

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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President George Bush visits Latin America: In Sao Paulo Brazilian military police attack protestors against Bush's visit, see page 6

INSIDE

WELCOME... p2

IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN

An era of perpetual war p1, 4

DOOMSDAY

Five minutes to midnight II p5

LATIN AMERICA

Bush visit: US imperialism on the defensive

Colombia: multinationals and state terror p6

HUMAN RIGHTS

imperialist crimes against humanity p7

CUBA VIVE

Cuban economy grows p7

LABOUR ARISTOCRACY II

Reformism and reaction p8/9

PALESTINE

New National Unity government p10

REVIEW

Newsinger: The British Empire: a dangerous view p11

FIGHT RACISM!

Charter flights to oppression p16

+ news, reviews, prisoners
fightback, round-up and letters

IRAQ: AN ERA OF PERPETUAL WAR

The spate of reports and critical debate in the US has defused mounting pressure on the Bush administration, allowing it to escalate the violence in Iraq under the guise of one last push either to total victory or withdrawal. But the US has no intention of pulling out of Iraq. Withdrawal would not simply be a sign of failure and defeat in Iraq but a major blow to the US strategy of global domination through the use or threat of overwhelming military force. The US relies upon this military power to keep in check political challenges from imperialist rivals such as the EU and Japan, from rising powers such as China and Russia, from opposition movements within allied and puppet regimes and from so-called 'rogue regimes'. Political hegemony bolsters the US against growing economic threats: for the US ruling class the key issue is control over Middle East oil. **JIM CRAVEN reports.**

In January, near Najaf, 263 people were killed and another 210 wounded when US aircraft launched an intense aerial bombardment against Shia pilgrims. The only warning was leaflets dropped from a helicopter saying, 'To the terrorists, surrender before we bomb the area.' The pilgrims were members of groups opposed to the Iraqi government who only took up

arms after their disabled leader, his wife and driver were assassinated by Iraqi puppet forces. Local tribesmen and residents were among those killed in the massacre. The attack set the tone for the new offensive ordered by President Bush. When the first of the 21,500 extra troops began their assault in February they attacked Haifa Street in the heart of the poorest quarter of

Baghdad, indiscriminately destroying buildings. Children were among the victims.

In mounting pressure on Iran the US sent a second aircraft carrier to the Gulf in January. Vice President Cheney said it was 'a strong signal that we have significant capabilities and that the US is in the region to stay and deal with the Iranian threat'. When asked about air strikes against Iran he refused to speculate but reiterated President Bush's assertion that 'all options are on the table'. The US maintains Iran is supplying weapons to the Iraqi resistance despite intelligence reports to the contrary. In February Bush said that any Iranians in Iraq deemed to be a threat to US personnel could be killed. Eight US helicopters took part in a raid on Iranian offices in Erbil, Northern Iraq, in January. Five Iranian officials were arrested. In the same month, Iranian diplomat Jalal Sharafi was kidnapped by Iraqi security forces acting under US command.

The US will not withdraw

Most of the criticism levelled at Bush's policy in Iraq from sections of the US ruling class stems from fear that the difficulties being encountered in Iraq are threatening wider interests

of US imperialism. The resistance to US and British occupation by the Iraqi people has given political space for the defiant stands of North Korea and Iran over nuclear arms. It has inspired the renewed resistance movement in Afghanistan. It has blunted possible imperialist responses to the election of Hamas in Palestine and to the victory of Hizbullah against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It has given the opportunity to develop the Cuba-Venezuela-Bolivia anti-imperialist front in Latin America. In February, President Bush reversed his refusal to talk with Syria and Iran as proposed by the Iraq Study Group and invited them to join a 'neighbours' meeting on stabilising Iraq, which met on 10 March.

The US's difficulties have also provoked criticism among European imperialist rivals. French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin dismissed as 'absurd' the idea that an enlarged US force would bring peace to Iraq and insisted, 'We need a clear horizon for the departure of foreign troops and the return of full sovereignty to Iraq'. Most EU members of NATO have rebuffed Bush's call to increase their troop commitments in Afghanistan. The Belgian Prime Minister called for NATO to withdraw. In February,

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi resigned when his coalition government split over retaining Italian troops in Afghanistan and expanding a US military base in Vicenza in northern Italy. Russia has objected to US plans to site missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic and threatened to target its own missiles on the Polish and Czech bases.

Era of perpetual war

Zbigniew Brzezinski, adviser to President Carter in the late 1970s, expresses the fears held by sections of the US ruling class. He cites two scenarios that could drag the US into open conflict with Iran and outlines diplomatic measures to avoid this and to extricate the US from Iraq. Brzezinski proposes the US should confirm its determination to leave Iraq and set a timetable in discussion with leaders of every section of the Iraqi community. The US should invite all Iraq's neighbours and other Muslim countries to discuss peace and stability in the region and have wider discussions with the EU, China, Japan, India and Russia. He also proposes a major effort to solve the Palestine problem.

continued on page 4

Ten years of Labour

Things can only get better,
Can only get better,
Now I've found you...

Thus chirped the pop-song; the Labour Party's theme tune as they returned to government ten years ago. It was the soundtrack that promised rewards to the middle classes who voted them in, but nothing for the poor.

In the run-up to the 1997 election charade *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* said: 'vote Labour and there will be no change... In fact it will be more oppressive, more racist, more anti-working class than the Tory government' (editorial FRFI 135). This was not a guess or a long shot. It was statement based on analysis and history, which led us to conclude that:

'[Labour] is far better placed than the Tories to mount a concerted attack on state welfare spending. It will continue with a bipartisan foreign policy and will maintain its support for the loyalist ascendancy [in Ireland]. It will retain all existing immigration controls. It will not repeal either the Asylum Act or the Jobseeker's Allowance.'

How right we were! The welfare state is in crisis, with the National Health Service and state education being dismantled to facilitate privatisation by the back door (see page 3). Immigration controls have been tightened and asylum seekers made destitute, detained and deported (see page 16). Labour's adherence to a neo-liberal agenda has seen budget after budget favouring big banks and companies in the financial services sector (see this page).

'Things are not getting better', said a military expert about the British occupation of southern Iraq: 'The British are aggravating tensions just by being there.' The first six years of the Labour government saw more imperialist interventions than during 18 years of Tory rule. Labour has committed us to an era of perpetual imperialist war: occupation without an exit strategy, as Labour shifts troops from Iraq to Afghanistan (see pages 1 and 4); war without rules, without human rights, without the Geneva Conven-



1997: New Labour takes office

tions, in which private mercenaries reinforce national armies. War in which those branded as 'enemies' are flown secretly around the globe, tortured and held indefinitely in concentration camps like the one at Guantanamo Bay (see page 6). War in which words like 'bringing peace and stability' and 'the democratic world' fall from the mouths of those threatening to use the ultimate weapons of mass destruction to halt Iran's nuclear energy programme (see page 5).

So much for all those who claim to have been 'betrayed' by Labour, that this is 'not what they voted for.' It is precisely what they voted for. It is what social democracy has to offer in a period of crisis in the capitalist system. Ten years ago we concluded: 'There is no choice for the working class but to begin the fight to establish its own independent political organisation and to assert its own interests against those of the rich and powerful. The message is: don't vote - organise!'

Sadly, but predictably, the British left did not agree. Consequently, they struggle to explain the last decade of escalating racism and imperialist aggression by Labour. They call the disintegrated anti-war movement a 'success', claiming that: 'in five short years we have got rid of our Prime Minister over the question of the war' (John Rees, Socialist Workers' Party leader). They set up 'alternative', not oppositional, electoral parties (Socialist Alliance, Respect, Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity) - all fellow travellers of Labour, joining the charade instead of rejecting it. They make unprinci-

pled alliances with 'left' Labour MPs. They organise and police demonstrations to control public anger. They claim that Britain has been reduced to a mere colony of the US, cynically opposing the policy of war without exposing how war is necessary for British as well as US imperialism (see page 11).

And now, when things are getting worse than ever, many on the British left have exceeded themselves in stupidity, blatant opportunism and reaction with their latest strategy: rejoin the Labour Party to support Labour MP John McDonnell's leadership challenge! The Stop the War Coalition (STWC) has become a platform in the bid for leadership of the most racist and imperialist Labour government in history. At the STWC demo on 17 February, McDonnell declared: 'We want a British Prime Minister that speaks independently for Britain and does not parade around the world like some personal Vice President of the USA.' Another leadership contender, Michael 'Four Homes' Meacher, told the STWC 'People's Assembly' on 20 March: 'We should establish our own agenda of peace - not the George Bush agenda of a "war on terror".'

Since its foundation in 1914, the Labour Party has stood for 'social imperialism'. There is no sign that these 'left' candidates for leadership will end this tradition. Unperturbed, Rees welcomes the McDonnell campaign on behalf of the SWP, stating that: 'whenever there is a gain for the left, whether inside or outside of the Labour Party, it is a gain for the whole of the left.'

The hypocrisy of this SWP leadership is boundless - whilst encouraging reactionary Labourites, it condemns socialist Cuba and hesitates to support the growing anti-imperialist, popular, revolutionary movement in Latin America, which had Bush on the run during his whistle-stop tour of the continent (see page 6). Cuba and Venezuela are in an international vanguard, their example is demonstrating the superiority of socialist cooperation and militant anti-capitalism (see page 7).

Don't sink in the quick-sand of parliamentary politricks, rise up on the wave of anti-imperialist resistance across the globe. Don't believe the lies of opportunists, apologists and compromisers, link arms with those committed to building a better world. Join us in the fight for socialism!

Send us your contributions, both written and financial to: FRFI BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Budget for a parasitic and decaying capitalism

Gordon Brown's eleventh and last budget speech was designed to take the wind out of the sails of David Cameron, the new Tory pretender. With barely a hair's breadth separating the policies of the two main imperialist parties, Brown's budget challenged the Tories on their home turf by announcing a 2p cut in both corporation and income tax rates from April 2008. The cut in the rate of income tax from 22p to 20p in the pound - the lowest basic rate for 75 years - was theatrically announced at the end of his budget speech.

This was not a tax cutting budget. If anything, overall taxes will rise in 2008-09 once the announced changes kick in. Brown is rigidly constrained by Labour's neo-liberal agenda; the 'fiscal discipline' needed to promote the interests of banking and multinational capital at the heart of Labour's economic policy. So the income tax cut will largely be paid for by removing the 10p starting rate - hitting low paid workers - and by aligning national insurance and tax rates at the higher rate tax level. The costs from the cut in corporation tax on businesses from 30p to 28p are to be recovered by significantly reducing the capital allowance per year on investment in plant and machinery from 25% to 20% and by increasing the corporation tax on small businesses from 19% to 22%.

On the spending side Brown has produced the tightest spending round for many years. Education spending, the new 'priority', will see a real annual increase of only 2.5% a year to 2010-11, a significant slow-



down on the 4.4% real annual increase since 2000. Home Office expenditure will be frozen, Revenue and Customs and Work and Pensions will be cut by 5% a year in real terms. Public sector pay will be cut with pay rises below the rate of inflation.

Military spending will continue to rise next year with an extra £400m pencilled in to pay for the continuing war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan cost £1.7bn last year bringing the overall total on these 'international commitments' so far to £7.4bn. Defending Britain's imperialist interests throughout the world is the top priority for the Labour government and, whatever the economic constraints, the necessary funds will be found.

So who were the winners and losers from this budget? Following income tax changes, the main losers are low-paid workers unable to claim tax credits and earning between £5,225 and £18,610 a year, including single adults with no children earning less than £18,500 a year. This group has

been hit hardest by the abolition of the 10p band. The winners are those earning between £18,500 and £39,000, many in the richest 10% of households. The rise in income from increased tax allowances for pensioners over 65 will almost certainly be wiped out by the increases in council tax and the massive rises in the price of fuel.

Most significant are the winners from the changes in capital allowances and the cut in corporation tax. They were the highly profitable multinational companies, and particularly the international banks in the booming financial services sector and the City. Stephen Green, chairman of HSBC, spoke for them all when he said: 'We continue to see London as the crossroads of the world and the premier international financial services sector. The news on corporation tax is a very welcome boost for business and one which serves to further enhance London's competitiveness'. The losers were small businesses and manufacturing and other companies investing in plant and machinery in Britain. As one director of a Birmingham-based steel processor put it: '[The budget] is an insult to the country's manufacturing base'. Such is the nature of British capitalism.

Gordon Brown made all this clear in his budget speech. 'Britain must champion open markets and free trade - an open and inclusive globalisation, not protectionism'. This then is his final budget in the service of a parasitic and decaying capitalism before he takes over from Blair.

David Yaffe

Ireland: Assembly elections

PAUL MALLON

Speaking in the White House at the 14 March St Patrick's celebrations Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern trumpeted progress with the Irish peace process: 'The IRA campaign has ended, the weapons have been decommissioned, inclusive support for policing has been agreed and the programme of normalisation of security in Northern Ireland will be completed shortly. The door is now open to shared government'. Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness has declared his 'wholehearted support for the PSNI' (Police Service of Northern Ireland).

Elections to the Stormont Assembly on 7 March have confirmed the ascendancy of the loyalist bigot Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). With a 30.1% share of the vote, it won 36 seats in the 108-seat Assembly, a gain of six seats over its 2003 result, while the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) lost nine seats, ending up with 18 (14.9% of the vote). Sinn Féin won 28 seats, a gain of four (26.2%) and the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) lost two, ending up with 16 (15.2%). This leaves Paisley as both the First Minister and the undisputed leader of Unionism. The ten-member Executive will now

consist of four DUP ministers, three Sinn Féin, two UUP and one SDLP. Paisley has been the real winner of the peace process: in 1997, his DUP got only 13.6% of the vote compared to the UUP's 32.7%.

Those candidates standing on a Republican platform opposed to Sinn Féin's support for British policing polled around 1%. On the day before the election the recently formed 'Ex-PoWs and Concerned Republicans Against RUC/PSNI' took out a full page advert in the *Irish News* signed by over 400 former political prisoners, stating: 'The people's desire for peace has been cynically exploited... We reject the logic of the proposition that the interests of peace can be in any way served by our young people signing up to join the British Crown forces such as the RUC/PSNI... We view this as a betrayal of everything Republicans fought for... We support open and free debate among Republicans... to bring about, by peaceful means, a thirty-two country democratic Republic...'. However, Sinn Féin and its supporters were happy to ignore the prisoners' standpoint.

As part of his budget on 22 March, Chancellor Gordon Brown revealed a billion pound package as part of a 'peace dividend' to force the parties to agree to power sharing by 26

March. Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams had earlier written to the Chancellor stressing the importance of a 'sustainable and substantial economic package'. This provides £600 million over four years for infrastructure development, including a major new roads programme. £400 million of this will come from the Dublin government. A further £400 million will enable the Stormont Assembly to delay the introduction of new water charges. The DUP described the package as 'modest progress', and whilst Paisley expressed continuing doubts about Sinn Féin's commitment to policing, Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain said that 26 March 'is the date by which there is either devolution or dissolution'.

STOP PRESS: As we go to press, Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley have agreed to enter a power-sharing agreement starting 8 May. Paisley's brinksmanship in the days before the deadline meant that Hain had to back down from his ultimatum. It shows that the DUP have an outright veto on all major political decisions, and this sectarian reality will be visited upon the nationalist people again and again in the future. The carnival of reaction will continue.

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FRFI 2007 Fund Drive - £10,000

A slow start to our fund drive - so far we have collected £1,586. You, our readers, will be crucial in enabling us to reach our target. This issue of FRFI tells you once again how our political activity continues to develop: fighting alongside asylum seekers, supporting the Palestinian people and opposing the imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. We need your financial support to keep it going and expand it.

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

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Labour government is bad for your health

'The chaos currently engulfing the NHS is due entirely to its marketisation by the government and the transfer of up to 50% of public money to the private sector [...]

Increasingly, government has given away control of resource allocation and more and more of the NHS's scarce funds are flowing into the pockets of shareholders, bankers, management consultants, and for-profit providers – away from the service.'

Allyson Pollock, head of the Centre for International Public Health Policy, University of Edinburgh, January 2007.

Such chaos is evident at every level in the NHS:

- The shortage of midwives and the closure of maternity units;
- The national NHS IT system and its continuing failures: *Computer Weekly* in September 2006 catalogued a series of failures around the country that were considered to have caused 'significant adverse impact on the delivery of patient care [...] or significant financial loss and/or disruption'. There is no sign that matters are improving as suppliers con-

tinue to fail to deliver.

- Nurse shortages in hospitals whilst, for instance, 75% of nurses qualifying in September

2006 from City University in London have no nursing job.

- The false assurances that services removed from hospi-

tals will be available in the community when community services are also being savagely cut.

To cap it all, the government has announced a review to 'look at the possibility of drawing up a package of [NHS] services that all users are entitled to' – and therefore define the ones that people will have to pay for. Restricting NHS provision to core services will make it a two-tier service that penalises the poor.

Women and children

In February, figures obtained by the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association showed a 40% drop in training places for health visitors. This is mainly because health authorities have not commissioned courses for financial reasons. In Scotland, it has been proposed to merge the role of health visitor with that of district nurse. The number of school nurses has also dropped.

Ironically, an OECD report released in February showed that children and young people in the UK have the poorest quality of life of the 21 industrialised nations surveyed. The

six assessment categories were: material well-being, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people's own subjective sense of well-being. The UK came lowest overall and was in the bottom third in five of the six categories.

Britain now has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in Europe: 13 deaths per 100,000. There has been a 21% rise in deaths of pregnant women over the past three years compared to the previous three years. In Britain Caesarean sections now make up over 20% of deliveries compared to the World Health Organisation guideline of 15%. Meanwhile, there is an estimated shortfall of 10,000 midwives, maternity units are being closed or health care assistants are being employed as a cheaper option.

Foundation hospitals

The Homerton hospital, a Foundation hospital in east London, exemplifies the current situation in the NHS. Morale is plunging as more job cuts are announced daily. The Trust has had to reduce costs by £6 million in 2006/07 and will have to cut a further £5 million in 2007/08. Management is proud that out of the 100 posts gone so far there have only been ten redundancies, but it takes no account of what the job losses mean for the service, the staff team or morale. Instead it claims that

cutting 'waste' will reduce job losses. A nice message pops up on every computer screen: email goodideas@homerton.nhs.uk and any suggestions will be taken up! The chief executive writes that 'if all those who use rubber gloves reduced their usage by two pairs a day, the savings would fund the salary of a band five nurse'. A 'war on waste' email circulated states 'if we all reduced our waste by just 5p per working day, we could fund an extra trained nurse – small is not trivial'!

The chief executive announced in mid-March that it looks like the hospital will close this year's £4.6 million financial gap. She mistakenly says that there is no evidence that this has been at the cost of patient care. Senior clinicians who are involved in this process are seriously harming the health of the community that the hospital serves. To add insult to injury, they are dressing it up as 'streamlining services resulting in improved efficiency and quality of care'. This is happening up and down the country.

More and more campaigns are springing up to defend NHS services: the government review makes action all the more urgent. Everyone who cares about equitable, universal and high quality health care provision free at the point of delivery must begin to act together.

Hannah Callier



Junior doctors demonstrate against a new system for training

Education notes

The scramble for state nursery places

Travel on public transport in any British city late on any weekday evening and you will see exhausted parents or carers struggling home with babies in buggies, sleepy toddlers and little children. They are the Labour government's sacrificial lambs on the altar of the education market. In 2007 state provision of free nursery places is almost non-existent and paid state nursery places are hard to get even for working parents paying up to £200 a week. While state nursery and primary places have dropped by 300,000 in the past ten years, the private sector has boomed. Working class parents are left juggling a mixture of family support and child minders as best they can. This shameful public neglect of young children is ignored by Labour's high-handed education 'experts' who lay down laws for child development and design tests for four-year-olds.

Plenty of cash – but not for the poor

Since Labour came to power in 1997 state expenditure on education has risen. However, this money has cascaded down into the private sector by a process of fragmenting services in order to outsource them to private companies. An ideological attack on the very notion of state provision has been used to justify handing over state finances to thousands of new education businesses and consultancies that have mush-

roomed in the grab for profitable investment opportunities. Handing over £35 million of assets to companies and Trusts to run Academy schools is only the latest in Labour's 10-year promotion of private enterprise as the future of education. As a result, class size in British schools remains disgracefully high with Reception classes of 30, 25% of school leavers have no qualifications and Britain is placed 24th out of 29 advanced countries in staying-on rates for further study.

Big money

Meanwhile, most of Labour's big new ideas fail at the cost of millions – although there are always businesses that cash in on them. The £2bn school truancy plan made no difference to school attendance, but made lots of money for security firms. The £3bn Individual Learning Accounts scheme led to a boom in phoney education providers, which continues today in the Learning and Skills sector.

This year the scheme for the computerisation of national curriculum tests is in disarray after a £26 million launch less than six months ago, but for RM, the computer software giant that developed and sold the test, it was pure profit. But the education department will not finance the upgrading of the information technology infrastructure of every school in the country that would have made it a viable national programme.

Class war in the classroom

Free state education was introduced at the end of the 19th century because private benefactors, philanthropists, charities and churches were failing to educate the working class to a level necessary for a disciplined proletarian class in an industrial economy. At regular intervals the ruling class takes a stand against the expansion of educational levels for all. The capitalist class remains antagonistic to the expansion of the cultural and educational levels of the working class as a whole.

This hostility dominates British society today. Any increases in state expenditure are designed to go towards the standard of living and salaries of the increasing layer of middle-class supplementary workers whose jobs cluster around the basic provision of state welfare.

On 19 March Blair and Brown appeared together at a new Academy school in Hackney to announce the aims of the latest Cabinet review. Labour wants 'to tailor public services to the needs of individual families' via 'increased choice in public services and more competition between state and private sectors'. This is a cover for rationing services to the poor, but it is also a threat to the rights and dignity of the working class. Only by opposing Labour's plans can we establish a future – for the many, not the few.

Susan Davidson

Fight Labour plans to cut ESOL funding

Labour plans to axe free English language lessons for asylum seekers aged over 19 from August 2007, despite its demands that immigrants pass an English Language Test to be allowed to stay. Ironically, only five years ago the government declared its commitment to free English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), on the basis that the ability to speak English was essential for full integration into British society.

2.1 million people aged 16-64 currently receive ESOL teaching. Many of them will be excluded after August 2007. The proposal has sparked condemnation and protest across the country. Recent reports from Amnesty International and Refugee Action highlight the plight of destitute asylum seekers, whose applications have been refused and who are forced to sleep rough in parks, public toilets and phone-boxes. Many are without vital medicines even after suffering torture. The withdrawal of English teaching will make their situation even more desperate.

The impact on non-English speaking women will be particularly severe, rendering it almost impossible for them to seek employment or education and increasing their dependence on their partners.

Although Labour insists children will be exempt from cuts to ESOL, in fact they will be compelled to interpret for



Protesters demonstrate through Newcastle upon Tyne against Labour's cuts to ESOL funding

adult family members. The Children's Society has warned that cuts would disempower parents and place an inappropriate level of responsibility on children. There have already been instances where children with non-English speaking parents have had to interpret the results of sensitive medical tests, sometimes relating to rape and torture. Without English language lessons, asylum seekers, refugees and low-paid migrant workers will be unable to help their children with school work or participate fully in their welfare.

Labour's plans for ESOL expose the contradiction between demands for immigrants to 'integrate' and the barriers being put up to

ensure they cannot do so. Bill Rammell, Minister for Education, defends this racist hypocrisy on the basis that 'Is it really right that taxpayers' money should support the learning of English for people whom we expect to leave the country?'

Cuts in ESOL funding will affect not only asylum seekers but also lower-paid migrant workers, as fee remission will only be available to people receiving means-tested benefit and family tax credit. An ESOL course costs an average of £200. Even those entitled to tax credits face an application process so complicated that only an estimated 50% of those eligible actually claim them.

Alyse Thomson

IRAQ

An era of perpetual war

continued from page 1

Brzezinski cites as the correct model of diplomacy that used by the US after the Vietnam war. What he ignores is that in the 1970s the US was undisputedly the leading imperialist nation. The EU was still in its infancy. Neither China nor Russia posed any economic challenge. The capitalist crisis of investment and expansion was at a much lower stage. True, the Soviet Union deterred US imperialist expansion, but this applied to the US's rivals as well. Now the EU countries combined have more than twice the US's foreign investment. Japan and Germany are re-arming. The economies of China, Russia and now India, all nuclear powers, are growing rapidly. The competition for profitable investment, energy resources, raw materials and markets is escalating. These competitors would take advantage of any US retreat. US forces are not going to withdraw. We face an era of perpetual imperialist war.

US digs in

The US has built four massive military bases at strategic points throughout Iraq. It is also building the world's biggest embassy in Baghdad, four times the size of the United Nations in New York, with walls 15 feet thick and self-sufficient in supplies and services. These are not the actions of an occupier intending to leave.

US and British plans to seize Iraqi oil are also moving ahead. Iraqi oil reserves are the second largest in the world. A law facilitating their exploitation by foreign companies is in its final stages. The law was drafted by representatives of the Iraqi government and the major oil multinationals, including BP and Shell, under the supervision of US management consultants and with assistance by the British Foreign Office. It allows foreign multinationals to arrange Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) that could effectively give them control of 87% of Iraqi oil for 30 years or more, with profits between 42% and 162% guaranteed for 25 years. Members of the Iraqi parliament only saw the law when it was leaked on the internet.

PSAs will mean the theft of up to \$200 billion from the Iraqi people. The IMF had insisted the law be passed by the end of 2006 but objections from the oil-rich Kurdish north delayed it. The latest draft has removed references to PSAs leaving an Iraq Federal Oil Council which includes 'executive managers from important related petroleum companies' to decide the matter. Since the rules could permit these oil multinational representatives alone to form a Council quorum, the outcome is not in doubt. The Council will also decide the fate of earlier contracts signed with French, Chinese and Russian companies.

Iraqi workers are, however, preparing to defend their oil. Head of the Federation of Oil Unions Hassan Jumaa said, 'We strongly warn all foreign companies and foreign capital in the form of American companies against coming into our lands under guise of PSAs.' The General Union of Oil Employees, which booted Halliburton out of oil refineries after the invasion, called an anti-privatisation



FRFI supporters in Newcastle mark the anniversary of the Iraq war with a demonstration at their local Shell garage: Blood for Oil

conference and two-day strike last summer. The US and Iraqi governments promptly froze its bank accounts and arrested and fired union members. At least two of their leaders were assassinated. Saddam's law banning unions remains in force. Paul Bremner, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, declared unions illegal in 2004.

War budget

The Bush administration's budget requests for 2008 includes \$145 billion for the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan for the year beginning October 2007, plus a further \$93 billion emergency fund for this year, bringing the total spent on the two wars to \$662 billion. The amount so far spent on the Iraq war alone is greater than all the money ever spent anywhere on cancer research. These requests are on top of a record \$481 billion budget for the Pentagon: 10% up on last year and 62% greater than in 2001, not the sort of spending to suggest a run-down of US military action. If the Pentagon were a country its budget would rank just behind the Netherlands in 16th place. To pay for the war the US government plans to slow growth in Medicare spending and cut the Social Security pension programme. Overall spending on non-security matters will be cut in real terms year on year.

Shadow Democratic opposition

The supposed opposition to Bush's plans that enabled the Democratic Party to win control of both houses of Congress last autumn has come to nothing of consequence. The Democrats have no plans to stop Bush's budget requests. Their main concern is to deflect criticism for their own culpability for the war. The House of Representatives passed a motion opposing the extra troops for Iraq only because it knew the Bush administration would ignore it. Most Democrats originally supported the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Democratic Senator Russ Feingold admits 'If Congress doesn't stop the war, it's not because it doesn't have the power. It's because it doesn't have the will'.

Britain has announced that it will withdraw 1,600 troops over the next few months with possibly another 500 in the summer, claiming the security situation has improved and Iraqi forces are now able to take over. This

is complete nonsense. Security specialist Andrew Cordesman points out that the British had lost control of Basra by the second half of 2005. A Washington Institute for Near East Policy report says: 'By September 2006 British forces needed to deploy a convoy of Warrior armoured vehicles

just to ferry police trainers to a single police station and deliver a consignment of toys to a nearby hospital.' The remaining 5,000 British troops will stay until at least 2008. Because of the deteriorating security situation they will abandon the British consulate in Basra and withdraw to Basra air station outside the city, only patrolling the airport and giving support to Iraqi forces. The British plan to hand over Maysan Province to Iraqi control in the next two months but this has already been put off several times.

In January 2003 the Labour government justified the impending invasion with a vision of post-war Iraq as 'a stable, united and law-abiding state ... providing effective representative government to its people.' By February 2007 the Ministry of Defence had reduced such ambitions to achieving 'a manageable level of threat from insurgents.' Blair still denies the occupation is unpopular and the cause of armed resistance, but Richard Cobbold of the Royal United Services Institute said, 'Things are not getting better. The British are aggravating tensions by just being there' - a point echoed by Basra politician Salam Al Maliki, a supporter of Moqtada Al Sadr, who said, 'When the occupiers go, all the violence here will end'.

Who is behind the 'sectarian killing'?

The prime target of the US 'surge' is the Mehdi Army, supporters of the Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr, who has consistently opposed the US occupation even though his supporters form an important bloc in the Iraqi coalition government. The US has said they will either kill or capture Al Sadr. The Mehdi Army has fought major battles

with occupying forces on several occasions. The US and Britain blame the Mehdi for many of the attacks on Sunnis, but Al Sadr has repeatedly called for the unity of the Iraqi people, saying that those carrying out the attacks were members of the Iraqi security forces which had infiltrated the Mehdi.

Certainly, many of the killings are carried out by the Iraqi police. Shia militias were enrolled by the imperialist forces in the early days of the occupation and soon came to dominate the Iraqi security forces. There is even unconfirmed evidence that British forces were responsible for some bombings in Basra. This would be consistent with tactics employed in other counter-insurgency operations: divide the opposition and terrorise the civilian population.

Private security firms continue their operations. They include Armor Group whose chair is ex-Conservative Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind. These 'private military contractors' were given immunity from prosecution in Iraq alongside the occupying forces. There are at least 48,000 such mercenaries in Iraq, possibly up to 100,000. Nearly 21,000 of them are British. They have been seen firing indiscriminately at Iraqi citizens while driving down the streets.

Meanwhile, there is no end to the suffering of the Iraqi people. Latest figures from UNHCR show two million people out of a pre-war population of 25 million have now fled the country, with a further 500,000 expected to join them by the end of the year. Another 1.7 million Iraqis have been displaced within their country. UNHCR says that women and children are being forced into prostitution and child labour in order to survive.

Resistance grows in Afghanistan

The suicide bombing at the Bagram air base in February graphically illustrated the deepening problems for the imperialist forces in Afghanistan. After five years of occupation they could not even protect the most heavily guarded base in the country when US Vice President Cheney was visiting. A report by the US Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said that the occupation was fuelling the Afghan resistance and that NATO operations were doing more harm than good. It criticised NATO for overestimating the number of resistance fighters it has killed and for blaming civilian deaths on the Taliban. The report admitted that most Afghans were disillusioned with the occupation and that indiscriminate actions by the imperialist forces were 'creating ten enemies out of one'.

At the end of February, a rally of 25,000 people in Kabul quickly turned into a demonstration against the occupation with chants of 'Death to America' and 'Death to the enemies of Afghanistan'. The CSIS report went on to criticise what it called 'abusive elements' in the Afghan government and police and among local commanders. It said the Afghan army 'remains ineffective and is held in low esteem' and that the legitimacy of the government has 'deteriorated'. The outgoing commander of US forces, General Kark Eikenberg agreed that 'a point could be reached at which the government of Afghanistan becomes irrelevant to its people'.

Such a point has probably already been reached, for the government and the Afghan security forces are riddled

with bribery and corruption and dominated by warlords and drug barons. Ahmad Wali Karzai, younger brother of the puppet president Hamid Karzai, is himself one of the biggest drug barons. He shares in a heroin trade worth £1.6 billion a year; 50% of the total Afghan GDP. Poor Afghan farmers, who are having their poppy fields destroyed by the imperialist forces and their stooges, have nothing to fall back on. Some have to sell their children because they cannot afford to feed them. Even so, total opium production rose by 25% in 2005-6 and the area under production in 2006 increased by 61%. The eradication programme too is failing.

Imperialist troops from Iraq to Afghanistan

In an attempt to halt the deteriorating situation the US is sending another 3,200 troops, bringing its total to 27,000. They will be diverted from duties in Iraq, causing others to have their tour of duty extended by several months. Britain too is sending a further 1,400 extra troops, bringing its total in Afghanistan to 7,700, more than in Iraq. 600 troops will have to be withdrawn from Bosnia, and Defence Secretary Des Browne has admitted that Britain cannot sustain the extra troop deployment indefinitely. However, he also said the troops will stay until 'the government of Afghanistan is able to deliver security and economic prosperity'. He did not suggest when that might be. Plans have also been announced to increase the Afghan army from 32,000 to 70,000 by 2008. Additionally, there are tens

of thousands of US and British paid mercenaries in Afghanistan.

Despite renewed calls by Bush and Blair for further spending and military commitment by other NATO countries, most are refusing to respond. They will not even agree to supply extra transport aircraft and helicopters that the occupying forces require. France has opposed any idea that the new NATO rapid response force should be used in Afghanistan, saying it is intended for emergency actions only.

The imperialist forces are expecting a spring offensive from the Afghan resistance. The new head of NATO forces in Afghanistan, US General Dan McNeill, was critical of his British predecessor's policy of establishing local peace deals and favours a more aggressive approach. British patrols will now extend to five provinces in the south and east and include the border with Pakistan.

In February, both Cheney and Labour Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett visited Pakistan's President Musharraf to 'persuade' him to do more to prevent the Taliban and other Afghan resistance forces operating across the border from Pakistan. The border runs through mountainous terrain for 2,500km. Whatever new measures the imperialists employ they have little chance of cutting off fresh supplies and reinforcements to the Afghan resistance.

When the latest phase of the British occupation began just over a year ago the then Labour Defence Secretary John Reid suggested the British troops might come home without a shot being fired; since then they have used over 600,000 rounds of ammunition. ■

FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

Part two

On 14 March the British House of Commons voted by 409 votes to 161 to replace the Trident nuclear submarine missile system with a new generation of nuclear weapons. The cost of the new system will be £65 billion over 30 years, according to the Ministry of Defence. The submarine and missile technology will be primarily US-supplied thereby preserving the ties between the British state and the US military-industrial complex. Iran's government denounced the vote for encouraging the drive towards nuclear proliferation. In *Five minutes to midnight*, Part one (FRFI 195) we examined US and Israeli preparations for an attack on Iran, including the possibility of a nuclear attack. Here we explore the latest developments over Iran and North Korea and the manoeuvres of rival powers as they resist the US capitalists' attempt at global hegemony. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

North Korea, Iran and the EU

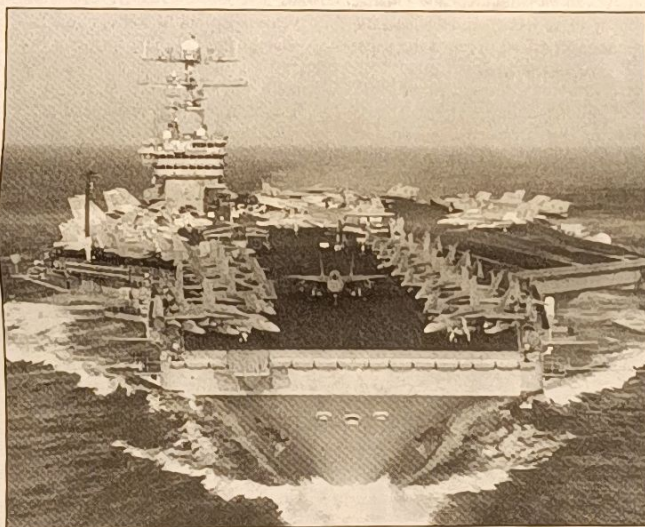
On 12 February North Korea agreed to close its main nuclear weapons related facilities in exchange for large amounts of energy assistance. North Korea has no oil or gas reserves. The US government thanked China for its role in achieving the deal. China signed a mutual assistance treaty with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1961 that requires China to come to the assistance of the DPRK if it is attacked. The Chinese state has no intention of seeing a hostile regime installed in place of the DPRK on its northeast border. Given that the DPRK receives 90% of its imported supplies from China, most significantly fuel and food, China no doubt encouraged the DPRK to talk to the imperialists.

Former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton condemned the agreement as a concession to North Korea's nuclear threat. The removal of former US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld and of Bolton from their posts signals that the neo-conservatives and the more pro-war elements are losing their influence in the US government, in large part because of failures in Iraq.

US and Israeli bellicosity towards Iran continues. On 25 February US Vice President Cheney said, 'It would be a serious mistake if a nation like Iran were to become a nuclear power. All options are still on the table'. The formula 'all options' refers to the continuing nuclear threat against Iran if it continues its nuclear energy programme. US troops are stationed in 120 countries and have bases surrounding Iran. Two US aircraft carrier fleets are in the Persian Gulf.

In January the US authorised its forces to kill or capture Iranian agents in Iraq. Five Iranian consular officials were seized by US soldiers in Erbil in northern Iraq in January. They are still being held. On 4 February a second secretary of Iran's Baghdad embassy was seized by gunmen that Iran accused of 'operating under the supervision of American forces'. A former senior Iranian general has gone missing and is believed to be in US hands, either as a defector or undergoing interrogation.

The head of Israeli artillery, General Oded Tira, said in January that 'As an American strike in Iran is essential for our existence', Israel must lobby the US Democratic Party to ensure that



On 23 March, as we go to press, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards captured 15 British Royal Marines and sailors, accusing them of illegally entering Iranian waters in the Persian Gulf. Predictably, the British government said their personnel had been in Iraqi waters and were kidnapped. Both the US and Britain use this area to spy on Iran. The Iranian people have every right to defend their sovereignty. The British military, on the other hand, has no right to be in the Gulf or in the Middle East.

there is support for an attack. All three leading Democratic candidates for the Presidency, Clinton, Obama and Edwards, subscribe to the 'all options' formula.

In keeping with the December US Iraq Study Group proposal, US and Iranian diplomats met in Baghdad in March to discuss Iraq's security. Angry words were exchanged: to US accusations that it had proof that Iran was arming Iraqi Shia militias, the Iranian envoy reposted, 'Your accusations are merely a cover for your failures in Iraq'. About 90% of attacks on US forces are made by Sunni-based groups. Contradicting his government, US General Peter Pace, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the US does not have infallible evidence of Iranian government involvement in arms supplies to Iraqi militias.

US threats against Iran serve to underscore the determination of the US ruling class, with British support, to maintain control over the Middle East and its oil. They are also intended to prevent Europe, Russia or China strengthening their positions in the region. In February French President Chirac wondered aloud whether it would be such a bad thing for Iran to have one or two nuclear weapons,

'Where would it fire that bomb? At Israel? It wouldn't have travelled 200 metres through the atmosphere before Tehran would be razed'. Chirac was rounded on by the US media and its European counterparts.

Having imposed its own financial sanctions on Iran, the US is pressing Europe to withdraw the credits with which the country finances its imports and to discourage investment in Iran. The European Union (EU) has resisted this pressure and refuses to impose sanctions alongside the US against Iranian banks that the US claims are associated with Iran's missile programme.

The US push for sanctions is intended to ensure that the US acts as arbiter of access to Iran. Britain is the main European supporter of the US stance, but the EU insists that Iran remains open to it. In mid March Germany objected to further US proposals to halt new credits and export guarantees to Iran.

Thanks largely to higher oil prices, Russia's gross domestic product rose 73% between 1998 and 2006. The Russian ruling class is seeking to recover the regional influence lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union and this means repelling US encroach-

The militarisation of science

On 17 January the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock from seven to five minutes to midnight. The scientists explained: 'we stand on the brink of a second nuclear age. Not since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has the world faced such perilous choices'.

Nuclear proliferation, the US' stated readiness to use nuclear weapons, the nuclear weapons stockpiles in the US and Russia and the threat to civilisation presented by global warming all counted in the decision to move the Clock hands towards midnight.

Science is a force of production. The development of the forces of production has the potential to

assist humanity in its liberation from want, but under capitalist relations of production the forces of production are turned into means of exploitation and destruction. Just as the development of factory machines were turned into instruments of drudgery and exploitation so the combination of telecommunications, computers and satellites is turned against humanity as means of spying and warfare.

Satellite technology has the capacity to help in agriculture, to fight against disease and the threats to the environment. In the hands of imperialism science is used to locate and destroy military and civilian targets and to enrich the parasites that conduct the global financial markets.

ments. Citing a threat to the US and Europe from future Iranian nuclear missiles, the US announced its intention to station missile defence systems in Poland and the Czech Republic; these countries are supposedly enroute to the US for the hypothetical missiles. Bulgaria has also signed an agreement to host three US bases.

Speaking in Munich in February Russian President Putin said that 'illegal' and unilateral US military action had plunged the world into an 'abyss of permanent conflicts'. Yuri Baluyevsky, Chief of Russia's General Staff, remarked, 'What they [the US] are doing at present, building a third missile defence ring in Europe, is impossible to justify'. Russia warned Poland and the Czech Republic that they risked becoming Russian military targets and Germany's foreign minister criticised the US for not considering Russian worries about the anti-missile system. The Labour government has been lobbying for US anti-missile systems to be based in Britain.

With the US military floundering in Iraq we can expect more assertiveness from Russia, the EU and China where their interests do not coincide with those of the US.

China and space war diplomacy

'The emerging synergy of space superiority with land, sea and air superiority will lead to Full Spectrum Dominance.' US Space Command, Vision for 2020, 1997.

'Space represents a fundamentally new and better way to apply military force.' US Strategic Command, 2004. 'He who knows everything fears nothing.' Dr Joseph Goebbels, Nazi propagandist.

The Duke of Wellington said that he had spent his life guessing what was on the other side of the hill: satellites in orbit flatten the hills. The UN General Assembly voted in December 2006 on a resolution to prevent an arms race in outer-space. The Assembly adopted the resolution with 178 in favour to one against (the US), with one abstention (Israel).

Deng Xiaoping once said that China must 'hide brightness and pourish obscurity...to bide our time and build up our capabilities'. Hosting the Olympic Games next year, China's rulers must calculate that the time to 'nourish obscurity' is now past. On 11 January China successfully launched a missile to destroy one of its own weather satellites in space. This was China's first successful test of an anti-satellite system after three previous trials. China had demonstrated that it could eliminate US satellite intelligence and could stymie the US plan to monopolise space. China did not acknowledge the operation. The US condemned it: the 'development and testing of such weapons is inconsistent with the spirit of co-operation that

both countries aspire to in the civil space area'. Japan and South Korea added to the condemnation.

Orbiting satellites (Global Positioning, imaging and communications) are essential to the US military. They serve to navigate ships, aeroplanes, troops, artillery, 'smart bombs' (such as the one that destroyed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999) and to provide real-time intelligence. US General Fogelman, then Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, expressed misplaced faith in the new technology: 'In the first three months of the twenty-first century, we shall be capable of finding, tracking and targeting virtually in real-time any significant element moving on the face of the Earth.' He could have added 'and destroy it'. In August 2006 President Bush claimed the US right to 'freedom of action in space' with a policy to 'deter others from either impeding these rights or developing capabilities intended to do so'. This includes the right to 'deny, if necessary, adversaries the use of space capabilities hostile to US national interests'. Whether they intended to or not, the Chinese, by firing on their own satellite in space, issued a warning to the US on the use of its military.

In thrall to its space technology advantage over the rest of the world, a key component for global domination, the US has received a symbolic strike at one of its weakest points.

During 2006 China added more electricity generating power than the entire UK national grid; about 102 gigawatts, or twice the capacity of California. (*Financial Times*, 7 February 2007) This expanded capacity is underpinned by fossil fuel imports. The Middle East now accounts for 46% of China's oil supplies. China's main oil suppliers are Angola, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia. China is negotiating oil deals worth tens of billions of dollars with Iran. Dozens of Chinese companies are investing in Iran's infrastructure, including the Tehran metro. China's interests in Iran do not coincide with those of the US.

China and Japan together hold over \$1.7 trillion in US currency and US-based assets. The Royal Bank of Scotland noted in a February survey that the central banks of Italy, Switzerland and Sweden had made 'major adjustments' in their dollar holdings as the dollar weakens. US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson recently installed a 'hot-line' to his Chinese counterpart. Presumably the Chinese are intended to consider this an honour, but perhaps they detect a weakness in the embrace of their dollar-issuing partner. As with North Korea so with Iran; China is beginning to use its economic power to project political power.

In part three we shall examine the response of Japan and India to the US quest for global hegemony and the lethal folly of blind faith in technology in military matters.

US imperialism on the defensive

In early March, George Bush scuttled round Latin America, visiting Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay in a desperate effort to mend his political fences as the masses press their demands for a divorce from US imperialism. In response Venezuelan President Chavez took the opportunity to shadow Bush and expose his politics. **ALVARO MICHAELS** reports.

Hillary Clinton explained why Bush had to make the visit when she said recently: 'Look at what's happening in Latin America...where we are seeing anti-American regimes gain ground. We don't engage with bad guys, so we don't engage with, you know, Chavez and try to...see if there is any way to pull him back, or at least prevent oth-

ers from following his lead.' The US Government Accountability Office estimates that if Venezuela were to suddenly cease exporting oil to the US, the latter could experience a reduction of its gross national product of up to \$23 billion.

At the 2005 Summit of the Americas, Chavez, along with Brazil's Lula da Silva and Argentina's Nestor



In Colombia, 20,000 troops were mobilised to protect Bush against a mass demonstration



Demonstration in Bogotá against Bush's visit to Colombia

Kirchner, had crushed any US hopes of establishing a Free Trade Area of the Americas. Now, two years later, Chavez's fierce criticism of Bush at a mass rally in Buenos Aires brought support from Argentinean President Nestor Kirchner, Ecuador's President Rafael Correa, and, unusually, from Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte. Each of these has their own agenda, but none can afford to reject the spirit of Chavez's speeches. For Correa, Venezuela's foreign policy is 'wonderful', and US foreign policy 'terrible'. Duarte spoke of Washington's 'waging of wars' and pointed out that the US government does not remove protectionist barriers in the developed world.

Guatemala will hold presidential elections this September; the radical contender being Rigoberta Menchu, a very popular indigenous leader and

payments. More importantly, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina recently announced the creation of the Banco del Sur, or Bank of the South. This will break the stranglehold of the IMF and the US.

Even Mexico's President Calderon now intends to seek closer ties to Venezuela and criticised Bush's immigration policies. Meanwhile Brazil gets most of its coal from reserves in Venezuela and nearly all of its natural gas from Bolivia, so Bush's idea that the US purchase sugar cane-derived ethanol from Brazil is preposterous simply from the standpoint of capacity.

In Uruguay, President Tabaré Vazquez is more in line with Lula and Chile's Michelle Bachelet than with Chavez. Although Uruguay is currently seeking a free trade agreement with the US, the visit was deeply unpopular with the masses, and criticised from within the ruling coalition. Marina Arismeni, Minister of Social Development, stated that 'Mr Bush represents all that is most execrable, murderous and warmongering in the world'.

In Colombia, the government sinks deeper into its own mire, anxious not to lose its US subsidies – actually commission on surpluses made by US corporations there. 20,000 troops were mobilised to protect Bush as he and Uribe reassured each other before Bush rushed off to his next destination. In São Paulo, Montevideo, Bogotá, Guatemala City and Merida, tens of thousands of protesters had marched against him; some demonstrations leaving many injured and hundreds detained. According to a poll in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela conducted at the end last year, 86 percent of those surveyed disapproved of the US's role in Latin America and wanted to see a change in the country's foreign policy.

COLOMBIA

Multinationals in collusion with state terror



Colombia's President Uribe

The revelation of the secret Ralito Pact between leaders of the fascist AUC and a number of senior elected officials has lifted the lid on political collusion between the paramilitary death squads and successive Colombian governments, in particular that of current President Álvaro Uribe. An investigation into the collusion has already led to the arrest of eight of President Uribe's congressional allies on grounds that they conspired with the death squads. A further 20 are now under investigation.

One of the signatories of Ralito Pact, pro-government Senator Miguel de la Espriella, announced its existence in a newspaper interview in November 2006. Other signatories included politicians who supported Uribe in his successful 2002 presidential campaign

as well as AUC leaders Salvatore Mancuso and Rodrigo Tovar, alias 'Jorge 40', both of whom are wanted for extradition to the US for being amongst Colombia's biggest cocaine traffickers.

As part of a process of centralising state power, President Uribe's government has offered pardons, pensions and jobs – in local militias, the army and police – to over 31,000 demobilised AUC members through the 'Law of Justice and Peace'. The aim is to create a force capable of defeating the socialist armed resistance of the FARC. Ex-AUC members keep their businesses and political networks and even their arms. The government also hoped to escape any accusations of working with the AUC terrorists.

Under the law, a leader like Mancuso can confess to as many massacres as he likes but face only a maximum of eight years in gaol, provided he pays compensation to his victims. This means he can let dozens of his co-terrorists off the hook by claiming the crimes that they committed – so far his list is over 500. With nothing to lose – in 2003 he was convicted in absentia for the 1997 massacre of 14 peasants in El Aro – his statements have been carefully worded to implicate only those government and military officials who are already imprisoned or dead.

The revelation of the Ralito Pact has blown this strategy apart. Links between the military and AUC have

been well documented for some time, but not the political links. Now President Uribe, a wealthy landowner who was involved with other ranchers in setting up the death squads in the 1980s, finds six of his allies being questioned about drug trafficking and extortion. On 30 November 2006 the Supreme Court ordered the investigation after the seizure of a laptop belonging to 'Jorge 40' revealed detailed accounts and recordings of meetings between politicians and AUC paramilitaries. These involved the arrangement of elections for chosen candidates and scams involving the theft of funds from the health services. These funds are held by local governments and feed a whole chain of local *gamonales* (political tyrants). The money links mayors, military officers, landlords and paramilitary gangs, creating an interlocking network of political and military power.

Two senators – one of whom, Álvaro García, is on the run – face charges of murder for plotting to kill 14 villagers in Macayepo in 2000 and for ordering the murder of an election official. Along with Erik Morris, in March 2006, García sought re-election for the northern department of Sucre to the Chamber of Representatives. Both are charged with financing terror. Five others face investigation. Senator Araújo, who is also being questioned, is brother of Foreign Minister María Consuelo Araújo. He has threatened that if he goes down, others will fol-

low. A former head of Colombia's intelligence agency (DAS) who served under Uribe, Jorge Noguera, is also under arrest for organising an electoral fraud in coastal municipalities which secured Uribe the 300,000 votes that gave him his first-round presidential victory. One other former congressman has admitted his part in the Ralito Pact and has resigned his government office. A former Congresswoman, Muriel Benito Rebollo, has been arrested, whilst a former governor, Arana Sus, is also on the run.

Corporate terror

It is not just the Colombian state that connives in the murder of its citizens. US corporations do as well. On 10 March, US federal judge Bowdre allowed a case to be opened in Alabama against the US Drummond Coal Corporation for ordering the murder of three of its employees in Colombia. The men's union, Sintramienergética, is using the testimony of ex-DAS member Rafael García who is now in prison in Colombia.

García, former head of DAS IT, stated in 2006 that he had attended a meeting with Augusto Jiménez, President of Drummond in Colombia, who gave him a suitcase with \$200,000 to pass on to 'Jorge 40' to pay for the assassination of Valmore Locarno and Víctor Hugo Orcasita, both trade unionists at Drummond. They were murdered in 2001. Locarno and Orcasita were respectively President and Vice president of Sintramienergética. The next President, Gustavo Soler, was also murdered.

This is not the only example of collusion between US multinationals and the AUC death squads. In 1997 the then chief of the AUC, Carlos Castaño and the managing director of Banadex, a Chiquita Brands subsidiary, agreed an operation to 'pacify' its Urabá plantations. In March, Chiquita Brands was fined \$25 million for paying the AUC paramilitaries \$1.7m over more than six years – to February 2004 –

becoming one of the main financiers of terrorism in plain violation of its own government's Patriot Act, and the US's belated and hypocritical classification of the AUC as a terrorist group in 2001.

The US Department of Justice, following a Securities and Exchange Commission report, has now confirmed that in November 2001 Chiquita shipped 3,400 AK-47 rifles and four million 7.65mm cartridges from Nicaragua and stored them for the war against the FARC. Chiquita was forced to sell off Banadex after the 2004 revelations. Yet there has been no trial of Chiquita, Banadex or any of its directors for any of the crimes they committed in this period. It has taken until March 2007 for the State Prosecutor to ask the US for information about the case. The 'pacification' of areas such as Magdalena Medio involved the murder of thousands of workers as the AUC cleared the land for the large corporations to enable them to set up their plantations. Such land clearances have displaced three million people within Colombia. Chiquita itself has a notorious history, including, as the United Fruit Company, funding the CIA's overthrow of the progressive Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954.

Drummond and Chiquita are not alone. Coca Cola has paid for the murder of union members on its property, whilst Nestlé and Del Monte's Multi-fruit currently face charges for abuse of workers. Meanwhile the US has made no move to extradite either Mancuso or 'Jorge 40', or to suspend \$700 million aid it is giving annually to the Colombian government to crush the revolutionary movement of the FARC. Mancuso has threatened to stop talking if he can't leave prison and live freely, and has declared himself insolvent to avoid paying compensation to his victims' families. In Colombia, the multinationals and their ruling class allies murder with impunity.

Alvaro Michaels

Imperialist crimes against humanity

On 20 February, a US Court of Appeal ruled that hundreds of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay concentration camp had no right to *habeas corpus* under the US Constitution, as 'non-citizens held outside the sovereign territory of the US'.

On 13 March, a British court cleared the final two out of seven British soldiers charged with the abuse of nine Iraqi prisoners in Basra in 2003, which resulted in the death of one man. In February, four other soldiers were cleared due to lack of evidence.

These cases represent the triumph of barbarism over justice. Where once the US and Britain had to hide their war crimes, today they flaunt them, casually brushing aside international human rights legislation, including the Geneva Conventions, as an inconvenience. CAT WIENER reports.

Legal limbo

'Cuba – not the United States – has sovereignty over Guantanamo Bay', wrote Appeals Court Judge Raymond Randolph. In fact, the Platt Amendment of 1903 gives the US 'complete jurisdiction and control' over the territory. To all intents and purposes, Guantanamo Bay is part of the US. It is occupied territory. US federal law applies to all US personnel stationed there. Cuba has regularly denounced the illegality of the interrogation camp based on its land. Can the Cuban courts now demand the release of the detainees?

The US has deliberately created this legal no-man's land by side-stepping the laws that govern warfare, where necessary simply redefining the rules of the game. The court ruling upholds the Military Commissions Act passed by Congress in 2006, which states that 'enemy combatants' may not file claims in US courts. But, as US civil rights lawyer Michael Ratner explains in his excellent book about Guantanamo:*

'The administration is using the term enemy combatants for combatants captured in Afghanistan and Iraq who should be classified as prisoners of war. That is what the Geneva Conventions require...Enemy combatant is a sort of catch-all phrase, to which no status or rights apply under international or domestic law and which the administration thus be-

lieves it can use to treat people as it wants'.

The Geneva Conventions cover everyone captured in the arena of war. Those operating outside the strict framework of a war between nations – 'terrorists' – are provided for under domestic criminal law. No one, however heinous their crime, is outside the law. By defining the events of 11 September 2001 as a declaration of war rather than a terrorist act, and launching its global 'war on terrorism', the administration can claim that the entire world is a battlefield and anyone picked up in that battlefield is an enemy combatant and therefore comes under military legislation. If classed as POWs, those captured in Afghanistan would have had to be freed once that war was over. But the war on terrorism is a perpetual war, with no end in sight – and thus the administration justifies keeping the Guantanamo detainees locked up indefinitely with no possibility of legal redress other than military tribunals, where they never see the evidence and where confessions extracted by torture are admissible.

Britain, covertly, is taking steps down the same road. There are non-British citizens swept up as alleged suspected terrorists and illegally detained without charge. One, Reda Dendani, who is Algerian, broke through the secrecy surrounding these



'Conditioning' detainees for interrogation has become the hallmark of the war on terror

cases, to write from Long Lartin prison: '[The Home Office] has trespassed its limits by ordering my detention in a high security prison against my will without any charge... I'm not allowed to know and therefore to cross-examine what is held against me...I'm fighting a ghost...I'm in the UK's version of Guantanamo'. He has been held almost continuously for four years.

Torture

As early as January 2002, Alberto Gonzalez, then Counsel to the President and now Attorney General, wrote to President Bush arguing that the Geneva Conventions should not apply to Taliban or Al Qaida prisoners for three reasons:

- not applying them would eliminate 'any argument regarding...POW status';
- the war on terror 'renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on the questioning of enemy combatants';
- not applying the Conventions would 'substantially reduce the threat of domestic criminal prosecutions... under the War Crimes Act'.

In other words, the administration planned to use, or was already using, brutal and inhumane methods to extract information from detainees and wanted to be sure it could continue to do so with impunity.

Guantanamo is an interrogation camp, something absolutely banned

by the Geneva Conventions. The use of stress positions, short-shackling, withholding of food and medical care, sleep deprivation, exposure to extremes of temperature, beatings and psychological torture are all routine. All constitute degrading or cruel treatment prohibited by international law. Detainees are questioned for up to 18 hours at a time, sometimes chained to

captured by the Queen's Lancashire Regiment in 2003. One of the men, receptionist Baha Mousa, died after 36 hours of beatings with his head shoved down a latrine and 93 separate injuries on his body. The men's jailer, Corporal Donald Payne, admitted the war crime of treating the nine men 'inhumanely' but was cleared of manslaughter. This means that no one will now be held to account for the murder of Baha Mousa. According to *Panorama*, the army and investigators colluded to ensure those responsible were never even charged. Lieutenant Craig Rodgers and his men, who, the programme alleges, were responsible for the worst of the brutality, did not appear in the dock. Over the six months of the £20m trial, soldiers replied 'I do not remember' to more than 650 questions. Lt Rodgers has since been promoted to captain and is now in Germany training troops for Iraq and Afghanistan.

At their trial, the defendants claimed that beating, hooding, forced stress positions and sleep deprivation were used as 'conditioning' to 'soften up' prisoners ahead of 'tactical questioning'. The court heard that this was in contravention of the Geneva Conventions and the laws of armed conflict but was 'accepted practice' and sanctioned by top officers. In fact, under the Geneva Conventions, a command to mistreat a prisoner is an illegal command and carrying it out constitutes a war crime.

Panorama's harrowing reconstruction of the Iraqis' ordeal was shocking, not only in its portrayal of casual, routine brutality, but also in exposing what a travesty the claim of 'interrogation' is. After just a day and half the men would have said or signed anything to make the torture stop. Two days after the broadcast, the Pentagon trumpeted the confession of Khalid Sheikh Mohamed whom they claim is the 'Al Qaida No 3'. He admitted his absolute responsibility 'from A to Z' for every attack ever planned or carried out by Al Qaida. He had been held by the FBI and CIA for four years and tortured – including the use of 'water-boarding' (partial drowning) – in secret interrogation camps before being flown to Guantanamo in September 2006.

This is imperialism unrestrained by laws or morals, operating as it knows best – with a bloodied and iron fist. Britain and the US are guilty of crimes against humanity. They must be brought to justice.

* Guantanamo: what the world should know, Michael Ratner and Ellen Ray, Aris Books 2004, £8.99

Green light for torture

'What I saw in that cell wasn't interrogation...it was torture as far as I'm concerned. It was barbaric.' (unidentified soldier, *Panorama*, 'A Good Kicking', BBC1 13 March 2007)

The court case held in February and March concerned the brutal treatment meted out to nine Iraqi hotel workers

CUBA VIVE

Cuban economy grows

In 2006, Cuba's economy grew by 12.5%, the largest growth in the 48 years of the Revolution and the highest for this period in Latin America. It reflects the steady growth of the economy since 2004.

Particularly significant has been the reorientation of the economy towards services, which now account for nearly three quarters of all exports and receive 68% of total investments. The economy has also been buoyed by the upsurge in trade with Latin America, in particular with revolutionary Venezuela, as well as with China, which provides Cuba with considerable technological input. Ministers also highlighted the country's developing control over the exchange rate and the elimination of the dollar from circulation.

As a result, Cuba has been able to:

- develop its energy programme, reducing black-outs;
- improve food production and distribution, despite shortfalls in agricultural production, in part due to severe hurricanes in the last year;
- complete 110,000 new homes in 2006 with a further 70,000 planned next year, and allocate resources for the repair and preservation of a further 150,000;

- maintain its programme for repairing and upgrading hospitals and polyclinics;
- continue its international medical missions, including Operation Milagro, which has restored sight to thousands of Venezuelans;
- increase university education by 600,000 students in the last year;
- develop the biotechnical sector, with Cuban biotechnical products now being marketed in over 50 countries.

Illiteracy remained at 0.2%, and unemployment was 1.9%.

As Jose Luis Rodriguez, minister of economy and planning, explained, economic growth and social advance have to go hand in hand: 'This new focus [of the economy] has allowed for maximum results with minimum resources, maintaining social solidarity and assuring development via the creation of indispensable human capital, which requires an economy based on knowledge'.

An increase of 10% in GDP is expected this year, with 22.6% of GDP allocated to health and education budgets.

Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly, praised the achievements of the Cuban people: 'We are ending a year that saw undeniable social advances,

even though aggression against Cuba has been intensified by the US government. We have the right to be proud of what we have achieved and of our capacity for resistance, to build a project that little by little is being recognised throughout the world.'

However, he pointed out that none of these achievements justify errors committed as a result of incompetence and lack of rigour. This is a point stressed by Raul Castro, who has called for a debate on inefficiency, corruption and lack of organisation in state management. The army, headed by Raul Castro, which runs some of the most efficient companies in Cuba, has joined the debate, calling for the application of *perfeccionamiento empresario*, a perfecting of the state company system. Raul Castro has urged the Cuban media to be more critical of state companies and instructed academics to study social economic problems, arguing 'We are tired of excuses in this revolution'. Cuba goes forward into 2007 with the task of building on its economic and social successes by making socialism even more efficient, the better to meet the needs of the Cuban people.

Cat Wiener

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE 2007 BRIGADE TO CUBA



In April, a Rock around the Blockade brigade will be visiting Cuba, staying first in Calimto, a rural area in the province of Havana, living with students and visiting CDRs, cooperative farms, schools and health centres. Then on to Havana City to attend an international congress for the Cuban 5, visit the Latin American School of Medicine and take part in the mass celebrations on 1 May. A full report of the brigade's activities will appear in FRFI 197. (Above, brigadistas in Havana in 2005.)

In the previous issue,¹ we showed how Charles Post's attack on the theory of imperialism, the material basis for the labour aristocracy, was factually and theoretically flawed. In this issue, we discuss Post's own explanations of reformism and struggle.²

Labour Aristocracy II: reformism and reaction

Those who reject the theory of the labour aristocracy³ create a difficulty for themselves: they must find some other explanation for the stubborn hold of reformism on the mass of the working classes in the imperialist countries. Post takes three runs at it but never clears the bar.

Attempt number one

He first tries to blame the labour bureaucracy: 'the bureaucracy of the labor movement is the social foundation for ... reformist practice and ideology in the labor movement'. After a couple of pages developing a sociological explanation of bureaucracy – based on material privilege – Post realises that he still hasn't answered the question of why workers support these bureaucrats: 'Why do most workers, most of the time, accept reformism?'

Attempt number two

The hold of reformism – you see – is because workers are satisfied so long as the bureaucracy delivers: 'the continued hold of reformism over the majority of workers requires that labor officials "deliver the goods" in the form of improved wages, hours and working conditions'. Yet Post immediately runs into trouble for, as he shows himself, the bureaucrats haven't been able to 'deliver the goods' for years. We still need an explanation of reformism.

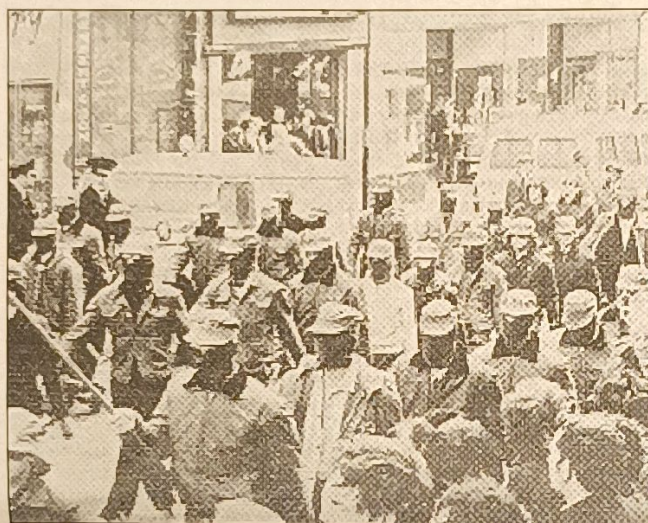
Attempt number three

It turns out that this is inherent in capitalism: 'The objective, structural position of workers under capitalism provides the basis for collective, class radicalism and individualist, sectoralist and reactionary politics'. The working class can't take one step forward without taking two steps back. For Marx, by contrast, 'the working class is revolutionary or it is nothing'. For Post, the working class is reactionary: *objectively, structurally*, it is condemned to 'individualist, sectoralist and reactionary politics'. The result is that:

'the stronger sections of the working class...defend their positions by organizing on the basis of already existing ties against weaker, less organized sections. They can take advantage of their positions as Americans over and against foreigners, as whites over and against blacks, as men over and against women, as employed over and against unemployed, etc...when reformism proves incapable of realistically defending workers' interests – as it has since the early 1970s – workers embrace individualist and sectoralist perspectives as the only realistic strategy.'

The working class, it seems, is objectively, structurally, condemned to bounce back and forth between reformism and reaction forever: workers, left to themselves, gravitate toward adopting reactionary ideologies.

For adherents of the labour aristocracy theory, there is no such problem. The working class inherently tends toward internationalism and toward



'Strikes can be utterly reactionary. The successful Ulster Workers Council strike of May 1974 by Loyalist workers brought down the 'power-sharing' executive and strengthened the grip of imperialism over Ireland.'

socialism. Reformism and reaction are not objective structural consequences of capitalism afflicting the entire working class, but temporary, historical consequences of imperialism. Part of the working class, the labour aristocracy, acts as a brake on the overall struggle with the ruling class, passively acquiescing in or actively supporting their betrayal and repression. It is a sad fact that, for example, during the Civil Rights Struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, the US labour aristocracy stood aside as millions of black workers struggled for equality.

But after all, struggles for civil rights, against immigration controls, for the right to abortion and so on, are not, for Post, the 'real' struggle. The 'real' struggle, you see, is in the workplace:

'Only through the experience of collective, class activity against the employers, starting at but not limited to the workplace, can workers begin to think of themselves as a class with interests in common with other workers and opposed to the capitalists. Workers who experience their collective, class power on the job are much more open to class



Marx addressing the IWMA: 'Whereas we tell the workers: "You have fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples' struggles to go through, not only to change the conditions but in order to change yourselves and make yourselves fit for political rule"'

– and anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-militarist, anti-nativist – ways of thinking.'

Rather than join with workers who, whether 'starting at' the workplace or not, are already anti-racist, we have to wait around in the workplace, hoping for the racists to wise up. It's clear that Post unconsciously assumes that his workers are generally white, male and employed. After all, how many black or Hispanic workers are spontaneously racist? How many women workers are sexist? And what are the unemployed to do?

Post's entire theory of revolution rests on the crude idea that 'workers' self-organization and self-activity in the workplace struggles is the starting point for ... an effective challenge to working class reformism'. Workplace struggle supposedly automatically dispels reformist illusions: 'Without the experience of such struggles, workers will continue to passively accept reformist politics or, worse, embrace reactionary politics'. This being the 21st century and Post being anti-racist, anti-sexist and all those good things of course, other struggles are important – sort of. But, really, Post implies, it ain't a serious struggle unless it's in the workplace.

Post gives himself theoretical air cover for this idea by appealing to Marx:

'As Marx pointed out, it is through the workplace and union struggles that the working class "becomes fit to rule" – develops the organization and consciousness capable of confronting capital.'

Apparently Post recalls Marx's quote via Hal Draper. Actually, Marx (and Draper) 'pointed out' something completely different – in fact, quite the opposite. Post leaves out just one word. Marx did not say 'fit to rule'. He said 'fit for political rule' [our emphasis]. Here's what he really said:

'Whereas we tell the workers: "You have fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples' struggles ["Bürgerkriege und Völkerkämpfe"] to go through, not only to change the conditions but in order to change yourselves and make yourselves fit for political rule"'.⁴

For Marx, it isn't workplace struggle that makes workers 'fit to rule', but political struggles. What, then is the role of 'workplace struggle' in Marxist theory?

Marx, Engels, the trade unions and 'workplace struggle'

Marx and Engels became very closely engaged with trade unions and their struggles through their work in the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), the 'First International' as it became known subsequently. Their reflections are very instructive.

Marx and Engels were the first socialists to recognize the importance

of trade unions or 'combinations', as they were sometimes known at the time they wrote. They recognized that the union was the most basic form of working class organization, created in order to prevent competition between workers for jobs from driving their wages down. By uniting or combining, workers put an end to individual competition and confronted the capitalists as united wage labourers against employers, over the wage relation.

'Trades' Unions originally sprang up from the spontaneous attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition, in order to conquer such terms of contract as might raise them at least above the condition of mere slaves. The immediate object of Trades' Unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities, to expedients for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in one word, to questions of wages and time of labour'.⁵

Despite this limited aim, as explained in the *Communist Manifesto*, communists fully support such struggles: 'The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class'.⁶

Trade unions give the working class collective power and give it organizational skills. Although developed in the course of spontaneous defence against the capitalist class, it prepares them for more far-reaching tasks:

'If the Trades' Unions are required for the guerilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour and capital rule [sic].'⁷

They have to serve as

'organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation'.

In order to do so, they must support, not just workplace struggles, but

'must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction.'

They must embrace not only unionised workers, but all workers:

'considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks.'

They must help workers who are not so powerful:

'They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances.'

They must make evident that they are struggling in the interests of the entire class:

'They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.'

And, since Marx was writing for an audience of different nationalities, he did not need to explain what was obvious to them all: the international dimension of these obligations.

Strikes and workplace struggle

As a devotee of 'workplace struggle' Post is particularly excited by strikes. Yet strikes are just tactics, and individual workplace struggles are battles, not the war. Engels could write to Bernstein, in 1879:

'One can speak here of a labour movement only in so far as strikes take place here which, whether they are won or not, do not get the movement one step further. To inflate such strikes ... into struggles of world importance, ... can, in my opinion, only do harm.'⁸

Strikes can be utterly reactionary. The successful Ulster Workers Council strike of May 1974 by Loyalist workers brought down the 'power-sharing' executive and strengthened the grip of imperialism over Ireland. In Poland in 1980-82, the *Solidarnosc* ('Solidarity') trade union organized strikes and disruption to bring down socialist Poland, leaving the working class impoverished, unemployed and forced to emigrate in the hundreds of thousands in search of work.⁹

Clearly, what is decisive is whose interests are served by the strike.

Beyond strikes

Post doesn't spell out in detail how workplace struggle develops, but we are left with the impression that, if workplace struggles simply increase in volume and intensity, they will, somehow, left to themselves, turn into something different. But workplace struggles have their limits:

'the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement'.¹⁰

To emancipate itself, the working class must take its struggle beyond the workplace, confront the capitalist class as a whole over the conditions of, not just this or that workplace, but of the entire working class:

'On the other hand the movement to force an eight-hour day etc law is a political movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement, that is to say a movement of the class, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion.'

Organisation and struggle in trade unions provide preparation and training for this political struggle. These political struggles, in turn, help develop this organisation.

However, Marx is not saying that economic struggles somehow automatically turn into these political struggles. Capitalism brings the working class into being, but only in its most primitive form, unaware of its historical interests. When it struggles for its immediate economic interests, in trade unions,

'this mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself.'¹¹

'The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.'¹²

The problem is that, although objective conditions may be sufficient for a revolution, class consciousness lags behind. It is the duty of the most advanced sections of the working class to overcome that gap.

'The English have at their disposal all necessary material preconditions for a social revolution. What they lack is the

spirit of generalization and revolutionary passion. Only the General Council¹³ can provide them with this, and thus accelerate a truly revolutionary movement here and, in consequence, everywhere.'¹⁴

Thus, the economic struggles can only fully turn into political struggles as a result of the intervention of the most advanced section of the working class to raise the class consciousness of the rest of the class. This is what changes the class from being a class in itself, to a class 'for itself'.

'The Communists...point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, ...are...practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others...theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.'¹⁵

The economic struggle and the political struggle

Far from economic struggles building up and turning into political struggles, some of the most momentous political developments for the working class grow out of political events and catalyse economic struggle.

The IWMA was founded as an initiative originally led by English trade unionists. Yet, if we were of the mindset where everything depends on 'workplace struggle' we would look in vain for the strikes we might expect to bring it about. In fact, the IWMA was founded as the result of great political struggles of the British working class, of demonstrations of its (then) internationalism.

• The British working class was spontaneously sympathetic to the US Republic and the great mass of working people supported it during the Civil War. Meetings were held all over the country in support of the United States, culminating in the great meeting in London on 26 March 1863, organized by John Bright and trade unionists.

• When the Italian republican Garibaldi visited London in April 1864 he received an enthusiastic welcome from the British working class.

• Polish independence, too, had the support of the working class. Another great meeting was organized by trade unionists in London on 22 July 1863 and made an appeal to French workers for solidarity. A joint public meeting in support of Poland was held on 28 September 1864 and led to the founding of the IWMA.

Political struggle can in fact be the catalyst for economic struggle! Many are familiar with Marx's remark that labour 'cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded'. But not so many are aware of the context of his remark:

'In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.'¹⁶

So a great political victory – the defeat of the slave South helped catalyse the economic struggle.

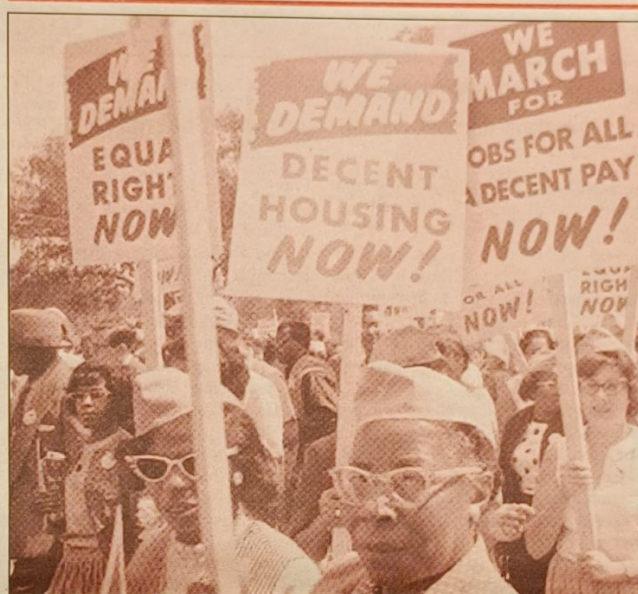
The Paris Commune was a result of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, not 'workplace struggles'. The great 1905 revolution in Russia 'grew directly out of the Russo-Japanese war'.¹⁷ The 1917 Russian Revolution grew out of the imperialist war of 1914-18, and the Chinese Revolution developed out of the struggle against the invasion of Japanese imperialism.

The IWMA was not occupied exclusively, nor even primarily, with eco-

omic issues. Although it agitated for the eight-hour day and extension of the franchise, leading to the Reform Bill of 1867, Marx saw that the way forward for the working class internationally against Capital lay through support of the Irish struggle for independence:

'England ... [is] ... the only country in which the material conditions for this revolution have reached a certain degree of maturity. It is consequently the most important object of the International Working Men's Association to hasten the social revolution in England. The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent. Hence it is the task of the International everywhere to put the conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with Ireland.'¹⁸

This is a world removed from the 'primacy of workplace struggle'.



'It is a sad fact that ... during the Civil Rights Struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, the US labour aristocracy stood aside as millions of black workers struggled for equality.'

Can the labour aristocracy really be revolutionary?

After his flawed attempts to undermine, empirically and theoretically, the economic aspects of the theory of the labour aristocracy, Post cites historical examples which, he claims, demonstrate that the 'best paid industrial workers' are generally revolutionary or radical, while lower-paid workers have been 'unorganized or apolitical'. Post is in embarrassing company: a century ago, Eduard Bernstein, the notorious revisionist in the German Social Democratic Party, asserted that:

'in the socialistic movement in England, just as elsewhere, the better-paid – that is, the educated – workmen of higher mental endowment form the picked troops. One finds in the assemblies of socialist societies only very few so-called unskilled workmen.'¹⁹

For revisionists like Bernstein and Post, there is no imperialism and, consequently there can be no bribery of the workers – it is just a matter of differences in pay and education. For revolutionaries, it is not a question of the best-paid workers, but of their relationship to imperialism.

Post claims that 'the most important counter-example' to the theory of the labour aristocracy 'is the Russian working class in the early 20th century':

'The backbone of Lenin's Bolsheviks ... were the best paid industrial workers in the Russian cities – skilled machinists in the largest factories. Lower paid workers, such as the predominantly female textile workers, were generally either unorganized or apolitical (until the beginnings of the revolution) or supported the reformist Mensheviks.'

Yet these 'best paid industrial workers' were not, in Russia, a pro-imperialist labour aristocracy! The labour aristocracy, in Lenin's sense, is not defined by being well paid, but by being bribed by

imperialism. Lenin has already anticipated Post's argument:

'In countries more advanced than Russia, a certain reactionariness in the trade unions has been and was bound to be manifested to a much stronger degree than in our country. Our Mensheviks found support in the trade unions ... precisely because of the craft narrowness, craft egotism and opportunism. The Mensheviks of the West have acquired a much firmer "footing" in the trade unions; there the craft-union, narrow-minded, selfish, case-hardened, covetous, petty-bourgeois "labour aristocracy," imperialist-minded, imperialist-bribed and imperialist-corrupted, emerged as a much stronger stratum than in our country.'²⁰

There was no significant 'imperialist-minded, imperialist-bribed and imperialist-corrupted' labour aristocracy in

with the colonial invasions perpetrated by the bourgeois class of their countries? What have they done from the day they accepted Lenin's political programme to educate the working class of their countries in the spirit of just internationalism, and that of close contact with the working masses in the colonies? What our Parties have done in this domain is almost worthless.'²²

Again, Post's misrepresentation falls flat on its face as soon as we look at it close up.

We'll spare Post the embarrassment of exploring his quaint notion that Britain experienced a 'proto-revolutionary mass struggle' in 1967-75. Yet, he coolly ignores the much more important struggles of the Irish people against British imperialism, the risings of black youth in 1980-81, and the miners' strike of 1984-85. If reality doesn't suit his argument, he simply ignores it.

In other cases, he ignores the significance of anti-imperialist struggles in enabling the metropolitan struggle to advance. Take Portugal, 1974-75. Post conveniently forgets that the revolution was prepared, not by workplace struggle (that developed later) but by 20 years of armed 'people's struggles' led by revolutionary communists in the Portuguese colonies in Africa. But, of course, they weren't white, 'Northern' or in the workplace.

Conclusion

Post tries to portray the privileged labour aristocracy as the vehicle of socialism. In fact, he only manages to score own goals. His historical examples blow up in his face. His whole political theory of 'workplace struggle' tries to restrict the struggle, not to advance it, to confine it to economic struggle and to leave imperialism, the enemy of working people throughout the world, untouched. The most important struggles in the United States today are those against the war and in support of immigrant workers. But Post's politics don't lead us into battle alongside the most advanced workers – the immigrant workers struggling for their rights – but divert us into the dead-end of waiting for the most backward section of the US working class to turn revolutionary.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

- 1 See www.revolutionarycommunistgroup.com/frfi/195
- 2 <http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/129>
- 3 Eg Tony Cliff, 'Economic Roots of Reformism', *Socialist Review*, Vol 6 No 9, June 1957.
- 4 Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Vol 2, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1978, p78. The quote is from 'Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne'.
- 5 Marx, *Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council*, Section 6 'Trade Unions: their past, present and future', August 1866, hereafter referred to as *Instructions*.
- 6 *Communist Manifesto*, Section IV.
- 7 *Instructions*.
- 8 Engels to Bernstein, 17 June 1879. *Our emphasis*.
- 9 See the insightful discussions in the RCG book, *The Legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp60-68 and Sam Marey, *Poland: Behind the Crisis*, available at www.workers.org/marey/cd/sampol/index.htm.
- 10 Marx to Bolte, 23 November 1871.
- 11 Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, p125.
- 12 *Ibid*.
- 13 Of the IWMA.
- 14 Marx, 'Confidential Communication', 28 March, 1870.
- 15 *Communist Manifesto*, section 2.
- 16 Marx, *Capital* I, chapter 10.
- 17 Trotsky, 1905, preface.
- 18 Marx to Meyer and Vogt, 9 April 1870.
- 19 Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, p106.
- 20 Lenin, *Left Wing Communism an Infantile Disorder*, 1920, Section VI Should revolutionaries work in reactionary trade unions?
- 21 Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 1915
- 22 'The Fifth Congress of the Communist International' 8 July 1924, *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh* Vol 1

PALESTINE: New National Unity government

On 17 March the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) met in Gaza City and Ramallah and voted 83 to 3 in support of the National Unity government proposed by Hamas and Fatah. The three votes against included two Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) members of the PLC who opposed it on the grounds that the political programme of the new government is a retreat from the prisoners' National Reconciliation Document, the publicly-declared basis on which a unity government was to be formed. Missing from the vote were the 41 members of the PLC who were being held in Israeli prisons, the majority detained without charge. **BOB SHEPHERD** reports.

by the Palestinian resistance forces in June was being held there.

A second ceasefire was declared on 3 February, and talks sponsored by Saudi Arabia on a national unity government began in Mecca on 6 February. On 8 February Hamas and Fatah signed



Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyeh with President Abbas

the Mecca Accord. The basis of the Accord was set out in a letter of entrustment presented by Abbas to Haniyeh asking him to form a new government: 'to work in order to achieve its national goals as was approved by the Palestine National Council, the clauses of the Basic Law and the National Reconciliation Document...to respect international resolutions and the agreements signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO)'.

Abbas and Fatah have been forced to retreat from their immediate aim to exclude Hamas from the Palestinian government by a combination of mass popular opposition to the growing civil war and the strength of Hamas's military resistance. The letter of entrustment represented a major retreat by Fatah as it did not mention imperialism's three demands as set down by the Quartet of the US, UN, EU and Russia.

In agreeing to form a unity government Hamas is hoping that the inter-

national isolation of the PA will be broken; for this to happen, though, they will be forced to give more political authority to Abbas and his pro-imperialist allies. These moves will risk weakening and undermining the anti-imperialist forces in the Palestinian government. The response of imperialism to the new government exposed divisions in the approach of the US and European states. Norway immediately recognised the government; Italy also declared its support and the new Palestinian Foreign Minister was invited to visit France and Belgium for talks. Russia also declared its support. Margaret Beckett, the British Foreign Minister, in welcoming the formation of the unity government bemoaned the fact that it had not accepted the Quartet's conditions but indicated that Britain will deal with ministers who are not members of Hamas. A similar position was put forward by the US government but with no indication that it will end its economic blockade of the PA. Israel has declared that it will not have any dealings with the new government and will continue to withhold Palestinian tax revenues; it will though keep its contacts with Abbas.

One of the first decrees passed by Abbas after the formation of the new government was the appointment of Zionist and US stooge Mohammad Dahlan as his National Security Advisor. This was immediately opposed by Hamas, Salah Bardawil, its PLC spokesman declaring 'Dahlan is a provocative personality and we have just escaped a critical internal situation, involving infighting and the killing of people. He was one of the most noticeable figures during the fighting...he is persona non grata in the Palestinian street'. This is the first open expression of what will be a continuing conflict within the unity government between the pro and anti-imperialist trends represented there. ■

Of the 25 ministers in the new government 11 are from Hamas, six from Fatah, four from smaller parties and four are independents. Two of the most important ministries, Foreign and Interior, have been filled by independents and the Finance Ministry by the US-educated Salam Fayyad, a member of the small pro-imperialist Third Way party. Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh continues as Prime Minister with a Fatah member as Deputy Prime Minister.

The agreement between Hamas and Fatah was an unexpected development as all previous attempts to form a unity government had broken down over Fatah's condition for joining: that Hamas renounce violence (that is, resistance to occupation),

recognise Israel's right to exist and adhere to all previous international agreements signed by the PLO. It followed on deadly clashes between Hamas and Fatah forces in Gaza which had led Haniyeh to declare that 'the US and Israel's strategy was to prevent the formation of a national unity government and instigate a Palestinian civil war'.

Between 24 January and 6 February, when talks began in Mecca between the two sides, over 50 Palestinians were killed in the fighting which started when Fatah members of the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces in the north of Gaza attacked Hamas members of the Executive Force. On 25 January there was a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attack on the house of the Hamas

Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al Zahar in Gaza. The Hamas Interior Minister declared that Mohammad Dahlan was behind the attacks and that he was leading a 'mutiny' trend in Fatah that was acting in the interests of the US and Israel. A ceasefire agreed on 30 January almost immediately broke down. The next day, Bush authorised the immediate transfer of \$86m to Abbas to boost his security forces. On 1 February, Hamas forces stopped a convoy of trucks from Egypt carrying arms for Abbas's Presidential Guard; in the resulting fighting over 20 Palestinians were killed. The same day, Fatah forces attacked the Islamic University in Gaza City using mortars and RPGs, causing millions of dollars of damage. It was reported that they believed the Israeli soldier captured

British imperialism in Vietnam

Many people, including much of the Left, believe that British troops did not fight in Vietnam and that Britain gave the US political, but not military, support. For instance, Peter Taaffe of the Socialist Party in *Socialism Today* (November/December 2003), comparing Prime Minister Wilson to Blair, claims that Britain did not send troops to Vietnam and that Wilson played the role of peacemaker. The Communist Party of Great Britain made a similar point in the *Weekly Worker* on 15 March 2001. This is a myth. Britain fully supported the US in Vietnam and even had troops there. **THOMAS ATKINS** examines the evidence.

1945-1954

On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Viet Minh proclaimed Vietnam independent on behalf of its people. The Japanese occupation and Vichy French colonial troops had been disarmed. France, the pre-war colonial power, was in no position to intervene. Britain sent its 20th India Division to occupy Vietnam on behalf of the French. They rearmed the fascist Japanese and Vichy troops and re-imposed French rule.

In 1946 the British withdrew and the Viet Minh began a liberation war against France. France was defeated on 7 May 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. Under the 1954 Geneva Accords the French then pulled out and the country was divided at the 17th Parallel. By 1956 the north had established a socialist state, whilst the south was ruled by corrupt despotism.

Britain and the Soviet Union were co-chairs of the Geneva Accords. An international control commission set up to police the settlement made it illegal for Britain to play any role in the war.

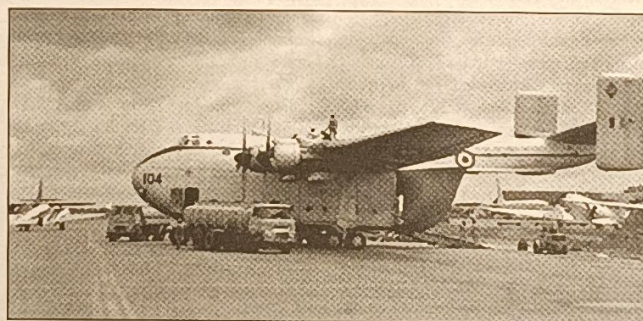
Diplomatic support

The word diplomacy comes from the

ancient Greek for 'two-faced' – an accurate description of the 'diplomatic' support given by both the Tories and Wilson's Labour government for US policy in Indo-China. In February 1965 the US began its 'Rolling Thunder' bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Britain promised 'unequivocal support'. Just two days after the attacks began Labour Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart told the British Embassy in Washington of the 'military necessity of the action.' He informed Wilson 'I was particularly anxious not to...appear critical of the US government.'

In June 1966 the US began to target civilians in North Vietnam. Protests in Britain forced the government to publicly disassociate itself from US actions. However, privately Wilson assured President Johnson of his continued support.

In June 1965 US National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy was impressed by 'the overall strength and skill of Wilson's defence of our policy in Vietnam and his mastery of his own left wing in the process... [British support] has been of real value internationally – and perhaps of even more value in limiting the howls of



A British RAF Beverley transport plane on an airstrip in Vietnam

our own liberals.'

That year prominent Labour Party member philosopher Bertrand Russell resigned from the Labour Party after 51 years over Vietnam and Labour's 'shameful betrayal'. In contrast Tony Benn – still a Labour Party member today despite his professed opposition to the war in Iraq – joined the Labour government as a minister and kept his mouth shut in conformity with the principle of 'Cabinet collective responsibility'.

Intelligence

The GCHQ station in Hong Kong monitored Hanoi's military radio traffic and passed it on to the US. MI6 operating from the British embassy passed on information about bomb damage, surface-to-air missile sites etc. (See Stephen Dorrell, *MI6: 50 years of Special Operations*).

Logistics and material

Declassified documents now prove that the Wilson government illegally supplied the US with arms including, in 1966, 300 bombs and 200 armoured personnel carriers.

The Anglo-Dutch oil company Shell provided the US armed forces with fuel throughout the war. The British crews of the British-registered Shell tankers were paid a war bonus. In the 2001 Discovery TV documentary *The authorised history of the Royal Air Force*, Captain David Green of the RAF claimed to have been a Beverley transport pilot based at Nui Dat because the US did not have military transport aircraft capable of landing on short airstrips hacked out of the jungle. Throughout the war the RAF supplied US troops from RAF Buttersworth in Malaya and from Hong Kong.

Personnel

In September 1961, Tory Prime Minister Macmillan appointed Brigadier Sir Robert Thompson as head of the British Advisory Mission Vietnam (BRIAM). Both Tory and Labour administrations claimed that BRIAM was a civilian advisory team. It was nothing of the kind. During the 1950s, in Malaya, Thompson was involved in developing a strategy to put down a communist-led liberation movement. They brought the rural population into

fortified villages, cutting them off from the freedom fighters, and imposed collective punishments. Massive areas of the countryside were declared 'free-fire zones.' The British used head hunters as mercenaries and tortured prisoners. Thompson brought this strategy to Vietnam where it developed into the infamous Strategic Hamlets programme. BRIAM also trained US and South Vietnamese troops at the British Army jungle warfare school in Malaya. From 1962 to 1963, over 300 South Vietnamese troops were trained.

In summer 1962 Britain mounted a military expedition into Vietnam commanded by Colonel Richard Noone. Noone, an MI6 officer and special forces soldier, was involved in using Malayan and Burmese Defence Force soldiers and mercenaries who spoke the same dialect as some Vietnamese tribes, to act as interpreters between US special forces and South Vietnamese troops and fight against the liberation forces. This was in violation of the Geneva Accords.

There is evidence that British specialist troops and special forces served in Vietnam. Websites for British veterans reveal that over 70 campaign service medal Vietnam clasps were issued to British troops. The recipient would have had to serve at least 28 days in the theatre of operations. The US Library of Congress records that on 18 January 1964 a US Army Huey helicopter attacking enemy positions crashed into the South China Sea. Two crewmen were rescued and two posted as missing in action, but Wing Commander Allan H Lee RAF was posted as killed in action.

On 28 July 1965 Bundy did propose to President Johnson that Britain be paid a billion dollars for a brigade in Vietnam. Johnson rejected the idea, but is alleged to have quipped to Wilson 'At least give me a bagpipe band.' The evidence shows that Britain had already provided a great deal more. ■

A dangerous view

■ **The blood never dried: a people's history of the British Empire,** John Newsinger, Bookmarks Publications 2006, £11.99

John Newsinger presents his book *The blood never dried: A people's history of the British Empire*, as a riposte to contemporary apologists for imperialism such as Niall Ferguson. His own argument, however, is far more dangerous for the anti-war movement, as it seeks to justify a continued alliance with the Labour Party through its left wing. This is the strategy of the SWP, of which Newsinger is a member.

The SWP openly backed Labour until the 1997 general election despite the increasingly reactionary programme of 'New Labour'. Now this is untenable: Labour has lost all credibility amongst anti-war activists. As a result the SWP has been forced to provide more covert support which continues the alliance with Labour's left wing, but which also seeks to build an alternative, a more credible Labour Party, Respect. Newsinger provides an ideological defence for this standpoint.

The first chapters of *The blood never dried* deal with episodes of British colonialism in the 19th century which particularly illustrate the barbarity and naked greed of the British ruling class: its support for slave plantations in Jamaica, the Irish famine of 1846/47, the Opium Wars against China, its savage suppression of the 1857 Indian Mutiny and its conquest of Egypt and Sudan in the 1870s and 1880s. But when Newsinger moves into the 20th century and deals with the 1916 Easter Rising his reactionary standpoint becomes evident.

Lenin welcomed the Rising, condemned those who called it a putsch, and used it to expose the doctrinaire concept of a 'pure' social revolution. Against those who argued that it was 'premature' he said:

'It is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful revolutionary movements that the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength and get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught.'

Newsinger rejects this. He complains 'if only the rebels had waited' (p102) and although he concedes that 'Lenin provided the starting point for any analysis of the Easter Rising', he adds that 'he [Lenin] lamented the fact "that they rose prematurely, when the European revolt of the proletariat had not yet matured"' (p102) without referring to Lenin's subsequent comments. Elsewhere Newsinger has described the Rising as 'a classic instance of a putsch' which Connolly should have opposed (Newsinger, *Rebel City - Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement*). He also refers to a report the Labour Party issued in January 1921 that in his view:

'stated quite bluntly that there were things being done "in the name of Britain which must make her name stink in the nostrils of the whole world". It condemned "the reign of terror in Ireland" and the way it was being used to hold the Irish in subjection to "an empire that is the friend of small nations". The Labour Party could never get it quite right'. (Newsinger p105)

The flippant conclusion obscures the fact that Labour could and did get it right - from the standpoint of impe-

rialism. Critically, Labour refused to recognise the Dail Eireann in 1918 to which the mass of Irish people had given their allegiance; it objected to the British use of force not out of concern for the victims but because it might turn them towards revolution. Labour favoured self-determination only if a subsequent Irish constitution 'afforded protection to minorities' and prevented 'Ireland from becoming a military or naval menace to Great Britain' which together conceded the need for partition and a continued occupation. (see David Reed, *Ireland, the Key to the British Revolution*, 1984)

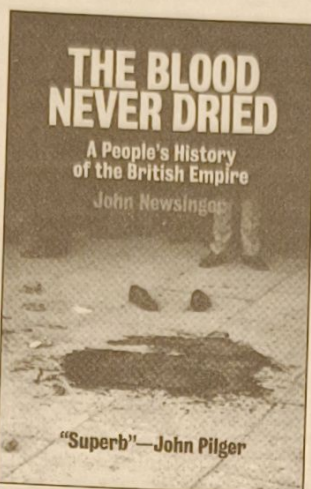


Anglo-French invasion of Suez 1956

This takes us to the central point. Newsinger does point out that the Labour Party has always been pro-imperialist, saying for instance that: 'While Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and the New Labour government might well have dispensed with just about everything the Labour Party stood for, as far as domestic policies are concerned, with regard to imperialism they are very much in the Labour tradition'. (p10)

But what is this tradition? How and why did it arise? Newsinger cannot explain since he implicitly rejects Lenin's developments of Marx and Engels' positions on the nature of British imperialism, its impact on the British working class and the development of opportunism as a necessary trend within the working class movement of an imperialist nation. This theoretical poverty becomes evident when Newsinger contrasts 'New Labour' with 'Old': New Labour has proclaimed itself 'unequivocally the party of business' and presided over increased inequality 'whereas the Labour Party was originally founded to challenge this state of affairs' (p231).

Only an idealist could imagine that the Labour Party was founded to chal-



lenge capitalism and inequality. From the outset, it represented the interests of a privileged stratum of the working class, the labour aristocracy, and defended the source of those privileges - British imperialism. Labour's establishment was a retrograde step for the working class since it entrenched the power of the labour aristocracy against the mass of the working class

after the defeat of the unskilled union movement in the late 1890s. Labour's reactionary role as a bastion against communism was consolidated with the Party's 1918 constitution and later with its takeover of the Labour and Socialist International.

Newsinger can as little account for Labour's absolute commitment to defending the colonial empire in 1945-51 as he can for its earlier opposition to Irish self-determination. Although he cites the fabulous profits the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company made in this post-war period (p165), he misses out Bevin's key concern when he quotes the Labour Foreign Secretary as saying that 'the Middle East was an area of "cardinal importance...second only to the United Kingdom itself"' (p167). Let Bevin himself explain:

'His Majesty's Government must maintain a continuing interest in that area if only because our economic and financial interests in the Middle East are of vast importance to us...If these interests were lost to us, the effect on the life of this country would be a considerable reduction in the standard of living...British interests in the Middle East contribute substantially not only to the interests of the people there, but to the wage packets of the workpeople

of this country'. (Cited in Robert Clough, *The Labour Party: A party fit for imperialism*, p87)

The same weakness is evident when Newsinger deals with both the dollar-earning capacity of Malaya's tin and rubber industries and the accumulation of sterling balances from the colonies - which were essentially forced loans (p207). Newsinger agrees that 'it was under Attlee's government that British colonies were to be most ruthlessly and successfully exploited' (ibid). But he does not describe the political consequences. For that we have to turn to one of his sources who concludes that through the manipulation of the sterling balances, 'the colonies were compelled to subsidise Britain's post-war standard of living...the Labour government used colonies to protect the British consumer from the high social price which continental countries were then paying for their post-war reconstruction'. (DK Fieldhouse in *R Oventdale, The foreign policy of the British Labour government 1945-51*, pp96, 99). Relative social peace in Britain was bought at the expense of the colonial people.

Newsinger thus detaches the economics of imperialism from its politics. He compounds this by belittling the independent interests of British imperialism post 1945. True, he refers at times to the global character of 'British interests' (p181, p221) or to 'British capitalism's global interests' (p228). But he never concedes that such 'interests' reveal the predatory, parasitic character of an imperialist power or that Britain has remained the second major imperialist power throughout this time. Far from it: in his introduction Newsinger says he wants 'to explore the process of British subordination to American imperialism that has taken place since the Second World War' (p11), saying that after Suez, 'both Conservative and Labour governments have aspired to a subordinate role in the American Empire. This remains the situation today and it will continue when Blair has gone. In opposing our own government, we are participants in the global fight against American imperialism' (ibid).

Newsinger's crude anti-US political standpoint starts with the Labour-led British intervention in Korea in 1950 where he argues that British intervention was no more than Britain paying a 'blood price' for its alliance with the US (p217), adding that 'The cabinet decided that "British land forces should be sent in order to consolidate Anglo-American friendship and to placate American public opinion". British troops were to fight and die in an American war' (p218, emphasis added).

It is one thing to say that British imperialism is a junior partner of US imperialism. But to characterise this as 'dependency' minimises Britain's significance as the world's second imperialist power and Newsinger achieves this by omitting any of the relevant facts (for which see David Yaffe's article in *FRFI* 194). He is part of an anti-American tradition in British social democratic politics which dates back more than 50 years. Thus the CPGB declared in its 1952 political programme, the *British Road to Socialism* that 'the subjection of Britain to American imperialism is a betrayal of the British people in the interests of big business...In the economic sphere, Britain has been turned into a satellite of America' (p7). Tony Benn holds a similar position, writing in 2004 that 'if there is a role for Britain that would make sense it would be as an independent nation', whilst cau-

tioning that 'if we began moving in this direction...the response in the White House...could be explosive as they face the world without Britain as its colony'. (*Socialist Campaign Group News*, June 2004) This, from the President of the Stop the War Coalition, draws out the reactionary logic of Newsinger's argument very clearly.

What are the political consequences? Whilst Newsinger says (p10) that 'Labour politicians invented a tradition of anti-imperialism for the consumption of Labour Party members', he also says 'many Labour Party members, or more likely today, ex-members, and some Labour MPs certainly have been anti-imperialists and believe in this tradition' (p10 and, similarly, p146). Yet he cites only one instance where such internal opposition could be argued to have made a difference - in preventing British troops being sent to Vietnam (although hundreds were sent covertly). Even then, they were unable to prevent the Wilson government from giving full support to the US's onslaught. Otherwise left Labour MPs have been completely powerless.

Lenin was very precise about what was required of anti-imperialists, arguing that the 'fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism'. In other words, such Labour members would have to break with and fight openly against the imperialist and racist party to which they belong. Instead, the anti-American standpoint Newsinger sets out continues to tie the working class to the middle class and bourgeoisie, and hence to the Labour Party: it is a defence of opportunism.



Ernest Bevin

In conclusion, Newsinger fails to explain the material basis for Labour's imperialism. He reduces Britain's position in the post-war period as the second most powerful imperialist power to a mere dependant of the US.* His 'anti-imperialism' can include any Labour reactionary who mouths anti-US sentiments. Lindsey German's recent call to welcome previously pro-war MPs as new recruits to the anti-war movement (*Socialist Review*, September 2006) is a case in point. A few weeks later, a mere dozen such MPs supported a call for an inquiry into the war thereby illustrating the bankruptcy of such a strategy. Anti-imperialists must oppose it.

Robert Clough

* Some might point to other SWP representatives as acknowledging the existence of British imperialism. For instance, Chris Harman writes that 'New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair is commonly referred to as George Bush's "poodle"'. This sums up the subordinate position Britain plays in relation to US imperialism. But it also underestimates the degree to which British capitalism has its own imperialist interests' (*International Socialism* 99 No4). Harman sees a military dependency on the US, but he also refers to 'the decline in the economic importance of the [British] empire in the 1950s and 1960s' without explaining how and why Britain's overseas investments remain second only to those of the US, or what their political significance is. Like Newsinger, he separates the politics of imperialism from its economics.

Raising the debate on socialism

■ **Democracy and revolution: Latin America and socialism today**, DL Raby, Pluto Press 2006, £18.95, 280pp

The premise of this book is that a new type of revolutionary movement, inspired by the example of Cuba and Venezuela, is now a real possibility with imperialism and neo-liberalism in crisis. This follows the defeats the Left suffered with the collapse of the socialist bloc. DL Raby analyses the Cuban and Bolivarian revolutions, as well as the defeats in Chile (1970-3), Nicaragua (1979-90) and Portugal (1974-5) and attempts to draw lessons for revolutionary movements elsewhere.

At a time when commentators in both the mainstream and the Left press talk about 'transition' in Cuba, and refer casually to it as a 'dictatorship' or a 'deformed workers' state', this book offers an important alternative analysis. For Raby, 'the Cuban Revolution, for all its faults, continues to represent the most advanced attempt to build socialism anywhere in the world; but this makes it all the more important to defend Cuba and analyse it critically'. Raby seeks to understand the unique features of the Cuban Revolution and explain how it has managed to build and maintain a socialist democracy despite US hostility and the extreme hardships of the Special Period, which, as Raby points out, would have caused a state without mass popular support to fall within a matter of weeks.

Raby makes no apologies for Cuba's single party democracy and devotes a chapter to analysing the way in which pluralist liberal democracies are used to maintain the privileges of

the capitalist class. A single party system is not antonymous to democracy, and, on the contrary, in Cuba, has provided the unity needed to carry the Revolution forward and create a more profound type of democracy. She describes the system of 'popular power', whereby representatives are directly elected at every level, and in which the Communist Party and mass organisations are forbidden from interfering. However, she criticises what she regards as the more restrictive nomination procedure above municipal level, and says that debate at the national assembly is controlled by the Communist Party. She concedes that 'It is possible to justify this as necessary in the face of US sabotage, but it cannot convincingly be described as fully democratic'. This is a concession: the overriding issue for the Cubans must be to defend the Revolution, and this may at times require limitations to a form of democracy which still remains superior to that in bourgeois nation states.

Raby says that Venezuela is, in some ways, a more relevant example for others to learn from. She is hopeful that Venezuela will carry through a revolution and, at the same time, build a participatory democracy that is fully open at every level. In this respect she is inspired by the success of grass roots organisations such as the Bolivarian Circles, land and water councils and 'Units of Endogenous Battle', which are described in detail.

Raby recognises that Venezuela has a long way to go in challenging its national oligarchy, which still holds huge economic power, but she is optimistic. Chavez has the support of the

military and a clear majority of the people, and this has been decisive in defeating the attempted coup and a series of crippling strikes. Raby believes that the policy of 'endogenous development' (a mixture of state-owned enterprises, workers' co-operatives, and private capital) will meet the demands of the people. In this context a deeper analysis of the current position of national and international capital in Venezuela would have been useful. How much power will have to be taken away from the national bourgeoisie and multinationals if the land redistribution and employment programmes are to work? What will be the likely reaction?

Democracy provides the dynamism necessary to carry a revolution forward. This is undeniable, but as Raby points out, Venezuela's socio-economic system is still predominantly capitalist. Venezuela may find that if it is to face down the threat of imperialism it has to settle for something less than a perfect democracy at the present time. It's clear that Raby supports Cuba, but at times she verges on being apologetic about its political system, when, as she acknowledges, the Cubans have good reason to be concerned about protecting revolutionary power.

Raby shows several similarities between the Cuban and Venezuelan experiences. Both movements arose largely independently of existing political parties and were not explicitly socialist at the outset. Both emphasised the importance of a new type of grassroots democracy, and both have had strong, charismatic leaders, who enter into a direct relationship with the oppressed classes, interpreting and

responding to their demands. From these characteristics, together with her analyses of the defeats in Chile, Nicaragua and Portugal, Raby draws lessons for revolutionary movements elsewhere. A successful movement should be rooted in national popular culture and committed to participatory democracy. It should transcend conventional political parties and institutions and remain ideologically pluralistic. Furthermore, a strong leadership is essential (often producing an individual charismatic leader like Fidel or Chavez) which must be determined to seize state power.

The signs of such a movement emerging in Europe are thin on the ground, but Raby is encouraged by the size of the anti-war movement, and also by the electoral gains of various Left parties in Europe, such as Communist Refoundation in Italy, or Respect in Britain. She admits that none of these forces has revolutionary potential alone, yet sees them as a possible

basis for a new popular movement. However, she does not consider whether the lessons of Cuba and Venezuela can be applied to movements in imperialist countries, where there is a privileged section of the working class politically tied to imperialism. What would she now make of Communist Refoundation voting to keep troops in Afghanistan, or to stop campaigning against the occupation of Iraq? Or of the collapse of the anti-war movement in this country?

However, with its broadly positive assessment of the Cuban Revolution, this is an important book. As Raby says, the Cuban Revolution is the most advanced attempt to build socialism anywhere, and the Left in this country should not just support it, but seek to learn from its example. Raby is to be commended for raising the level of the debate on the way forward for socialism.

Sam Rae

Hamas: from left opposition to government

■ **Hamas: A beginner's guide**, Khaled Hroub, Pluto Press 2006, £11.99, 170pp

Khaled Hroub was born in a refugee camp in Bethlehem and is currently director of the Arab Media Project at Cambridge University. His *Hamas: a beginner's guide* is a clear, concise and informative book which charts the metamorphosis of Hamas from its foundation in 1987, through the first Intifada 1987-1993, to its present role as the backbone of the Al Aqsa Intifada and its victory in the PLC elections in January 2006. Presented in an accessible question-and-answer format, the book deals with the movement's ideology, its social, political and resistance strategy, its organisational structure, and its relationship with the Palestinian people and the international community.

For those fed on a diet of imperialist propaganda which parrots the official Tel Aviv and Washington line that Hamas is a terrorist organisation indistinguishable from Al Qaeda, the book explodes many commonly held misconceptions. It is clear from Hroub's analysis that Hamas is a very different organisation today from that associated with its 1988 charter which contains anti-Jewish racism. The author says that this document, often cited in the media, bears little relation to the organisation which now forms the government of Palestine. So how has Hamas changed?

During the first Intifada Hamas refused to participate in the popular committees, the beginnings of mass popular power, which emerged in the early stages of the uprising against Zionist occupation. It actively opposed the Palestinian left's call for civil disobedience to undermine the Zionist administration in the West Bank. Hamas was accused of refusing to join the national liberation struggle and the PLO and of playing a sectarian and divisive role. There was evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood, the parent organisation of Hamas, received funds from the Zionist State. In their book *Intifada: Israel's Third Front*, Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari comment: 'The civil administration has contributed considerably to the development of the Muslim groups... many Israeli staff officers believed that the rise of fundamentalism... could be exploited to weaken the PLO.' According to Haim Baram, writing in the *Middle East International* in January 1983, 'The Israelis pumped millions of dollars into the Muslim coffers as part of their grand design to circumvent the PLO at any conceivable price'. Under the pressure of the Palestinian masses, Hamas was forced to reject its past and embrace the cause of Palestinian nationalism. After 1993, it became the leadership of Palestinian opposition to the Oslo peace agreement; its members were jailed, tortured and even murdered by

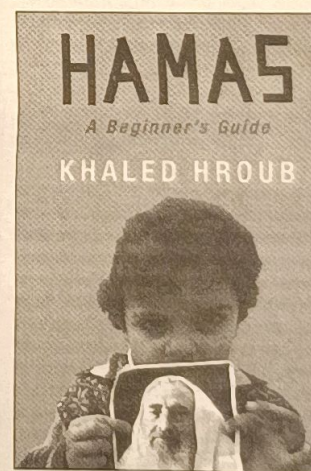
the fledgling Palestinian Authority for their stance.

Hroub looks at the tension within Hamas between the political tasks it faces as part of the Palestinian national liberation struggle and its religious ideology and social agenda. He points out that although Hamas is an Islamist movement, many of its supporters are atheists or Christians and indeed Hamas stood Christian candidates in the 2006 elections, one of whom is now the Minister of Tourism. His explanation is that in the eyes of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas represents the principles of the national liberation struggle against occupation. 'Palestinians support whichever movement holds the banner of resistance against that occupation and promises to defend the Palestinian rights of freedom and self-determination. At this juncture of history, they see in Hamas the defender of those rights.' The idea of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine featured in early Hamas literature, but is rarely mentioned nowadays; instead its propaganda is dominated by more immediate political demands. Hamas has often declared that it has no intention of imposing Islamic religious practices on Palestinian society.

Hroub also deals with Hamas's conservative outlook on the role of women in society. He shows that women are very active in Hamas in political mobilisation during election time

but points out that women disappear at leadership levels. 'Compared to the broader Palestinian national movement, where many female figures have left a political impact at the public and leadership level, Hamas women are almost invisible to the outside world.' When Hamas formed the Palestinian government it appointed only one woman to the cabinet as the minister of women's affairs which Hroub argues perpetuates traditional conservative attitudes.

Hroub states that Hamas was both surprised and totally unprepared when it won the 2006 elections by a landslide. The movement was suddenly faced with the task of governing Palestine and making the transition from resistance movement to a governing party. He looks at the grass-roots social work of Hamas through its network of Islamic charities in the West Bank and Gaza which provide health, education and welfare. In November 2003 there were 120,000 Palestinians receiving monthly financial assistance and 30,000 more getting annual allowances. This sustained devotion to the needs of the poor and a lack of corruption helps to explain the success of the movement and its mass base. Hroub reminds us that many of Hamas's political leaders come from poor backgrounds and still live in modest homes in refugee camps among their popular base and that many others have been assassinated



by the Israeli government.

However Hamas's commitment to the oppressed, according to Hroub, does not move beyond charitable handouts and welfare to building a movement that represents the independent interests of the working class in Palestine: 'In practice Hamas membership includes merchants, business people and the rich as well as the middle class and poor. Outside Palestine, rich Muslim business people in the Gulf Countries and other Muslim places represent the majority of funding'. In this context, Hroub says that Hamas puts forth no particular economic ideology, although he says that it 'subscribes to the widespread belief within the circles of Islamist movements that Islam encourages free enterprise and enshrines the right to hold individual property' (p69).

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in understanding the current political struggle in Palestine.

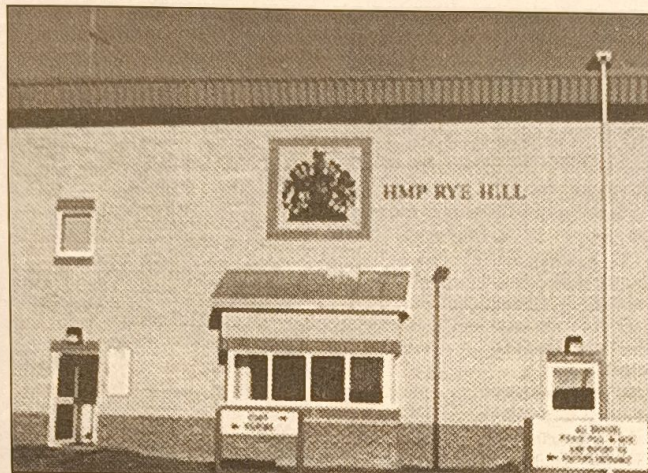
Barnaby Mitchell

Rye Hill prison staff on trial for manslaughter

A jury at Northampton Crown Court has heard that a prisoner at privately-run Rye Hill prison committed suicide less than three weeks after making serious allegations of corruption against five officers. Three former members of staff are charged with manslaughter by gross neglect. One of them, along with another ex-officer, is charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. It is believed to be the first time in over 30 years that prison staff have stood trial in connection with the death of a prisoner. ERIC ALLISON reports.

The court heard from the prosecution that in March 2005, 23-year-old Michael Bailey from Birmingham was found hanging in his cell in the segregation unit at Rye Hill prison near Coventry. He was on suicide watch following a rapid decline in his mental state which began shortly after being put in segregation.

The former Director of Operations at Rye Hill, Steve Hepworth, told the court that he had an hour-long meeting with Michael Bailey after he had made the allegations against staff. Bailey had been 'very coherent, switched-on, confident and articulate'. However, when the two men met again two weeks later in the segregation unit, he had become a 'frightened, incoherent figure who mumbled away while sat on his bed'. Under cross-examination, Hepworth conceded that Bailey would have been vulnerable if information about his allegation of corruption had got out. He agreed Bailey had passed on 'highly sensitive information that, if correct, would implicate prison officers in criminal conduct' and that a move



HMP Rye Hill

to another prison should have been considered.

The court was also told that at the time of Michael Bailey's death, senior management at Rye Hill were investigating 25 separate intelligence reports relating to trafficking or other inappropriate behaviour by prison staff.

Dan Daymond, Paul Smith and Samantha Prime are charged with the manslaughter of Michael Bailey. The thrust of the prosecution's case is that they ignored the warning signs in the days leading up to his death. On one occasion he stripped naked in the exercise yard and walked around reciting the Lord's Prayer. Another time he

told a member of staff that he was ready to be baptised and to die.

Michael's mother, Caroline, visited her son two days before he died. She told the court that Michael was normally a self-confident and positive young man who took care of his appearance but had not showered or changed his clothes for a week. There were cuts and scars on his chest and neck which

Michael told her were self-inflicted. He said he had tried to commit suicide using a string tied around his neck but that the noose had broken under his weight. Ms Bailey said that her son was in a highly emotional state on the visit, repeatedly bursting into tears and saying that staff had told him that his family were dead.

Later that evening she telephoned the prison and passed on her concerns to Samantha Prime, who worked on Edwards wing, where Michael was held before going to the segregation unit. In police interviews, Prime denied the conversation took place.

The prosecution told the jury that if

Ms Bailey had told Samantha Prime about the marks on Michael's neck and his admission of self-harm and the officer had done nothing about it this would amount to gross negligence.

The jury heard that Bailey was placed in a cell containing a ligature point and was allowed to keep his shoelaces and that although the staff were supposed to carry out daily 'fabric checks' on all cells, the one where Bailey died had not been checked for weeks. The jury was told that the failure of Paul Smith, the segregation unit manager, to order these checks and to organise proper suicide watch checks amounted to gross negligence on his part.

Prosecuting counsel, Rachel Brand QC said that Bailey should have been checked six times an hour by staff but, when he was found dead at 12 noon on 24 March 2005, nobody had seen him for an hour. He had been found hanging by a ligature formed by a shoelace, threaded through a hole in a metal panel on the inside of his door. Ms Brand said that there was no doubt that he had taken his own life but that he had been failed by prison staff, whose duty was to safeguard him, particularly with their knowledge of his mental state. Without their gross negligence, if they had done their duties fully and properly, Michael Bailey would not have been able to take his own life.

Ms Brand said that after the alarm was raised, custody officer Dan Daymond told his colleague, Ben King, to forge entries in the Suicide and Self-Harm Book. King is then said to have falsely entered the times 11.09, 11.17, 11.30 and 11.45 in the book with the words: 'in cell'.

As the trial continues, prison staff appear to be relying on the defence that Global Solutions Ltd (GSL), the private company that runs Rye Hill, is to blame, rather than they as individuals, as they were not properly trained to do their jobs. The jury was told by defence counsel that a month after Bailey's death the Chief Inspector of Prisons visited Rye Hill and found that most officers were 'fairly new and young' with 'far less experience of jail than the long-term prisoners in their care'. The inspectorate had voiced very serious concerns about safety at the prison and had singled out the 'below

standard' monitoring of prisoners regarded as being at risk of suicide or self-harm.

The barrister representing former prison guard Paul Smith told the jury that despite Rye Hill having a policy dictating that staff should have a minimum of a year's experience before working in the segregation unit, in early 2005 three virtually untrained staff were on the unit at the Warwickshire prison: one had only two months post-training experience; another had been an operational officer for 16 days and the third had not received his Home Office security clearance.

GSL is a massive corporation which runs prisons, immigration detention centres, prisoner escort services and a myriad of related projects. In Britain it manages Rye Hill, Altcourse and The Wolds (criminal prisons for adult males), Yarl's Wood, Campsfield House, Tinsley House and Oakington (immigration prisons), Medway and Rainsbrook Secure Training Centres (prisons for children). It also runs prisons and detention centres in Australia, South Africa and on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. GSL has a 25-year £35m PFI contract to design, build, finance and operate Manchester Magistrates Court and a £400m 30-year contract to construct and service the new GCHQ government spy building in Cheltenham. It should indeed be held to account for the death of Michael Bailey, along with those of all the prisoners and detainees who have died in its establishments. However this does not mean that the individuals who brutalise or neglect prisoners and then blame their bosses should be able to wipe their hands and walk away.

From Wormwood Scrubs to Abu Ghraib, on the all-too rare occasions in which the state is compelled to prosecute its own for crimes against the oppressed, the fall-out is similar: the little people blame those at the top and those at the top keep their distance. The staff from Rye Hill are right to blame a multi-million pound corporation for exploiting both them and prisoners like Michael Bailey to make a fat profit, but this does not exonerate them for their own indifference and neglect. Custody officers who do nothing to prevent deaths of prisoners should be on trial but they should not be alone in the dock. ■

Close down women's prisons!

Following the tragic deaths of six women at Styal Prison in the 12 months ending August 2003, the government ordered a review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system. The report, published on 13 March 2007, calls for women's prisons to be closed, and replaced with a local network of small custodial units, reserved only for those who are a danger to the public. Labour Baroness Jean Corston, who led the nine-month review, wants fewer women to be gaoled, with a much greater use of community punishment.

The majority of sentenced female prisoners are held for non-violent offences, and two-thirds of women inmates are mothers who are often held a long way from their families due to the small number of women's prisons. There are some very worrying figures – although women make up only 6% of the prison population, they account for more than half of all incidents of self-harm. Around 80% have diagnosable mental health problems. It is a bleak picture, made worse by the fact that most women prisoners have experienced domestic violence or been the victims of childhood abuse.

The unacceptable practice of sending mentally ill people to prison, whether female or male, belongs in the history



books. Once the Corston Review recommendations are implemented, ministers must then turn their attention to the problems in men's prisons.

Labour chose not to implement much needed penal reform when it took office in 1997. The consequences are now all too apparent, with gaols filled to over-

flowing, and the Prison Service lurching from one crisis to another. And the ongoing abuse of human rights in our gaols, shameful in the 21st century, must be addressed, otherwise Labour has no right to call itself a 'modern' government.

My only child Sarah, 18, was the youngest of the six women who died in the so-called care of Styal Prison. I am angry that a further 34 women have died from self-inflicted injuries in women's prisons in England since my daughter's death in January 2003. Many of the women were mothers who have left behind motherless children. Home Secretary John Reid likes to think he is 'tough' on crime. But I wonder if he understands how tough it is for the children whose mums have died in the 'care' of his prisons.

No-one is saying people who do wrong mustn't be held to account. But we know that prison doesn't work. In view of the high reoffending rate, so it's time for some common sense – and, hopefully, some humanity – to enter the debate.

Pauline Campbell
Bereaved mother of
Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, 18,
who died in the 'care'
of Styal Prison, 2003

Dovegate

In March another private prison, Dovegate in Staffordshire, was the subject of a critical Chief Inspector's Report. Dovegate, which holds 860 prisoners and is operated by Serco, was last inspected in 2003 when the inspection team found staff were low in numbers and inexperienced, and criticised the prevalence of drugs and bullying. The latest report quotes a survey of prisoners in which 56% said that they had felt unsafe at some point – more than double the proportion in similar prisons and far higher than in 2003. Foreign nationals were reported to feel acutely at risk. More prisoners complained of being threatened, intimidated or assaulted by staff than in other similar establishments.

On 29 January, a month before the publication of the report, around 30 prisoners refused to return to their cells and allegedly set fire to dustbins and smashed TVs. According to press reports, the disturbance lasted six hours and was brought to an end after 120 officers were brought in from other prisons, including Stafford. Any FRFI readers in prison who have more information about this incident are invited to send us accounts or updates for publication. ■

FRFI ROUNDUP

Fighting back against imperialism

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! has been busy over the past two months organising meetings and demonstrations in support of those fighting back against imperialism internationally or involved in struggle in Britain.

Support asylum seekers!

We have been actively supporting asylum seekers who have taken a stand

(DRC). The Labour government supported the fake elections in the DRC and is deporting asylum seekers on charter flights under the pretence that the DRC is safe. London comrades have also continued pickets on the first Tuesday of every month at Communications House reporting centre for asylum seekers. Come and join us.

In Newcastle, through involvement

system, cuts to ESOL funding are another attempt by the Labour government to divide asylum seekers from others in Britain who are also under attack, and to prevent any united fight back.

Another TCAR family, Joy and her daughter, received notification that they would be deported to Jamaica on Wednesday 14 March, despite a pending citizenship claim by her daughter. TCAR organised a national media campaign and as a result the deportation was frozen. The media focused on the fact that Joy's sons had served in the British Army, with the front page of the *Independent* carrying the headline: 'Your country needs you...but not you: soldiers' mother faces deportation'.

A TCAR delegation attended the Glasgow No Borders conference with a proposal to coordinate national actions in defence of asylum rights. TCAR argued for the need to take a collective approach and defend the interests of all, recognising the limitations of a legal system that is geared towards failing asylum seekers. Also in Glasgow, on 7 March, FRFI joined a militant demonstration against recent deportations to the DRC. Around 80 asylum-seekers gathered outside the immigration courts, with chanting and singing against dawn raids and deportations.

On 7 March in Manchester the Congo Support Project (CSP) held a lively demonstration outside the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal on Mosley Street. It was supported by FRFI members through the North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG). More than 100 protesters from DRC attended, together with some other anti-racist campaigns.

Another of the British state's disgusting, racist institutions, kept out of the public eye, is Dallas Court Immigration Reporting Centre in Salford Quays. NWASDG has been organising protests outside the building for almost a year, and now more asylum seekers are beginning to do the same. The CSP called a demo on 13 March from 12 noon to 2pm. It was attended by around 250 Congolese refugees, supported by NWASDG and FRFI, some Libyan activists and other anti-racist individuals. For more than 20 minutes the demonstrators blockaded the entrance to Dallas Court, forcing it to be temporarily closed, and gave speeches about British imperialism's reactionary record in DRC, and demanding the right to stay. When the police attempted to arrest one black man for 'picking up a brick' or 'other offensive object' (a mysterious thing which was never found) the crowd physically rescued him from the arms of two cops. When it was discovered that Rosetta, a Congolese woman signing on, had been detained at the centre, the demo demanded her release and extended the protest by 2½ hours. NWASDG are calling further protests outside Dallas Court.

ered that Rosetta, a Congolese woman signing on, had been detained at the centre, the demo demanded her release and extended the protest by 2½ hours. NWASDG are calling further protests outside Dallas Court.

Stop the war!

FRFI has been active against the brutal occupation of Iraq. On 17 March in Trafalgar Square in London, FRFI held an anti-war demonstration as part of the International Day of Action against the War. Written in large chalk letters on the

Victory to the Intifada!

In London, weekly demonstrations continue against Marks & Spencer on Oxford Street because of the company's support for Zionism. In Manchester on 17 February we held a picket of Marks & Spencer on Market Street. The Manchester protest against M&S continues to gather new supporters. A successful picket was also held in Rochdale a week later.

FRFI also attended the opening meeting of the Enough! Coalition in London. Enough! is an organisation formed in large part by the leadership of the Pales-

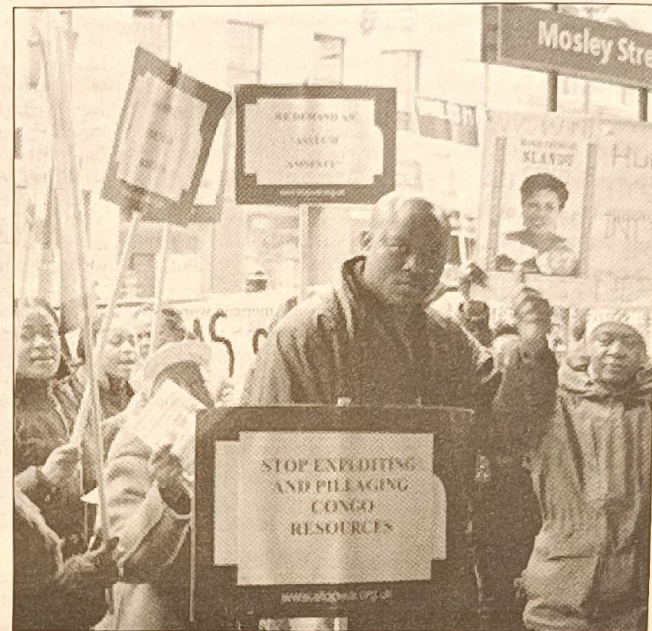


FRFI protest in Trafalgar Square to mark the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq

against racist deportations. In London on 10 February FRFI activists took part in a picket of Harmondsworth Detention Centre to demand its closure. Later in the month FRFI helped organise a demonstration at the Home Office to stop the deportation of families back to dangerous and life-threatening conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo

with Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR), FRFI has been working closely with asylum seekers facing deportation. This has included two Kurdish families who were snatched in dawn raids and taken to Yarl's Wood detention centre and then Heathrow airport. The Erdogan family and the Dagon family both physically resisted their removal and were taken off the aeroplanes as the pilots refused to fly. TCAR held emergency demonstrations outside the Government Offices North East in response to the snatches of both families. FRFI comrades are building support for the pledge of resistance in local communities and are working together with anarchists who are monitoring the activities of the North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre. We will show the government that they cannot simply 'disappear' people. Together we are stronger and the government's actions will have political consequences on the streets.

On 3 March TCAR joined with Newcastle College Student Union and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) staff and students to organise a march and rally against the Labour government's proposed cuts to funding for ESOL. Along with denial of the right to work and a parallel and inferior welfare



Congo Support Project demonstration in Manchester

ground were the words '655,000 dead in Iraq'. British people and tourists also signed messages of resistance in many languages. We were joined by Kurdish and Turkish comrades from the MLKP. On the same day in Manchester a protest was organised with the Stop the War-mongers (see Roundup FRFI 195), in Piccadilly Gardens to mark four years since the invasion of Iraq. The local Stop The War Coalition called a 'die-in' protest on the same day at the same time in Albert Square, a quarter of a mile away.

In Newcastle FRFI activists have continued their work with Tyneside Stop The War Coalition (TSTWC), engaging in joint activities whilst putting forward the principled demand of a break from the Labour Party. On 24 February a Troops Out demonstration took place in the centre of Newcastle, called by FRFI and supported by Tyneside STWC. On 17 March FRFI activists staged a protest outside a Shell petrol station in the East End of Newcastle to highlight British multinationals' ambitions in the plunder of Iraq, which was joined by members of Tyneside STWC.

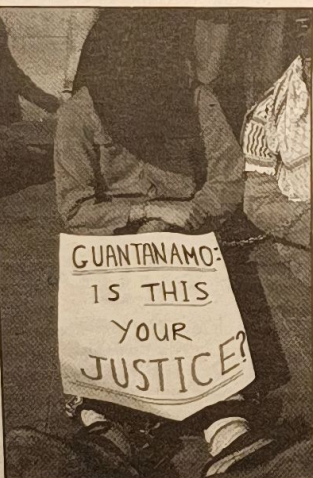
tinian Solidarity Campaign. One of the main conditions for joining Enough! is to hold to the principle of non-violence. We wrote and asked if non-violence applied to Palestinians living under occupation. Enough! didn't answer and rejected our application to join.

Viva Cuba!

Work in solidarity with socialist Cuba has continued around the country. At the London School of Economics there was a meeting organised by the FRFI society. The highly political discussion was about revolution and democracy in Latin America and the main speaker was author DL Raby (see review page 12).

In the last year Rock around the Blockade has raised over £3,000 to support the work of the Union of Young Communists in Cuba (UJC). In April a brigade will be going to Cuba to donate this material aid and give political solidarity to the UJC. There will be report-back meetings across the country in May.

Come and join us!



Protesters highlight human rights abuses

Events

LONDON

Saturday 7 April, 12-3pm
Free the Cuban 5
Rally North Pavement, Trafalgar Square

Wednesday 11 April, 7-11pm
Rock around the Blockade (RATB) fundraising film night showing *Battleship Potemkin* and *Inventos*
Bodrum Café, 61 Stoke Newington High Street, N16 8EL
Entry £5

Wednesday 16 May, 7-9.30pm
London School of Economics FRFI society with RATB
Public meeting: Eye-witness report from recent brigade to Cuba
Room S221, LSE, Houghton Street WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Wednesday 30 May, 7-9.30pm
LSE FRFI society public meeting
Education and the limitations under capitalism
Room S50, St Clement's Building, LSE

Every Thursday, 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Picket of Marks & Spencer
Marble Arch end of Oxford Street
For further details call 020 7837 1688
Or email eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com / northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NEWCASTLE
Saturday 7 April, 11am-2.30pm
Day of Action to Free the Cuban 5
Grey's Monument

Saturday 14 April, 1.30pm
General Meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR)
St. Thomas's Church, Haymarket

Sunday 15 April, 4pm
Public meeting: Democracy and Revolution, speaker author DL Raby
Phone or email for details

Saturday 5 May
We Demand the Right to Work for All!
TCAR contingent on Tyne and Wear May Day March
Phone or email for details

Wednesday 16 May, 6.30pm
Cuba brigade report-back meeting
Phone or email for details

For further details call 07857 323 523
Or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com
Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk
To contact TCAR email tynesidecarn@yahoo.co.uk

GLASGOW
Tuesday 3 April, 7.30pm
Public meeting
Revolutionary Latin America
Room M127, George Moore Building, Caledonian University

Saturday 7 April, 1-3pm
Prisoners of US Imperialism - free the Cuban 5!
Street protest: Donald Dewar statue, Buchanan Street

Thursday 12 April, 6.30pm
Film showing *The Battle of Algiers*
Room 506, Boyd Orr Building, Glasgow University
(Hillhead underground or bus 44/44a)

For details of Cuba brigade report-back meetings in Glasgow, email joeyfrfi@yahoo.co.uk

MANCHESTER
Sunday 1 April, 2pm
Public meeting
Labour's war on asylum seekers
Cross Street chapel (off Market Street)

Saturday 7 April, 12 noon
Street protest Hands off Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia!
Free the Cuban 5! US out of Guantanamo! Free the detainees!
Piccadilly Gardens

Wednesday 11 April, 9am
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG)
Defend Halima and Bailey Jrl
No deportation to Cameroon!
Protest outside the Immigration Tribunal
Mosley Street (next to tram station)

Sunday 15 April
Sponsored walk for Cuba
Kinder Scout, the Peak District
Contact us to donate or to take part

Saturday 19 May, 12 noon
Victory to the Palestinian people!
Picket of Marks & Spencer, Market Street

Sunday 3 June, 2pm
Report from RATB brigade to Cuba
Cross Street Chapel

For further details call 07816 547 066 or email mrcrgfrfi@fsmail.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk

To contact NWASDG: call 07779 189 794 or email fightback_05@yahoo.com
Website: www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk

LEEDS
RCG/FRFI in Leeds are currently planning new activities in the area
To get involved contact 07899 983 131, or email frfi_leeds@yahoo.co.uk

Congo Support Project
FRFI is supporting the national days of action against deportations to DRC on 28 March and 12 April. Contact us for details of the demo nearest to you.

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

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

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

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Underestimating the labour aristocracy

Since when does 'the working class' receive paid vacation and bank holidays (77% of US workers do); healthcare insurance (71% of US workers do); dental coverage (46% of US workers do); retirement benefits (60% of US workers do); life insurance (52% of workers do); short-term disability benefit (39% of US workers do); or long-term disability benefit (30% of US workers do)? Isn't the proletariat defined as such by getting paid less than the value of its labour? If so, what justifies so many American 'workers' receiving such massive bonuses, and why do they accrue only to the pockets of the American working class and not the world working class? Are they paid for out of profits created by American workers? But over half of the US bourgeoisie's profits come from super-exploitation according to the gross underestimate given in Mr Palmer's own article. (FRFI 195) Further, according to the same article, American workers receive on average between \$14.72 per hour for service workers (who create no exchangeable commodities and are, strictly speaking, unproductive/parasitic in capitalist terms) and \$25.14 per

hour for manufacturing workers (an insignificant rump of US workers in any case).

If we determine that all labour employed by capital globally is equally productive (and this is being generous to the imperialist country workers due to the far greater intensity of work done in Third World countries) then we ought to divide the global GDP by the number of workers and hours worked annually. Doing so, we find that the value of labour is around \$4-5 (above the average income of a typical Third World worker). What justifies the massive wages plus subsidies that, because they are somewhat unevenly distributed, Mr Palmer suggests point to the existence of a large American proletariat? Mr Palmer bemoans the fact that the already absurdly inflated pay packet of the average unproductive American worker has gone down in recent years, whilst failing to mention that the purchasing power of the same has gone up. I am afraid that, as usual, FRFI is downplaying the size of the labour aristocracy which is, in fact, the vast majority of the population of imperialist countries like the USA.
CLIVE
England

Reply

The proletariat is not defined by 'getting paid less than the value of labour'. That would exclude the unemployed, and capitalistically unproductive workers. It is defined as 'the class of modern wage labourers, who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live' (*Communist Manifesto*). The critical point that I was making with the figures about benefits was their unequal distribution within the working class. This point Clive does not refute but just ignores: a huge section of the US working class does not share in imperialist superprofits. What the 'massive bonuses' are that Clive is referring to, I have no idea. The figures I gave for workers' pay are not the US average, but for a certain size of establishment. I gave them to make a specific point about large companies. The definition of 'service' has nothing to do with Marxist categories but is taken from bourgeois definitions which, unfortunately, lump together affluent lawyers and 'consultants' with waiting staff. Wages in parts of the United States are so low that some European countries are outsourcing work to the southern US. Poverty in the US, depending on how brutally it

is defined, afflicts 11%-21% of the population. Amongst the poor, surveys show that about 13% permanently do not have enough to eat and much larger proportion have food insecurity – about 25 million in the US experience temporary or permanent hunger.

Clive's calculation of the relative wealth of workers in imperialist and oppressed countries is simple, inviting and wrong. Marx devoted a whole chapter of *Capital* (Volume 1, chapter 22, 'National differences in wages') to showing why this is invalid. Clive's assumptions about productivity are unjustified, not least because workers in oppressed countries do not work harder or more intensively. Productivity is the result of not just the worker effort but of the means of production (machinery, tools, energy) he or she uses in work.

Clive shares with Post the belief that all workers benefit equally from imperialist superprofits. At least Post produced facts to try to back up his case, whereas Clive simply throws out extravagant assertions. If he has a case, he should back it up with hard facts.

STEVE PALMER
US

Democratic Republic of Congo where their lives will be at risk. Meanwhile the battle near the platform was to get the organisers to honour their promise to allow Brian Haw to speak. As the rally ended and people began to drift away, Brian Haw was finally taken. What an insult from the leadership of the British anti-war movement, that a man who has spent years in Parliament Square opposing the barbaric policies of the Labour government is not given proper speaking rights at a national rally against the war.

Break with Labour!

ANNA CORALLY
North London

Immigration officers snatch child from school

In March, Julio Quinones, aged 10, who is Bolivian, was removed from his classroom at Brunswick Park primary in Camberwell, south London, by immigration officers armed with batons, put in a van where his mother was already waiting and driven away. His teacher, Susannah Bellingham, said they did not know where the child had been taken and his

friends were left frightened and bewildered. The school was given less than an hour's warning. Bellingham told the *Times Educational Supplement* (16 March 2007): 'We didn't have time to prepare our goodbyes... I'm shocked that this is considered acceptable practice. It seems cruel to do that to a child. He is being plucked from his life here, which



Bring back Munasimenda Kanyama

I am seeking your support to help me bring my husband, Munasimenda Kanyama, home. He was refused a visa in Zambia on 2 January 2007 on grounds that left the family bewildered. Munasimenda and I had been living together in London since 26 September 2004 and we have six school-aged children. On 1 November 2006 we got married in Zambia, having gone there after an immigration hearing in Britain advised us that it would be best for Munasimenda's application if we sought entry clearance as a married couple. However he has not been allowed to return to Britain. I cannot manage to look after the children alone. One of them is suffering from sickle cell disease. I am therefore campaigning to bring my husband home.

KATE KANYAMA
London

I am glad to hear that you are working tirelessly in support of reuniting me with my family, from whom I have been disconnected due to illegal and racist UK immigration legislation. The *Willesden and Brent Times* is also publicising my case. The current situation in Zambia is that on 2 January I was refused an entry visa on the grounds that the British authorities did not believe that I am married to Kate, despite our providing them with evidence of the marriage certificate and photographs of the wedding and all bills relating to our staying together in the UK for over three years.

My solicitor and my wife have appealed against this decision and the Home Office has given until 6 June 2007 for a file to be received from Zambia to facilitate a case management, and it therefore might take another year before a hearing date can be set. Meanwhile

is really all he has ever known'.

More than 2,000 children whose families have lost their claims for asylum are detained by the Home Office every year. The Home Office has been accused of targeting children and families, rather than individuals, to boost deportation figures. In the same week, the Institute for Race Relations released a report accusing Britain and other European countries of robbing the children of asylum seekers of their basic human rights.

To drag children out of school, away from their friends and community without warning and incarcerate them in a detention centre shows the level of callousness to which this Labour government has sunk in its racist hostility to asylum seekers.

CAT WIENER
Camberwell, south London

I am unemployed, homeless and unwell. My wife has brought me enough medication to last up until April. At the moment am residing in a church sleeping on a small mattress on the floor and church members provide me with some meals whenever possible. I miss my family and I hope that you can help me be reunited with them as soon as possible, especially the children who need me as a father figure in the home for guidance, love and protection.

The campaign to Bring Back Munasimenda Kanyama! is supported by the following organisations: Africans Getting Involved, United Kingdom Coalition, RCG/FRFI, Rain Trust, ACP with the SUF, AHPN, OPAM and by Brent East MP Sarah Teather. A street event to publicise my campaign took place in Kilburn Square on 10 March. I appeal for support to help me be reunited with my wife and family. Thank you all for your support.
MUNASIMENDA KANYAMA
Zambia

Defend Ola and her family from deportation!

Olawumi Alao and her three children, aged six, four and one, were released on 13 March 2007 from Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre in Bedfordshire after almost six weeks. They are now back home in Liverpool from where they were kidnapped by snatch squads early on 1 February. But for an injunction filed by her solicitor, they would have been deported by 5 February. Ola and her youngest child suffer from Hepatitis B but were not given any treatment at Yarl's Wood.

Ola told us 'Nine officers came after midnight, woke my children up and told us we were going "back to Nigeria"... We went first to the Home Office in Liverpool and then to Yarl's Wood. They gave me a letter and travel documents, and seized my handbag and my mobile... My baby was sick, but they wouldn't give him any medicine. They made me wait. I cried a lot – I didn't want anything to happen to my baby. When we complained about the food, they said, "You are in detention". At some food times, they said, "You were late, you have to wait for the next meal."

Ola and her two older children fled Nigeria in August 2005 after her father, mother and two sisters were murdered. Fayad was born here. Ola was refused bail, because the Home Office said she was likely to 'abscond'; but Ola has

lived in Liverpool for the past 18 months without 'absconding', reporting to Reliance House regularly and keeping her children in the local schools. Britain is colluding with the Nigerian government to rig the 2007 elections and plunder of Nigeria's oil. A war is raging in the Niger Delta between the people and the US and British-trained and armed Nigerian army, the Joint Task Force, a brutal official militia. Foreign oil workers are being told to leave Nigeria, while Britain tries to deport Ola!

Since September 2006, we have been campaigning against Ola's deportation. On hearing about her kidnap, we ran stalls in Longsight, Rusholme and Manchester city centre and used our website to publicise the detention. We contacted the press, other anti-deportation groups and

Ola's local councillors, who all proved uninterested. One councillor told us helping Ola was 'out of my league'. Ola's MP and her children's school were very supportive and rang Ola in gaol. Many people wrote to the Home Office and phoned Yarl's Wood. Eventually this public support forced the racist Home Office to grant Ola 'Temporary Admission'. Now they want her to 'voluntarily' leave Britain. Ola says, 'I want to carry on campaigning'.

CHARLES CHINWEZU
NWASDQ

FRFI: great analysis

Thanks for David Yaffe's wonderful analysis of British capitalism (FRFI 194). With its help I've amazed at least one friend who thought Blair had merely taken leave of his senses.

Hardly less notable has been Steve Palmer's total refutation of Charles Post's sophisms (FRFI 195). It really is amazing to observe the wilful self-deceits of those who covertly support the existing order yet claim to be its critics.

JOHN O'HIGGINS
Leicester



Olawumi Alao

Labour Party – war party!

I was on the national demonstration against the war in Iraq on 24 February. The RCG/FRFI contingent was lively, noisy and militant with people being encouraged to join in, make a noise and be heard. Slogans included Labour Party – war party! – exactly the clear message that is needed.

On reaching Trafalgar Square, there were speakers already on the platform. The crowd stood and listened. There were all the same old faces again: the Jeremy Corbys, the Tony Benns, the whole host of speakers who are still in the Labour Party and some actually in government, yet who speak as if they were the opposition.

I wandered away to speak to some people who might be a little less tied to the Labour Party, only

to find that there is currently a trend on the left whose main campaign is to get John McDonnell elected as next leader. I was disgusted to find that there are people who are joining the Labour Party in order to vote for McDonnell... what, I asked, will they do with their membership card when he doesn't even get the necessary votes to stand and what do they think he will do if he doesn't get to stand? Give up his parliamentary privileges?

I then bumped into someone who had tried unsuccessfully to get an announcement from the chair about an emergency demonstration at the Home Office to prevent the forced removal of adults and children from Britain to the

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Charter flights to oppression

On 12 February 2007, 38 asylum seekers were deported on a special flight from RAF Brize Norton to Erbil in northern Iraq. On 26 February, 40 adults and children were flown from Stansted Airport to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). As Home Secretary John Reid steps up his drive to demonstrate the increased efficiency of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, we can expect more large-scale removals to war-torn countries that Britain has decreed to be 'safe'.

NICKI JAMESON reports.

Brize Norton to Erbil

Despite the continued stance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that the situation in northern Iraq 'remains tense and unpredictable' and that 'careful consideration' must be given before any deportations take place, the British government has chartered planes to send groups of asylum seekers to there three times in the past two years.

In November 2005 an attempt to deport 70 Iraqi Kurds was partially averted with just 15 removals taking place following a series of last-ditch legal applications. One of the deportations that did go ahead was subsequently ruled unlawful, resulting in humiliation for the government, which was forced to track down the asylum seeker and bring him back. Having learned nothing from this, on 31 August 2006 John Reid wrote to the High Court, stating he would ignore any challenge short of a full injunction to the next planned mass deportation of 32 Iraqis.

Deportations to Iraq are likely to increase, as the government is desperate not only to prove to its critics that it is not 'soft on failed asylum seekers', but perhaps even more crucially to establish, despite all evidence to the contrary, that at least part of Iraq is safe, now it has been 'liberated' and 'democratised' by the British and US military.

Around 60 people protested at Brize Norton on 12 February as the latest charter took off carrying 38 asylum seekers. Reports say the plane landed in Erbil, not at the normal passenger terminal but in a cargo area, which journalists and most airport workers were kept away from. Members of the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party's special police, the Asayish, were waiting for the plane and some deportees were beaten by airport guards as they were herded onto a waiting bus.

Stansted to Kinshasa

Two weeks later, over 40 people, including 19 children, were forcibly removed on a charter flight to DRC. Sixty demonstrators gathered at the Home Office in London in an emergency protest called by the Congo Support Project, Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! and the LSE FRFI society. This protest was widely publicised and endorsed by NCADC, Unity Centre Glasgow and London No Borders, among others.

In the week leading up to the flight other demonstrations had been held in Glasgow, Leeds and Middlesbrough, and Brighton No Borders had taken the protest to the offices of flight operators XL Airways in Crawley. The Bishops of Winchester, Chichester, Durham and Ripon spoke out against the mass expulsion to DRC, literally thousands of faxes were sent to the Home Office and XL Airways, and actor Colin Firth wrote to *The Independent* and *The Guardian* protesting

that the government was 'conniving at murder'.

Although, unlike Iraq, DRC is not directly occupied by British and US troops, the British Labour government is still keen to peddle the myth that it is a safe place, following the election last November of President Joseph Kabila after a war that had ravaged the country since 1998 and in which over four million people died. While the British media, when it mentioned it at all, reported the war as an 'ethnic' war, this was not true. DRC has the world's largest deposits of copper, cobalt, coltan and cadmium, as well as large quantities of chrome, timber, tin, rubber, oil, uranium, germanium, dia-

FRFI interviewed two Congolese refugees, Yannick and Dems after a mass protest outside Dallas Court reporting centre in Salford which followed the charter flight deportation.

What is your view about the British government's deportation of asylum seekers to Congo?

To deport people into the hands of the people who have killed five million people is inhuman. Britain is picking on soft targets as a present to Kabila and to prevent Congolese demonstrations informing the British people about what is happening in DRC.

What is your message to the British people?

Everyone wants to be in their country if there's peace – no one will choose to be here without their family. The fact we are here shows that there must be a problem in Congo. There is a war in our country. We ran away from people who want to kill us. There's no peace in our country that's why we are here.

Britain says Congo is safe. What do you think?

If Congo is safe as the British government says, why are they going to Maheba refugee camp in Solwezi, Zambia and bringing refugees [via GPP – see main article] to live in Sheffield, Bolton, Hull and Rochdale? This is a contradiction. And again, why is there no UN tribunal in Congo? Five million people have died. This is genocide. Britain is asking for a war crimes tribunal in Darfur, Sudan, but not in Congo? This is very shameful.

Tony Blair claims to be a champion of Africa. What's your message to him?

Blair recently apologised for slavery. I say to him, don't apologise for something that he did not do, but apologise for what he did in Iraq and Congo. This is hypocrisy to apologise. Does he expect someone to apologise for him in 200 years time?

monds and gold and the war was for control of these resources. According to a 2003 UN report, high level political, military and business networks were involved in the organised theft of DRC's mineral resources, and by 2002 had transferred at least \$5 billion of state mining assets to private companies, including 18 British firms such as Anglo American, De Beers, Afrimex and Barclays Bank. Since his election Kabila has signed lucrative contracts with multinational companies, many of which have British links.

In a ridiculous twist of government policy, just one month before Britain kicked these 40 Congolese asylum seekers out, a number of families and individuals from DRC were brought into Britain through the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) and allowed to settle with refugee status in various parts of the country; 77 were settled in Motherwell in Scotland. GPP allows for in-country asylum applications and is designed to prevent people arriving in Britain and claiming asylum; however the annual total allowed in from all countries is 500.



Demonstration at Home Office, 26 February, organised by Congo Support Project and FRFI

Mass deportations

Britain has made regular use of charter flight deportations since 2001. Up until the end of January 2006, 12,956 individuals had been removed on 320 flights at a cost of between £1,226,972 and £1,968,025 per annum. In the following year (February 2006-January 2007) there were 64 flights; the major-

Organising against immigration raids in the US

La Migra esta en el Canal!... La Migra esta en el Canal!

The streets are empty. Children are afraid if they go to school, their parents will no longer be there when they return. Workers are afraid to go to work; scared they may not see their loved ones again. Many families are too afraid even to go out to get food.

No, this isn't Baghdad, but the Canal district of San Rafael in Marin, an immigrant stronghold in the heart of the wealthiest county in the United States. The terrorists responsible are the 'Migra', the Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement who, as part of the cynically named 'Operation Return to Sender', are harassing and deporting immigrant workers across the US.

The Migra have been slinking into the Canal in the early mornings, pretending they are police: 'The neighbours have complained about the noise', 'Is this your car?' They drag people out of cars, burst into homes turning children out of bed, threatening them with flashlights, questioning them about their parents. Children as young as seven have been taken away for questioning.

Children have been left alone to fend for themselves – calling hotlines asking for help, staying away from school – or marooned at school if their parents have been kidnapped from work, unable to collect them. Babies, separated from their mother's milk, have been hospitalised with dehydration.

In Marin alone 65 people have been arrested – although only five were named on the warrants; 23 have been deported. Others are back in the Canal, under house arrest, tracked by electronic bracelets.

But the fightback is beginning. Hundreds took to the streets in protest in San Rafael, most of them children. The local mayor and civic leaders, Democratic politicians and other dignitaries condemn the raids, although we know they won't do anything serious to defend immigrants.

Protest is also taking place outside the US. Guatemala has been bled dry by US imperialism and 10% of its population is in the US. When Bush visited in March he was taken aback to find even the Guatemalan President denounced US immigration raids and tens of thousands protested against them in the streets of the capital.

Venceremos!

Steve Palmer, US correspondent

Solidarity with asylum seekers

Uprising at Campsfield Immigration prison

On 14 March guards at Campsfield Detention Centre tried to drag an Algerian detainee from his room to deport him. Other detainees tried to prevent this and a revolt ensued. Thirty-five police officers and a dozen prison officers carrying shields were sent into Campsfield in response. According to Immigration Minister Liam Byrne, 60 of the 200 detainees at Campsfield have now been transferred to other detention centres.

Tragedy and resistance in Scotland

On 7 March Uddhav Bhandari doused himself in petrol and set himself alight at

the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal in Glasgow's Bothwell Street. The father of two fled Nepal six years ago but was facing a second immigration hearing which could have led to him being sent back. He died on 19 March, the latest victim of the Home Office's brutal asylum and immigration policy.

On the very day Uddhav set himself on fire, 80 asylum seekers and supporters demonstrated against the recent deportations to DRC outside the same building. Militant speeches condemned British and French imperialism for pouring arms into Africa and making ceaseless wars, while at the same time attacking the people forced to flee from these conflicts.