notice that if

the prison did not issue the paper, we would be taking legal action. They backed down. We will respond in the same way to any attempts to prevent this issue being delivered to the prisoners on our subscription list. FRFI is sent free to 200+ prisoners. Please send donations towards this to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. £10 pays a prisoner's sub (recorded delivery) for 6 issues.

rcg

FRFI supporters have been active up and down the country as well as in Scotland in support of the Iraqi and Palestinian resistance.

In Scotland, there have been regular pickets of Marks and Spencer in Dundee and Glasgow. We have also supported the Justice for Gordon Gentle Campaign. This is a campaign for immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq begun by the family and friends of Gordon Gentle, a 19-year-old Highland Fusilier killed by a roadside bomb in Basra in June. Other families have joined together to form Military Families against the War. Following the deployment of the Black Watch to cover the US onslaught on Fallujah, Justice for Gordon Gentle Campaign organised a demonstration on 30 October in Pollock, an overwhelmingly working class community from where a large number of ordinary soldiers are recruited and where their families live. This was reflected in the make up of the protest. We sold FRFI on the march and at the rally where relatives of soldiers who had died in Iraq denounced the war and called for the withdrawal of troops. Sisters and wives of serving soldiers approached us to buy FRFI and at no point in the event did we experience any hostility to our anti-imperialist message. Below is the text of our leaflet.

Troops out now! No to imperialist War!

To the youth When this bloody war began the schools emptied as thousands of young people marched out to protest. You were right and the war-making politicians were wrong. We say now: Don't join up! Talk to your friends, argue them out of going. Explain to them that this war is wrong because it is a war for the millionaires. It is a war to thief Iraq's oil for the British and US multinationals.

To the relatives The tens of thousands of Iraqi men, women and children who have already died, share your grief and anger. This war for oil and power has set working class people, poor people against each other while the wealthy sit back and enjoy the profits. It is never the rich, or their sons and daughters who die in these wars. If Blair and Bush want a war so bad, stick a uniform on them and send them out there.

To the working class The British Army is made up of working class people but it is there to do the job for the wealthy ruling class as muscle for the millionaires. Their TV channels, newspapers and politicians dress up this war as a battle against terrorism, a battle for freedom and democracy. It's all lies! This is a war to make the rich even richer and those with power even more powerful.



Justice for Gordon Gentle Campaign demonstration, Glasgow, 30 October

In 1916, John Maclean from Pollockshaws was sentenced to three years in jail for appealing to the working class to oppose imperialist war and for soldiers to refuse to fight wars for the wealthy. Maclean declared war against the war-makers. His courageous example must begin to be followed today.

The British army is clearly having problems with morale. One Black Watch trooper described Blair as a liar in response to a journalist's question about whether he believed his regiment would be home for Christmas. Such a public comment by a serving soldier is quite unprecedented. 17-year-old David McBride from Glasgow, who had refused to fight in Iraq and had gone Absent Without Leave, was quietly taken off the AWOL list in case others follow his example.

In England, activists inspired by the Victory to the Intifada campaign have started new pickets of Marks and Spencer in

Brighton, Nottingham, Stratford-upon-Avon and York. This is in addition to those in Canterbury, London and Manchester (see

separate report). In London, an attempt by Student Union organisers at the LSE to get us to take down a banner with the slogan

Victory to the Intifada failed. LSE FRFI society had put the banner up with a stall in Houghton Street, when after 40 minutes, a Student Union representative told us there had been a complaint about it. Shortly afterwards, LSE security chief Bernie Taffis and a couple of security heavies told us to take it down. We refused, and a lecturer in human rights who is writing about the illegal Zionist occupation of Palestinian territories backed us up. Apart from anything else, we were on a public highway where no university or Student Union representative had any jurisdiction. We have returned weekly since to make the point that we will not be silenced. The secretary of the student union has told us that it will be investigating the complaint with advice from the local police and the LSE itself. We have not heard anything, and we certainly won't be silenced!

Events

CANTERBURY

Saturday 15 January:
Picket of M&S, The Parade, 12-2pm.
For information about other events, phone: 07821 175 397

DURHAM

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

LONDON

Every Thursday:
Picket of M&S, Oxford Street (Marble Arch End), 6-8pm
Street stalls every Saturday, 12-3pm
For details email: victoryintifada@hotmail.com or call: 020 7837 1688

Wednesday 12 January:

LSE FRFI Society meeting 7.30pm
46 years on - Young people lead the Revolution in Cuba, Room G1, London School of Economics, 20 Kingsway WC2 (Holborn Tube)
To contact LSE FRFI society email: lse_frifi@lse.ac.uk

MANCHESTER

Every Saturday:
Picket of M&S, Market Street Manchester City Centre, 12-3pm
For more information email: victory_intifada@hotmail.com

Sunday 16 January:

FRFI anti-imperialist forum, 2pm Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street
For more information email: manchesterfrifi@revolutionarycommunist.com

Every Monday:

Salford University FRFI society
Stall and discussion
To contact the society, email: salfordfrifi@hotmail.com

MIDLANDS

For information on activities email: midlandsrcg@hotmail.com

SCOTLAND

Glasgow
Saturday 18 December and Sunday 19 December:
Protest against the slaughter in Iraq Donald Dewar Statue, Buchanan Street, 12-3pm
For further details contact of this and other FRFI activities in Scotland
phone: 07779 785 529 or email: frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk.

Rock around the Blockade round-up office@ratb.org.uk www.ratb.org.uk

Defending revolution, fighting opportunism

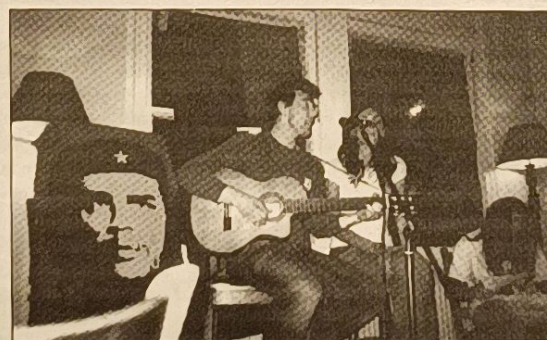
RATB mobilised its members to attend meetings on Cuba at the European Social Forum held in October (see article page 3). Cuban speakers included Che Guevara's daughter Aleida Guevara, UJC member Raul Van Troi Navarro and Noel Carillo, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The meetings were packed, showing a real enthusiasm for hearing about the example of the Cuban Revolution. Aleida Guevara's contributions revealed a principled fighter for socialism, giving no concessions to social democratic trends. At the opening speech she said 'socialism is still a possibility, solidarity is of paramount importance'. A doctor, working at the children's hospital in Havana, who has worked in Angola, Ecuador and Nicaragua, Aleida Guevara said 'neoliberal policies are destroying my continent...A better world is possible, the challenge lies in being able to act, rather than just talk'. She defended armed struggle and quoted the recent experiences in Venezuela to show that there is a place for armed struggle to give people back power.

In this context, the SWP, always so ready to spread their poison about Cuba when there

is no-one to challenge them, lacked the guts to stand up and put their questions to Aleida Guevara. Instead, leading members sat mutely in the audience; meanwhile, in another part of London, SWP leader Chris Harman continued to spew the reactionary party line at an SWP meeting on Cuba.

Meanwhile, in November, an RATB member in Spain noticed an advert for a meeting to be addressed by the SWP's Mike Gonzales in Madrid on the afternoon he was due to catch his plane home. Fresh from pursuing Mike Gonzales around Britain this autumn to denounce his reactionary new book on Che Guevara, the comrade raced to the meeting and was on his feet as soon as Gonzales had finished speaking, refuting the SWP's lies and ensuring the Spanish students at the meeting heard a revolutionary position on Cuba. Gonzales had little option but to slink away the moment the meeting was over. Oh, Mike, you can run...but you can't hide from the truth about Cuba.

But opportunism takes many forms, not least that of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. Rob Miller of the CSC claimed as the CSC's major achievement the fact that a number of Labour MPs, includ-



Commemorating Che with an evening of political speeches and music

ing Peter Hain and Tony Blair, had agreed, in response to a CSC questionnaire, that 'were the US to declare its intention tomorrow to force regime change on Cuba by military means it could not count on the support of British MPs'. The Cubans must be relieved! We know that such assurances are not worth the paper they are written on. What happened to all those Labour MPs who claimed to oppose the war in Iraq when the attack actually came? At a time when the warmongering British Labour government is manifestly as cravenly bound to US imperialism as at any point in its history, to suggest some kind of 'crack' in the Special Relationship - as a result of the CSC's

'12 years of patient efforts' - over Cuba is to sow illusions and disarm the solidarity movement.

Get active with RATB

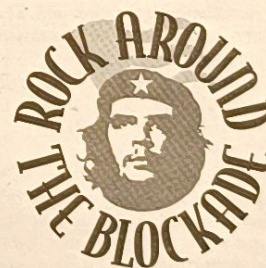
Meanwhile, RATB continues to work to build an active movement in solidarity with Cuban socialism.

Prior to the ESF, we spent an evening of discussion and questions with Raul Van Troi Navarro of the Union of Young Communists (UJC) in Cuba, in Britain as part of the Cuban delegation.

In October, RATB in London marked the 47th anniversary of Che Guevara's murder in Bolivia with an evening of political readings, singers, musicians and poets, rounded off by an enthusi-

astic rendition of Guantanamo. All money raised has been donated to the Che Guevara Study Centre in Havana.

The first Rebel Music night at Barfly in Glasgow in November was very successful and a second is taking place in December. This is part of RATB's fundraising for material aid for the UJC, to take a sound system to Caimanera in the eastern region of Cuba next year. A brigade of people committed to building a movement for socialism in Britain and de-



fending the Cuban Revolution will take out the equipment for the UJC to use for recreational and political purposes. We hope to link up with the World Youth Festival in Caracas, Venezuela in early August.

On 20 October, the FRFI student society at LSE in conjunction with RATB showed the film *Inventos: Hip Hop Cubano* by Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi. *Inventos* is the word Cubans use to describe their passion for resourcefulness: 'what people think can't be done can be done with *Inventos*' and it is this attitude, rather than that Timberland boots and diamond encrusted teeth, that characterises Cuban hip hop. Despite shortages of cassette tapes and CDs and expensive equipment, the Havana hip hop festival has been going for seven years and is endorsed by the Cuban government, which regards hip hop

as 'national culture'. Not long ago it was commonplace in the US for police to break up hip hop gatherings.

In *Hip Hop Cubano*, the rappers show their solidarity with their comrades in the US and recognise the racism embedded there. 'Free Mumial!' is regularly shouted during songs. To me it was inspirational to hear the Cuban people rapping about their duty to push the country forward as a nation. Because over here, we have to rap about the acts of injustice our government commits before we can even think about taking part in building our society.

Ethesham ul-Haque

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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Every cloud

Never underestimate the adaptability of capitalism and especially not its ability to turn a profit out of any misfortune. The front page of the *Financial Times* (2 November 2004) carries a report on the findings of 250 scientists commissioned by the Arctic Council representing eight countries with Arctic territory. The scientists record that Arctic ice is half as thick as 30 years ago and that the distribution of ice has shrunk by 10% in the same period. By the summer of 2070 the Arctic may have no ice at all. 'A warming Arctic could facilitate shipping, as the journey between the UK and Japan could be shortened by 10 to 12 days by a route through passages now ice-bound,' said Mr Prestrud (vice chairman of the committee that produced the report). 'The Arctic is believed to have 25% of remaining oil and gas reserves, and melting ice may improve accessibility.'

TREVOR RAYNE
South London

LETTERS

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

Moving beyond US elections

This past election, I did not vote. This was not out of apathy or resignation. Rather, I view the electoral process in this country as a sham. There is no democracy in the United States. I don't think that there has ever been democracy in the US and I don't think we can make any significant difference through the electoral process. The structure of this country is designed to assure benefits to the wealthy regardless of the party in power. By participating in this sham, we only perpetuate it and give it credence. Those in power maintain their power through our consent. I do not consent to them

nor to their rigged political process.

At this point, the US government is pursuing a barbaric capitalist and openly imperialistic policy abroad and an increasingly fascist policy domestically. US government policy threatens the survival of humanity through the unjust foreign actions which rightfully cause those being attacked to resist, and through the US energy and environmental policies which are depleting our natural resources and destroying our environment.

The recent elections made a few things clear. The Democrats' loss wasn't due to Ralph Nader, nor

was it because Bush stole the election. Republicans got a majority of voters to vote for Bush. The reality is that a vast majority of the US public, who are not presently benefiting and will never benefit from a Bush presidency (most don't have anything to gain from a Democratic presidency either) have been miseducated.

In the light of this reality, we can't lose any more time. We must begin the difficult work of educating the public to work for a dramatic/revolutionary change in US government. We must educate the public to learn to envision social justice and sustainable living

domestically and worldwide.

I compare the times that we are living in like the times of Hitler. The US government has a concentration camp in Guantanamo and a death camp in Fallujah – done in our names. History will judge us harshly. Will we work for social justice and sustainable living domestically and worldwide or will we be another bunch of Nazis, consenting to horrendous crimes against humanity being committed in our names?

STEVE FERNANDEZ
Boston, USA

Indymedia attacked

On 7 October 2004 the commercial website provider Rackspace was raided in London by FBI agents under a US court order. Rackspace was forced to hand over two servers hosting Indymedia sites. This affected over 20 sites including the US, UK, French, Italian, German, Polish and Brazilian arms of Indymedia. Indymedia is an alternative news site where progressive groups can post their actions and where individuals can discuss political developments.

Fight Racism Fight Imperialism! regularly posts reports of the Marks and Spencer's demonstrations and other actions on the site.

The notion that the Metropolitan Police had no knowledge of the raid, which is their claim, is ludicrous. The FBI has no jurisdiction over raiding property in London; the only way it could do so would be with the full and willing cooperation of the British police. This act against Indymedia is a clear example of how our so-

called 'democracy' regards freedom of expression and illustrates a new determination by imperialist states to cooperate in controlling the internet. 93% of the media in Britain is controlled by a handful of rich white men, all of whom represent the interests of the ruling class; there's clearly no room for an alternative media network run by the people for the people.

JIMMY GERMAN
North London

Labour warmongers in Vietnam

Most people think that the UK was not involved in the horrific Vietnam War. Yet British imperialism did assist US imperialism. They allowed US troops to take 'R and R' (rest and recuperation) trips to their colony, Hong Kong. British instructors taught US troops at the British Army Jungle Warfare School at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

However, the Harold Wilson 'Old Labour' government, may have given its US ally more substantial support. I have been told by an 'old salt' that HMS *Chichester*, a type 22 frigate, whose main armament was a 4.5inch gun, entered South Vietnamese waters in 1974. At the time *Chichester* was sailing from the Hong Kong Royal Navy base HMS *Tamar* to the UK when it received a signal ordering it to divert and assist US armed forces.

At the time the US puppet South Vietnamese regime was collapsing and the remaining US bases were in danger of being overrun by the North Vietnamese Army and the Marxist-Leninist National Liberation Front.

I do not know for a fact that this British warship was in the Far East in 1974. If any of your readers are ex-Matelots perhaps they could confirm and add some additional knowledge to what occurred. New Labour, Old Labour, it's always been a war party.

THOMAS ATKINS
North London

PETER HAYES 1939-2004

Peter was an activist involved in the picket of Marks and Spencer in Manchester. He became a Lib-Dem councillor in an attempt to improve the living conditions of poor children in Salford. Peter once told us of a discussion he had with fellow councillors on the subject of poverty: he spoke openly that capitalism was the cause; the room went quiet; the Lib-Dems changed the subject! Peter is a comrade who will be sorely missed.

Crisis in Nepal

The revisionist Communist Party of Nepal (UML) has just supported newly appointed Prime Minister Deuba, puppet of King Gyanendra, in enacting a law which would authorise the reactionary regime to arrest and hold a person for at least a year on mere suspicion of supporting the Maoists. This law is yet one more curtailment of the basic and fundamental rights of the Nepalese people.

The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) has just broken a ceasefire with the CPN (M) during the country's biggest festival Dashain, exposing the government's will to use violence against the Nepalese people, even at a time of cultural

and religious celebration. Prime Minister Deuba also continues to refuse calls for a Constituent Assembly which could help bring an end to the violence.

In the meantime the Indian expansionists are continuing to support King Gyanendra and bolster support for his brutal regime through arming the RNA and by having Indian border patrols undertake missions inside Nepalese territory. India is becoming increasingly anxious to halt the progress of the Nepalese revolution, particularly after the escalation of the Maoist insurgency in several Indian provinces following the historic unification of the two main Maoist factions

into the Communist Party of India (Maoist) last month.

The Nepalese revolution is itself going forth. There's been an increase in attacks against the RNA over the past month, most significantly on 14 November with a successful assault on an army barracks and an ambush on 16 November which left 30 RNA soldiers dead, with a lot of their weaponry stolen. Both these attacks are significant as they took place near Kathmandu – which was itself successfully blockaded for three days last month.

BABURAM SHARMA
London

UCATT sells out Tunnel workers

King's Cross residents recently won a court order forbidding Channel Tunnel Rail development work to be carried out 24 hours a day due to the noise and disruption this would cause.

Contractors Laing O'Rourke intend to offset their losses, caused by the subsequent delay in completion, by cutting workers' wages. UCATT, the construction union, agreed to the new contract without consulting the workers. This exploitative contract that workers are being forced to sign will cut their pay by half, leaving them reliant on bonuses to supplement

pay, but allowing management to decide who gets them, take away the automatic right to holiday pay and force employees to request a day off 40 days in advance.

Many workers are refusing to sign the contract (despite being threatened with the sack) and organisation has begun, with meetings, elected representatives and organised pickets. The same situation is now being applied to Laing O'Rourke workers on other sites including, in London, Canary Wharf, Heathrow's Terminal 5 and Newham Hospital. The erosion of construction

industry pay and conditions is leading to increased health risks and a decline in safety standards. There are already around 100 deaths per year in the building industry.

On 22 November activists sealed cranes at the King's Cross site in London as a mark of solidarity with the construction workers. They have pledged to continue to highlight this struggle and support the workers' collective action.

More information is available on www.indymedia.org.uk

MEGAN ST LOSKI
North London

European Social Forum playground for opportunists

continued from p3

Mashadani was invited to the ESF by two British trade unions – RMT and UNISON. The decision was controversial and had been opposed for weeks before the ESF started.

The chair of the plenary, Lindsay German (Stop the War Coalition/SWP) accused the protesters of denying Mashadani freedom of speech. She then asked participants to 'vote' on whether he should speak, without

any explanation of the protesters' reasons for their opposition. German won the 'vote' and demanded the protesters leave in the name of 'democracy'. They refused and continued to oppose the presence of this collaborator. Eventually the meeting was abandoned and Mashadani left with his bodyguards.

Wombling against Livingstone

There was more opposition at the antifascist plenary of the ESF

where Labour Mayor Ken Livingstone was billed to speak but did not turn up. 200 demonstrators erected banners that read 'Ken's party, War party' and 'Another world is for sale' on stage in the 2,000 capacity hall. Chair of this session, Weyman Bennett, (United against Fascism/ SWP), claimed the protesters were racist thugs, who attacked a meeting with black and Jewish speakers, and that he had his phone and wallet snatched in the process.

These allegations were easily and swiftly refuted – the protesters had been making a political point and got significant support from the audience.

The state of the movement in Britain

The SWP speaks on platforms with Iraqi collaborators, condemns those who point out Labour's record, and keeps quiet when faced with Cuban revolutionaries (see p14).

We need to build an open, democratic, anti-imperialist, anti-war movement, in solidarity with those fighting imperialism in Iraq, Palestine, Latin America. A movement which will fight for the interests of the poor and oppressed at home and abroad and those facing racism and discrimination, a movement which will defend socialist Cuba. To succeed, this movement must break from the Labour Party and all those who cover up for it. ■

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

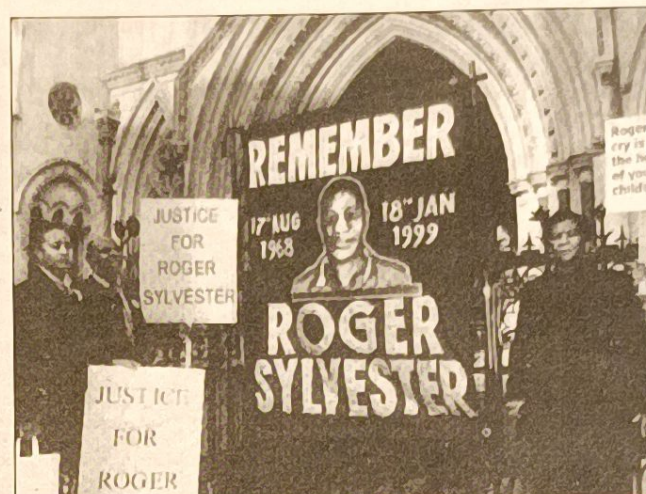
► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, immigrants, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

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

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Blunkett's police state



The verdict of unlawful killing at the second inquest into the killing of Harry Stanley created uproar in police ranks and a frenzy of lies, half-truths and spin from senior police officers and Home Secretary David Blunkett. Harry Stanley was killed by armed response unit officers Inspector Neil Sharman and Sergeant Devin Fagan on 22 September 1999 while he was walking home carrying a table leg in a plastic carrier bag.

Over 120 police officers refused to carry arms for 36 hours on 2-3 November following the jury's verdict. The press called this a strike, but the correct term was mutiny. There were no armed response units on London's streets during this period, but armed anarchy did not break out. The populace did not take up armed robbery, settle old scores with guns or massacre police officers. In fact the streets were arguably safer without 120 armed thugs on the loose.

On 3 November *The Sun* published an article by Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Sir Ian Blair, headlined 'We must stand by our hero gun

cops', calling for the law to be changed to give killer gun cops immunity. Blunkett echoed this throughout the media. Stanley family solicitor, Daniel Machover, said that putting armed police beyond the law is the hallmark of military dictatorship.

Meanwhile, scant regard was given to the basis of the inquest verdict. The police officers claimed that they challenged Harry Stanley, who turned around, grasping the contents of the bag in one hand and pointing what they believed to be a gun at Fagan. Yet the forensic evidence showed Harry had only just begun to turn towards Sharman, not Fagan, and that the fatal entry wound was at the back left side of Harry's skull. In fact, because Fagan was standing to Sharman's right, he was out of

range of any pointed 'weapon'. For the police account to be true, the fatal bullet would have had to enter the front right of his skull, not the rear left.

It took two inquests to reach this verdict because the forensic evidence was ruled out at the first. Meanwhile the two officers were not suspended; indeed Sharman was promoted to Chief Inspector, in charge of community policing in Colindale. They have now been suspended pending a decision by the Crown Prosecution Service on whether they will be charged. Even this small drop of justice for Harry Stanley has been turned into a discussion of the terms and conditions of his killers.

More deaths

There has been another imbroglio – this time between the coroner at the inquest into the death of Derek Bennett and Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stephens. Derek Bennett was shot by four bullets into his back when armed police were

called because he was seen carrying a gun – actually a cigarette lighter. The police successfully appealed against the coroner's order that their identities should be revealed. Stephens then tried to introduce new witnesses from the 'mental health authorities' to give evidence about Bennett's medical history. Presumably he thinks that evidence of mental illness would justify shooting Derek Bennett in the back.

In an outrageous High Court judgment the verdict of unlawful killing was overturned in the case of Roger Sylvester who died after being attacked by eight police officers outside his home. The police involved have now been reinstated. The Sylvester

family announced outside the court that they would no longer be participating in the farce that passes for British justice.

An inquest jury gave a verdict of accidental death for David Campbell, a 31-year-old Jamaican who died during a police raid. Campbell had overstayed his visa and died after falling from a third floor window during a police drugs raid. There was no evidence of his taking or dealing in drugs. Police raids are deliberately intended to terrify both the targets and the entire neighbourhood. David Campbell was running in fear for his life when he died. Another victim of a police state.

Jim Wills, friend of Harry Stanley

Racist Britain – same old story

Racist attacks are on the increase. Chinese, Asian and black people, and especially those whose 'actual or perceived' religion is Islam, are constantly subjected to sustained and brutal assaults. The Crown Prosecution Service recorded a 20% increase in reported 'race hate crimes' in 2002-03, despite its own racist prosecutors regularly reducing charges and downgrading crimes 'to remove the race element' (*The Guardian*, 7 April 2004). In the meantime, homelessness and overcrowding continue to climb in black and Muslim communities – 42% of Muslim children live in overcrowded homes compared to 12% nationally. Homelessness increased by 77% among ethnic minority households compared with 34% among the general population between 1997 and this year. For black people the figure is 89%. CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.



Foreign workers are granted temporary permits to work long hours on low wages

Whilst walking home with his ten-year-old nephew in Coventry on 26 September, Jagdeesh Singh was racially abused then kicked and punched over 30 times by two white racists who referred to him as 'Paki' and 'Bin Laden' (Institute of Race Relations, 30 September). In Swansea, Kalan Kawa Karim, who had been imprisoned and tortured in Iraq, was murdered by a punch to the back of the head. The Iraqi community in Swansea says it is living 'under a different kind of terror' with at least one racist incident reported to police daily, and most incidents not reported at all (*The Independent*, 23 October).

In Rochdale, Greater Manchester, race hate crimes increased by 38% in the six months to June 2004, with 435 reports of crimes. Asians are the victims in 50% of cases. The real figure is undoubtedly higher. Manchester's only Muslim school for girls has suffered a spate of horrible attacks, with windows smashed, computers stolen and 'no niggers' and swastikas daubed on the walls.

In Belfast, more than five racist or homophobic attacks take place every week; 129 'hate crimes' were recorded in 183 days between April and September. (*BBC Online*, 27 October). The police were 'dismissive of attacks' including those on disabled people. In fact, British government legislation on hate crimes does not include attacks on the disabled.

The charity Victim Support has reported an 11-fold increase in racist attacks over the last decade. The 33,374 reported attacks in 2003-04 included racist mail, harassment and bullying at work or school, arson attacks on home and places of worship, wounding and assault.

Fascist Britain

These attacks are the inevitable manifestation of the Labour government's policy towards Britain's most vulnera-

ble and marginalised community – asylum seekers. Since coming to power in 1997, Labour has introduced three major pieces of legislation on asylum and immigration, creating 28 new 'offences' that apply exclusively to immigrants and asylum seekers. New offences have also been ex-

and-a-half years in Norwich. He was so ill 'he was eating his own faeces'. He understands little English and thought he was going to Brixton rather than Casablanca. The second man was a gay, Muslim, Russian journalist who made films about Chechen refugees, and made clear his intent to commit suicide if forcibly returned. (*The Guardian*, 18 October).

Only five (0.07%) of the 6,400 Iraqi refugees who arrived in the year to June 2004 have been 'recognised'. The remainder have been left destitute as Blunkett pursues a policy of coercion to force them to accept 'voluntary repatriation' to a war zone being bombed by the Labour government.

Labour's racist policy is having the desired effect – total asylum applications fell from 84,130 in 2002 to 49,370 in 2003 (and the refusal rate increased from 66% in 2002 to 83% in 2003). Meanwhile, the numbers invited in on temporary work permits have increased – from 42,844 in 1997 to a target of 175,000 in 2003. In 2000, exactly zero Somalis and Iraqis were issued work permits, whilst about 91,000 cheap labourers from Eastern Europe have been granted entry under the worker's registration scheme since 1 May alone.

The work permit system is focused on a small number of specific occupational types: eight subgroups accounting for 71% of the total. These workers do the hardest, dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, mostly in nursing, catering, agriculture and food processing. 24% work in health and medical services. They have few or no rights and are paid a lot less than British workers. Those people issued permits in 2002 were mainly from India (21%), USA (11%) and South Africa (9%), as well as Malaysia, China and the Philippines. Their families are not allowed to join them and they have to leave after four years. The system has been extended to encourage more countries to become major suppliers of cheap labour to Britain. This exploitation is to guarantee the 'competitiveness of the UK economy', or in other words the profits of British imperialism.

Queen announces more repression

The Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament on 26 November demonstrated once again the priorities of her majesty's loyal Labour government: social control, repression and further entrenching inequality.

The 30 bills and draft bills to be introduced in the coming year include:

- **Civil Contingencies Bill** – unprecedented power in 'an emergency' to ban people from leaving or entering any area, deploy troops, ban gatherings, requisition property and disregard existing legislation. Described by Liberty as 'giving the government a blank cheque to define anything it wants as a civil emergency'.

- **Higher Education Bill** – introducing £3,000 top-up fees.

- **Immigration and Asylum Bill** – asylum seekers to get only one chance to appeal; families to have benefits stopped if their claim fails; children from these families to be taken into care; asylum seekers to be returned to 'safe' countries if they have already lodged claims there.

- **Draft Criminal Defence Service Bill** – will cut legal aid spending and reduce defendants' access to legal representation

- **Draft Identity Cards Bill** – will create a national register and powers for compulsory ID cards; passports and driving licences to include fingerprints within five years.

In addition, the Queen announced the setting up of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, a sort of British FBI, compulsory drug testing of people arrested and 'further legislation to tackle anti-social behaviour'.

Nicki Jameson