

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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US AND BRITAIN BACK ISRAEL'S WAR CRIMES

ISOLATE THE RACIST ZIONIST STATE



The murderous Israeli onslaught on the people of Lebanon has been sanctioned and supported by both the US and Britain. The murder of hundreds of Lebanese civilians, 45% of whom are children according to Save The Children, the forcing of over 500,000 people from their homes making them refugees, and the destruction of the civilian infrastructure of Lebanon are all a consequence of imperialism's attempts to restructure the Middle East and Central Asia on its terms. This began with the wars and subsequent occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and continues now with imperialism's propaganda war against Syria and Iran. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

In its attempt to destroy Hizbullah, Israel is fighting a proxy war on behalf of imperialism against Syria and Iran. In all the media talk about Iran supplying Hizbullah with arms and rockets, the fact that the bombs raining down from Israeli aircraft causing mass carnage are US bombs and the aircraft are US-made goes

deliberately unreported. The US and Britain blocked calls for a ceasefire at both the G8 summit in Russia and the UN Security Council meeting of 14 July, giving Israel the green light to intensify its attack on Hizbullah and the Lebanese people. Britain and the US along with Israel are guilty of war crimes under the Geneva Convention.

On Wednesday 12 July in an act of solidarity with the beleaguered Palestinians of Gaza, Hizbullah fighters launched a military strike at Israeli forces along the border with Lebanon, capturing two Israeli soldiers in the process. Hizbullah declared they would be released in exchange for Lebanese and other Arab prisoners held in Israeli gaols, some for over 20 years. The Zionist response was to launch a deadly and bloody attack on Lebanese civilians and the civilian infrastructure of the country, just as it had on Gaza when Palestinian resistance groups there captured an Israeli soldier on 25 June. The atrocities they have committed in Lebanon include the massacre of 15 children from the border village of Marwaheen on 15 July. This happened as people fled from their homes after Israeli loudspeakers ordered them to leave their border village; as they left in cars and vans Israeli planes attacked them,

murdering 20 Lebanese civilians including the children.

Immediately after the Hizbullah action, the Zionists announced a blockade of Lebanon's ports, declared its airspace closed and bombed the main road between Beirut and Damascus. Beirut's main airport and power station were also attacked along with at least two other airports and Lebanon's main sea ports. In addition, Zionist forces bombed roads, bridges and petrol stations in different parts of the country. All the bridges across the Litani River were destroyed, effectively cutting off the south from the rest of the country. The poor Shi'ite areas of south Lebanon and south Beirut, the bases of Hizbullah's support, were targeted and hundreds of civilians killed. On Monday 17 July, five days into Israel's murderous assault, the Lebanese government issued the first detailed report of the devastation.

Amongst the many properties listed as destroyed or damaged were a hospital and several schools, whilst a total of 38 roads had been cut off by bombs and 42 bridges had been destroyed.

Israel's murderous assault did not go without challenge as Hizbullah showed it had the resources to strike back. As Israeli military units crossed the border into Lebanon in response to the Hizbullah operation, Hizbullah forces blew up the first Israeli tank when it was only yards over the border, killing its crew of four. The Israeli army did not venture any further. Hizbullah also fired rockets at Israel's top secret military air-traffic control centre in Minron and other rockets that hit deep into Israel striking the cities of Tiberius and Haifa. They also launched an unmanned flying drone at an Israeli warship that was shelling Beirut, killing four sailors. But however resourceful and courageous

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Welcome...

'Have they all died for history, then, those thousands of dead...? The dead soldier with the bright wedding ring on his finger, the slaughtered masses of Sabra and Chatila, the Iranians putrefying in the desert, the corpses of Palestinians and Israelis and Lebanese and Syrians and Afghans, the unspeakable suffering of the Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, Lebanese, Afghan, Israeli – and, yes, American – torture chambers; was this for history? Or for justice? Or for us? We know that the Balfour Declaration [when Britain conceded to the idea of a Jewish Israeli state] was made eighty-eight years ago. But for Palestinian refugees, in the slums of their camps, Balfour spoke yesterday, last night, only an hour ago. In the Middle East, the people live their past history, again and again, every day.'

– Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The conquest of the Middle East*

Where Robert Fisk says history, we can say imperialism. The criminal destruction of human lives, infrastructure, environment and historical relics in the Middle East is the result of imperialism's rampant search for resources to devour, chew up and spit out. Imperialist brutality follows inevitably from capitalist exploitation of man by man, exported from developed capitalist countries to other countries. It is the domination, to facilitate exploitation, by the oppressor nation of the oppressed nation. It is not that the people of the Middle East live their past history every day; it is that they live under the yoke of the same imperialist system, led by the United States and Britain.

And Israel is their proxy state. Israel's current war against Hizbullah and the Palestinian people serves its local interests. But it is also a proxy war of the US and Britain against Iran and Syria, and linked to their desperation to get control of Iraq. That is why in mid-July, Bush and Blair and the G8 Summit refused to demand an end to the murderous Israeli onslaught on Lebanon. They want Israel to destroy Hizbullah, hoping to weaken Iran and Syria. The blatant media bias is necessary in order to



Every week Victory to the Intifada groups around Britain demonstrate against Zionist oppression of the Palestinian people - you can join them (see Events page 14).

confuse the public, to disguise the massively superior military force of Israel. Israeli representatives are given hours of interview time. What do we hear from the Palestinians? At least 44 Palestinians were killed in May, 55 killed in June and 121 in the first three weeks of July. This is the background to Hizbullah's attacks on Israel. Who else defended the Palestinians – when Israel confiscated their income, arrested their elected government, assassinated their resistance fighters, destroyed their electrical generator, shelled to bits a family on the beach and bombed another as they slept in bed? (see page 1, 2 and 3)

We have seen the images of bloodied corpses of children, and babies rushed into ill-equipped hospitals in Gaza. And one hour away in Tel Aviv, sun-soaked Israelis lie out on the beach. They are not ignorant or unaware. Most have served in the Israel army and are waiting to be called up as reservists. They continue to applaud their savage military and their racist politicians.

What about the US and British public? Iraq may not share our shores, but British imperialism is up to its neck in Iraqi blood, in history, and today, ever since Britain carved Iraq out of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. The British RAF bombed Iraq in six of the nine decades of its existence in the 20th

century. The public may feel confused about the sectarian violence, but we can all be certain of one thing: every day when we get home; from work, from shopping, from enjoying the sunshine, and we listen to the news, there will have been more bombings and more civilian deaths (see page 8 and 9).

A towering pile of Iraqi corpses – increasing by a hundred a day at present. We must never become immune to those images of the victims of wars for imperialist domination. We must cling on to our humanity, be angry, find our determination to oppose it, to fight back against it. Behind each number is a life, a family, a community, a people. And it is precisely among these people that the anger is taking root so deep that it will rise up once again in a new generation of resistance movements.

But we don't have to look to the Middle East to witness imperialist brutality. It's here in Britain. It is in the shoot-to-kill policy of the British police, granted immunity in the name of fighting terrorism (see page 4). It is in the treatment of asylum seekers, so cruel that many have been driven to suicide (see page 16).

A strong movement in defence of asylum seekers who are fighting back will help to prevent isolation and despair (see page 14). We need to make common cause between this struggle and daily struggles against health and education privatisation, and against the attacks on the working class (see page 5), against the social fascism of the Labour government's new 'law and order' plans to control the working class (see page 4). Let's unite with those fighting against British imperialism and multinationals in African countries such as Nigeria and the Congo (see page 6), and with those in Latin America, resisting their own ruling class allies of imperialism: in Peru, in Chile, in Mexico and in Bolivia (see page 10). And let us stand with those, like Venezuela and Cuba (see page 7), who are winning the battle against imperialism to create new societies free from exploitation.

Imperialism is a brutal system, but it is made by humans and humans can tear it down. Start today, contact us to get involved. Send us your contributions both written and financial.

FRFI
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London WC1N 3XX

US AND BRITAIN BACK ISRAEL'S WAR CRIMES

continued from page 1

Hizbullah forces may be, this is not a battle between equals: they face the fourth or fifth strongest military power on earth, a terrorist state intent on the death of Lebanese civilians and the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

The ferocity and wide range of Israel's attacks point to the fact that they are using the capture of the two soldiers to pursue a wider political aim: that of destroying the influence of Hizbullah and in the process striking a blow against Iran and Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has said that the attack on Lebanon will not cease until Hizbullah is disarmed and Lebanese forces replace Hizbullah along the Israel-Lebanon border, claiming that Hamas and Hizbullah are operating with the support of the 'axis of evil that stretches from Tehran to Damascus'.

Gaza – blockaded, shelled and bombed

On 25 June, some three weeks before the Hizbullah action, a joint Palestinian resistance force including the armed wing of Hamas carried out an audacious military strike against the Israeli army at the Kerem Shalom border crossing in Gaza, killing two Israeli soldiers and capturing a third. The resistance forces stated that their condition for releasing the soldier was 'the freeing of Palestinian women, children, chronically sick and those in detention for more than 20 years'. The Zionists hold over 9,000 Palestinian prisoners, of whom 150 are women and 330 are children.

Israel and the imperialists have been determined to destroy the Hamas Palestinian government. To that end there has been an almost total blockade of Gaza, with the border crossings closed and a block by the US and the EU on aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA). No PA employee has received an official wage since March. The effects of this have been disastrous: on 7 June, John Ging, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Gaza Field Director, described the general living conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Gaza as 'deplorable and getting worse.' Without money, the local authorities had been unable to pay salaries or any other bill for three months. 'In every municipality I have visited this week the situation is the same,' Ging reported, 'Garbage trucks are sitting idle while rubbish piles up, sewage treatment plants are struggling to remain operational, fuel for water pumps is running out and mosquito infestation is out of control in many areas as there is no money to purchase expensive pesticides.'

Alongside the economic blockade, the Zionists have stepped up their military onslaught on the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza. A report issued by the Palestinian National Information Centre detailed that for the month of May Israeli forces killed 44 Palestinians, wounded 183 and arrested 481. On 9 June, the world witnessed the horrific pictures of the little Palestinian girl, Huda Ghalia, hysterical after an Israeli shell landed on a north Gaza beach killing seven members of her family including her mother and father. Four days later, an Israeli aircraft fired a missile at a car in Gaza City carrying two Islamic Jihad militants. As people gathered to

give medical help, a second missile was fired, killing a further 10 people including four medical personnel and two children. On 20 June in another missile attack on a car in Gaza, this time carrying a militant from the Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, three passing children were killed. On 22 June a missile attack on a house in Khan Younis, Gaza, killed a pregnant woman. In the month up to 24 June Israeli forces had killed 47 Palestinians.

The Palestinian military attack on 25 June was therefore a response to the continuing massacre of Palestinian civilians, one which is completely under-reported in the British media. The scale of the Israeli reaction, a co-ordinated attack on the civilian infrastructure in Gaza and the Hamas government, showed that the Zionists were going to use the capture of the soldier to pursue their wider political agenda. On 28 June Israel launched a military onslaught under the grotesque banner of 'Operation Summer Rain'. Zionist bombers blew up the main power station in Gaza which supplies 60% of Gaza's electricity, three road bridges and a main water supply pipe. The same day, four Israeli jets flew over Syrian territory breaking the sound barrier over the Syrian Presidential Palace. Israel also targeted government buildings and occupied Gaza International Airport and a strip of land adjacent to Rafah. In the north of the strip, Israel occupied areas of Beit Hanoun. Hundreds of Palestinians were made homeless and are being put up in UNRWA school buildings.

Zionist Interior Minister Avi Dichter announced at a press conference on 29 June that Israel had decided to disband the Hamas-led government. That night, Israel arrested 64 Hamas PA officials including eight Ministers and 22 members of the Palestine Legislative Council. Shimon Peres, Israeli deputy Prime Minister and Labour Party leader, said that criminal charges would be brought against the arrested PA Ministers. Proving that this was no knee-jerk reaction to the capture of the soldier, the commander of the Israeli army Central Command said the arrests were planned two months previously.

Britain, the US and Israel – the real 'axis of evil'

In the period 6-12 July the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights documented 76 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. This figure includes nine members of one family killed on 12 July by a 550lb bomb dropped on their home while they slept in Gaza City. But when Qatar put forward a resolution the next day at the UN Security Council calling for a halt to Israel's military activities in the Gaza Strip, it was vetoed by the US whilst Britain abstained. Even though the first point in the resolution called for the release of the Israeli soldier, British UN Ambassador Emyr Jones Parry said that although he was 'concerned about the suffering of the Palestinian population' he 'regretted' he could not support the resolution as it 'was not sufficiently balanced'. Zionist forces murdered 121 Palestinian people during the first three weeks of July, including 24 children, and injured over 550. One Israeli soldier had been killed. What a notion of 'balance' – pure racism!

On 14 July the UN Security Council met again at the request of Lebanon.

continued on page 3 opposite

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Uncovering Israeli lies and expansionism

'The seeds for the coming revolution are germinating'

MANAL DARWISH reports from Palestine.



The Lebanese representative called on the Security Council to establish a ceasefire. The US and Britain ignored the call. The political reasoning behind this lack of action became clear at Blair and Bush's joint press conference at the start of the G8 conference in St Petersburg on the same day. Bush declared that 'One of the interesting things about this recent flare-up is that it helps to clarify a root cause of instability in the middle-east and that's Hizbullah, Hizbullah's relationship with Syria, Hizbullah's relationship with Iran and Syria's relationship with Iran'. Blair agreed completely, stating that Iran and Syria were backing 'extremists' who want to derail efforts to strengthen democracy in Lebanon and 'end the process that could lead to the two-state solution' in Palestine. Bush gave both his and Blair's approval to Israel's military action: 'Our message to Israel is to defend yourself but be mindful of the consequences.' The consequences

Bush and Blair are concerned about are the destabilisation of the new pro-imperialist government in Lebanon – but not the deaths of a few hundred Lebanese or Palestinian civilians.

We have to be clear: 'the axis of evil' in the Middle East is Britain, the US and Israel. They are guilty of war crimes, of the slaughter of thousands of ordinary men, women and children in the interests of imperialism. In Britain we have a duty to act against Blair and the Labour government: they are in the forefront of these massacres. All those opposed to the war crimes of this Labour government need to unite to build a mass anti-imperialist movement on the streets that fights Labour imperialism and supports the anti-imperialist struggles of the people of the Middle East.

*Fight Labour imperialism!
Isolate the racist Israeli state!
Victory to the Palestinian people!
Victory to the people of Lebanon!*

ISOLATE THE RACIST ISRAELI STATE – ISRAEL OUT OF LEBANON



Over 10,000 people marched in central London on 22 July to show their solidarity with the people of Palestine and Lebanon under brutal attack from Israel with the full backing of the British Labour government. Marchers were prevented from demonstrating their anger at Blair and the Labour government in the heart of Whitehall as the march bypassed Parliament Square and Downing Street. The march was called by the Stop the War Coalition, FRFI, Victory to the Intifada supporters, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP) and the International League for Peoples' Struggles formed a noisy, militant anti-imperialist contingent. The megaphone was used from start to finish, including within the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act exclusion zone, showing that the recent police arrests for megaphone use are arbitrary and punitive. The speakers at the rally included the usual opportunists such as Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn and other Labour Party supporters whose calls for a leadership change continued the age-old illusion that the imperialist racist Labour Party would be altered by a change of personnel. By contrast George Galloway, Respect MP in east London, made an important political intervention, calling for a victory to the Lebanese resistance led by Hizbullah and challenged Blair to a meeting in court as he continued to assert that Hizbullah (proscribed in Britain) has never been a terrorist organisation.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

Hizbullah

In 1982 Israeli forces led by the then Defence Minister Ariel Sharon invaded Lebanon. They advanced as far as Beirut in a drive to expel Palestinian PLO fighters who were based in south Lebanon at the time. Israeli jets ruthlessly bombed and shelled civilian populations and also used barbaric phosphorus bombs, a chemical weapon whose vapour burns the lining of the lungs when inhaled. Over 25,000 people died in a murderous onslaught, including up to 3,500 Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, massacred by the Lebanese fascist Phalange with Zionist encouragement. In 1985, Israel withdrew to a unilaterally declared security zone, a southern strip of Lebanon that they



occupied until 2000.

It was during this period that Hizbullah came into being, based among the mass of the poor Shias of southern Lebanon and south Beirut and looking to the victory of the Iranian Islamic Revolution for inspiration. Hizbullah set up schools and medical centres among the poor Shias and led the resistance to the Israeli occupation, fighting both the Israeli army and

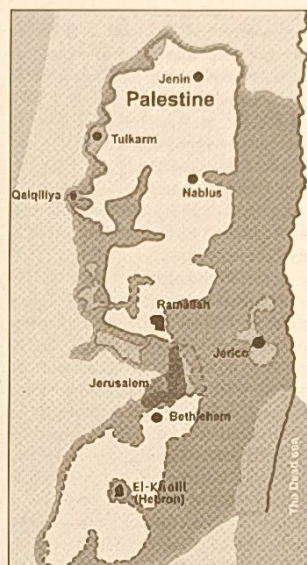
On 30 April 2006, the Israeli cabinet approved a revised route for the Apartheid Wall as part of the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's 'convergence plan'. This extends its total length from 670km to 703km, more than twice the length of the Green Line (which runs between the land claimed by Israel in 1949 and the West Bank), which is 315km. Only 20% of the Wall runs along the Green Line; 80% of it is inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

Olmert's plan is to use the construction of the Wall to lay down unilaterally the final borders for the Israeli state. Thus in an interview with *Ha'aretz* on 11 July he stated that 'I am absolutely determined to carry out the separation from the Palestinians, and establish secure borders'. Two days later, on a visit to London, and immediately after the massacre of the Ghalia family, he was even more explicit: 'We'll never agree to pull out of all the territories, because the borders of 1967 are indefensible'. What the Palestinian people will be left with will be a number of Bantustans on the West Bank without any viable economy and completely subject to Israeli military control.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the OPTs recently reported that when the Wall is complete, 60,500 West Bank Palestinians living in 42 villages and towns will reside in closed areas between the Wall and the Green Line.

This has far-reaching implications for almost every aspect of their lives. They will be cut off from their schools, families, health centres, markets and jobs. They have to obtain a permit from the Israeli army to cross the Wall. Even children going to school have to show a copy of their parents' ID before Israeli soldiers will let them through. If they do not provide this, the soldiers will simply turn them back. Such residents have to be registered on an army list; no one can pass if his or her name is not there. Relatives from the Palestinian side of the wall cannot visit them since they are not eligible for the permit.

The gates are only permanently open if there is an Israeli settlement on the other side of the wall. In June 2006, UN staff counted 73 gates along the Apartheid Wall; of these only 38 are accessible to Palestinians with the correct permit. These Palestinians face an uncertain future in terms of both



The map shows the route of Apartheid Wall which Israel intends should become the new borders of its territory

their personal and land status. In addition to this, there are about 124,300 Palestinians who live in 28 villages which will be surrounded by the Wall on three sides, with the fourth side controlled by a closure. These include Qalqilya town, and the areas of Biddya and Biddu.

About a quarter of the 230,000 Palestinians holding East Jerusalem residence permits are located on the West Bank side of the Apartheid Wall. These East Jerusalem ID card holders need to wait in line to cross through one of four terminals to enter Jerusalem for daily services and jobs. Jerusalemite Palestinians have to prove that the centre of their life is in Jerusalem otherwise they will be deprived of their ID and consequently of all their rights to enter Jerusalem or to gain access to their property there.

Yasmeen, a 17-year-old female student whom I met who lives 10 minutes from East Jerusalem by car with her parents in A-ram, told me that sometimes she leaves her house at 6am but only reaches her school at 10am as she needs to wait in line at the checkpoint. It is her last year at high school and a crucial one for her as it determines her future.

Olmert's convergence plan is intended to establish final borders, and these are already visible in the form of the Wall. In their report *Under the Guise of Security*, Israeli human rights organisations Bimkom and B'Tselem detail how the Wall has been erected to create prime real estate and hasten expansion of the Jewish settlements, which are of course illegal under international law. In the north of the OPTs, the Ariel settlements bloc extends 22km or 42% across the width of the West Bank. Closer to Jerusalem, the planned Apartheid Wall route will encircle the Ma'ale Adumim settlements bloc (also known as E-1), and will extend 14km into the West Bank or 45% across its width. Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions writes: 'Since 40% of the Palestinian economy revolves around Jerusalem and its tourist based economy, the E-1 plan effectively cuts the economic heart out of any Palestinian state, rendering it nothing more than a set of non-viable Indian reservations.'

E-1 will completely divide the West Bank and prevent Palestinian contiguity. Olmert says development of E-1 will go ahead despite the disapproval of the US State Department. The building of 3,500 units on E-1 precludes natural expansion by Palestinians of East Jerusalem on their own land which will be confiscated. 69 West Bank Israeli settlements will lie between the Green Line and the Wall as will an estimated 183,280 Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem.

Where the Wall is complete, Palestinians face economic hardship because they cannot reach their land to harvest crops. In some cases where there is a nearby settlement, armed settlers harass and prevent them reaching their land. This is the case with the Kaddum village and Kaddum-eem settlement.

In A-ram, a town of 62,000 Palestinians north of Jerusalem, the Apartheid Wall runs along its main street which connects Jerusalem with Ramallah. Here the economic situation has deteriorated sharply. The town used to have lots of jobs, but after the construction of the Wall the economy collapsed creating a high unemployment rate. More than 500 businesses were forced to close, as well as three schools. The town, which used to be busy with cars and merchants, looks dead these days. The mayor, who has not received his salary for some months as a consequence of the financial blockade of the Palestinian Authority, is being paid by the local people.

The level of solidarity among the Palestinian people has increased as a result of their international isolation. While I was interviewing the mayor, a man named Marwan approached him complaining that the contractor for the Apartheid Wall had come to him in the early morning with Israeli soldiers to inform him that they would demolish the entrance to his house to complete that section of the Wall. Marwan's parents built their authorised house in 1976 as their family increased. They have five daughters and five sons who are all married, and the sons with their 17 children live in the adjacent building. It is a beautiful entrance with a 33-year-old vine and cherry trees. The contractor did not have either a court warrant or an army one for the proposed demolition. If the entrance is demolished and the Wall completed the family will be left with no entrance or exit. Marwan said 'the Israeli army exercise the policy of facts on the ground. Their logic is that of power and might'.

The convergence plan means that Israel will remain in the West Bank. The infrastructure for this already exists in the form of Apartheid roads that connect the settlements with Israel, known as bypass roads. Palestinians cannot use some of these at all, others only in part. The plan means continuing Israeli control over 58% of the West Bank and the annexation of both the Jordan Valley and the big settlements as mentioned above. This plan violates both the Oslo Agreement and the Bush Roadmap, both of which were compromises from the Palestinian side.

The already-compromised Palestinian state will be further reduced to below 22% of historical Palestine. Since the 1967 occupation any viable Palestinian state has become a dream. It is time to expose the Israeli lies. A glance at the maps of Palestine proves that any viable Palestinian state is impossible. As the mayor said: 'The seeds for the coming revolution are germinating.'

Shoot-to-kill cover-up

CAROL BRICKLEY

One year after the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced that it will not press charges against any police officer for the shooting. Their excuse is that the officers involved reasonably believed that de Menezes was a suicide bomber who was about to explode a bomb on the tube. The CPS decision is not aimed at delivering justice for the de Menezes family, but at hiding the truth about the police shoot-to-kill policy and the events of 22 July 2005. This cover-up follows the police raid in Forest Gate, east London, in June 2006 when 250 police officers, armed and rigged in anti-chemical warfare suits, broke into two houses, terrorising the occupants and shooting one man in the shoulder. This raid was also based on false intelligence and once again, confirmed the British state's commitment to shoot-to-kill and terrorising communities.

Apart from being an insult to the de Menezes family, the CPS decision not to prosecute individual officers but to pursue action under Health and Safety laws against the Metropolitan Police as a whole, will have the effect of hiding the results of the IPCC investigation and the details of how de Menezes died, for at

least another year. Whilst the Health and Safety prosecution might result in an unlimited fine, it is akin to charging Jack the Ripper with littering, and is a lot less likely to succeed.

We should remind ourselves now that the immediate response of the police, the Labour Government and the press, in the days after the killing, was to cover up their guilt. Jean Charles de Menezes was tracked by police from his home in Tulse Hill to Stockwell tube station, several miles away. He was followed into the station by an armed squad of undercover police who pushed him to the ground as he entered the train and then pumped seven bullets into his brain and one into his shoulder in front of a carriage full of terrified passengers.

The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, immediately issued a statement claiming that the shooting was 'directly linked' to the ongoing anti-terrorist investigations. On the following day the Met admitted that de Menezes was innocent, but began the cover-up process by suggesting that his behaviour had been suspicious: he had 'bolted down the escalator', 'leapt over the barriers' and that he was wearing 'a chunky top', 'a fleece', 'unseasonal clothing' – all of which could have 'concealed a bomb'. All of this was a deliberate lie: de Menezes was wearing a t-shirt and denim jacket, used a travel card and

did not leap the barrier or bolt down the escalator. More crude attempts to vilify the victim began to appear in the press: he was working illegally and had 'a forged stamp' in his passport. Commissioner Blair attempted, completely illegally, to prevent the IPCC investigation by blocking their access to the tube station and to the witnesses. Emissaries from the Met visited Brazil to offer a pitiful sum in compensation to the family. The Met had a lot to hide.

Two brothers, Mohammed Abdul Kahar and Abul Loyair, and their families were the innocent victims of the Forest Gate raid on 2 June this year. Mr Kahar was shot in the shoulder when armed police raided their home and that of their neighbours. In both houses the shocked inhabitants met with violence and abuse. The police claimed that the raids were the result of 'specific intelligence'. Mr Kahar and Mr Loyair were detained for two weeks for questioning while their home was literally taken apart. In the end Assistant Commissioner Andy Hayman was forced to apologise to the families and their neighbours for the disruption caused. This apology did not prevent the police from leaking false information to the press about a large sum of money kept on the premises, suggesting that it was being used for criminal purposes.

Each time the Metropolitan Police murder, maim and terrify innocent people, the Labour Government and their hired press jump to the defence of the police, claiming that this is a 'small price to pay in the war against terror'. This is a lie. Prime Minister Blair has told the Muslim community that it is their job to fight extremism within their communities, meanwhile as henchmen for the Bush regime, his government is backing terror to the hilt: Israel's barbaric raids in Lebanon and Gaza, the disastrous war on the Iraqi and Afghan people, let alone the systematic despoliation of Africa. If the price to be paid in the war against terror is the death of innocent people and terrifying men, women and children in their homes, then it is the oppressed, both in Britain and across the globe, who are being asked to pay it – and the price is too high. ■

Labour attacks freedom to protest



LAURIE MITCHELL

The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA) became law on 7 April 2005. Its main purpose was to provide for the establishment of a new FBI-style 'Serious Organised Crime Agency'. However it has become most notorious for the anti-free speech measures tagged on at the last minute by then Home Secretary David Blunkett. FRFI supporter Barnaby Tasker is currently awaiting trial under Section 137 of SOCPA for the explicitly political 'offence' of 'using a loudhailer for the purpose of encouraging the crowd to chant pro-Palestinian and anti-government remarks'.

These measures were aimed at removing Brian Haw, the anti-war protester who has camped in Parliament Square for four years, and attempting to ensure the government would have the power to prevent or severely limit any future protests.

The SOCPA provisions, which came into force on 1 August 2005 prohibit any demonstration of one person or more within a one square kilometre 'exclusion zone' around the Houses of Parliament, unless prior permission has been granted by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. An individual may be charged with organising a demonstration, participating in a demonstration, or demonstrating as an individual without permission. Even an authorised demonstration

can be severely curtailed, limited and have conditions imposed on it. In other words, it is no longer possible to have meaningful demonstrations near Parliament. The use of megaphones is not permitted within the exclusion zone whether the demonstration is authorised or not. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) demonstration on which Barnaby was arrested was 'authorised'.

Brian Haw is still in Parliament Square, having successfully argued that his protest pre-dates the legislation. A high court decision, made just three days before 1 August, ruled that his protest was immune as the new act could not be applied retrospectively and he had been there since 2001.

In April 2006 Maya Evans became the first person to be convicted under section 132 of SOCPA for reading out the names of 97 British soldiers killed in Iraq and names of dead Iraqi civilians at the cenotaph in Whitehall. She was given a conditional discharge and forced to pay £100 costs.

On 28 August 2005 Mark Barret was arrested for meeting fellow activists for tea and cake in Parliament Square. On 8 April 2006 he was found guilty of violating SOCPA protest laws and fined £500.

Five PSC activists have been summonsed to court to face charges of breaching SOCPA following an emergency Palestine solidarity demonstration at Downing Street on 14 March against the Israeli attack on Jericho prison.

Barnaby Tasker's arrest occurred on 20 May on the annual march in support of Palestine called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in London. He is due to appear at Marylebone Magistrates court on 29 September and a picket in support of the right to protest will take place outside the court. Using a megaphone is essential for effective protest and communicating information and slogans on a demonstration. The state knows this and the banning of loudhailers is a serious attack on freedom to protest.

On 18 June Steve Jago carried a placard outside Downing Street bearing the George Orwell quote: 'In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.' He was promptly arrested under section 132 and was assaulted by police in the process.

The legislation also permits the Home Secretary to ban demonstrations in places designated by him to be 'in the interests of national security'. Under SOCPA, protesters who breach any one of 10 military bases across Britain will be treated as potential terrorists and face up to a year in prison or a £5,000 fine. Helen John, 68, and Sylvia Boyes, 62, both veterans of the Greenham Common protests 25 years ago, were arrested on 1 April after deliberately setting out to highlight SOCPA by trespassing on the US military spy-base at Menwith Hill.

SOCPA is another repressive piece of law in the armoury of laws which form the building blocks of Labour's police state. ■



British police, ready and waiting to arrest demonstrators, terrorise communities, suppress dissent and criminalise working class youth

Criminal justice reforms – another step on the road to social fascism

NICKI JAMESON

In June Prime Minister Tony Blair set out his manifesto for the 'reform' of the criminal justice system. Despite lip-service to the genuine problems faced by inner-city working class communities on drug and crime-ridden estates, his words were directed at the middle classes and labour aristocracy, whom Blair describes as 'ordinary, decent law-abiding folk...[who] think they play fair and play by the rules and they see too many people who don't, getting away with it'.

Blair's dishonest explanation for increased crime and alienation over the past 50 years is that, along with changed demography and a less cohesive society, 'a more prosperous nation is a more demanding nation. Prosperity increases the opportunity for crime and makes it more lucrative'.

But it is not increased prosperity

that characterises Britain under Labour, but increased inequality. Since 1997 the rich and middle class have grown better off while the poor have become poorer. In August 2005 research by the Office of National Statistics showed that the income gap between rich and poor has widened significantly under Labour.

Traditionally this situation would have resulted in at least a nod towards redistribution of wealth, usually through increased taxation of the better off. But Blair's Labour Party has no intention of taking anything away from the 'prosperous'; his sole aim is to attack the impoverished working class further. When he speaks of 'rebalance[ing]...in favour of the decent, law-abiding majority who play by the rules', he is actually setting out plans to tilt the scales still further against those already suffering the most. The poorest and most alienated will henceforth be targeted, monitored, and punished, not just for any crime they

might commit, but simply for being poor, for having children who are poor, or for being addicted to drugs. This is fascism.

Blair's concrete plans break down into four sections:

1. More laws. The power to arrest and bring immediately to court anyone who breaks an undertaking to have treatment for drug addiction. Swifter, summary powers to deal with anti-social behaviour. Changes to limits on the seizure of assets of suspects.
2. Special summary 'community courts', 'anti-social behaviour courts', 'drug courts' and 'domestic violence courts'.
3. Tracking of 'suspects and offenders' who will be 'given not just a sentence but an appropriate process for sorting their life out; and if they don't, be followed up, brought back to court'. Local authorities will be allowed to use non-compliance to limit entitlement to benefits and social welfare.
4. 'Public service reform' – in effect,



Blair – criminalising the working class from birth

more privatisation. It also includes 'giving the victim a right to be heard in relation to sentencing', which is code for lynch-mob justice.

Blair makes no apologies for this programme: 'We need far earlier intervention with some of these families, who are often socially excluded and socially dysfunctional. That may mean before they offend; and certainly before they want such intervention. But in truth, we can identify such families virtually as their children are born'.

These families are precisely those who are not benefiting from any 'increased prosperity'. Labour has singularly failed to honour its pledge to end child poverty. In Bristol where Blair delivered this speech, 26% of children live below the poverty line. In Britain's wealthy capital city, London, 41% of children live in poverty. But the 'intervention' that the government will be making in their lives is not to provide relief or assistance but simply punishment. ■

Attacks on the working class in Scotland

JOSEPH ESKOVITCH

The living standards of the working class across Britain are being attacked on all fronts as the bourgeoisie scrambles to extricate itself from the inherent contradictions of capitalism. In Scotland the process is particularly intense, and the Scottish proletariat faces the worst levels of poverty of the entire British working class.

A joint study by the University of Bristol and the University of Sheffield, published last year, found that health inequalities were the widest in Britain since Victorian times and exposed a ten-year difference in the life expectancy between the best and worst areas. The upper-class residents of Chelsea and Kensington live for 82.4 years on average; the population of the overwhelmingly working-class area of Glasgow City a mere 72.9 years.

However, the report hides the real extent of the problem. Average life expectancy for a male in Glasgow is 69.1 years; in Shettleston it is 63.9 years, falling to just 53.9 years in the area's Calton district – lower than in Madagascar and Eritrea. Unsurprisingly, the three areas in Glasgow with the lowest life expectancy (Shettleston, Maryhill and Springburn) are the poorest



Estimates show that 110,000 people in Glasgow claim state benefit, a quarter of the working age population

parliamentary constituencies in Britain. *Poverty: the facts*, published in 2004, further showed that 32% of the worst areas of unemployment in Britain are in Glasgow.

Indeed, unemployment is one of the principal scourges of the working class in Scotland. The Labour Party has consistently manipulated statistics: a study

carried out by the University of Glasgow in 2003 exposed unemployment figures in Glasgow as five times that claimed by the government. Latest estimates show that 110,000 people in Glasgow claim state benefit, a quarter of the working age population (Glasgow has a total population of 621,000). The government's figures were 18,000. The

study said that behind the government's numbers 'there is an army "of hidden unemployed"'. 70,000 people in Glasgow are now claiming incapacity and disability benefits. Reform of incapacity benefit, one of Labour's major platforms while in office constitutes a further attack on the working-class. Jon Knight, of the disability charity Leonard Chesh-

ire, said: 'The government's policies could end up making disabled people, already some of the poorest in society, even poorer'.

Low pay remains a serious issue. Yet another study in 2005 by the New Policy Institute found that 30% of Scotland's workforce, more than 500,000 employees, was paid less than £6.50 per hour, which, although above the minimum wage, is below the level suggested by the Scottish Low Pay Unit. Part-time workers, mostly women, were particularly likely to be low paid and half were earning less than £6.50 per hour. 50% of adults aged 25 to 50 without any Highers (Scottish 'A' levels) earned below £6.50 per hour.

Since the Labour Party took office, the only source of direct investment for public services has been private capital. The privatisation of school construction and maintenance has been worth billions, sold by the government, the Scottish Executive and Glasgow City Council as a necessary project of modernisation and sorely needed investment. However, as one news report put it, 'the scheme has been driven not by the educational needs of Glasgow's 30,000 secondary pupils, but corporate profitability'.

The only ones to benefit from the Executive's plans to overhaul or build 300 new schools in the next five years is the building consortia, set to draw massive profits. In Glasgow, the 3ED consortium, involving the Miller Group construction company, the Halifax bank and Hewlett Packard computers, will organise construction and retain operational control of the school buildings for the next 29 years. The city council will rent the buildings

from 3ED for an annual fee of £40.5 million and 600 ancillary staff will be transferred from local authority to private employers. At the end of the 29 years, the assets will return to city council control, after 3ED have recouped £1.2 billion – three or four times their initial outlay of £220-400 million.

The working class is also facing massive attacks on the housing front. Already in Glasgow the privatisation of social housing is firmly underway. According to campaign Edinburgh Against Stock Transfer (EAST), the principal result of stock transfer in Glasgow and other cities in England has been 'fat cat' salaries for housing association executives, higher rents and service charges, less security, a higher eviction rate, lack of landlord accountability, unnecessary demolitions to create room for private housing development and mergers and takeovers which increase the insecurity of tenancies. In 2004 the Chief Executive of the Glasgow Housing Association, which took over the running of the council's former council houses, 'earned' £161,000.

Privatisation means the houses of working-class tenants become an asset for private finance to secure profits. Any further investment in the long term needs of housing will belong to private finance; all local and central government accountability for the city's housing needs are removed. However, in Edinburgh tenants have already voted no to stock transfer (November 2005) and a grassroots campaign against housing privatisation is gaining strength, as working-class people defend themselves against the attacks of the Labour government.

Education notes

Reeding and riting with fonics

Synthetic phonics is the Labour government's preferred tool for teaching literacy to four-year-olds. Why? Why should successive education ministers favour one specific mode of learning to read and write English – a famously diverse melting pot of a language which lacks a systematic spelling system? Command and control is the answer. This authoritarian government imposes its will on the smallest details of daily practice in the state education system by enforcing specified criteria of performance for teachers, parents and pupils, by setting targets, testing, measuring, and assessing.

'You can keep on weighing the pig but it won't make it bigger'

Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers says, 'If the government sticks with the current high stakes testing regime, it will not meet its targets'. The most tested pupils in the world are failing to reach the standards set by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England. For example: Target: 85% of 11-year-olds achieving level 4 or above in English and Maths tests by 2006. Reality: in 2005, 79% achieved the benchmark in English, 75% in Maths. These statistics are not just some kind of raw data. They represent processes in the real world of school where life is dominated by government-imposed targets and teaching and learning is dom-

inated by criteria-referenced measurements.

The merger of PANDA and PAT

Teachers were roughly introduced to the idea of public accountability in 1985 when Tory Education Minister Kenneth Baker took five days off the annual holiday for training and introduced the National Curriculum. Since then education auditing has flourished into a £1m-a-year business and school data analysis has become a kingdom of its own. Ofsted (the Office of School Inspections, now including nurseries) rules here, although the DfES and the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) also have a role. The mass of statistical evidence now in use is mind-blowing. PANDA (Performance and Assessment Reports) present an overview of each school's performance in relation to other schools using data from the DfES, Ofsted and the QCA and indicate pupil progress shown by using contextualised value added scores (CVAs). What this means is that each pupil's test results in a given number of 'competencies' has been entered on a database with some modification for indices like English as a second language or free school dinners. But Ofsted is always on the move and has just announced 'Improved data usage and analysis: merger of PANDA and PAT (Pupil Achievement Tracker)', to be launched in summer 2006. Ofsted says:

'As part of the New Relation-

ship with Schools programme, Ofsted and the DfES are working together to streamline the provision of data analysis to schools. The new product will be known as RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School self-Evaluation). RAISEonline will provide schools, local authorities, School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and inspectors with a wide range of analytical information from one convenient source as well as providing schools with a tool for reviewing their performance data in greater depth as part of their self evaluation and target setting.'

Soon there will be no need for Ofsted inspectors to go into schools. They can simply look at statistics based on performance at key stages 1, 2 and 3, in only three subjects, add in the number crunching indices of social deprivation (CVAs) and calculate whether a school has added the required levels of value to a given percentage of pupils and is therefore failing or not. The DfES is indifferent to protests that the tests are so narrow as to be useless and that even Ken Boston, chief executive of the QCA, has publicly stated that they should be scrapped.

The real agenda

All this matters because the data decides schools' local and national rankings in the league tables. Schools found to be 'failing' can then be removed from local authorities and opened up to bids from businesses, religious groups or others interested in having (but not paying for) an input into education. The new independent state sector schools are the Labour government's present to its rich

friends who seek influence and business opportunities handed over under the banner of school 'ethos'. So keen is Jim Knight, schools' minister, on 'ethos' that he wants to give defence companies and the armed forces a role in running new trust schools.

The fightback is starting against this bullying and dismantling of the state education system. As so often it begins with recourse to the law as head teachers take legal advice about suing Ofsted for libel after being labelled 'failing' and 'need for improvement' schools. Similarly, parents are beginning to organise serious protest against plans to close local schools and establish big new academies in their place.

Susan Davidson

Stop kicking kids out of Manchester's schools!

In July *Manchester Evening News* detailed new government figures which show that nearly 10% of pupils are being suspended or expelled in high schools in parts of Greater Manchester. More than 12,000 secondary pupils served at least one fixed-period exclusion or suspension in 2004-05. This trend is rising, with a 15% increase in one year. Once again it is the children of working class families that are suffering.

In Salford, where poverty and unemployment are high, exclusions amount to 9.13% of the school population, in Manchester and Bury more than 8%, and in Oldham and Bolton more than 7% were expelled or suspended. And this attack extends to primary school children: 1,414 were suspended and 79 excluded in 2004-05.

Louis Brehony

Health advertisement speaks for itself

HANNAH CALLER

On 29 June the Department of Health placed an advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Union* inviting private companies to give their views on how they would run Primary Care Trusts (PCT). This was an open invitation to multinationals to manage services worth up to £64 billion.

Faced with outrage from health professionals and union reps, ministers initially defended the policy, then backtracked and withdrew the advertisement to correct a 'drafting error'. It finally emerged that the only real error was that the advertisement should not have appeared before ministers had announced the policy.

Commissioning treatments and services is currently the responsibility of local NHS managers employed by PCTs. PCTs control about 80% of the NHS budget in England. A recent report showed that nine of the 32 foundation trusts had concerns as to whether their local PCT would pay for work done and are budgeting for a deficit.

Under the new system, the PCTs would contract out the commissioning to multinational companies. Contenders include the US companies United Health and Kaiser Permanente, British insurers such as BUPA and PPP, and United Health Europe. The presi-



Labour is trying to privatise commissioning treatments and services for the NHS

dent of United Health Europe is Simon Stevens, a former health adviser to Blair.

The advert said the NHS was making a 'step change from a service provider to a commissioning-led organisation'. PCTs would be able to contract out procurement, financial management and human resources.

Patricia Hewitt was forced to state that: 'there is no question whatsoever of privatising the NHS' but former health secretary Frank Dobson was blunter: 'It is about putting multinational companies in the driving seat of the NHS'. In January, North Eastern Derbyshire PCT invited United Health Europe to run two general practices. In May Barking and Dagenham PCT signed a £5 million contract with Care UK to provide GP services for over 7,000 people.

Nigeria

Imperialist thirst for oil devastates a nation

Decades of anger and frustration in Nigeria have exploded into war between the people, and their government and the oil multinationals, ChevronTexaco, TotalFinaElf, Agip and Royal Dutch Shell, who have grown fat on the exploitation of Nigeria's resources. CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

British multinational Shell is the major foreign operator, through a joint venture with Nigeria's state oil company, NNPC, controlling about 50% of Nigeria's oil. 95% of this is extracted from the southern Niger Delta region, where the war is concentrated. The fightback has reached a more militant and organised phase. Resistance groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and the Martyr's Brigade, have emerged, calling for an end to 'the criminal exploitation of the Niger Delta protected territory, in collaboration with imperialist Great Britain and the dubious occupation Nigerian state'.

Since 2003, attacks against foreign oil firms in the region have intensified, with oil workers and their Nigerian guards captured by armed militants and local youths, demanding a larger share of oil revenues and compensation for the environmental destruction caused by oil exploration. Explosions of oil facilities and pipelines now occur almost weekly. By July 2006, 31 oil workers had been taken hostage this year. In April, a car bomb exploded inside a military base in Port Harcourt in southern Nigeria. In May, a US oil worker was shot dead also in Port Harcourt.

In February, the Nigerian military bombed several villages in Warri South-West killing at least 15 civilians, under the pretext of targeting 'saboteurs, oil smugglers and bunker-



Odioma village was burned to the ground by government troops in 2005

ers' (who siphon oil from pipes). The Nigerian military used a civilian airstrip operated by Shell to launch the attack. In February 2005 in Odioma village, Bayelsa State, the army murdered up to 30 people, raped women and razed over 100 houses, leaving charred bodies lying in the rubble.

Despite encouragement from the British House of Lords in April, which praised the 'courageous leadership' of the president and backed its commitment to 'stabilising' the country to the hilt, the Nigerian government is in fact at a loss as to how to respond to the

growing militancy and seems more concerned with rigging next year's elections to maintain its tenuous grip on power. The possibility has emerged of military intervention in Nigeria by the US and Britain. Since February 2006 rising attacks have reduced the country's daily production of 2.4m barrels by a quarter.

British imperialism has dominated Nigeria economically, politically and militarily for centuries. The IMF 'loaned' Nigeria \$5bn in 1980; by 2004, Nigeria had repaid \$16bn but still owed \$33bn. Britain is Nigeria's

biggest creditor, with 21% of its debt. Nigeria spends 15 times more on debt repayments than on health. Some 79,000 children under five die every month from poverty-related causes. Nigeria's 'debt relief', gleefully announced by the G8 last June, meant Nigeria had to hand over \$12bn to the Paris Club of lenders, to be 'forgiven' \$18bn. Oil provides 95% of Nigeria's export revenue and accounts for 25% of GDP and is controlled by a corrupt military and political elite. Nigeria will be the world's single largest exporter of liquid natural gas in five years and is the world's eighth largest producer of crude oil, exporting 2m barrels daily, generating \$118bn in the first quarter of 2006, when international market prices still averaged \$60 per barrel. Some £220bn was stolen by Nigeria's rulers between 1960 and 1999. Africa's oil, and Nigeria's in particular, is vital to the global economy, especially with the resistance to imperialism in the Middle East and an anti-imperialist government in Venezuela.

Shell in Nigeria

Between 1958 and 2004, the Niger Delta region has generated some \$360bn in oil wealth. None of this money has been seen by the people of the Niger Delta. Much of it is laundered through British banks, such as HSBC and Barclays. Meanwhile the people of the Niger Delta region live in poverty; 70% lack basic facilities such as running water, electricity, hospitals and medicines and proper housing. The vast majority of the 140 million Nigerians subsist on about 50p a day – £155 per year.

Oil production has destroyed the environment in the Niger Delta, which is criss-crossed by rusty, leaking, high-pressure oil and gas pipelines which regularly burst or explode. Spills are left for decades. By 2001 there had been 4,835 oil spills totaling almost 2.4 million barrels of crude in the region (*This Day*, 3 August 2001). The area is full of polluted water, emulsified oil pouring into fields, pools of sulphur, and polluted air from the daily flaring of 1.1bn cubic feet of

gas. Though flaring gas from oil wells in Nigeria was banned in 1969, it is still burning, producing more carbon emissions than everywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa put together. Sticky soot plasters surrounding communities. In April 2006, Shell was ordered by a high court in Lagos to stop the flaring, but refused to do so 'until 2009'. Shell was also fined \$1.5bn for polluting the Niger Delta, but refused to pay pending appeal.

Shell also has its own armed militia – the 'Shell Police' or 'Kill and Go' – to defend its interests in the region. It has admitted importing hand guns into the Niger Delta, and supplies weapons and money to rival ethnic groups, a classic divide-and-rule tactic. Chevron-Texaco has leased helicopters to the military to attack local demonstrators in Southern Ondo State. In February 2006 former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw announced £250,000 funding for the Metropolitan police to train their Nigerian counterparts in tackling 'violent drug gangs'. There is also direct arming by the US, Britain and other EU nations, through army training programmes worth millions in funding annually.

But this exploitation has led to rebellion. There have been many protests, strikes, and demonstrations which have been met with brutal repression by Nigeria's 'security' forces, who also instigate and exacerbate ethno-religious conflicts. Defenceless villages have also been bombed with helicopter gunships.

Over 10,000 people have been extra-judicially executed by government security agents; civilians have been maimed and tortured and women raped. In one state alone, 53,000 people have been killed in less than three years. As usual the war is described as 'ethnic rivalry' between different tribes.

This deliberately masks the role of imperialism in fuelling the war, importing arms and creating ethnic divisions to keep indigenous ethnic groups at each other's throats, in order to maintain the plunder of Nigeria's resources.

DR Congo

Imperialists organise war and plunder

On 30 July 2006, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire) will go to the polls for presidential and national assembly elections against a background of a war that has ravaged the country since 1998 and in which over four million people have died. IRENEE KAYEMBE reports.

The DRC, in central Africa, is the third biggest country in Africa with a population of approximately 60 million; it borders nine other countries. The British media occasionally reports the war as an 'ethnic' war – this is not true. The DRC has the world's largest deposits of copper, cobalt, coltan and cadmium, as well as chrome, timber, tin, rubber, oil, uranium, germanium, diamonds and gold and the war is to control these resources.

In 1998 DRC's eastern neighbours, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, illegally invaded the country with the tacit backing of the US, EU and UN. Armed groups from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, and Angola, plus the Congolese army, have been fighting ever since for control over mining rights. American William Swing, UN ambassador to the DRC, commands 17,000 men; Belgian Louis Michel leads an 1,600-strong EU mission. These 'peacekeepers' are more powerful than presidents.

According to a 2005 UN report, the

armed forces of the DRC and the other foreign armies/militias are committing war crimes, including massacres of civilians, mass rapes of women and girls and summary executions. Since January 2006, 90,000 people have fled violence in Rutshuru in eastern DRC. 80% of Congolese women of all ages have been raped at least once by military forces. Mass graves are found all over DRC by UN officials containing the remains of thousands of people killed after beatings, torture, rape and extortion. Between 15,000 and 30,000 children, many aged between 14 and 16, serve the armed groups as forced labour, porters, combatants, and sex slaves.

To control DRC, the US and EU are using the same strategy used at the turn of the 19th century by King Leopold II of Belgium who sent in the notorious early imperialist Henry Morton Stanley. In 1885 the king turned Congo into his private state, exploiting the boom in rubber with violent oppression. In 1905 the Belgian state took over and repression

continued as the colony was milked of its resources.

Formal independence from Belgium came in 1960, but in 1961 the US and Belgium assassinated Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically-elected Congolese prime minister. As the world market in copper and cobalt boomed, they organised a number of rebellions and ended up putting Joseph Mobutu in power after a coup d'état in 1965. His rule was sustained through terror, including televised hangings of opposition members.

Eventually Mobutu was booted out, after the war in 1997 and Laurent Desiré Kabila became the new imperialist-backed president, deploying Rwandan troops, military chiefs and civil servants.

Though a drunkard and a womaniser, Laurent Kabila shocked the imperialists by turning out to be a nationalist. He nationalised the diamond industry and wanted to get rid of Rwandan military and civil servants. He made links with Libya and prepared to sell uranium to the Arab

world. As a result, he, like Lumumba, was assassinated.

The current DRC President, Joseph Kabila, a Rwandan employed in Laurent Kabila's administration, is no relation but simply an imperialist puppet with a convenient name-tag. The imperialists continue to give the instructions through Rwanda and Uganda.

The production of laptops and mobile phones depends on coltan and cassiterite, found only in the DRC, Australia and in one Asian country. In the DRC these vital minerals can be mined with no taxes and no need to respect working conditions or human rights. The UN has blocked attempts to investigate the illegal exploitation of DRC's resources.

Meanwhile, the looting continues – every day corrupt DRC politicians and western corporations conclude new business deals. According to a UN report in October 2003, high level political, military and business networks are stealing the DRC's mineral resources, and by 2002, they had transferred at least \$5 billion of assets from the state mining sector to private western companies, including 18 British firms such as Anglo American, DeBeers, Afrimex and Barclays Bank (*The Observer*, 6 February 2005).

Rwandan exports of coltan, cassiterite, gold and diamonds have increased fivefold, yet none of these are found in Rwanda. There are 15 flights a day transporting minerals from the DRC to EU and the US via Rwanda and South Africa. Since the start of the 'transitional' government of dictator Joseph Kabila in June 2003, armed groups linked to Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, together with DRC government officials, have continued their

illegal plunder of the people and resources of the DRC.

Now the imperialists plan to intensify the plunder by legitimising their puppet president in the forthcoming fake elections. They have already succeeded in overturning the previous constitutional stipulation that the Congolese state is the sole owner of all mineral resources.

Opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, a nationalist in the mould of Lumumba, embodies the people's aspirations. His political party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress, has held demonstrations, pickets, campaigns and boycotts denouncing imperialism. He has been forced out of the elections. In March 2006 in Kinshasa, Tshisekedi said:

'In this country there is an independent people, free and sovereign, a people with an opinion, a people with legitimate aspirations just like those of the people of developed countries, a people with social and political forces and leaders representing their interests and claims. If the USA and EU continue to ignore these people, their force and their leaders, we, the representatives of the people will continue ignoring the US and EU.'

The June 2005 Lutundula Commission found that most mining and other business contracts signed by 'rebels' and government authorities are either illegal or 'of limited value for the development of DRC', and should be terminated. The UN and Belgium have refused to publish their own information regarding illegal deals. Meanwhile, on the ground, UN trucks, aircraft and helicopters are being used to carry weapons into Congolese territory in order to carry out massacres.

Chronicle of a war foretold US plans to destroy Cuba

The United States administration plans to increase the millions of dollars it is already pouring into its covert war against socialist Cuba in what US President Bush has described as a 'compact' with the Cuban people to support them 'as they transition from the repressive control of the Castro regime to freedom and a genuine democracy'.
Cat Wiener reports

A draft report from the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, chaired by Condoleezza Rice, was leaked at the beginning of July. It recommends that \$80m (£43m) be poured into Cuba over the next two years to boost 'civil society' (US front organisations and dissident groups) and plan for a 'post-Castro' transition (to capitalism). It focuses in particular on recommendations for destabilising Cuba in the event of Castro's death. Under the plans for 'transition', administered by a US-appointed bureaucrat, Cuba would, in the words of Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, 'be liquidated. It would simply disappear'.

In 2004, the Commission issued its first report, with six recommended steps to 'promote regime change' in Cuba. These can be summarised as:

- promoting dissidence
- intimidating the country politically
- strangling the economy
- making accusations of 'dangerous military capacity'
- demonising the government
- imposing US occupation

Such blatant disregard for national sovereignty and international law was met with outrage at the time. Although in essence this report is more of the same, it glosses its proposals by saying change must come from 'within Cuba', backed by US support – and then goes on to recommend actions including the dismantling of all the apparatus of the socialist state, reorganising the economy and educational system and holding 'multiparty' elections (from which communists will be excluded).

However, it is clear that if political and economic coercion fails, the US has even more sinister plans in store – contained in a secret annex to the report which remains classified for 'security reasons'. As Ricardo Alarcon told reporters in Havana: 'What's most important is that they admit to a secret plan to overthrow another government. What on earth could the secret part say when the public part violates all kinds of international law?'

So outrageous and illegal are the proposals that even Cuban 'dissidents' in Cuba are seeking to distance themselves from their paymasters, describing the report as 'counter-productive'. Veteran observer of US-Cuban relations Wayne S Smith, who served as Chief of the US Interests Section in Havana from

1979-82, has roundly condemned the report, arguing that its basic premise – that Cuba is on the verge of collapse – is simply wrong:

'The Cuban economy has shown strong signs of reinvigoration. Even the CIA gives it a growth rate of 8%. Cuba has new and vitally important economic relationships with Venezuela and China... Things are looking up, not down.'

Cuba's political system is robust, he argues, its social gains impressive and the Bush plan illegal and 'meddlesome'. 200 British Labour MPs have signed an Early Day Motion organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign calling for Britain to develop its own relations with Cuba and distancing Britain from the US proposals. However, in November 2005 the Foreign Office held a secret meeting with Caleb McCarty, US Cuba Transition Co-ordinator.

The 'democratic transition' envisaged by Condoleezza Rice and her ilk would herald a return to the brutal neo-liberal reality from which the Cuban people liberated themselves in 1959 and which is faced today by the oppressed peoples of the world. But what is certain is that the Cuban people are organised and prepared to defend their Revolution – which was never about just one great revolutionary – against every form of imperialist aggression, sabotage and subversion.

Rock around the Blockade

The next Rock around the Blockade brigade will be going to Cuba next spring. We need to raise £3,000 to take a sound system for the Union of Young Communists to use in their political and recreational work. With the revolutionary commitment of the Cuban people reinvigorated through the Battle of Ideas and revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements on the ascendant in Venezuela and Bolivia, with Cuba playing a significant role, this is an exciting time to get involved in our work in solidarity with socialist Cuba.

Over the last months we have been active throughout the country raising awareness about Cuba and raising funds for the sound system. In Manchester and London we have held street stalls demanding the closing down of the US concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, in illegally-occupied Cuba.

Activists in the north east campaigned in solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela at Newcastle Green Festival in June and at Durham Miners Gala in July, where an RATB member spoke. On 15 July a Rebel Music gig was held in Durham, with the 'revolutionary punk' of bands Community of Learners and Cheap Antiques raising money for the RATB brigade. In Nottingham in June a successful Bacardi Bar Bust saw activists dressed as bats visiting the bars of Nottingham to ask drinkers to boycott Bacardi, a key link in the chain of terror emanating from the US against Cuba.

www.ratb.org.uk

Cuban 5 Week of Action

Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, Rene Gonzalez and Fernando Gonzalez, heroes of the Cuban Revolution, in prison in the US for defending Cuba against sabotage and terrorism, have been incarcerated for eight years, despite having their convictions overturned by the US Court of Appeals in Atlanta last August.

In September there will be an International Week of Action calling for their release. RATB will be active up and down the country with meetings, discussions, film showings and demonstrations to help raise the profile of these freedom fighters. Get involved!

Training doctors for the world's poor



Seven young Honduran medical students hold the Honduran flag. They are studying in Cuba free of charge. Once qualified, they will return to work as doctors in their home country, where they would not have been able to afford medical training.

Cuba, though a poor country, has made this possible for these students, and for many more of the poor from Latin America – benefiting both the medics themselves and the poor and sick in their countries of origin. The Latin American School of Medicine in Havana, Cuba, has 10,000 students from across Latin America at any one time – all studying for free as part of Cuba's commitment to enabling access to health care for as many poor Latin Americans as possible. Cuba has also sent 52,000 of its own doctors and health-care workers to help in more than 90 oppressed countries – all free of charge.

Also pictured are two friends of the Hondurans – Rafael Sanchez (left) and Rigoberto Delgado (right). In the 1950s Rafael and Rigoberto were both members of the 26 July Movement, led by Fidel Castro, that fought against the tyrannical, US-supported regime of Fulgencio

Batista. Rafael, then a factory worker, and Rigoberto, then a cobbler, were both imprisoned by the Batista regime as a result of their efforts to free ordinary Cubans from the poverty, inequality and oppression of the US-supported regime. Rafael told me that on one of the occasions when he and Rigoberto were arrested under the Batista regime, the police handcuffed him and 20 others and took them on a public bus to transport them to prison. The police didn't have a pair of handcuffs for Rigoberto, however, and so merely pushed him on to the bus alongside the other prisoners. The passengers on the bus reacted with distaste and alarm when they saw the handcuffed prisoners. Rigoberto shouted out 'Don't worry – these people are not thieves or robbers, they are political prisoners who are fighting for the people against Batista!', whereupon the passengers on the bus attempted to rescue the prisoners from the police.

Rigoberto opens an old cardboard box which contains his life's history, old photographs of his detention in Havana and the visa issued by the Mexican embassy in the 1950s. He had been selected to

participate in the Granma expedition – the launch of the revolutionary struggle in Cuba – but was excluded when the Mexican authorities became suspicious. He tells of his time as the director of police in Jaruco after the Revolution, and the struggle he and Rafael undertook against counter-revolutionary bandits.

The two men also recall their sadness at the loss of close friends including a comrade, David Hernandez, tortured and then murdered by Batista's police. Both men are proud of their socialism and the triumphs of the Revolution. They say that they, the Cubans, will win the Battle of Ideas, and that 'un mundo mejor es posible' – a better world is possible, through socialism.

Amaya and Kely are two of the young Hondurans studying at the Latin American School of Medicine. Amaya says 'Without the struggle of both Rigoberto and Rafael we

would have never had the opportunity to study medicine. We owe them so much'. Kely adds: 'My mother supported the Cuban Revolution and even though I'm not Cuban I have had direct gains from the triumph, as have almost all of Latin America and other poor countries of the world.'

The Revolution of 1959 would not have succeeded without extraordinary 'ordinary' people like Rafael and Rigoberto, and young people today from poor backgrounds across Latin America – like the young Hondurans pictured – would not have had the opportunity to become doctors without the success of the Cuban Revolution.

This is just an illustration of some of the things at stake as right-wing politicians and their wealthy friends in the US increase their aggression towards Cuba and their determination to impose their own system on the Cuban people. If they succeed, not only will the vast majority of Cubans suffer, but poor people from across Latin America will lose the opportunities that revolutionary Cuba currently gives them.

Denis Doody, UCATT National Executive member for Yorkshire and Richard Burgon Thompsons Solicitors, (both in personal capacity)

Fidel Castro: revolutionary at 80

From Havana, Ariel Perez Pereda, a 19-year-old member of the Union of Young Communists and one of Cuba's new generation of revolutionaries, writes:

'On 13 August we will be celebrating the birthday of one of the most loved and popular of revolutionary leaders, that of our Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, unrivalled leader of the first proletarian revolution in Latin America. We will be celebrating yet another year of achievements, of completed tasks, of plans for the future and, without doubt, yet another year in which we can count on his wisdom, his teachings and his unshakeable conviction that our people are advancing towards an ever brighter future.'

'We, the communist youth, promise

that he can count on us in the frontline of battle, that each of us will defend our Revolution to our last breath and that we are ready to take on any task.'

'On a day like today, 80 years ago, a new hope was born for Cuba and for the world: someone whose vision would inspire so many people, open up a path of salvation for our people and change the course of history in favour of the dispossessed.'

'By one of history's happy coincidences, we celebrate the birthday of another great man at the same time, that of our hero Rene Gonzalez [of the Cuban 5] – in the midst of a historic battle against imperialism and war, for peace and for solidarity.'

'Never underestimate what it means to us, the communist youth, to be able to count on a leader and a comrade who has such faith in the young people of Cuba, the heirs of his political legacy who will continue the work he started and who today, more than ever, are surging for-

wards to become the most educated, informed and well-prepared population in the world.'

Message from Mumia Abu Jamal

'Fidel, with his determination, his profound humanism, has become a legend of the 20th and now the 21st century.'

'I'm sure people around the world, in the US, in Brazil, in Venezuela, in South Africa and beyond join with me in wishing millions of birthday greetings to this revolutionary: *Feliz cumpleaños, Fidel!*

'Cuba represents the power of resistance and survival against tremendous odds. It also represents the power of the small over the mighty. It is, in the words of Assata Shakur, a *palestine* (in slavery days in Brazil) – a place of freedom amidst capitalist tyranny.'

Mumia Abu Jamal, imprisoned black revolutionary writer and broadcaster, interview with Rafael Rodriguez-Cruz
26 May 2006

IRAQ

Growing resistance – imperialists sink further

When the US and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003, leading proponents of the war such as Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other neo-cons expected a swift victory using their overwhelming fire power in 'shock and awe' tactics. They would establish a friendly Iraq and stabilise access to Middle East oil at a time when the West's principal ally in the region, Saudi Arabia, was becoming increasingly problematic. Above all the war would send a warning shot across the bows of any potential challenger to US hegemony. Iraq would become a base for further US assertiveness, both in the region and beyond, as the US, with Britain tagging along, used its global military domination to prevent an economic crisis for imperialism becoming a political one. JIM CRAVEN reports.

Over three years later and the US and British troops remain bogged down in Iraq, sinking deeper every day. Their allies in the 'coalition of the willing', who hoped to gather crumbs from the imperial table, dwindle. Spain, Netherlands, Ukraine, Philippines, Nicaragua and Honduras have already withdrawn their troops. In June, Italy and Japan announced they would pull out by the end of the year. Not that their military contribution amounted to much but their retreat indicates that neither the war nor the US have the support they had. The war has destabilised the region and tied down imperialism.

Confusion in US ranks

In the US support for the war has fallen to 40%. The Bush administration is torn between keeping the necessary force in Iraq and bringing troops home, both for political reasons, with an eye on upcoming mid-term elections, and to prepare for other actions. At the end of May an extra 1,500 US troops had to be sent to Iraq just five months after the number of brigades had been cut from 17 to 15. The confusion in the ranks of the US ruling class was illustrated in June when US commander in Iraq, General George Casey, announced plans to reduce the number of brigades by two this September and cut the remaining troops by half by the end of 2007.

The announcement immediately had cold water thrown on it by President Bush's press secretary Tony Snow. In order to try and allow the withdrawal of ground troops and reduce its casualties, the US increasingly relies on aerial bombardment. According to a report in *Voices from the Wilderness* newsletter US warplanes attacked twice as many Iraqi cities in the period October 2005 to February 2006 as they did in the same period a year earlier. Daily bombing runs and missile launches from jets also increased by 50% between the two periods.

However, no matter what troop reductions the US might achieve in the short term it has no intention of withdrawing completely from Iraq, for to do so would be a major blow to its strategy of global military domination. On the contrary, as reported previously in *FRFI*, the US is building four major airbases in Iraq that presently house 55,000 troops. Two of the bases are strategically placed to secure Iraq's main oil reserves and three of the four could be used to attack Iran. Additionally, in Baghdad the US is building the world's biggest embassy, the size of Vatican City and totally self-sufficient.

Another puppet government

When a new Iraqi government was finally formed in May, five months after the elections, it was hailed by the imperialists as another landmark for progress and democracy in Iraq. The government, however, was largely the creation of the US Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, anxious to ensure the majority Shia parties did not have a monopoly so as to keep on board some of the Sunni groups and prevent a hardening of the armed resistance. It took a further month to appoint heads to the defence and interior ministries, which had become strongholds of the Shia militias respon-

sible for many of the sectarian killings against Sunnis. The new government has made very little difference. Ministries remain the fiefdom of whatever faction holds the ministerial post. Corruption is rife and most ministers remain cosseted in the heavily fortified Green Zone. They cannot be dismissed because that would upset the balance of perks and privileges. When the Shia Fadila group lost control of the oil ministry it retaliated by interfering with oil production in southern Iraq. This important ministry was handed to Hussein al-Saristani, who then called for the centralisation of oil contracts and preparation for foreign investment.

That the new government remains a puppet of the imperialist occupiers was graphically illustrated when Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki announced the capture and killing on 7 June of Musab Al Zaqawi, self-styled leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Maliki was flanked by US commander General George Casey and Zalmay Khalilzad. When Al Maliki suggested that all but two of Iraq's provinces could be under control of Iraqi security forces by the end of the year, British Prime Minister Blair immediately contradicted him. Blair said the policy was not to set dates but to decide according to the level of violence and the preparedness of the Iraqi forces. In June the Iraqi government announced a 'peace deal', including an



amnesty for some resistance fighters, a review of the policy preventing ex-Ba'athists taking senior civil service and armed forces positions and a schedule for withdrawal of occupying forces. Some Sunni resistance groups have had informal talks with the Iraqi president and the US ambassador. The key question was the withdrawal of imperialist forces. But while the Iraqi government was promising a fixed timetable for withdrawal, a British government official insisted that British troops would remain in Iraq until at least 2010.

Divide and rule creates sectarian violence

Meanwhile, sectarian violence spirals. The day after the June 'peace plan' announcement, two bombs in Baquba and Hillah killed at least 40 people on a day when there were 22 other deaths. A few days later at least 66 people were killed and more than a hundred injured by a car bomb in Baghdad. Throughout the country Shias, Sunnis and Kurds are fleeing from areas where they are in the minority. This is not through mutual

hostility; there is a remarkable degree of unity among the Iraqi people against the occupation and in favour of living together as Iraqis. Rather, the people are victims of a chain of attacks and counter-attacks instigated by militias created by the imperialists to assist them in the early days of the occupation. The imperialists are more than happy to ignore the sectarian violence while it prevents united resistance to their occupation from emerging. Indeed, there is evidence that imperialist troops have provoked sectarian violence by planting bombs at holy sites.

Resistance grows – imperialist atrocities mount

Despite this the resistance movement continues to gather strength. In the first four months of 2006 attacks on the British were up by more than a quarter compared with 2005, rising to a total of over 100 attacks in April. Central Basra is a no-go area for British troops. In May Prime Minister Al Maliki announced a state of emergency in Basra province. With the complete disregard for the blindingly obvious, habitually demonstrated by the Bush administration, US Vice-President Cheney claimed for the second time in just over a year that the resistance movement was 'in its last throes'. A report from the British parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee on 2 July, however, admit-

ted there had been a 'worrying' deterioration in what it called the security situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

By early July a total of 113 British, 2,547 US and 113 other troops had been killed in Iraq together with 100 journalists and over 350 private contractors. 20,000 occupying troops had been wounded. One in five of US and British troops who have served in Iraq since 2003 suffers mental health problems. US Colonel Dan Smith predicts there will eventually be more than 200,000 totally disabled veterans never able to work. Latest estimates from the US Congressional Research Service state that at the present rate of expenditure of \$9.7 billion a month the Bush administration will have spent over \$500 billion on Iraq, Afghanistan and associated military activities by the end of 2007; enough to provide adequate food, shelter, health and education for everyone in the world for two years. There has been a sharp increase in desertions from the British forces during the Iraq war – over 1,000 since 2003. Hard drug abuse in the British Army has increased by 50%



'... the people are victims of a chain of attacks and counter-attacks instigated by militias created by the imperialists to assist them in the early days of the occupation'

in five years. British Army recruitment is running 27% below target. Soldiers are offered a £1,300 bounty to recruit friends.

Evidence of atrocities committed by the occupying forces continues to be revealed. In Haditha on 19 November 2005 US marines shot 24 civilians, including seven women and three children, after an army driver had been killed by a roadside bomb. The marines tried to claim that most of the victims had been killed in the road blast and that others were 'insurgents', but video evidence of the slaughter has come to light supporting accusations that the marines went on a revenge rampage and shot the Iraqi villagers in cold blood. On 15 March 2006 in Ishaqi 11 people, again including women and children, were bound and blindfolded and shot by US troops according to reports from Iraqi police and video evidence obtained by the BBC. Witnesses said those murdered were herded into one room that was later destroyed by the soldiers to try and bury the bodies. An enquiry by the US military concluded there is insufficient evidence to prosecute the soldiers. Seven US marines and a sailor have been accused of conspiracy, kidnap and murder in the case of the death of an unarmed civilian in Hamandiyah in April. The troops are said to have fixed evidence to suggest the man was planting a roadside bomb. Another four US soldiers have been charged with shooting and killing three civilians on 9 May, and on 30 June the Pentagon announced an inquiry into the case of five soldiers alleged to have raped an Iraqi woman and killed her and three members of her family. Even puppet Prime Minister Al Maliki was moved to rattle his strings, complaining about the 'daily' violence against unarmed civilians by the US military. 'They run them over and leave them, or they kill anyone suspicious. This cannot be accepted,' he said. He included a promise to stop abuse by US and British troops in his 'peace plan'. Quite how Al Maliki intended to enforce this was never spelled out.

The *New York Times* has made more revelations of the torture of Iraqi prisoners. An elite US Special Operations unit known as Task Force 6-26 operating at top secret camps throughout the country 'beat prisoners with rifle butts, yelled and spat in their faces'. Some detainees 'were stripped naked and had cold water thrown on them to cause the sensation of drowning'. Over 50,000 people have been imprisoned since 2003, almost all without charge or access to legal process. The US admits at least 14,000 are still being held. Among them, despite attempts by the imperialists to conceal the fact, are children and

women, who have not only suffered torture but sexual abuse and rape.

Life deteriorates

For Iraq's people the miseries of daily life deepen. The average number of multiple fatality bombings rose from 23 per month in the first part of 2005 to 41 per month in 2006. During June over 1,500 bodies from violent deaths were sent to Baghdad mortuary. No-one knows how many Iraqis have died altogether because the occupying forces have never considered it worthwhile to count their deaths. Iraq Body Count says between 39,116 and 43,568 have been killed by military intervention since the start of the war but these are only deaths confirmed by at least two independent sources. The total will be much higher.

20% of the population live in absolute poverty. Unemployment is estimated at around 50%. Prices have risen while wages have fallen. Inflation has increased by more than 30%. Lack of public interest laws, environmental regulations or worker protection mean imperialist corporations operating in Iraq can extract maximum profits from the country's resources and working class. In August 2005 the puppet government passed Decree 8750, which gave them detailed control over trade unions with the power to freeze assets and disband them. In May striking dockworkers were arrested in Basra.

The UN has reported that 400,000 Iraqi children are suffering 'dangerous deficiencies of protein'. Deaths from malnutrition and preventable diseases have increased. Typhoid and tuberculosis sweep the country. Dust from depleted uranium weapons has poisoned much of Iraq. Thousands of Iraqis have lost limbs from mines and other explosive devices. Water, sewerage and electricity supplies are below pre-war levels. A leaked memo from the US Ambassador to Condoleezza Rice about life in Baghdad said electricity supplies averaged only four to eight hours a day and one suburb had not had power for a month, but that when a new government minister was appointed his apartment block immediately received a 24-hour-a-day supply.

The network of hospitals and health centres has been severely damaged by the war and looting. The US military attacked hospitals to prevent them giving out casualty figures. In 2005 the UN reported that 84% of higher education establishments had been 'destroyed, damaged and robbed'. Religious bigotry is rife. As many as a million Iraqis have fled the country to Jordan, Egypt and Syria; mainly the educated professional and middle classes. The poor stay and suffer.



AFGHANISTAN

Resistance flares in face of British forces

When the then British Defence Secretary John Reid announced in April that an extra 3,200 British troops were to be sent to Afghanistan, he said he hoped they might get through their deployment without a shot being fired. This was a preposterously disingenuous statement meant to sustain the stereotypical image of British 'Tommy Atkins' as the friendly peacemaker risking his life to bring harmony to troublesome foreigners. The reality is that the level of violence is now greater than at any time since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Over 600 people were killed in May alone. The British force is carrying out ruthless search and destroy missions, engaging in firefights with the Taliban and other resistance fighters every day. As junior defence minister Tom Watson more truthfully admitted on 3 July, 'That was why we sent an armoured battle group, artillery and Apache attack helicopters.' Still the deceit continued. The same day the Ministry of Defence said there were no plans to increase the total force on the ground and

denied reports that commanders had called for more armoured vehicles, helicopters and jets. A few days later it was announced that a further 800 British Army personnel were going to Afghanistan along with extra support ordinance. This will bring the total British presence in Afghanistan to around 6,000, approaching the 7,200 in Iraq. The total NATO force in Afghanistan is 25,000, including US troops, and came under British command in July.

Despite all this, the resistance to imperialist occupation is growing. On 30 May a recklessly driven US Humvee ploughed into civilians in Kabul killing five Afghans. In the riots that followed Afghan police joined the demonstrators. Twelve people were killed when US troops fired on the protesters. Hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed the town of Musa Qala on 18 May, killing 13 police. They now have control of the area around Kandahar and hit the airbase there with two rockets at the end of June. In an attack on the British base at Sangin on 2 July two British soldiers were killed. Troops there face fierce resistance from local people. Six British

soldiers were killed in less than four weeks at the beginning of the summer. For the first time the resistance entered Kabul at the beginning of July when four bombs exploded in 48 hours.

Destruction of the poppy harvest is sometimes cited as a major justification for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. It is the source of 87% of the world's opium. Valued at \$2.7 billion a year it constitutes more than 50% of the Afghan economy. Western officials admit that this year's harvest will be the biggest ever.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, totally ineffectual, vilified and isolated in his heavily fortified presidential palace, was praised by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during a visit at the end of June. Not to be outdone by Dick Cheney and John Reid for completely distorting reality, Rice said, 'I don't know anyone who is more admired and respected in the international community than President Karzai for his wisdom and for his courage to lead this country, first in the defeat of the Taliban and now in building a democratic and unified Afghanistan.'

The Supreme Court has ruled that military tribunals at Guantanamo contravene both the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners and the US code of military justice.

Guantanamo

Labour refuses to request release of British residents from illegal torture camp

In January 2002, following the invasion of Afghanistan, US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld defended the detention of suspects held in cages open to the elements at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, saying: 'Let there be no doubt, the treatment of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay is proper, it's humane, it's appropriate, and it is fully consistent with international conventions. To be in an 8-by-8 cell in beautiful, sunny Guantanamo, Cuba, is not inhumane treatment.'

Recent events have shown that there is no doubt that the prisoners have been denied their rights under the Geneva Convention and that Rumsfeld has been personally involved in developing a torture regime at the camp. At the time of writing, 460 prisoners are still being held but only ten have been charged to appear before a US Military Commission.

There have been at least 25 suicide attempts at Guantanamo in the last four years and in the latest horror to reach the outside world, on 10 June three prisoners' bodies were found hanging in their cells.

The US authorities claimed that the two Saudis and a Yemeni had hanged themselves using their bedclothes, and tried to deflect criticism and sympathy for the prisoners. One official, Colleen Graffy, even described the men's deaths as a 'good PR move to draw attention'. She said it was hard to see why the men had not protested about their situation – ignoring the fact that two of the men had been on hunger strike since August 2005, along with many other detainees.

Moazzam Begg, who spent three years in Guantanamo, is probably a more reliable source than Ms Graffy. He said of the prisoners: 'They're in a worse situation than convicted criminals and it's an act of desperation.'

A statement released by the former British Guantanamo detainees on 13 June cast doubt on the official version of the deaths. 'It has been reported that the three men died in Camp 1 (Delta). We know that the only isolation block in Camp 1 is "India", where there are no places to attach or tie anything, since the cells are made of sheet steel welded together. In our experience, suicide attempts in this camp could only be, and were, made in the main cellblocks, where the cells were constructed of meshed steel, through which sheets could be threaded. Those of us who ever witnessed a prisoner attempting suicide always raised the alarm instantaneously by screaming and banging on our cells. The guards, who were always patrolling the blocks or were close by, would respond immediately to take down the prisoner. Many questions about the official story remain unanswered.'

A recent US Supreme Court judgement has exposed the growing opposition to Bush's policies in ruling circles and even within the military and US intelligence. The Supreme Court has ruled that military tribunals at Guantanamo contravene both the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners and the US code of military justice. The Court also ruled that the tribunals were not expressly authorised by any congressional act, and there was no

'sweeping mandate for the president to invoke military commissions whenever he deems them necessary... We conclude that the military commission ... lacks power to proceed'.

The Supreme Court ruling is a major blow to President Bush – but it does not order the closure of Guantanamo. Bush has been put into a state of confusion: on the one hand he says that he wants to close Guantanamo but he has also said that he wants to press ahead with military commissions despite his own Supreme Court ruling that they are illegal.

Although strong campaigning helped to win the release of nine British citizens in 2003/2004, up to now the Labour government has refused to assist ten men, still detained, who were resident in Britain prior to their detention, on the grounds that they are not British citizens. In David Hicks' case Labour has had to dream up a new excuse. Hicks holds dual Australian and British nationality but has been told that Her Majesty's Government can't help him because at the time of his arrest he was travelling on an Australian passport.

The National Guantanamo Coalition was recently established to coordinate the work of local campaigns in Brighton, London and the Midlands. The campaign has brought together relatives of the prisoners, Muslim groups and left organisations. There has been support for the campaign from the Liberals and even the Conservatives but so far the spineless Labour MPs who have been approached say that they support the demands in a personal capacity but have refused to publicly call for the British residents' release.

In London, the family of Jamil El Banna has played an active role in building the campaign. Jamil had been living in northwest London for a number of years when he was abducted on the back of false information provided by British Intelligence while on a business trip to the Gambia. Jamil has five young children, including Mariam who is four and has never seen her father. FRFI and other groups have joined the El Banna family on street events in northwest London.

The family of another detainee, Omar Degayhes, spoke at a recent street event in Kilburn, west London describing the brutality of the guards at Guantanamo and how they had attacked Omar with a pepper spray, rubbing the chemical in his eyes, so that he is now completely blinded in one eye.

The campaign has received a good response, especially from young Muslims, but much more pressure is needed and there is a risk of doing too much to accommodate the quibbles of Labour MPs who have done very little to support the prisoners. The government will only act if there is massive public pressure on it to do so.

Jim O'Rourke

More Information: National Guantanamo Coalition www.guantanamo.org.uk
Cageprisoners www.cageprisoners.com
Reprieve www.reprieve.org



Mexico: masses battle to retrieve stolen election

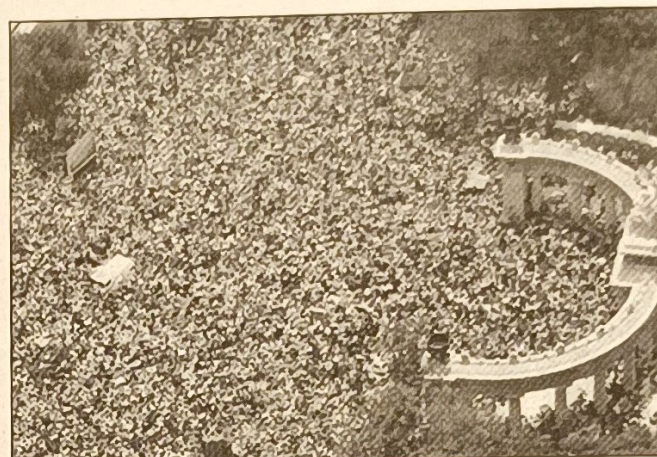
On Sunday 16 July, more than one and a half million people flooded into the Zocalo square in the centre of Mexico City to demand a full recount of the 2 July presidential vote and restore the result to the rightful winner, Lopez Obrador of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). In a blatantly rigged election, Felipe Calderon of the pro-imperialist National Action Party (PAN) was declared winner by a margin of 0.58%, 243,000 votes out of 42 million cast. Now the masses will decide the result on the streets of Mexico's cities in mobilisations which will terrify the Mexican ruling class and its allies in Washington. **ROBERT CLOUGH** reports.

This outcome was inevitable. The ruling class had tried everything to frustrate an inevitable Obrador victory. In March 2005, it attempted to prevent the popular Mexico City Mayor from standing as a presidential candidate by alleging public misconduct in widening a road to a hospital. Over a million people took to the streets and restored him to the ballot. During the campaign itself, the ruling class demonised Obrador as another Chavez, believing this would cost him support. Although Obrador's politics are completely social democratic, as his campaigning slogan 'For the good of all, the poor first' suggests, even his mildly progressive programme presents a profound challenge to the neo-liberal order.

In Mexico, 50% of the population live in poverty; bribery and corruption are endemic. Between 1960 and 1980 its per capita income had grown by 99%; between 1980 and 2005 under the pressure of neo-liberalism, the growth had amounted to a mere 19%. Obrador did not campaign for the end of the North American Free Trade Association which has brought the Mexican economy to its knees, but did promise to cancel a clause which would unleash subsidised US corn and beans exports onto the Mexican market in 2008, destroying the livelihoods of tens of thousands of farmers.

The fraud that took place was pervasive. It started at the top, with the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), Mexico's electoral authorities. The software it used to count the votes was supplied by Calderon's brother-in-law Diego Zavala. By the evening of Monday 3 July, IFE was claiming that 98% of the votes had been counted and that Calderon was the clear winner. In fact its own screens showed that only 39 out of 42 million votes had been counted – three million had been 'lost'. Throughout Monday and Tuesday reports of missing votes and manipulated local counts started to flood in. In the town of Comalcalco, the people seized a PAN truck containing thousands of votes destined for the dump before they could be included in the national tally: Obrador had taken 73,473 votes against 3,863 for Calderon. At a rally attended by half a million in Mexico City on 9 July, Obrador played a recording of a telephone conversation between a corrupt PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) trade union leader and a PRI state governor, where the trade unionist urges the governor to contact Calderon 'to sell him what you have' by way of PRI votes because the PRI candidate is so far behind.

The back-drop to the election was an intensifying class struggle. On 21 April 1,000 armed police attacked 600 striking steel workers who fought back with slingshots and iron ore pellets, driving the police off. Two young workers were killed. This followed the removal by outgoing President Vicente Fox of the leader of the miners' union, Napoleon Urrita, after he organised strikes in protest at the death of 65 coal miners in a pit accident. In Oaxaca, 70,000 teachers have been on strike since June. On 15 June, an attempt by police to evict them from an encampment in the central plaza of the state capital ended in failure. Half a million people marched in their support the following week calling for the formation of an autonomous popular assembly. In May police also attacked protesting farmers in Atenco just outside Mexico City, killing two, beating and jailing hundreds and raping or sexually abusing more than 20 women. The farmers have received widespread support. Finally, the Zapatistas organised in The Other Campaign have toured the country demanding a constituent assembly. Their leader, Delegate Zero, formerly Sub Comandante Marcos, has expressed support for the campaign to retrieve the stolen election. That campaign will continue to take to the streets.



Half a million demonstrated against the rigged election results

Bolivia: new dangers ahead

On 2 July, the Bolivian people voted for who would represent them in the Constituent Assembly that will meet on 6 August. The result was a foregone conclusion: President Evo Morales' Movement Towards Socialism party, MAS, won a majority of the delegates, 137 out of 255, with 54% of the poll. However, constitutional changes require the approval of a two-thirds majority of the Constitutional Assembly, or 170 delegates, and with reactionary organisations such as the neo-liberal Podemos picking up most of the remaining 118, it may well prove to be difficult to make much progress unless there is a strong mobilisation of the anti-imperialist social movements which propelled Morales to power in December last year.

Simultaneously, Bolivians also voted on proposals to implement forms of regional autonomy for each of its nine provinces. Nationally, autonomy was rejected by 54% to 46%. However, in the most affluent provinces of Tarija and Santa Cruz, where most of the country's oil and gas reserves are located, the vote went the other way: in Santa Cruz, the vote for regional autonomy was 72%, and in Tarija 63%. These majorities reflect the interests of the local ruling class: the Santa Cruz bourgeoisie wants a much larger share of the national cake, and has threatened to secede from Bolivia if it does not get what it wants. Sections are already organising in support of this. On 4 July, the neo-fascist

Santa Cruz Youth League attacked a trade union rally, injuring dozens whilst police stood by. When Morales dismissed the police chief, the head of the powerful Santa Cruz Civic Committee declared that 'Patience can come to an end; we have limits'. The Committee, which represents the local white ruling class, has also threatened to set up militias to oppose Morales' proposed land reforms which would distribute some state-owned land to the landless, who are overwhelmingly indigenous.

In the meantime, Petrobras, the Brazilian oil company which is the largest investor in Bolivia's gas industry, has announced that it will not consider meeting the Bolivians' demand for a world market price for the gas it pipes into Brazil. Currently Petrobras pays \$US3.4 per British Thermal Unit (BTU) whilst the world market price stands at \$US8.00. Whilst Brazil continues to play a reactionary role in Bolivian politics, Morales can continue to count on Cuban and Venezuelan support. A recent survey showed that 72% of Bolivians support the entry of 800 Cuban doctors to provide health-care services and that 56% believed that a recent visit of Chavez to Bolivia was positive. Cuba's support means that more than 11,000 Bolivians have received free eye operations and one million will become literate using the Cuban teaching methods.

Robert Clough

Latin America round-up

Chile: student uprising

In Chile, a series of strikes and occupations by students has become the first major crisis to be faced by President Michele Bachelet's government. Student anger at inequalities in education had been simmering for years and protesters saw the opportunity to force Bachelet to implement the 'social justice' she promised during the elections last December. The protests began in Santiago in late April, sparked by the announcement of an increase in the fee students pay to sit university entrance exams. Sit-ins and demonstrations spread across the country's schools and universities, drawing students from public and private schools into a struggle to overhaul Chile's unjust education system. Pupils from secondary schools also joined the strikes. Demands included free bus passes, free university entrance exams, a shortening of the school day, greater student representation in the education system and a guaranteed quality education for all.

The government initially condemned the demonstrations and refused to take the students' demands seriously. Police brutality on their demonstrations did not deter the strikers and public support for them grew in the light of the security forces' indiscriminate violence. After a national day of action supported by teachers' unions and involving over 700,000 students on 30 May, Bachelet was forced to announce a series of reforms and an increase in funding. Student leaders rejected the proposals and a second day of action went ahead on 5 June. The national student assembly

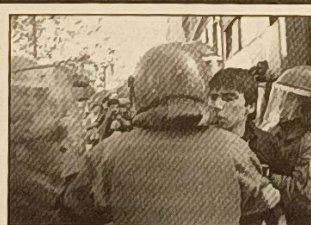
finally called off the protests on 9 June, agreeing to take part in the president's newly-created advisory panel on education. Round One to the students.

James Doran

Brazil: breaking with Lula

Lula's IMF policies have failed to meet the minimum needs of millions of Brazilian workers and have now forced workers to create a new labour confederation, Conluta. With over 2,700 delegates from 22 states representing nearly 1.8 million workers at its first conference in May 2006, Conluta presents an alternative forum for tens of millions of Brazilian workers. Founded by public sector trade unions representing metal workers and civil construction workers, Conluta incorporates employed and unemployed workers' organisations, neighbourhood and rural workers' movements, students, women, ecological and landless workers' organisations. Representation at this first Congress was based on direct elections from democratic assemblies and represents the first major break with the Lula regime. As such, it portends a revitalisation of urban working class politics.

Rural workers continue to organise in the Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST). Founded in the 1980s, the MST now has over two million members. It is the largest landless farmers' movement in Latin America and has helped over 250,000 families win title to land. 350,000



Chile: students protest against unjust education system

families now live in settlements due to MST campaigns; they have created 1,200 primary schools and dozens of secondary schools. But 160,000 families still live camped under black plastic sheets, along highways or next to untended estates. Lula promised agricultural reform – 1% of the landowners hold 46% of the land – and he would not have won his presidency without the support of the MST. But the power of agribusiness has blocked change. Brazil recently overtook the US as the largest producer of soya beans and multinational corporations have taken over more land. The rural poor are continuously made landless, hungry and socially insecure. Under Lula, Rio Grande do Sul state settled only 100 families in three years. In Maranhão state, not a single family was settled in 2005. In 2005, 38 landless peasants were murdered by landowner militias, 28 of those in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

It is essential that the urban workers of Conluta unite with the rural workers of the MST in a common programme to stop the human and ecological disaster that is capitalism in Brazil.

Peruvian election: US client hangs on

In a run-off presidential election held on 4 June, the Peruvian ruling and middle class desperately turned to the corrupt Alan Garcia in order to ward off the challenge from Ollanta Humala who spoke for the 14 million, mostly indigenous, people who live in poverty out of a population of 27 million. Garcia ruined the Peruvian economy when he was president between 1985 and 1990; his government was a byword for corruption and he himself has just been indicted by a Chilean court for the murder of 119 political prisoners in June 1986.

Following Garcia's victory by a margin of 5.2%, his party immediately endorsed the outgoing government's Free Trade Treaty with the US. The new treaty limits Peru's ability to

renegotiate or cancel contracts with multinational gas and mining companies on environmental grounds, and forces the country to use international mediators. The US has now re-staked its claim on Peruvian copper, gold and natural gas. From 2007, 95% of farmers will suffer from subsidised US imports. A miserable subsidy package is offered to disguise the huge losses to Peruvian cotton, maize and wheat. Garcia's role will be to manage the new treaty by stimulating food exports in a country where half the people struggle to eat at all. The Peruvian oppressed will not accept this for long: already on 4 July thousands of farmers blocked highways in protest at the Treaty whilst others marched on the capital, Lima.

Alvaro Michaels



Mr Parasite goes to Washington

'The credit system, which has its focus in the so-called national banks and the big money-lenders and usurers surrounding them, constitutes enormous centralisation, and gives to this class of parasites the fabulous power, not only to periodically despoil industrial capitalists, but also to interfere in actual production in a most dangerous manner – and this gang knows nothing about production and has nothing to do with it.' (Karl Marx, Marx and Engels Collected Works, 37, 541-2)

On 10 July, Henry Paulson was sworn in as the United States' 74th Treasury Secretary. At the ceremony, Bush emphasized that 'Hank Paulson will be my leading policy advisor on a broad range of domestic and international economic issues, and he will be the principal spokesman for my administration's economic policies'.

Although there are divisions within the US ruling class over foreign policy and the war, Paulson's nomination won unanimous consent in the US Senate. Despite the tensions, there is fundamental unity within the US ruling class over the direction of US imperialist economic policy. This is unsurprising: under the Bush regime, the US ruling class has been raking in enormous profits. On 4 June the *Financial Times* reported that:

'US companies have increased their share of the economic pie at a faster rate over the past five years than at any time since the second world war... profits from current production as a share of national income have risen from 7 per cent in mid-2001 to 12.2 per cent at the start of this year. This rate of growth is unprecedented since collection of these figures began in 1947.'

This is the kind of performance the bourgeoisie wants.

Profits have climbed by 123% over this period, an extraordinary development (see Figure 1). Even during the heady years of the late nineties, nothing happened like this.

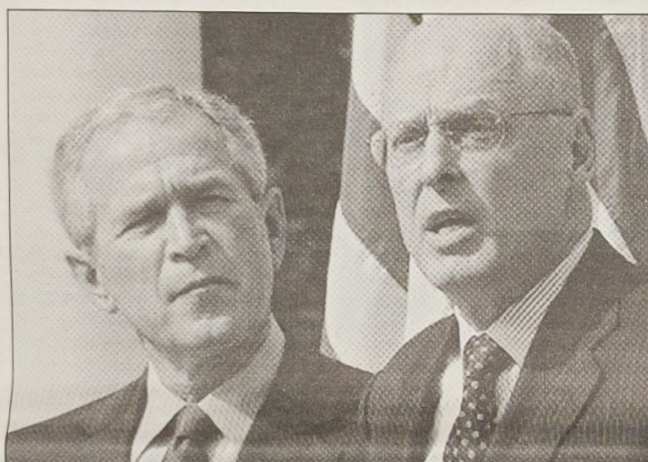
All these profits with nowhere to go

Why change Treasury Secretary and why at this time? New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer explained: 'His experience, intelligence, and deep understanding of national and global economic issues make him the best pick America could have hoped for to deal with the difficult economic problems the country faces.'

Problems? First, there's the debt: households are now in debt to 126% of their annual income – some \$11.8 trillion, largely mortgages secured against overvalued houses. Federal debt is at \$4.9 trillion which increases by a trillion every year; the US states and cities owe \$1.9 trillion. This debt is financed by sucking in dollars from all over the world – the net external debt of the US is now \$2.7 trillion, about 21.5% of US GDP. Nobody knows how long that will continue. The financial sector is carrying \$13.2 trillion of debt, 'secured' by increasingly risky and speculative 'assets'.

Second, industrial capitalists are supposed to use profits to expand productive capital. But they're not: utilization of manufacturing capacity is 81.1%, only slightly above the average for the last 30 years. Generally, capitalists already have the plant and equipment needed to expand production if there is a rise in demand. Why increase it further? Instead, they're throwing some of the profits to the shareholders as dividends to keep them quiet: \$486.1bn at an annual rate in the first quarter of 2006.

This still leaves a lot of cash: after



Parasites for a parasitic system

paying tax, they still have a huge dollop of 'undistributed profits' or 'retained earnings' left over. These have risen from 26% of profits in 2001 to almost 50% in 2005, some \$643bn. Lacking sufficient profitable opportunities to expand their existing capital directly, they're finding other ways to do it, using this cash. They can try to grow by acquiring other capitals; they can lend it out to someone else to make some money for them; they can use it to manipulate their share price or they can export it.

One way of expanding capital is to get hold of someone else's, to merge or acquire other companies, an attractive way of expanding capital without increasing production. US mergers and acquisitions completed in the first half of 2006 had a total value of \$646.8bn compared with \$377.7bn in the same period last year.

Companies can also invest this spare cash in the financial markets to make a profit. Companies' 'interest income' – their profit on undistributed cash profits – grew by 37.9% in 2005 and is estimated to grow by a further 64% this year. As a share of earnings, it has grown from 2.0% in 2004 and 2.3% in 2005 to an estimated 3.6% this year, large enough to have a significant impact on company earnings.

The cash can be used to help pump up the share price. Despite huge increases in earnings, stock prices have remained stubbornly low over the last five years. Yet the stock market is supposed to pay the pensions of the middle class.

Increasing earnings per share (EPS) is supposed to make stocks more attractive for investment, increasing prices. In an attempt to boost EPS, companies have been buying back their own stock, so the same earnings are measured over fewer shares. Companies in the S&P 500 index spent \$100.2bn on buybacks in the first quarter, only slightly less than the record \$104.3bn in the last quarter of 2005. Total withdrawal of shares reached an annual rate of \$586.8bn in the first quarter of 2006. Thanks to what is little more than an accounting trick, Exxon Mobil's first quarter net income increase of 6.9% became an increase of 12.3% earnings per share.

Or the money can be sent abroad in search of profits. Compared to annual US private non-residential fixed investment, US private investment in international assets has grown from 27.3% in 2002 through 52.2% in 2004-2005, to reach 93% in the first quarter of 2006. Between 2002 and

2005, the net worth of US non-farm, non-financial companies has grown by 30%, from \$9,535.3 trillion in 2002 to \$12,418.5 trillion in 2005, while US private international assets have grown by 64%, from \$6,563.9 trillion to \$10,813.6. Direct investment is only about 1/3 of these assets – most are financial in some form.

Paulson has made it clear that further expanding these international assets is one of his priorities:

'The strength of the US economy is linked to the strength of the global economy... we must work to expand trade and investment, work to reform and modernize international financial markets, and be vigilant in identifying and managing potential financial vulnerability.'

Parasitism runs wild

We've seen that industrial capitalists are being forced to invest their profits outside production. So are the institutional investors who used to invest conservatively in their shares. Pension funds need to turn an annual growth of, say, 8-9% to finance pension plans. With share prices flat, they have to become more adventurous.

Instead of shares, capital is flowing into risky and speculative markets which swell to enormous, in some cases almost unimaginable, proportions. The entire annual income of the United States is about \$12 trillion. The notional value of 'Interest-rate Swaps' has grown from \$48.8 trillion in 2000 to \$147.4 trillion in 2004, although dealers insist that the amount 'really' at risk is 'only' about \$2 trillion – about 17% of the net worth of US non-financial corporations.

What's going on here is not an expansion of capital but an expansion of parasitism: capital is 'expanded', 'profits' made, not through the direct exploitation of the working class, but by swindling, dealing and gambling of all kinds – trying to grab profit from other capitals. Since the 2000 crisis, itself brought to a head by speculative investment, parasitism has gone wild. With the fall in share prices, but still lusting for the huge profits made by speculation in the nineties, capital has moved into other markets.

Low interest rates enabled the housing market to grow at a formidable rate. Household mortgages have grown from \$4,770bn in 2000 to \$8,945bn this year (1st quarter, annualized). Between the first quarter of 1999 and first quarter of 2006, the Housing Price Index rose by 81%, much faster than the population, the number of new owners or the prices of construction materials. Despite the obviously fictitious growth, valuations on these prices have been used to justify the explosion in mortgage lending.

Even though the mortgages are backed by overvalued assets, the

'ABS' market, so called 'Asset-Backed Securities', has arisen, betting on the mortgages. While the total debt of the financial sector grew by 163% between 2000 and 2006, ABS issuers' debt grew by 216%, to \$3.2 trillion. Despite their solid-sounding name, the underlying 'asset' is risky: mortgages could be paid off early or defaulted on. But they offer higher than average returns in return for greater risk.

So-called 'emerging markets' – imperialist-speak for the more developed oppressed nations – have become another target for speculative investment. Capitalists in countries like Turkey, Brazil and China are developing stock markets, trying to imitate the professional imperialists. Imperialist financiers have begun speculating in these markets too. But they are notoriously risky: the iShares MSCI Emerging Markets exchange-traded fund, which rose by 22% in 2004 and 32% in 2005, has fallen 16% from its peak in May as the Indian and Russian stock markets have slid by 20%.

Commodities, gold, foreign exchange, pork bellies, orange juice – every possible market has been raided and squeezed for its profit potential. Sooner or later we hear the pips squeak, as with emerging markets, and it's time to move on to more reckless gambles.

The so-staid and secure sounding pension funds and institutional investors are increasingly handing over their funds to some very dubious players. 'Hedge funds' take money from rich individuals and institutions and play fast and loose with it in every market. They are unregulated. Their total size is estimated at somewhere in the \$1-2 trillion range. According to Republican Senator Oren Hatch: 'Hedge funds are the Wild West of our financial markets'.

So-called 'Private Equity' (PE) funds, which are even more shadowy than hedge funds, make piranhas look almost like cuddly toys. They snap up companies, chew them over, suck out all the juice then spit them out again. They specialize in 'LBOs' – so-called leveraged buyouts, where a fund raises debt – typically \$4 for every \$1 of its own money – to buy out companies. Claiming returns of 50% or more, they attracted \$106bn in 2005, twice the 2004 figure, and are expected to draw in even more this year to a total of half a trillion dollars. This will bankroll them to spend \$2.5 trillion in dealing and raiding.

Investment banks pocket fees and commissions of all kinds. They broker bids, advise on tenders, get commission for selling target assets and then collect again when the target company goes public again. They pocketed \$11.8bn in 2005 from PE business and some \$25bn in 2004 from hedge funds. Goldman Sachs, the largest of the investment banks, reported a staggering \$2.6bn profit on \$10bn of revenue for the first three months of 2006. Not content with just skimming off the cream, they are increasingly trying to milk the cow themselves, engaging in trading activities of their own on a massive scale, which now exceed even the hedge funds.

This is the world Henry Paulson comes from: his predecessors were representatives of industrial capital – Paul O'Neill ran Alcoa aluminum and John Snow ran the CSX railroad. Before taking the job, Paulson was chief executive of Goldman Sachs. Paulson's appointment represents the full ascendancy of US finance capital over industrial capital. With a personal fortune of over \$700m, he's obviously got the vital interests of US finance capital at heart. How completely appropriate to put a professional parasite in charge of US parasitism!

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

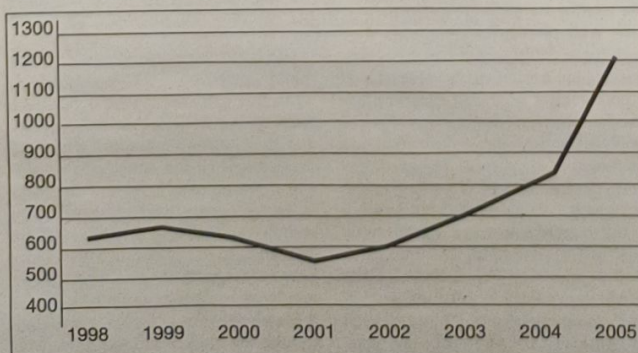


Figure 1: Profits of US nonfinancial corporations – \$ billions

The drive to global war

Naked Imperialism – the US pursuit of global dominance
John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review*
Press 2006, 192pp. \$15.95

John Bellamy Foster's *Naked Imperialism* is a collection of editorials on US imperialism, published in *Monthly Review* between November 2001 and January 2005. At a time when the US military is hopelessly bogged down in Iraq, and an apparently indefinite supply of British troops is being demanded to control an uncontrollable situation in Afghanistan, this book is a timely reminder of how imperialism has arrived at the present point.

Foster argues that we are now witnessing a phase of imperialism which, whilst not new in its fundamental aspects, is distinct from the whole period since the second world war in the naked brazenness with which it embraces its imperial ambitions. In the earlier sections of the book Foster addresses the view put forward by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire* in 2000, and which was a dominant view within the anti-capitalist movement of the late 1990s. This argues that the world has now progressed to a post-imperialist, 'globalised' period in which national states and ruling classes are increasingly irrelevant. Foster's debunking of this view is brought to a conclusion by his discussion of the events following the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.

By 2002 the open celebration of an imperial role for the US, previously limited to the 'neo-conservative right', had become part of the mainstream within the US, and Peter Rosen, head of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, could write in the *Harvard Review* (May-June 2002): 'Our goal [that of the US military] is not combating a rival, but maintaining our imperial position, and maintaining imperial order'. Foster deals in detail with the ideological constructions set

up to justify the increasingly blatant imperialism of the US, and explains how this is merely a new form of the idea of the 'white man's burden' presented by Rudyard Kipling in 1899 in relation to the US annexation of the Philippines. Such arguments depict the driving force of imperialism as a recurring 'idealistic impulse' on the part of imperialist countries to spread first 'civilisation' and today 'human rights and democracy'. This is done in order to obscure the real basis of imperialism which lies in economic exploitation and the internal dynamics of capitalism.

Foster draws on Lenin to counter the denials of economic exploitation which prevail in bourgeois discussions of imperialism. In a period when the nakedness of imperialism is forcing the imperialist ruling classes to acknowledge its existence, it is vital to reassert Lenin's contribution in establishing the connection between imperialism and monopoly capitalism, and this Foster does. Lenin went beyond an analysis focusing on unequal distribution of income or the profit-seeking motives of particular corporations, to address the underlying fusion of financial and industrial capital, and the complex development of capitalism into its monopoly stage, with competition amongst giant corporations driving inter-imperialist rivalries and consequent wars. Foster draws out from these contributions important lessons for those engaged in the struggle against capitalism today, many of whom mistake the surface phenomena and instruments of imperialism – such as the 'unethical' practices of particular multinationals, or structures such as the WTO or the World Bank – as the roots of the problem itself. What is lacking from Foster's discussion is a fuller development of the analysis of the capitalist crisis. Foster's predecessor at *Monthly Review*,

Paul Sweezy, rejected the Marxist analysis of the falling rate of profit as being no longer relevant to capitalism in its monopoly phase, and replaced this with a neo-Keynesian analysis of crisis based on a 'potential surplus' of

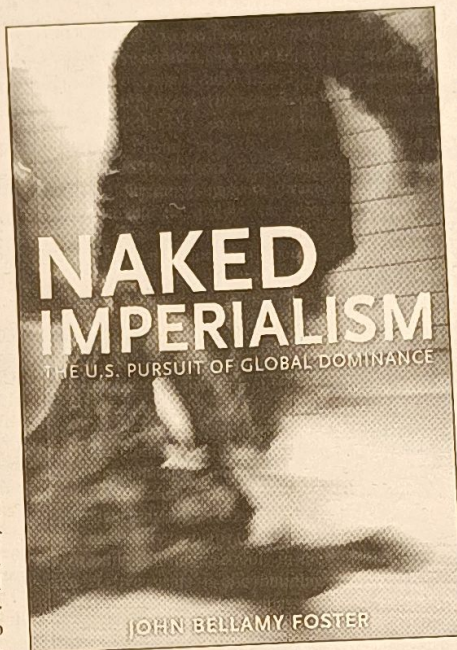
overseas, Foster exposes the economic necessity which lies at the root of military interventions, rather than the idealistic motivations of particular members of the ruling class. Foster makes the point that political, economic and financial power requires the periodic exercise of military power, and that in the absence of direct political control of oppressed nations in the form of colonialism, military bases take on an even greater importance. Foster challenges the idea that the current military offensive by the US is the result of the takeover of the administration by a 'neo-conservative cabal' of ideologues. He makes plain that it is rather the growing rivalries between the US and other imperialist countries which lie behind the drive to global war. From the end of the second world war until the early 1970s, Japan and Europe gradually moved to rival the US economically, and in 1971 the dollar was delinked from gold, putting the US ruling class under increasing pressure, and prompting fears that the US might be superseded as the dominant imperialist power, just as it had surpassed British imperialism over the course of the two world wars.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the related setbacks of movements for national liberation and socialism around the world in the early 1990s, a section of the US ruling class saw the opportunity to use its massive military dominance to establish unchallenged global domination, as a way out of its present crisis and economic weakness versus its imperialist rivals. It used the 1991 invasion of Iraq to substantially increase its

military presence in the Middle East, most notably in Saudi Arabia, followed by the invasion of Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and again Iraq in 2003, along with military intervention in Latin America as part of 'Plan Colombia', each of which has left a lasting US military presence. By March 2002 the US had established military bases and 'forward operating locations' in more than 60 countries and separate territories. Despite reductions in the number of troops permanently stationed abroad, these have been replaced by shorter, more frequent tours of duty, so that already by 1999 an Army War College study found that on average military personnel were stationed abroad for 135 days a year for the army, 170 for the navy, and 176 for the air force. These figures can only have increased since then, with the establishment of new bases in countries including Ecuador, Curaçao, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iraq.

Writing in the US and therefore having as his foremost concern the building of an anti-imperialist movement within that country, Foster could be read by a British audience as at times underplaying the significance of European imperialism, and his work may well be used selectively to advance such an 'ultra-imperialist' argument. A full reading however makes clear the fact that not only does the threat from imperialist rivals lie behind the US war drive, but that it is the very attempt by the US to establish for itself an absolute global hegemony which is causing this rivalry to intensify: 'intercapitalist rivalry remains the hub of the imperialist wheel. How could it be otherwise when the United States is trying to establish itself as the surrogate world government in a global imperial order?' This indicates the limitations of imperialism, as the 'band of warring brothers' come into increasing conflict not only with those they seek to oppress and exploit, but also with one another. Such problems faced by the imperialist ruling classes are at the same time opportunities for those opposed to imperialism to advance.

Thomas Vincent



capital. Foster touches on this point only briefly in *Naked Imperialism*, and further development will be necessary in order to take accurate account of the unstable and dynamic nature of capitalism in determining the global strategies of the imperialist ruling classes.

The greatest strength of *Naked Imperialism* lies in the detailed and concrete way with which it establishes the relationship between imperialist economic interests and the use of military force. By tracing the historical development of US military presence

Which way for the anti-capitalist movement?

Babylon and Beyond: The economics of anti-capitalist, anti-globalist and radical green movements
Derek Wall, Pluto Press 2005, £14.99

Research has shown that studying conventional economics makes you more selfish. This slim volume, an introduction to anti-capitalist economics, will hopefully have the opposite effect. Derek Wall, lecturer in political economy and UK Green Party activist, sets out to 'unpick the intellectual knots' within the modern anti-capitalist movement. In each chapter he examines a different school of thought, starting with those who seek to reform capitalism and moving on to those who see the market as inherently exploitative.

One of the questions Wall attempts to answer over the course of the book is whether economic growth should continue in a post-capitalist system. Ecosocialists such as US author and activist Joel Kovel see environmental destruction as an inevitable outcome of continual economic growth, which is only necessary when goods are pro-

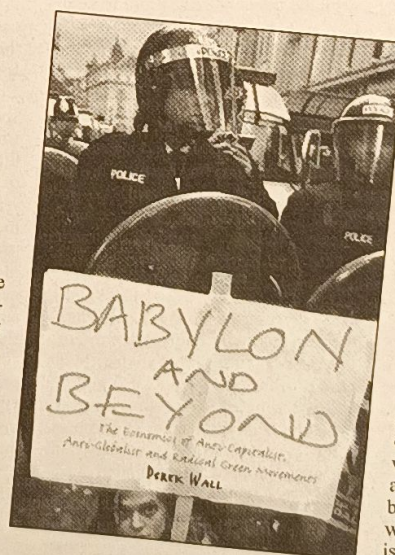
duced and marketed in such a way as to maximise profit and consumption rather than to meet real needs. Many socialists play lip-service to environmentalism, while maintaining that production should continue to expand under socialism. Wall follows Kovel in arguing that economic growth would be unnecessary under socialism, and should therefore be rejected on ecological grounds. Wall draws a parallel here with the thought of Cuban President Fidel Castro, who has argued similarly:

'It is not that I think the world should become a monastery. However, I do believe that the planet has no other choice but to define which are going to be the consumption standards or patterns, both sustainable and obtainable, about which mankind should be educated.' (Castro, *On Imperialist Globalization: Two Speeches*, 2003)

Wall draws favourable attention to the fact that both Cuba and Venezuela are promoting organic farming. He is also clear that both countries deserve international solidarity for providing health, education, and housing for all, and for their essential role in fighting

imperialism. However, elsewhere Wall criticises Cuba for being a one-party state, assuming that the only type of valid democracy is a multi-party system, and leaving the uninformed reader to conclude that Cuba is therefore not democratic.

In the last chapter Wall discusses how we should go about getting rid of capitalism. He criticises Marxists for believing that capitalism will inevitably create the conditions for its own downfall. Wall is sceptical that this time will come: 'Capitalism has crisis tendencies but capitalism uses barriers as a pole vault uses obstacles to practise jumping ever higher' (p177). For Wall, any anti-capitalist strategy should be rooted in the present. He advocates 'amphibious strategies' – 'half in the dirty water of the present but seeking to move on to a new, unexplored territory.' (p178). Examples that Wall gives include the electoral success of the Green movement in parts of the US (and its beginnings in China) as well as workers' cooperatives, the anti-imperialism of Cuba and Venezuela, and open-source software.



Wall sees the open-source movement, where volunteers collaborate to write free software, as the cyberspace front of the fight to 'defend, extend, and deepen the commons' which he says should be the anti-capitalist slogan above all others. For him the commons (resources that can be used by a community, rather than exclusively by an owner) are vital because they show how access to finite resources can be regulated by the community of users themselves, providing an alternative to both the market and the state. Wall cites numerous examples of commons systems still in operation, from the

harvesting of wild rice in Canada to the sustainable management of grazing land in Switzerland.

For Wall, 'amphibious strategies' are important because they demonstrate that there are alternatives to the capitalist mode of production. This is important, but by focussing on it exclusively Wall sidelines the issue of class, which will be central to any serious challenge to capitalism. If, as Wall advocates, people do start reclaiming the commons, the state will defend the rights of property owners, using brutal force if necessary. Only a movement based on the class consciousness of the oppressed would have the will to resist such an attack. Wall criticises Marxists for believing that crises in capitalism will 'flip society neatly into a socialist order', but this is a caricature. Crises do occur, forcing capitalists to increase exploitation of workers, who do fight back. These struggles are the key to overturning capitalism.

This book works well as an accessible introduction to the various strands of anti-capitalist thought, but the concluding chapter on strategy is unconvincing. Wall ends by saying that the system lives through each of us, so we have the power to change it, as long as we keep protesting. The problem is that he doesn't say how this approach could build a movement strong enough to challenge the state machinery that defends capitalism.

Sam Rae

Alan Lord: 16 years after Strangeways the punishment continues

At the beginning of May, I travelled to Kingston prison in Portsmouth to act as an observer at the parole hearing of life-sentence prisoner Alan Lord. It was an interesting experience, which gave me an unexpected insight into the lifer system. I cannot say that I was impressed.

Long-time FRFI readers will know that Alan was present for 23 of the 25 days of the Strangeways uprising in April 1990. After the revolt he received an additional ten-year prison sentence to run concurrently with the life sentence he was already serving.

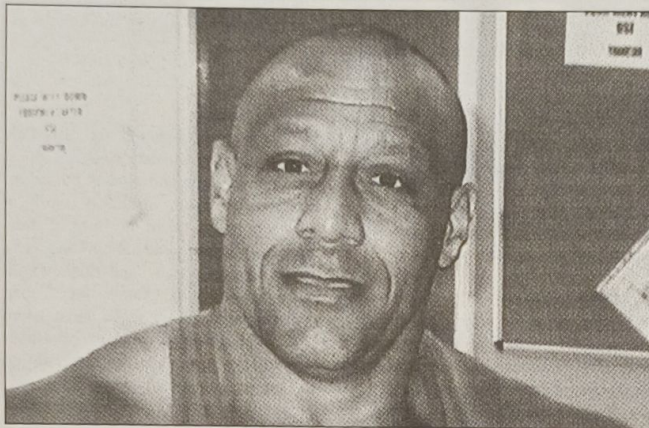
Alan was 20 years old when he was given life for the murder of a jeweller in Manchester in 1981. The trial judge recommended he should serve 15 years. Now, 26 years on, Alan is still a category B prisoner, having been finally downgraded from the highest security category, Category A, in 2003.

After Strangeways Alan was shunted around the system like a parcel and suffered at the hands of staff who were not prepared to forgive him for his part in what was the biggest disturbance in British penal history. However, for at least the last ten years, he has been a 'model prisoner' and receives good reports from those in daily contact with him.

Despite this general good behaviour, Alan is still seen as something of an awkward customer by the prison authorities. He is not slow to complain but always does so through the official channels. Over the years, he has acquired habits and traits that are seen by his keepers as non-conformist. For example, he does not sleep on a bed - a legacy from the days when he was moved (and abused) on a regular basis. He takes the view that, the less he 'takes' from those in power, the less they are able to take from him. Using the same reasoning, Alan has never had a television in his cell. He keeps his possessions neatly packed at all times, ready for any sudden move.

A fair-minded system might view such traits as idiosyncrasies, understandable pockets of behaviour after a quarter of a century of incarceration. Observing the parole hearing, it became clear that the system did not share that outlook.

A district judge chaired the hear-



Alan Lord

ing, and a governor was there to present the views of the Secretary of State. Alan was represented by a barrister and there were several staff witnesses from Dovegate, his previous prison, and Kingston.

The board heard that Alan was employed at Kingston, that he was on enhanced status and was a 'polite prisoner, who did not present any concerns. Then a lifer governor from Dovegate said that Alan had impressed there as well, but issues had arisen as a result of a relationship between him and a female custody officer. It was agreed by all concerned that this relationship had been entirely mutual; however as soon as it came to light the work Alan was doing with a psychologist was immediately terminated and it became apparent that his days at that prison were numbered.

Astonishingly, both the governor and the psychologist spent an inordinate length of time discussing whether Alan was 'institutionalised' or 'too rigid in his thinking'. They were con-

cerned that, if Alan was downgraded to Category C or D he might have difficulty in sharing a cell after being so long on his own, as if sharing a tiny space in a prison with another man somehow proved a lesser degree of 'institutionalisation'. It was even put to him that by not watching television he was lessening his chances of living comfortably in the 'real world' - as if television represented reality.

The only words of sense in this grotesque debate came from Alan, who, when asked how he would get his views on outside life (if he were free and still not watching the box), replied 'I would open my front door and look out at life'.

This nonsensical argument aside, the biggest shock of the hearing came by way of omission. Throughout the almost three-hour hearing, the words 'Strangeways' and 'riot' were not uttered once. But for the seriousness of the situation, it would have compared with the *Fawlty Towers* farceline, 'Don't mention the war!' But this

is no laughing matter. This is a matter of an unforgiving system, still bent on revenge, 16 years after it was exposed as rotten and brutal to the core.

Alan Lord is still in prison because of his part in the Strangeways uprising, yet the system that keeps him incarcerated dare not say as much. If it did, then his supporters could point to masses of evidence, including Lord Justice Woolf's official inquiry report into the disturbance to show that he and his fellow protesters were scapegoats for the failures of the Prison Service.

'The disturbance was planned as a limited protest, the majority of inmates shared the belief that conditions at the jail were unacceptable and inhumane...there are three requirements which must be met if the prison system is to be stable: they are security, control and justice...The April 1990 disturbances were a consequence of the failure of the prison system to conform to these basic rules.' (Woolf Report 1991)

So, officially, Alan Lord remains in prison due to fears that he is institutionalised! His good behaviour seemingly counts for little. The process is a sham and an affront to the justice that Woolf spoke about.

In his own words to the parole hearing: 'I behave, I do all the programmes, but the gate doesn't get any nearer.'

A few days after the hearing Alan received his answer. His application for a move to an open prison, where lifers have to spend a period prior to release, was denied. The gate is still a long way away.

Eric Allison

You can write to Alan Lord (K80382) at HMP Kingston, 122 Milton Road, Portsmouth, Hants, PO3 6AS.

INSIDE NEWS

Families demand justice for children murdered by prison system

Following the publication of the report into the death of Zahid Mubarek, the families of Joseph Scholes (16), Gareth Myatt (15), Sam Elphick (17), Adam Rickwood (14) and Gareth Price (16) who died in prisons or 'secure training centres' during the past five years, renewed their call for a public inquiry. Four of the boys took their own lives, while Gareth Myatt died 'under restraint' from prison staff - but all were murdered by the system as surely as Zahid was. The call for a generic inquiry into the deaths and into the imprisonment of children was supported by former Chief Inspector of Prisons Sir David Ramsbotham at a parliamentary briefing meeting organised by INQUEST on 4 July. Ramsbotham lambasted former head of the Prison Service Martin Narey, who four years ago opposed the call for such an inquiry but now opportunistically supports it in his new role as head of children's charity Barnados.

Rye Hill screws on trial

Four prison custody officers are due to be tried in connection with the death of 23-year-old Michael Bailey, who was found dead in his cell at privately-run HMP Rye Hill on 24 March 2005. Dan Daymond is charged with manslaughter by gross negligence and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Paul Smith and Samantha Prime are charged with manslaughter by gross negligence. Ben King is charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Unlike most other people who face such serious charges, the defendants in this case have not been remanded in custody.

Discrimination against foreign national prisoners continues

Following the hysterical panic in May in the wake of the government announcement that in the past seven years 1,000 overseas prisoners had been released on completion of their sentence, rather than being considered for deportation (see FRFI 191), the media and government onslaught continued, as new Home Secretary John Reid vowed to get tough and the newspapers wallowed in a slough of anti-prisoner, anti-foreigner headlines.

On 26 May 300+ riot-clad prison officers carrying shields and armed with staves laid siege to Ford open prison in Sussex, in order to effect the high-profile transfer back to closed profiles of 135 non-British prisoners. Elsewhere, lawyers were forced to begin court proceedings to obtain the release of British citizens who had finished their sentences but had just happened to be born outside this country. And across the prison system anyone not British kissed goodbye to any previous prospect of moving to an open prison or being released on temporary licence for any purpose whatsoever.

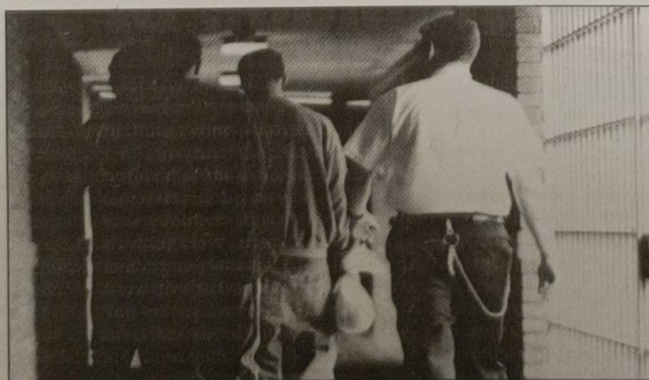
While the official position remains that foreign national prisoners should be considered for transfers to open prison, temporary release etc in the same way as anyone else, with their immigration status just one factor among many in the prison's risk assessment, the unofficial policy is different. It has become clear that a secret memorandum has been sent to prison governors stating that any non-British prisoner, whom the Immigration Service has not categorically stated it has no interest in, will remain in a closed prison and not be considered for any kind of temporary or early release. ■

Britain's racist prisons

Less than a week after the publication of the scathing official report into the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek at Feltham, which condemned the prison system for its treatment of Zahid and held it significantly responsible for his murder, the shocking treatment of mixed-race prisoner Sean Higgins showed how absolutely nothing has changed.

Sean has been a consistent target of racism throughout his sentence and suffered flagrant abuse and serious assaults from prison officers because of his vocal objection to the sort of treatment highlighted in the Mubarek report. Always his protests and complaints have been met with violence and victimisation, and for years his enduring spirit of resistance has resulted in a vicious cycle of complaint and brutal repression with his captors that now threatens his life.

On 30 June whilst at Gloucester prison Sean became involved in an argument with a prison officer in the presence of other staff and prisoners. The officer, angered by Sean's temer-



ity and refusal to back down, called him a 'black cunt' and threatened to take him to the punishment block and 'squash him like a bug'. Sean was soon afterwards transferred to Bristol prison as a 'problem' and met there by a reception committee of the goon squad. Sean described to his lawyer Vicky King what happened, saying that on arrival at Bristol he was seri-

ously assaulted by staff there, sustaining a broken arm and a broken ankle. Staff refused to arrange x-rays. Sean was left with 27 shards of glass in the bottom of his feet. He says that a senior member of staff tried to force a fire hose up his rectum and also wrapped it round his neck. Vicky King said: 'He sounded absolutely dreadful. I have never heard him

sound so awful. That's including the time that I sat with him in cells in Hull Crown Court whilst he was almost naked, on dirty protest, and with a freshly broken arm. He was in a bad way then but he sounds a hundred times worse now.'

The truth is that Sean is being pitilessly driven beyond the limits of human endurance and systematically destroyed by the racism of the prison system. The same racism that drives a disproportionate number of young black men to self-harm and kill themselves in prison.

Despite what the official mouthpieces of the prison system say publicly about 'tackling racism', the reality is that prisoners of colour are being brutalised and sometimes murdered by racist prison staff who are allowed to get away with it.

Email Deborah.Marchington@hmps.gsi.gov.uk or write to Prison Service Headquarters, Cleland House, Page Street, London SW1P 4LN and the governor of Bristol prison complaining about Sean's treatment and send cards and letters of support to Sean Higgins VA3977 HMP Bristol, Cambridge Road, Bristol BS7 8PS

John Bowden, HMP Saughton

FRFI ROUNDUP

Support asylum seekers

In response to the Labour government's increasingly racist asylum laws, FRFI comrades have stepped up their work with asylum seekers. In the North East, twice-monthly pickets of North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre (IRC) have been taking place for over six months. FRFI activists working in Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) helped initiate a national day of action against IRCs on 22 June. At the North Shields centre over 60 protesters, including asylum seekers from Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, delivered a list of demands, which manager Derek King refused to come out and accept. The protesters then marched into the centre of North Shields, where they held a rally, which received significant support from local people.

On 24 June people travelled from Manchester, Glasgow, London and Durham to participate in an Anti-Imperialist Tribunal in Newcastle organised by Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Participants from the DRC, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Jamaica came together to discuss the impact of imperialism on their countries, and the immediate tasks facing us in building an anti-imperialist and anti-racist movement in the heartland of imperialism.

In London, FRFI has held pickets of Communications House IRC on the first Monday of the month since June. These have been joined by supporters of Wake up Congo and Africans Getting Involved (AGI) who have used the megaphone to let people know why people flee their country and seek asylum, what it is like to have to sign on and what fate awaits them in Britain.

An extra picket also took place on the day of action on 22 June, supported by the All African Women's Group from Crossroads Women's Centre, AGI and other groups and individuals. On 24 June our comrades joined London Against Detention's demonstration at Tinsley House Detention Centre near Gatwick Airport.

Comrades in Manchester also took action on 22 June at Dallas Court IRC at a picket organised by the North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG). NWASDG was set up by RCG members, asylum seekers and others to support all asylum seekers against Labour's attempts to deport them and to stand against the racism of immigration controls in Britain. The Defend Kalombo Campaign is one affiliate to NWASDG. Kalombo, a Congolese refugee living in Ashton, is an anti-imperialist with great knowledge and experience of European exploitation of his country's resources, and about past struggles led by Patrice Lumumba and other revolutionaries. Kalombo's campaign has been a central focus for our street work. The Defend Eucharía and Timeyi Campaign, also involved in NWASDG, held a successful fund-raising meal on 25 June. Eucharía's own Nigerian cooking, alongside African drumming, was extremely well received.

In Glasgow, on 27 May over 100 asylum seekers and their supporters gathered at an FRFI protest supported by Unity (the Scottish Union of Asylum Seekers), to highlight the ongoing racist attacks by the Labour government, demanding the right to work and an immediate end to dawn raids. On 29 June, comrades supported the Unity protest outside the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, which was attended by around 150 asylum seekers from Glasgow. The RCG had a strong contingent, with members and supporters from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle.



Picketing Communications House in London to support asylum seekers

Asylum seekers applauded the links made by the RCG speaker between attacks on asylum seekers and working class people in Britain, and the brutality of British imperialism abroad. Colin Fox SSP MSP was seen briefly at the demonstration, as was Rosie Kane SSP MSP, who addressed the crowd before heading back into the parliament for what she termed 'political work'.

Following the success of the 27 May protest and in response to asylum seekers calling for more protests, FRFI called a further protest on 8 July, again supported by Unity. Three days before the protest, members of the No Borders Network, using the name of Unity, announced a 'bring a dish' picnic and party in Pollok Country Park 'to celebrate friendship and have a good time', to take place at exactly the same time as the planned protest in the centre of town. Despite the obvious confusion that this caused, 50 people attended the City Centre demonstration, which was even

more lively and militant than the previous one, with members of Glasgow's Congolese community playing a leading role. The protest was able to speak to the thousands of passers-by, drawing support from many people outraged at the Labour government's treatment of asylum seekers.

Free Palestine!

In response to the vicious Zionist attacks against the Palestinian and Lebanese people, FRFI comrades and supporters have been active across the streets of Britain. Comrades in London continue to be in Oxford Street, the capital's main shopping street, every Thursday on the Victory to the Intifada picket of Marks & Spencer, demonstrating against Britain's collaboration with the Zionist state of Israel and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. In the North East FRFI activists have been out on the streets of Durham and Newcastle in solidarity with those fighting occupation in Iraq

and Palestine. Following Israel's land invasion of Gaza at the end of June, pickets were held of M&S in Newcastle on 1 July and Durham on 5 July, and we intend to intensify this area of our work in the coming weeks. On 1 July FRFI called a protest in Glasgow in response to the Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people. We were joined by activists from the Glasgow Palestinian Human Rights Campaign. We will continue to work alongside this campaign throughout the summer.

Viva Cuba!

FRFI and Rock around the Blockade (RATB) continue to campaign in support of socialist Cuba and against the criminal US blockade. Solidarity work in Manchester has taken the form of stalls in Market Street, aimed at building Rock around the Blockade and raising both consciousness and funds for Cuban youth. Some of our stalls have taken place alongside supporters of Babar Ahmed, a British man facing extradition to the US on trumped-up 'terrorism' charges. On these occasions, we have been able to draw clear links between this oppression, and the brutality faced by prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, occupied by the US against Cuba's will. Our work is set to intensify with a month of action, called by Cuba, in solidarity with the five Cuban prisoners in the US.

In the North East activists have been steadily building support for Cuba and Venezuela, on the streets and at events such as Newcastle Green Festival on 3 and 4 June and Durham Miners Gala on 8 July. Despite being barred entry by SWP member Simon Hall to a public film showing on 31 May which was supported by Hands Off Venezuela, FRFI activists in Newcastle have since made contact with Hands Off Venezuela's less sectarian members, and a

public meeting was held at Durham Miners Gala at which a member of RATB spoke. On 15 July a Rebel Music gig was held in Durham, raising money towards the FRFI fund drive and the sound system to be donated by the spring 2007 brigade to Cuba. In Nottingham a street action in defence of Cuba on 3 June was followed by a successful Bacardi Bar Bust on 16 June. Activists dressed as the vampire bats of Bacardi visited the bars of Nottingham to spread the word about Cuba, and to ask drinkers to boycott Bacardi, a key link in the chain of terror emanating from the US against Cuba.

Stand up for your rights!

London FRFI joined the march and rally in east London to show outrage at the 'anti-terrorist' arrests of two innocent young men in Forest Gate in June. The shooting of one of the men, the immediate attempt of the police to cover up the shooting, the vastly excessive number of police involved, the violent mistreatment of the family and the neighbours are all part of the terror and divide and rule tactic that Labour are using against working class, black and Asian families in Britain today. The rally was marked by the unity of the brothers with the family of Jean Charles de Menezes, the innocent Brazilian man murdered a year earlier by the police, none of whom are to be charged. Near unanimous booing greeted the local Labour MP as he got on to the podium to speak.

At the same time as using 'anti-terrorism' powers to terrorise communities and shoot innocent people, the government is clamping down on protest and dissent. Clauses in the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA) are being repeatedly used to limit demonstrations and megaphone use. Our comrade Barnaby will be in court on 29 September, charged with 'using a loud-hailer for the purpose of encouraging the crowd to chant pro-Palestinian and anti-government remarks' on an authorised Palestine solidarity march. We will be organising a demonstration outside the court and will continue to defend our right to protest!

EVENTS

LONDON

Mondays 7 August and 4 September
1-2pm **Defend asylum seekers!**
Protest at Communications House IRC
210 Old Street, London, EC1V 9BR
(nearest tube Old Street)

Wednesday 2 and 23 August, 7pm
LSE FRFI society public meeting
Palestine update
London School of Economics (LSE)
Houghton Street, WC2
(nearest tube Holborn)

Wednesday 6 September, 7pm
Public meeting - **Seeking asylum is not a crime: stop detention and deportations**
UKC, 250 Kennington Lane, SE11
(nearest tube Vauxhall)

Wednesday 27 September, 7pm
LSE FRFI society public meeting -
The sixth anniversary of the Intifada

Friday 29 September 9.30am
Picket of Marylebone Magistrates Court in support of FRFI comrade arrested under SOCPA - **To demonstrate is not a crime**

Every Thursday, 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Demonstration outside M&S,
Oxford Street
(nearest tube Marble Arch)

For further details call 020 7837 1688 or
email london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NORTH WEST

Saturday 29 July, 12-3pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Demonstration outside M&S, Market
Street, Manchester

Tuesday 1 August, 7pm
NWASDG Public meeting
Speakers from FRFI, Defend Kalombo and
Defend Eucharía campaigns, Friends
Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester

Friday 18 August, 12-2pm
NWASDG protest outside Dallas
Court IRC,
Salford, near Broadway tram station

Saturday 19 August, 12-3pm,
Street stall **Hands Off the Middle East!**
Town Hall Square, Bolton

Sunday 27 August
Sponsored walk for Cuba, commemorating
the 1932 mass trespass by communists, of
Kinder Scout in the Peak District.

Saturday 7 September, 12 noon
Demonstration **Hands Off Cuba!**
Free the Cuban 5!
Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester

Saturday 16 September, 12-3pm
Street stall: **Hands Off Cuba!**
Market Street, Manchester

Saturday 16 September, 12-3pm
Street stall: **Hands Off Cuba!**
Town Hall Square, Bolton

Wednesdays 20 and 27 September, and 4 October, 7pm
Revolutionary film series - including
Commandante by Oliver Stone, *Venezuela: The Revolution will Not be Televised*
The Basement Café, Lever Street,
Manchester

Wednesday 27 September, 1pm
Stop the warmongers! Demo against the
Labour Party conference
St Peter's Square, Manchester

For further details phone 07816 547 066
or email
manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.co.uk
or visit www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk

Get in touch with North West Asylum
Seekers Defence Group: at
fightback_05@yahoo.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 5 August, 2-5pm
Victory to the Intifada public meeting on
the current situation in Palestine
Venue to be announced

Wednesdays 9 and 23 August, 10.30am-1pm
Defend asylum seekers!
TCAR Picket of North Shields Immigration
Reporting Centre
Norfolk Street, North Shields
(next to the library)

Saturday 19 August, 12 noon
TCAR demonstration: **Defend asylum rights! No to deportations!**
Grey's Monument, Newcastle city centre

Tuesday 12 September, 12noon
TCAR demonstration: **No to asylum apartheid! Get rid of NASS!**
Assemble at Grey's Monument, Newcastle,
to march to NASS offices

Every Saturday 12-2pm street activities in
either Newcastle or Durham,

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

GLASGOW

Saturday 29 July, 11am
Rock around the Blockade vs Glasgow City Council: Battle against Censorship
Janefield St, Celtic Park
Challenge the council's new bylaws

banning the display of political material
outside the stadium. Bring tricolours,
Palestinian flags and Che Guevara T-shirts!

Saturdays 5 August, 9 September, 7 October, 1-3pm
End dawn raids, no to deportation! End immigration controls!
FRFI protest rally supported by Unity
Donald Dewar Statue, Buchanan Street
(Outside the Royal Concert Hall)

Thursday 17 August 7pm
FRFI activist and readers group meeting
Friends Meeting House, Elmbank Crescent,
Glasgow G2

Sunday 27 August
Scotland Cycle for Cuba
Glasgow to Edinburgh cycle ride to raise
funds for Rock around the Blockade
campaign

Thursday 31 August, 6pm
Public meeting - **The fight against racism in Glasgow**
Speakers from Fight Racism! Fight
Imperialism!, Tyneside Community Action
for Refugees and Pollokshaws Unity
branch
Pollokshaws Burgh Hall
Buses 22/23/45/47/57

Saturday 16 September, 1-3pm
Protest **Free the Cuban Five! Hands off Cuba! US out of Guantanamo!**
Donald Dewar Statue
Tuesday 19 September, 7pm
Public meeting: Revolutionary Cuba and
the fight against imperialism
Friends Meeting House,

For further information on activities in
Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee call 07779
785 529 or email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

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 ☐

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

email _____

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Stop Babar Ahmed's extradition!

Babar Ahmed, who was born in London and has lived there all his life, was brutally arrested by 47 police officers in December 2003 in Tooting, south London, in a dawn raid. The police broke in to the house at 6am, arrested him in front of his wife, handcuffed him, humiliated him, destroyed his property. He was released without charge. He was then re-arrested in August 2004 and has been in HMP Woodhill since. He has not been charged under British law but is fighting extradition to the US on charges of aiding and abetting Islamist fighters in Afghanistan and Chechnya through the Islamist website azzam.com. His appeal took place on 11 July.

After the July 2005 London bombings, Tony Blair spoke to Britain's four Muslim MPs and told them that they had a part to play in rooting out the 'poisonous and perverted misrepresentation' of Islam. They have remained staunch allies for the government with all

Racism in the white working class

Susan Davidson's review of Michael Collins' 'British nationalist account of the white working class' ('Resisting racism's apologists', FRFI 191, June/July 2006) is, sadly, somewhat confused.

The British white working class have been propped up financially, culturally and politically by British imperialism for a century and more. Once the Welfare State had been firmly established (its groundwork having been laid much earlier by 1911 when compulsory unemployment insurance and health insurance were universally introduced), British workers instinctively turned towards the party most boldly representative of propertied and imperialist interests, the Tory Party. Contrary to FRFI's suggestion that 'the white working class cannot be defended by servants of the ruling class', the British white working class has long and hardened experience of itself as the ruling class, and not merely its lower class dupes.

The 'white working class' is well represented by today's forces for Crown and Empire. For how much value do British workers have extorted from their labour, when, according to 2004 British government statistics, at most 13% of the workforce is in the productive sector? One must ask who is the exploited and who the exploiter in this situation?

The British racist's grassroots are lumpen aristocratic bullies at best and petty bourgeois enthusiasts at worst. They are unequivocally behind the entire British national edifice, racist and imperialist as it is.

FRFI, the most serious, honest and revolutionary of newspapers on the British far left, would do better and be more edifying if it explained the class nature, in the national context, of those who vote for the BNP today, and those white mobs who made life hell for their black compatriots in the 1950s. Further, it might do well to examine why street parties were

held in the East End of London (flying banners reading 'Poor but Loyal') to celebrate her imperial majesty in the early part of the century. The British working class has a long tradition of lording it over immigrants – first Irish, then Jewish, then black and now Muslim. And please, don't feed us readers the old 'British workers are victims of false consciousness' line! We would read *Socialist Worker* if we were interested in that kind of opportunist apology.

FRFI is the most cognisant of the formation and position of the British labour aristocracy on the far left. But revolutionaries in Britain, young and old, deserve to know what they are up against. What size is the British labour aristocracy, if immigrants are the only genuinely proletarian social group in Britain (now that Six-County Catholics have been significantly deproletarianised)?

JOHN BELFAST, Ireland

I was a human shield in Iraq

I met activists from FRFI campaigning against the war in Iraq on the streets in Islington in July, when I was on a CND stall. I was in general agreement with many articles in FRFI, though I am not a committed communist, and agreed to write for FRFI about my own experiences in Iraq.

I went to Iraq, via Jordan, on 18 November 1990, as one of the seven strong advance party of the Gulf Peace Team, headed by Pat Arrowsmith. Two of our group were Arabic speakers and our aim was to set up a peace camp on the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, thus symbolically to hinder or prevent the hostilities which threatened. My motivation, as an anti-nuclear campaigner, was to prevent what could have developed into WWII with nuclear weapons involved. Remember that the US had threatened their use if Iraqi forces used poisoned gas to repel invading troops. With Israel and Russia as near neighbours, who was to know what might develop?

It was suggested that an international peace camp could use what was already established as a stop-over camp for pilgrims to Mecca, on the desert road, just inside the Iraq border. We did our best to remain independent but had to accept help as regards transport etc. The camp was established on

24 December 1990 and by the time the ultimatum expired, there were 73 people present from 15 different nations. Bombing began in the early hours of 17 January 1991. On 27 January, without prior notice, at about 3am, two coaches and a lorry arrived from Baghdad, about 150 miles away, with orders to evacuate us.

Our destination was Baghdad – from a 'safe area' right into the target zone. Strange to be on the possible receiving end from bombs dropped by our own 'boys'. We were accommodated in the five-star Al Rashid Hotel (which had lost some of its stars due to unfortunate circumstances). I did not witness the RAF doing its low-level stuff, destroying bridges and getting zapped sometimes. I could not understand how the bombing could take place with any accuracy, as this was the first time, I think, that laser-guided bombs were used. US aircraft flew so high that one could not see them, only vapour trails. By day the Iraq AA fire was therefore quite ineffective. From our room, through thick plate-glass windows, we watched the 'fireworks display' at night, with shell bursts and tracer ammunition, no defence at all. There was the odd crash of exploding bombs occasionally, unpleasantly close sometimes but mostly more

Nepal's road to the future

For the last ten years, a People's War has been raging in Nepal. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) now controls over 80% of the country.

In Rolpa district, one exciting project that the people are undertaking is the Martyrs Road – the first road suitable for motorised transport ever to be built in that part of Nepal. Under the slogan 'Our Effort, Our Development', the people, along with Maoist local leaders, party cadres and liberation army soldiers, have picked up spades and pickaxes themselves in order to break off the chains of feudal and imperialist oppression through self-reliance, without waiting for the crumbs from the

distant. Iraqi authorities laid on mini-bus trips for any of us that wanted to go. On one of these we were taken to see the notorious wreck of the baby milk factory. What is happening at the present time in the Gaza Strip whereby civilians are being deprived of electric supplies deliberately, by targeted shelling by Israeli forces, is precisely what was happening to Baghdad and other cities in 1991.

RICHARD CRUMP North London

struggle is stronger and where large numbers of Kurdish people live. It is also supporting Islamic groups in Kurdish cities in order to weaken the Kurdish liberation movement.

The government refuses all overtures towards peace from the liberation movement, while the PKK appears to be hoping that if Turkey joins the EU, this will be a big step towards a solution; however it is time to be realistic and recognise that the EU is not going to solve this issue on behalf of the Kurdish people. It is happy to ignore the issue altogether and collaborate with the Turkish state. History is full of examples of the way in which imperialists have abandoned the Kurds and their struggle and the EU cannot be relied on any more than any other imperialist formation.

MUZUR DERSIMI North London

Turkey attacks Kurdish freedom fighters

In June 2006 the Turkish military mounted a massive attack on Kurdish guerrilla fighters, carrying out 77 operations – in Amed, Botan, Serhat, Gorzan, Erzurum, Dersim and Amanos. Ten of these attacks also involved the Iranian military. In operations against the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) 104 Turkish, 41 Iranian soldiers and 24 guerrilla fighters have been killed.

four voting in support of extending the detention period for terrorism suspects, and in favour of incorporating into the Terrorism Act 2006 the crime of 'glorification of terrorism'.

HANNAH CALLER North London

Free Mumia Abu Jamal now!

Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal is now on the 'fast track' in the US federal appeals court and the state is determined to carry out his execution.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an innocent man. A former Black Panther Party spokesman, supporter of the MOVE organisation and award winning journalist known as the 'voice of the voiceless', Mumia was framed in 1982 on false charges of killing a Philadelphia police officer. Sentenced to death based on his political history and beliefs, Mumia has spent 24 years on death row for a crime he did not commit. The frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal shows what the death penalty is all about. It is a legacy of chattel slavery and a barbaric outrage, it is the lynch rope made legal.

The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal exemplifies the race and class bias of the US justice system against workers, black people, the poor and all the oppressed. The notorious trial judge Albert Sabo was overheard at the time promising, 'I'm going to help 'em fry the nigger.' Racist jury-rigging,

table of the monarchy or capitalists. Indeed, this is a Road to the Future.

This area of Nepal, like many others, is hideously underdeveloped. Distances between villages are not measured in kilometres but in the number of hours or days it would take to walk between them. Travel was done solely on foot along precarious steep mountain paths. The result was extreme economic backwardness and appalling difficulties of accessing health and education. Globalisation and the free market have done nothing for the development of this region, and neither has the western-backed royal government in Kathmandu.

Republican prisoners need your support

The Francis Hughes Cumann of Republican Sinn Fein (Glasgow) gives its full support to the 38 Republican POWs in Maghaberry Prison who are protesting for better conditions and the restoration of political status. They are demanding: free association, an end to controlled movement, the right of access to full time education, a separate visiting facility and the right to organise their own landings. The POWs have made it clear that they will continue the protest until their just demands are implemented.

It is tragic that Republican POWs are still forced to take on the British government because the right to political status, won by Bobby Sands and his nine comrades in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh 25 years ago, has been removed under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

In Glasgow, thousands of people marched recently to commemorate the ten H-Block Martyrs who died on hunger strike in 1981 in opposition to the efforts of the British government to

false testimony coerced through police threats, and prosecutorial cover-up were the basis for Mumia's conviction. Both the Pennsylvania state courts and the federal courts have refused to consider the reams of documented evidence that prove Mumia's innocence. Foremost is the sworn confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, killed the police officer, and that Mumia had nothing to do with the shooting.

We stand with the millions around the world—workers, students, death penalty abolitionists, fighters for black rights and immigrant rights, socialists—who have taken up the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal now!

Demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal and oppose the racist death penalty. Send copies of motions or statements of support to: the law offices of Robert R Bryan, 2088 Union Street, Suite 4, San Francisco, California 94123, USA; email BryanlawSF@aol.com

PARTISAN DEFENCE COMMITTEE BCM Box 4986, London, WC1N 3XX

However, after a few years of the socialist policies of the CPN(M) Rolpa has seen a transformation, which it is important to witness firsthand.

In 2005, the Magarat Autonomous People's Republican Government issued a call for international volunteers to work on the road, in solidarity with the people of Nepal and to see the changes themselves firsthand. In November 2005 the First Road-Building Brigade spent two weeks working on the road. In April 2006 the Second Road-Building Brigade (which I attended), was caught up in the amazing experience of the People's Movement in urban areas of Nepal before travelling to reach the Magarat area and spending time on the road.

If anyone is interested in joining the Third Road-Building Brigade, or any future brigade, or is simply interested in finding out more information, please email aroadtothefuture@yahoo.com.

MICHAEL COHEN London

criminalise the Republican prisoners and the freedom struggle. Today the issues are no different and we call upon those same marchers and everyone who believes in justice in Scotland to support the campaign for the restoration of political status. Help to avert another tragedy and stop this latest attempt by the British government to brand Ireland's fight '800 years of crime'.

The mainstream media is deliberately ignoring the prison protest. You can help to break the silence by publicising the plight of the prisoners and by attending planned events in support of their just demands. For updated statements from the POWs and the Republican Prisoners Action Group, log on to the website of the Francis Hughes Cumann of Republican Sinn Fein at www.rsfglasgow.com.

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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Asylum seekers fight ghettoisation

Following a call by the Home Office to transfer more of the accommodation for asylum seekers to private housing providers, a new National Asylum Support Service (NASS) contract has come into force in Glasgow. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) snapped up a 10% stake, while another 10% went to the Angel Group, a London-based corporate housing provider, already notorious in England for providing asylum seekers with sub-standard flats in squalid condition while cashing in on the profits. Angel was investigated for fraud last year. DOROTHEA FORSBERG reports.

Since the introduction of the dispersal scheme, Glasgow City Council has been contracted by NASS to provide housing for asylum seekers through the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) which manages council housing on its behalf. Asylum seekers have usually been accommodated in tower blocks, many of them already earmarked for demolition.

Under the new contract, asylum seekers are being forced out of their current homes, uprooted from their communities and relocated anywhere in the city by their new housing providers. Up to 1,000 of Glasgow's estimated 6,000 asylum seekers are thought to be affected.

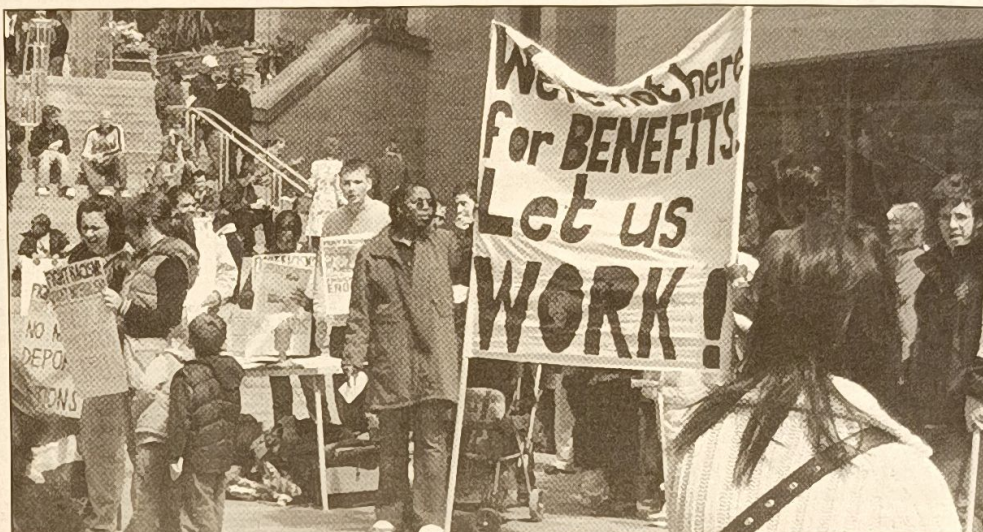
The YMCA owns and manages a 30-storey tower block in the infamous Red Road estate in the North of Glasgow. It was originally designed as short-term hostel accommodation for single people. Residents are required to sign in and out whenever they leave or enter the building. Guests can stay no later than 10pm; phones, satellite TV and computers are not allowed in the flats; there are four token-operated

washing machines for the whole building; staff have access to flats and all locks have been removed from the doors.

The YMCA is now trying to move families of seven or eight people into this accommodation. The reason being given is that the YMCA is now the only provider of three-bedroom flats to house big families. As the GHA, which still provides 80% of the housing, owns thousands of properties all over Glasgow, this simply can't be true.

The reality is that bigger families mean more profit. The YMCA – and the Angel Group – are paid by person. Official figures are not available, but it is obvious that the companies are only spending only a fraction of the money on the accommodation.

The YMCA is now exclusively housing asylum seekers. This is an attempt to create a ghetto and segregate asylum seekers from the Scottish community and any support networks that have been built up. Behind the façade of a Christian charity the YMCA is colluding with the Home



FRFI supporters demonstrate with Glasgow asylum seekers protesting against their treatment

Office – it is a partner of the International Organisation for Migration, which is trying to bribe asylum seekers into returning to the countries they have fled by promising them £3,000 if they return voluntarily. Immigration snatch-squads carrying out dawn raids on YMCA tenants can expect no resistance from the staff.

Since mid-May, asylum seekers have been receiving letters informing them that the YMCA is their new housing provider and giving them a date to move to the new accommodation – usually within the next two weeks, with little time to appeal.

As soon as the first letters arrived, resistance among the asylum seeker families started. None of them wanted to be forcibly relocated to a hostel at the other end of the city, having well integrated into their local community, with children at school and hardly any time to prepare for the move.

On the day the YMCA staff arrived to collect the families and the few belongings they were allowed to take with them, the asylum seekers simply refused to move. Every single relocation team returned without completing the job.

The YMCA responded by colluding with NASS to cut the families' benefits. NASS cancelled each family's address and issued letters to their 'new' flat instructing them to collect their meagre benefits at the local post office in Springburn, seven miles and two bus journeys away and therefore out of reach – essentially trying to starve the families into moving.

But nothing could stop their determination. By the end of June, not a single family had moved. Organising meetings were taking place in the communities; protests outside the YMCA tower block had started and NASS finally had to give in and put an

immediate stop to moves to the YMCA. For the next three months no one will have to move to the YMCA, while the Angel Group will try to secure enough properties in the local areas to house the affected families. But after this date, nothing is guaranteed.

Following this victory, resistance to all the government's repressive measures against asylum seekers has been stepped up. The weekly vigils outside Brand Street reporting centre in solidarity with those signing on have grown over the last couple of months and have forced the Home Office into granting monthly instead of weekly signings to all families signing on Saturdays.

The movement will grow stronger until it will be able to successfully challenge the racist controls imposed upon asylum seekers by the British state.

Detention centre protests continue

Colnbrook

Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre (IRC), near Heathrow Airport in London, has become notorious for brutality towards detainees. There has been an intermittent hunger strike by asylum seekers in protest at their detention and treatment since 8 April.

Between 2 and 16 May six asylum seekers attempted to commit suicide. On 2 May, 24-year-old Amadie Ayatollah from Afghanistan was seriously injured after jumping from the second floor landing. The same day, hunger-striker Romeo Dzamba was locked in a secure block after being beaten and racially abused by SERCO security officers for talking to the press. He was handcuffed and his head repeatedly banged against the floor. He was then removed to Chelmsford prison. On 16 May Ayatollah Hamedji jumped three floors; he left a suicide note addressed to the centre Manager Craig Thomson, detailing the racist abuse and threats he had suffered. On 3 June Matadi Kidinga Christian slashed his wrists after being beaten by four immigration officers. Doctors and the press are being denied access to the prisoners who are attacked by officers and put into solitary confinement if they talk to outsiders.

SERCO has increased body searches and threatened protesters with isolation cells, and the Home Office has sped up the deportation of those such as Amos Onokare Alajaibo, Thomas Galazoe and Romeo Dzamba suspected to be involved or leading the protests. Direct phone lines to Colnbrook have been cut off and the Home Office and media have censored information about the existence and extent of the protests.

Resistance is at an all-time high. Forty detainees have formed the Colnbrook Detainees Forum and issued a joint statement on 22 June:

'We the detainees of Colnbrook IRC have come to the conclusion that we are being held hostage by a monster that appears to be out of control by its creator... We have run out of pleas and petitions, or reason to explain or question the ethics behind an organisation that dedicates itself to the dehumanisation of already distressed, displaced and disturbed people... We have repeatedly called for help and intervention, for an investigation of these crimes against humanity... We are beginning to believe the silence which has greeted our cries is either inevitable because no one can help, or deliberate because no one will help, or

no one is willing to or bold enough to help. This is why we have resolved to proceed on a declared hunger strike... until someone in authority takes notice of our plight. We make the following requests with all respect for the authorities:

- an audience with the immigration minister Liam Byrne, MP,
- parliament to set up an independent committee to investigate the injustices being perpetrated by the IND, the AIT and Detention Centres.
- temporary admission for any detainee in custody for over one month.
- a temporary work permit for every detainee granted temporary admission, so they can earn a living, and support them... those who had work permits before detention, to be reinstated.
- temporary NASS assistance for all detainees made destitute by the long periods of detention.'

Campsfield

At Campsfield IRC in Oxfordshire 120 asylum seekers began a hunger strike on 14 June in protest at their indefinite detention without charge or trial and the brutal, racist dehumanising conditions.

The protest was triggered after a

Somali man climbed onto the roof with a rope and plastic bag, threatening to hang himself if he wasn't released. The police were called and he was removed to Colnbrook. He had been living in Milton Keynes for more than 10 years after claiming asylum; he has British citizenship, but was arrested as a suspected 'terrorist', imprisoned for a year and then kept in prison for a further four months, threatened with the further punishment of deportation, despite removal to Somalia being unlawful.

On 21 June hungerstriker Antony Osas Aghayere was beaten by guards as he was dragged out of Campsfield and moved to Colnbrook. His injuries were still evident a week later when he was seen by a doctor. The Home Office has tried to deport him to stop him bringing a case of assault.

The detainees wrote to the press: 'Most of us have been here for a long while now. There are people who have been detained for up to two years... We are cramped in here like animals. We are treated like animals and moved around different detention centres like animals. The immigration service have taken husbands from their families and taken people who ran away from persecution in their various

countries, and dumped everyone in here... Campsfield has become a slave house. We detainees are treated like slaves, to do odd jobs for officers. Detainees are handcuffed to see doctors or dentists in hospitals or clinic appointments. We have some racist security officers who make racist comments to detainees and go out of their way to make you feel like committing suicide. Detainees have to be at the point of death before they get to see the doctors. The food is not worth eating. Even dogs would refuse to eat what we eat... We want the government to stop its hypocrisy and release the innocent people they herd into their detention centres.'

Campsfield is now run by US corporation GEO (Global Expertise on Outsourcing), formerly Wackenhut, which has a history of running racist brutal detention centres in the US and Australia. Medical treatment is now non-existent – sleeping tablets are given to people who have rashes and those who complain of serious illnesses are given paracetamol. One detainee who has a bullet lodged in his knee has been refused an operation. Journalists have been refused entry into the centre. Asylum seekers are forced to work: painting, gardening, clearing tables and mopping floors in return for £3 or £5 vouchers. Guards have even tried to bribe detainees with extra vouchers either to end their hunger strikes or to identify the detainees who organised the protests.

Charles Chinweizu