

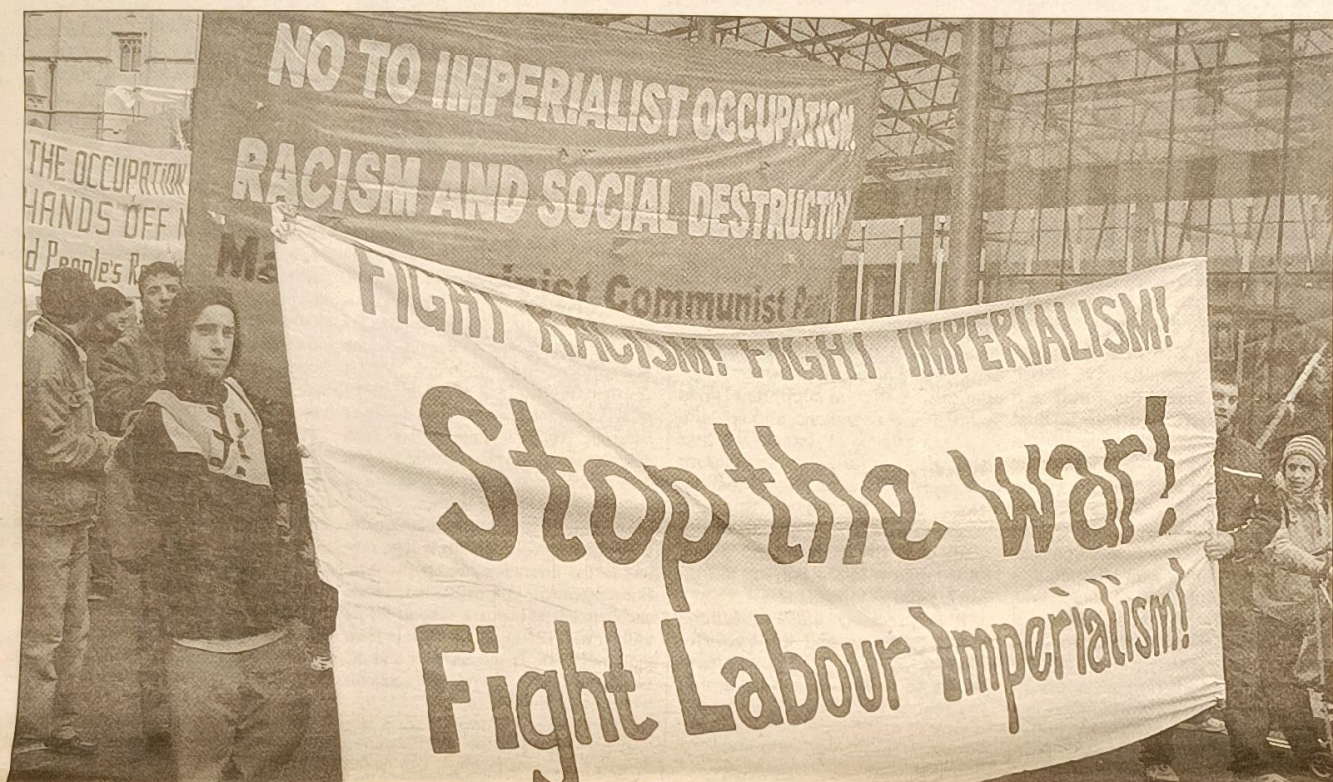
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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FRFI on the Stop the War demonstration in London on the third anniversary of the Iraq war

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IRAQ Imperialists fan the flames of sectarian violence

In a major speech last autumn President Bush described the establishment of democratic elections as a 'moral imperative' of US policy in the Middle East. What he intended, of course, was that such elections would legitimise the imposition of puppet governments sympathetic to US concerns. But the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election and the continuing difficulties in forming a government following the Iraqi elections are forcing a reassessment of the policy and adding weight to those in the imperialist camp who would prefer to divide and rule through naked military power. **JIM CRAVEN reports.**

Writing in the *Jerusalem Post* the leading US neo-con and arch Zionist Daniel Pipes said 'The bombing on 22 February of the Askariya shrine in Samarra was a tragedy but it was not an American or a coalition tragedy. When Sunni terrorists target Shi'ites and vice-versa, non-Muslims are less likely to be hurt. Civil war, in short, would be a humanitarian tragedy but not a strategic one. Civil war will terminate the dream of Iraq serving as a

model for other Middle Eastern countries, thus delaying the push towards elections. This would have the effect of keeping Islamists from being legitimated by the popular vote, as Hamas was just a month ago'. Pipes also welcomed the fact that civil war 'would likely invite Syrian and Iranian participation hastening the possibility of confrontation with these two states'. Pipes was updating a scenario first elaborated by other influential neo-

cons such as David Wurmser, Richard Perle and Douglas Feith in 1997.

Fanning the flames

The destruction of the Shia Askariya shrine sparked a new wave of sectarian violence. Some sources claim over 1,300 were killed. Many were Sunni victims of reprisals by the Shia militias. They included 47 men who were taken from their vehicles and shot and a group of teenagers who were shot while they played football. John Pace, head of the UN human rights commission, said up to three-quarters of all bodies in the Baghdad mortuary had been executed or showed signs of torture by death squads.

The imperialists have tried to use these events for their own purpose, to distract from the over-riding culpability of the occupation and legitimise it as the only means of maintaining some form of order in what they would have us believe is a country on the brink of internecine implosion. US Ambassador in Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad claimed Iraq was 'on the brink of civil

war'. US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, in line with the neo-con strategy, said the US would not interfere if civil war was to break out.

There is evidence that the imperialists have not only tolerated but also provoked the sectarian violence. Reports from the Iraqi resistance stated that (not for the first time) US and British forces withdrew to their bases or stood by and watched as the carnage took place. On 9 March three British soldiers disguised as Iraqis were discovered by Iraqi police trying to plant a bomb outside the headquarters of the Sunni Islamic Party of Iraq. A similar event had been reported last September when British troops were arrested in Basra while trying to plant a bomb at a Shia shrine.

Bush blamed the upsurge in violence on Iran and said the Iraqi people had the choice between 'unity and chaos'. In fact, the Iraqi people are remarkably united against the imperialist occupation. A poll carried out for the British Ministry of Defence found 82% of the Iraqi population were

'strongly opposed' to the presence of imperialist troops. Another survey for the Brookings Institute in Washington found that 80% of Iraqis favoured US troop withdrawals in the near term. Following the attack on the Askariya mosque Shia leaders rallied to maintain Iraqi unity. Abdul Aziz Al Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), said that those who bombed the shrine 'do not represent the Sunnis in Iraq'. Moqtada al-Sadr ordered his followers to refrain from harming fellow Muslims and Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, called for a halt to the divisions.

Occupiers cannot secure their puppet government

In the elections, the party of Iyad Allawi, the man favoured by the imperialists, fared badly and Allawi is now being opposed for any role in the new government by supporters of Moqtada Al Sadr. The Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the leading group in the new parliament, has

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Editorial

Don't give in to government terror!

On 22 March the House of Lords finally gave in to the government and allowed through the latest Terrorism Bill (Labour's fifth since coming to power in 1997), which will now become law. In the sixth round of a debate, centred in the main on the clauses that outlaw 'glorification of terrorism' and which has bounced between the Commons and Lords since last August, peers accepted the government plans by a majority of 112.

Baroness Scotland spoke for the government, warning the non-elected Lords in no uncertain terms that they 'should not seek to oppose the will of the elected Chamber for too long, or on too weak a basis'. She cited the government's insistence on specifically outlawing 'glorification', as well as 'encouragement' and 'incitement' as based on its need to 'send a strong message - a message that the press and the public and would-be terrorist proselytisers understand - that we will not tolerate those who glorify terrorism with a view to encouraging terrorist outrages'. Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale then went on to put forward the 'best example of that [as] the placard about the "magnificent four" [London suicide bombers] in the demonstration in London [against the publication in Denmark of anti-Islamic cartoons]'. In the context of the debate, this example, together with discussion as to when a celebration of the Dublin Easter Rising would and would not constitute 'glorification', makes it clear that any movement which is still actively engaged in struggle and which celebrates the heroes and martyrs of its past, can be criminalised.

When the Bill was first introduced in August 2005, it contained a specific and separate section outlawing 'glorification of terrorism'. This was then withdrawn but the government simply reinserted the ban on 'glorification' into a different part of the Bill covering 'indirect encouragement' of terrorism.

On 16 January this year the Lords voted 270 to 144 to remove the 'glorification' part of the Bill. The debate then returned to the Commons, where on 15 February



Would the thousands who mourned the death of Irish hunger striker Bobby Sands in 1981 all have been guilty of 'glorifying terrorism'?

MPs voted by 315 to 277 to reinstate it. A pathetic 17 'rebel' Labour MPs joined the Tories and Liberal Democrats to vote against the measure. Blair claimed the vote was a 'signal of strength'.

In the Commons debate Home Secretary Charles Clarke insisted that outlawing 'glorification of terrorism' was a 'manifesto commitment' and in line with UN Security Council resolution 1624, which was passed on 14 September 2005 and which condemns 'in the strongest terms the incitement of terrorist acts and repudiating attempts at the justification or glorification... of terrorist acts that may incite further terrorist acts'.

While MPs who oppose the Bill imaginatively cited numerous past and current examples of movements, the 'glorification' of which the government would have difficulty with or might not wish to outlaw (the Easter Rising, Robin Hood, the French and American Revolutions, the French Resistance to Nazism, the EOKA movement in Cyprus, Watt Tyler, the ANC) the specific example given by Clarke of exactly what the government is intending to curb was 'We glorify the memory of Mohammed Sidique Khan', one of the 7 July bombers.

Robert Burden MP raised the subject of Hamas, pointing out that 'Hamas was elected with a parliamentary majority in a free and fair vote' and asking if the government genuinely would wish to criminalise 'a young Muslim in the UK who hears about a Palestinian child

being shot by Israeli troops - as happened a couple of weeks ago - [and] says that he supports Hamas and that Palestinians should take up arms against Israel.' Neither Clarke nor any other Labour Minister answered his question. Nor did Baroness Scotland respond in the final debate to the Bishop of Chelmsford who asked 'Are those who are fighting in Iraq insurgents or terrorists?'

It is precisely these questions about Palestine and the Iraqi Resistance which the government wants to avoid. Blair, Clarke and the rest of the Labour Cabinet are happy to make a public fuss about condemning anyone who supports the bombings of civilians in New York, London, Madrid, Bali and elsewhere. They can fend off questions about the struggle against apartheid South Africa or the French Revolution by stating that 'glorifying' these past events does not carry with it any incitement to do the same in future. But they do not want to reply to those who suggest, correctly, that this measure will be used to criminalise opposition to the ongoing war in the Middle East.

We must be completely clear - we oppose this draconian Terrorism Bill, as we have opposed all British 'anti-terrorist' legislation from the anti-Irish Prevention of Terrorism Act brought in by another Labour government in 1974. We will not be silenced and will continue to show active, vocal support for the Intifada in Palestine, the resistance in Iraq and the struggle of oppressed peoples around the world against injustice, occupation and imperialism.

Victory to the Intifada!
Victory to the Iraqi resistance!

Education for sale

You cannot bend or bribe or twist
Thank God, the English journalist
But seeing what the man will do
Unbribed, there's no occasion to

(Humbert Wolfe, *The Uncelestial Body*)

Not so Labour Party Members of Parliament. They have a minimum bribe price of £78,000 a year wages plus expenses. And to keep their jobs and privileges they supported the Prime Minister's Education Bill, that 'monumental barrel of bollocks' as Ted Wragg described it, rather than break with Labour. Only 51 MPs voted against the Bill which will unleash a new wave of privatisation into the English school system and undermine further the welfare state.

The Bill, which is a very dense document of over 1,000 pages, will progress slowly through committee stages and the Tories threaten to withhold support at any time. The key issue is still the role of local education authorities and their 'strategic commissioning roles with duties to ensure that every child reaches their educational potential'. Quite what this means will have to be seen.

The Bill permits local authorities to create new schools, but this will be subject to the Education Secretary's veto. Encouragement to private individuals and consortia to buy new schools for £2 million with £25 million thrown in from the government is still on offer and the target to establish 200 Academy schools by next year remains.

'Trust' schools, however, are a new feature of the Bill. These are state-funded independent schools which will be controlled by outside organisations, such as businesses or charities, but which do not have to provide funding (England only). Whether only those with no head for sums will apply to run an Academy when they could get a 'Trust' school for free is something only time can tell.

You already heard it here

The Labour Party's cash for peerages arrangements work especially well in the education sector. As reported in FRFI 189, a big contribution to the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) will get your name to the prime minister's office and 'for a donation of £10 million you could go to the House of Lords'.

Goodbye to Rod

Rod Aldridge is a busy man. His company Capita grew from a £112 million turnover in 1996 to almost £1.3 billion in 2004 because of its leading role in grabbing finances from the Labour government's massive expansion of public sector outsourcing. Capita runs the literacy and numeracy strategy for the Department for Education and Skills, runs the Criminal Records Bureau, and collects the television licence fee. And

despite inefficiency and financial scandal (last week the company was fined £300,000 by the City watchdog after an alleged £1.8 million fraud attempt by some of its own employees), Capita thrives. Over the next three years Capita will be running BBC human resources and providing Birmingham city council with all its IT under a £424 million contract.

It will be no surprise to learn that Rod Aldridge keenly supports the government's policies of encouraging private sector involvement in the public services. He sponsors one of Blair's 'flagship' Academies and is one of the secret Labour lenders of £1 million. Rod Aldridge has just resigned as chairman of his company. Capita now has over a third of all public sector outsourcing contracts and Rod does not want his company to suffer from the slightest suspicion that it has sought favours or brought advantage from those in government handing out the contracts.

Sir Michael regrets...

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the biggest-spending quango (quasi non-governmental organisation) in the country. This huge institution superintends provision for the 25% of 16-year-olds who leave school without any qualifications each year. It is what used to be called the Careers Office. Today it is a funding organisation that offers vocational qualifications, and 'entry-to-employment' courses. Not directly of course, but by outsourcing to firms and training providers. Some of these set-ups have proved very dodgy in the past as this newspaper has recorded, like the fraudulent Individual Learning Accounts and the e-learning computer system.

Sir Michael Bichard, permanent secretary of the LSC recently confessed that his organisation has failed some of the country's poorest teenagers and is actually 'deepening social inequalities'.

It is so overstretched with projects and initiatives that the LSC is putting financial pressure on training firms which makes it less likely that they will take on those who have struggled at school. There is a 22-week cap on funding apprenticeships which is not long enough for those with serious literacy and numeracy problems to succeed and as a consequence drop-out rates are about 80% in many vocational areas. Sir Michael says that this is personally 'very disappointing... because the simple fact is that the council is not treating seriously or equitably this most vulnerable group'.

The trouble is, Sir Michael, that when your so-called partners in training are actually firms receiving massive subsidies from the state, things are likely to go very badly wrong when the funding dries up.

Susan Davidson

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20 years ago...

For almost four years, from April 1986 to the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square, London, stood as a focus for anti-apartheid protest. The picket, was organised by City of London Anti-Apartheid Group, initially set up by Norma Kitson, whose husband David Kitson was an apartheid prisoner for 20 years, the RCG and a few others; its hallmark was that it was open to all those who opposed racism in Britain and South Africa and the shameful role of the British government in supporting apartheid. City AA gave solidarity to all liberation movements fighting apartheid. Our stance brought us into conflict with the British state and the British AAM as the police harassed us, arrested us and tried to ban us altogether, and the AAM tried to end the picket: we fought back on the streets and through the courts and won.

The Budget Pitching for the top job

Chancellor Brown's tenth budget is designed to be his last one. 'The British economy is strong and strengthening', he declares at the beginning of the budget speech, rattling off reams of statistics to drive his point home. This 'new economic stability', the result of his stewardship, makes Britain 'better placed than ever to be one of the global economy's success stories'. Surely he now must move on to replace an increasingly discredited prime minister Tony Blair before any further damage can be done. That is what he wanted us to believe as he delivered what the *Financial Times* called 'not so much a budget, more a lengthy application for the job of prime minister.'

As with all Brown's budgets the form and presentation are everything. The substance is often very different. What the budget speech leaves out is invariably more revealing than what it contains. There was no mention of health because the NHS faces a severe crisis despite the massive rise in spending. His predictions are always far too optimistic. The projected level of public borrowing over the next five years – £152.1bn from 2005-06 to 2009-10 – is already some £19bn above that predicted in his 2005 budget, and it will almost certainly rise further in future budgets, threatening to break his self-imposed 'prudent' limit of a 40% public debt to GDP ratio. Even the claim that 'the UK economy is experiencing its longest unbroken expansion since quarterly records began' (Red Book) of 54 consecutive quarters (over 13 years) is formulated to disguise the fact that on an annual basis the post-war boom from 1949 saw 25 years of successive growth.

Education, Education, Education...

Education was the stick Brown used not only to beat the leader of the opposition David Cameron but also to lay down his own 'progressive' credentials to disillusioned Labour MPs. It took the form of an intention to eradicate the pupil funding gap between state and privileged private schools. This was not just a populist dig at Cameron who was educated at Eton but also designed to give heart to those Labour MPs who want to see Blair, another private school boy, replaced by Brown as prime minister. In reality it is all wishful thinking. Annual spending per pupil in state schools is at present around £5,000. In private schools it is £8,000. The Treasury is already backtracking on Brown's announcement, saying that he had not said in his speech that he wanted to eliminate the differential between state and private funding but had an ambition to raise spending to £8,000 per pupil in state schools.

Brown's speech was in fact typically ambiguous. He wanted in the long term to ensure all children had 'the educational support now available to just 10 per cent private pupils'. He also said that he had an objective 'stage by stage, adjusting for inflation, [to] raise average investment per pupil to today's private school level.' The long term will be very long indeed because to carry out this policy, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, would require an additional £17bn a year – equivalent to 5p on the standard rate of income tax. Prudent Brown has no intention of raising income tax to pay for his policy. He will, however, increase schools' capital



Gordon Brown: Chancellor of the Exchequer or prime minister-in-waiting?

investment on equipment and buildings from £5.6bn to £8bn a year over a five year period to match private sector levels of capital investment.

The increases in schools current budget are minimal, £270m in 2006-07 and £440m in 2007-08, just 0.08 per cent of government expenditure. This small expenditure in a priority area reflects the harsh reality of public finances under Brown's neo-liberal spending restraints.

Rises in education and health spending are crucial if the middle and upper working classes are to continue supporting Labour. Education spending on present estimates will have risen by 65% in real terms between 1996-97 and 2007-08. But that is no guarantee that there will be any significant improvements in education for the vast majority of children if the experience in the health sector is anything to go by. Health spending will have risen by a massive 90% in real terms over the same period. Brown didn't mention it in the budget because

NHS trusts have an overall deficit of some £750m and have been forced through government policies to close beds and have already cut, in the last month alone, over 4,000 jobs. Millions have been wasted through the creeping privatisation process, on management consultants, high paid executives and the wasteful administrative costs of setting up internal markets. Labour's reforms are costly and wasteful. Brown replacing Blair will not change any of this.

A reactionary opportunist

Brown is an opportunist. In his 2005 budget (see FRFI 184 April/May 2005) he needed to win voters for the coming election. Typically he offered pensioners over 65 a £200 council tax rebate. In this budget, with the election won, he has taken it away. He has also frozen the winter fuel allowance, despite energy prices rising by 57% for gas and 42% for electricity since the last increase. As a smokescreen he has offered to extend

free bus travel available locally to over 60s to any part of the country after April 2008, hoping no doubt for an improvement in public finances by that time.

Brown tried to show his 'green' credentials by raising vehicle excise duty on high polluting cars. The amount is derisory, around £45 on cars such as SUVs costing up to £45,000. Fuel duty is to be frozen yet again despite a fall in motoring cost of 8.6%. Brown knows Labour's core supporters and he is not about to upset them.

Brown has solidly defended British imperialist interests with hard cash since he has been in office. An additional £800m is to go towards military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan next year with the total cost for those operations now approaching £6bn. He has also allocated a further £200m 'to promote peacekeeping in the most troubled parts of the world', that is, to have troops and equipment available to defend British interests in the poorest parts of the world. No doubt this will prove useful for the new City of London taskforce he has set up to promote British financial interests globally.

Brown made the usual overtures to Labour's rich supporters this time by new rules for real estate investment trusts (Reits). They are investment trusts for holding property which pay hardly any tax. In return for not paying corporation tax, Reits must distribute 90% of their net profits to shareholders. Brown has made them less restrictive. Property shares rose 10% after the budget. In addition the threshold for inheritance tax has been increased well above the rate of inflation. Brown never lets down Labour's rich friends and middle class supporters.

The Private Finance Initiative has some 200 projects (worth around £26bn) due to be signed over the next few years – one of the largest private finance programmes in the world. The privatisation of public assets will continue unabated as Brown tries to increase funds for his key expenditure programmes. £30bn of state assets will be sold by 2010, and, in addition, there are plans for a further £20bn to be raised by selling off assets such as the state-owned nuclear industry. With the creeping privatisation of the health and education service offering easy money to a broad spectrum of businesses, it is not surprising that Labour had little difficulty finding rich businessmen to secretly lend Labour the £14m to fight last year's election. They are on to a good thing.

David Yaffe

Knowing nothing

There has been much hand wringing in the ranks of the Labour government in recent weeks.

First of all culture minister Tessa Jowell faced probes into her involvement in her husband's dirty dealings as legal adviser to Italy's right-wing Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (friend and holiday companion to the Blairs). David Mills, a lawyer, is to go on trial for corruptly giving false evidence on behalf of Berlusconi for which he allegedly received £344,000. This 'fee' was used to pay off a mortgage on the Jowell-Mills family home. Tessa 'knew nothing' despite having signed the mortgage papers.

Some questions are in order, but are unlikely to be answered now that Tessa has ditched hubby (at least for the time being). Where, for instance, did she think the £344,000 had come from and why did it need to be laundered through so many offshore bank accounts? Didn't she smell a rat?

The Labour government's troubles did not end here. The names of four multi-millionaires who had issued loans to the Labour Party to bankroll its last election campaign were leaked as having their nominations for peerages blocked by the Standards Commission which is meant to keep undesirables out of the House of Lords. Its success at doing this can be judged by the fact that the Upper House is stuffed full of crooks, liars and perjurers.

Labour Party treasurer Jack Dromey publicly announced that the loans had been kept secret from elected officials, including himself. To which Charles Clarke, Home Secretary, responded that 'you had to wonder how well he was doing his work'. Such acts of collective responsibility and camaraderie became the norm as ministers like Prescott and Hewitt announced that while they themselves had 'known nothing' what the prime minister had done was 'not against the law'.

This, of course, begs a question or two. These charlatans and double dealers wrote the law which allows them to disguise very large 'loans' and reward their creditors with peerages (and maybe more). It may not be an accident that amongst the 12 bank-rollers who were later named as supplying the Labour Party with £13.9 million are property speculators, super-market supremos and biotechnology whiz kids. Not least is Rod Aldridge whose company Capita has benefited to the tune of £1.4bn turnover a year from large public contracts like the Criminal Records Bureau, teachers' pensions and London's congestion charging. Labour's plans for ID cards will no doubt boost the business coffers.

You might think that one or two of the ministers who 'knew nothing' would have noticed that the Labour Party spent £18 million during the last election campaign and wondered where it had come from. Didn't they smell several million rats?

Expecting probity from the ruling class, however, is like asking mud-spattered pigs to fly. From the time of William the Conqueror, Britain's absolute monarchs bankrolled their corrupt lifestyles and their bloody wars by selling honours and peerages. The parliamentary governments which inherited these powers have simply carried on the tradition.

Labour's loans are said to be 'commercial', but don't bother asking a high-street bank to match the interest rates. Don't expect the ruling class to allow the working class the same favours. While the likes of Jowell, Mills and Aldridge get the benefit of the doubt (and a lot of money), the working class gets a very different sort of 'justice' where 'knowing nothing' gets you locked up.

The state of the unions

Recent figures confirm that trade unions in Britain do not represent the mass of the working class, and mainly organise amongst the more secure and privileged sections of the working class. 6.51 million employees are trade union members (autumn 2004). Fewer than one in five private sector workers are members (17.2% or 2.79 million workers); the figure was 18.2% a year earlier. Almost three in five public sector workers remain union members (58.8% or 3.71 million).

Other figures show that:

- Fewer than one in ten 16-24 year olds is a union member; they make up just one-twentieth of trade union membership;
- 42.5% of union members either have a degree or other higher education qualification. The figure for non-union members is 26.3%.
- 41.1% of trade unionists are professionals or associate professionals; 19.9% of non-members fall into these categories. 8.7% of trade unionists are process, plant and machine operatives.
- Almost half of union members (47.4%) have done more than ten years' service compared to 19.9% of non-union members.



Workers demonstrate against sackings at Heathrow

Trade unionists, therefore, tend to be highly-qualified workers in the public sector who have stable working conditions. Unions tend to ignore the low-paid and casually employed.

The advent of the so-called 'awkward squad', a group of left-wing leaders, has not affected the generally supine character of the trade unions and their absolute determination to support the Labour government come what may. In 2005, 157,000 days were lost in strike action, the lowest since records began in 1891. The annual average in

the 1960s was 4,350,000 days; in the 1970s, 12,968,800 days, and in the 1980s, 6,206,900 days. As the crisis bit, so trade unions gave up any pretence at fighting. In the 1990s, the annual average was 519,200 days.

Since the advent of the Labour government in 1997, the annual average has been 518,500. Although more than a million workers will strike on 28 March against attacks on public sector pensions, the trade union leadership will do its damndest to make sure the protest is no real challenge to Labour.

Labour catapults NHS into chaos

On 7 March, Sir Nigel Crisp, NHS Chief Executive, announced that he would take early retirement (to the House of Lords) at the age of 54. He took with him pension entitlements worth £3.2m. Over the following three weeks, the NHS reeled with announcements of cuts and redundancies:

- University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust announced 1,000 redundancies in an effort to balance its books; 750 will be compulsory. Of these, 370 are expected to be midwifery and nursing posts;
- The Royal Cornwall NHS Trust is making 300 redundant to sort out a deficit of £8m;
- In Birmingham, Good Hope Hospital is closing two wards, losing 50 beds and an operating theatre to save £21m;
- 250 jobs are to go at Coventry's Walsgrave Hospital;
- In Manchester, Trafford NHS Trust is closing two in-patient wards in Altrincham hospital;
- In London, the Royal Free Hospital will lose 480 jobs as it tries to remove a £25m deficit, and Queen Mary's Sidcup is losing 190 jobs, 103 of which will be in midwifery and nursing.

Overall, according to the Royal College of Nursing, 38% of acute Trusts have closed wards, and 27% are deferring treatment to save money. Meanwhile, the Department of Health has prepared proposals which would end the right of thousands of elderly and disabled patients to free long-term NHS care. Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt is calling for asthma sufferers and those with chronic heart disease to be treated in the community to save costs: care in the community however has been seriously compromised by lack of nurses and funds. This is the inevitable consequence of the re-introduction of an internal NHS market and the accelerating privatisation of services. HANNAH CALLER and ROBERT CLOUGH report.

Patricia Hewitt claimed last December that the NHS end-of-year deficit would be £200m; now she admits it will be £630m. In reality it will be greater than £900m. Labour is laying the blame on NHS managers. Gisela Stuart, Labour MP for Birmingham Edgbaston wants Hewitt to take a tough line: 'I hope she will tell managers they need to live within their means.' Yet the reality is that much of the increased spending has been on staffing costs, as the number of NHS employees rose by 213,000 between 2000 and 2004, above average pay settlements were offered to various staff groups, and national insurance contributions increased. Between August 2002 and August 2004, average consultant pay rose from £83,700 to £94,700; their numbers rose from 27,070 to 30,650 over the same period. The new GP contract has been a gold-mine, with few GPs now earning less than £100,000; the government underestimated its cost by at least £250m. A King's Fund report recently showed that 87% of the 2004/05 funding increase went on meeting cost pressures such as these rather than new developments. Overall, the real increase in NHS funding to spend on new facilities or drugs has been about 1% annually over the last three years.

Private Finance Initiative

On 8 March, the Department of Health finally approved the PFI scheme to redevelop St Bartholomew's and the Royal London Hospitals in East London. Originally due to cost £1.1 bn, Health Secretary Hewitt put the scheme on hold in January, at a cost of £600,000 per day to the hospital. If the deal with Skanska Innisfree had been shelved, £100m would have been lost at that point. Hewitt announced that £850m has been saved by a cut in interest rates and the annual mortgage bill to Skanska from £116m to £96m. Barts and the London will have to guarantee payments for 35 years for a project due to be completed in 2016; to cut costs, three floors will remain empty, reducing the planned 1,248 beds by 300. In addition, the Trust will have to find £22m in savings to bridge the gap between what it can afford to pay and the actual cost of the scheme.



Royal Free Hospital, London – one of the main teaching hospitals sacking workers

Trusts with PFI contracts have been particularly hard hit since they are not able to reduce or defer onerous repayments.

Behind this there has been a constant process of reorganisation, euphemistically dubbed 'reform'. In April 2003, Health Authorities were replaced by 380 Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and 28 Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs). Now, three years later, the number of PCTs is to be reduced to about 120, and SHAs to nine. Hundreds of staff will be made redundant during 2006/07 with a view to saving £200m. Commissioning of hospital services will pass to GPs in a return to the GP fund-holding system of ten years ago. That they neither wish nor are equipped to undertake this role is not considered important: the point is to make NHS services fit for privatisation. The sale of two GP

Referral management schemes

These schemes, which vary widely across the country, have been set up to vet referrals from GPs to hospital doctors, allegedly to help ensure the patient sees the right specialist. However, in some extreme cases, Trusts are using clerks to make decisions on whether referrals are appropriate or not. Hamish Meldrum, chair of the British Medical Association's General Practitioners Committee, says 'in some areas of the country they are essentially mismanagement schemes where the primary concern is to delay treatment to balance the books and ride roughshod over patient choice. As more and more trusts feel the financial pinch they are jumping on the bandwagon'.

whereby NHS organisations can lend cash free to each other to tide over immediate problems. Instead, they have to lend the money at commercial rates with definite repayment periods. The system of tariff payments for each hospital operation will be extended to cover emergency as well as non-emergency activity. These new rules have one purpose: to remove the efficiencies of a nationalised state system of health provision in order to establish a 'level playing field' for private health care providers. In the place of regional planning, hundreds of organisations will be forced to compete. The overheads are enormous: the cost of running the tariff system runs into hundreds of millions of pounds. Marketing will become a crucial part of NHS Trust operations; their finance departments will expand to ensure they recover as much income from their purchasers as possible. Legal contracts will govern their relationships.

'... it will be the working class and poor who will suffer the consequences of NHS meltdown'

Private sector providers are set to extend their operations. Back in 1997, the government promised it would never privatise clinical services. Then it set up Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs) which, unlike NHS trusts, had contracts guaranteeing volumes of operations and consequent income. PCTs were forced to buy operations from them even if they didn't need to. These ISTCs were supposed to add extra capacity and reduce waiting lists. Of course, what happened was that they took over the straightforward treatments which have minimal clinical risk. Like parasites

Foundation status, stars and money

The Homerton Hospital in East London, a flagship Foundation Trust, is struggling in the run-up to the end of the financial year. With staff working flat out it is still unable to meet the waiting time target set for A&E (98% of all patients to be seen and discharged within four hours). All the stops are being pulled out in the last two weeks up to 5 April; if the Trust does not meet the target, it will lose its star rating, and may even lose its foundation status. Extra nurses and doctors are being pulled in – but for the 3-4 weeks only. This is the warped logic that targets encourage.

practices in Derbyshire to US health-care giant United Health is a foretaste: North Eastern Derbyshire PCT refused to shortlist proposals from local GPs to run the practices.

The chaos will continue. New accountancy rules mean that trusts with deficits at the end of the year will simply have the equivalent removed from their budget in 2006/07. The NHS has banned the brokerage system

they sucked away income from NHS hospitals. If there were clinical problems – as there have been with hip replacements – then the NHS would bail them out just as it has done with the problems of private hospitals. Now an ISTC in Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust will start up in a year's time, operating from NHS premises and using NHS staff and support. According to Trust Chief Executive Mark Hackett 'it is projected that up to 7,500 procedures will be performed there that were previously provided by Southampton University Hospitals'. The ISTC will replace, not augment NHS capacity: it is a sign of the times.

The Department of Health proposals to deny access to free long-term NHS care for elderly and disabled people show that it will be the working class and poor who will suffer the consequences of NHS meltdown. Because the present rules are so

The incompetence of the private sector

Running hospitals: The Good Hope hospital was the first to be taken over by a private company. Consultancy firm Secta won a three-year contract to run the hospital in August 2003. They had to be removed within eight months as the level of debt soared at the rate of £1m per month.

Doing hip operations: Writing in the *British Medical Journal*, Professor Angus Wallace, an orthopaedic consultant in Nottingham, says that 'the number of patients [from ISTCs] we are seeing with problems resulting from poor surgery – incorrectly inserted prostheses, technical errors and infected joint replacements – is too great'. Some ISTCs have a 20% failure rate, compared to the NHS average of 1-1.5%.

unclear, tens of thousands of patients are having to pay for means-tested 'social care' when in fact they should receive free NHS care. Patients who want their entitlement are having to take legal action to get it. Now the Department wants to basically end any eligibility to free long-term NHS care. In a test of the new proposals on 20 elderly patients in West London currently entitled to free long-term care, only two met the criteria. When the proposals were tested against 13 severely disabled patients, only four were able to maintain their entitlement, and then only just. As one social services spokesperson said, 'this would effectively be the end of the NHS for older and severely disabled people'. This is the necessary consequence of NHS privatisation.

Pilot project for patients not entitled to NHS treatment

From 1 February, the Homerton Hospital in the East End of London has employed a person to vet the eligibility of patients to receive free NHS treatment. Starting with the antenatal clinics, the work has been extended to include ward admissions from A&E.

This follows the publication in April 2004 by the Department of Health of *Implementing the overseas visitors hospital charging regulation – guidance for NHS Trust hospitals in England*. The foreword by John Hutton, then Minister of State for Health says 'The NHS is first and foremost for the benefit of people who live in the UK'.

However, the Homerton Hospital's scheme shows that it is not simply about living in Britain, it is about immigration status. The worker on the pilot has direct access to Home Office information if necessary. People admitted to the Homerton Hospital are now being asked not just to confirm their GP details, but also what countries they have lived in during the past year. If they do not satisfy the interviewer, they may be asked to provide proof of their right to NHS care. Without this, they will be billed for their treatment. Vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, who may have fled violence and torture, are now being actively denied free treatment on the NHS. Since they do not even have the right to work in Britain, they clearly do not have the means to pay. In the meantime, *Médécins du Monde*, a health charity which sets up health clinics in war zones, has opened its first centre in Whitechapel, East London.

Internationalism in practice: Cuban doctors in the mountains of Pakistan

'It has made me more revolutionary,' a young Cuban doctor, tearful with emotion, told reporters at the airport in Havana in mid March. She belonged to a brigade of the Henry Reeve International Contingent returning from a five-month medical mission to Pakistan. By that time 2,500 Cuban medical personnel had joined the mission to Pakistan, responding to the human catastrophe left by the earthquake which wrecked northern Pakistan and Kashmir on 8 October 2005 killing 75,000, maiming hundreds of thousands more and leaving hundreds of thousands without homes. HELEN YAFFE reports.

Following the earthquake, as the approaching winter threatened to kill thousands more, the bourgeois press blamed 'compassion fatigue' for the lack of material aid and financial donations made by the west. The reality is that western offers of aid amount to little more than a PR exercise; grandiose promises are made while disasters such as the earthquake or Hurricane Katrina are in the media spotlight but the money rarely, if ever, materialises. In contrast, within six days of the earthquake the first Cuban doctors arrived in Pakistan, setting up hospital tents and trekking into mountainous areas, inaccessible by road, with backpacks full of medical supplies. In one region of Pakistan, Dar-Band, there was just one doctor for a population of 25,000 before the Cubans arrived.

By mid-December there were nearly 2,000 Cubans distributed between more than 40 different areas within Pakistan: 1,200 doctors, 500 paramedics and the rest assistants. By 23 February 2006:

- Cuban doctors had treated 1,043,125 patients, 439,894 of them during home visits in mountainous communities of northern Pakistan. 48.3% of the patients were women.
- In the Cuban surgery tents 10,920 operations had been performed, 40% of them major surgery.
- 76,183 Pakistanis had received specialised physiotherapy.
- Cuban specialists had carried out 432,118 rehabilitation treatments using modern technology, including laser therapy.

The contingent remains in Pakistan and these figures are soaring as every day the Cuban medics continue their life-saving work in tent hospitals providing emergency consultation, laboratory services, x-rays, ultrasound, and surgery rooms, with medics on duty 24 hours a day. At the end of January the contingent initiated a training programme of teaching practice for final-year Pakistani medical students to learn alongside Cuban doctors. By early March, 14 Pakistanis who had lost a limb had been flown to Havana to receive rehabilitation.

The presence of Cuban doctors and the gratitude they receive from the neglected and impoverished populations they treat highlight political contradictions within Pakistan and serve to further break the international isolation Cuba suffered following the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991. On 7 February, Pakistani prime minister Shaikat Aziz and foreign minister Khurshid Kasari, alongside President Musharraf, met Cuba's Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, who was visiting Cuban medical centres. Roque delivered an official invitation from Fidel Castro for Musharraf to participate in the 14th Summit of the Non Aligned Movement in Havana in September 2006, when Cuba takes over the presidency of the Movement.

Roque also offered 1,000 scholarships to Pakistani students from poor regions to study medicine in Cuba. Musharraf declared that Cuba and Fidel were in Pakistan's heart.

Neither Musharraf's support for Cuba's enemy, US imperialism, nor language barriers, nor religious, cultural or climate differences have stopped the Cubans demonstrating internationalist solidarity with the poor people of Pakistan. Cuban newspapers have run informative articles on social and cultural differences between the two countries, for example in the role of women and the poverty in Pakistan. The experience is also encouraging Cubans to reflect on their own society and to appreciate the incredible gains made since the Revolution in tackling poverty, promoting sexual equality and most of all, in medical care provision.

The Henry Reeve International Contingent came into being as Cuban doctors gathered in Havana airport, backpacks filled with medical supplies, waiting for the US government to accept Cuba's offer to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina which hit the southern US on 29 August 2005. Henry Reeve was a US citizen who fought alongside Cubans in the ten year war for independence from the Spanish empire from 1868. The name celebrates the historical links and solidarity that have existed between Cuban and US citizens, despite the imperialist aggression of the US government.

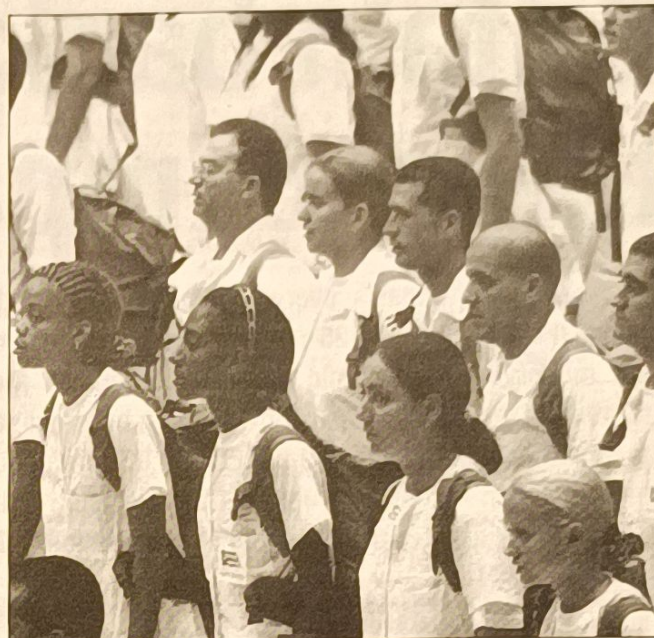
The US ignored Cuba's offer of emergency medical aid but soon afterwards in October 2005 the Henry Reeve Contingent flew to Guatemala where Hurricane Stan had wreaked havoc on poor, mainly indigenous communities in mountainous areas. In sub-zero temperatures the Caribbean doctors provided medical assistance to 442,000 Guatemalans, saving 1,360 lives within two months. More than 60% of the Cubans stayed in the homes of their own patients, witnessing the poverty and alienation which mark their daily lives. Most of the patients had never seen a doctor before, let alone a specialist. Cuban paediatrician Elizabeth Palago Benitez, who went to Guatemala, told *Granma* newspaper (8 December 2005) that their action had helped to prevent an epidemic in the aftermath of the natural catastrophe.

On 2 February 2006, the first 140 doctors of the Henry Reeve International Contingent arrived in Bolivia with 20 mobile hospitals to assist the 50,000 rural families affected by heavy flooding at the end of January. By 24 February, nearly 600 Cuban doctors in nine provinces had treated 56,011 Bolivians.

The Henry Reeve International Contingent is in addition to the 25,000 Cuban health professionals providing free medical services in nearly 70 countries. Around 70% of those

abroad are general medical practitioners, experts in preventive medicine, who provide training in the host country. Cuba has helped to set up medical schools in 11 of the nations assisted so that native populations can continue and develop the work done by Cuban health care professionals.

Foreign students in Cuba are also being incorporated into the Integral Health Programme, which provides medical provision abroad based on humanitarian solidarity and not contracted services. For example, more than 150 students from the medical university in Santiago de Cuba have just joined the Ernesto Che Guevara Contingent in Haiti. 80 of those students are Haitians in their sixth year of medical studies in Cuba. Within Cuba, there are nearly 12,000 students from 28 countries studying medicine at the Latin American School of Medicine in



Hundreds of Cuban doctors at a rally addressed by Fidel Castro

Havana. They include Africans and poor students from the US, as well as Latin Americans.

The contingents are also in addition to Operation Milagro (Operation Miracle), set up as part of the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America to bring Venezuelans to Cuba for treatment to retrieve their eyesight. By January 2006, Cuban eye surgeons had treated well over 208,000 people from Cuba, Venezuela, the Caribbean and other countries in Latin America. Operation Milagro is expanding rapidly to include more countries. The aim is to conduct five million eye operations every year.

While imperialism exports rapacious capital to pillage the world and

its people and dedicates science and technology to develop weapons for war, socialist Cuba deepens its revolutionary humanitarian solidarity throughout the world, without regard to the political or economic system of their governments.

'Our doctors will go anywhere, wherever they are needed, and every one of those will be a teacher, a health professor; this is what we are trying to achieve, to save children and mothers, multiply the years and prolong life, in the midst of a world in which millions of people die who could be saved.' Fidel Castro, closing speech of the IX International Seminar of Primary Health Care, Havana, 10 March 2006.

Haiti: end the UN occupation

LOUIS BREHONY

The 7 February presidential election in Haiti took place two years after the imperialist-backed coup of 19 February 2004, which saw popularly elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide forced out of the country. The election took place under a brutal UN occupation, in place since the coup. Despite this, the imperialists' favoured candidates failed and Aristide ally Rene Garcia Preval won. Preval's test will be how he deals with the occupation, and subsequently the poverty and oppression faced by the Haitian masses.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and second poorest worldwide. Its Gross Domestic Product is below \$12 billion – around 20% of what Tesco made last year. 80% of Haitians live in abject poverty and nearly 70% depend on the agricultural sector, made up mostly of small-scale subsistence farming, employing about two-thirds of those with jobs. Two-thirds of the population is unemployed, the average wage is \$2 a day, and over half are illiterate.

Rene Preval was prime minister until the 1991 US-backed military coup which ousted President Aristide for the first time, and then president between 1996 and 2000 before Aristide and his Lavalas party were elected with 91.8% of the vote. Preval was seen as an ally of Aristide, but in the February election sought to distance himself from Lavalas. Preval said the 10,000 UN troops 'should stay as long as it is necessary', in contrast to Aristide and the majority of Lavalas who denounce the occupiers as servants of the US, France and Canada. Preval does support the popu-

lar demand to bring Aristide back from exile in South Africa, which won him support from Haiti's poor. He also promises literacy programmes and steps to improve agriculture. Lavalas was prevented from running in the election. The party's main candidate, Aristide ally Gerard Jean-Juste, was imprisoned and therefore unable to stand. Jean-Juste pledged his support to Preval's Lespwa coalition.

Preliminary election results indicated a Preval majority of 60%, but this figure dropped suddenly to 48.7% – which would have made a run-off between him and the next candidate necessary. There were widespread reports of vote-rigging, and in some poor neighbourhoods and rural areas, where Preval had strong support, polling stations remained closed. On 25 January, the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced that no voting stations would be placed in Cité Soleil, an impoverished, pro-Aristide district that has faced repression from the UN occupation forces. The polling stations were supposed to be guarded by these troops. Protests forced the CEP to retreat and 90% of Cité Soleil's voters chose Preval.

Elsewhere, communities around Port-au-Prince protested against the CEP's attempts to manipulate the result against Preval, with violent clashes reported. Eventually, Preval was declared the winner with 51.2% of the vote, over four times as many as his closest rival. Despite the imperialists spending \$75 million, Guy Philippe, the former police chief who led the 2004 coup, and Charlito Baker, businessman and favoured candidate of the US, got less than 10% between them.

Despite Preval's overwhelming victory he is unable to take office until Parliament is seated. The results of the

7 February parliamentary elections have still to be announced, and the opposition is crying foul over vote-counting procedures for the presidential election.

Rich capitalist governments pledged \$1.3 billion to rebuild Haiti after the coup. The UN says little of this has been received. The UN, with the Haitian National Police, has been accused of massacres and targeted killings of anti-occupation activists. Since the coup and the beginning of the occupation the country has seen militant protests on a huge scale. Workers responded to violent UN repression with a general strike in December 2004. Military incursions into neighbourhoods like Cité Soleil have prompted huge, armed demonstrations calling for the return of Aristide and an end to the occupation. It was this resistance movement on the streets that forced the imperialists to accept Preval's victory.

The US response was given by Ambassador Timothy Carney at a party in a wealthy area in the mountains above Port-au-Prince: with Preval in attendance, Carney told a reporter, 'We believe we can work with Preval... I think what he's doing now is proving he has the force of character, by reaching out to the opposition, by beginning to move forward with no Aristide in sight' (*New York Times*, 20 February). The US is now pushing Preval to reconcile with coup leaders Louis Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe, who have long-standing ties to death squads and the former US-backed Duvalier dictatorship.

Preval has two choices: either serve the interests of the Haitian people and listen to their demands, or serve the imperialists and their bourgeois Haitian allies.

Britain backs Zionist terror campaign

In response to Hamas's overwhelming victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections of 25 January, Israel, Britain and the US have engaged in a joint military and economic offensive to punish the Palestinian people. The storming of the Jericho prison on 14 March by Israeli forces exposed the depth of the military collaboration, and the EU and US threats to withhold aid payments to the Palestinian Authority (PA) whilst the Zionists retain customs taxes that they owe the PA, illustrates their economic co-operation. **BOB SHEPHERD** reports.

The purpose of the Israeli attack on the Jericho prison was to capture the unarmed Ahmad Sa'adat, General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The attack began 15 minutes after the British government withdrew its monitors from the prison. The PA was holding Ahmad Sa'adat in Jericho at the insistence of the Zionists who accused him of organising the assassination of Rehavam Zeevi, the then Israeli tourist minister, in October 2001. Zeevi's assassination was a response to the murder of PFLP General Secretary Abu Ali Mustapha the previous August. In a clear attempt to destroy the political leadership of the Intifada, an Apache helicopter had fired a missile into his Ramallah office, killing him as he sat at his desk. Zeevi had been selected for retaliation because of his extreme fascist and racist views. He was a vociferous supporter of the ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians from 'Greater Israel' - that is from the West Bank as much as from within existing Israeli borders, and was renowned for using virulently racist terms such as 'insects' when referring to the Palestinians.

Sa'adat was detained in January 2002 and in February the PA arrested four members of the PFLP cell that had supposedly killed Zeevi. They were tried by a PA kangaroo court, sentenced to various terms of imprisonment and were then held in Arafat's compound, the Muqata, in Ramallah. The Zionists refused to accept this, and at the end of March, laid siege to the Muqata demanding that Sa'adat and his comrades be surrendered to them. After a month, under pressure from the US and Britain, Arafat capitulated and agreed a deal to end the siege, the so-called Ramallah Protocol. This required Sa'adat, his four comrades and Fuad Shubaki, a PA official accused of organising the smuggling of weapons into Palestine, to be imprisoned in Jericho under the supervision of British and US monitors. The presence of these monitors was itself a breach of the Geneva Convention, but this did not deter the Labour government one bit.

On 3 June 2002 the Palestinian High Court ruled that there was no evidence linking Sa'adat to the assassination and ordered his immediate release. The Israeli government responded that 'if he is not brought to justice, we will bring justice to him' - a clear threat to assassinate him if he were freed. The PA used this as an excuse to continue holding him; however, following his election to the PLC as one of three PFLP representatives, Hamas announced that they would release him as well as his comrades. The response of the Labour government was to demonstrate that they would undermine any attempt by Hamas to defend victims of Israeli terror. On 8 March, the British and US government sent a joint letter to the PA stating that they would consider



Jericho massacre 2002: Daniel Bethlehem, newly-appointed Foreign Office lawyer, advised Ariel Sharon to block a UN inquiry into Israel's massacre of refugees in Jericho in 2002

withdrawing their monitors since 'the pending handover of governmental power to a political party that has repeatedly called for the release of the Jericho detainees also calls into question the political sustainability of the monitoring mission'. As Zionist forces surrounded the gaol and started to bombard it, Jack Straw repeatedly denied any British collusion with the Israeli army. This was of course a lie: the possible withdrawal had been openly signalled and the Zionists would know immediately it happened because the monitors would have to go through their checkpoints. As it was, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz told the press that 'the Americans and British informed us of their pullout from the gaol a week ago'. The Palestinian people were not deceived by Straw's lies, and crowds attacked and ransacked offices of the British Council in Gaza and Ramallah, and of the HSBC in Ramallah.

Starving the Palestinians

The new democratically elected PLC met for the first time on 18 February. Because the Zionists refuse to allow Palestinians free passage between the West Bank and Gaza it was forced to meet in two different locations, Ramallah and Gaza. As Hamas made clear it would not capitulate to demands that it recognise Israel or renounce armed struggle, the following day the Israeli Cabinet announced it was stopping the payment of customs taxes to the PA. Israel collects these taxes (on the import of goods into PA territory, all of which have to pass through Israeli customs posts) on behalf of the PA and under the Oslo Agreement cannot withhold them.

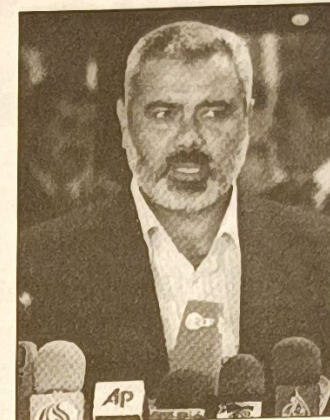
The revenues amount to about £29.5m a month, and are used primarily to pay the wages of the 137,000 employees of the PA: hundreds of thousands more depend on this income for their food and shelter. Hence the impact could be catastrophic, with 50% of Palestinians already forced to live on less than the \$2 a day poverty line. The impact was immediate: PA

Israeli terror

Israel's military attacks and incursions into the West Bank continue unabated. On 19 February Zionists launched Operation Northern Lights, a mass invasion and occupation of the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. Within five days they had killed seven people in the camp and two in Nablus. The Israelis also targeted ambulance staff and medical volunteers. On 23 February one ambulance driver was shot in the arm and leg and a medical volunteer was shot in the head. On 6 March an Israeli aircraft launched a missile at-

employees did not receive their February wages until 15 March. The aim of the Israelis is clearly to starve the Palestinians into submission; as Zionist government advisor Dov Weissglas told the Cabinet 'the Palestinians will get a lot thinner but won't die'. The aim is to turn Palestinian people against Hamas; it will not succeed since the election victory was a rejection of PA collaboration and not merely of PA corruption as the imperialists would have us believe.

In the absence of a viable domestic economy, the PA depends not only on these tax revenues but also on the aid it receives from the EU and the US. Following a meeting of the so-called Middle East Quartet (US, EU, Russia and the UN) at the end of January, UN Secretary Kofi Annan announced that 'all members of the future Palestinian government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agree-



Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh

ments and obligations including the roadmap'. Hamas's response was one of defiance: 'The Quartet should have demanded an end to Israeli occupation and aggression...not demanded that the victim should recognise the occupation and stand handcuffed in the face of the aggression.'

At the end of February the EU announced it would pay £94.5m in emergency aid to the Palestinians although only £11.9m would go directly to the PA. The first part of this was paid in mid-March. Jack Straw declared that the EU 'doesn't want to punish the Palestinian people for their votes at all...On the other hand the Palestinian people need to say to any Hamas government that democracy involves responsibilities and above all a responsibility not to get involved in

tion of the Apartheid Wall. The latest stage involves the consolidation of the Zionists' grip on the Jordan valley. Israel is encouraging settlers to move into the valley and is making it more and more difficult for Palestinians either to enter or travel through it. The plan is for the Wall to be constructed through the Valley completely enclosing Palestinians in the West Bank. Zionist intentions are quite naked: Ehud Olmert, Ariel Sharon's replacement as head of the Kadima Party has said, 'it is impossible to abandon control of the eastern border of Israel'. Israel is publicly deemed to include the West Bank with the exception of the Palestinian cantons or bantustans.

As the Israeli election on 28 March drew close Kadima set out its plans for the West Bank. Shaul Mofaz, Israeli Defence Minister declared, 'When we talk of Israel's permanent or future borders it includes the Jordan Valley, Ma'ale Adumim, Gush Etzion, Ariel, Kedumin-Karnei Shomron and Rehav-Shaked'. This area accounts for over 20% of the West Bank. Olmert announced that if Kadima won the election Israel would put down permanent borders within four years, separating itself off from the 'decisive majority' of Palestinians in the West Bank. He stated that the land between East Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim, known as E1, would be built up. 'It's entirely clear that the territorial continuity between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim will be a built-up continuity. This is clear both to the Palestinians and the Americans.' There has been no condemnation from either the US or the British Labour government for this proposed land-grab. In this context it is vital that we step up our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Victory to the Intifada!

More British collusion

A week before the attack on Jericho the Foreign Office announced it was appointing Daniel Bethlehem, as head of its Legal Department. Bethlehem is former senior advisor to Sharon; it was he who told Sharon to refuse to allow a UN inquiry team access to the Jericho refugee camp following the April 2002 massacre. Bethlehem also took the lead for the Israeli government at the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 2004 to defend the building of the Apartheid Wall. Defending the appointment of this Zionist, the Foreign Office said 'Our view is that Mr Bethlehem has had a distinguished career in international politics'.

More evidence has now come out detailing how successive British governments, both Conservative and Labour, broke international law and aided the development of Israel's nuclear programme. Conservative governments in the late 1950s sold heavy water to Israel; the 1964 Labour government then sold plutonium and other material essential for the development of a nuclear bomb. Tony Benn was Minister for Technology from 1966 and therefore in charge of the nuclear industry. He was also a member of Labour Friends of Israel. He now denies all knowledge of the assistance Britain was giving to the development of Israel's nuclear arsenal. Given that he also denies that he knew anything about the illegal import of uranium from the Rossing mine in South African-occupied Namibia, he clearly must have been asleep throughout this time.

tack on a car in Gaza City. Two occupants, militants of Islamic Jihad, were killed, as well as three children standing on the pavement. On 17 March the Israelis shot and killed a nine-year-old girl sitting in the back of a taxi in Jericho.

Between the elections on 25 January and the attack on the Jericho prison, the Zionists had murdered over 50 Palestinians without a single Zionist death. No condemnation from the Labour government has been forthcoming.

A report released by Defence For Children International lists 230 children arrested by the Israeli Occupation Forces in the months of January and February.

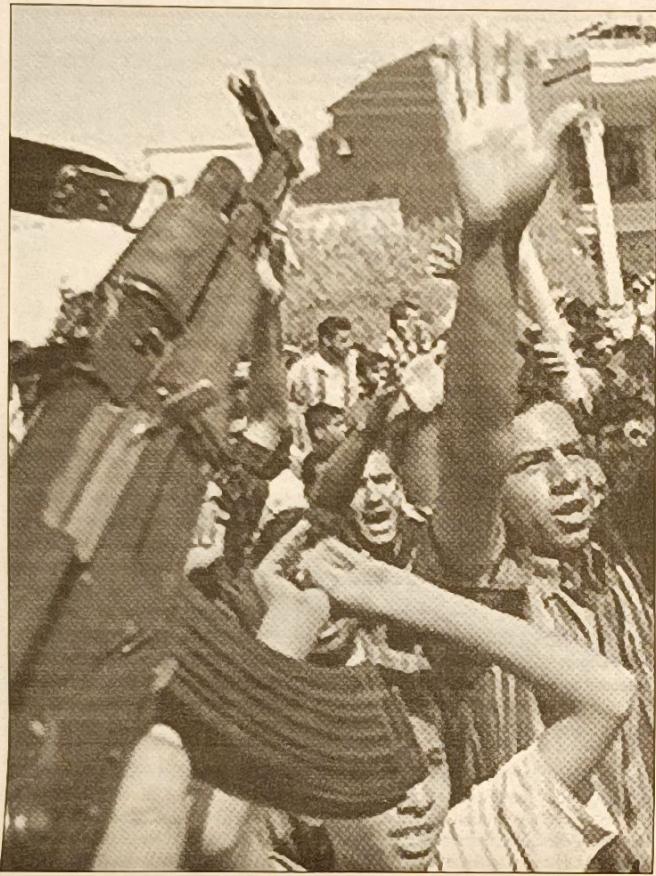
violence'. This is sheer hypocrisy given the continuing Zionist terror.

It is not just withholding money: the economic pressure includes continued closing of border crossings. In the Gaza Strip, Karni, the main border crossing for the import and export of goods and food, has been shut for most of this year. 'The bakeries are rationing bread,' said John Ging, director of UN operations in Gaza. 'People queue and they're given a coupon and a rationed amount...The shelves are quite empty. There's no sugar, oil, milk, the basics. The shops are really depleted on those essential items.' Food is running out as the world's most powerful nations unite to crush an impoverished people.

Zionist annexations continue

Meanwhile on the West Bank Israel continues unchecked with its expansion of settlements and the construc-

Iraq Imperialists fan the flames of sectarian violence



Demonstration against British army activities in Basra

continued from page 1

chosen Ibrahim Al Jafaari, the standing prime minister, as their candidate for that post in the new government, ahead of the imperialist's preferred man Adel Abdal Mahdi, a member of SCIRI, the biggest group within the UIA. In response SCIRI is demanding that it should retain control of the key interior and defence ministries. Under its control, the Badr militias attached to SCIRI have carried out brutal abductions, torture and murder, particularly of Sunnis suspected of being active in the resistance. While the imperialist forces have been happy to encourage these atrocities as a means of dividing the resistance, they would need a strong Sunni presence in any puppet government able to isolate the resistance and create the conditions for troop withdrawals. Consequently, never slow to interfere in the 'democratic process' when it's not going the imperialists' way, Foreign Minister Jack Straw has called for the interior and defence ministries to be 'in the hands of competent people, probably technocrats', while US Ambassador Khalilzad demanded that the ministries should not be in the hands of sectarians and threatened to cut off US aid to Iraq if Shias dominated the new government. It is already over three months since the elections and there is no sign that an agreed government will emerge before the summer. Little wonder that there is confusion in the imperialist camp about what strategy to take.

British military favours imperial counter-insurgency tactics

These uncertainties in tactics and strategy must be severely testing the imperialists' unity. An article by British Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster in the November/December US Military Review severely criticised the US army's strategy in the occupation of Iraq. He said that the US failed to realise 'that all military activity is subordinate to political intent, and must

be attuned accordingly: mere destruction of the enemy is not enough'. Drawing on the vast experience of British imperialist counter-insurgency operations in places such as Malaya, Kenya and Ireland, Aylwin-Foster said that an occupying army must drive a wedge between 'insurgents' and their base in the rest of the population. Rather than treating the population as an obstacle to be cleared out of the way, the occupying forces must interact with the people, gathering HUMINT (human intelligence), 'winning hearts and minds' and being acutely aware of cultural differences. As if to prove Aylwin-Foster's point, the Governor of Karbala Province cut off all co-operation with US forces in February when they used sniffer dogs to search local houses.

However, despite attempts by the media to show British troops in a different light, they have been just as brutal as the US forces. A video broadcast in February showed British troops in Amarah beating up young Iraqi protesters. The callous commentary to the video and the casual attitude of other troops passing by indicated that such beatings are not unusual events. Following the incident two provincial Iraqi councils ended co-operation with British troops. In a demonstration against the beatings at Amarah, two British troops were killed and others stoned by the local population.

British forces under stress

Britain has announced a small reduction in the number of its troops in Iraq, but this has more to do with the army being over-stretched, given its increased commitment in Afghanistan, rather than any improvement in the security situation. By the beginning of March, 103 British troops had died in Iraq. Approximately 230 were being treated for combat injuries in British army hospitals, including 40 for serious injuries such as loss of limbs and brain injuries. At least 1,333 service men and women have returned from Iraq with serious psychiatric prob-

lems. Families of dead servicemen in Britain, many of whom now oppose the war, say that Blair ignores them. The number of US troops killed in Iraq was 2,290 at the beginning of March. Bush has imposed a ban on the photography of coffins returning to the United States. The Pentagon has confirmed reports that it pays for favourable Iraq news stories to be published and broadcast. Donald Rumsfeld in typically cynical double-speak called it 'non-traditional means to provide accurate information'.

Problems mount for imperialists throughout Middle East

Having hounded Syria as part of the 'axis of evil', the US has now had to make a deal with the Syrians. In return for arresting over 8,000 supporters of the Iraqi resistance and for using their influence to prevent the forces of Moqtada Al Sadr from uniting with the Sunni resistance, the US has agreed to ease up on the investigation into the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Syrian agents are accused of murdering the ex-prime minister of Lebanon. The US, Britain and France were threatening sanctions if the perpetrators were not brought to trial. A major

suspect in the inquiry, Syrian secret policeman Mohammed Zuhair Siddiq, has been released by a French court.

Iran shows no signs of giving way to US and British threats over its nuclear programme. The matter is now with the UN Security Council but US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, has reiterated Bush's assertion that all options, including the threat of military action, remain on the table. Indeed, the US has been secretly moving massive numbers of bombs into Afghanistan, probably ready for use against Iran.

In Afghanistan US forces suffered more casualties last year than in any since the invasion. The Taliban and other resistance fighters control large areas of the country and the puppet government of Hamid Karzai is barely hanging on. The British armed forces in Afghanistan are to be raised from 850 to 3,300 by late summer. A British officer said 'Man for man, the Americans consider this is now a more dangerous operation than Iraq'. They will be supported by eight Apache attack helicopters, 10 other helicopters, a battery of high-tech 105mm guns, a battery of Desert Hawk drones and four Hercules aircraft. Their base, Camp Bastion, will be the biggest British military base since the Second World War, suggesting it is intended to house even greater forces there in the future. Alongside it the US has built another \$50 million base for Afghan government forces to be trained by the British.

One of the main tasks of the British

will be to cut off supplies and reinforcements for the resistance forces coming from over the border in Pakistan. However, the stability of Pakistan itself is under threat. Waves of mass demonstrations have hit the country over the past few weeks. The underlying causes of the discontent are the policies of President Musharraf, nicknamed Busharraf for his pro-western stance. If Musharraf falls he is likely to be replaced by a regime far more sympathetic both to the Taliban in Afghanistan and the resistance fighters in Iraq.

Preparing for global war

No matter what difficulties the US imperialists face they cannot afford failure in the Middle East for it would be a major blow to their global strategy of maintaining economic and political domination through massive military superiority. Consequently they continue to tool up for more and more wars. The Bush administration's new budget, proposed at the beginning of February, gives \$439 billion to the Pentagon, up 6.9% on last year. On top of this is \$120 billion in 'emergency funds' for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The National Security Strategy declared that the US military will be 'strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equalling, the power of the US'. The Labour government, keen to defend the interests of British imperialism, will continue to ride on the back of this death machine. ■

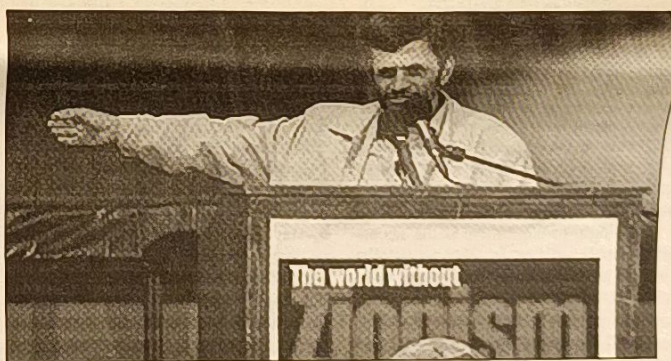
Iran Defying Imperialism

Over the last few months, Britain, the US and Israel have been intensifying the pressure on Iran. In scenes very similar to the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, they have made much of Iran's supposed quest for nuclear weapons and the alleged threat it poses to world peace and security. Although Iran is clearly working for a peaceful resolution, the US has already stigmatised it as part of its 'axis of evil' and is threatening to use 'every tool at its disposal' to prevent Iran from developing its nuclear capabilities. Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, said recently that Iran was probably the number one challenge for the US:

'We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran, whose policies are directed at developing a Middle East that would be 180 degrees different than the Middle East we would like to see developed.'

Iran, which is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has said that it has no plans to build nuclear weapons and that it requires nuclear energy for civilian purposes to meet the energy demands of its increasing population and expanding economy. These claims were substantiated by the International Atomic Energy Agency which after three years of investigation has found 'no evidence of diversion'.

Imperialism is manipulating international law to help set its own agenda. The hypocrisy is overwhelming. Both Britain and the US have huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Both ignore the fact that Israel, which has not signed the NPT, is the only country in the Middle East with such weapons, possessing an estimated 400 nuclear warheads. Both also ignore the support given to Pakistan and India which also have expanding nuclear arsenals. It is clear that imperialism is concerned only to maintain a nuclear weapons monopoly for itself and its allies.



Economic dependence and oil

Imperialist hostilities towards Iran are nothing new. The US and British first conspired against Iran in 1953 when they ousted the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq, which had plans to nationalise the country's oil. The result was over 20 years of the brutal Shah dictatorship, which safeguarded imperialist interest in Iran until the 1979 revolution, soon after which oil was nationalised. No formal ties between the US and Iran have existed since.

Iran not only has 10% of the world's proven oil reserves, but also the second largest natural gas reserves after Russia. Given the fact that US oil reserves at the current level of consumption will run out in 2010, Middle East oil resources are gaining in strategic importance even if, at the moment, the US is only importing 18% of its oil from the Persian Gulf. However, it faces opposition: both Russia and China are refusing to agree to any strong censure of Iran at the UN Security Council.

This story is all about oil – but it's not just about who gets it, but about who doesn't. The US seeks to control access to these energy supplies, not only of its imperialist rivals, Europe and Japan, but also of the emerging Chinese economy. By controlling Chinese, Japanese, Russian and European

access to the Middle East's oil, the US along with Britain, seek to maintain their global economic position.

Iran is now scheduled to shift its petrodollars into a euro-based bourse. Should other countries join Iran in taking this step, the effect on the dollar could be significant and potentially, in the long term, disastrous. At present the dollar is bearing the burden of a national debt exceeding \$8 trillion and a trade deficit of more than \$800 billion. That oil is traded in dollars is critical in maintaining the dollar as the world's reserve currency.

The need for Iran's oil and gas reserves, competition with other imperialist nations and the rise of the euro have made Iran a 'pressing issue' for the US and Britain. The imperialists, however, have few options at the moment given the resistance in Iraq. Interviewed recently on the BBC, ex-US President Bill Clinton was asked if he could see Iran being invaded by the US. He replied 'No. I can't see where we would get the troops from at the moment'. However, the Bush government is in crisis, and it may choose to lash out. Whatever course of action it and its British ally adopts, we stand with the Iranian people in their struggle against imperialism.

Hands off Iran!

Yeyha Ayesh



Student anti-imperialist network

war, imperialism and resistance

On 4 March the Student Anti-Imperialist Network (SAIN) held meetings at the London School of Economics and at Glasgow University. Both dayschools focused on the topic 'War, Imperialism and Resistance,' discussing the current international situation and what action we could take on a national basis. The opening speech in London, given by TREVOR RAYNE from the FRFI Editorial Board (see below) led to a lively debate about imperialism and war from comrades and supporters who had come from around the country. London also heard from Omer Dolutas (see p11) about his campaign to fight against his extradition to Turkey.

In the following sessions both meetings had excellent discussions concerning the anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America which focused on Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia.



On 11 February SAIN members in Britain joined demonstrations in support of the Cuban 5, imprisoned by the US on false charges. Shown here, SAIN members in Scotland and the North East demonstrating outside the US consulate in Edinburgh for the immediate release of the prisoners

Imperialism: the road to ruin

I first visited the London School of Economics in 1967, protesting against the war on Vietnam. A few years later I was at a different university studying economics and I remember on the syllabus reading list were books by Professors JK Galbraith and EJ Mishan and a book by a Professor Meadows called *The Limits to Growth*. These were pretty mainstream texts. They warned of ecological disaster if humanity did not change direction. Over 30 years later the rainforests have shrunk, the air is polluted and the sea and rivers are poisoned. Eminent scientists now warn of impending, perhaps inescapable, catastrophe in the century before us. It is as if we are powerless to save ourselves or the species we live with. We are travelling at 90 miles per hour down a dead-end street and instead of jamming on the brakes we are pressing ever harder on the accelerator. This is capitalism. This is imperialism and it is madness. It is the road to ruin.

The logic of capitalism is the necessity of making a profit. If the capitalist invests 10 and makes 20 then next time they will invest 20 to make 40 and so on. In its constant search for expansion, every limit, every barrier that capital encounters becomes its next starting point. Every barrier – legal, cultural, political, geographical – must be surpassed as capital seeks to make the world in its own image. It is not Marx who is reductionist; it is capitalism that reduces the world to its financial calculations. If capital does not expand it must destroy and then resume growth from a smaller base. However, capital is not just the gyrations of digitalised money swirling around the world in electronic waves. Capital is a social relation whose basis is the dispossession of the means of production from the worker and their ownership by the capitalists, the bourgeoisie.

Remember, 1998, the electronic waves poured out of the Asian Tiger economies driving those economies down by 15%. \$4 trillion was wiped off share prices; oil prices were pushed below \$13 a barrel (they are now around \$60 a barrel). Tens of millions of people were thrown into unemployment and poverty. A vortex of imploding debt provoked mass demonstrations that pulled down the monster President Suharto in Indonesia. In 1965 the British Labour government sent SAS troops to help General Suharto's troops kill between 500,000 and one million communists. Suharto became president in 1967.

To expand, to make a profit, the capitalist constantly tries to raise the productivity of labour by driving down the returns to labour and investing in new

machinery and equipment. As this happens so the ratio of constant to variable capital rises, resulting in a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. This is the underlying reason for capitalism's periodic crises, even if they manifest themselves as financial crises, as in 1998.

Monopolies and militarism

As the productivity of labour grows so new markets and investment outlets have to be opened for capital to expand and the profits to be realised. After the network of roads, canals and railways had integrated Britain into a single market, ships were added to draw Africa, America and Asia into the web of capitalist relations as colonies. By the middle of the nineteenth century the lives of hundreds of millions of people were subject to the dictates of a handful of capitalists in the City of London.

Speaking in 1864, Marx said of Britain in the previous 100 years or so when it was building its empire, 'Death by starvation rose almost to the rank of an institution during this intoxicating epoch of economic progress in the metropolis of the British Empire. That epoch is marked in the annals of the world by the quickening return, the widening compass, and the deadlier effect of the social pest called a commercial and industrial crisis'. These crises of capital accumulation plunged workers in Britain into desperate poverty and forced them to struggle to survive.

In order to expand, capitalism not only opened up new markets in the colonies but concentrated capital into larger units in fewer hands. Small firms were bought by larger firms and large firms amalgamated into giant firms, monopolies. Industrial capital fused with banking capital to create a powerful financial oligarchy at the centre of the British ruling class. The government became an instrument of these monopolists.

1871 was the first year Britain exported more capital investment than it invested at home. Rather than invest at home, where profit rates were relatively low, capital was invested in the colonies where labour and materials were cheap. If we look at the last 30 years of the nineteenth century, when, for example, Marks & Spencer went from peddler to market stall to departmental chain store, per capita incomes in Britain rose on average by 70%. This was in large part due to the tributes of empire. It is impossible to understand the social structure of Britain without understanding the role of imperialism in determining it. Imperialism conditions class politics and class analysis.

Lenin reflected on Engels' writings

on the British working class in the 1880s and its conservative, pro-imperialist trade union leaders. He said, 'The causes are: (1) the exploitation of the whole world by this country; (2) its monopolist position in the world market; (3) its colonial monopoly. The effects are: (1) a section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeois; (2) a section of the proletariat allows itself to be led by men bought by, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie.' Imperialism generated super-profits that allowed the ruling class to create privileged conditions for a section of the working class, a section that came to dominate the political leadership of the workers. Lenin called this section a labour aristocracy.

Lenin described imperialism as having the following characteristics: the concentration of ownership and production into monopolies; the export of capital; the conquest and domination of territories; the division and re-division of the world by the imperialists and competition between imperialist powers. The fundamental economic traits of imperialism make it necessarily militaristic because it is predatory.

Approximately one tenth of Britain's remaining manufacturing workforce is involved in arms production. In many years Britain is the world's second biggest arms exporter. About 40% of the US's arms imports come from Britain. Britain has Europe's biggest arms company BAE Systems (formerly British Aerospace). Britain is the second biggest holder of overseas assets after the US. Nearly half of Europe's 50 biggest multinationals are British or Anglo-Dutch. Two of the three biggest oil companies are British, BP, and Anglo-Dutch, Shell. The City of London, along with New York and Tokyo, is one of the three financial centres of imperialism. To quote from the Labour government's 1998 *Strategic Defence Review*, 'Our closest economic partners are the European Union and the US, but our investment in the developing world amounts to the combined total of France, Germany and Italy'. These tremendous assets need military protection to ensure the flow of profits is not interrupted.

Since the end of the Second World War British armed forces have engaged in approximately 100 separate overseas military interventions around the globe and of these 29 have been in the Middle East. In six of the nine decades of its existence the RAF has bombed Iraq. This is the British state in a condition of constant war to defend multinational corporations' assets and expand them. In this context we support the right of nations to self-determination. British

capitalism today requires the armed subjugation of peoples around the globe in what Lenin called the oppressed nations. There can be no end to the rule of British capitalists and no end to war without support for the national rights and independence of the oppressed nations and peoples. We accept as proven the principle 'No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.' There can be no fight against capitalism in this country that does not side with the oppressed nations against the British ruling class. This means the ruling class and all its supporters; the labour aristocracy and its allies, primarily the Labour Party and its apologists on the British left.

Today, we declare in support of the right to self-determination of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. We must support the fight of the Palestinian people for self-determination and nationhood. The Palestinian people are waging the most progressive struggle at a critical juncture in the Middle East and the world. Just as their subjugation and the establishment of the state of Israel were central to imperialist domination of the Middle East, so the freedom of the Palestinians will be a terrific victory for all the poor and oppressed of the region and the world.

Fred Halliday is Professor of International Relations at the LSE. He published *The World at 2000* based on a series of lectures at this institution. In it he says that communists are 'not in a position to command widespread support, in any country, let alone to shape the course of international relations. The residual communist states – North Korea, Cuba – are on the verge of dramatic change.' This is almost the only reference Halliday makes to Cuba, expecting Cuban socialism to collapse. He does not mention Venezuela or Bolivia at all. By 2006 this book is redundant. With Cuba and Venezuela taking the lead, the Latin American people are breaking free from imperialist domination. For them socialism offers solutions to their problems. We must defend the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions and side with the risen people of Latin America.

The form that national oppression takes in the oppressor nations is racism. There can be no fight against racism that does not fight imperialism and the imperialist state. Imperialism of neces-

sity produces racism. Now, as imperialism intensifies its attacks on the oppressed nations it attacks the racially oppressed in its heartlands. This is state racism, state terrorism at home and abroad. The military, legal and political methods used by the British state to repress the oppressed nations are turned against the people in Britain. We are confronted by a paramilitary police force and the legal machinery for fighting a war against the poor and working class in Britain.

Two particular features of contemporary imperialism have special significance for us in Britain in the coming period. Firstly, inter-imperialist rivalry will increase, noticeably that between the US and Europe. This will produce divisions in the British ruling class. These divisions already exist and will be exacerbated – witness the arguments over the war on Iraq. This will create possibilities for socialists and anti-imperialists. Secondly, the material basis for the labour aristocracy will be undermined. The economic means by which a privileged layer of workers predominates politically and culturally in Britain will dwindle. New social forces with a different social and economic basis will emerge to challenge the labour aristocracy and its political expression, the Labour Party.

Trevor Rayne

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review feature

How SWP discredits the Venezuelan revolution

■ *Venezuela and Revolution in the 21st Century*, a Socialist Worker pamphlet by Joseph Choonara. February 2006 pp30

'To the metaphysician... a thing either exists or does not exist; a thing cannot at the same time be itself and something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in rigid antithesis one to the other.'

Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*

And so it is with this pamphlet. The old Venezuelan state 'has not yet been smashed' (p25), the role of the market and free enterprise has not been abolished, so the revolution, in fact, does not exist. In 30 pages we see nothing but a ridiculous caricature of revolutionary ideas, an utter failure to grasp the political significance of the new Venezuelan constitution, ignorance of the new administration, a complete neglect of the revolutionary internationalism shown by Cuba, a complete failure to understand the significance of 'Bolivarianism' in Latin America, a denial of imperialism, a patronising attitude to the working class in Venezuela and a social-liberal sympathy for the labour aristocracy, all tied to attacks on President Chavez, his party and allies.

SWP leader Chris Harman recently visited Venezuela, carrying his metaphysical method of judging revolutions, and now Joseph Choonara asks the question 'Is Venezuela heading for revolution?' His circular answer is that a 'revolutionary process has been driven forward by growing class conflict', and he concludes profoundly that it 'is unfinished' (p6).

In Choonara's view there is not presently a situation of dual power in Venezuela. The majority and its government are not fighting to transform the economic and political life of the country against imperialism. The pamphlet concludes that 'the power and centralisation of a well-organised ruling class and state machine' exists in Venezuela, obstructing real revolution. It states that a new revolutionary party must be formed, 'armed with the tools and arguments to convince others around them' which 'will be crucial to turning the dreams of socialism...into reality' (p29-30). In brief, President Chavez, his political party the MVR – which on 4 December gain-

ed an absolute majority in Congress – and its allies, are not fit for the job. They are just dreamers. When Choonara quotes Chavez on the reinvention of socialism or the refusal of the Venezuelan people to surrender to counter-revolution (p5 and 15), he can thus only be doing so to show he is such a dreamer. Choonara concludes that: 'The parties linked to Chavez cannot be the vehicle for the deepening of the revolution' (p29). In fact this SWP pamphlet aims, as we have said previously of Chris Harman's public statements, to 'throw doubt over whether a "revolution" [is] taking place in Venezuela, thereby saving the [reader] any concern with supporting it' (FRFI 188 December 2005).

Whose 'ambiguity'?

In the section 'Steps still to come', Choonara asserts that at the heart of the Bolivarian process there is 'an ambiguity' over 'who makes the revo-

lution'. He shamelessly asserts that: 'Chavez's politics are based on the belief that he and others with similar objectives can take power, either through a coup, as he attempted to do in 1992, or through elections, as he did in 1998, and hand out reforms from above' (p22-23), thus, 'The Bolivarian circles set up by Chavez are essentially top-down bodies implementing decisions handed down from above' (p29). He writes 'Obviously, it would be stupid to oppose such reforms, especially as many of them are the results of demands made on the government from below' (p23). Well, Mr Choonara, are they 'handed down' or aren't they? He goes on: 'Reforms handed down from above can be taken away again.' Why would the demands from below cease? The only 'ambiguity' here is Choonara's metaphysical view of class struggle as a sort of 'pass the parcel' – 'Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another'. His is the ambiguity, as he constantly calls the whole process a revolution but insists that only easily reversible 'reforms' have taken place!

The key problem for Choonara is that there are 'contradictions'. For him these are entirely subjective and take the form of attempts by Chavez 'to satisfy the demands of different and opposed classes in Venezuelan society' (p15). What Choonara misses is that the struggle in Venezuela is first and foremost a struggle against impe-

rialism, a revolutionary national struggle. This can only succeed with the extension of political democracy whilst transforming it with a new economic democracy, but without allowing its enemies to wreck production. For expressing precisely this concern Choonara attacks Marta Harnecker 'a left wing activist close to Chavez' (p23). Yet this is the significance of the 1999 constitution – the basis for all the subsequent progressive legislation – which is the most democratic in Latin America, and which the SWP pamphlet dismisses as capturing 'the contradictions of the period'. As if an honest constitution could do otherwise! He warns that 'the dangers of relying on the constitution are clear from the example of Chile in 1973' (p25), yet conceals from the reader that Chavez is arming the workers and that at present 500,000 Venezuelans are training voluntarily as members of the new territorial guard. Two million have signed up for a people's army, to dissuade the US from further acts of aggression.

Choonara cannot understand the national question historically. He completely ignores imperialism and speaks only of 'neo-liberal policies' from which – in the case of Kirchner's Argentina – 'capitalist normality' can be restored (p8). 'Anti-capitalism' and 'class struggle' in Venezuela are presented entirely abstractly, thus avoiding the tasks of challenging US and European imperialism in Latin America. Worse, Choonara sneakily says that 'condemning "Yankee imperialism" has always been a useful way to distract from continued inequality at home...the assertiveness also reflects the interests of groups of (Latin American) capitalists' (p28), so throwing suspicion upon anti-imperialists whilst separating inequality at home from imperialism! He then attacks Chavez again. 'A central plank of Chavez's foreign policy has been greater integration of different Latin American oil and gas companies... But these companies...[seek] to plunder Bolivia's oil and gas resources' (p28). When even the *Financial Times* can point to the fact that energy accords between Morales and Chavez 'are expected to underpin forthcoming radical reforms to Bolivia's economy and energy sector', Choonara's dirty game is well exposed.

Not surprisingly Bolivarianism is ignored. Simon Bolivar is by-passed simply as an anti-colonial leader (p5), not one who fought to unite Latin America and who warned of the US's

'destiny' 'to plague Latin America with misery in the name of liberty'. Choonara will not see that oppressed nations must unite against imperialism if they are to avoid permanent underdevelopment. He does not want to discuss the issue of imperialism. Thus the land question is simply of 'huge symbolic significance' (p17), when in fact Venezuela is the only country in Latin America to depend on food imports, so that farming and land ownership are fundamental to the national independence of the Bolivarian Republic.

Choonara's disdain for the constitution and elections echoes Mike Gonzalez who (*Socialist Worker*, 7 August 2004) said of the Venezuelan recall referendum of 15 August 2004, 'If our [sic] side respects bourgeois democracy, the bourgeoisie will overturn it in defence of its own interests. The shape of the future will not be the result of this or any other referendum'. In fact that referendum campaign was vital in the development of the revolutionary organisation of the working class and as Choonara admits, the result 'reflected the overwhelming support Chavez had gained' (p21). Still Choonara reiterates Gonzalez's caricature of the MVR's strategy as naïve, because 'since his election Chavez has adhered strictly to constitutional legality, the old ruling class will show no such restraint, as they demonstrated in 2002' (p24). Not a word about the intense and unceasing efforts of Chavez as a responsible leader, his promotion by every means to raise the self-confidence, knowledge and revolutionary activism of the masses, a confidence that has been repaid in a unity against reaction. In contrast Choonara relegates half the country's labour force – 'informal workers' – to an early stage in the revolution, which only later gives way to 'serious involvement by groups of organised workers' (p19). Some of these have 'clashed' with the government, 'raising demands over pay and conditions'. Rather than see the political dangers of economism here, or seriously discuss the moral problem posed for the government by the conditions of other far poorer workers, Choonara declares that 'the lifestyle available to supposedly "privileged" organised workers is a world apart from that enjoyed by the real Venezuelan elite who exploit their labour' (p27). Nothing could more clearly express the mentality of the petty bourgeois who understand nothing about equality or solidarity amongst the workers themselves or the problems of building a socialist economy.

Last year Richard Gott wrote a feature, 'Hugo Chavez and Venezuela's slow revolution' in *Socialist Worker* (12 February 2005). Gott shows a solid understanding of the constantly evolving political and economic relationships in Venezuela, and has great respect for President Chavez. 'He is almost like a successor to Fidel Castro, who is immensely popular in Latin America'. Yet Choonara is silent on the close relation between the two states, the exchanges of oil for massive health and literacy programmes, and of the first 'South-South' agricultural agreements. Choonara cannot conceal the well-known fact that 'Cuban doctors employed to provide basic healthcare under Mission *Barrio Adentro* have had a dramatic impact on health, treating 18 million people according to official figures' (p20).

In this muddled pamphlet, which diverts our energies from the real task of fighting imperialism, we find barren negation. Choonara is not part of the revolution in Venezuela, his opinion is introduced from without, and 'as nothing can result from it, the negator must be at loggerheads with the world, sullenly finding fault with everything that exists or ever happened, with the whole historical development.' (Engels' Preparatory Materials for *Anti-Duhring* Part 1)

Alvaro Michaels

Alvaro Michaels

Ecuador: massive protests against US trade talks

Unelected President Palacio faces massive demands to stop his intended economic sell-out to the US. From 13 March daily mass demonstrations blocked roads in 12 provinces. On 18 March 10,000 workers marched on Riobamba. Everywhere demands continued to end the 'Free Trade' talks, the expulsion of the Occidental Oil Corporation – in breach of 30 laws – from the country and the creation of a Constituent Assembly. Palacio refused. Executive Minister Castillo resigned. Police and army attacks badly injured 30 protesters and killed

one. 300 protesters were affected by gas. The government accused 'foreign infiltrators' of fomenting protest, and then apologised for implying Chavez was one.

If concluded, the 'confidential' talks in Washington will remove average tariffs of 18% for the local economy. Local taxes will have to increase to raise state revenue. US non-tariff barriers to Ecuador's produce are excluded. Genetically modified crops will be forced on the country. Foreign investors will be given free rein to plunder the country's bio-diversity.

The indigenous peoples' movements estimate that 90-100% of manufacturing will disappear in 11 of the 22 provinces, and 18% of traditional agricultural workers and inland fishermen, and 16% of fishermen along the coast will lose their jobs. Santiago de la Cruz, vice president of the Federation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), announced on 24 March that community and popular assemblies would be established for the people to decide the fate of the Free Trade Agreement.

Bolivia: imperialist alarm grows

ROBERT CLOUGH

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America. GDP per capita has fallen over the last 25 years as imperialism has stripped the country of its wealth. Two-thirds of the population live in absolute poverty. Now they are demanding a fundamental change in their conditions, and the new president Evo Morales, elected on a landslide in December 2005, has promised to deliver this. How has he fared in the two months since his inauguration?

Morales' government reflects the contradictory pressures he faces. On the one hand, it includes a number of representatives from the anti-imperialist movements, such as Santiago Galvez, a trade unionist who is Minister of Labour, Abel Mamani, the FEJUVE leader from El Alto, who is Minister of Water, Casimira Rodriguez, leader of the Union of Women Cleaners, who has become Minister of Justice and Andres Soliz Rada, Minister of Hydrocarbons, who had opposed the earlier MAS policy which fell short of a call for nationalisation. On the other there are Salvador Riera, a last-minute financial contributor to Morales' campaign and a Santa Cruz businessman who is Minister of Public Services, Defence Minister Walker Rodriguez, a former director of Lloyd Bolivia Airline, who has been accused of covering up the illegal privatisation of the former state airline, and Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca, a close collaborator of former President Jaime Paz Zamora who led Bolivia down the neo-liberal path in the 1980s.

One of Morales' election pledges was to nationalise the country's oil and gas resources and he has recently confirmed that this will happen by 12 July. In the meantime, the government has commis-

sioned a complete audit of existing contracts with multi-national oil companies, and after looking at deals reached with foreign oil firms between 1993 and 2003, Attorney-General Pedro Gareca said he had found illegalities in:

- 39 contracts signed by Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who governed from 1993 to 1997 and 2002 to 2003;
- Four contracts agreed by Jorge Quiroga, who served in 2002, and who opposed Morales in the 2005 election;
- One deal signed by Carlos Mesa who was President between 2003 and 2005

On 14 March, Repsol YPF Bolivian President Julio Gavito and Operations Manager Pedro Sanchez were held for questioning about customs evasion on the export of 230,000 barrels of oil to Argentina and Chile in 2004-05, worth \$9.2m. A further smuggling charge involving gas-bottling equipment worth \$8m is also being investigated. Spain's Foreign Minister said the actions against Repsol were sending 'bad signals' to foreign investors in Bolivia, to which Morales riposted that it is not a 'bad signal to follow the law'. Gavito has since resigned.

It is not just oil and gas reserves which the Bolivian people wish to see in common ownership: at Mutun there are huge iron and manganese deposits worth \$400 billion, but \$30,000 billion if all the processing took place in Bolivia. The outgoing Mesa government had organised a tendering process to sell off these reserves without any requirement for local processing. In December, in a concession to the ruling class, Morales agreed the sale could go ahead. There was huge political opposition from the trade unions and anti-imperialist movements. In early March, Morales announced that: 'We have taken the decision to postpone for 90 days the [Mutun] tender,

after studying the reports from the inter-ministerial commission, the technical commission and the judicial commission. With the new tender and the new contracts we will be able to better the income for the state, construct the first steel industry in Bolivia – through the industrialisation of iron – and preserve the environment with the replacement of carbon for natural gas as the source of energy. I want to thank the social and civic movements of the east for understanding and supporting our decision.' The lesson is clear: the Morales government is having to respond to the pressure from the mass movement.

Meanwhile the government is coming under pressure from the US. A conference of the coca-growers in Cochabamba passed a resolution demanding that US officials and NGOs should leave Chapare, one of the principal coca-growing areas. On 16 February, following a complaint by the US ambassador, Morales distanced himself from the declaration. At the same time, newly-elected senator Leonilda Zurita Vargas, a human rights leader and a close political associate of Morales from Chapare, was barred from entering the US under the Patriot Act on the grounds that she had links with 'terrorist activity'. Whilst Senate President Ramirez demanded a detailed report from the US ambassador, Vice President Garcia Linera said 'we are not worried about a senator not having a visa.'

There are governmental divisions, too, over economic relations with US imperialism. Foreign Minister Choquehuanca has said that Bolivia is open to agreeing a free trade agreement with the US, and has said 'we do not reject entering the Free Trade Area of the Americas'. However, Morales has made it clear that this will not happen since it

'would cause more hunger, misery and unemployment in Bolivia'. On 21 March, Claudius Lestat, a US citizen, and his Uruguayan girlfriend set off bombs in two La Paz hotels, killing two people. Morales immediately denounced the attack as an act of terror and to demand assurances that the US was not behind it.

Morales has now presented a Law to Convoke a Constituent Assembly with sufficient powers to change Bolivia's constitution. On 2 July there will be elections to the Assembly, and it will meet on 6 August. Anyone over 18 can both vote and stand as candidates, 50% of the candidates will be women. Morales needs a two-thirds majority of Congress to support the proposals, but has declared that the force of the people

should be employed if it is blocked. Hundreds of thousands of Bolivian poor were disenfranchised in the December election because they were allegedly not properly registered. Now the government intends to address this by issuing free identity cards as part of a registration process using Venezuelan aid.

Alongside this Morales launched a mass literacy campaign on Monday 20 March, declaring that 'literacy is the decolonisation of our country'. With Cuban and Venezuelan support, the plan is to set up 30,000 literacy centres throughout the country which will serve more than a million Bolivians. The intention is to eradicate illiteracy within 30 months. Imperialist alarm is growing: Latin American unity is posing a serious threat.



Lloyd Bolivia Airline workers march in Cochabamba in February 2006 demanding its re-nationalisation. Defence Minister Walker Rodriguez is implicated in its illegal privatisation

Moribund US imperialism

STEVE PALMER

It has been said that in the moribund patient, deepening stupor and coma are the preludes to death. If we go by these signs, US imperialism is certainly preparing itself for the grave. What are missing are the gravediggers. While the rest of the world was being horrified by the release of more pictures of US torture at Abu Ghraib, the US media spent days debating whether a Vice-President had shot up one of his buddies by accident, incompetence or because he was drunk.

This preoccupation with microscopic marginalia while anything substantial is ignored has eaten to the heart of bourgeois politics. While approval of Bush and the Republicans has declined to an all-time low, approval of the Democrats has fallen even further. Week after week, the administration offers fat juicy targets that the Democrats insist on ignoring or missing. Easy opportunities to cut deep into the jugular present themselves every few days. Yet if any individual Democrat is aggressive enough to do so much as stick their head over the parapet and fire a few squirts at the administration from a water pistol, their colleagues recoil in horror and their condemnation rivals that of the Republicans.

When congressman Murtha calls for troops to be withdrawn from Iraq – just to neighbouring countries – 'left-wing' Democratic leader in the House, Nancy Pelosi immediately distanced the rest of the party from the congressman. When Senator Russ Feingold tabled a motion censuring Bush – just censuring him, slapping him on the wrist – fellow Demo-

crats roundly condemned the senator.

The only way the Democrats can unite is when they find a way of attacking the Bush administration – from the right. Thus we had the pitiful spectre of the furore over the takeover of port management contracts by a Dubai based firm. Although the emirate of Dubai is a staunch ally of US imperialism and US warships are berthed and maintained there, the Democrats conjured up the image of this company – many of whose managers are US and European ex-patriates – smuggling dirty bombs, biological warfare agents and who-knows-what into the US. Never mind that port security is the responsibility of the Coast Guard, not the private companies. The logic goes like this: some of the 9/11 terrorists were from Dubai, the company is from Dubai, so it must have some involvement in terrorism. When this safely racist bandwagon came trundling by, the Democrats couldn't resist hopping on board.

Throughout there is one constant pattern: the Bush administration pushes ahead, shredding the constitution, breaking the law, tyrannising at home and abroad, spreading brutality and torture – only to be savaged by the Democrats with all the ferocity of a flock of dead sheep. It is difficult to think of a time or place where a self-styled opposition has been so timid, supine or cowardly. This naturally encourages the administration to be more audacious and aggressive.

Abortion rights under attack

The state of South Dakota has enacted legislation which makes abortion a criminal offence in almost all cases and does

not protect a woman when her health is in danger or even in cases of rape or incest. Doctors who violate the ban could face up to five years in prison. The law is clearly designed to push the issue of abortion rights up to the Supreme Court, which now has an extreme right-wing majority, with a view to overturning the historic *Roe vs Wade* ruling which legalised abortion in the US. Already, although abortion is legal in theory, in most states it has been so hedged around with restrictions that, although legally accessible under some circumstances, it is practically unobtainable to the women who need it. Waiting periods, parental notification requirements, gag rules, unparalleled requirements for patient 'safety' and so on are imposed. In only five states is abortion available free of most restrictions. The victims of all this are, of course, poor working class women.

Anti-immigrant legislation

Currently immigration violations are civil offenses. The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 is now before the US Senate. It will make all 11 million undocumented immigrants (about 5% of the work force and a much higher proportion of the working class) aggravated felons – criminals, subjecting them to imprisonment and deportation, and depriving them of any access to a hearing prior to deportation. Anyone who helps undocumented immigrants, including employers, social service agencies, spouses, colleagues, teachers and medical workers, will be liable to criminal prosecution as smugglers. Two thousand

'K-9' dog units will be deployed for additional 'border protection', along with special radar and unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. 700 additional miles of border fence will be built.

If this law is enacted and any serious attempt made to enforce it, blood is guaranteed to flow in the streets of this country: immigrant workers will not be going down without a fight – they have nothing to lose but their chains. On 10 March 100,000 workers marched

through Chicago to shouts of 'Si, se puede!' – Yes We Can! Dozens of businesses had to shut down and schools emptied as students joined the march.

Even the capitalists are worried by this vicious zealotry – lest they lose vital cheap labour. They're proposing 'guest-worker' schemes that will provide a steady supply of docile and easily-controlled super-exploited workers, lest they turn into the real gravediggers of US imperialism.

Ireland: nationalist youth oppose loyalist demonstration through Dublin



Nationalist youth led the protest against a proposed loyalist demonstration through the centre of Dublin on 25 February. Sinn Fein's leaders condemned the youth and their street fights with the Irish police but the police were forced to cancel the loyalist march.

France: no to casualisation!

ANNABELLE RICHARDSON

Hundreds of thousands of young people have been demonstrating and occupying universities and sixth-forms throughout France in protest at a new law passed on 9 March which significantly reduces employment rights for those under the age of 26. The government forced the Law for Equality of Opportunities through parliament using a special article in the French constitution to bypass the National Assembly and thus suppress any debate. The new law creates a 'First Employment Contract' (CPE) which will allow an employer to fire an employee under the age of 26 during the first two years of employment without having to give any reason. The law has been billed as a solution to high youth unemployment, which at over 20% (and 50% in the poor suburbs) is twice the national average. The government says that rigid labour laws are a disincentive for employers to hire young people as they cannot afford the risk in the new economic climate. Increased flexibility will increase employment. In other words, workers' rights are harming profits. This new First Employment Contract is part of a broader ruling class strategy of stripping workers' rights. It follows an almost identical contract established in August 2005 that can be used by small businesses. In 1994 the Balladur government tried to impose the CIP or 'Beginning Work Contract' which lowered the minimum wage for those aged 25 and under in order to make them more employable. On that occasion mass action forced the government to repeal the law.

Resistance to this casualisation of labour has mushroomed, taking the form of demonstrations, strikes and occupations as well as direct action against the state. As FRFI went to press, 21 universities were being occupied and 46 more dis-



French riot police attack those protesting for jobs and employment rights

rupted. The movement has also spread to the secondary schools, with 814 lycées participating in some sort of strike action. In some schools and universities teachers have joined the students in occupying the buildings.

Occupations of universities started in early March. On 9 March, students occupied the prestigious Sorbonne university in Paris. After three days, the police used tear gas and batons to force them out. The area outside of the Sorbonne is now heavily militarised, with a ring of steel surrounding the university. It has become a site of struggle between protesters and the state. Other occupied universities have also been brutally cleared by the police, on the pretext that protesters are destroying the buildings. The ruling class media has engaged in a deliberate smear campaign in an attempt to divide the movement. For example at the Sorbonne the occupiers were compared to Nazis for burning books. Independent journalists and students have refuted these claims stating that what was burnt was rubbish not books, and that the riot police came with axes to destroy the building.

Organisation of students is developing. For example at Censier university students have organised themselves into different 'commissions' with responsibility for different aspects of the work, from leaflet writing and banner making to barricade control. Students across the country are voting in general meetings

to decide the next course of action. Trade unions, recognising the importance of the struggle, have supported the youth and are refusing to negotiate with the government until it drops the law.

The police are playing their usual repressive role, with the most serious casualty so far being Cyril Ferez who was beaten into a coma and trampled on by riot police. They originally claimed that demonstrators had attacked him but footage and testimonies have clearly disproved this account. There is also evidence to suggest that young fascists have also come to cause violence on demonstrations, with organised gangs attacking demonstrators in Paris on 24 March. However, in other areas such as Rennes poor working class people are fighting side by side with students, chanting 'we're all hooligans', a slogan first adopted during the 1994 anti-CIP demonstrations. Within Paris, too, youth from the suburbs are joining in the protests. Resistance is continuing as we go to press with increasing speculation that prime minister Dominique de Villepin will be forced to resign.

Guantanamo Bay – no hiding place for torturers

CAT WIENER

On 6 March, the United Nations demanded that the US concentration camp in Guantanamo be closed down, that all torture must cease immediately, as must the force-feeding of detainees on hunger strike, and that the remaining 500+ detainees be tried or set free. In the face of this uncompromising denunciation, even the US's staunchest ally, Prime Minister Tony Blair, was forced into the grudging admission that the Guantanamo camp is an 'anomaly' that should be closed 'sooner rather than later'.

That the true horror of what has been going on in Guantanamo and other US torture camps is beginning to emerge is testimony to the courage of the detainees and all those who have campaigned to expose the crimes committed by the US administration and British complicity in those crimes.

Hellhole Guantanamo

The US chose Guantanamo Bay, a strip of Cuban territory it occupies illegally, for its camps precisely because it could argue that, as foreign territory, it was outside the reach of both international and US federal law.

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described the detainees as 'among the most dangerous, best-trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth'. The reality is that many were bought off Afghan bounty hunters for \$500 a piece, or simply kidnapped on the flimsiest of evidence. Of over 700 detainees who have passed through Guantanamo, only four have ever been charged. At the tribunal of British citizen Feroz Abbasi, held without charge for two years and released last year the judge, a senior US military officer, told him: 'I don't care about international law. I don't want to hear the words international law again... Geneva conventions do not matter here.'

Rendered anonymous by the ubiquitous orange jumpsuits that have become a symbol of US oppression, chained and forced to their knees in the searing heat and dust of Guantanamo; locked in cages and denied access to journalists, lawyers or even the Red Cross, these detainees were to be the lowest of the low, swallowed up in what the British Court of Appeal has termed 'a legal black hole', without rights, without charge and without redress. Rumsfeld boasted that he 'didn't even know their names'. Today the names of British detainees Asif Iqbal, Shafiq Rahul and Rihel Ahmed (the Tipton 3) and Moazzam Begg, who spent four years incarcerated in Guantanamo, are broadcast on film, in the press, on television, as is their evidence of the routine use of torture at Guantanamo, including painful and degrading stress positions, sleep deprivation, isolation, beatings, 'white boarding' (partial drowning), the threat of dogs and sexual humiliation. Their testimony chimes with the horrific photos of abuse that have emerged from the US detention centre at Abu Ghraib, (which finally faces closure).

'Words can mean whatever I want them to' – Humpty Dumpty, Through the Looking Glass

Torture of any kind is in breach of international law, US federal law and the Geneva Convention. Torture is

defined in the UN Torture Convention as: 'Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person', whether to obtain information or a confession, as punishment or intimidation, by a person acting in an official capacity.

In the face of such a blanket ban, the US administration simply changed the name of the game. Having already declared the Geneva Convention 'irrelevant', a working group memo of 2002 insists that both US domestic law against torture and the United Nations Convention against Torture 'prohibit only the most extreme forms of physical and mental harm', redefining just about anything short of organ failure, severe incapacitation and death under the heading of 'cruel, degrading and unusual punishment'. A similar semantic con trick saw the detainees designated as 'unlawful combatants' – a term with no legal status intended simply to strip them of the rights of prisoners of war.

British government colludes with torture

British law is unequivocal. In a hearing over the refusal of British ministers to request the release of three British residents held in Guantanamo, Mr Justice Collins stated that the US's idea of what constitutes torture 'is not the same as ours and doesn't appear to coincide with that of most civilised countries'.

The Law Lords concur, ruling out the use of evidence gathered by torture 'on the grounds of its barbarism, its illegality and its inhumanity'. Lord Bingham spoke of the law having 'regarded torture and its fruits with abhorrence for over 500 years' – an abhorrence clearly not shared by this Labour government which fought the ban all the way to the country's highest court and continues to attempt to deport suspects to countries which routinely practise torture. M15 and M16 have been complicit in the torture of suspects in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In March the government's flouting of the law was further exposed when British officials were forced to admit knowledge of 73 CIA torture flights landing at British military airports en route to transporting suspects to US torture camps around the world. Up till now, the government has told lie after lie about such flights while secretly briefing ministers to 'move the issue on to the huge challenge which the threat of terrorism poses'.

Early this year footage emerged showing British soldiers beating Iraqi teenagers in 2003 and shouting 'You're going to get it...you little fuckers. Die. Ha, ha.' and mocking the boys as they beg for mercy. The response of Labour Defence Secretary John Reid was to ask us to be 'a little slower to condemn and a little quicker to understand'. In the name of fighting so-called terrorism, anything goes. As released British detainee Tarek Dergoul said of being chained in an agonising stress position for hours at a time: 'It wasn't about trying to get information. It was just about trying to break you'.

But the repression is failing. As more and more evidence emerges and US and British imperialism stand exposed in their naked inhumanity and arrogant contempt for either morality or legality, the oppressed are increasingly galvanised into fighting back.

No extradition to Turkey

On 30 January British police arrested 28-year-old Turkish refugee Onder Dolutas at his home in London, following a request from the Turkish authorities for his extradition. The following day Bow Street Magistrates court released him on conditional bail. FRFI has been participating in the campaign against his extradition; at the first hearing of his case on 14 March over 50 people staged a lively demonstration in solidarity with Onder and opposition to British collaboration with Turkish fascism. The case has now been adjourned for a review on 11 April. The main hearing will take place on 8 May.

Onder was arrested on charges unrelated to any activity in this country. His arrest was carried out by British authorities on the request of the Turkish government. From 1995 to 2000 Onder Dolutas was a student of maritime engineering at the University of Istanbul, where he participated in the democratic activities of the students' union. He arrived in Britain in May 2001 and was granted refugee status in January 2003.

After trying hard to rebuild his life in this country, Onder Dolutas is now under threat of extradition. His arrest in Britain exposes the sheer callous attitude of the British authorities. It exposes the total collaboration of the British government and its legal system with the regime in Turkey.

Turkey's disregard for human rights



Supporters of Onder Dolutas outside Bow Street Magistrates court in March

is well-known, as is Britain's selective approach to the human rights' records of countries it does business with. The attack on Onder Dolutas is an attack on the rights of all migrants and refugees who have sought refuge in Britain for fear of persecution, torture, imprisonment and death in their own countries. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Demonstrate outside Bow Street Magistrates Court, London WC2 Tuesday 11 April and Monday 8 May 2006, 10am onwards

For more information please contact: stop_extradition@yahoo.co.uk The Campaign to Stop the Extradition of Onder Dolutas! is supported by the International League of Peoples' Struggles (ILPS), Confederation Of Workers From Turkey In Europe – England Committee (ATIK), Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!, European Confederation Of Oppressed Immigrants (AveG-Kom), Anatolian People's Cultural Centre, ADHK,

Stop the extradition of Onder Dolutas! Condemn British collaboration with the fascist regime in Turkey!

Imperialism's economic war

■ **Confessions of an Economic Hit Man** – The shocking inside story of how America really took over the world. John Perkins, Ebury Press, 2006, 250pp, £7.99

John Perkins was trained in business administration at Boston University College, but in 1971 he was targeted by a mysterious woman who seduced him and inducted him into the dirty business of war against communism. His war was not to be the violence of armed conflict, but the 'soft' war of economic conquest.

At that time the outcome of the Vietnam War was looking uncertain and the US military was looking for an alternative base to secure its sphere of influence in the East. President Nixon's advisers decided to move against the new Republic of Indonesia which, free from Dutch and then Japanese rule, had elected its first leader, President Sukarno. Determined to win the pro-Soviet republic away from communism, the US fomented and backed a brutal coup in which an estimated 500,000 people, mostly pro-communist peasants, were slaughtered, and put the US puppet General Suharto in place. US military control was complemented by economic control and US corporations moved in to dominate the planning structures and primary resources of the country, including oil.

Perkins had little economic and no engineering knowledge. Nevertheless he was hired to persuade the Indonesian government to accept enormous development loans for electrification and water construction – and to make sure that these projects were contracted to US companies. He became an Economic Hit Man (EHM). In his own words:

'Economic Hit Men are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex and murder... Once these countries were saddled with huge debts, the American government would request their "pound of flesh" in favours, including access to natural resources, military cooperation and political support.'

It took many years and several attempts before John Perkins found the courage to get his story written and published. Following 11 September 2001 Perkins felt both guilty and shamed into answering the questions raised by so many: why is the US so hated? Why do terrorists attack us? Perkins gives this reply:

'Executives at our most respected companies hire people at near slave wages to toil under inhuman conditions in Asian sweatshops. Oil companies wantonly pump toxins into rain forests, consciously killing people, animals, and plants, and committing genocide among ancient cultures. The pharmaceutical industry denies life-saving medicines to millions of HIV-infected Africans.'

As an EHM since the early 1970s, Perkins' confession is personal but his activities are not unique. As he says, it is also the story of many who today 'walk in the corridors of Monsanto, General Electric, and Nike, General Motors, Wal-Mart, and nearly every other major corporation in the world'.

Perkins describes the impact on a country once it becomes a target of US big business development plans and

his examples are precise and well documented. For example:

'Because of my fellow EHMs and me, Ecuador is in far worse shape today than she was before we introduced her to the miracle of modern economics, banking and engineering. Since 1970, during the period euphemistically known as the Oil Boom, the official poverty level grew from 50 to 70 per cent, under- or unemployment increased from 15 to 70 per cent, and public debt increased from \$240 million to \$16 billion. Meanwhile the share of national resources allocated to the poorest segments of the population declined from 20 to 6 per cent.'

Not only are millions of people impoverished and saddled with unpayable debt, but the economic and social structures of the country are distorted to obscene extremes, so that 'the top one per cent of third world households accounts for 70 to 90 per cent of all private financial wealth and real estate ownership in their country; the actual percentage depends on the specific country'.

Although directly serving the national interests of the US military and industrial ruling class, the work of EHMs is buried within the complicated structures of big corporations. Behind them, even deeper in the shadows, are the CIA-sanctioned jackals who move in if countries turn down the plans and proposals for US control. The jackals carry out the executions of those national leaders who will not be bullied or bribed into submission.

Jaime Roldos of Ecuador and Omar Torrijos of Panama both died in plane crashes in 1981 and Perkins makes the case that both were killed by CIA jackals because they defied plans for a US takeover of their countries' wealth and resources. The Panamanian government has just announced that it will be reopening the post-mortem on Torrijos following the revelations in this book.

Finally, however, if neither the EHMs nor the Jackals succeed, then the US moves to war, invasion and occupation: 'And if by chance the jackals fail, as they failed in Afghanistan and Iraq, then the old models resurface. When the jackals fail, young Americans are sent in to kill and die.'

Militarism and war are not the only consequences of living in a country that oppresses and dominates others. The population that benefits from the systematic exploitation of most of the rest of the world is consuming a flow of parasitical wealth flooding into the USA from overseas.

'Is anyone in the US innocent? Although those at the pinnacle of the economic pyramid gain the most, millions of us depend – either directly or indirectly – on the exploitation of the LDCs. The resources and cheap labour that feed nearly all our businesses come from places like Indonesia, and very little ever makes its way back... Does the excuse that most Americans are unaware of this constitute innocence? Uninformed and intentionally misinformed, yes, but innocent?'

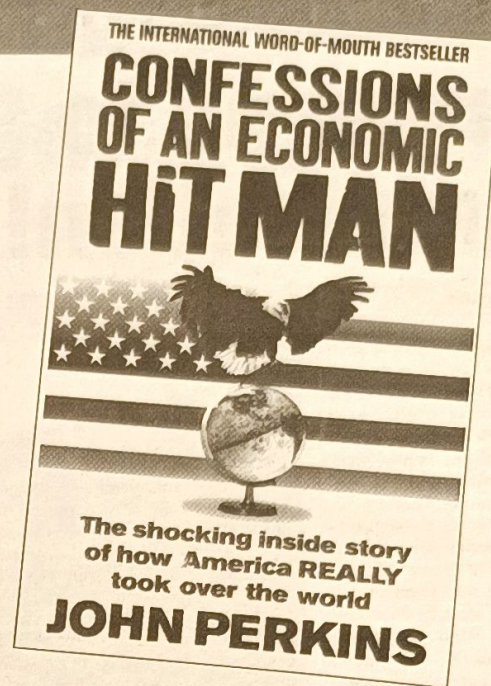
Yet those who collaborate also have a price to pay. The corporations have tied the US population to a future of domestic debt, consumerism and environmental degradation. 'As one of the wealthiest societies in history, America also has some of the highest statistics on violence, depression, drug abuse and crime. Twelve million families in our own United States worry

about their next meal.'

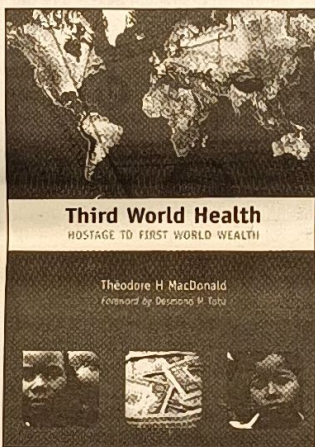
This book is highly recommended reading, not only as a historical record of US imperialism but also as an indictment of capitalism as a whole. Perkins concludes that production for profit and not for use is at the root of the entire system of economic, social, military and political domination that he describes. It is not a question of a few bad men and there is no organised conspiracy. He says, 'I wish it were so simple. Members of a conspiracy can be rooted out and brought to justice. This system, however, is fuelled by something far more dangerous than a conspiracy'. The name of that system is, of course, imperialism and if there is to be any hope for the future of mankind it must be destroyed.

Susan Davidson

* Throughout the book John Perkins uses the term America to signify the United States of America.



Killer capitalism



■ **Third World Health: Hostage to First World Wealth**, Theodore H MacDonald, Radcliffe Publishing 2005, 312pp, £35.00

One quarter of the world's population lives on less than \$1 per day, with 80% of people not having adequate access to clean water.

These are the facts Theodore MacDonald uses to introduce his book, to make the point that these factors manifest themselves as health issues and therefore health is 'a good barometer of equity/inequity worldwide'.

Throughout, MacDonald focuses on the division in the world between oppressed and oppressor nations. He demonstrates how capitalism and imperialism satisfy the rich in the wealthy countries and their corporations at the expense of the poor. He explains the origins of the words 'first world' and 'third world' and the terms developed and developing countries, showing how since the 1970s 'developing nations' has been a misnomer: these nations are in fact going backwards.

The poor fund the rich

The examples he uses are stark: Ghana for instance, in the late 1990s, due to previous IMF and WB loans, was paying off accumulated compound interest which amounted per year to eight times what they spent on health and education. In Uganda, for every dollar spent on health per person, \$8 is spent on debt repayment. Between 1995 and 1998, the poorest

African countries paid \$13 billion to creditors while UNICEF estimated that health and nutrition for the whole of Africa would cost \$9 billion. In 1996, debtor nations paid \$1.8 billion more in debt servicing to the IMF than they received in new loans.

MacDonald explains compound interest and provides appendices so that the reader understands all the arguments. He shows how poor countries are forced to adjust their domestic programmes to sustain foreign aid. The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) imposed on nations by the WB and IMF are the conditions that the debtor nations must fulfil by making changes to their spending policies before a loan will be granted: these always involve cuts in public spending.

Health of the poor marginalised

80% of the world's population receive only 11% of global spending on health. In the 1990s, communicable, perinatal and nutritional conditions accounted for 42% of the deaths in third world countries, compared to 6% in the rich nations. Life expectancy is 37.5 years in Sierra Leone, compared to 80 years in Japan. 99% of the 500,000 annual maternal deaths occur in the third world.

45% of Cambodian peasants who are now landless were forced to sell their acreage because of illness – mainly malaria, dengue fever, TB and typhoid, all of which are preventable or curable.

Common diseases which almost exclusively affect the poorest countries attract much less research funding and professional interest compared to high profile diseases in the rich countries. For instance annual global research on malaria in 1990 came to \$65 per fatality compared to \$789 per asthma fatality.

MacDonald shows how the global financial control exercised by the first world leads to health threatening phenomena such as pollution, deforestation, illegal drug trade, war, global warming and the battle for control of resources such as water. Milk, tobacco and HIV/AIDS, each have a chapter devoted to exposing the killer actions of the imperialists through their multinational corporations such as Nestle (powdered milk promotion), British American Tobacco and the pharmaceutical industry.

Socialist Cuba – an inspiring example

One of the most dramatic tables in the book is the World Development Chart for 2004 which charts the relationship between GNP and the number of children who die in the first five years of life per 1,000 live births. There is a strong positive correlation between being rich and healthy. Notable exceptions include the US – one of the wealthiest nations, yet relatively low on child health indices – and Cuba, a poor country with health indices similar to the richest.

MacDonald dedicates a whole chapter to socialist Cuba and its achievements since the Revolution in 1959. MacDonald, who lived and taught in Cuba, puts Cuba's achievement in context: blockaded by the US and under siege from imperialism. As a teacher of health promotion, MacDonald recognises that while in 1975 the issue of health promotion was an academic issue, not yet identified as a WHO objective, in Cuba it was already happening. Cuba dedicates 40% of its GNP to health and education – the highest proportion in the world. MacDonald describes how 'human dignity and social response to one another's needs are now deeply entrenched in the thinking of ordinary Cubans'. This is reflected in every aspect of their society and their dedication to internationalist missions.

MacDonald points out how Fidel Castro and the Cuban government recognise that young people need to have their cultural needs met and that this has health promotion implications. He cites the work of the Revolutionary Communist Group and Rock around the Blockade and the sound systems they have given as material aid to the Union of Young Communists and quotes Plato: 'Music reflects the soul of a people and any government which does not support it cannot sustain the loyalty of the people.'

MacDonald concludes that civilisation is being threatened by capitalism and that it is imperative that we all raise awareness about and make information available on an alternative – 'the health and human dignity of millions of people is the price'.

Read this book, arm yourself, knowledge is power, action must be taken.

Hannah Caller

No to sweatboxes! Stop imprisoning children!

In February ERIC ALLISON wrote for *The Guardian* about how heavily pregnant prisoners were being forced to travel hundreds of miles in the claustrophobic prison vans known as 'sweatboxes', often spending hours in cramped cells measuring 860mm by 620mm (34in by 24in) with hard seats and no seatbelts. He reports here for FRFI.

I quoted Beverley Beech, chair of the Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services, who said 'It is time this unethical and barbaric practice was stopped... women in advanced pregnancy are in no position to run away and they should be treated with humanity and awareness of their condition.'

In January, one woman was taken from Styal prison in Cheshire to Liverpool for a court appearance. It was the day before her baby was due and she expected to be taken to court by taxi. Naturally, she complained when told she would travel in a prison van. She was then offered a thin cushion. The journey took two and a half hours on the way there, due to various stops and diversions to drop off or pick up other prisoners. During this time, she was allowed to go to the toilet just once. After the court hearing, which lasted an hour, she was returned to Styal, with the return journey taking a further hour and a half.

The article caused a fuss. Representatives of prison reform and women's organisations signed a joint letter, calling for the ending of 'this indecent, dangerous way of transporting women', and Liberal Democrat MP Annette Brookes put down an early day motion in the House of Commons calling for the ending of this method of transport for pregnant women. (I urge readers, in and out of prison, to contact their MPs asking them to sign the motion.)*

The Prison Service has now been forced to put a halt to moving pregnant women in this way. This should be just the start - why should any prisoner be forced into this barbaric form of transport? In 1997, I travelled back to Risley from the Court of Appeal in a sweatbox. We set off around 4.30pm and went via Leicester and Leeds, where I spent an hour in a freezing car park under the main police station. We arrived at the police central detention centre in Manchester at 12.30am, long

past the hour Risley would accept me.

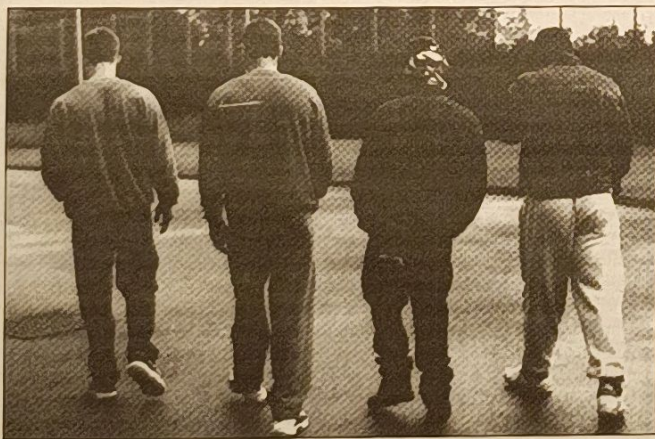
The 30-minute journey to Risley next morning was the last time I travelled in such style and I made my mind up there and then that, if I ever go back inside, they will have to knock me out before putting me into a box again. I regard that journey from London as one of the worst experiences of my prison career and that includes being attacked by staff in segregation units.

Apparently these wretched boxes were introduced by the police in the 1970s for transporting alleged football hooligans from football grounds to the nearest lock-up, usually a matter of minutes away. Now, men, women and children are moved hundreds of miles in these steel cupboards and it is time we all started working on making them stop the vile practice.

I urge prisoners to write to me either at FRFI or *The Guardian* to tell me the details of the nightmarish journeys that I know many of you will have endured. After my journey from the Court of Appeal to Manchester, I tried to sue Group 4, (Now Global Solutions Ltd - what problem did they ever solve, global or otherwise?) but I lost my case in Warrington County Court. Let us see if we can win now.

* See <http://www.writetothem.com/> for a quick way to email your MP

Police investigate racist treatment at Whitemoor



Evidence has been mounting for some time that prison officers operating regimes in the segregation/punishment units of the maximum-security dispersal prisons such as Frankland, Full Sutton and Whitemoor are systematically brutalising prisoners.

On 30 January a front-page article in *The Guardian* revealed that the police were investigating allegations of persistent racist assaults and abuse at Whitemoor. *The Guardian* quotes a 'source with close knowledge of the investigation' who told the paper that there was a fear of systematic abuse being meted out by 'a hard core of rogue officers'. This is all very reminiscent of official claims made after the exposure of staff brutality at Wormwood Scrubs when a numerically tiny group of staff were blamed and prosecuted. It emerged subsequently that in fact there had been widespread collusion amongst staff at

all levels at the Scrubs, including prison doctors, and the attempted cover-up had probably extended into Prison Service headquarters itself. Far from a 'few bad apples' being responsible for the ill-treatment and in some cases torture of prisoners at the Scrubs, the entire prison was involved in the conspiracy to weave a shroud of silence around what was being inflicted on prisoners.

The British Medical Council later said that the physical abuse of prisoners at the Scrubs could not have taken place without the collusion of doctors who turned a blind eye to what was going on and covered up for violent prison staff. The latest police investigation into Whitemoor should be seen in the context of substantially increased staff brutality throughout the dispersal system and the vicious disempowerment of long-term prisoners over the last 15 years.

The remarks of Brian Caton,

General Secretary of the Prison Officers Association (POA), in response to the exposure of racist brutality at Whitemoor are almost laughable: 'Our union has done more than any other to rid itself of racism. We have expelled members whose actions we discovered to be racially motivated. We don't want racists in the POA.' The truth is that the POA has always had a large number of racists and fascists in its ranks and a sizeable presence of BNP and National Front Members. It's extremely unlikely that the POA has ever willingly expelled racist prison officers or made any serious initiative to pursue an anti-racist policy and, on the contrary, has always covered up for and vigorously defended staff accused of unlawful behaviour by prisoners seeking legal justice.

The fact is that it has always been prisoners themselves who have highlighted and challenged the unlawful behaviour of prison staff, never the POA or anyone else involved in prisons in an official capacity. It is the collusion and complicity of the POA, prison governors, doctors, chaplains and so on, that enormously empowers the racists in uniform and allows them to operate with virtual impunity. The current investigation into racist abuse at Whitemoor will be hamstrung by two formidable factors: the entrenched hostility and reluctance to co-operate by prison staff and the inevitable disinclination of an institutionally racist police force to uncover the real extent of the abuse. The prosecution of racist staff at Whitemoor is extremely unlikely and, as usual, it will be down to prisoners themselves to pursue their own legal actions and try to bring to public attention what the prison authorities have always tried desperately hard to keep hidden and unchallenged.

John Bowden, HMP Saughton

In February the shocking results of the inquiry by Liberal Democrat Lord Carlile QC into children in custody were published. Carlile reported that imprisoned children in Britain are routinely subjected to treatment that would result in child protection investigations and criminal charges in any other setting.

The inquiry was established after 15-year-old Gareth Myatt died after being restrained by staff at Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre (STC) in April 2004. The report describes 'dehumanising and dehumanising' strip-searching, painful physical restraint and long periods of isolation. Launching the report Carlile called for an end to the use of prison segregation units and solitary confinement for children.

According to figures given to the inquiry by the Youth Justice Board, restraint was used 7,020 times on young people in STCs between January 2004 and August 2005, 5,133 times on juveniles in young offender institutions (YOIs) between January 2004 and September 2005, and 3,359 times in eight secure children's homes between January 2004 and October 2005. Handcuffs were used on children 29 times in Hassockfield STC and 17 in Oakhill STC from April to September 2005. In one STC more than 1,500 strip-searches were carried out in an 18-month period.

The inquiry describes the prison segregation units where children can be held for days or weeks at a time as 'little more than bare, dark and dank cells which in effect were inducements to suicide'. Solitary confinement was used 2,329 times between January 2004 and June 2005 across two YOIs, one STC and three local authority secure children's homes. One YOI used an 'isolation cell' which was completely bare except for a raised concrete plinth for a bed.

The few allegations of assaults by staff on children reported to the police rarely result in prosecution. In one case the police were told about an incident where a child had the 'imprint of a footprint' on his back, but no charges were brought.

All the barbaric practices uncovered by Carlile are imported straight from the adult prison system, where segregation/isolation, 'control and restraint' and strip-searching are used on a constant basis. The use of such tactics against any human being is appalling - against children it graphically demonstrates the viciousness of the British Labour government, which has kept to its election pledge to lock up more 'young offenders' and is waging an unfettered war against working class youth.

Nicki Jameson

'No more prison' campaign launched

Over 60 people from across Britain joined together in London on 28 January to establish a new organisation, No More Prison. Former prisoners, activists, health and prison workers and academics exchanged ideas and strategies to stop prison building, end child imprisonment and develop alternatives to punishment that better meet the needs of victims and lawbreakers. Britain locks up more people than any other country in Western Europe, with the prison population currently standing at over 88,000 children, women and men.

Opening the seminar, Professor Joe Sim argued the need for a new abolitionist movement which distinguishes itself from the prison reform group movements that have become entangled with New Labour's law and order project. Such groups have been 'defined in' as acceptable commentators on prison, while other, more challenging groups remain 'defined out' and consequently silenced. Both the state and prison reformers are focusing on fixing rather than reinventing the penal system, and the rebranding of gaols as places of reform and progress shrouds the reality that prisons remain instruments of pain delivery, and that the collateral damage

to prisoners' families is consistently ignored.

In the discussion that followed, there were calls for a moratorium on prison building, a redirection of the prison budget, a dismantling of the negative and punitive prison officer culture and a widening of definitions of social harm to encompass white collar crime and deaths at work, amongst others.

No More Prison is holding an activists meeting in London on 1 April and a picket of Styal prison on 8 April. FRFI will be attending both events and encourages readers to become involved with this initiative.

For more information, write to No More Prison, c/o Paul Mason, School of Journalism, Media and Culture Studies, Bute Building, Cardiff University, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3NB or visit the No More Prison website <http://www.alternatives2prison.uk.com/>

Meeting - Saturday 1 April 2006 2pm Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London (directly opposite Euston station).

Demonstration against the plans to expand Styal Prison to make it the largest women's prison and calling for its closure. Saturday 8 April, 1.30-4.30pm Styal Prison, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4HR (Directions and travel details on the No More Prison website)

FRFI ROUNDUP

No to war! No attacks on democratic rights!

As Britain and the US become more bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, whilst threatening Iran, the British government is clamping down on opposition in a myriad ways, ranging from anti-terror laws that criminalise dissent to increasing the powers of 'street wardens' to interfere with peaceful protest. FRFI supporters are undeterred and have been on the streets in support of the resistance in Iraq, the Palestinian Intifada, the Cuban Revolution and the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain.

In the North West, pickets of Marks & Spencer have focused on the slogan 'Sanctions on Israel not Palestine' and calling for an end to the British state's ban on Hamas and the PFLP. At Chester on 4 February police unsuccessfully attempted to deter the protest, pointing to the 'sensitive' situation in Palestine after the election. In Manchester on 25 February the regular M&S picket was again attacked by British and Israeli

Zionists and fascists. One ex-Israeli army 'counter-protester' head-butted a picketer and other activists were threatened. A passer-by used the Zionists' megaphone to shout 'vote BNP', which visibly embarrassed them into putting away the union flag they'd been waving up until then. On this occasion the police were conspicuous by their absence.

On 11 March despite snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures, a successful picket took place in Sheffield, attracting big support for Palestinian democracy.

On 18 March Manchester FRFI joined a militant demonstration called by the General Union of Palestinian Students in response to Israel's raid on Jericho prison and arrest of PFLP General Secretary Ahmed Sa'adat and over 100 other Palestinian freedom fighters. A large crowd joined in the chanting and Palestinian students gave excellent speeches denouncing the reactionary collaborationist role played by Britain and the US.

FRFI activists in Manchester also continue to work with the Defend Eucharistia and Timeyi Campaign (DETC) and on 18 February took part in a well-attended public meeting of the Justina and Yonre Must Stay campaign. Eucharistia, who like Justina is from the oil-rich, British-exploited Niger Delta region of Nigeria and has been denied asylum, spoke passionately about Britain's brutal involvement in Nigeria.

On 10 March DETC and FRFI joined a picket of Home Office Minister Hazel Blears' Salford surgery, called by the Altaf family, who fled domestic abuse in Pakistan, and have been rejected for asylum and evicted from their home, despite suffering physical disabilities.

FRFI supporters in the North East have also been active in defence of asylum seekers (see page 16). Regular pickets of Newcastle M&S have also continued, and on 18 March FRFI supporters protested against the continuing occupation of Iraq, staging a colourful street theatre under the slogan 'The rich keep lying, the poor keep dying'.

In Glasgow FRFI have continued to support the weekly pickets of the Home Office Immigration Reporting Centre and is building for the forthcoming march and rally against deportations. On the international day of action against war on 18 March, RCG comrades held the only anti-war protest in Scotland – a lively event joined by local youths and the Hands off Iran Campaign. It was agreed to make this a regular rally point for anti-war activity in Glasgow.

In London on 18 March a lively contingent of FRFI supporters and comrades from the Marxist Leninist Communist Party of Turkey and the International League of Peoples' Struggles took part in the national anti-war demonstration, chanting slogans against the war-mongering racist Labour government. At Parliament Square, claiming to be using the new legislation on protests outside Parliament, the police seized a megaphone from an Iranian group, despite the march clearly being a permitted event.

Locally, policing of campaigners in London is also becoming increasingly vicious. Following run-ins with various types of street warden and police officer in Brixton and Camden, in Wood Green

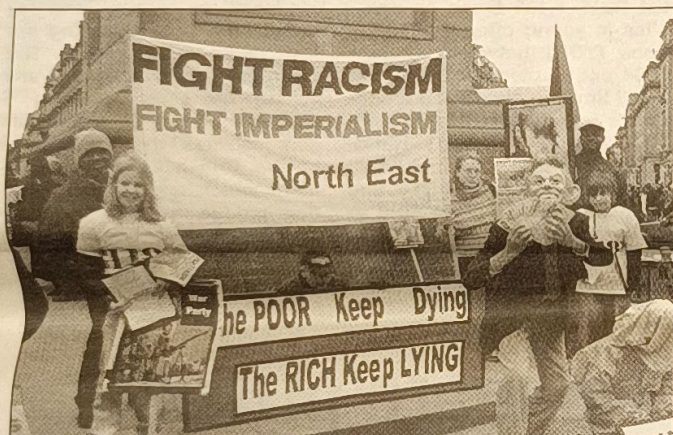
on 25 February plain-clothed council officials attacked an SWP stall, and then rounded on FRFI's stall when we showed our solidarity with the group being attacked. Campaign material was confiscated and a stall was smashed up and removed by the council's Heavy En-

forcement Team (HET), as the police watched. About 30 people gathered, expressing outrage at this blatant infringement of civil liberties.

FRFI immediately wrote to the council leader and local MP in protest and liaised with other groups to defend our rights by calling for a unified presence. On 11 March the thuggish behaviour of HET towards FRFI, the SWP and the Haringey No to ID Cards campaign was no different but the threats were empty and they didn't call the police. We will continue to stand up for the democratic right to protest.



Third anniversary of the Iraq war, Stop the War march in London



FRFI supporters demonstrate in Newcastle city centre

RATB ROUNDUP

Free the Cuban 5!

On 11 February, Rock around the Blockade held demonstrations to demand the release of the Cuban 5, still incarcerated in US prisons despite having their convictions overturned last August. In Scotland, the main street in Edinburgh, resounded to the cry of 'The Cuban 5 were falsely tried! US justice is a lie!' as we assembled with banners and placards to march to the US consulate. Supporters from Scotland, England, France, Switzerland, Iran, Mexico and Africa brought the message of the Cuban 5 to the people of Edinburgh. In Newcastle, comrades held a week of action for the Cuban 5 before travelling up to join the Edinburgh demonstration.

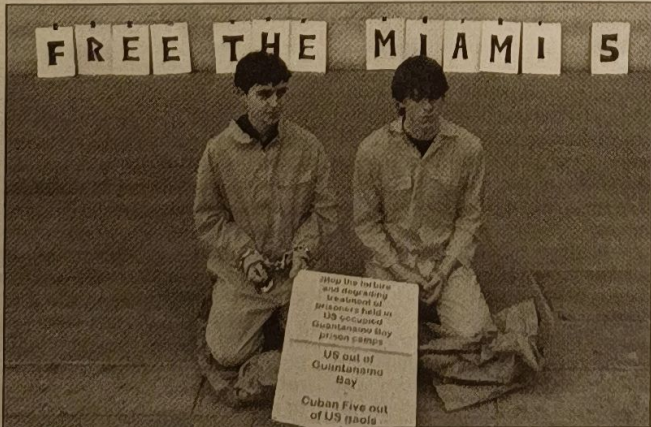
In London, Rock around the Blockade's demonstration for the immediate release of the Cuban 5 was held with banners and placards in Trafalgar Square. It coincided with a mass demonstration protesting against anti-Islamic cartoons, which meant that we had a supportive audience of thousands for our message exposing the barbarity of US imperialism. We emphasised the hypocrisy of a US administration that gaols Cuban fighters against terrorism and lets mass murderer Posada Carriles walk free. We also used street theatre with participants in orange jumpsuits kneeling in chains to emphasise the difference between Guantanamo, US torture camp

and Guantanamo, Cuba, where every child goes to school, health care is free and universal and human rights and dignity are respected.

CSC – copper's nark

The British Cuba Solidarity Campaign has for many years focused its activities on building up links with the Labour Party and trade union movement, tailoring its demands and political stance to what is acceptable to its allies. On 7 March, Rock around the Blockade sup-

porters were shocked to witness to what depths the CSC's sectarianism has brought it. We attended a packed meeting organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign at the House of Commons to hear Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister, Eumelio Caballero speak, alongside Labour MPs Ian Gibson (chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cuba) and Colin Burgon. The meeting was organised to discuss British policy on Cuba and was a response, in part, to a reception late last year held by the British Foreign Office for Caleb McCarry, US Transition Coordinator for Cuba (read 'transition to capitalism' co-ordinator). Eumelio Caballero spoke about manoeuvres by the United States Interests Section in Havana to create an internal opposition within Cuba, on



Demonstrating in Trafalgar Square against the US torture camp in Guantanamo Bay and calling for the release of the framed Cuban 5 prisoners

Events

NORTH EAST

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 8 April 12 noon

Support Palestine!

Anniversary of Deir Yassin massacre

(full details to be confirmed)

Wednesdays 12 & 26 April 7pm

Public meeting of Tyneside Community

Action for Refugees (TCAR)

Downstairs at the Amnesty Bookshop,

Westgate Road (contact to confirm venue)

Wednesdays 5, 12 & 26 April 10am-2pm

TCAR Picket of North Shields Immigration

Reporting Centre

Norfolk Street, North Shields (next to the

library)

Street actions every Saturday 12-2pm in

either Newcastle or Durham

For further details call 07813 073 846

Or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

NORTH WEST

MANCHESTER

Saturday 1 April 12-3pm

Marks & Spencer picket

Market Street

Saturday 8 April 1.30-4.30pm

Styal prison demo

(see page 13 for full details)

Saturday 15 April 12-3pm

Street action: Defend socialist Cuba/

US out of Guantanamo

Market Street.

Sunday 30 April 2pm

Anti-imperialist Forum

Cross Street Chapel.

Contact 07816 547 066 or email

manchesterrfi@revolutionary

communist.com (website

www.manchesterrfi.5u.com)

SHEFFIELD

For information on events in Sheffield email

sheffieldfrfi@hotmail.co.uk

LONDON

Saturday 8 April 11am-2pm

Street stall – Stand up for our rights/ Stop

the extradition of Odrer Dolutas

Outside the library, High Road, Wood Green,

London N22

(nearest tube Wood Green)

Tuesday 11 April and Monday 8 May 10am

onwards

Picket of Bow Street Magistrates' Court,

Stop the Extradition of Odrer Dolutas!

(nearest tube Covent Garden)

Wednesday 3 May 7-9.30pm

LSE FRFI student society

Palestine update

LSE, Houghton Street, WC2 (room to be con-

firmed) Entry free

Every Thursday 6-8pm

Victory to the Intifada picket of M&S

Marble Arch end of Oxford Street

Street stalls every Saturday 11am-2pm

For further details phone 020 7837 1688

or email london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

SCOTLAND

GLASGOW

Saturday 8 April, assemble 11am for

12 noon march

Anti deportation march

From Home Office Immigration Reporting

Centre, Brand Street,

to Trades Hall, (nr George Square) for

General Meeting at 2pm.

Called by Unity the Asylum Seekers Union,

supported by Glasgow No Borders Network

and FRFI/RCG

Saturday 15 April 1-3pm

Hands off Cuba! US out of Guantanamo!

Donald Dewar Statue, Buchanan Street

(Outside the Royal Concert Hall)

Wednesday 26 April 7pm

Film: Revolution Bolivariano,

Boyd Orr Building, Lecture Theatre one,

University Avenue, University of Glasgow

(meet outside main entrance at 6.45pm)

Wednesday 17 May 7pm

Film: Injustice,

Boyd Orr Building, as above

(meet outside main entrance at 6.45pm)

Every Saturday 10am-12pm

Picket of Home Office Immigration

Reporting Centre, Brand Street, Ibrox

(nearest underground Cessnock)

For further information on events and activities

in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee call

07779 785 529 or email

frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

which it has lavished – with little success – millions of dollars to date. He also focused on the issue of human rights and the US's inhuman use of illegally-occupied Guantanamo Bay as a torture camp.

After the meeting, Rock around the Blockade handed out leaflets about our own meeting on Guantanamo, alongside a comrade from the Hands off Venezuela campaign, who was also leafletting. Everyone seemed keen to take our material and find out more...until the Cuba Solidarity Campaign sent in its goons to stop us. CSC official Rob Miller and his female sidekick told us we had to stop distributing our material as it was *their* meeting and they had already given out *their* leaflets and our presence would

jeopardise their chances of holding such meetings again. 'People like you just want a revolution in this country,' the woman told us, and 'that attitude puts people off'. What does she think the Cubans wanted in 1959 – a tea party?

When we continued to leaflet, Rob Miller called on the police officer stationed outside the room to intervene. What irony! A representative of a movement that sees itself as being in solidarity with revolutionary Cuba actually felt compelled to call on a representative of British state repression to protect its cosy little relationship with the Labour Party! In doing so, he proved himself to be the right even of the Labour MPs in the room, none of whom had any problems with our leaflets.

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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Lincoln: a reluctant revolutionary

I would like to make some remarks about comrade Steve Palmer's article in FRFI 189 'US: Nadir of the bourgeoisie' concerning the role of Abraham Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln was a most reluctant revolutionary. The abolitionist Wendell Phillips described him as a 'first-rate second-rate man', (quoted by Marx, *Collected Works*, Volume 19, p234-235). Marx himself characterised Lincoln as giving 'the most important utterances the most commonplace form. Other people claim to be

"fighting for an idea" when it is a matter of fighting for square feet of land. Lincoln, even when he was motivated by an ideal, talks about square feet' (*ibid*, p250). But Marx in the same article puts Lincoln on a par with Washington. He also describes him as a unique figure in history.

For the first 18 months the war went badly for the North, mainly because Lincoln bent over backwards to conciliate 'moderate' opinion trying to hold the Union together. Hence the letter which Steve Palmer quotes. After the serious defeat at the Battle of Bull Run, he even gave command of his army to a Democrat and supporter of slavery, General McClellan.

However, within the Union Army there were generals, like Hooker, who were abolitionist by conviction. Others, like Sherman and Grant, understood, despite being conservative professional soldiers, that to defeat the confederate army they had to wage all out total war, not just on the enemy army but on the economic structures that supported it. At a decisive moment, only a short time after the letter Steve Palmer quotes, Lincoln personally intervened. He made the most radical moves. Lincoln was no Robespierre, but the change in Lincoln's political leadership can be compared to

the difference between the Girondins and the Jacobins.

He raised the first black regiment: in all over 200,000 black men joined the Union Army. He made a declaration freeing slaves throughout the Confederacy. Most importantly, he dismissed McClellan and the War Secretary and altered the army chain of command. White soldiers welcomed escaped slaves into their camps. The Union army confiscated 'rebel' property, including slaves, in all areas they occupied.

Sherman went further than any bourgeois army general had ever done. Under Field Order 15, he confiscated land from the plantocracy and distributed it in 40-acre plots with an army mule, to 40,000 freed slaves.

To blame Lincoln for what happened after his assassination in the spring of 1865 is like blaming Cromwell for the restoration of the monarchy. He was not to blame for the Jim Crow laws, the rise of the Klan, the lynchings and discrimination that followed. It was his successor Andrew Johnson who revoked Field Order 15 in 1866. It was after Lincoln's death that the Republican Party dumped its revolutionary slogans.

More died in the Civil War than the US troops killed in two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq combined. Humanity should honour those who fought for the Union and their leader Abraham Lincoln. Because of them, bond slavery has been made illegal worldwide.

As for General William Tecumseh Sherman, the federal government in 1994 proposed erecting a monument to him and his troops. It was blocked by a North Carolina state official who compared him to Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible.

JIM WILLS
North London

Response to Comrade Jim

Jim describes Lincoln as a revolutionary. Marx was not so enthusiastic. In the same article which Jim quotes, he wrote:

'He has no initiative, no idealistic impetus, cothurnus [larger than life appearance], no historical trappings ... without intellectual brilliance, without a particularly outstanding character, without exceptional importance – an average person of good will.'

He was a contradictory character forced to do revolutionary things after he exhausted every other possibility: 'President Lincoln never ventures a step forward before the turn of circumstances and the general call of public opinion forbid further delay'.² When Marx compared Lincoln to Washington, it was not the man, but his 'place in history' – a subtly different thing. Lincoln had greatness thrust upon him because he was forced to do things which had momentous consequences – 'compelled by circumstances "to act the lion"'.³

The difference with Robespierre was not one of degree but of kind: Robespierre led the French Revolution in the direction he foresaw it needed to go and pushed it along. Lincoln followed the course of history because it dragged him along behind it. Lincoln was no Robespierre, who rose to power on the shoulders of the *sans culottes*: 'Lincoln is not the product of a popular revolution ... [he was] placed at the top by the interplay of the forces of universal suffrage unaware of the great issues at stake'.⁴

Jim suggests some dramatic shift in Lincoln's policy, akin to the switch from moderate to radical bourgeois leadership (from Girondo to Jacobin) in the French Revolution. Not one of his examples supports this assertion.

He raised the first black regiment? Nope. The first black regiment was the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers, raised by Senator Jim Lane, a 'Jayhawker' – a radical abolitionist guerrilla fighter, like John Brown. Raised in 1862, it took more than a year to gain

official recognition. Several other attempts to organize black soldiers were made against official resistance before Lincoln finally recognized necessity. Then, he argued, it would save white lives: 'I thought that whatever Negro soldiers could be got to do as soldiers leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do, in saving the Union.'

He made a declaration freeing slaves throughout the Confederacy? Precisely! He made a declaration only freeing slaves throughout the Confederacy – only in the rebellious southern states, not in the border states of the Union. The declaration was issued on 22 September 1862, but did not come into effect until 1 January 1863 – Lincoln's priority was not freeing slaves, but pressuring the Southern states back into the Union.

White soldiers welcomed slaves into their camps? In some cases former slaves were returned to their enemy 'owners' under the Fugitive Slave Act. In other cases, legalisms drew a distinction between slaves who had been working for the Confederate Army (thus constituting enemy military equipment) and slaves who had not. Even later in the war, former slaves faced a mixed reception on the Union side from enthusiastic reception to sullen racist acceptance.

Lincoln dismissed McClellan? Yes. But only after McClellan had openly politically campaigned against Lincoln, displayed utter military conservatism and been clearly demonstrated to be insubordinate.

Sherman's distribution of land was limited to the 40,000 in a small area (400,000 acres), not throughout the territory he liberated. The other 3,960,000 freed slaves got nothing from Sherman.

It is important to remember the importance of the work of revolutionary communists, in both Britain and the United States in bringing an end to slavery.⁵ Former comrades-in-arms of Marx and Engels in the 1848 German

Revolution, such as Wedermeyer and Willich, had moved to the United States and worked hard to swing the support of German immigrants behind, first, Lincoln's nomination by the Republican party, then behind Lincoln in the presidential election of 1860. They went on to take up arms in the Union cause. In England, the weavers of Lancashire supported the boycott of Confederate cotton, suffering destitution and starvation, in solidarity with the struggle against slavery. It was a superb example of international working-class solidarity.⁶

Lincoln played a revolutionary role, but he was a bourgeois politician in the narrow sense of the term. He followed but did not anticipate the logic of history. At each major fork he chose the progressive road. Right at the outset of the war, Marx recognized that it was slavery, not the integrity of the Union, which was at the heart of the struggle. Lincoln tried to avoid recognizing this until the last possible moment.

STEVE PALMER
San Francisco, US

1 Marx, 'Comments on the North American events', 7 October 1862.

2 Marx, 'American Affairs', 26 February 1862.

3 Marx, 'Comments'.

4 Marx, 'Comments'.

5 See August H Nimitz, Jr. *Marx, Tocqueville and Race in America*, (Lanham, MD, 2003), Chapter 3. 'The outstanding feature of Marx and Engels's activities and those of their comrades in America before and during the Civil War is that they were integrally involved in the most important struggle against racism in history, the overthrow of slavery in the the United States', p129.

6 See Philip S Foner *British Labor and the American Civil War*, (New York, 1981) and the numerous articles and letters by Marx discussing the struggle in Britain. The British petit bourgeois 'left' has largely ignored this momentous episode, a real heroic workers' struggle. Their beloved labour aristocracy, of course, supported the South.

Free British residents from Guantanamo

I urge your readers to support the campaign in defence of the British residents still being held in the torture camp at Guantanamo Bay. There are 480 detainees including eight British residents currently held in the most degrading conditions.

One of the most shocking cases is that of Jamil el-Banna who had been living in Brent, north London for several years with his wife and young family. In November 2002, Jamil was on his way to the Gambia for a business trip and was arrested by the police in London and questioned about a 'suspect device'. The device turned out to be a battery charger that Jamil had bought from Argos! Jamil was told by the police that he was free to go but on arrival at Banjul airport in the Gambia, he and his five friends were arrested and he has not been seen by his family since that day.

It turns out that MI5 contacted the Gambian secret police and the CIA to finger Jamil for arrest although they knew that he was innocent of any involvement in terrorism. Jamil

was then 'rendered' by the CIA to Afghanistan and in March 2003 he suffered the 24-hour flight from Afghanistan to Guantanamo during which he was shackled, deprived of sleep and forced to wear a mask, goggles and earphones. He has been held at Guantanamo since March 2003 and he has never seen his three-year-old daughter, born after his kidnap.

Jamil's lawyers applied for a judicial review to force the British government to press for the release of three of the British residents held at Guantanamo – which they had refused to do on the spurious grounds that Jamil is not a British citizen.

Jamil's family and other organisations have recently launched the Justice For Dad campaign to fight for his release. Anyone who supports the three aims of the London Guantanamo campaign is welcome. The three aims are:

1. The return to the UK of all British residents imprisoned in Guantanamo
2. Support for the families of the detainees
3. Justice for all prisoners in Guantanamo and other illegal prisons.

The London Guantanamo campaign can be contacted on 07930 564 781 or by e-mail

London_gitmo@yahoo.co.uk. The release of Jamil would be a defeat for the US and British torturers and would mean that the five el-Banna children would see their father again.

JIM O'ROURKE
North London

Attacks on Basque movement continue

On the night of 22 March, the Basque public TV channel received a video containing a message from ETA. In it, the organisation declared a permanent ceasefire, stating that the chance existed to overcome conflict and calling for the opening of a democratic process to make that possible.

ETA hasn't committed any killing in the last two years, but had continued to bomb businesses of bosses who refused to pay a 'revolutionary tax'. Although the Spanish government boasts of the chance to end violence, state institutions have continued their witch-hunt of Basque political dissidents.

In late February, ETA prisoner Igor Angulo hanged himself in his cell at Guadalupe prison. A few days later, Roberto Sáinz, another member of the armed group, died in prison after a heart attack. Basque movements blamed their deaths on conditions in Spanish gaols and the government's 'non-intervention' policy.

After the funerals, unions and youth groups called for a general strike in the Basque country on 9 March. In response, riot police charged against tens of thousands of demonstrators. The day resulted in tear gas, burning barricades, violent clashes, stone throwing and several people taken to hospital. Police and courts declared that the banned party Batasuna was behind the protest, and proceeded to take action against its leader Arnaldo Otegui, who could now face prison with no option of bail.

Meanwhile, the trial continues of 56 people from Basque youth groups, media and prisoners' support groups charged with aiding or belonging to ETA. Activists in the dock view this as a political trial: they have demanded Euskara (Basque language) interpreters, refuse to answer questions from the attorney and wear T-shirts

saying 'For civil and political rights'.

I'd like to congratulate FRFI, because it has always shown a principled position on this and other struggles.

IKER GONZÁLEZ
Spain

Cemil must stay

Cemil Dogan is a 28-year-old refugee, who has lived in Britain for the last three years. He was forced to leave Turkey because of his support for the MKP (formerly known as the Turkish Communist Party – Marxist Leninist (TKP-ML)) which is currently an illegal organisation in Turkey. He came to Britain as a political refugee in 2002.

Between 1996 and 2000, he was arrested nine times, held for up to seven days at a time and tortured with electric shocks. Once he was suspended by his hands. A high pressure water hose was also used on him. On another occasion he was taken into the mountains, blindfolded and had a gun held to his head. The police told him that it was his last chance to talk. Cemil thought he was going to die.

On arrival in the UK Cemil applied for refugee status. His application was refused on the grounds that Turkey is a safe country. He appealed to a tribunal in September 2004 and won the right to have his case reviewed. In May 2005 he received a letter asking him to attend court. This court session was cancelled and the Home Office called him to attend a second interview in June 2005. After three months he was told that he had once again been refused because Turkey had reached the 'European standard' of human rights. On 16 June 2005, 17 members of the Maoist Communist Party (MKP – formerly TKP/ML) were assassinated by the 'anti-guerrilla' wing of the Turkish army.

REFUGEE VOICE FOR THE CEMIL MUST STAY CAMPAIGN

Send messages of support for Cemil (HO Ref. D1071704) to: Tony McNulty, Minister for Immigration, 3rd Floor, Peel Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SA1P 4DF

Copies to CDAS, c/o Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers c/o TUC Sheffield, Sheffield Trades and Labour Club Talbot Street Entrance, Sheffield S2

Asylum and immigration: maximising Britain's economy

Destitution as policy

Thousands of asylum seekers have been thrown into poverty. 1,600 Iraqi refugees in Yorkshire and Humberside have been denied Section 4 ('hard case') support (a room and £35 in food vouchers/week). In Leeds 250 single men were forcibly evicted and have 'vanished' into Britain's cold winter (Yorkshire Evening Post 14 December 2005). Over 300 asylum seekers in Newcastle are homeless and surviving on charity; many have physical and mental illnesses. Even those who do receive 'hard case' support, including new mothers, are denied basic toiletries like nappies and sanitary products.

In December 2004, the government began piloting Section 9 of the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act, in Central/East London, Greater Manchester and Yorkshire. Under Section 9, families who have exhausted all their asylum appeals can have financial support and accommodation removed if they 'fail to take reasonable steps' to leave Britain. When inevitably they become destitute, their children can be taken into the care of social services. 116 families including 219 children, from African and Asian countries including Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Pakistan, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, were selected to take part in the pilot. A report by Refugee Action and the Refugee Council found that 35 families have disappeared, terrified their children will be taken away, and are now 'without support, housing or access to health and welfare services'. 10% of the women were in late pregnancy; many families had serious physical and mental health problems for which they were not receiving adequate

Labour's racist attacks on asylum seekers are set to intensify. The government intends to increase deportations (already 1,350 per month), detentions and use of ID cards and electronic tagging for all new adult asylum seekers. At the same time, 345,400 immigrants from Eastern Europe have been encouraged to enter Britain under temporary work permits since 1 May 2004. This 'managed migration' is now to be extended via a five-tier points system based on age, skills and qualifications to migrants from outside the EU, while asylum seekers are not allowed to work and deliberately driven into destitution.

health care; 80% of the parents had mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and self-harming, which were made worse by the distress and panic caused by Section 9. Four children and babies have been taken into care, three families have been forced to sign up for 'voluntary return' and another 12 have taken steps to obtain travel documents, cooperating out of fear. The intention is clearly to intimidate, victimise and terrorise asylum seekers and by extension all immigrant communities.

Parasite opens its doors

Whilst clamping down on immigration of asylum seekers, Britain has been expanding its capacity to bring in migrants on temporary work permits. Britain was one of only three EU states to open its borders immediately to migrants from Eastern Europe, on the grounds that they would fill gaps in the labour market, said to number 600,000 jobs. Between May 2004 and December 2005 over 345,000 workers were registered, mostly (59%) from Poland, where unemployment is more



Protest outside Glasgow's Brand Street Immigration centre, 11 March 2006

than twice as high as the EU average, standing at 19.6% nationally and in some regions above 40%.

These workers do the hardest, dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, mostly in nursing, catering, agriculture and food processing, based mainly in London and East Anglia, with its concentration of agribusiness. They work on short-term contract jobs, earning as little as £4.50 an hour or less, are not allowed to bring their families with them, and must leave after four years.

On 7 March 2006 Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced a five-tier points system, allowing greedy British corporations to recruit from outside the EU. The new system will consolidate more than 80 existing work and study immigration schemes into five tiers:

1. Highly skilled individuals such as scientists or entrepreneurs, who will be the only group able to come to Britain without a job offer.

2. Skilled workers with a job offer such as nurses, teachers or engineers.
3. Low-skilled workers filling specific temporary labour shortages such as builders for a particular project.
4. Students.
5. 'Youth mobility' and temporary workers, such as working holiday-makers, musicians coming to perform, sportspeople coming to compete, volunteers or non-preaching religious workers. It will apply to those aged 18 to 30 and will allow them to stay for up to two years.

Britain has not spent a penny to pay for the training of any of these workers, whom Immigration Minister Tony McNulty says will make a 'welcome contribution to our economy'. As ever, Britain's racist asylum and immigration policies are dictated by the need to maintain the profits of British capitalism.

Charles Chimwezu

Asylum seekers organise in Scotland

Following a period of relative quiet, brought on partly by consistent protest, the Labour government has resumed dawn raids and deportations. At the same time, the increase in repression has given rise to a qualitatively new stage in the struggle: the formation of a union of asylum seekers. Ironically for the state, it is some of its most punitive policies of containment and 'dispersal' of asylum seekers that have provided the conditions in which they are now both forced to and able to unite and organise.

To begin with, the asylum community was disparate and scattered, with national, religious and language barriers preventing asylum seekers from recognising their common social conditions of poverty, destitution and racist discrimination. However, as the numbers 'dispersed' to Glasgow significantly grew, the state was forced to put thousands together in the cheapest accommodation available. This created areas in Glasgow such as Pollockshaws, Red Road and Sighthill where thousands now live under almost identical conditions in substandard giant tower-blocks flats, facing the same problems: enforced weekly or monthly signing-on; constant fear of dawn raids and deportation; bad housing; poverty; no right to work; no education or even adequate healthcare for

their children. This concrete experience has forged people together in a hundred different ways, establishing closer and closer links and connections, creating an ever more homogeneous and stronger grouping. The very purpose of the 'dispersal' system, to locate asylum seekers far from the support networks of their individual communities, has been defeated by the creation of a new cross-community unity.

Unity – the asylum seeker union

Throughout 2004/2005 anti-deportation campaigns were waged on behalf of individuals and families, involving many asylum seekers and also drawing in large sections of wider Scottish society, such as students from Drumchapel girls' school who marched in support of their friend Saidha Vucaj, as well as attracting the support of trade unions and MSPs.

In December 2005 Congolese asylum seekers from Petershill organised a march through Glasgow calling for the right to remain and the right to work. This was organised outside of the usual mainstream support structures and supported by the No Borders Network (NBN) and Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI), who were mounting weekly pickets of the Immigration Office at Brand Street, Glasgow (see FRFI 189). It was prior

to this march, during organic meetings of small numbers of asylum seekers that it became obvious that the community demanded a higher form of organisation, which would enable asylum seekers to organise independently and struggle effectively for basic demands.

In February 2006, asylum seekers from Red Road, with the assistance and support of NBN and FRFI, established the first branch of Unity – the asylum seekers union. Over 100 asylum seekers attended the founding meeting. Inspired by the example of Red Road, similar branches were quickly established in Pollockshaws and Sighthill.

The union's first action was a mass protest outside the Brand Street Immigration Offices on 11 March 2006. This protest showed the massive reservoir of potential strength in the asylum seeker community. Unity is at a very early stage of development but is nonetheless beginning to forge together and grow in strength. A powerful union of asylum seekers in Glasgow can provide a shining beacon for all those throughout Britain suffering the same conditions. We will help to support and build this movement in any way we can.

**No to all immigration controls!
End dawn-raids!
No to deportations!**

**Support Unity – the asylum
seeker union!**

Joseph Eskovitch

*'We're not here for
benefits. Let us work'*

Supporting asylum seekers in the North East



In Newcastle, FRFI comrades have been playing a leading role in the Tyneside Community Action for Refugees network (TCAR), which brings together local and refugee communities in defence of asylum seekers. The main focus has been regular pickets outside North Shields Reporting Centre, where 'failed' asylum seekers have to sign their continued compliance with an unfair system. TCAR offers tea and coffee to asylum seekers going to sign and engages in discussion.

On 11 March TCAR held a lively demonstration demanding the right to legal work for all asylum seekers. Protesters gathered in the snow in central Newcastle under the banner 'We're not here for ben-

efits. Let us work!' We used street theatre and organised an open mic so that as many people as possible could speak. A woman from the Congo demanded asylum seekers be treated with respect and dignity while a man from Nigeria pointed out the irony of the British ruling class portraying asylum seekers as scroungers when imperialist Britain has been pillaging and exploiting Africa for centuries.

The right to legal work has been denied to asylum seekers since July 2002. Instead, skilled and willing workers

are forced to survive on benefits of £38.96 per week, well below the official poverty line. 'Failed' asylum seekers have all benefits and accommodation removed, forcing many into homelessness and others into poorly paid illegal work. Without insurance, unions, contracts or a decent minimum wage, workers in the illegal economy are the most exploited section of the labour force.

A TCAR spokesperson said, 'We know that many people think that we just came to Britain for benefits. This is not true: we are refugees. It is not safe for us in our own countries. We didn't come here for benefits. We demand the right to legal work.'

Annabelle Richardson