

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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FRFI marching against Labour imperialists in Manchester, 23 September

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IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN IMPERIALISM'S CRUSADE

'It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century.'

In a speech to the American Legion in Salt Lake City at the beginning of September, President Bush said, 'The war we are fighting today is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century.' Coming from Bush this was a remarkably accurate statement. It indicates that the ruling classes in the imperialist countries understand that what is at stake in the present struggles in the Middle East and elsewhere may be the very survival of imperialism itself. JIM CRAVEN reports.

A few weeks earlier, speaking at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, British Prime Minister Blair had referred to 'an elemental struggle about values' and said the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan 'were not just about changing regimes but changing value systems'. Had they elaborated in an honest fashion Bush and Blair would have explained that the ideology and values at stake represent the right of the rich capitalist nations to conquer,

occupy, oppress and exploit the resources and people of the rest of the world. More likely they would have mystified their ideology, as capitalists usually do, by talking about spreading 'freedom', 'democracy' and 'civilisation' against 'the forces of evil'. At the same American Legion rally at which Bush spoke, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, with his grotesque ability to calmly turn the truth on its head, said the world faced 'a new kind

of fascism'. He went on, 'Those who know the truth need to speak out against the kinds of myths and distortions that are being told about our country and our troops.' Immediately afterwards the Pentagon announced they would tender a \$20 million public relations contract to promote more positive coverage from Iraq in US and Middle Eastern media - 'public relations' being what Rumsfeld regards as synonymous with the truth.

Difficulties sow division

However, no amount of public relations can conceal the fact that mounting problems for the imperialists are creating divisions among their ruling classes and cynicism among the people. Nearly two thirds of the US population disapprove of the way Bush is handling the war on Iraq. In Britain Blair is leaving office with his reputation in tatters, in part, at least, because of concern among sections of the rul-

ing class at his handling of the war and his unconditional support for the Zionist onslaught in Lebanon. The imperialist public relations machine can no longer get away with talk of weapons of mass destruction or toppling dictators. The rallying cry of 'democracy' has been muted by imperialism's blatant attempt to starve into submission the freely elected Hamas government in Palestine. Even the 'war on terror' excuse is beginning to wear thin. More than half the US population no longer believe the war on Iraq has anything to do with a war on terror. Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, one of many Republicans trying to distance themselves from Bush in the run-up to the November Congressional elections, said of the war in Iraq, 'This is no more a war on terror than World War Two was a war on blitzkrieg... Terror is a tactic; it is not our enemy. Our enemy is a people who have an ideol-

ogy.' On 8 September the US Senate issued a report stating that Saddam Hussein's regime had no relationship with Al Qaida, one of the big lies used by the Bush regime as a pretext to invade Iraq.

Those arrayed on the other side of this 'decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century' presently include resistance fighters in Iraq and Palestine, the people's army in Nepal, the government of Iran, Hizbullah and the Taliban, and the people and governments of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. Their ideologies range widely from militant Islam to revolutionary socialism. What they have in common is a rejection of the idea that their countries can be exploited in the interests of imperialism and its agents and a willingness to fight for their ideals. In recent months their forces have been in the ascendancy, creating the present turmoil within the imperialist ranks.

continued on page 3

Welcome...

'Yesterday, ladies and gentlemen, from this platform, the President of the United States, the gentleman to whom I refer as the devil, came here talking as if he owned the world. Truly, As the owner of the world. I think we could call a psychiatrist to analyse yesterday's statement made by the President of the United States. As the spokesman of imperialism, he came to share his recipes, to try to preserve the current pattern of domination, exploitation and pillage of the peoples of the world.' Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, at the UN General Assembly, 20 September 2006



President Hugo Chavez addressing the UN General Assembly

(see page 12).

In Latin America people are moving in the opposite direction. Between 14 and 17 September in Havana, Cuba, the 14th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement took place where leaders from Latin America, Africa and Asia discussed the possibility of creating a world free from imperialist domination and exploitation (see page 6). Resistance in Latin America is widespread and the potential for revolution is apparent, from the workers and peasant struggle in Bolivia to the protests of the Mexican people against fraudulent elections and the decision of the Venezuelan government to reject imperialist interference (see page 7).

At the heart of this movement for change is revolutionary Cuba, which despite the illness of its leader Fidel Castro, remains strong and calm (see page 6). This is hardly surprising considering the level of consciousness of the Cuban people under the stewardship of a disciplined and dedicated Communist Party.

Here in Britain, life for many is going from bad to worse. The education of working class children has become a commodity which can be sold to the highest bidder (see page 4). Hospitals are cutting services to make way for privatisation. New plans include closing down hospitals and midwife led maternity units despite a rise in A&E attendances (see page 4).

Asylum seekers in Britain are also feeling the cutting edge of the increasingly reactionary policies of the British state. Entire families who have fled from poverty and war, created by the imperialist economic system, to seek refuge in Britain face discrimination and ill treatment (see pages 13 and 16). Who is behind the pillage and injustice here? The devil in the UN? Tony Blair?

Gordon Brown? No. It is not a matter of individuals. It is the capitalist system that is to blame and it is the British Labour Party that is both the representative of and executioner for this backward system.

The system now relies on repression more than ever. Police, under the guise of fighting terrorism, have been granted new powers to make arrests (see page 5). The reality, of course, is not about combating terrorism but about keeping working class people from fighting for their basic rights. Any genuine movement must confront the imperialism of the Labour Party and make a clear split from it. We can have no confidence in the trade unions. The trade union movement has never recognised nor represented the most oppressed sections in society and they continue to tie themselves to the blood-stained Labour Party (see page 10).

It is time for serious action. As Hugo Chavez said: 'The imperialists see extremists all around. No, it's not that we are extremists. What is happening is that the world is waking up and people everywhere are rising up. I have the impression, Mr Imperialist Dictator, that you will live the rest of your days as if in a nightmare, because no matter where you look we will be rising up against US imperialism. Yes, they call us extremists, we who demand complete freedom in the world, equality among peoples and respect for national sovereignty. We are rising up against the Empire, against the model of domination.'

Imperialism is a brutal system, but it is made by humans and humans can tear it down. Start today, contact us to get involved.

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£10,000 target met

Many thanks to all our readers and supporters: we raised £10,209 in this year's fighting fund appeal. This has enabled us to support our expanding work building an anti-imperialist movement in Britain.

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NEWS

US admits torture charter

CAT WIENER

On 6 September, US President Bush shamelessly confirmed what has long been known – that for the past five years the CIA has been operating a network of secret torture camps across Europe and the Middle East. At the same time he announced that 14 'top level Al Qaida terrorists', having been subjected to 'tough' interrogation, would now face military commissions at Guantanamo Bay concentration camp. These commissions are simply a new name for the military tribunals banned by the Supreme Court in July 2006 and

will continue to deny rights to the defendant and permit evidence obtained by torture. Far from being closed down, Guantanamo is being re-vamped.

The Supreme Court also ruled that Article III of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits 'outrages upon personal dignity' and 'humiliating and degrading treatment' applies to Taliban and Al Qaida suspects. In 2002 Bush had stated that they were exempt. With the risk that CIA operatives could now face prosecution as war criminals, Bush brokered a deal whereby he would nominally accept Article III, while retaining the right, as Commander in Chief, to breach it if

'necessary'. In the same vein, the Pentagon issued a watered-down version of its field manual for interrogation techniques. For example, water boarding (partial drowning), included in earlier drafts, no longer appears.

However, George Bush and Dick Cheney have fought tooth and nail against 'anti-torture' proposals put forward by Republican Senator John McCain, threatening to veto them and attempting to exempt the CIA from their provisions.

Whatever is written on paper, George Bush has made it clear that the US administration will continue to use torture in its arsenal of terror against its opponents.

Doha trade talks collapse

TREVOR RAYNE

Disputes that resulted in the failure of the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organisation (WTO) conference were replayed and led to the collapse of the so called 'Doha round' of talks in Geneva at the end of July.

Ostensibly about promoting free trade, the US and EU agenda is really about promoting big business at the expense of small producers, especially in the underdeveloped countries. The US and EU representatives fell out over reducing agricultural subsidies: neither would move before the

other. The underdeveloped countries resisted opening their markets even wider to US and EU exports and investments without the US and EU cutting their farm subsidies. India's trade minister, Kamal Nath, explained that: 'Indian farmers can compete with US farmers, but not with the US Treasury.'

The 30 most developed capitalist nations spent \$285 billion on agricultural subsidies in 2005. Almost one third of EU farm income came from these payments. In the Doha round the US stated that it intended to increase its farm subsidies by \$3.5 billion a year. In the name of free trade the

US and EU argued that the underdeveloped countries should pull down remaining tariff barriers against their agricultural exports.

In the EU and US the bulk of the subsidies are paid to large agribusinesses and big landowners. The failure of the Doha round reflects the rivalry between US and EU capitalism and the refusal of the poor countries of the world to endorse their own economic and social annihilation under the rule of multinational corporate power. Imperialism will now proceed to try and impose trade deals on individual countries, playing one off against the other.

Life shouldn't be like this – the fight to beat the multinationals

SAM RAE

The struggle of Indian people in the southern state of Kerala against Pepsi and Coca-Cola products reached a new stage when on 22 September, in a court case brought by the multinationals, the Kerala High Court overturned a state ban on their production and sale. In response, supporters of the ban smashed stocks of Pepsi Cola and attacked eight lorries ferrying Coca-Cola. The Kerala state government has said it will appeal to the Supreme Court.

Kerala banned the sale and production of Pepsi and Coca-Cola products in August in response to a recent study showing dangerously high levels of pesticide residues in Indian soft drinks. Seven other Indian states have banned the sale of Coca-Cola and Pepsi drinks in schools and government buildings.

The pesticide study was published by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a high profile NGO. The results show that Indian soft drinks contain pesticides at levels on average 24 times higher than the safety standard agreed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). The study looked at 57 samples from 25 bottling plants throughout India, all of which contained a cocktail of three to six different pesticides. In one sample of Coca-Cola the CSE found Lindane, a confirmed carcinogen, at a concentration 140 times



'We want fresh air. We want fresh water' – Protest at a Coca Cola plant

the BIS standard. Chlorpyrifos, a neurotoxin, known to cross the placenta in pregnant women, was found in all the samples at an average level of 47 times higher than the BIS standard.

The CSE first revealed the high levels of pesticides in soft drinks in 2003. At that time a Joint Parliamentary Committee recommended compulsory standards for pesticide residues in soft drinks. Although these standards have been agreed, the Ministry of Health has yet to implement them. The CSE has accused the Ministry of colluding with the cola companies, which together control 80% of the Indian soft drinks market. The cola companies are lobbying for regulations to be restricted to the raw materials that they use – water and sugar – and not to their final product.

In imposing the ban the Kerala government also pointed to the devastating impact of Coca-Cola's bottling plant in Plachimada, Kerala, which has

caused severe water shortages and soil contamination in the surrounding area. Large scale protests succeeded in closing the Plachimada plant in March 2004, and similar grassroots campaigns exist against plants throughout India.

Meanwhile the US government has written to Indian officials urging them to treat the companies fairly. Clearly the drinks giants and the US government think it's 'unfair' for the Indian people to set their own regulations to protect public health and the environment. What else would you expect from a company like Coca-Cola, implicated in dirty deals around the globe and already subject to a boycott because of its collusion in the murder of eight trade unionists in Colombia?

Coca-Cola's Hindi slogan is *Life ho toh aisi* – Life should be like this. Thankfully there are many Indian activists who don't agree, and they are fighting to make their voices heard.

IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN

IMPERIALISM'S CRUSADE

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Iraq occupation escalates violence

It was only a few months ago that the US and British governments were promising that the new government in Iraq would lead to peace and stability and that the occupying forces would soon be able to hand over control to Iraqi security forces. At the beginning of August, however, the outgoing British Ambassador to Iraq, William Patey, in a leaked memo to Blair warned that civil war leading to a de facto division of the country was a more likely outcome in Iraq than the emergence of a stable democracy. He suggested that, 'Even the lowered expectation of President Bush for Iraq – a government that can sustain itself, defend itself and govern itself and is an ally in the war on terrorism – must remain in doubt.' Around the same time General John Abizaid, head of the US Central Command that oversees the war on Iraq, admitted: 'The sectarian violence is probably as bad as I've seen it'.

An additional 100,000 US-trained recruits have joined the Iraqi army and police over the past year, bringing the total to more than 260,000. In September the occupying forces formally handed over command of the Iraqi forces to the Iraqi government. This, however, was just another public relations exercise. In reality the US military will continue to control them just as they do the Iraqi intelligence services, which are funded by the CIA and report back to them first, not to the Iraqi government.

Despite the increased number of Iraqi troops, the situation is so perilous for the occupying forces that General Abizaid had to play down suggestions made only the previous month by General George Casey that troop cuts would soon be possible. This confusion in the ranks of the US state was underlined when a group of leading Democrats wrote to President Bush calling for a phased redeployment of US troops to begin by the end of the year. John Warner, chair of the Senate armed services committee, said Congress might have to re-examine the authority given to Bush to wage war in Iraq.

The number of violent deaths each month in Iraq has been rising since February. Even official figures reveal that over 3,000 Iraqis were killed in June. In July there was an average 52 attacks each day across Baghdad. A record 1,815 bodies, many of them the victims of torture and mutilation, arrived at the Baghdad morgue. By early August, 120 Iraqis every day were suffering violent deaths; an annual rate of over 43,000.

The imperialists blame much of the violence on sectarian militias. In mid-August occupation and puppet government forces launched a major operation called 'Together Forward', ostensibly to weaken the power of the militias, an extra 12,000 troops were drafted into Baghdad. However, the focus of the operation was only those militias hostile to the imperialist occupation. A former Iraqi government minister said: 'The Americans are not honest brokers. They switch their support between the Shi'a, Sunni and Kurds in order to serve their own interests.' They turned a blind eye to the Shi'a Badr militias that control large sections of the Iraqi security

forces and are responsible for many of the attacks on Sunni supporters of the Iraqi resistance. Most Sunnis regard Iraqi police and police commando detachments as officially sanctioned death squads. Instead, the imperialist forces concentrated on attacking the Mehdi army, followers of the Shi'a cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Moqtada has his base among workers in Sadr City, the poorest part of Baghdad. In the leaked memo William Patey said, 'preventing the Mehdi army from developing into a state within a state, as Hizbullah has done in Lebanon, will be a priority'. Although sections of the Mehdi army have been blamed for some attacks on Sunnis, Moqtada has repeatedly called for united resistance among Iraqis and the Mehdi have several times engaged in prolonged fighting against US forces. On the first day of the operation US forces killed three people including a child in Sadr City. They also seized seven bodyguards of Iraqi health minister Ali Al Shemari, a follower of Moqtada. At the end of August 73 people, including 23 Iraqi soldiers, were killed in a battle between the Mehdi army and Iraqi security forces in Diwaniya.

Resistance takes its toll

The US military claimed attacks in Baghdad had fallen by 41% since the start of the Together Forward campaign. However, resistance to the occupation is unrelenting and deepening its toll on imperialist troops. The Pentagon's latest quarterly report to Congress admitted that the Iraqi resistance movement remained 'potent and viable'. Other US military figures showed that attacks against US and Iraqi puppet forces had doubled since January. In July US forces encountered 2,625 roadside bombs compared with 1,454 in January. US Private Justin Cross said, 'It drives you nuts. You feel like every step you might get blown up. You just hit a point where you're like – "If I die today, I die". You're just walking a death walk.' In Britain the Ministry of Defence said that 1,541 British service personnel had received treatment for mental health problems between the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and December 2005. The size of the British Army fell by 1,500 last year, despite increased recruitment, because so many troops are leaving. Absence without leave is also increasing. By mid-August 740 troops had gone AWOL. By 6 September 2,663 US troops, 117 British troops and 102 other Coalition troops had been killed in Iraq.

Afghan resistance exhausts British forces

In Afghanistan British Lt-General David Richards, NATO commander, said the resistance was even fiercer than in Iraq. He admitted it was the worst sustained fighting the British army has had to face since the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. When British reinforcements were sent to Afghanistan last spring the then Defence Secretary, John Reid, wanted to give the impression it would be a short-term 'hearts and minds' campaign, said he hoped the troops would return without a shot being fired. Since then hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Afghan people and resistance fighters have been killed. Since June 16 British soldiers have been killed in action. From 1 August to 15

September 11 British and 11 Canadian troops were killed in combat. Additionally, on 2 September a RAF Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft taking part in a major NATO operation crashed killing 14 more servicemen. The Army initially denied claims that it had been shot down by the Taliban. Later the Ministry of Defence (MOD) modified this to say it was 'pretty confident' that the crash was an accident. However, eye witnesses report seeing flames coming from the aircraft at a high altitude. When a Hercules aircraft crashed last year in Iraq killing 10 servicemen the MOD also claimed it was an accident, only to discover later that the plane had been shot down by resistance fighters. In any case the army admitted in June that the Taliban had SAM missiles capable of attacking aircraft in the air and that there had been three to five attempts to 'lock-on' to aircraft this year.

NATO commanders in Afghanistan have been calling for troop reinforcements for 18 months. In July Britain sent an extra 900 troops bringing the total British force to 4,500. However, the fighting has been so intense that troops on the ground are said to be exhausted. Brigadier Ed Butler, commander of British forces in southern Afghanistan, said: 'We've used all the assets available to British forces.' Sir Richard Dannatt, head of the British Army, said British forces were fighting at the limits of their capacity and could 'only just cope' with the campaign. In September Lt-General Richards called for 2,500 further reinforcements including a 1,000 strong rapid reaction force.

Germany and the Netherlands, which have 2,200 and 1,400 troops respectively in the NATO force, as well as Turkey, Italy and Spain, have all so far refused to increase their contingents and are reluctant even to re-deploy any of their present forces to the main battlefields in the southern Helmand province. Pleas from NATO's Secretary General, US Secretary of State Rice and Prime Minister Blair for additional NATO combatants have thus far elicited 1,000 Polish soldiers promised for February who were already promised anyway and will be stationed well away from the fighting. Consequently, it is reported that Britain may post more troops to Afghanistan. The NATO powers are close to open division.

At the beginning of August three British soldiers were killed in Musa Qala on the first day of a major operation when their patrol vehicle was hit by rocket-propelled grenades and machine-gun fire. In the rising panic over the British death toll there has been much criticism in the media that British forces are still having to use Land Rover 'snatch vehicles' designed for use on the streets of Belfast and Derry. But this patrol was destroyed in a heavily armoured Scimitar tank. At the end of the month the first death of a British soldier to be killed in a direct attack on an army post occurred at the Musa Qala outpost.

Imperialist troops have now been forced to pull back to more easily defensible positions at Lashkar Gar and Camp Bastion and the US firebase at Musa Qala has been shut down. The resistance fighters have proved strong enough to move from small groups using hit and run tactics to larger detachments able to take and hold substantial areas and are proving very



Time they went?

20-40,000 people attended the Stop the War 'Time to Go' march in Manchester on 24 September. The Labour Party conference hadn't started, so the whole affair was a harmless gesture as far as the government was concerned. Labour lefts were welcome on the platform: Tony Benn, MPs Alan Simpson, Jeremy Corbyn and Michael Meacher spoke alongside TGWU General Secretary Tony Woodley and SWP's Lindsey German. No break here with the rotten racist and imperialist Labour Party: no surprise that FRFI's noisy contingent chanting 'Labour Party, War Party' met with hostility from the organisers. We say: it's time Stop the War stopped being an obstacle to building a real anti-imperialist movement.

difficult to dislodge. Suicide bombings against military targets have also started within Kabul itself. A British soldier was killed there in a bomb attack on 3 September. On 8 September a suicide bomb killed 16 people including two soldiers near the US embassy in Kabul.

Record opium crop

Eradication of the opium crop, which the US and Britain in particular used as an excuse for their actions in Afghanistan, has not happened. This year will see a record harvest, up 59% on last year, mainly due to increased production in the southern provinces where British troops are operating. Afghanistan will produce about 6,100 tons of opium; 92% of the world's output. It is the only significant item in the country's economy. The puppet government is riddled with drug barons. US officials fear their corruption has created a crisis of confidence among the Afghan people and could bring down the govern-

ment. Executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, said that Afghanistan was 'displaying ominous hallmarks of incipient collapse with large scale drug cultivation and trafficking' and what he called 'insurgency and terrorism and corruption'. Lt-General Richards described the country as 'close to anarchy'. The British occupiers are in a dilemma: if they confront the opium crop they will drive more Afghans towards the Taliban, if they allow it then Taliban funds grow.

Imperialism is failing in Iraq and Afghanistan – it is being hurt. Senior British officers and politicians repeatedly praise the 'professionalism and commitment' of British soldiers and reassure us of their 'high morale'. The British ruling class has a long tradition of expending young lives in Afghanistan and Iraq and will continue to do so until it is stopped. What imperialism cannot stand is to be seen to be losing.

Whose conspiracy?

Franz Kafka remarked that the cinema put the eye in uniform. Doctor Goebbels was a past master at spreading rumours, often accompanying them with photographs used to devalue and supplant any precise information. On 10 August the British security forces announced that they had foiled the plans of a gang of 'radical Islamic' terrorists intent on blowing up aeroplanes flying from Britain to the US.

M15 said that this was a 'critical situation' and called on the public to 'be very vigilant'. Flights were cancelled, rigorous check-in procedures introduced and the disruption filmed and broadcast far and wide. US President Bush praised the British strike at terrorism and announced that we are 'at war with Islamic fascists'. We were to be on our guard – and mobilised into the war on terror. 24 people were arrested in Britain, and US intelligence said at least 50 people linked with Al

Qaida were involved.

Whatever the substance of the conspiracy (still to be proven) the police operation coincided with growing criticism and disgust at US and British support for Zionism's premeditated attempt at annihilating Lebanon. For several days the cameras and newsprint focussed on the 'war on terror' back home; it was made headline news, supplanting Lebanon's suffering. In February 2003 British Army tanks were deployed at Heathrow airport to thwart a rumoured attack. This preceded London's two million strong demonstration against the looming Iraq war. A presumed Al Qaida threat was invoked to support US and British war preparations. The British state is at war, psychological operations are integral to war. Goebbels and the Nazis knew all about putting on a show to aid their mobilisations; we can expect more and bigger shows.

Trevor Rayne

HEALTH MATTERS

Privatisation in all but name

HANNAH CALLER

'Are we privatising the NHS? Never. Are we changing the NHS? Absolutely.' These are the words of the Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt as she pledged to press on with the current NHS reforms despite protests from health workers and patients, calls for an end to private sector involvement and outcry over hospital closures, cuts in salary, job losses and service reduction.

In a speech to health workers at the Institute for Public Policy and Research, Hewitt insisted that core NHS values were 'non-negotiable' but that services had to change to meet modern needs and admitted that it was difficult times for staff and 'there is a sense that many in the service no longer know where it is going'. In reply to a question on how far the government would go with the new reforms, Hewitt replied 'I don't think we should set artificial limits'. She has stated that introducing more competition is vital to securing better services and has ruled out limits on the involvement of private companies in the NHS. Hewitt's pledge amounts to little more than a semantic con-trick than fools no-one. The government's plans for the NHS will amount to privatisation in all but name.

Reducing the deficit or improving care

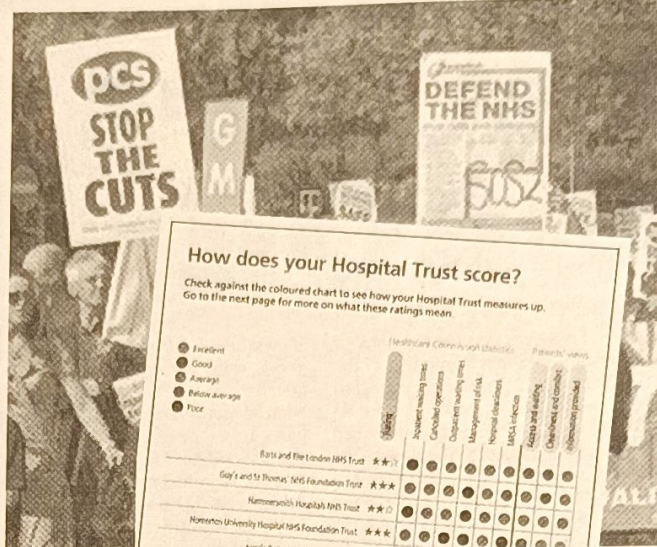
Only a month into the job and the new

NHS chief executive David Nicholson has announced up to 60 'reconfigurations' of NHS services affecting all areas of Britain with the aim of improving patient care. This will particularly focus on A&E services, maternity departments and children's services. Nicholson angered the Royal College of Midwives by referring to the 'wicked issue' of maternity. Nicholson admitted that some changes were aimed at reducing the NHS deficit, £512 million last year, but said the overall aim is to improve the NHS by concentrating services in fewer hospitals. The plans include closing hospitals in towns of fewer than 250,000, closing midwife-led maternity units, replacing A&E departments with minor injury units and moving some services out of hospitals and into community clinics and GP surgeries.

This comes at the same time as research is published showing that A&E attendances have risen since the GP contract changed and out-of-hours care was handed over to the Primary Care Trusts. Since October 2004 for instance, Heartlands and Solihull Hospitals have seen attendances for less severe conditions rise by 51% while major illness and trauma figures have remained stable. Earlier in the year, A&E attendances across the country were reported to have risen by 13%.

Privatisation's ugly trail

Despite Hewitt's protestations, privatisation is being stepped up and money is being poured into the private sector, with significant redundancies and closures widespread. The Independent Sector Treatment Centre programme (now in phase two with 14 different independent sector providers being brought in to deliver 150,000 elective operations per year) will take work from the NHS and contribute to situations such as that at Ravenscourt Park Hospital in west London. Ravenscourt Park Hospital was leased from the private sector by the NHS in 2002. After four years of not attracting sufficient patients it is closing. If the building is not used taxpayers will be paying £40 million for an empty building for the remaining lease.



The Labour government is offering the illusion of choice to cover up the reality of rationing

staff in five distribution centres, services 10,000 destinations and makes an average of 1,200 deliveries a day. Now NHS Logistics and the Purchasing and Supplies Agency are being outsourced to DHL/Novation. Novation, based in Texas and currently under investigation by the Senate for alleged anti-competitive behaviour, is negotiating a contract that will make it and its German partner, DHL, responsible for buying everything for the health service. From 1 October, Novation will be responsible for negotiating the purchase of 500,000 products. DHL/Novation will be paid on the basis of the money it saves the NHS. There is no incentive for quality. The Department of Health has refused to disclose the full list of what it will supply, stating that it is a confidential part of the negotiations.

Outsourcing supplies

NHS Logistics, set up in 2000 as a non-profit organisation and responsible for £4.2 billion a year of purchasing and distribution, provides the health service in England with a huge range of products from food, mattresses and syringes to magnetic resonance imagers, electricity and fuel. NHS Logistics employs 1,400

staff in five distribution centres, services 10,000 destinations and makes an average of 1,200 deliveries a day.

There is great concern about whether a private company will be able to deliver on time. This concern follows the deaths of elderly people when the privatised company responsible for delivering oxygen to their homes failed to do so. Unison says that the ten year contract

is worth £3.7 billion. Workers at NHS logistics are planning two 24-hour walk-outs, the second to coincide with the Labour Party conference. This is part of the biggest outbreak of industrial unrest in the NHS for almost 20 years.

A government pledged to our well-being?

How ironic this all is in the light of a document brought out recently by the Labour government: *A strategy for health and well being of working age people*. It states that: 'The health and well being of people of working age is therefore of fundamental importance to our future and we are committed to bringing about a real and sustained improvement in this area.'

In London alone in 2005, £259 million was cut from health spending with £70 million further cuts announced. 300 jobs are to go at the Hammersmith Hospital, 480 at the Royal Free, 300 have gone from St George's with a further 150 to go, and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich has gone bankrupt through the process of Private Finance Initiative. Surrey and Sussex are losing 400 jobs, United Lincolnshire hospitals over 500 jobs, the National Blood Service has lost over 150 jobs and NHS Direct over 1,000 jobs. These are just a few examples. Overall up to 20,000 NHS staff are set to lose their jobs.

Always electioneering

It is increasingly clear to all that these changes are motivated by financial and political considerations, not a desire to improve patient care. With an eye to the next general election, the government is attempting to engage in some damage limitation, mapping out closures to avoid making cuts in marginal Labour seats.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister-in-Waiting Gordon Brown has his own plans, to devolve the running of the NHS to an unaccountable board which will enable the government to distance itself from any controversial decisions about services.

Despite Hewitt's words, the government plans are clear - there is no limit to their plans, market forces are driving the changes and this is the next step in the dismantling of the National Health Service.

EDUCATION NOTES

Education for an ever more competitive market - sometimes

It is a particular vice of this government to combine low-minded moralising with high-level grovelling to big business. Labour's 'respect agenda', a package of insults and attacks on working class families, is brought out of the cupboard every time critical voices are raised against privatisation in the public services. Bad parenting is unpatriotic, goes the spin. It results in failure at school, low skill levels and unemployment. The very future economic stability of the country depends upon raising the skills level of the new workforce if Britain is to remain a global competitor in the international league table of prosperity. This is why the regime of testing and targets holds state education in an iron grip and why parents are subject to threats and sanctions, such as loss of housing benefit or imprisonment.

The national curriculum, from reception class to school-leaving is designed for 'employability' but the government fails to get the poorest young people into work. The previous £40 a week minimum training allowance for work-based learning programmes such as Entry to

Employment has been cut to a means-tested £10 to £30 a week and as a result recruitment has fallen off by 50%.

Employers do not give skills training unless it pays for itself. In 1998, it was estimated that only 13% of work places could be designated high-performance work places, where, for example, teamwork and responsibility were encouraged. The workplace Employment Relations Survey carried out in 2004 found that this proportion had risen to 16% of workplaces, covering 28% of the national workforce. Professor David Ashton of the Centre for Labour Market Studies says, 'Current government policy is focused on persuading employers that if they invest in skills there is an automatic pay-off in terms of profitability' but he adds that 'many businesses know only too well that raising the skills of their employees eats into profits'.

Contestability and contestation

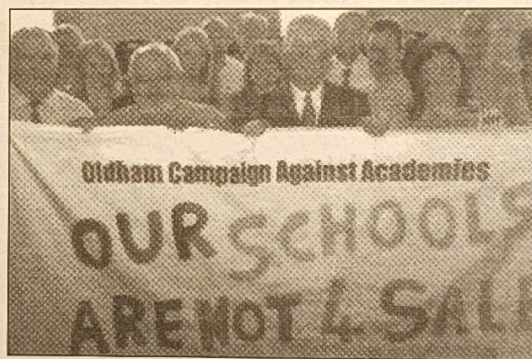
The aggression and fear that has been created around bad parenting and the skills agenda is a diversion to justify the privatisation of public resources. The government uses spin-speak, and Gordon

Brown is excellent at this, such as 'driving forward the contestability and competition agenda to introduce choice by layering resources to needs'. This means outsourcing and selling off the public sector to companies who will sell on services to consumers. At times, the new customers are a section of the public who can now afford to buy extra privileges such as private schooling for their own children or the customer may be the government itself.

From junior librarian to Guantanamo Bay camp

Thumb prints of children as young as 11 are used as an identification system in around 3,500 British schools, usually in libraries but also for attendance and cashless school lunches. A Leave Them Kids Alone campaign has been set up by parents in Cambridge to protest about issues of security and privacy. There are, however, further grounds for outrage. A military company connected to US interrogators at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay Camp in US occupied Cuba is behind the fingerprinting system used in British schools. VeriCool, which runs the finger printing sys-

tem, is part of Anteon, a US company which provides training and technology for the US military. Anteon has the contract to run specialist courses on interrogation and counter-intelligence at Fort Huachuca in Arizona, headquarters of the US Army Intelligence Center. The company, recently bought by a larger defence business, General Dynamics Information Technology, has been accused of training interrogators who worked at Guantanamo Bay Camp. Its instructors have included former staff sergeant Jeanette Arocho-Bukart who was criticised for humiliating Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib using techniques such as smearing them with red ink which they were told was menstrual blood. Anteon was also involved in running news websites in the Balkans and Africa which claimed to provide impartial coverage but were in fact funded by the US military to broadcast propaganda. The Pentagon ruled in December 2005 that the websites had not violated US law. What better illustration could there be that the business sector, admired by the Labour government as efficient and well-managed, is based on the torture and tears of others?



Never mind the \$2 million

Academy sponsorship of privately run schools by religious groups, charities and businesses, now includes West Bromwich Albion football club, HSBC and one of Britain's biggest pub owners. Newly-built state funded buildings at an average cost of £30 million each are being handed over for £2 million payment, now deferred over 5 years, as an inducement to those who want to buy friends and influence people. It is attractive to be a benefactor, to give tax-deductible funds away, to be an official philanthropist. Take for example, Jack Petchey, with a personal fortune of £525 million, up from £300 million in 2005 and the 119th richest man in Britain. His academy opens this year in Hackney, London, one of the most deprived boroughs in the country. The eighty year old is a local boy made good, his latest investment being the purchase of 205 pubs for £98 million. He has already given £15 million to Essex and east London clubs and schools and the Petchey Academy will be the crowning glory of his charitable legacy. However, the taint of criminality attached to academy sponsorship in the cash for honours scandal is the least of the problems. Parents protest that huge new academies, many with a Christian fundamentalist ethos, are being established at the cost of the closure of a range of local schools. The rushed legislation that was bullied through to establish the new academy schools is unclear about who really runs these institutions and whether national wages and conditions apply. Parent protest groups are springing up all over the country despite threats that money will be withheld from refurbishing crumbling buildings if the local community does not go along with selling off state schools.

Susan Davidson

Labour's war on working class youth

In August Surrey's assistant chief constable Mark Rowley put forward proposals as part of an internal debate within the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) which would give police new powers to act as judge and jury on Britain's streets. This comes at a time when the Labour government is considering further measures to 'deal with' working class youth.

In a memo leaked in June Home Secretary John Reid was revealed pushing for 'community punishments' to demonstrate 'penance and contrition', and calling for prison-like uniform so convicts can be seen to be repaying the community. Reid's personal secretary told an official that the Home Secretary 'would like us to think outside the box for targeting young offenders. He is keen on looking at involving the army to provide structure to young people's lives'.

Earlier in the year Labour Party Chair Hazel Blears called for compulsory state nannies in the homes of 'nuisance families.' In the same light Tony Blair has been pushing for measures to beat down work-



Police want powers to act as judge and jury on British streets

ing class youths 'before birth.' As they fight to maintain the support of the rich, Labour's war on the poor continues.

A recent study by academics at the University of York showed Britain's 12 million children and teenagers as the unhappiest and unhealthiest of any wealthy European country and 21st out of 25 EU member states in a league table of child well-being. Leading the study Professor John Bradshaw put this down to the fact that 'We've

had two generations of children with very high levels of poverty'. The hardship that exists amongst working class children in Britain is considerable:

- More than 27% of all children in the UK (3.4 million) live in poverty according to the Department for Work and Pensions;
- More than a third go without two or more items that most of the population see as necessities, such as adequate clothing, toys, or three meals a day;

• More than 17% live in households whose adult members are unemployed – the highest level in the EU;

• Poverty is even sharper amongst ethnic minority communities: for example well over half of people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin live in poverty.

Since 1997 under the Blair government police have been given unprecedented powers to criminalise youth and restrict their freedom of movement, association and speech. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), along with the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act, represent some of the most oppressive of Labour's neighbourhood control measures. On-the-spot fines for petty offences (such as £40 for being drunk and disorderly), 'naming and shaming', dispersals, banning orders, evictions and imprisonment are all at the disposal of the police, the foot soldiers of the government's 'respect' programme.

In March, the Home Office announced that 7,356 ASBOs had been given out since 1999 in England and Wales, overwhelmingly to under 18s, including hundreds with ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome or learn-

ing difficulties, and mainly in neighbourhoods with high social deprivation.

Over the summer new Parental Compensation Orders were rolled out in ten areas to force parents of under 10s 'to pay for the damage their children cause' – in other words, the state creates the crime and the poor bear the brunt of the cost.

Mark Rowley's proposals include the immediate exclusion of 'yobs' from town centres at night, and further restrictions on association to tackle 'street gangs', all as part of the Home Office's drive to 'rebalance' the criminal justice system 'in favour of the victim'. According to Rowley, it is 'time to debate whether constables should be given substantial additional, discretionary, summary powers to meet these challenges... Such powers would effectively bring existing criminal justice system powers to the street. We could move from the police referring and the courts sentencing to the police solving and the courts providing scrutiny.' In other words, building a police state, for the purpose of maintaining the 'balance' in favour of the privileged classes.

Bob Quick, Surrey's chief constable, also on ACPO's Workforce Modernisation Committee, defended his colleague's proposals. Apparently there is 'a professional debate going on within the police' over how to deal with people who are 'impervious to the current criminal justice system'. All of this is a precursor to the government's proposals to dish out 'summary justice'.

Not content with curbing the liberty of the nation's deprived youth, Blair and other Labour leaders along with police chiefs have been pushing for 'pre-birth' action to criminalise working class children before

they are even born. The Prime Minister asserted: 'I think we need to deal with these particular issues and we actually do intervene and we intervene at a very early stage. If you've got someone who is a teenage mum, not married, not in a stable relationship: "Here is the support we are prepared to offer you, but we do need to keep a careful watch on you and how your situation is developing because all the indicators are that your type of situation can lead to problems in the future".' He continued: 'If we are not prepared to predict and intervene far more early, children are going to grow up in families that we know perfectly well are completely dysfunctional'. So on the one hand we have communities of poor families struggling to bring up children under harsh social and economic conditions, and on the other a government and state responsible for their oppression and exploitation, attacking and criminalising them, while claiming to be 'supportive'.

Blair has given one home truth about Labour's war on the working class: 'For us as a party and a government, this is something we are passionate about, that we have developed for a number of years and will continue long after I've gone'. Labour will continue their 'Judge Dredd' rule whoever is in their leadership. When Blair said, 'The kids a few years down the line are going to be a menace to society and actually a threat to themselves', what he really means is that working class 'kids' might one day be a threat to the state and the wealth it represents. The government's attacks won't stop until we organise our communities against them.

Louis Brehony

The race to be Prime Minister has started...



Tweedledum and Tweedledee

Agreed to have a battle;

For Tweedledum said

Tweedledee

Had spoiled his nice new rattle.

Just then flew down a monstrous

crow,

As black as a tar-barrel;

Which frightened both the heroes

so,

They quite forgot their quarrel.

Lewis Carroll, Alice Through the Looking Glass

There are still some in Britain who believe that the Labour Party will be born again through the appointment of a new Prime Minister when Tony Blair finally shuffles off. There are even some on the left who think that Gordon Brown is closer to 'Old Labour' than Blair's New Labour – by which they mean that with Brown in the driving seat, the Labour Party will restore its allegiance to the working class, trade unions and 'socialism'. 'Give them another chance', they will cry. Think again. Gordon Brown is every inch an imperialist, just like Blair and the Labour Party they both belong to. This is Brown's record on some of the main issues.

War in Iraq...

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown
The international community should not – and cannot – tolerate or leave unaddressed the

issue of a regime that proliferates chemical, biological and potentially nuclear weapons in absolute defiance of international agreements and decisions...

Gordon Brown, FT interview September 2003 – never retracted despite the evidence that there were no WMDs, chemical, biological or nuclear, no contacts with Al Qaida and no threat to imperialism.

'A secure, safe and strong Britain requires concerted action against global terrorism with all the means at our disposal: military, security, intelligence, economic and culture. To this end coordinating the way we address international terrorism will be a central feature of the coming Spending Review...' Gordon Brown, Hansard

...and the War on Terror

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown
... as Jack Straw, Charles Clarke and John Reid have said, both internationally in Afghanistan and Iraq and at home we will at all times have the strength and resolution so that there is no hiding place for terrorists – or those who finance terrorism – and so we will protect and defend the security of the people of this country.

Gordon Brown, Labour Party Conference 2005 – (Charles Clarke and Jack Straw lost all resolution shortly after).

Detention without charge of suspects under the Terrorism Act for 90 days

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown

'I think people have got to wake up to the complexity, the scale, the global nature of this and why the police need more time...' Gordon Brown, BBC interview after the defeat of the government's proposal, February 2006

Wage restraint for workers (Ooops!)

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown

'Let our party be the pro-enterprise as well as the pro-fairness party: Labour the party of small businesses and the self-employed in Britain just as much as we have always been and are the party of employees.' Gordon Brown, Labour Party conference September 2002: (the term 'workers' is so 1996!)

'Wage discipline must match investment in public services.' Gordon Brown, May 2005

Public Finance Initiatives (PFIs)

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown

'Having promised at the election that we would put schools and hospitals first, we must keep our promise to the people... When the plans are drawn up, the building workers are there and the money provided, the public will not tolerate delays.' Gordon Brown, Labour Party conference 2002

Patriotism

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown

ID cards

☐☐☐☐Blair ☐☐☐☐Brown

'The English language, he will say, should be made an essential element of citizenship, through mandatory language courses for jobseekers found wanting.' (from Press release) Chancellor advocates annual celebration to emulate the US Fourth of July, January 2006

'So out he goes to bat for the ID cards he used to think wildly too expensive. In his speech yesterday on security, he even made a reasonable stab at pretending a pressing need for the 'glorification of terrorism' clause, which virtually no one in the Commons believes. His speeches are taking a Churchillian turn as he reprises his Britishness theme, calling for ceremonies in every constituency for Veterans' Day and new cadet schemes to instil military discipline in state-school pupils.' Polly Toynbee, The Guardian February 2006

– Guantanamo Bay camps, immigration, human rights, ASBOs, police powers ... Brown just needs to keep prudently quiet. As the Lebanese and the Palestinians battled for their lives and the imperialists bought time for the Zionists invaders over the summer, Brown was holed up in Scotland bottling his 'socialist' credentials. Jane Bennett

Rising from the ashes ... another bourgeois party for Scotland

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has split following a high-profile defamation case taken by its former leader Tommy Sheridan against the *News of the World*. On 4 August, Sheridan won £200,000 in damages in response to allegations the newspaper made in 2004/05 that he had cheated on his wife, frequented sex clubs, used prostitutes and participated in orgies.

The trial was the first of its kind heard in a Scottish court. In total 11 leading SSP members gave evidence against Sheridan, telling the jury that their former leader had admitted to them that he had attended a swingers club. Their testimony that Sheridan had lied about his private life severely damaged the SSP and laid the basis for Sheridan to launch a breakaway party, 'Solidarity', with an identical political programme and himself again in charge. Announcing its formation, Sheridan argued that another left parliamentary group could gain support in Scotland: 'We've got a huge constituency. I'm not interested in just the 7 per cent who voted for the

SSP but that 51 per cent who didn't vote and the 30-odd per cent who voted Labour who are now very disillusioned'. Just as the SSP have courted the second preference votes of Labour Party voters, so will Sheridan's Solidarity at next year's May elections to the Scottish Parliament.

Following the trial the Sheridans have featured widely on television and radio and were paid £25,000 for their story by the *Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail* where Sheridan posed topless. Sheridan's increased media exposure since the trial may well be an indication of the shape of things to come for his political career. Sheridan has received support from the Respect MP, and fellow ex-Labour party member and self-publicist George Galloway, along with the Socialist Workers Party.

The SSP now has four representatives in the Scottish Parliament, Solidarity has two. Their role in future will be no different to the past: confined to the bourgeois respectable limits of parliamentary politics.

Paul Mallon

14TH NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT IN HAVANA: Oppressed stand up against imperialism

Between 14 and 17 September, barely 90 miles from the shores of the United States, delegates from 118 countries, representing the majority of the oppressed peoples of the world, gathered in Havana, Cuba for the 14th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. **CAT WIENER** reports.

Countries represented included Venezuela, Bolivia, Iran, Syria and North Korea, noted hate figures of the Bush administration. As Raul Castro put it in his opening address: 'We assume that here present are representatives of the majority... of the "60 or more dark corners of the world" cited as possible targets of future [US] attacks'. There were delegates from Bangladesh, threatened with annihilation by rising sea levels, from African countries devastated by war, famine and disease, from the Middle East, subjected to threats and attacks from imperialism, from the plundered nations of Latin America and the Caribbean, all united by the desire to stand together against the rulers of the real dark corners of the

world, US imperialism and its allies. One delegate described the summit as 'the voice of the voiceless', another as 'a forum for change'.

President Hugo Chavez predicted that this would be the most important meeting of the movement to date, coming as it did at a moment when the balance of world forces is poised between the brutal attempts of the US to impose itself as world gendarme against a rising movement of opposition. How fitting, then, that the summit should have been held in Cuba, which has withstood and denounced imperialist aggression for 47 years and today, alongside Venezuela, gives a principled, anti-imperialist and socialist voice to the oppressed of the world.

And, despite Fidel Castro's ab-

sence because of illness, it was clearer than ever that the voice of the Cuban Revolution still speaks out loud and clear. Raul Castro, Acting President of Cuba, took on the mantle of accuser of the US and its allies. After denouncing Israel's 'shameful wall, symbol of apartheid' and the war on Lebanon, he continued:

'We all know who provides economic and military support for the Israeli government, who time and again vetoes the proposed resolutions in the Security Council and hampers plans for this organ to meet and discuss their brutal conduct.'

'We also know who act as their accomplices, who keep silent about the grave violations against prisoners held in the jail operated by the United

States in their naval base in Guantanamo, land which was illegally seized with Cuba; who have cooperated with the secret flights and clandestine prisons'.

The discussions addressed, in Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's words, 'the principal political, economic and social issues of our time'. Resolutions were passed condemning Israel for its unlawful aggression against the Palestinians and demanding Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the release of all detained Palestinian officials and reparations for military damage. The summit also denounced Israel's barbaric bombing and destruction of Lebanon, the illegal imperialist war in Iraq and the torture camps run by the US.

There were calls for a fairer and more equal economic order between the 20% of the world who comprise the population of the rich countries and the 80% who are poor, and the right of the countries of the South 'to

ensure that they have control over their natural resources, for the benefit of their peoples'.

Raul Castro highlighted the need for solidarity with immigrants organising in the industrialised nations against racism, poverty and xenophobia.

Other delegates spoke of the urgent need to act in the face of accelerating environmental degradation, of the widening gulf between rich and poor, of the HIV/AIDS pandemic 'decimating entire nations from the underdeveloped world', of the 876 million illiterate adults and 325 million children in the world today without access to schooling. Raul Castro pointed out how little, relative to the wealth of the developed countries, it would take to resolve these problems when \$1 trillion a year is spent on weapons and troops and nearly as much again on advertising. 'The belief that an economic and social order that has proved to be unsustainable can be maintained by force is simply ridiculous. As President Fidel Castro said... "Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick and the ignorant, but they cannot kill hunger, disease and ignorance"'.

Under Cuba's presidency, the Non-Aligned Movement is emerging as a key rallying point for all those lining up against imperialism in a battle that is about the very future of humanity.

Calm versus hysteria as Fidel temporarily cedes power

On 31 July in Cuba a proclamation by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz was read out on television revealing that he had undergone a serious operation for gastrointestinal bleeding and was temporarily ceding power while he recovered. In Havana, where I watched, the response of the Cubans around me was calm concern, coupled with confidence that appropriate steps had been taken to secure the Revolution's stability and progress.

Fidel temporarily ceded his responsibilities to seven comrades: Raul Castro Ruz (first secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and President of the Council of State and government of the Republic); José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera (national and international Public Health Programme); José Ramón Machado Ventura and Esteban Lazo Hernández (national and international Education Programme); Carlos Lage Dávila (national programme of the Energy Revolution and cooperation with other countries on this); Dávila with Francisco Soberón Valdés and Felipe Pérez Roque to manage funds for health, education and energy programmes. These individuals are well known and logical choices. For example Raul was already the deputy to Fidel in these areas, Balaguer is Minister of Public Health and Soberón is President of the National Bank.

Such was the calm and optimism on the island that I was shocked to see images of hysterical Cuban exiles celebrating in the streets in Miami, hoping to cheer this revolutionary old man to his death. In reality, it involved 5,000 people out of a Cuban community in Florida of nearly a million. The Cuban press published the range of reactions from around the world. The daily televised round table discussion analysed the reaction in the US Congress, dissected articles and intelligently mocked the



Fidel Castro — on the road to recovery

hysterical enemies of the Revolution. Rich and powerful right-wingers pressurised the US government for military action, hoping to incite a coup d'état on the island, and demanded the \$80 million fund earmarked by the Bush administration for the destruction of the Revolution be allocated immediately.

Without announcement, Cuba mobilised for national defence. Reserves were called up and bomb shelters prepared, all with great discretion and discipline. With preparations complete, Raul announced the mobilisation. By then, Cubans had been treated to televised images of Fidel meeting with Venezuelan President Chavez, and the wind was knocked out of those with imperial ambitions over Cuba.

Fidel's health is recovering but it remains unclear whether he will resume his previous responsibilities. Regardless, recent events have demonstrated concretely that the Cuban people and their revolutionary motor, the Cuban Communist Party, are well prepared for the future. With or without Fidel, the Cuban people will drive forward the Revolution.

Helen Yaffe

BACKGROUND

Raul Castro a communist fighter on every front

'Behind me are others more radical than I.'
Fidel Castro, 1997

In 1997, Raul Castro, head of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), was appointed Vice-President of Cuba and therefore the person who would step into President Fidel Castro's shoes if it became necessary. With Fidel currently recovering from illness, Raul has taken his place. Raul Castro, a revolutionary of nearly 60 years' standing and one of the pivotal figures in Cuba's march towards socialism, is more than equal to the task.

Already a committed communist, from his university days, he fought in the Moncada Uprising against the hated Batista regime in July 1953, and was captured and imprisoned on the Isle of Pines before being released in a general amnesty in 1955. He then travelled to Mexico with Fidel to organise insurrection against Batista — the *Granma* expedition of late 1956. During this time he met Che Guevara and introduced him to Fidel.

For the next two years he fought in the Sierra Maestra. But in 1958, Raul's organisational skills and political vision were thrown into sharp relief as the Frank Pais Second Eastern Front, led by Raul, swept into the Oriente eastern province of Cuba. As Batista's forces were driven back, Raul set about mobilising the peasants and industrial and agricultural workers, setting up a comprehensive civil administration that was later seen as the model for the revolutionary regime. In every locality peasants were organised into revolutionary committees and involved in political education to prepare for agrarian reform. 200 disused schools were reopened and another 300 set up, with teachers and students drafted in from the cities to begin a literacy campaign. Watching the flames rising after his forces had burned down a Batista garrison, he wrote: 'In the distance the flames of liberty can be seen burning over the garrisons of oppression. Some day soon we will raise schools on those ashes'. 20 hospitals were set up, and in those areas infant mortality dropped from 40% to 5%. Raul also ensured his troops received political, cultural and ethical education to equip them not just as soldiers but as revolutionaries.

After the Revolution in 1959, Raul became leader of FAR, setting up training schools for military cadre while also promoting the doctrine of War of All the People, with a civil population armed, trained and ready to defend its revolution. He remained a key figure in the July 26 Movement, the band of radical revolutionaries grouped around Fidel who were the driving force towards socialism, and was

instrumental in forming close ties with the Soviet Union. He married Vilma Espin, who had fought in the underground movement and the Sierra Maestra against Batista and after the Revolution fought for women's emancipation and equality. Today she is head of the Cuban Women's Federation.

Battles as crucial as those of the Rebel Army lay ahead. In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union when the Special Period began to bite, Raul articulated the challenges that lay ahead for the Communist Party as it tried to navigate the new economic and political reality — what he called a 'life or death' battle for the survival of the Cuban Revolution (see FRFI 131, June/July 1997).

'The only form of socialism possible in Cuba today [requires] us to assimilate such difficulties as mercantile commercial relations and even certain elements of capitalism and reinsert ourselves into the world economy dominated by the monopolies of the imperialist powers.' He recognised that this was a setback for socialism and would inevitably create inequality and give rise to a privileged, proto-capitalist class defined by individualism, personal enrichment and corruption; a breeding ground for counter-revolutionary tendencies. Only by working with the mass of the people could this be overcome. 'We must convince the people or the enemy will do it.' Measures that appeared to benefit the few — such as hard currency stores — must be shown to be in the interest of the masses, generating resources to provide 10,000 children with a litre of milk a day. Communists must work in people's assemblies and workers' parliaments so that the ideological struggle and measures to defend socialism would become 'a mass movement, a work of the masses'.

Unrest on the streets in the late 1990s was faced down by ordinary workers, not the army. Raul set the armed forces to growing vegetables and fruits to be sold at lower prices than the private farmers' markets: 'The people need beans, not guns', he commented.

Chairing the Non-Aligned Summit held in Havana in September, it was Raul who was the leading voice demanding the regeneration of a global movement against imperialist brutality and devastation and for internationalist solidarity, equality and justice.

Raul Castro has always said that carrying a party card confers no special rights or privileges: the respect of the people must be earned through hard work and sacrifice. It is clear that in the new battles to regenerate the Cuban economy and deepen the socialist consciousness of the people, Raul Castro will continue to win that respect. **Cat Wiener**

Mike and Condi, two of a kind

'How can the Cuban people regain control over their own society? There is no simple answer other than to continue to organise and fight for the right to organise freely and democratically in defence of their own interests.'

This was denied under Fidel...

Another mealy-mouthed offering from Condoleezza Rice, outlining the US administration's plans for a 'post-Castro' Cuba, perhaps, as when she announced 'We are empowering Cuban civil society to better organise and advocate for democratic change. We're working... to broadcast the truth about [the Castro regime's] deplorable treatment of the Cuban people'.

No, that first bit of poison comes not from some vitriolic Bushite neocon, but straight out of the pen of the SWP's Mike Gonzalez, in Socialist Review September 2006. That the Vice-President of Cuba, Raul Castro, should have been asked to assume the role of Acting President during Fidel Castro's illness, has been whipped up by Gonzalez's febrile and reactionary imagination into a 'dynastic succession' and gleefully transmogrified into another stick with which to beat Cuba. Gonzalez uses the opportunity to accuse Cuba, as ever, of lack of political democracy — 'there remains as little control from below over the shape and direction of Cuban society as ever', coupled with economic liberalisation and inequality. Inevitably, he shows no understanding of the incredible economic and political feats achieved by Cuban communists over the last 15 years, in steering their society through the harsh economic realities and political compromises demanded by the Special Period to the economic growth and regeneration of political consciousness increasingly evident today. But then why would he? Gonzalez and his ilk are of a privileged, reactionary political stratum that knows to the warmongers, racists and fat cats of the Labour Party in Britain while criticising from on high those actually transforming the lives and conditions of the poor in the oppressed nations. But the SWP leadership are fast becoming a caricature of themselves: as the tide of revolutionary movements in Latin America sweeps on, history is leaving them looking increasingly stranded, clinging to a fossilised position that even many of their own members now find ridiculous. No wonder Socialist Review is now titled 'SR'. These people wouldn't recognise socialism if it trussed them up and flew them from a flagpole. ■

Free the Cuban 5

'They were carrying out an indispensable, peaceful and noble mission. Defending their homeland and people from systematic aggression, including acts of terrorism, that has caused the loss of thousands of lives and substantial material damage. The evidence is overwhelming. Ignoring it is infamous.'

Ricardo Alarcon,
Communist Party of Cuba



Demonstration in Brixton: Free the 5

Indefinite imprisonment

Despite having their convictions overturned by a three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Atlanta Court of Appeal in August 2005, the Cuban Five – Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero – remain in jail. They were arrested eight years ago in Miami while working to prevent terrorist attacks against Cuba by the Miami exile community, sanctioned and funded by the US government.

In August 2006, in a politically-motivated and unprecedented ruling, the full 12-judge panel of the Court of Appeal overturned the decision of the 2005 hearing, ratifying the original convictions and rejecting the application for a retrial. This ruling condemns the Cuban 5 to indefinite imprisonment.

Degrading treatment

The five men have been subjected to degrading treatment amounting to torture. After their arrest on 12 September 1998, they were taken to the FBI general headquarters in Miami and brutally interrogated. They were then held in isolation and punishment cells for 17 months, before being split up between five different prisons.

The man in charge of their arrest and ill-treatment was Hector Pesquera, a former FBI boss in Miami and expert in 'interrogation techniques' who advised interrogators in the Guantanamo prison camps. In the punishment cells in the US, the Cuban 5 were allowed one hour out of the cell every 24 hours on weekdays and subjected to continuous lock-up over the weekends, they had no personal belongings and their cells measured less than three by two metres.

Month of Action

Cuba called for a month of action in solidarity with the Cuban 5 from the 12 September to 6 October. Rock around the Blockade and supporters of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! have been busy with events up and down the country. We have held street meetings, fund-raising bike rides and walks, film nights, social events and public meetings to highlight the case of the Cuban 5 and demand their immediate release. As Ricardo Alarcon made clear:

'The solidarity of the peoples is the only means of bringing them justice. Today, throughout the world, a series of international events are taking place to demand freedom for our five selfless compañeros and to demand justice for all victims of terrorism. Solidarity will grow: until the heroes are liberated.'

Free them now!

Hannah Callier

Bolivia: right wing threatens civil war

As Bolivia's Constituent Assembly, elected on 2 July, faces right-wing sabotage of its deliberations on a new constitution, the ruling class is mobilising opposition to Evo Morales' government on the streets in the east of the country: class struggle is intensifying. What is at stake is whether or not Bolivia can break from the grip of imperialism that has made it the poorest country in South America.

ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

The Constituent Assembly has been bogged down by procedural wrangling. Evo Morales' Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) and smaller allies control about 155 votes, short of the 170, a two-thirds majority, needed to guarantee approval of its proposals. The right wing, led by PODEMOS (Democratic and Social Power), insists that every matter the Assembly votes on requires a two-thirds majority. To break the deadlock MAS delegates proposed that only the final document should require a two-thirds majority and all other decisions should be by simple majority. At the vote on 1 September, 96 right-wing delegates walked out whilst 141 supported the MAS proposal.

Such actions reflect the fears of the ruling class, particularly that section based in the wealthier eastern part of

the country, that their power is being undermined. Morales' reforms challenge imperialism, even if they seem modest. The nationalisation of oil and gas reserves on 1 May was to negotiate more favourable contracts with oil multinationals. Land reform proposals involve either state-owned land, or that handed out illegally by previous governments as bribes. In neither case has expropriation been threatened. However, today's conditions of imperialist crisis mean that these limited steps have profound significance, particularly since the Morales government is backed by the mass anti-imperialist social movements of Bolivia's people.

The ruling class is mobilising. Juan Carlos Urenda Diaz, of the separatist Santa Cruz Civic Committee, said, 'We are coming to the point where we are not going to look any more for



'Morales' reforms challenge imperialism, even if they seem modest.'

legal arguments... if the Constituent Assembly does not respect the law and the popular will of 72% of voters in Santa Cruz, the country is going to split'. (72% of the province's population had voted for autonomy in July; the majority of the Bolivian people were against). PODEMOS deputy Ruben Cuellar told *The Washington Times* that the country 'is divided between two visions. The west wants to take us back a thousand years to a savage primitivism while the east wants to move forward towards the future through a culture of free enterprise'. This racism towards the indigenous people is typical of those who lead the Civic Committee and who dream of a nation in the east where indigenous people are stripped of all rights. Bolivia's Permanent Assembly

for Human Rights reports that eight campesinos have been killed in land occupations this year: the Santa Cruz ruling class fears that land reform will stimulate further land seizures.

On 7 September Mercosur Press Agency reported a plan to destabilise the government through the autonomy movement: the US embassies in Bolivia and Argentina, Petrobras (Brazil) and Repsol (Spain) oil companies are co-ordinating the subversion. On 14 September Petrobras declared that investment in Bolivia was 'unfeasible'. Meanwhile, the poor mobilise for themselves: Repsol was forced to halt operations at its Vibora fields after some 60 peasant farmers occupied the site in Bolivia's eastern Ichilo province on the same day, demanding houses, schools and school supplies.

Venezuela: gears up for December elections



On 3 December the Presidential elections will be a vote on the decision of the ruling party, the Movement of the Fifth Republic, to build socialism in Venezuela and reject the long interference of imperialism in Latin America.

After US pressure, the remnants of the opposition parties agreed on a single opponent – Manuel Rosales, governor of the wealthy and heavily populated Zulia state. Since it is impossible to campaign against the progressive steps taken by the Chavez government, the right wing programme is a 'law and order' campaign against 'delinquency', demonising the youth that support Chavez. Open bribery of the electorate is also proposed by offering voters direct hand-outs from the country's oil wealth, the ultimate in populist politics of which Chavez is accused!

President Chavez has fought to release Venezuela from imperialism, understanding that unity and mutual support amongst those threatened by the US is central to Venezuela's success. Democratising the country is an inseparable part of the process. Reinforcing OPEC and stopping the theft of Venezuela's own oil revenues was the start. In China, in August, Chavez called for the prosecution of Israeli leaders for genocide in Lebanon. In Cuba, in September, he stood out as a leading spokesperson for

the Non-aligned Movement. Addressing the United Nations Chavez accused the US of 'hegemonic pretensions...placing at risk the very survival of the human species'. Later, speaking of Fallujah, Chavez demanded that 'the President of the United States must be charged with genocide'.

After the re-establishment of state control over the oil industry in 2003 new contracting arrangements have been established with western corporations to prevent the wholesale theft of resources. New contracts, first with European and then Latin American states, were established, to reduce the previously forced relationship with US capitalism.

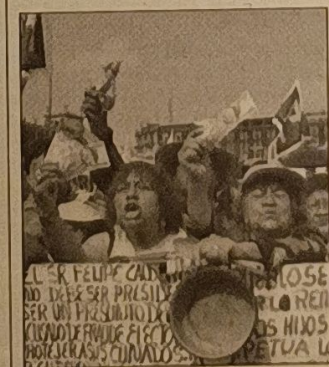
Seeking further to break the US grip on its economy, new agreements were made in July with Russia to buy attack helicopters and advanced fighters, with plans to produce Kalashnikov rifles in Venezuela. Gazprom and Lukoil are exploring in Venezuela. Venezuela's supplies of 150,000 barrels of oil a day (bpd) to China are to rise to one million bpd by 2016. China is investing in oil tankers, rigs, mining and infrastructure and will build 20,000 new homes as part of the battle against homelessness. A new 'Chinese Wall' is being built against the stranglehold the US has had over the Venezuelan economy.

Alvaro Michaels

Mexico: people challenge the state

On 16 September up to a million supporters on the streets of Mexico City declared Lopez Obrador as the legitimate President of Mexico, following the country's Electoral Tribunal's decision that the ruling class candidate Felipe Calderon had won the fraudulent 2 July presidential election. The Tribunal ruled for Calderon despite acknowledging that outgoing President Fox's interference in the election had put it 'at risk'; that transnational and national corporation-funded anti-Obrador commercials were illegal; and that Calderon, whose claimed majority was a mere 237,000 or 0.55%, had been awarded thousands of unsubstantiated votes.

Obrador and his PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) have kept up mobilisations since the ruling class stole the elections. Gatherings of hundreds of thousands have taken place in Mexico City. Calderon is hounded wherever he goes and prevented from speaking at public rallies. The reasons for the massive support for Obrador and his anti-poverty message are clear. Of 44 million workers, only 22 million have formal employment; nine million have been forced to emigrate to the US to find work, and the rest are either unemployed or working in the informal sector in near destitution.



Millions of farm workers face being thrown out of corn production because of subsidised US imports.

Obrador will be 'inaugurated' at a popular assembly on 20 November and will set up a parallel administration. He has declared that Calderon will not be able to govern, especially when it comes to the sale of state-owned oil company Pemex. Oaxaca, one of Mexico's 31 states, is already proving ungovernable for the ruling class. Since the failed attempt to suppress striking teachers in June (see FRFI 192) a huge mass movement has taken over Oaxaca City. Organised through the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO), the people have taken over the city hall and seized nine radio stations. Their immediate objective is the removal of the hated state governor Ulises Ruiz. He has already fled the city. Ruiz won office through a fraudulent election and ruled with armed thugs. However, his attempt to smash the teachers with riot police on 14 June completely backfired. Three days later a state-wide popular assembly with representation from 85 popular organisations established APPO as the supreme authority in Oaxaca. On 1 August, women seized radio stations and the state television studios. For three weeks, ordinary people were able to broadcast across the state about the wretchedness of their lives: the lack of schools, of basic sanitation, the loss of their land to developers, of their suffering under neo-liberalism. TV station Channel 9 also broadcast a programme on the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories. Police and state officials shot up and smashed equipment in the transmission tower. People responded seizing more radio stations to broadcast on behalf of APPO. APPO calls for a national popular assembly and for a constitutional convention. With the campaign for Obrador's parallel government gathering momentum the Mexican ruling class has reason to be afraid.

Robert Clough

Hizbullah's victory: a strategic defeat for imperialism

The Israeli invasion and murderous onslaught on Lebanon, fully backed and supported by the US and Britain, lasted 34 days and left over 1,200 Lebanese dead. It destroyed the infrastructure of large parts of the country, particularly the Shia areas in the south and the southern suburbs of Beirut, and created over one million refugees. However, the Zionists failed to achieve their war aims: the release of two captured soldiers, the defeat and disarmament of Hizbullah and its expulsion from Lebanese border areas south of the Litani River. Hizbullah guerrilla fighters fought the Israeli invasion forces with tenacity and courage and in the process gained what Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah called 'a strategic and historic victory' over Israel. Hizbullah's victory was also undoubtedly a strategic defeat for imperialism in the Middle East. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

The Israeli attack on Hizbullah was sanctioned and encouraged by both US and British imperialism as the first shot in a proxy war on their behalf against Syria and Iran. It was to be the next stage in imperialism's attempt to restructure the Middle East and Central Asia in its own interests. That was the reason why the US and Britain blocked calls for an immediate ceasefire throughout the month of July and gave the green light to Israel's continued targeting of the civilian population in the south of Lebanon. In an interview with *Al Jazeera*, Hassan Nasrallah recognised this too:

'They want to put an end to any resistance of any sort...They want to delete the word resistance, render it taboo. The same applies to martyr, jihad, steadfastness, combat, liberation, freedom, dignity, pride, honour...All these meanings have to be removed from the Lebanese dictionary, from the press, from political debates, from the political mind and from the popular psyche. This is what Israel is actually doing. America needs this to reshape the region.'

At a press conference on 21 July, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was quite explicit in her reason for not supporting an immediate ceasefire: 'I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante. I think it would be a mistake. What we are seeing here, in a sense, is the growing, the birth pangs of a new Middle East.' That these 'birth pangs' were at the expense of the lives of hundreds of Lebanese people was of no consequence to Rice and the representatives of imperialism: they hold the people of the Middle East in racist contempt.

At the beginning of August Israeli Prime Minister Olmert boasted that one of the accomplishments of Israel's military action was that '...all the population which is the power base of the Hizbullah in Lebanon [has been] displaced'. To achieve this displacement, Israel had destroyed whole villages, massacring women and children in the process: up to 45% of all dead and wounded, were children according to estimates made by Save The Children. Even UN peacekeepers were not safe from Israel's bombardment: on 25 July

four UN soldiers were killed when Israel, according to UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, 'deliberately targeted' and bombed a UN observation post where they were based.

In beating back the Israeli invasion, the determination of the Lebanese resistance has completely upset the plans of imperialism. Hizbullah was not, as Israel and the imperialists had hoped, isolated and vilified for causing the Israeli attack. In fact, the reverse was the case - Palestinian militants from the refugee camps in Lebanon and fighters from Amal and the Lebanese Communist Party supported it militarily. Surveys showed that as the Israeli attack intensified support for Hizbullah rose to over 80% amongst all sections of Lebanese society.

As it became clear that, far from defeating Hizbullah, Israel was getting a bloody nose from their fighters, the UN Security Council, with the backing of both the US and Britain, moved to

agree a ceasefire from 14 August. The resolution called for the deployment of a UN force of up to 15,000 troops alongside the Lebanese army within the border area with Israel, the simultaneous withdrawal of Israeli troops and the disarmament of Hizbullah. Nasrallah has replied that Hizbullah will not disarm until the Lebanese army is capable of defending the country from Israeli attacks, adding on 13 September that 'the resistance is present south of the Litani River and in the whole south of Lebanon...nobody can prevent us from being present on our territory or from defending our territory, our honour and our homeland'.

Once it became clear that a UN-brokered ceasefire was imminent, Israel stepped up its terrorist attacks on Lebanon with the explicit aim of preventing Lebanese refugees from returning to their homes in the south of the country. It undertook a series of bombing raids in the 72 hours before the



'Israel destroyed whole villages, massacring women and children in the process: up to 45% of all dead and wounded, were children'



Blair the war criminal visits the Middle East

Blair visited the Middle East in early September in an effort to bolster the position of British and US imperialism after the debacle of the Lebanese invasion. First stop of course was Israel where he met Prime Minister Olmert. Olmert was fulsome in his praise, describing Blair as 'a true and proven friend of the State of Israel...Britain is Israel's staunch ally and a trusted partner'. The following day he went to Ramallah to make just that point. Before his arrival, Palestinian activists issued a statement branding him persona non grata and declaring, 'he is coming here to wash his hands that are dripping with Lebanese blood with Palestinian water'.

The day after, and it was on to Beirut to meet Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora, and to try to shore up the pro-imperialist forces within the Lebanese government. The Lebanese Communist Party and other anti-imperialist organisations held protests against Blair's visit and Hizbullah's two ministers in the government refused to meet him. Galeb Abu Zeinab, a leading member of Hizbullah, said: 'Blair was a true partner in the killing of children and the destruction of thousands of homes, if he hadn't fully supported the US-Israeli position the war would not have happened in the way it did...He is a full partner in the atrocities and I think he should be prosecuted as a war criminal alongside Bush and Olmert.' Never have truer words been spoken!

This puts even more responsibility on anti-imperialist forces here in Britain to build opposition on the streets to the war crimes of the Labour government and British imperialism and to build support for the resistance in the Middle East.

ceasefire came into effect, which involved the dropping of more than 700,000 bomblets across southern Beirut and in the villages and fields of the south of the country. This was 60% of the total dropped throughout the onslaught; it is thought that 130,000 remain unexploded. Civilians are now dying as they tread on these anti-personnel mines. The Zionists also used phosphorus shells, which can cause excruciating burns and are prohibited internationally: the overwhelming majority were fired in the last 10 days of the war.

Israel has continually violated Lebanese airspace since the ceasefire and maintained its air and sea blockade of the country until 7/8 September. Although the majority of Israeli troops have left Lebanon, they still occupy a strip of land along the border. The UN has agreed to broker a deal to obtain the release of the two Israeli soldiers whose capture by Hizbullah was the pretext for the war. This will undoubtedly require the release of Lebanese prisoners held by Israel, a demand Hizbullah made before Israel launched its onslaught. The status of the Shebaa Farms area is now on the agenda of the UN with promises to define once and for all whether the area is part of Lebanese territory.

The growing crisis in Palestine

Since the capture of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian Resistance forces in Gaza on 25 June, the situation facing the Palestinian people in Gaza has become desperate as Israel has imposed an economic blockade by maintaining an almost complete closure of all border crossings into Gaza including the Rafah crossing from Egypt. As the situation has deteriorated the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has had to feed 830,000 Gazans out of a population of 1.4 million. On 10 September UNRWA began an emergency food distribution programme; this had been delayed by a week because of the border closures. As it is, the food distribution is limited to families with at least eleven members. John Ging, UNRWA Gaza Field Director, described the situation as 'desperate and unprecedented...there is not enough food in Gaza, even we at UNRWA are struggling to get the food in'.

The closure of the border crossings and the attacks Israel launched after 25 June which destroyed Gaza's only power plant along with roads and water pipes have led to the collapse of the Gazan economy. Only 40 of the 150 major companies in Gaza are still running and unemployment is now over

60%. Hospitals, businesses and homes are without electricity and running water. Between 25 June and 13 September, Zionist forces killed 228 Palestinians, including 48 children, and wounded over 800 more (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights). The Zionist state has recorded eight Israelis killed by Palestinians over the same period. Five of these were soldiers and two were settlers on the West Bank.

No PA employee has received an official wage since March because of the international sanctions on the Hamas government. Fatah, acting in the interests of imperialism, has been attempting to use this economic crisis to undermine the Hamas government. It convinced PA civil servants to begin an open-ended strike from 2 September calling for the payment of the wages they are owed. Schools that were due to open for the new term were affected, more so in the West Bank than Gaza, where Hamas is stronger. The strike seemed to be losing momentum in mid-September as negotiations on a National Unity government proceeded. These have moved slowly. Having rejected Hamas' offer of a National Unity government in January, Fatah is intent on using Hamas' international isolation and the current economic crisis to regain its political influence. The discussion between the two organisations has centred on the Palestinian Prisoners National Conciliation Document which calls for the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, implying acceptance of the State of Israel. The Document also calls for the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Hamas has declared that as the party with the most votes, it would keep the Prime Minister's office and have more government Ministers than Fatah. However, it would allow Abbas as President to deal with all negotiations with Israel. Although Abbas announced on 11 September that a new government would be formed within a few days, five days later he called a halt to the process while he visited his paymaster in Washington. Both Bush and Blair have repeated that they will not endorse a new Palestinian Unity government until it recognises Israel, renounces violence and accepts previous agreements made with Israel. These are all steps that Hamas has refused to take. The pressure on Hamas is intensifying, but the victory of Hizbullah in Lebanon will have strengthened its position. ■

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

The tragedy of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon started with their expulsion from Palestine in 1948. Since then there has been a constant worsening in their conditions. According to the United Nations for Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East March 2006, there are 405,452 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, of whom 220,000 live in 12 official refugee camps. UNRWA reports of all the 4.375 million Palestinian refugees they serve in the Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza, Syria and Jordan that those in Lebanon have the highest percentage living in abject poverty. The total population of refugees is estimated at 5.5 million, as there are a further 263,000 internally displaced in 1948 who became Israeli citizens, and 773,000 displaced by the 1967 war.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 and the consequent expulsion from Lebanon of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) resulted in a sharp deterioration in the conditions of Palestinian refugees there. Until that time, the PLO had provided work for about 65% of the Palestinians in Lebanon as well as health and education services. The Oslo peace process in the early 1990s marginalised them further and made their right of return, recognised in the UN Resolution 194 of December 1948 and re-affirmed by the UN over 110 times, as remote as ever as the PLO concentrated its diplomatic efforts on the West Bank and Gaza. The international aid the PLO has received has mainly been invested in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Budgets of international organisations operating in Lebanon, especially UNRWA, have also been cut down drastically. Finally, the international boycott of the Palestinian Authority following the Hamas victory in the elections in January 2006 has

increased their distress.

The latest Zionist war has exacerbated the misery and plight of the Palestinian refugees even further. Hoda Samra, UNRWA spokesperson in Lebanon, told Reuters on 17 September that: 'Whatever affects the Lebanese affects the Palestinians, given that they are residing in this country. But the Palestinians also lack coping mechanisms. Any emergency affects them even more than other groups, as the Palestinians in Lebanon are vulnerable by definition.' During the war they were mostly sequestered in the refugee camps where Israeli missiles targeted houses and made even more people homeless. According to Samra 'Preliminary estimates indicate that 102 [Palestinian] homes or shelters were totally destroyed, 159 were partially destroyed and 755 are in need of minor or major repairs as a result of the conflict.' UNRWA reported that on 14 August, only one hour before the ceasefire, Abed Al Saghir, a Palestinian who worked for UNRWA was killed in Ein Al Hilwi camp. During UNRWA Deputy Commissioner General Filippo Grandi's visit on 24/25 August 2006 to Ein Al Hilwi camp, refugees expressed to him their concern at the large quantity of unexploded ordnance in the orchards and fields of south Lebanon where many rely on agriculture for their living. This sector has suffered enormously as a result of the heavy Israeli bombardment and the blockade it imposed on the country.

The decades of exile are aggravated by the systematically discriminatory policies of the Lebanese state. The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon do not have citizenship, so they are considered foreigners by law even if they have been there since 1948. Lebanon considers their presence as temporary and has repeatedly stated that it will not accept their permanent settlement. To be able to work legally they need a work permit that is valid for a maximum of two

years. However, Lebanese law restricts Palestinians from practising over 70 professions outside the camps: they cannot work as an accountant, engineer, lawyer, pharmacist or even as a concierge, cook or hairdresser. Those few Palestinians who have a work permit are not entitled to social security despite the fact that they pay for it. They can only join a trade union if they have no criminal record, even then they cannot be elected to any office. They are limited to electing a representative who is allowed to defend their interest in the union board.

Palestinians in refugee camps are isolated from the outside world by fences. The camps are controlled by Lebanese soldiers who decide who goes into or exits the camps. Inside the camps there is another layer of control, but this time by armed Palestinians. UNRWA reports that 60% of Palestinian refugees live in poverty and more than 70% are unemployed. Their high level of poverty and inhuman living conditions are a consequence of the discriminatory policies of the Lebanese state. Even refugees living outside the camps can only move about in Lebanon if they inform the Lebanese department that administers the Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

Housing is one of the main problems Palestinian refugees face as the land designated for the official camps remains almost the same as it was in 1948 despite the substantial increase in the population. According to a 2005 Amnesty International report, more than 10 persons share the same room in some houses. Since the late 1990s the Lebanese authorities have prohibited the entry of building materials into the camps in the south of Lebanon which has resulted in further deterioration. The situation in the unrecognised camps is worse as the houses there are mostly built of corrugated iron which is sensitive to climate change and which as a result does not provide adequate protection. The Lebanese authorities



'The latest Zionist war has exacerbated the misery and plight of the refugees

prevent refugees from replacing the corrugated iron dwellings with bricks. Palestinians who have gone ahead anyway have been fined and in some cases had their brick houses demolished. These small illegal ghetto-camps are not recognised by UNRWA and are therefore left without aid.

Lebanese authorities prohibit the Palestinians in refugee camps from using Lebanese government hospitals and other public health services. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society suffers also from limited budgets as a result of a cut in PLO funding. Refugees are therefore totally reliant on UNRWA health services that in turn are insufficient to meet the needs of the growing number of impoverished refugees. Despite all the hardship, the refugees do not leave the camps in large numbers. Um Fadi, from Ein Al Hilwi, the biggest camp of 45,337 Palestinians, told *Le Monde Diplomatique* in July 2006, in response to the internal conflict between the different Palestinian factions 'often there are deaths and people are afraid. But they don't want to leave, because the camp still symbolises our long wait for return and the struggle for our rights'.

Manal Darwish

The origins of Hizbullah

The origins of Hizbullah lie in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon led by war criminal Ariel Sharon. Israel's aim was to destroy Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) resistance fighters based at the time in South Lebanon. Zionist forces bombed and shelled civilian populations, using barbaric phosphorous bombs and chemical weapons to massacre more than 25,000 people, wound more than 35,000 and make more than half a million people refugees. They sent the fascist Phalange militia into the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila in Beirut, murdering 2,500 civilians.

Hizbullah was formed from numerous Lebanese Shi'a groups that came together shortly after the invasion, and was based among the mass of the poor in South Lebanon and southern Beirut. It looked to the 1979 victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran for inspiration. Iran, with a majority Shi'a population, openly supported Hizbullah and provided it with both moral and logistical support.

In its founding statement, issued in Beirut on 16 February 1985, entitled *An Open Letter to All the Oppressed People in Lebanon and the World*, Hizbullah declared that its aims were:

'To drive out the US, French and Israeli occupiers; to defeat the fascist Phalange Party, known as the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which had collaborated with the occupiers and to permit our people to choose in all liberty

the form of government they desire'.

Whilst the statement called on the masses to 'pick the option of an Islamic government', it went on to say 'we do not want to impose Islam upon anybody, we do not want to reign Lebanon by force'. Addressing Christians, it said: 'Do not be deceived and misled that we anticipate vengeance against you.' Hence whilst Hizbullah's ideology fits in with the Islamic religion, it can never be described as fundamentalist, it wishing to impose a reactionary way of life on the people. Hizbullah is an Islamist national liberation movement. The vast majority of actions taken by its military wing have been against Israeli occupation.

Between the spring of 1983 to the summer of 1985, Shi'a fighters launched a wave of suicide attacks including those on the US embassy and a US Marine base in Beirut which killed 242 US service personnel. These actions effectively drove the US and French imperialists out of Lebanon. Meanwhile Hizbullah fighters mounted sophisticated and ever more lethal guerrilla attacks on Zionist forces so that in 1985 Israel withdrew to a unilaterally declared security zone, a southern strip of Lebanon. Hizbullah continued to fight a guerrilla war for over 10 years against Israel and the SLA. One episode in this war of liberation was Operation Grapes of Wrath when Israel launched an air and land assault on Hizbullah, in April 1996. The campaign failed, but not before the Zionists had

deliberately targeted a UN outpost in Qana where some 800 civilian refugees were taking shelter, massacring more than 100. However, worn down by continuous audacious Hizbullah attacks, Israel was effectively forced out of its security zone in 2000, remaining in occupation only of a tiny strip known as the Shebaa Farms.

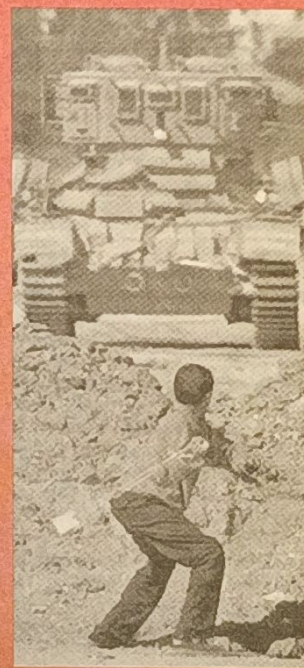
After this victory, Hizbullah, which has 23 representatives in the Lebanese parliament, became a beacon of resistance against Zionism and imperialism. It remained as an armed force in South Lebanon and called for Israel to withdraw from all the land it occupies – including Palestine and the Golan Heights – and to free all prisoners held in Israeli jails, some for over 20 years. A measure of its achievement in the latest war is that 89% of Lebanon's Sunni Muslims, 80% of its Christians, 80% of its Druze and 100% of its Shi'ite populations support Hizbullah's resistance. At least as telling are statistics showing that 97% of Palestinians support Hizbullah, including 95% of Christian Palestinians. Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Iran are not the only places where support for Hizbullah has increased dramatically. Among the populations of the imperialist-backed Arab states, notably Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there is also widespread support for Hizbullah, no small achievement given that Hizbullah is a Shi'a movement regarded with suspicion by many Sunni states.

Yehya Ayyesh

Six years of the Intifada

In the six years of the Intifada, which began on 28 September 2000 after Ariel Sharon and his security goons invaded the area around the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem:

- 4,217 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and 30,714 have been wounded. 22% of these are children (Palestinian Red Crescent Society). These are conservative figures as statistics released by the Palestinian Authority consistently show a higher total.
- By the end of August 2006, Zionists had demolished 6,755 Palestinian houses, 2,826 of them in Gaza (Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem)
- Up to the end of 2005, the Israeli army and colonial-settlers had uprooted 464,945 Palestinian olive trees (Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture)
- Settlement expansion continues. Areas such as Ma'ale Adumim to the east of Jerusalem are rapidly expanding with the aim of surrounding Palestinian East Jerusalem with Jewish areas and forcing the Palestinians to leave.
- The Israeli settler population in the West Bank in 2000 was approximately 193,000. In June 2006 the Israeli Interior Ministry Population Registry stated that it had risen to 234,500. For East Jerusalem, the figures are 170,400 in 2000, rising to 185,000 in 2006.



● The construction of the illegal Apartheid Wall on the West Bank is continually stealing land. 80% of its route is on Palestinian-owned land; if it is completed 570,560 dunums (over 200 square miles) of land will lie between the Wall and the Green Line, effectively annexed by Israel.

The state of the unions

On 28 March, more than a million local government workers went out on a one-day strike in defence of their pension rights. Within two weeks, the principal unions involved, Unison and the T&G, had negotiated away the key principle of the 85-year rule whereby workers could retire at 60 with full rights if they had worked 25 years. It was yet another example of how the trade union movement has acted to protect the Labour government against the working class. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

In two successive years, 2003 and 2004, trade unions had helped defeat motions at the Labour Party conference which opposed the occupation of Iraq, and whilst Blair may have had a hard time at the 2006 TUC Congress, this was merely because the trade union leadership saw him as a lost cause. Days lost through industrial action have been at a historical low, averaging 518,000 per annum during the life of the government, with a mere 157,000 days lost in 2005. Yet three years ago, leading SWP member Alex Callinicos told readers of the Australian socialist journal *Links* (January-April 2002 issue) that in Britain 'a genuine "class struggle left wing" has emerged in the trade union bureaucracy that is prepared to oppose war on Iraq on a principled basis and to challenge Blair's neo-liberal economic agenda'. The July-August 2002 issue of the SWP journal *Socialist Review* enthused at the 'revival of class struggle' over pay and privatisation and described 'the election of left wing trade union leaders - the "awkward squad" as New Labour spin doctors like to call them' as one indicator 'of the growing radicalisation'.

However, within 18 months, Chris Harman had to acknowledge that for the second year running, the unions had bailed the Labour leadership out at the Labour Party conference over Iraq. 'Not so awkward now' was the headline in November 2004; in a lame attempt at explaining why the SWP had got it so badly wrong, Harman referred to Trotsky's assessment of the total 'ideological formlessness' of the trade union left, adding a completely apolitical analysis of bureaucracy: 'The bureaucracy as a whole is a hierarchical structure in which officials make careers out of bargaining with capital over the price paid for the labour power of the workers. The bargaining involves trying to organise workers and giving expression to their pressure for better lives. But it also involves channelling that pressure into negotiations within the system. The bureaucracy prioritises preserving the stability of union organisations over the conditions of the members it represents. The pressure from below can lead to militants from the left winning positions within the structure. But once there, they are subject to massive conservative counter-pressures to which they all too easily succumb.'

However, FRFI 174 (August-September 2003) rightly assessed the 'awkward squad' as being 'all mouth and no trousers' well before the SWP decided that they were 'not so awkward'. The article showed that there was no evidence that 'after years of lethargy and support for Labour's reactionary policies, the trade unions [were] taking a new stand as fighting organisations of the working class.' 'Far from opposing the Labour Party, its vicious anti-working class and anti-trade union policies, the "new militants" want to save it by winning just

enough concessions to maintain the votes of Labour supporters.' The trade unions remained 'tools of the privileged labour aristocracy'.

That the unions continue to organise overwhelmingly amongst the most privileged sections of the working class, particularly in the public sector has continued to be the case during the years of the Labour government. Trade union membership in the private sector continues to fall: in 1995 it was 3.14 million, now it is 2.72 million and union density is down to 17.1%. Trade union membership in the public sector has increased slightly, from 3.12 to 3.57 million since 1995, but because the number of public sector jobs has increased substantially under the Labour government, density has also fallen, from 61.4% to 58.4%. It is the increase in public sector employment that has stemmed the rate of loss of trade union members over the past ten years.

Four measures of privilege are educational qualification, job type, length of tenure and pay. Trade unions today organise mainly amongst the more highly educated, amongst professionals and managers, amongst those who have stable employment and amongst the better-paid sections of the working class.

Trade unionists and educational qualification

Trade unions tend to organise amongst the more highly qualified sections of the working class:

Regardless of qualification there has been a steady decline in union density. However, the lower the qualification, the more rapid the decline. In 1995, there was a twelve-point difference in union density between workers with a degree and those with no qualification; by 2005 this had risen to 16 points. Today, more than a quarter of trade union members (27.9%) have a degree, and 43.1% of union members either have a degree or other higher education qualification. The figures for non-union members are 18.8% and 27.0% respectively, and for all workers, 21.4% and 31.4%. Trade union members are therefore significantly more educationally qualified than the working population at large.

The jobs trade unionists do

The types of jobs that trade unionists undertake reflect their higher levels

Qualification level	Union density in %	
	1995	2005
Degree or equivalent	40	38
Other higher education	49	43
A level or equivalent	32	26
GCSE or equivalent	24	23
Other qualifications	29	24
No qualifications	28	22

of qualification. 42.1% of trade unionists are now professionals or associate professionals, compared to 26.7% for the working population as a whole and 20.6% who are non-members. In 2005, a mere 8.8% of trade unionists were Process, Plant and Machine operatives. Most tellingly, in 1991, 34% of trade union members were either managers, professional or associate professionals; by 1995 this had risen to 41%. Now, 51.5% of trade unionists fall into these three categories. The more highly skilled the job, the more likely you are to be a trade unionist.



Trade unionism and length of tenure

Employment level is correlated with length of tenure. Almost half of union members (47.7%) have done more than 10 years' service compared to 20.5% of non-union members. 67.6% have done five or more years' service, compared to 39% of non-union members and 46.6% of all workers. The longer you have been in a job, the more likely you are to be a trade unionist.

Trade unionists and pay levels

The differentials in educational qualification, employment status and length of service have a further expression in levels of pay. Except for the top band, trade union density rises with wage levels:

If you earn between £500 and £999 per week you are two and a half times more likely to be a trade unionist than if you earn less than £250 per week. £500 a week puts you in the top 30% of earners (the median wage in 2005 was £365 per week - median means 50% earned less than this figure, and 50% earned more. The average wage was £450 per week). The figures for women skew this result considerably: fewer than 20% of women earn more

Weekly earnings in main job	Union density in %		Women	Full-time	Part-time
	All	Men			
Less than £250	16.1	11.7	17.9	15.4	16.5
£250-£499	33.9	30.5	38.3	32.3	52.1
£500-£999	41.1	36.5	51.6	41.3	34.6
£1,000 and above	19.0	18.9	19.3	19.1	

than £500 per week, and about half of those are trade unionists.

By combining figures from the trade union membership survey and the annual pay survey, we can conclude that:

- There are three times as many women who earn less than £250 per

truth. Trade unions are also wealthy institutions. The four largest, which include more than half the membership of the TUC, have gross assets totalling more than a third of a billion pounds and net assets only slightly less (see table).

The ten largest TUC-affiliated trade unions have gross assets worth just over half a billion pounds, and net assets of £415m. These assets include properties and shareholdings. Their general secretaries have substantial salary packages: in 2005, those for Amicus, the NASUWT, NUT, RCN, T&G and Unison were in excess of £100,000 per annum; the lowest paid is the PCSU's general secretary whose package was £84,000. This is three-four times the average wage. Top pay for these posts three years ago was about £80,000.

These then are not organisations which will risk their financial position for the sake of their members particularly if it involved defying the most repressive trade union laws in Europe. The *Observer* recalled Tony Blair's declaration that 'There will be no return to secondary action, flying pickets, strikes without ballots, the closed shop and all the rest. British law [will be] the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world'. When Gate Gourmet workers were sacked in 2005 for protesting against the use of agency workers at lower wage rates, the T&G refused to endorse their strike action for fear of being sued by the company. 560 workers lost their jobs, and only 272 were re-instated. There has been no effective campaign against these laws.

In the 1970s, the annual average number of days lost through strikes was 12.9 million days, and even in the 1980s it was 7.2 million. By the 1990s it had fallen to 660,000 and on average has remained below this low level since. Despite this, the privileged sections of the working class have seen their wages increase in real terms at an unprecedented rate over this period: their gains have not been the result of any struggle but through British imperialism's parasitical relationship with the rest of the world. The current anti-trade union laws have served a purpose however in ensuring that unions serve as a police force, taming outbreaks of working class indiscipline particularly amongst the poorest and oppressed sections. Gate Gourmet was one example; before then there were SkyChefs, the Liverpool dockers and the Tameside care workers. At each and every stage the unions have protected Labour and the interests of British imperialism because they have a real stake in the system, not because of their bureaucracy. The 'awkward squad' have made no difference to this, and Blair's departure will not change matters.

Trade unions as institutions

An article in *The Observer*, which attempted to account for the lack of resistance to the closure of the Peugeot factory in Ryton in April this year, made the point that trade union legislation is the most repressive in Europe and more repressive than it was in 1926. Yet this is only part of the

Trade union	Membership	Annual Income	Gross Assets	Net assets
		£000,000s	£000,000s	£000,000s
Unison	1,301,000	132.8	111.2	97.1
Amicus	935,321	69.4	115.9	95.3
T&G	816,986	72.9	99.3	91.8
GMB	600,106	47.9	49.3	26.0

The condition of the working class in the United States

An organizational split in the trade union movement; a brutal, predatory, imperialist war; a massive and systematic assault on civil rights; the largest mass mobilization of workers ever on a directly political issue; a steady erosion of abortion availability; a vicious onslaught on workers' rights and conditions; and, underneath it all, deepening economic contradictions – these developments beg, demand, nay scream for an anti-imperialist analysis of the condition of the working class in the US and the way forward for it. So, when *Monthly Review* (MR)¹, the influential US socialist magazine, devotes its July-August 2006 issue to 'Aspects of Class in the United States',² we are entitled to expect some insights. After all, as editor John Bellamy Foster writes: 'By focusing on class and class struggle our underlying purpose is clear: not simply to interpret the world but to change it.'



There are some good articles – concrete or historical, and relevant. Vogel's 'Harder Times', about undocumented workers, and Lavelle and Feagin's 'Hurricane Katrina', together with Luce and Brenner's 'Women and Class' and 'The Pedagogy of Oppression' by McLaren and Farahmandpur. Vogel takes a recent study of employment in Los Angeles to show the extent of the informal 'off-the-books' economy. This has been steadily growing, to 15% of the LA workforce, around 700,000 workers. Most of these are undocumented immigrants, predominantly women. An interesting aside is that some 35% of informal employees are legal residents. Forced out of their homeland by the impoverishment exacted by imperialism, immigrant workers are forced into the US informal economy. By lowering wages, intensifying work and eliminating benefits, the informal economy is a mechanism for super-exploitation within the imperialist country. It also helps restrain the struggle of workers in the formal economy. Extended to the US as a whole, this informal economy probably measures around 8-10% of the workforce – between 10 and 13 million workers nationwide.

'Hurricane Katrina' is an all-too-short survey of the historical background to the tragedy in the slave roots of New Orleans and shows the obstacles that the ruling class are throwing up to rebuilding in any other way than as a racist city. 'Women and class' is a good survey of the state of working women after the last 40 years of organized struggle for women's rights. Unfortunately, though, it ignores the steady erosion of access to abortion for working class women. 'Pedagogy' briefly shows how the 'No Child Left Behind' program is leaving children in public schools to the nurturing clutches of the military, nutrition by McDonald's and the warped priorities of 'objective testing'.

Yet the volume fails to tie the objects of these essays – undocumented workers, the black community, women workers, working class youth – into any overall analysis of class in the United States. Interesting as they are, they seem peripheral afterthoughts to the 'real' issue of class.

This issue of MR comes on the heels of a debate on class in the United States which has been led by the three

leading bourgeois newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times*,³ the *Wall Street Journal*⁴ and the *New York Times*.⁵ From anecdotal reporting through to careful original statistical analysis, these bourgeois papers demonstrated that class exists in the US, that mobility between classes is limited, that unequal distribution of income and wealth is extreme and has been growing, that individual wealth depends less on work and more on who's your daddy?

Michael Perelman ('Some Economics of Class') cycles through the numbers showing the absolute decline in income of the mass of the US population. For the bottom 90% of the population, income peaked at \$28,540 in 1973 and has steadily declined to \$25,862 in 2002. At the other end, he shows the increasing concentration of income and wealth amongst a tiny minority: the top 0.01 % of taxpayers, some 13,400 families, was about the same as the poorest 25% of the population – about 18 million families. Corporations have benefited fabulously during this period. This 'represents the largest transfer of wealth and income in the history of the world – far larger than what occurred during either the Russian or Chinese revolutions' (p26). But much the same point was made by the bourgeois newspapers, if less dramatically.⁶

Perelman observes that the ruling class is doing this 'to extract more surplus value from ordinary people' (p27). But then, in an extraordinary conclusion, thrown in at the last minute, he adds, 'the right wing is undermining the very foundation of the economy'. But this is a profit-hungry capitalist economy: extracting more surplus value from workers helps this economy. It is not this or that policy which is undermining the economy but the normal inherent operation of capitalism itself, which continually drives the economy into crisis due to its tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Suddenly responsibility is lifted off the capitalist class as a whole and shifted onto its 'right-wing'. This creates illusions in some 'left-wing' of the ruling class. Elsewhere Michael Zweig yearns for 'a progressive revival of the Democratic Party' (p125), while Tabb regrets that 'Unfortunately, the other major party [the Democratic Party] has not been able...to advance its own prospects' (p9 – my emphasis).⁷

Zweig does some calculations which, he claims, shows that the working class are 62% of the labour force, capitalists just 2% and the middle class some 36%.⁸ The strikingly obvious question is: if the gap between workers and capitalists is just due to a 'right-wing policy' and if workers are a 'substantial majority', how come George Bush and the Republicans got elected? How come there isn't fighting in the streets? This does not occur to Zweig, who is concerned to downplay economic differences: 'these divisions are not best understood as simply the difference between "rich and poor".'

However, other 'differences' also bother Zweig. He complains about getting 'trapped in confusions about race and los[ing] sight of class' (p118). He criticizes excessive emphasis on black suffering during Katrina: 'Neglecting white suffering only contributes to racial resentment and undermines the political unity that both black and white, working- and middle-class residents will need.' (p121) Here 'racial resentment' can only mean on the part of whites, and the concept of 'political unity' is of blacks joining whites, not whites abandoning racist divisions and uniting with blacks around their demands. Let's keep race out of it, so no one gets upset! And, while we're at it, why not gloss over the 'differences' between the working and the middle class? '[M]ost Americans identify themselves as members of the middle class so political appeals to the middle class are appropriate for building winning messages.' (p123) Lo and behold! By the end, even capitalists are invited to the party with hopes 'of a progressive revival of the Democratic Party' and off we zoom to Neverland with Peter Pan and Wendy where we'll find 'a party of broad vision, not just a party of interest-based policy proposals'. Awww, quite warms the heart, doesn't it? Only Willie Wonka and the Oompa Loompas are missing.

This voyage into nonsense land starts the moment Zweig casts loose from the moorings of Marxism. Instead of defining class in terms of the collective relationship to the means of production, he substitutes individual power. 'The working class are those with little personal control over the pace or content of their work and without supervisory control over the

work lives of others.' (p117) But nobody has personal control over the pace or content of their work. Capitalism is an anarchic system which no-one controls: capitalists are compelled to behave the way they do as much as the rest of us. Capitalists own it and will fight to the death to try to keep it, but they don't control it personally. So 'personal control' is not some objective category, but a subjective perception.

Like natural scientists discovering, not inventing, the physical laws of the natural world, Marx discovered, through scientific analysis of the commodity, the social and historical laws governing the capitalist system. Instead of scientific analysis, Zweig invents the arbitrary criterion of power because it seems more useful. But for Marxists something is not true because it is useful, but useful because it is true. What at first seems useful to Zweig ends up being useless to the working class. What, we ask again, stops the working class from overthrowing the system? Zweig's theory glosses over divisions in the working class, divisions responsible for holding it back.

Bourgeois critics of Marx often claim that Marxism is disproved because of a growing middle class. Many Marxists have responded by asserting that the working class is a majority (Zweig, p117, Perelman, p18). In fact, Marx predicted that growing productivity of labour would lead to a relative decline in the working class:

'Although the number of workers grows absolutely, it declines relatively...in proportion to the part of society not directly involved in material production or indeed engaged in no kind of production whatsoever.'⁹

Far from predicting 'the disappearance of the middle class', Marx predicted the exact opposite: 'This is in fact the course taken by bourgeois society.'¹⁰ Ricardo, Marx argued:

'forgets to emphasise... the constantly growing number of the middle classes, those who stand between the workman on the one hand and the capitalist and landlord on the other.'¹¹

These middle classes 'are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand.'¹² Living on the product of the productive worker, their 'interest in his exploitation coincides more or less with that of

the directly exploiting classes.'¹³

Indeed ('usefully' for left wing academics!) Zweig discovers 'a new academic working class' (p118). So, salaried educators with retirement benefits, medical coverage and receiving the equivalent of \$30-50 per hour are on a par with un-benefited hourly workers in part-time jobs receiving \$8.50 per hour! Indeed, if the educator has an earning partner (typical) and the hourly worker is a single parent (quite typical) the distance becomes even more glaring. It is precisely representatives of this kind of middle-class – who insist that the problems are just with a right-wing, that we should shut up about racism, pander to middle-class prejudices and hope for 'a progressive revival of the Democrats' – who are holding the working class back.

The introduction quotes Lenin:

'Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.'¹⁴

This would seem very clear: that to understand class, we need to understand, specifically, the place of different groups in social production, of their property rights, and 'consequently' the way in which they acquire and distribute wealth. In analysing the working-class, that means examining where it is employed; how, specifically, it is exploited; how this has been affected by 'globalisation'; its internal differentiation – especially the labour aristocracy, the divisions within the class and the role of immigration; the growth of service workers and the changing composition of the middle classes. Sadly, MR missed an opportunity to start laying the groundwork for a materialist analysis of class.

Steve Palmer

1 *Monthly Review*, 58, 3 July-August 2006

Double Issue

2 www.monthlyreview.org

3 Peter Gosselin's 'New Deal' series, beginning 10 October 2004 and continuing. See www.latimes.com.

4 *Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2005 to 20 July 2005. See www.wsj.com (subscription required).

5 *New York Times*, 'Class matters' series, 15 May 2005 to 12 June 2005. See www.nytimes.com. Also published as a book, *Class Matters* (Times Books, New York, 2005).

6 *New York Times*, 'Class Matters', chapter 12: 'The Richest Are Leaving Even The Rich Far Behind'; *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 2004, 12 December 2004.

7 Marx, of course, regarded the Democratic and Republican parties ('two great gangs of political speculators') as essentially interchangeable (see the introduction to *Civil War in France*).

8 See also Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (ILR Press, Ithaca, 2000).

9 Marx, *Collected Works* Vol 30, p303

10 *Theories of Surplus Value* (TSV) Vol 3, p 63.

11 TSV Vol 2, p573

12 TSV Vol 2, p573.

13 TSV Vol 2, p571

14 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 29, p421



CHINA

myths and realities

The impressions are awesome: 70% of the world's construction cranes will be operating in China over the next five years; in 2005 China consumed half the world's cement and built as much as the whole of Europe will in three years. Investment bank Goldman Sachs announced that China's economy will exceed that of the US by as early as 2041. China's surging growth and emergence as a significant player in the world economy are undeniable but what this means for the global balance of forces and future of imperialism has still to be demonstrated. For some on the left the image of a rising China coming into conflict with the US eclipses the necessity of analysing inter-imperialist rivalries and the substance of China's rise. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

TV poseur Niall Ferguson gives a dramatic depiction of the 'triumph of the east', wherein 'a hundred years ago... the west could justly claim to rule the world. After a century in which one western empire after another has fallen, that can no longer be claimed.' Now it is Asia, led by China, which is in the ascendant. (*New Statesman*, 26 June 2006)

Martin Jacques imagines the coming unravelling of the projected 'American Century': 'China is a different matter altogether. Bin Laden was never going to pose even the most minuscule threat to the position of the US as the sole superpower. China clearly could, and in the long run certainly will. Its growing economic power will, in time, underpin wider political and military ambitions.' (*The Guardian*, 18 June 2005)

Boarding the bandwagon, the SWP's Alex Callinicos also describes the division between the US and China as the determining fault line in the future balance of global forces. 'China and the other East Asian states now closely bound up with it have become the underwriters of the continued expansion of American capitalism. Simultaneously China has also become the lightning-rod for geo-political tensions, has supplanted Japan as the main object of protectionist agitation in the US, and has been identified by the Pentagon and the CIA as the Great Power with which America is most likely to go to war.' (*International Socialism*, 108). 'Even Panitch and Gindin [of *Socialist Register*: TR] can't deny China's potential as a challenger to US domination in Asia'. (*International Socialism*, 110).

It is not that Ferguson, Jacques and Callinicos are entirely wrong but the emphasis that they give to the projected US-China confrontation deliberately denies the reality of inter-imperialist rivalries and most specifically the relations between the US and Europe. It also denies the significance of the struggle of the oppressed nations against imperialism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks analysed how monopoly capitalism divides the world up between oppressor and oppressed nations and between rival imperialist powers. The laws of capitalist accumulation drive the capitalists into contentions that result in wars to re-divide the world. This re-division is accomplished on the ultimate basis of the relative economic power of the competing powers. European capital and the European ruling classes cannot accept a role subordinate to the US ruling class;

they must confront US monopoly capital's attempts to establish a century of global hegemony. The oppressed nations must fight their oppressors, locally and internationally, to survive. These are the defining fault lines of the imperialist era.

US and European power

There is nothing in Marxism that denies the possibility of a new imperialist power emerging and China may become that power. However, China could only become such a power after the destruction of the dominant US, European and Japanese imperialism. If that destruction is not achieved by socialist revolution, which would prevent China's rise turning into imperialism, the prospects of humanity and the species are dim. It is really an indication of the fragility of the international capitalist system that China's emergence has created such a stir and encouraged the spectre drawn for us by Ferguson, Jacques and Callinicos.

In 2005 China's gross domestic product (GDP) was \$2.3 trillion. That of the US was \$12.5 trillion or a quarter of the world's annual output. The EU's total GDP was \$13.4 trillion. Annual average foreign direct investment overseas for the years 1999 to 2004 by the US was \$192 billion, by the EU was \$457 billion and for China the amount was \$2.6 billion. Annual average foreign direct investment received for 1999 to 2004 was \$196 billion in the US, \$409 billion in the EU and \$51 billion in China. The point is that China's investment overseas and receipt of investment is growing but it still does not compare with that of the US or the EU. China's exports amount to 7.7% of the world's total, below those of Germany and the US. Foreign multinationals account for 60% of China's imports and exports. Trade exceeds 60% of China's GDP. In this context China's economic growth has become dependent on international capitalism and the issue for the prospects of China emerging as a real contender to the imperialist powers is control: control of China's capital and state power. In 2004 Chinese companies accounted for only \$490 million investment in the US out of a total foreign investment in the US of \$1.5 trillion. In 2005 US companies had accumulated investment in China of \$350 billion.

A figure often cited as evidence of China's extraordinary performance is the average yearly growth of the economy by 9.5% since 1991. This compares with Britain's annual growth

rate of about 2.75% over the same period. When examining economic data it is worthwhile asking what interests the compiler has. The boom figures certainly encourage capitalists to invest in China, conforming to Chinese government policy. Academic studies of Chinese data reveal that local and provincial figures for GDP growth do not tally with the national figure, the discrepancy being almost 4% of the total. A study of China's economy between 1996-99 gave an acco-

ing less than 2% of GDP on defence – for now.

The power of trade

It is in trade and its impact on commodity prices, that China's global influence is revealed. China-Africa trade reached almost \$40 billion in 2005, quadruple the 2001 figure. In the first four months of 2006 China's imports from Africa rose 50% on the previous year's volume; much of this increase was in oil. The International Energy



'With growing inequality and primitive capitalist accumulation dispossessing the peasantry and working class, tensions in Chinese society have led to outbreaks of revolt.'

Agency reports that between 2002-2005 43% of the additional global demand for oil came from Asia with 28% from China. China, self-sufficient in oil until 1993, is now the world's third biggest oil importer. Angola is second to Saudi Arabia as an oil exporter to China. This April Nigeria gave preferential drilling rights for oil to China in exchange for \$4 billion infrastructure investment. The Gulf of Guinea supplies 15% of US oil imports and the US hopes to raise this to 25% in a decade. In the context of the imperialists' scramble for Africa China offers an alternative to national governments.

By mid-2005 the value of China's overseas acquisitions was five times the previous year's deals: the most reported of such purchases being MG Rover and IBM's personal computer division. However, almost half of China's foreign direct investment has gone into Latin America and China intends it to reach \$100 billion in the next five years! Joint ventures are agreed in steel, transport, energy and military exchanges. In 2005 China's stock of overseas investment was \$50 billion, less than one sixth that of Spain's. It is China's demand, helping to boost commodity prices and incomes for under-developed country producers, that offers an alternative to US economic and political hegemony. This has been particularly helpful to the Latin American countries, led by Cuba and Venezuela, seeking to break from US dominance. They are also using the mire the US military machine is sinking into in Iraq and Afghanistan to press home their opportunities.

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The issue is control

Before recently being appointed US Treasury Secretary, Hank Paulson is estimated to have visited China as chief executive of Goldman Sachs 70 times over 15 years. His efforts produced results: Goldman Sachs gained effective control of Hainan Securities, a stockbroking firm, and a \$2.6 billion 7% stake in the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the country's biggest lender. As Treasury Secretary, Paulson says he wants pressure on China to open up its financial sector to foreign firms. In December 2005 the European Commission warned China to open up its markets or face a legal challenge at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). A condition of China joining the WTO in 2001 was to open its financial system to foreign banks, insurance companies and other agencies by the end of 2006. Standard and Poor's rating agency calculates that 45% of China's bank loans are non-performing, many of them to state-owned enterprises. The big four imperialist accountancy firms (PwC, Deloitte, KPMG and Ernst and Young) are getting ready for the pickings and plan to increase their staff in China by 20% this year.

The Chinese government operates legal restrictions on the forms and amounts of foreign investments in its financial system and proposed major investments are scrutinised by the state. With growing inequality and primitive capitalist accumulation dispossessing the peasantry and working class, tensions in Chinese society have resulted in outbreaks of revolt. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has recently discussed reform of distribution to raise the incomes of the poorest and create a middle class for the sake of social stability. China's government says it will prioritise raising rural incomes.

The political legitimacy of the CCP and the state itself are declining as state power is seen by many as a means to personal enrichment. In July the CCP said that 85% of private companies eligible to have a party committee had established them. These committees are not representative bodies of workers; they are composed of owners and managers. The *Financial Times* commented, 'The move underlies the growing convergence of interests between China's dynamic private sector and its communist rulers, who began to allow entrepreneurs to join the party officially only in 2002.' (14 July 2006)

Given this growing alliance and that the CCP has 71 million members it is not surprising that debate has surfaced in the ranks of the Party. There has been growing criticism of the government's policies on foreign takeovers and management buy-outs of state-owned enterprises. A proposed key property law was postponed after a debate over whether it would undermine the foundations of China's 'socialist market economy'. Hank Paulson and the appetites of those he represents will ensure that the debate continues. China's workers are discussing and organising and have a heritage of socialism to call on. They will no doubt have the last word on the matter of their fates. They and the masses of oppressed humanity will dictate where the fault lines with imperialism fall and where the lava-roar of revolution erupts.

The struggle in detention centres continues

Britain now locks up more asylum-seekers and migrants than ever before: approximately 30,000 per year are detained. On 26 July a report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers strongly criticised the policy of detaining children, saying there was 'no evidence that the child's welfare was taken into consideration'. The parents of 16 families from Liberia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, China and Uganda held at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) then began a hunger strike to highlight their situation. **MATTHEW ZACCHARIAS** reports.

Yarl's Wood is run by private company GSL-UK Ltd, contracted to the Home Office, and is the main holding centre in England for families facing deportation. One of the hunger strikers was Prisa Kafoula, a Congolese mother of three children, aged 6, 4 and 2. Prisa and her children had been forcibly separated from her husband who is still resident in Leeds. Speaking from Yarl's Wood, she said, 'This is no place for my children. After my 3-year-old daughter was killed in the Congo in 1998, I would rather die here than let that happen to my children'.

Six of the hunger strikers maintained their protest for 14 days. On 12 August Paul Lopo, a Congolese asylum seeker who had participated in the hunger strike, was taken to Colnbrook IRC while his children, Christian, aged 5, and Josee, aged 7, were left at Yarl's Wood for several days. This was against the Home Office's own policy that asylum seeker children should be cared for by social services in the absence of their parents. Mr Lopo said: 'As a parent I was doing the best I could for my children in detention, as only a caged animal can do. I am their father and should be there to look after them.'

Deadly detention

The government's detention policy is being placed under further scrutiny by the inquests into the suicides of three asylum seekers. There have been ten deaths in Removal Centres in the last six years and figures released earlier this year showed that there was one serious attempt at self-harm every 36 hours.

The current inquests concern the deaths of:

- Sergey Baranyuk, from Ukraine, found hanged at Harmondsworth on 19 July 2004;
- Peter Kenny, from Nigeria, who died in hospital on 7 November 2004 after throwing himself from the third floor at Colnbrook;
- Manuel Pereira Bravo, from Angola, found hanged at Yarl's Wood on 15 September 2005.

Britain deports to war zone

The government stepped up its attacks on Iraqi asylum seekers when on 5 September it forcibly deported 32 Iraqi Kurds to the north of Iraq, the first forced deportation to Iraq since November 2005. Britain constantly tries to maintain the myth that despite

the continued barbaric war that it and the US have foisted on the region, all or part of Iraq is 'safe' for refugees to be sent back to.

Home Secretary John Reid showed his contempt for the legal process by announcing that last minute applications for judicial review would not stop the removals. Nevertheless, lawyers acting for five of the men obtained injunctions preventing their deportations going ahead. The Home Office then revealed that they had five other Iraqi Kurds on a reserve list who would take their places.

The Kurdish-controlled region in northern Iraq is increasingly unstable. In July and August there were waves of demonstrations over the corruption of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) officials and the lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity and fuel. The PUK and KDP responded by conducting house-to-house searches, arresting political activists and shooting at demonstrators.

Two of the asylum seekers managed to contact the Iraqi Federation of Refugees and described their deportations. They had been pushed barefoot out of the detention centre on the morning of 5 September while the security guards swore at them. They were then handcuffed and two security guards were assigned to each of them. A coach drove them to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, where they were pushed onto an army plane and given flak jackets. The plane then flew directly to Erbil Airport in northern Iraq. Before the plane landed, the security guards tried to give the asylum seekers \$100 each, which they ripped up and threw away. At Erbil Airport they were handed over to the KDP and questioned for several hours before being released. It is not known what happened to the other 30 asylum seekers.

New Asylum Model – same Labour racism

The New Asylum Model (NAM) was announced in February 2005 when the government published its five-year strategy for immigration and asylum. NAM was piloted at Harmondsworth and Yarl's Wood detention centres and then extended in June 2005 with the establishment of 'non-detained processes' in Liverpool and Croydon. NAM was implemented nationally from May 2006 and all new cases will be dealt with under the new model by the end of March 2007. In October 2005, 99.6% of 'fast-track' claims at Harmondsworth were refused and 98-99% of all applications under NAM are being refused.

The main features are:

- Automatically labelling as 'late and opportunistic' applicants who apply for asylum after a period of leave to remain, or arrest due to illegal working. Anyone so labelled has to 'report' to the Home Office every day.
- 'Fast-tracking' the process to 11 days including appeal. Applicants from 17 listed 'safe' countries are denied appeal in Britain and deported regardless of whether an appeal has been lodged.
- No independent legal representation – an Immigration Advisory Service lawyer facilitates any legal advice.
- A single IND 'case owner' will oversee all aspects of the application to the granting of status or deportation.
- No written applications allowed. All asylum seekers, including children and victims of torture interviewed, usually alone. Any inconsistencies used as grounds for refusal.

Asylum seekers forced to live in prison-like accommodation in return for £35 a week support and constantly monitored. In south Liverpool, around 250 are packed into three accommodation blocks (former student halls of residence). They describe the removal procedure as 'inhuman':

'They come at 6.30am when you are in bed, and they use 20 police officers to remove one asylum seeker. They don't let people take any of their possessions with them. Only the clothes they are standing in. One of the main problems is the attitude among the Home Office staff that we are liars...many asylum seekers are victims of NAM. It...depends on the officer who takes charge of your case and whether he likes you or if he is in a good mood. They use country profiles to find out about the situation in your country. But sometimes these are out of date and they say a country is safe to go back to. In Ethiopia, because Tony Blair is friends with the government and he gives them aid, they say it is safe...but it is not. There are many people like us who are genuine but who can't produce their papers because they have been trafficked and smuggled.'

Racist crimes against Liverpool's asylum seekers continue to rise. Official figures indicate around 1,000 race hate crimes in 2005 ranging from verbal abuse and racist graffiti to serious violent attacks. There were a further 287 racist incidents logged between April and June 2006.

Charles Chinweizu

SOLIDARITY WITH PRISONERS!

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is the only paper on the British left which regularly reports on and supports the struggles of prisoners within British gaols. For 25 years our paper has carried news from inside the institutions that are at the sharp end of the state's attack on the working class and on anyone who dissents against it.

We need your help to send FRFI to more people in prison. In order to reduce the possibility of interference by the authorities we send prisoners' copies by recorded delivery. A year's subscription therefore costs £10. Please help us by funding this important area of our solidarity work.

I would like to pay for _____ subscription(s) to FRFI for prisoners and enclose £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

(Please make cheques payable to Larkin Publications and return to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX)

Cruel and inhuman treatment of terminally ill prisoner

Former prisoner, Chris Tierney, who is dying from a brain tumour, has been recalled to prison for swearing at staff at a care home. Chris is paralysed down one side, losing his sight and displaying behaviour that medical experts on brain tumours say he cannot control. Ella Pybus, from the charity Brain Tumour UK, told *The Guardian* that it was 'cruel and inhuman for a man who has served his sentence to be returned to prison to face a lonely and degrading death because of behaviour caused by a condition he cannot control, one that cannot be treated and that will end his life prematurely'.

Chris was imprisoned for life for murder in 1986. In 2004, he was diagnosed as having a brain tumour and was released from prison in March the following year, having been told that

he had three years to live. On his release he was sent first to a probation hostel in Norwich, and from there eventually moved to a care home which specialises in the care of people with brain injuries. On 13 September probation officers recalled him to prison after he allegedly used abusive language towards a member of the nursing staff. He is now in the health care centre at Norwich prison.

FRFI sends warm greetings to Chris, who has been a subscriber to this paper throughout almost the whole of his sentence. Chris has always had a deep understanding of the iniquities of the system and has always stood up against its excesses with unbending principle.

Please write to Chris Tierney J28231, HMP Norwich, Knox Road, Norwich, NR1 4LU.

Ray Gilbert moved back from 'therapeutic prison'

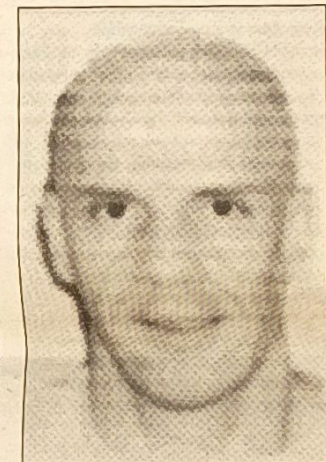
The news that innocent life sentence prisoner Ray Gilbert has been sent back to Woodhill prison from the therapeutic regime at Grendon came as a blow to his supporters, who had hoped that Grendon might have been a sign that he was on his way out after serving 26 years.

At least Ray is on normal location at Woodhill, instead of the intense and punitive Close Supervision Unit, where he spent some years before his move. Prior to that, he had been passed around like a parcel from one segregation unit to another for much of the quarter a century he has been in prison. He is now 11 years over the 15-year tariff he was given.

Ray pleaded guilty under duress to the murder of a Liverpool betting shop manager in 1981. His co-accused, John Kamara, pleaded not guilty but was convicted. John was released by the court of Appeal in 2000 after serving 21 years. John had protested his innocence throughout, written in the region of 337,000 letters to MPs, lawyers, supporters and anyone who would listen, and spent in total approximately 16 years in segregation for refusing to work or co-operate with the prison regime.

Upholding John Kamara's appeal, the court stated that Merseyside Police had withheld over 100 statements that would have helped the defence. The prosecution case was that Ray and John had acted together and anybody reading the evidence would have little doubt that if John Kamara was innocent, then Ray Gilbert must be equally so.

A distinguished consultant psychologist has examined Ray's confession and has indicated



that it should not be relied on. In a 29-page report, she cites his youth, limited education, high state of anxiety and lack of legal assistance as factors that may have gone towards him admitting to a crime he had not committed.

Ray's character has developed during his incarceration and he is now a strong-minded man. The main reason he is still inside is that the Prison Service and Parole Board continue to hold his denial of the offence against him. In 2004, the Board said 'You deny your guilt, but that does not mean that the conviction goes away or that the risks disappear'. What they ought to be asking is why would a man go on denying his guilt for over a quarter of a century when, by completing all the courses and saying that he was guilty, he might have been freed years earlier?

Eric Allison

Write to Ray Gilbert H10111, HMP Woodhill, Tattenhoe Street, Milton Keynes MK14 4DA

Overcrowding

Once again the prison system is so full to bursting that newspapers and politicians have begun discussing the merits of amnesties versus more prison building. On 15 September there were 79,145 people in prison in England and Wales, 2,200 more than this time last year. The government has not in fact announced any amnesty, but

the 'debate' around even the suggestion of one allows *The Sun*, *Daily Mail* etc to level accusations of leniency at the government. Meanwhile the reality is that a disused army barracks near Dover is set to be converted into emergency prison accommodation, and there is speculation that part of Ashworth high security mental hospital will also be used to house prisoners.

FRFI ROUNDUP

Fighting racism and imperialism!

Free Palestine!

Over the summer months, as Israel invaded Lebanon, the weekly Victory to the Intifada (VTI) demonstrations against the Zionist Marks and Spencer (M&S) flagship store in London have grown as people responded to the international situation and took a public stand. The opposition from Zionists flying the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes and the Israeli flag still exists, but with an open microphone and a busy shopping street, the message Free Palestine! Hands off Lebanon! was heard loud and clear. London VTI had loud and militant contingents on the marches and held two large public meetings, with discussion of the current situation facing the Palestinians and those in the Middle East.

On 9 September we attended the 12th Anniversary celebration of the Turkish/Kurdish MLKP where our solidarity message was warmly received.

On 29 July on Market Street, Manchester FRFI members and supporters held a successful protest against M&S, with well over 150 people from different communities taking part. One of our members was assaulted by the Zionist opposition that came along in a vain attempt to intimidate the demonstrators. The police did little to stop the provocation and the week after, when we held another picket, the police banned us from using the Hizbullah flag – which we found out later to be legal on our part. The 5 August protest was again very well attended, despite many going down to London for the national demonstration there. The Zionist 'counter-demo' didn't turn up so we were unopposed.

In the following weeks we held more M&S pickets in Manchester, during which we continued to uphold our right to

fly the flags of the legitimate resistance movements in the Middle East. But opposition came, this time from the 'left', when Stop the War Coalition leaders at a public meeting on 21 August attacked the pickets. Mark Krantz of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) said that it was fine to shop in M&S, and Rob Owen, general secretary of Manchester Students Union, ranted at what he called 'sectarian' protests 'against individual stores.' Shameful when their Boycott Israeli Goods campaign hasn't been active in Manchester for a long time. Despite these attacks the protests kept a sizeable number of people on the streets, including a Hizbullah victory celebration organised by VTI in Piccadilly Gardens, which included 'conquering' the Queen Victoria statue with anti-imperialist flags!

In Newcastle, comrades are increasing their focus on the weekly pickets of M&S and as a result the pickets have received an increase in support from local people. Police harassment of VTI increased during the Israeli offensive. On Wednesday 9 August three supporters of the Victory to the Intifada campaign were arrested whilst doing a stall in the city centre in support of the Palestinian and Lebanese people. During this police harassment a large crowd gathered most of whom were very supportive of the VTI members and vocally opposed the police attack on their democratic rights. All those arrested were released without charge.

In the run-up to the Labour Party conference demonstration in Manchester on 23 September, FRFI activists attended several local public meetings organised by the STWC. In response to our challenge that it is necessary to go

beyond the demand that it is 'Time [for Tony Blair] to Go' and to fight for a break from the whole of the Labour Party, the Socialist Worker speaker on the platform at one meeting made their position clear: 'I would be proud to march alongside members of the Labour Party, and indeed those of the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives'.

In Scotland comrades from the RCG had a militant and lively contingent on the 8,000-strong march through Edinburgh in August in defence of the Palestinian and Lebanese people. Street stalls in Glasgow were held to highlight

House, exposing this place of fear for asylum seekers who have to sign on and risk detention. We have also been involved in launching the Kanyama Must Stay campaign (see p16). The demonstrations at Communications House will change from Mondays and will now be on the first Tuesday of every month from 1-2pm.

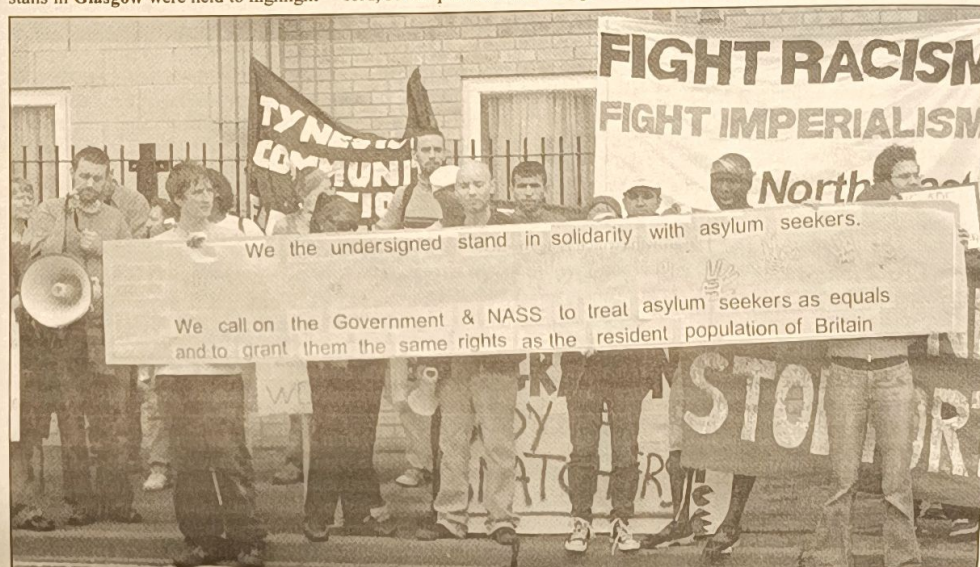
The North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG), initiated by FRFI, has been gathering momentum. We have begun to work with Halima, a Cameroonian refugee facing deportation to that war-torn African country. With her 5-month-old son Bailey Jr, she is facing deportation and has to walk miles from Blackley to Salford every day to report. As kidnappings continue at Dallas Court asylum reporting centre in Salford, so our protests outside it go on. On

received coverage from a number of local radio and television stations with members of FRFI and TCAR giving interviews. The bi-weekly pickets of the North Shields Immigration Reporting Service also continue.

In August, Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! held a well-attended meeting with asylum seekers in Pollokshaws, Glasgow discussing imperialism, racism and immigration. Speakers from the RCG in Scotland and Tyneside Community Action for Refugees gave talks on the links between racism and the capitalist system and a lively discussion ensued with asylum seekers about how to build a movement capable of resisting both. Street events in Glasgow city centre in defence of asylum seekers, drawing support from working class people, also continue.

Viva Cuba!

Rock around the Blockade has been busy mobilising for the Worldwide Days of Action in support of the Cuban 5 and demanding their immediate release. In London the events kicked off with a Cuban film night on 12 September, followed by street stalls on 16 September, a



the role of British imperialism in the Middle East and we continued to stand on the streets in defence of Lebanon despite the 'ceasefire'.

Support asylum seekers!

London FRFI activists have continued the monthly pickets of Communications

15 September we held a lively demo with the support of Women Asylum Seekers Together, the Samina Altaf Campaign, and others. The place reverberated to the sounds of 'Deportation is a crime! Lock up Labour!' We now need to step up support for asylum seekers and get their communities on board. For more info on NWASDG contact fight back_05@yahoo.com or visit www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk/immigrant.html.

In Newcastle FRFI has continued working in Tyneside Community Action For Refugees (TCAR) which has organised a number of regular public meetings. Since the successful 'Know your rights' meetings two new local communities have decided to set up TCAR committees. On 19 August a rally was held at Newcastle monument and despite attempted disruption from other groups on the left, the rally was large and successful. Another large rally and march were held on 12 September against the National Asylum Support Services. This

rally on 30 September, a sponsored bike ride on 1 October and a public meeting on 4 October.

Street events and meetings in Glasgow and Manchester are also in place as part of the week of action in support of the Cuban 5. On 27 August RCG supporters from Manchester braved turbulent weather conditions for a 10-mile sponsored walk up Kinder Scout in the Peak District, the scene of the 1927 mass trespass by communists which eventually resulted in the lands being made a public right of way. Retracing their steps, and with Cuban and communist flags in hand, we raised nearly £300 for Rock around the Blockade towards the sound system for the youth of Guantanamo. We are also deciding how we can mark the 80th anniversary of the trespass in spring 2007.

In Scotland two activists from Rock around the Blockade raised several hundred pounds for Cuba by completing a 50-mile cycle from Glasgow to Edinburgh.



Above: Tyneside Community Action for Refugees in Newcastle. Below: Sponsored walk up Kinder Scout.

Events

LONDON

Every Thursday, 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada picket Marks & Spencer
Marble Arch end of Oxford Street
Special picket 28 September for the anniversary of the Intifada

Wednesday 27 September, 7-9.30pm
6th Anniversary of the Intifada
public meeting: Bertrand Russell room,
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2

Saturday 30 September, 10am
Rally for the Cuban 5
North pavement Trafalgar Square

Sunday 1 October, 12-3pm
Rock around the Blockade sponsored bike ride
Meet at Stansted Mountfitchet
35 minutes train journey from Liverpool Street
Minimum £10 donation if no sponsorship

Tuesdays 3 October & 7 November, 1-2pm
Demonstration against racist asylum and
immigration laws Outside Communications
House, 210 Old Street EC1,
Nearest tube Old Street

Wednesday 4 October, 7-9.30pm
The Cuban 5 must go free
public meeting: Yorkshire Grey pub
29-33 Grays Inn Road, WC1
Nearest tube Chancery Lane

Wednesday 25 October, 7-9.30pm
Freedom for Palestine
LSE FRFI student society public meeting
London School of Economics (LSE), Houghton
Street, Nearest tube Holborn

Wednesday 8 November, 7-9.30pm
LSE FRFI student society Cuban film showing
and discussion

Wednesday 15 November, 7-9.30pm
Victory to the Intifada – LSE FRFI student
society public meeting. Part of the
international week of action against the
Israeli Apartheid wall

Further details: 020 7837 1688 or
email: london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

MANCHESTER

Saturday 30 September, 12-3pm
Free the Cuban 5! demonstration
Piccadilly Gardens

Monday 2 October, 9am
Defend Halima and Bailey Jr (aged 5 months)
from deportation to Cameroon
NWASDG protest outside Immigration Tribunal,
Mosley Street (next to tram stop)

Saturdays 7 October & 11 November 12-3pm
Victory to the Intifada picket of Marks &
Spencer
Market Street

Tuesday 10 October, 7.30pm
NW Asylum Seekers Defence Group meeting
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street

Further details: 07816 547066 or
email: mrcrgfrfi@fsmail.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk
NWASDG: fightback_05@yahoo.com
07779 189794

Student societies at Manchester and Salford
universities: 07940 961169
VTI: victory_intifada@hotmail.com

NEWCASTLE

Wednesdays 4 and 18 October, 10.30am-1pm
Tyneside Community Action for Refugees
(TCAR) Picket of North Shields Immigration
Reporting Centre
Norfolk Street, North Shields (next to the
library)

Friday 20 October, 8pm till late
Rock around the Blockade fundraising gig
Clear Bar, Collingwood Street (Next to
Revolution bar)

Every Wednesday, 7pm
TCAR public meeting
Downstairs at the Amnesty Bookshop,
Westgate Road

Every Thursday, 6-8pm
Picket of Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

Every Saturday, 12-2pm
Street events in Newcastle or Durham

Further details: 07813 073846 or
email: frfi_northeast@yahoo.com

SCOTLAND

Saturday 30 September, 1-3pm
Picket of Marks & Spencer – protest against
Britain's support for the racist state of Israel
Argyle St, Glasgow

Wednesday 4 October, 6pm
Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Readers,
and supporters group meeting: Room 613,
Boyd Orr building, University Avenue,
Glasgow University

Saturday 7 October, 1-3pm
No dawn raids! No deportations!
Demand the right to work!
Street protest called by Fight Racism! Fight
Imperialism! In defence of asylum-seekers,
Donald Dewar statue, Glasgow

Tuesday 10 October, 7.30pm
Imperialism, Resistance and Che Guevara
–revolutionary hero
FRFI society, Kilmarnock College

Wednesday 11 October, 7pm
Imperialism, Resistance and Che Guevara –
revolutionary hero
FRFI society, Glasgow University
412 Lecture Theatre B, Boyd Orr building,

Tuesday 24 October, 7pm
Victory to the Palestinian people! Imperialism
out of Lebanon!
public meeting: speakers from the
Revolutionary Communist Group and activists
recently returned from the Occupied Territories
Friends Meeting House, Glasgow

Further details: 07773 374858 or
email: frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

CHOOSE THE

RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative – **Join the RCG!**

I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG ☐

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group ☐

Name

Address

Tel

email

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FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Australia – key ally of Imperialism

Don't forget that the axis of US/GB must include Australia. The legislation passed by the Howard government reflects legislation in the UK – against Industrial Relations, asylum seekers, sedition etc.

At present Australia has armed forces (called peace keepers) in Solomon Islands, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, and police in Papua New Guinea, sent there against so-called 'failed states'. Howard is called the 'deputy sheriff' by George Bush. This makes these countries safe for big business – Australian business.

Asylum seekers are processed on Nauru outside Australia. Nauru would not exist without Australian money. Growing numbers of people oppose these policies – in spite of the Murdoch and Packer press barons with their lies of the ruling class.

MARJORIE BROADBENT
Victoria, Australia

LETTERS

FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: editorial@rcgfrfi.plus.com
website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com

Red and green future

Thanks for a balanced and appropriately critical review (FRFI 192, August/September 2006), generous given our political differences in a number of important areas. The essential point that a capitalist economy is unjust and ecologically unsustainable was well understood by your reviewer, as was the fact that practical alternatives to both the market and the state are possible. The difficult question of how to bring real prosperity and respect ecology can be met by making goods to last longer, by creating libraries and other provisions for social sharing, through permaculture and other forms of diversive, organic agriculture.

None of this is possible under capitalism, which as Marx noted, requires constantly increasing blind accumulation. One depressing feature of writing *Babylon* was the fact that it became clear that much anti-capitalism is misnamed; many writers simply want a fairer system of exploitation. Equally many so-called socialists have failed to criticise the pathologies of markets, enclosure and GNP growth (which is a growth in

exchange values rather than access to useful things).

Of course the big question is one of strategy and there are no easy answers. My views have changed a bit since writing *Babylon*, particularly having visited Venezuela in January and having had the pleasure of meeting Chavez in London. While Venezuela is not immune from criticism, it is obvious that millions of people in the country are working for a future which is both red and green. I had the pleasure of discussing socialist economics with workers at 'El Che', a disused rural factory being reclaimed by workers outside of Caracas.

The very real progress on health, literacy and organic agriculture explains why both Cuba and Venezuela are so hated by the Bush regime. All socialists and greens should be supporting the campaigns such as Rock around the Blockade and Venezuela Information Campaign to defend them.

DEREK WALL

author of *Beyond Babylon: the economics of anti-capitalist, anti-globalist and radical green movements*

Full Sutton injustice

Your newspaper is perhaps the best medium available to prisoners to reach prisoners held in other establishments. Therefore, I will be very grateful if you kindly include my appeal in the letters section of FRFI.

I have recently heard that some inmates are engaged in civil proceedings against HMP Full Sutton. I will request these inmates or their solicitors to contact my solicitors or myself immediately. This is because I am also pursuing a claim against the same prison and I believe that forming a united front against the injustice will help all the victims. I would also love to

hear from any inmates who have been victimised in any way (racial discrimination, religious persecution, other human rights violations etc) by Full Sutton's staff, particularly those inmates who were on 'A' wing or in the segregation unit between January 2002 and September 2003. They can also contact my solicitor: Ms Ofer, Hickman and Rose Solicitors, 144 Liverpool Road, London N1 1LA.

ALI ABBAS DN9521
HMP Whitmoor, March, Cambs
PE15 0PR

The 'N-word'

We welcome your recent printing of our statement on the campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal (FRFI 192 August/September 2006). It is the duty of socialists to take up this case which represents all that the barbaric, racist death penalty is about.

However, we were utterly dismayed that you changed our statement yet printed it as though it were our own. In the third paragraph, we quoted trial judge Albert Sabo declaring 'I'm going to help 'em fry the n—r'. You decided to fill in the gaps and spell out the 'N-word'.

We fight against the use of the 'N-word' because it embodies a programme: originally the slave masters' epithet for the brutalised Africans brought in chains to the old US South, it was and remains the rallying cry of the white supremacist lynch mobs and of cops who beat and gun down black youth in the ghetto streets. Far from a subversive assault on the language of oppression, the pervasive use of the word by black youth today reflects a profound, if unconscious, demoralisation and internalisation of the demeaning view of black people propagated by the capitalist rulers and their media. It represents a retreat from the fight against racism since the social struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and the mood of defeat and despair about the fight for black equality.

Rapper Ashley Walters (MC Asher D) of So Solid Crew explains that in his investigation of the use of the 'N-word' by black youth, 'I realised that words don't change their meaning depending on who

says them. It hit me then that I was giving racism more longevity by helping to make the N-word seem like a cool, hip word...I was actually making it easier for the racists to use' (*The Observer*, 2 October 2005).

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a black journalist now in his 25th year on death row, was framed up because he was a fighter against racist oppression, defiantly speaking out for the oppressed from the time he was a Black Panther Party member in his teens. The American rulers want to execute Mumia because they see in him the spectre of black revolution. The 'N-word' denigrates blacks as slaves who are unworthy of human life, as the US bourgeoisie has treated Mumia.

The Partisan Defence Committee is a class struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defence organisation which takes up cases and causes in the interests of the whole of the working people; this purpose is in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League. In fighting to free Mumia and abolish the racist death penalty we seek to bring to workers and youth the understanding that the capitalist state including its courts are the apparatus of violence used to preserve bourgeois rule by suppressing the working class and oppressed. Our fight for Mumia is part of the struggle for black liberation, part of the struggle for socialist revolution, to one day usher in a world in which the 'N-word' and all the other legacies of slavery are consigned to the scrap heap of history.

KENDRA OLSEN
Partisan Defence Committee

Sectarian SWP

On Saturday 16 September, a group of Rock around the Blockade members and RCG supporters held a street stall in Brixton, south London, in support of socialist Cuba as part of the Month of Action for five Cubans jailed in the US.

Among the hustle and bustle of Brixton high street was a Stop the War stall. When we started using a megaphone to make our voices heard, the activists on the other stall started on their megaphone in an apparent attempt to drown us out.

One of our comrades went over and politely suggested the two groups take it in turns to use a

megaphone, so that everyone could be heard. What followed was a tirade of abuse; the SWP members accused the RCG of not being anti-imperialist because we aren't part of the Stop the War coalition. And referring to the fact that the RCG was formed when members split from International Socialist, today's SWP, 30 years ago, we were told that: 'The worst thing is that when we kicked you out we didn't shoot the lot of you.'

The SWP member who said this didn't look much older than 25 himself, yet has obviously been briefed to loathe the RCG with a passion. I wonder why?

Perhaps if he'd been less aggressive we'd have been able to discuss our differences.

We were in Brixton campaigning for a living example of socialism and yet we were met with seething hostility from people who call themselves socialists! Meanwhile the SWP are proclaiming that it's 'Time to Go' for Blair – perhaps because they're guaranteed success with that particular campaign – but do they really think that whoever replaces him will move us towards socialism in Britain?

SAM
London

Fight press censorship in Turkey

On 8 September 2006 in Istanbul 'anti-terrorist' police raided the premises of the *Atilim* newspaper, the Socialist Alternative for the Oppressed, and *Ozgur Radio*. Their equipment was smashed up and 20 people were arrested, assaulted, tortured and sent to prison charged with being members of an illegal Marxist-Leninist organisation. They are currently awaiting sentence. The newspaper offices remain closed, even though the workers have not been convicted.

The Turkish police were operating under new anti-terrorism legislation enacted this year, which grants the Attorney General the power to ban newspapers. The raid was timed to pre-empt the 12th anniversary of the formation of the organisation of which they are accused of being members and is part of a wider campaign against socialists and revolutionaries by the fascist Turkish state.

On 21 September police intensified the clampdown, raided homes and arrested more than 100 supporters of *Atilim* under the

same legislation. Most of them are still being held without charge.

A statement from *Atilim* reads: 'We are calling on our readers and friends who live in Europe, on all native and immigrant workers and the toilers, on all women and young people to take part and support the campaign for the release of our newspaper staff.'

Fax or email letters of protest to the Turkish Embassy on 0207 393 9213 turkish.emb@btclick.com
For further information contact atilimuk@hotmail.com

End kidnappings of asylum seekers!

On 18 August 2006, North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) held its third protest against Dallas Court, the 'reporting centre' for asylum seekers in Salford, Manchester, where people are daily abused by racist staff, and some are kidnapped and taken to detention centres.

A week earlier, NWASDG had asked Emma Ginn, northwest coordinator of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), to publicise the event. Our leaflet included the details of three cases of asylum seekers who were kidnapped and transferred to detention centres after 'reporting' at Dallas Court between May and August 2006.

On Wednesday 16 August 2006, another refugee Jean Lobouka was detained after going to sign at Dallas Court and taken to Campfield. NWASDG publicised this and reminded

everyone of the planned demo two days later.

It was not till 17 August that Emma Ginn, who had not distributed our information to any of the NCADC's vast network of contacts, finally replied. She cited 'issues' with the wording of our text and asked if we had spoken to one of the asylum seekers ('N'), whose case we mentioned, to check he wanted his case publicised. This was information that we had actually taken from NCADC's website and was still available there and through other public sources. She said that she understood he no longer wished to campaign.

The following day, Kevin Egan, who said he was N's campaign manager, called to ask again if we had got N's 'permission to circulate and use information about him'. He suggested we restrict our campaign and publicity to our 'own' (!) asylum seekers and

rejected our use of the word 'kidnapping' as emotive. Egan also emphasised that the Home Office had 'not done anything illegal' and suggested we use the word 'detained' instead.

NWASDG held another Dallas Court demo on 15 September and has called another at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, Manchester for the 2 October to protest against the possible deportation of a five-month-old baby to Cameroon. NCADC has not publicised either of these events, despite our emails and phone calls. NWASDG will continue to highlight the treatment of asylum seekers at Dallas Court, to oppose kidnappings and to work with anyone and everyone who genuinely opposes Britain's racist immigration controls.

NORTH WEST ASYLUM SEEKERS
DEFENCE GROUP
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No to NASS!

On 12 September Tyneside Community Action for Refugees organised a vibrant demonstration in Newcastle against the racist National Asylum Support Services (NASS) system. Protesters marched through the centre of Newcastle to the NASS offices, picking up dozens of new supporters on the way.

NASS was created in 1999 as a parallel welfare and housing system for asylum seekers, which

keeps them isolated and in worse conditions than the British working class. Asylum seekers are forbidden to work and only receive 70% of income support while their claim is processed.

Currently thousands of asylum seekers are being made destitute and homeless by NASS countrywide. Those with accommodation have to live exactly where they are told, frequently in areas where they face racist attacks. Asylum housing is contracted out to private companies, such as Angel

Group (nicknamed 'Devil Group' by asylum seekers), who make vast profits but fail to maintain houses properly and collude with the Home Office in deporting people once their claim fails. Failed asylum seekers without children face homelessness once their claim fails. In Newcastle alone there are over 300 homeless asylum seekers who are entitled to no help whatsoever because they have 'failed'.

ANNIE RICHARDSON
Newcastle

Time to deal with racist Reid

British Home Secretary John Reid has called on Muslim parents to shop their kids to the British state. This Mofa needs to be dealt with. These people never urged Northern Irish Protestants to dissuade their children from joining paramilitary organisations, nor white parents to dissuade their

children from joining the National Front, British National Party, British Movement or whatever, or Jews to stop their children from supporting Zionism. My disgust knows no bounds.

STEVE
US

FRFI: a breath of fresh air

Dear friends
FRFI is the airhole through which I breathe. Please send the October/November edition.

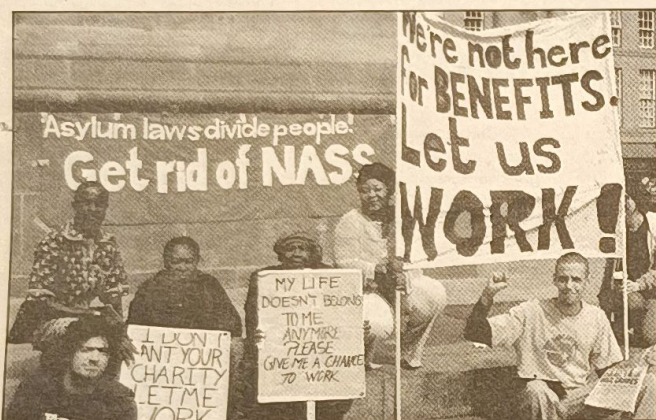
JOHN O'HIGGINS
Leicester

FIGHT RACISM

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Labour's racist immigration policy

Prior to 2000 the Labour government's immigration policy was to grudgingly welcome a small number of asylum seekers into Britain, whilst attacking the majority of would-be refugees as selfish, materialistic 'economic migrants' pretending to flee persecution in order to increase their income or improve their life-style. This policy was then completely turned on its head and now, after six years of propaganda about 'managed migration', we have a tiered immigration policy. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.



At the top of the pecking order are skilled workers and professionals who are encouraged to settle in Britain. Then there are the lower paid workers from EU accession states who are allowed into Britain to seek work but whose welcome is far from assured. At the bottom of the ladder are asylum seekers, who are defamed, detained and deported. Below even those on the lowest rung of this precarious ladder are an increasing number of foreign national prisoners. The racism becomes apparent once you consider

that a significant number of the 'top' group are white people from former Commonwealth countries, while the second group are overwhelmingly white, East Europeans and the majority of those in the 'bottom' groups are from Africa and Jamaica respectively.

Attacking foreign prisoners

On 19 July Immigration Minister Liam Byrne updated Parliament on the steps to crack down on non-British prisoners and make sure they would be

swiftly deported as soon as, or if possible even before, their sentences are finished. He dramatically announced that at midnight the immigration rules would change 'to confirm the presumption that all such prisoners should be deported', adding that there were further plans to remove exemptions, such as that for Commonwealth nationals who came to Britain before 1971. The government is also seeking to make it easier to deport people detained under mental health law.

Attacking asylum seekers

A week later Home Secretary John Reid announced the findings of the Review of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) that he had promised to carry out when he replaced Charles Clarke. Clarke was made the scapegoat for the embarrassment caused to the Labour Party in the run-up to the May local elections by the so-called 'foreign prisoner scandal' (see FRFI 191) and by the general inefficiency of the IND.

Ridiculously entitled *Fair, Effective, Transparent and Trusted: Rebuilding Confidence in our Immigration System*, the review sets out four 'key objectives': to strengthen borders using tougher checks, fast track asylum

decisions, ensure and enforce compliance and 'boost Britain's economy'.

Proposals include:

- exit controls on people leaving Britain by 2014;
- extending border checks on people before they travel to this country, particularly via 'high risk routes';
- 'strengthening the powers of the borders service' with 'a more visible uniformed presence'; doubled spending on enforcement by 2009/10;
- biometric residence permits for foreign nationals in 2008;
- anyone from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) to have unique, secure IDs to be able to travel to Britain by 2011;
- granting or removing 90% of new asylum claimants within six months by 2011;
- increased deportation, use of detention, tagging and monitoring;
- removing in-country rights of appeal;
- fines and seizure of assets of employers employing illegal workers.

Reid boasted that the government had already 'made significant progress' in deporting more 'failed asylum seekers', reducing applications, cutting illegal immigration and speeding up asylum decisions. He went on to say that IND now 'needs to be more visible and equipped with the right skills and powers to conduct its work effectively', with 'the resources, increased powers, new technology and increased visibility required to transform our border service'. He pledged to 'take away the barriers currently preventing deportation of those who should no longer have the right to call the UK home'.

From the repeated mentions of uniforms and 'visibility' it is clear that Reid's aim is to change IND from a glut of inefficient bureaucratic civil servants into a new paramilitary immigration policing service.

'Real progress'

The annual statistics on immigration published on 20 August showed the government had indeed deterred and deported more asylum seekers in the second quarter of 2006 than in the first. Asylum applications fell by 15% from 6,455 to 5,490, with the top applicant nationalities: Afghanistan (580), China (535) and Eritrea (535). The number of applicants from Zimbabwe fell 52% to 355. Removals increased by 3%. 4,480 principal applicants were deported, a 36% increase on the same period last year. Home Office minister Tony McNulty described this as 'real progress'.

Workers come to Britain

Meanwhile, the total number of work-permit holders and dependants admitted

to the UK was 137,000 in 2005 – 10% more than in 2004. There was an increase of 29% in the number of people settling in the UK in 2005 to 179,210, with employment-related grants of settlement rising by 49% to 63,015.

Although McNulty announced future controls on these groups, the entry and assimilation of these mainly middle class immigrants has so far caused few concerns for the government. The same cannot be said of the lower paid workers of varying skill levels who have come to Britain in large numbers from Eastern Europe.

447,000 people applied to the Worker Registration Scheme between May 2004 and June 2006. In the last quarter the number of individuals applying fell slightly to 52,195 (of which 49,850 were approved) compared to 57,105 (55,100 approved) for the same period last year. 78% of registered European workers earn less than £6 per hour, compared to just 20% of British workers.

Although capitalism is clearly happy to have a supply of cheap, reliable labour, more or less unfettered entry is sparking calls for control which are very similar in their panicky xenophobic tone to those raised in the 1950s and 1960s following the arrival of Caribbean and South Asian workers. There is no doubt that in the same way as happened then, when there is no longer a need for these workers the government will use the racist tide currently being whipped up as its justification for introducing controls.

The right to work

Unlike both groups of openly 'economic migrants', asylum seekers are actively prevented from seeking work. The government does not want them legally employed, as they cannot simply leave Britain whenever work ceases to be available. Furthermore their presence in workplaces, like that of their children in schools, encourages solidarity from members of the settled workforce, something the government is anxious to avoid. Asylum seekers provide an unpalatable reminder to the racists in power that it is their own vile activities around the world that have caused people from war-torn, impoverished nations to seek sanctuary here. Their situation here is a political one and talking about it to co-workers might politicise them into questioning Britain's role abroad and domestically. This would not be in the interests of a government, which like all capitalist governments, rules by maintaining division.

The RCG opposes all British immigration controls. It has always been our position that in an imperialist country, immigration restrictions must necessarily be racist. This applies both to the 'management' of 'economic migration' and to the scrutinising of claims for asylum.

*Oppose all immigration laws and restrictions!
Fight racism! Fight imperialism!*

HIV positive migrants – not safe in Britain

According to the United Nations: 'There is no public health rationale for restricting liberty of movement or choice of residence on the grounds of HIV status...any restrictions on these rights based on suspected or real HIV status alone, including HIV screening of international travellers, are discriminatory and cannot be justified by public health concerns.'

Worldwide, 39m people are infected with HIV (compared to 8m in 1990), with Sub-Saharan Africa the hardest hit region where about 25m people are infected. About 6,000 15-24 year olds become infected with HIV every day. More than 25m people have died of AIDS since 1981 and Africa has 12m AIDS orphans.

150 delegates from South Africa to the International AIDS conference in Toronto are reported to be seeking refugee status in Canada. A study of maternal deaths in South Africa from 2002 to 2004 shows that AIDS is the biggest single killer of new mothers, but South African Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang denies the link between HIV and AIDS and insists herbal remedies are sufficient to clear the infection. South Africa is the richest country in Africa yet among the worst hit by HIV. It is overwhelmingly the poor black population who are affected – over 10%, compared to 0.6% of the white population.

The British media propagates stories about asylum seekers and refugees coming to Britain for medical

treatment, describing it as 'health tourism'. HIV treatment represents less than 0.1% of the total NHS budget, approximately £279m is spent on HIV treatment and prevention as opposed to £3.8bn per year on alcohol-related illnesses and £7bn per year on heart disease. In 2005, the House of Commons Health Committee reported that HIV positive people from overseas tend to seek treatment late in their illness and are therefore unlikely to have come only for treatment. 73% of HIV positive migrants arriving in Britain are unaware they have HIV.

Before April 2004 anyone who had lived in Britain for a year or was applying for asylum had access to free NHS treatment. Under new legislation, only those granted legal status in Britain can have free HIV treatment (treatment for other sexually transmitted infections remains free for all). Labour said 'The only people who have anything to fear...are those who are abusing the system and shouldn't be here'. In reality, those affected are too poor to pay, not legally allowed to work and cannot leave the country. They are therefore left more unwell and more at risk of passing the infection on. Many cases are reported of people admitted to A&E unwell, subsequently diagnosed with HIV, treated, then billed (for thousands of pounds) and vanishing without ongoing treatment.

In July 2006, the *British Medical Journal* stated that Labour's policy of

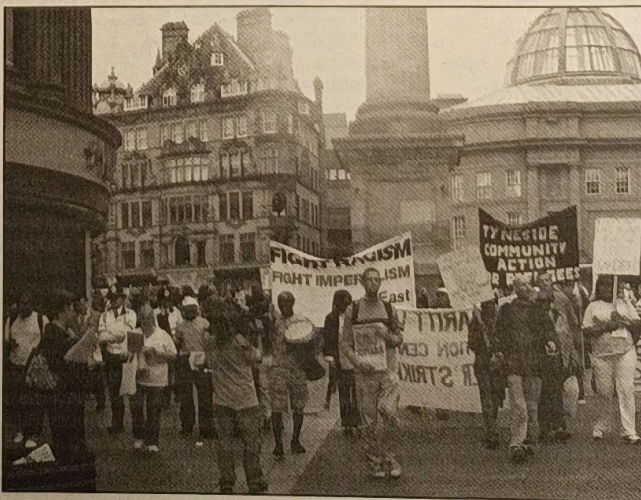
denying treatment to 'failed' asylum seekers living with HIV violates international human rights law and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Kanyama must stay!

Kanyama is a mathematics teacher originally from Zambia. He came to Britain in 2002 to pursue a master's degree in Business Administration. His then partner and children had settled status in Britain. In June 2003, Kanyama was diagnosed with HIV and began anti-retroviral treatment. In November 2005 the Home Office wrote to Kanyama telling him Britain was not responsible for his treatment and he must return to Zambia. His appeal has been unsuccessful. Zambia has 1.1m people infected with HIV, of whom the sickest 200,000 are in desperate need of treatment, but only about 21,000 receive anti-retroviral medication provided either by the Zambian government at a subsidised cost of \$16 per month or via private prescription, costing \$200 a month. Two out of three Zambians have no access to safe, clean water and 80% live on \$1 or less a day.

London FRFI is working with the Kanyama Must Stay campaign to secure Kanyama's right to stay in Britain. The next event is a picket of Communications House on Tuesday 3 October, 1-2pm. For details contact 020 7837 1688 or london@rcgfrfi.plus.com

Hannah Celler



Photos this page: Tyneside Action for Refugees on the march in Newcastle upon Tyne