

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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CAPITALISM ON THE ROCKS

All over Britain, from 13 to 17 September, queues of people desperate to withdraw their savings from Northern Rock bank demonstrated deep distrust of authority and the clear belief that whoever the British government represents, it isn't ordinary people. After watching the Labour government's enthusiastic encouragement of finance capital, of extravagant borrowing and lending while a minority benefit, ordinary working people no longer believe what politicians say. Only when all deposits were guaranteed by the government did the queues disperse. STEVE PALMER explains the tremors that are shaking the system.

Why Northern Rock? Traditional building societies would accept deposits from customers, then use these as a basis for mortgage lending. Northern Rock pursued a different strategy of borrowing wholesale from the capital markets to finance its lending. The ratio of borrowing to assets was over 70%. Close behind Northern Rock stand the Alliance and Leicester, and Bradford and Bingley, both with ratios of around 50%. Northern Rock was relying on short-term financing to

support its long-term loans, but when the credit crisis struck, it could no longer find lenders to renew its debts, driving it into a crisis, setting it on the hunt for funds. The Bank of England was asked to step in and the queues formed.

Normally, when the poor and unemployed are really suffering and need help, capitalists blather on about the 'free market', attack 'state interference' and indignantly condemn welfare 'handouts' and 'the nanny state'.

They justify their monster salaries, bonuses and profits by pointing to the 'risks' they take with 'their' money. Yet the moment their billions are under threat, they run to the government, squealing to be bailed out. So, although both Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, and his US counterpart, Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank, the US central bank, initially resisted taking action, they were both forced to change course, King having to execute a particularly sharp U-turn.

'Maybe our boy has righted the ship' enthused Robert Toll, CEO of the largest US luxury homebuilder, in obvious relief on 19 September. 'Our boy' Ben Bernanke had just cut the Federal Funds Rate from 5.25% to 4.75%. Only weeks ago, Wall Street insiders were deriding Bernanke as an 'academic outsider', 'out of touch with reality'. Brokers literally cheered and the New York Stock Exchange leapt some 350 points on the news. What a difference a day makes, particularly when it brings such gifts!

Now, with the rate cut, the world's stock exchanges have leapt upwards,

the parasites are smiling once more and the day of reckoning has been postponed. But nagging questions remain: how has the US subprime mortgage crisis wormed its way onto the high streets of Britain? Who else is going to be affected and how? Is this rate cut the end of this panic? Can the capitalists contain this and keep expanding the market for ever?

The mortgage crisis

FRFI readers know that the real culprit is capitalist imperialism and its contradictions. In FRFI 198, we described in detail how the massive expansion of credit, which keeps capitalism afloat, has resulted in a speculative bubble in the US housing market; how aggressive lenders have made millions of subprime mortgage loans, many of which are going to default. The US working class, of course, is bearing the brunt: over 100 mortgage lenders have evaporated, throwing more than 50,000 financial workers out of work and a similar number of construction workers, many of them undocumented immigrants.

According to Realtytrac, in August there were 243,947 foreclosure filings, up 36% from July and 115% from a year ago. A higher proportion were bank repossession, meaning that the properties are going back to the banks, instead of being sold off. House sales in California were down by 35%. Since millions of mortgages are going to 'reset' - increase interest rates - in the next 18 months, this foreclosure rate of more than two million per year can be expected to rise. All indications point to declining house prices. Hovnanian Enterprises - a large homebuilding company - sold 2,100 houses in a weekend 'Sale of the Century' - almost as many as in the previous three months - but only after slashing prices by up to \$100,000. George Bush's promised reforms will only help some 80,000 of the most creditworthy homeowners - when there are millions of mortgages about to reset. So we can expect continuing upsets for the credit system from mortgage-backed securities. Nothing 'our boy' Bernanke can do is going to alter that.

continued on page 3

Welcome...

'Modern capitalist society is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.' Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Crisis. This is the dirty word that the capitalists dare not whisper, but it is the word that best describes what lies ahead. Capitalism is an economic system riven with contradictions that it is unable to resolve. It relies on the need to produce more and more profit. This means higher degrees of exploitation, extension of credit and greater debt. This accumulation cannot go on indefinitely, so what is the result? Crisis. Full-blown crisis for the capitalist system. This is the inevitable result of the laws of capitalism.

The world economic system is not yet at crisis point but massive cracks are already evident. The sub-prime mortgage crash that has gutted many US financial houses has claimed its first major victim this side of the Atlantic. The bank Northern Rock has been brought to its knees after running to the Bank of England (see pages 1 & 3). Northern Rock's customers only stopped closing their accounts when the government stepped in and guaranteed their savings. But how exposed are other banks and how can the government act as guarantor to all? In an attempt to stave off crisis both the Federal Reserve and the Bank of England will toy with interest rates, shift a few funds around and speak of calm instead of chaos. If enough people keep their heads in the sand the forthcoming crisis may just not happen. Purple pigs may also fly to Pluto.

Capitalism in its highest stage develops into imperialism. This is a system where major capitalist countries export capital abroad in order to seek greater returns. It is this exploitation of the majority of the world's people and resources that allows the capitalist system to grow, dominate and delay the inevitable crisis. The only problem, from the imperialists' perspective, is that people will not sit back and allow themselves to be exploited and robbed forever without a fight. As a result a key characteristic of imperialism is the reliance on brute force and military might. This aggression is most evident in Iraq, home to one of the largest resources of oil in the world. For over four years the people of Iraq have bravely resisted their brutal occupation. This resistance has recently forced the ignominious retreat of British troops from Basra Palace. Neither the US or Britain have any intention of leaving Iraq altogether and they will keep military bases in the country, having a watchful



The Russian Revolution: an example for the future

eye over the entire Middle East (see pages 6 and 7). Close to Iraq imperialism still has a trusty ally in Israel, where the Zionist state continues to brutalise the Palestinian people and seeks to divide them at every opportunity (see page 4).

Crisis of course has always existed. Rome was not built in a day, nor was it brought down in a night. Its supremacy decayed and was eroded over time as debt and discord grew at home, while its armies became overstretched abroad. Conquest is an expensive business – a necessary one for imperialism, but it has to bring dividends, it must pay for itself. The reality of Rome over-reaching itself is now coming true for the US empire as it seeks to maintain its global hegemony in an increasingly divided and competitive imperialist world. The economic crisis is becoming a political crisis of the system too (see page 5).

It is not necessarily the fate of humanity to continuously live out destructive cycles. Capitalism cannot overcome its contradictions, despite the protestations of some of its apologists (see page 12). We need to overcome it, smash it and replace it. It is only socialism that can free us from the barbarity and insecurity that capitalism creates. We should learn from the legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution which emancipated the working class in Russia (see page 10). We should also turn to the ideas of Che Guevara, who was executed 40 years ago this month, for guidance on the economic transition and evolution in consciousness that is necessary to build socialism (see pages 8 and 9). Che's ideas are no mere theory, they are being revived and developed in Cuba and throughout Latin America.

Here in Britain it is our duty to learn from Che's ideas and build a society free from the misery and suffering of this crisis-ridden system. See page 14 at the back of this paper to find out about the important work we have been doing and how to join us in action.

Burma: people on the march

As we go to press, the outcome of the mass uprising against the tyrannical military junta in Burma remains unclear. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in protest against a regime infamous for its brutality against the poor and the indigenous populations of the country.

The spark for the uprising was a decision by the junta on 15 August to double the price of diesel and to raise the price of gas by 500%. As a consequence, the price of essential food items rose by 35%. Demonstrations started on 19 August and then swelled until on 24 September marches were held in dozens of towns and cities, and an estimated 100,000 protested in the capital Rangoon. Led by Buddhist monks, marchers have been shot down, tear-gassed, clubbed and arrested.

This is not the first time the Burmese people have risen up. In both 1986 and 1988 mass protests calling for democratisation were met with savage repression and thousands were killed on the streets. Following this the Burmese army established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), now renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Under SLORC, the country was completely militarised. Campaigns were waged

against rural ethnic communities as they fought to defend their land. Thousands were murdered each year and a million people displaced. A regime of slave labour was established to undertake infrastructure projects; according to John Pilger, some two million people have been forced to work on building roads, railways, airports and gas pipelines and tourist facilities. The UN Commission on Human Rights reported in 1994 that 'torture, summary and arbitrary executions, forced labour, abuse of women...oppression of ethnic and religious minorities' were 'commonplace'.

This did not stop western oil companies from signing up to exploit Burma's gas resources. In 1995, a consortium led by US company Unocal and France's Total signed a deal to extract gas off the Burmese coast and pipe it across indigenous lands in southern Burma. Forced labour was used to build the pipeline as SLORC brutally cleared the area it was to run through. In 1996, Labour shadow Foreign Office minister Derek Fatchett supported sanctions; when in office a year later he said the government would 'continue to provide British companies with routine advice about doing business in Burma'. As it is, many US and British companies have continued to deal with the Burmese



Demonstrators have been shot down, tear-gassed, clubbed and arrested

regime through subsidiaries in Thailand and Singapore.

Today 90% of the population live below the UN poverty line of \$1 per day; malnourishment is endemic and next to nothing is spent on healthcare so that the infant mortality rate is a staggering 100 per 1,000 live births. According to an unemployed economist, 'living standards have gone down and down. The middle classes have become poor, and the poor have become destitute' (from *Sydney Morning Herald*).

The struggle in Burma has now become a battle between the imperialist powers. George Bush's and Gordon Brown's concern for democracy has everything to do with Burma's geo-strategic position, its natural resources and its relationship to China, and nothing to do with the interests of the mass of the Burmese people. Britain and the US are looking to the

bourgeois National League of Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi to replace the SPDC junta. The NLD, which has a straightforward neo-liberal programme, is worried by the demonstrations; spokesperson Sann Aung issued a statement on 25 September saying 'We're not calling for the junta to step down. We don't want it to lose face. We want it to engage in dialogue and a political settlement with Aung San Suu Kyi'. Such temporising followed the 1988 demonstrations; the consequence was elections in 1990 whose result (an 82% landslide victory for the NLD) SLORC promptly disregarded.

FRFI completely supports the struggle of the poor and oppressed of Burma and their right to determine their future free from military rule and any external interference.

Robert Clough

Health matters

Labour's promises

Every year, over 1,600 people die from MRSA in England and Wales and over 3,800 people die from clostridium difficile. An investigation into two outbreaks of clostridium difficile at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in 2004 and 2005 that killed 30 people determined that the deaths were avoidable. The report found a lack of side rooms, a shortage of nurses, poor infection control practice and a poor ward environment. It concluded that the Trust compromised the care and safety of the patients due to the priority it gave to controlling finance, reconfiguring services and meeting targets.

Prime Minister Brown has promised to rid all hospitals of MRSA and clostridium difficile over the next twelve months by restoring their original state of cleanliness. His idea of a 'deep clean' does not address understaffing, reduced bed capacity and bed over-occupancy, staff education or clinical practice, all critical to attaining the objective.

Labour's record

Almost 4,000 babies were stillborn in 2006 in Britain and many of them were avoidable. In the last ten years the stillbirth rate has remained unchanged: 5.4 per 1,000 births in 2006 with regional variations showing London to have the highest rate at 6.3. Only four countries in Western Europe have a worse rate. The Perinatal Institute has recently revealed

that women in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to have a stillbirth as those living in the least deprived areas.

Births have risen by 12.5 per cent since 2001 but midwife numbers have risen just 4.5 per cent since 1997. Almost half of all midwives are due to retire in the next ten years and the Royal College of Midwives predicts that an extra 5,000 will be needed by 2012 in order to reach government targets. Meanwhile the government has just announced that it is ending bursaries for trainee midwives.

The Homerton hospital in east London, guilty of closing ten maternity beds in the past year and with a shortage of qualified midwives has proudly announced the introduction of volunteer labour support workers – women who give their time for free to support women in labour. Cheap and cheerful, but no substitute for qualified midwives.

Private Finance Initiative

'The NHS is now a tenant in hospitals it once owned, leasing back buildings and services from private sector landlords at astronomical rents that are currently consuming £500 million a year and will increase exponentially.' Allyson Pollock, head of the Centre for International Health Policy.

For almost every hospital built under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), three hospitals will close and bed closures and cuts in staff are par for the course. The government says

the NHS has had unprecedented funding but whereas administrative costs of the NHS used to be 5-6% of total spending, now they are 15-20% of the NHS budget (over £12 billion per year). These funds are squandered on the transaction costs of the market: invoicing, accounting, auditing, setting up and monitoring projects, management consultants, financial rescue teams, marketing and advertising, lawyers and communications and so on.

Chaos when money drives a health system

The icon on the Electronic Patient Record (EPR) screen to

complete the computerised check out of a person when they leave the A&E department at the Homerton hospital is a little sack labelled 'moneybag'. A crude reminder that generating income is a priority.

For financial reasons, the children's ward at the Homerton no longer has a ward clerk. The work a ward clerk does allows nurses to devote more time to patient care. Now nurses' duties include answering the telephone and door entry-phone, and many other tasks unrelated to their clinical work. Ironically, the ward clerk had ensured that entries on EPR were up-to-date and accurate so that the hospital received the money it was owed.

Hannah Callier

FRFI Fighting Fund near £10,000 target

Thanks to the efforts of readers and supporters, we are on the verge of meeting our fundraising target for this year. With £9,051 actually received, and a further £1,028 pledged, we will have raised £10,079. If you have pledged money, please send it in as soon as possible and if you have not made a donation there is still time to bump up the final total.

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

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CAPITALISM ON THE ROCKS



continued from page 1

Commercial Paper

But what about the wider liquidity and credit crisis? To understand what's going on, we need to understand the market for 'Commercial Paper' (CP). 'Commercial Paper' sounds dull and unremarkable – and that's the way it used to be until recently. CP has its origins back in the earliest days of US capitalism. In other countries, banks were nationwide institutions. This enabled surplus funds in one part of the country (say from harvest sales in East Anglia) to be lent out to capitalists in other parts of the country (manufacturers in Birmingham or Manchester, perhaps). By contrast, banks in the US were restricted to a single state. This limited the ability of capitalists to circulate surplus funds, restricting the availability of credit elsewhere. In order to avoid high local interest rates, capitalists might raise funds in New York by selling CP – essentially IOUs. CP is unsecured debt, dependent on the history and reputation of the borrower. CP was typically used for short-term funding to cover day-to-day operations: a company might need money to pay expenses such as this week's payroll or to purchase raw materials but not receive payment for products until the following week and have to borrow to bridge the gap for a few days.

CP is generally cheaper than a bank loan. Since it is short-term (falling due within nine months, usually within days or weeks) it isn't subject to scrutiny by the securities regulator, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). While CP is unsecured, borrowers still have to maintain a line of credit with a bank as insurance. In the supposedly unlikely event that it cannot buy back the paper, the issuer turns to the bank which has to pay up. Normally this is just insurance, and never gets called down.

CP and arbitrage

The lower rate of interest on CP aroused the interest of 'arbitrageurs' – capitalists who profit from the difference in prices between different mar-

kets. They buy and sell large volumes of some commodity simply to profit from the slight price differences. In the financial world, they seek to profit from slight difference between two interest rates – the so-called 'spread' between them. Financial firms became involved from the 1920s after General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) started to use CP to finance consumer car loans. GMAC would borrow at the low CP rate and lend the money to the customer to buy the car, charging a higher rate and making money on the difference in rates. This kind of CP is called 'financial' CP, by contrast with the 'non-financial' or 'industrial' CP which originated the market.

Starting in the mid-1980s, banks started to offer CP type financing to their corporate customers, secured against that company's trade receivables (expected payments). These became known as 'Asset Backed' CP (ABCP). With deregulation ABCP has gone wild: on 8 August, total value of ABCP peaked at \$1,174.3bn – 53.7% of a CP total of \$2,186.6bn. Much of this reflects creative 'financial engineering' where banks have created

'conduits' financed with CP and 'Structured Investment Vehicles' (SIVs) which use CP and medium term debt to support a portfolio of high yield assets.

Deregulation in the 1990s opened new opportunities for financial ingenuity, but banking regulations made it impossible for banks to engage directly in these more exotic activities. Banks were therefore forced to set up other entities to pursue them. The conduits and SIVs they created are 'off Balance Sheet' – do not appear in the banks' assets or liabilities. Indeed, they are frequently described as 'bankruptcy remote', meaning that if they fail, that is not going to directly impact the bank.

Although the banks tried to push risk out of the front door, they have quietly allowed it to creep back in, round the side, by providing lines of credit for ABCP. Typically CP matures and is often immediately reissued – 'rolled over' – without problem for a further period. However, some \$300bn plus of ABCP assets contain securitized mortgages. We explained in FRI 198 why these are turning out to be of uncertain value, even worthless. This reduces the value of assets dramatically. Since the SIVs no longer have adequate assets to back the Commercial Paper they have issued, lenders are refusing to buy their CP when it is due so it cannot be rolled over. By 12 September outstanding ABCP had fallen to \$945.1bn – down \$229bn and falling. So the conduits and SIVs are turning to the banks and activating the line of credit. When that happens, the 'off balance-sheet' liabilities suddenly get dumped on the banks' books and then it's the banks' turn to come up with the financing. They suck up available funds, creating a liquidity problem: there's a shortage of loanable funds, leading to cutbacks in lending, increased rates and tighter conditions.

This spilled over from the most speculative ABCP to the whole Commercial Paper market, threatening to gum up day-to-day functioning of some of the world's best known corporations, like Volkswagen and Sainsbury's. They rely on CP for

working capital so they can operate without interruptions, and some have been forced to go to the banks for more expensive and less flexible loans. The Federal Reserve was forced to step in, and reduced the rate it charges for emergency borrowing by banks – the discount rate.

That cut relieved the liquidity crisis somewhat and has enabled the CP market for non-financial CP to keep flowing. Wall Street has been clamouring for Bernanke's cut in the Federal Funds Rate, the rate charged to banks needing overnight money to meet statutory reserve requirements. The idea is that this would somehow unclog the pipes and get credit flowing again. There are problems with this. Tweaking interest rates is not going to change the risk of dubious mortgage backed securities: a batch of canned food contaminated with botulism is no healthier at half the price. Subprime mortgage based financial assets are just far too risky and their value so uncertain that small changes in the interest rate will fail to coax lenders into buying them.

The CP crisis is over; the conduits and SIVs will be reorganized and their assets revalued or sold over the next few months. This will be bumpy, yet not fatal. The biggest speculators have been bailed out and will gear up to inflate the bubble even more, probably in the commodities market. Bernanke has bought time – at the expense of inflating the bubble further.

Before long another puncture will appear, and similar problems will come to the fore. The fault lines are already visible, though where exactly it will fracture we can't tell.

- Leasing: 31% of business equipment in the US is leased, compared to around 10% in Britain, and is therefore particularly vulnerable to credit problems. Important areas of leasing in the US are aviation, information technology and new vehicles.

- Owners of apartment blocks, offices, and retail premises are starting to report financing constraints of various kinds.

- The fall in property prices will cut state and local property taxes. At the same time municipal bonds ('munis') are encountering difficulties in the market: there has been difficulty selling munis at full price and there have been some sell offs, driving prices further down. Cuts in state and local services can be expected.

- Apparently sovereign nations have been digging deep into sub-prime debt. The vaunted growth of a number of ex-socialist states is simply credit-card capitalism built on cheap credit. Latvia is running a massive current account deficit of 30% of GDP and has had its credit ratings cut. Lithuania, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria are in a similar, if less severe, state. They are highly dependent on the rate of exchange to keep loans coming: any sharp falls, and their ability to repay will immediately be challenged.

- There is a hangover of some \$350bn of debt needed to finance leveraged buyouts – half the debt for the Boots deal is still stuck in the banks. Deals have been cancelled, delayed and repriced. These debts too are showing up on bank balance sheets now.

- Loans which earlier would have been securitized and sold off a few months ago are remaining 'warehoused' with their originating institution, stalling part of the credit 'pipeline'.

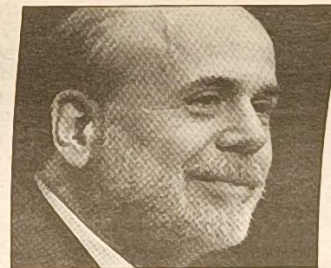
The 'real economy'

For weeks bourgeois commentators with serious faces have been assuring us that this is 'just a problem in the housing sector', 'just a liquidity problem', 'just a problem in the money markets'. Something called the 'real economy' is just fine, 'the fundamentals are fine', that 'the world economy is growing at a record rate'. By 'real economy' they seem to mean where serious things, like cuckoo clocks and

cluster bombs and wall-mounted, plasma-screen TVs, are being made, rather than frivolous stuff like banks and stock exchanges.

But the 'real economy' is also a money-making economy: that the money and credit system are not just froth on top of the 'real economy' but the glue, nuts and bolts, the connecting rods, the lubrication, which hold it together and keep it running and are just as much part of the 'real economy' as hammers and sickles, factories and farms. So when the banking and credit system have problems, so does the real economy.

This 'real economy' is in real trouble.* In the last 50 years, we can see two dramatic shifts in the US economy. First, it has become more parasitic. In 1951, interest and dividends – money paid to owners of capital who take no part in production and just live off its profits – was just over 27% of the total profits plus interest of US capital. This grew gradually during the 1960s and 1970s to reach 64% in 1981 and to over 70% in 2001. This is a colossal shift from capitalist industry to capitalist idleness and consumption, which is of course reflected daily in the consumerism depicted in TV advertising. Second, the share of profits and interest coming from abroad has increased over the same period. Income from abroad (property income, royalties, license fees, other services) has grown from around 10% in 1961, to over 46% (second quarter, 2007). In other words, the US economy has grown more and more parasitic – and more and more parasitic on the rest of the world. It gets even worse: the US economy is not just in real trouble, it's in real, REAL trouble: the growth in income from abroad, as a share of profits and interest, grew from 'just' 31% in 2002 to 46% this year, largely due to the decline in the dollar against other currencies. US

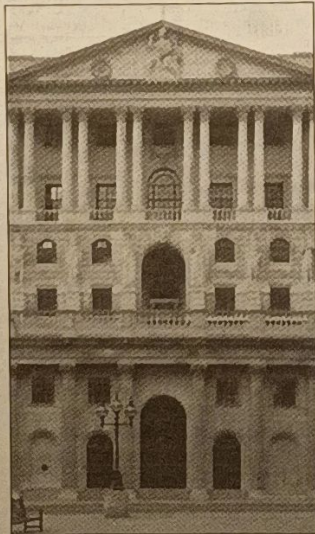


Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank

non-financial corporate net borrowing grew steadily from just \$12.8bn in 2002 to \$625.9bn (annual rate) in the second quarter of 2007. As a proportion of non-residential fixed investment by nonfinancial corporations (a measure of investment in 'productive' capital), this borrowing shot up from 1.4% to 58.2%, meaning that the continued growth of productive investment is increasingly dependent on credit. In short, in the last five years, the parasitism, the dependency on international parasitism – imperialism – and on borrowing to keep the US economy going has intensified.

If this were a piece of machinery, being run under these stresses, it would be screaming, smoking and glowing red hot. If this were an individual, their financial adviser would be giving them a stern lecture about impending disaster and bankruptcy. But this is US imperialism, so it just drops interest rates a little, pops open a few more bottles of champagne, turns up the music, shoots more Iraqis, deports more undocumented workers, puts it all on the tab and keeps partying as if this is never going to stop. ■

* All figures calculated from internet accessible National Income and Product Accounts and International Transactions tables at www.bea.gov and the latest US Federal Reserve Bank Flow of Funds accounts at www.federalreserve.gov/releases/z1/Tables/F1,F6.



The Bank of England – forced to offer guarantees

The Palestinian people's struggle has always had the potential to detonate a wider revolutionary struggle for democratic rights across the Middle East: it has become the symbol and hope of all the poor and oppressed in the region. A victory for the revolutionary struggle of the Palestinians would be catastrophic for the interests of imperialism and act as a beacon of hope for the oppressed millions of the Middle East. For this reason imperialism and its Zionist henchmen have taken every step to prevent it.

Over these seven years of struggle Israeli forces have killed around 4,600 Palestinians, including 967 children, and injured some 32,000. In August this year alone, the Zionists killed 52 Palestinians, 12 of them children, three of whom were blown up by a missile. On 19 September, the Israeli Security Cabinet declared the Gaza Strip to be an 'enemy entity'. It said that there would be 'limitations on imports to the Gaza Strip and a reduction in the supply of fuel and electricity'. Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, on a flying visit to the region for talks with Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas to prepare the ground for the US's proposed Peace Conference in November, agreed: ' Hamas is indeed a hostile entity. It is a hostile entity to the US as well'.

The declaration of the Israeli Security Cabinet is the latest stage in the policy of isolation Israel and the imperialists have been implementing against Hamas and the people of Gaza since Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections at the beginning of 2006. This policy has escalated since Hamas took control of Gaza in June. The situation in Gaza is dire: since June 75,000 workers in the private sector have been made redundant; unemployment rates are now a staggering 75%. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reported in July that 70% of Gazans, totalling some 900,000 people, now rely on food aid. The main border crossings at Rafah and Karni have been virtually closed by Israel since 12 June; Karni being the main entry point for commercial and humanitarian supplies into Gaza.

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum was clear in his analysis of the strategy of Israel and the imperialists: 'They aim to starve our people and force them to accept humiliating formulas that could emerge from the so-called November Peace Conference...they want the Palestinian people to revolt against Hamas...but the Palestinian people are supporting Hamas by all means because Hamas continues to refuse to recognise this occupation or end its resistance.'

Israel and Fatah co-ordinate attacks on Hamas

The imperialists have been ably assisted in their attack on Hamas by the puppet Palestinian Authority (PA) based in Ramallah and run by Abbas and his pro-imperialist Fatah faction. On 19 August Gaza suffered an electricity blackout when the European Union stopped paying for fuel which supplies Gaza's only electricity generator. The PA provided the excuse for stopping the payments by spreading the false rumour that Hamas was going to tax people for their use of electricity. The PA Cabinet Secretary said that the electricity would be cut off in order to drive people to rebel against Hamas. Fatah also used its control of PA finances to threaten PA employees in the Gaza Strip, telling them that their pay would stop if they didn't support Fatah's call for a general strike against Hamas on 9 September. The strike was a response to Hamas' actions two days earlier in dispersing Fatah supporters who were using Friday prayers as a platform to

Seven years of repression and resistance

The seventh anniversary of the start of the second Intifada on 29 September 2000 sees the Palestinian movement at one of its lowest ebbs ever, with Fatah openly acting as an agent of imperialism and Hamas, its anti-imperialist wing, isolated internationally. Imperialism has always been determined to deny the Palestinian people their right to national self-determination, all the more so since the invasion of Iraq. The reason for this is the strategic importance of the Middle East for imperialism. BOB SHEPHERD reports.



Palestinians stopped at Qalondaya checkpoint, East Jerusalem

foment opposition to Hamas. In the event, most PA schools were closed by the strike as were many businesses and markets.

At the beginning of September, Hamas issued a report covering the period between 11 June and 31 August, detailing the attacks Fatah forces have carried out on its members and supporters in the West Bank. The report listed 639 arrests, including elected officials such as mayors and councillors. There were 36 attacks where Fatah forces opened fire on individuals and there were 163 assaults on universities and their students. A number of Hamas offices and houses of its members were attacked and burnt down, including the Ramallah home of the speaker of the PLC, Dr Aziz Dewaik, who is imprisoned by the Israelis. The morning of the start of Ramadan on 12 September saw Fatah forces raiding mosques in the West Bank and arresting Hamas supporters. At the same time, in what was clearly a co-ordinated action, Israeli forces raided the West Bank arresting 18 Palestinians. The Palestinian Prisoners' Society stated that Israel had abducted 900 people from Hebron this year alone.

Fatah and Israel's attack on Hamas is not just targeted at individual members and supporters; it is aimed at destroying the whole social infrastructure of the organisation. Following on from Abbas's decree that revoked the licences of all NGOs operating in the West Bank, forcing them all to reapply, Prime Minister Fayyad issued an order closing 103 named charities and social welfare institutions that he linked with Hamas.

On 11 September the military wings of Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees launched a rocket attack on an Israeli military base north of the Gaza Strip, injuring 69 soldiers. The Israeli response was, however, low-key as the government

realised that an all-out onslaught on Gaza would have been a unifying factor for the mass of Palestinians. The Israeli Deputy Defence Minister declared such an action might force Abbas to stop co-operating with Israel: 'When the

Illegal settlement of the West Bank continues

Throughout the Intifada, illegal Zionist settlements in Jerusalem and on the West Bank have continued to expand in defiance of the 1993 Oslo peace accords. About 40% of the West Bank is now taken up by Israeli infrastructure. This includes settlements, outposts, network of roads, roadblocks, checkpoints, military bases, nature reserves, closed military areas and the Apartheid Wall.

Today, about 450,000 Israeli settlers live in the Occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem - 57% in East Jerusalem. Between 1987 and 2007 the settler population increased by 150%, a rate of growth three times that of the Israeli population and twice that of the 2.4 million Palestinians in the West Bank. There are 149 settlements, nine industrial sites and over 100 outposts, of which 60% have been established since 2001.

A July 2007 report by Peace Now reveals that 90% of the settlements go beyond the area the Zionist authorities have illegally assigned them, an area which already constitutes more than 40% of the West Bank. Of this, only 3% is actually built up. Thus Ma'ali Adumim, the largest of all settlements, is 76% empty and unused,

so that although its population is less than a tenth of Tel Aviv's, the area it covers is almost the same (48 sq km). In the Jordan Valley the disproportion is greater. For example, the area assigned to Kibbutz Mitzpeh Shalem, with a population of 180, is over 35 sq kms. In most cases settlements are built on private Palestinian land.



Israel provides material incentives for Israelis to live in these settlements. These include housing subsidies, preferential loans



House in Gaza destroyed by Israeli forces, September 2007

President of the Palestinian Authority stands in the same trench as Israel in confronting Palestinian extremists that must be held on to.'

In preparation for any new Palestinian elections and in an attempt to strengthen the chances of Fatah, Abbas issued a decree at the beginning of September changing the existing electoral system from a mixture of proportional and direct election to one that is purely proportional. This makes the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem one electoral block. In a blatant attempt to exclude Hamas from contesting any forthcoming elections the decree also stipulates that any candidate must recognise the Fatah-dominated Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas has never been part of the PLO and the only purpose of Fatah's recent promotion of the organisation is to undermine Hamas' position in Gaza.

Fatah's role is currently being supported by the PLO left parties DFLP and PFLP. Both groups have agreed to be part of the new Commission for National Activity set up under the umbrella of the PLO. One of the first acts of this Commission was to support the 9 September general strike.

PFLP leader Kayed Al Ghoul told *Al Jazeera* that the strike was to bring Hamas back into the Palestinian national movement: 'Last Friday, democracy was attacked...We want to reinforce democracy, multiplicity, respect for other opinions, freedom of expression and the use of peaceful means to express one's positions'. In practice, however, it meant the PFLP was being drawn in behind Fatah.

The November 'peace conference'

The US-sponsored Middle East Peace Conference scheduled to start in November is an attempt to promote Abbas as a statesman who can deliver for the beleaguered Palestinian people. In reality everyone knows that there will be no agreement on the return of Palestinian refugees, the dismantling of the Zionist settlements in the West Bank, the pulling down of the Apartheid Wall or the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. However there will no doubt be a lot of hot air to give the impression that Abbas can deliver as he and Fatah are now in the forefront of imperialism's attack on the Palestinian people's revolutionary struggle for national self-determination. ■

and lower taxes. It has also created a network of roads which carve up the Occupied West Bank and link these settlements to one another and to Israel. Palestinians are either prevented from using these roads or have restricted access controlled by checkpoints. Along with the Apartheid Wall, these roads are a measure to achieve Zionist domination of the West Bank whilst forcing the Palestinian population into impoverished ghettos.

In order to complete their domination, Zionists have seized control of the natural resources of the West Bank, of which the most vital is water. 80% of the mountain aquifers supplying Israelis and Palestinians are located under the West Bank. However, 83% of the available water is used for the sole benefit of Israeli cities and settlements. Israeli water consumption is 350 litres per capita per day, compared to 60 litres per capita per day for Palestinians in the West Bank. The water consumption of Palestinians in the West Bank is 40 litres less than the minimum global standards set by the World Health Organisation.

The strategy of the Zionists is to continue the process of colonising the most fertile parts of the West Bank until they feel strong enough to annex them. PA collusion is giving them the breathing space they need to flout previous agreements and UN resolutions.

Manal Darwish

FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

Part four

On a burning platform

The US ruling class's attempt to achieve global domination following the collapse of the Soviet Union has increased the incidence of wars and likelihood of devastation in an already endangered world. In 2001 the US withdrew from the anti-ballistic missile treaty in pursuit of 'full spectrum dominance' on land and sea and in air and space. The US is the only state that deploys nuclear weapons abroad. On 17 January 2007 the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock from seven to five minutes to midnight. Midnight is the symbolic end of civilisation: Armageddon. The scientists explained that '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.' The scientists said proliferation of nuclear weapons, the US's proclaimed readiness to use nuclear weapons to destroy 'time urgent targets', the 26,000 nuclear weapons still held by the US and Russia and the 'dire threat to civilisation' posed by global warming weighed in their decision to move the clock hands forward. Atomic scientists know all too well about the militarisation of science. US and British soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan experience the limitations of relying on science and technology to win wars. Now economic crisis may undermine US ruling class ambitions. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

Analysing the First World War, Lenin said that 'World domination is...the substance of imperialist policy, of which imperialist war is the continuation'. When the socialist countries and Soviet Union collapsed, the US role as military bulwark for different imperialisms was removed; henceforth each imperialist power would seek its own advantage. Of course, this is always done in the name of defending civilisation, culture and country. The US ruling class intends to use military superiority to prevent any challenge whether global or regional from Europe, Japan, Russia, China or anybody else. Treaties signed when the Soviet Union existed, restraining US force, have been disregarded or rejected. The US has declared the right to use pre-emptive attacks, including nuclear attacks, on other nations.

Today the US has over 766 overseas bases containing a quarter of a million troops in about half the nations of the world. The US navy has 251 overseas naval bases and ports. In Iraq the US is building four major permanent bases which, when combined with Israeli forces, it judges should secure it continued domination of the Middle East. US military bases are stationed from Western Europe to the Chinese border; only Russia, Syria and Iran provide substantial zones free from US military presence.

Part one of *Five minutes to midnight* (FRFI 195) examined US and Israeli preparations for an attack on Iran, including the possibility of a nuclear attack. Part two (FRFI 196) looked at China's challenge to US attempts to gain space domination and European capitalism's tensions with the US over Iran. Part three (FRFI 198) explored the US need to establish regional allies to ensure its global reach. Here we report on the continuing threats to Iran and weaknesses in the imperialist armour.

War drums

North Korea closed its main nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in July and in return is to receive oil supplies. Discussions are planned to remove the



Russian President Putin and his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao observing joint military exercises in the Ural mountains

country from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, allowing North Korea access to low interest loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. North Koreans might conclude that the country's nuclear weapon test last year has paid dividends by ending the imperialists' attempt to squeeze the country in to submission. However, stories circulate in the bourgeois media accusing North Korea of supplying Syria with nuclear technology. On 20 September President Bush warned North Korea against nuclear proliferation.

On 6 September Syria accused Israel of bombing its territory. The *Observer* speculated that it might be a trial run for an attack on Iran, while the *Sunday Times* linked the incident to an attack on a Syrian nuclear weapons programme, using equipment supplied by North Korea. The media is used to ratchet up the threat against Iran and Syria. Neither Iran nor Syria has expressed any intention of building nuclear weapons, yet they are frequently accused of doing so. On 28 August the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) reported: 'The agency has been able to verify the non-diversion of the declared nuclear materials at the enrichment facilities in Iran and has therefore concluded that it remains in peaceful use.' Just as the IAEA's reports on Iraq were dismissed out-of-hand in 2002-03 by the US, so the US government dismissed this report. On

that very same day President Bush declared Iran to be 'the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism' and pledged to 'confront Tehran's murderous activities' - 'We will confront this danger before it is too late.' Within hours of Bush's speech a group of Iranian officials, guests of the Iraqi government, were seized in Baghdad and detained overnight by troops under US direction. The US state has said it intends to declare the 125,000 strong Iranian Revolutionary Guards, an Iranian state force, to be a 'terrorist organisation'. This will make them a target for US attack.

British troops have relocated close to the Iraqi border with Iran. Both the US and British military accuse Iran of involvement in attacks on their forces in Iraq. The US is sponsoring and equipping groups fighting the Iranian state within Iran. US B-2 stealth bombers have recently been refitted to carry 30,000-pound 'bunker-buster' bombs. Specialists warn of 'shock and awe' writ large, with up to 10,000 Iranian sites being targeted. Noam Chomsky says the US government is 'desperate... They might go for broke, and hope they can salvage something from the wreckage'. French Foreign Minister Kouchner said that if 'such a bomb is made... we must prepare ourselves for the worst... That is war, sir.' French President Sarkozy announced Iran 'is trying to equip itself with a nuclear bomb'. This united imperialist

pressure on Iran, with ever tightening financial sanctions, is intended to weaken the Iranian state and diminish its regional influence, which has grown with the imperialists' problems in Iraq and Israel's failure against Hizbollah in Lebanon last year.

Reasons to pause

US and British forces are already over-stretched and Iran has warned that it will retaliate if attacked. Any assault on Iran or Syria could provoke convulsions in Middle Eastern societies as anti-imperialist trends among the masses strengthen. Furthermore, oil prices went over \$80 a barrel on 13

arms sales as wanton interference in China's 'internal affairs' and the *People's Daily* warned of war with the US. It said the US was playing the 'Taiwan card' to 'constrain or restrict China': 'This indicates that once the situation across the Taiwan Strait is out of control, military clashes would likely phase in and the possible clashes between China and the US cannot be ruled out entirely.'

Lessons from Rome

US additional supplements, on top of rising military budgets, to fight the 'global war on terrorism' will amount to \$737 billion between 2001 and



US warships on exercise in the Bay of Bengal

September; attacking Iran may have dire consequences for an already fragile international capitalist economy. Disruption to oil flows from the Gulf and solidarity action from Venezuela and other oil producers could push oil prices well over \$100 a barrel. This will accelerate the tendency to recession in the US, European and Japanese economies and risk turning an economic crisis for capitalism into a political crisis.

There are other factors for the warmongers to consider. This August, as Russian President Putin revived long-range bomber patrols, reversing a 1991 decision to suspend them, Russian and Chinese soldiers engaged in a joint exercise in Russia's Ural mountains. On 2 August a submarine planted a Russian flag on the sea bed beneath the North Pole claiming the area as Russia's. The Arctic is thought to contain 25% of the world's oil and gas reserves plus gold, silver, diamonds, plutonium and other minerals. With the polar ice melting we can expect a scramble for these resources and control of the new sea lanes linking Europe and Asia. Russia continues to oppose US anti-ballistic missile systems being stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Together with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Russia belongs to the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation. This grouping met in August, Iran being given observer status, and the US was pointedly kept out. In the UN Security Council, Russia and China have opposed new sanctions against Iran. The combination of China and Russia with Iran has the potential to make the imperialists pause and to create a strong enough polarity to counter US hegemony. In August Russia started delivery of 50 anti-aircraft missiles to Syria; they are described as 'extremely accurate'.

China receives nearly 60% of its oil from the Middle East. Up to half the world's oil is estimated to travel through the Malacca Straits from the Indian Ocean towards East Asia. The US ruling class reckons this is a choke point for the Chinese economy. In September the US led the biggest naval exercise ever held in the Indian Ocean; warships from the US, India, Japan, Singapore and Australia manoeuvred in the Bay of Bengal. Also in September, the US announced plans to sell 12 anti-submarine aircraft and 144 anti-aircraft missiles to Taiwan. The Chinese government denounced the

2008. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars are now more expensive to the US than the Korean and Vietnam wars were. The accumulated US government budget deficit between 2001 and 2006 is \$1.23 trillion. US national debt is \$9 trillion and interest payments on it took \$406 billion in 2006. The US trade deficit exceeds \$800 billion a year. US indebtedness has been funded by other countries buying US dollar denominated assets. The US needs \$2.5 billion of such purchases each day. China now has \$1.3 trillion worth of foreign currency reserves and is a major purchaser of the US assets. On 8 August two senior Chinese government spokespeople said that Chinese holdings of US dollars and Treasury bonds 'contributes a great deal to maintaining the position of the dollar as a reserve currency' and if the US were to employ sanctions against China 'the Chinese central bank will be forced to sell dollars, which might lead to mass depreciation of the dollar'. This was a warning shot across the bows of the US ruling class. The world's central banks, led by China and Japan, sold 3.8% of their holdings of US debt during August. Central banks and others sold off a net \$9.4 billion of US Treasury and private bonds compared to net purchases of \$24.7 billion in June. Since Bush came to office in 2000 the dollar has depreciated 40% against the euro. The Chinese warning must be factored in to any consideration of attacking Iran or Syria. The US ruling class is running out of the means to pay for its global appetite.

The *Financial Times* (13 August 2007) carried the reflections of the US comptroller general, 'a non-partisan figure in charge of the Government Accountability Office, often described as the investigative arm of the US Congress'. 'The US government is on a "burning platform" of unsustainable policies and practices with fiscal deficits, chronic healthcare under-funding, immigration and overseas military commitments threatening a crisis if action is not taken soon... Drawing parallels with the end of the Roman empire Mr Walker warned there were "striking similarities" between America's current situation and the factors that brought down Rome, including "declining moral values and political civility at home, an over-confident and over-extended military in foreign lands and fiscal irresponsibility by the central government".'

IRAQ: bloody reality behind the lies

September's report by General Petraeus on the progress of the so-called 'surge' was always going to be ambiguous, for the reality is too obviously horrific. Accordingly Petraeus, commander of US forces in Iraq, claimed modest success in reducing sectarian violence and in preparing the Iraqi security forces so that he could plead more time was necessary for the 'surge' to work. Since the military aims of the 'surge' were vague, Petraeus's report was never going to give a clear judgement on the success or failure of the supposedly short-term strategy. He was left, therefore, to say that the undefined tasks were unfinished and so make the continuing US occupation of Iraq seem inevitable. The political purpose of the 'surge' was to give a new impetus to the occupation and defuse the mounting criticism of President Bush. In that sense, the 'surge' and Petraeus's report have done their job. JIM CRAVEN reports.

General Petraeus was clearly the man to tell the Bush administration what they wanted to hear. Following his much-lauded 'hearts and minds' campaign in Northern Iraq in 2003-4, he wrote, 'I see tangible progress. Iraqi elements are being rebuilt from the ground up. The institutions that oversee them are being re-established from the top down and Iraqi leaders are stepping forward.' As soon as Petraeus withdrew, the Iraqi forces he had trained and praised either deserted or joined the resistance.

US will stay in Iraq

Petraeus made some concessions to congressional concerns that the US army is over-stretched, by suggesting there could soon be a token withdrawal of troops and that numbers might be reduced to pre-surge levels by next summer. However, there was never any question that he would recommend a major withdrawal. The US cannot afford to do so, for military occupation of the region and control of its resources, particularly oil, is a crucial part of US imperialist global strategy to maintain economic hegemony against potential rivals such as Russia, China and the EU by the use or threat of military power. If the US is ever able to significantly reduce its forces in Iraq it will still keep substantial numbers at the big military bases it is building. Indeed, in a speech broadcast two days after Petraeus's report, President Bush argued for a continued troop presence 'beyond my presidency', adding: 'The success of a free Iraq is critical to the security of the United States.' Bush later compared Iraq with South Korea, where US troops have been stationed for over 50 years.

A series of reports leading up to that of Petraeus had prepared the ground for justifying the occupation. They variously claimed that Iraqi government forces needed continued Coalition assistance but were improving, that although the Iraqi police and Ministry of the Interior were 'plagued by dysfunction', 'uneven progress' was being made, but overall Iraqi security forces were unlikely to be able to take over in the next 12 to 18 months.

Much was made of the situation in Anbar Province as an example of what the 'surge' could achieve. President

Bush, Defence Secretary Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice paid a flying visit there at the beginning of September. However, resistance forces in Anbar were not subdued by the US 'surge'. Rather, local Sunni tribal leaders had made a pact with US forces. This was reportedly because of the hostile attitude of Al Qaida fighters towards the local population. However, Sheikh Abdul-Sattar Abu Risha, who initiated the pact, ran a profitable import-export business and owned several houses in a heavily fortified compound guarded by US tanks next to the US base in Ramadi. Some local people, not only the Al Qaida fighters, regarded him as a traitor, particularly when he was photographed shaking hands with President Bush. This chimera of exemplary peace blew up in the imperialists' faces when Abu Risha was assassinated by a roadside bomb in mid-September.

Iraqi resistance grows

The imperialist forces are meeting increased resistance from the Iraqi people. Abduljabbar Al Kubaysi, secretary-general of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance, estimates that well over 100,000 resistance fighters are now involved, with a further 300,000 Iraqis taking part in support and intelligence gathering roles. Other resistance leaders have pointed out that, contrary to imperialist attempts to characterise the resistance as so-called Al Qaida terrorists, only a little over 1,000 of the fighters have an allegiance to Al Qaida. Al Kubaysi maintained that all sectors of the population in all parts of the country (although he did not mention the Kurdish north) backed the resistance and that most of the sectarian bombings attributed to Al Qaida were perpetrated by the occupying forces and puppet government supporters. Interestingly, Al Kubaysi criticised the ambivalent role of Moqtada Al Sadr and the Mehdi Army even though they are one of the main targets of the US 'surge'. Al Sadr has been aware for some time that rogue elements in the Mehdi have been responsible for sectarian killings. At the end of August he called a six-month ceasefire for his forces in order to 'rehabilitate the Mehdi army in a way that will safeguard its ideological image'. What that will entail remains to be seen but all Al Sadr's most rec-

ent action and rhetoric has been to oppose the puppet government and call for unity between Shias and Sunnis in resisting the occupation. In August he said the priority was to form a united nationalist front. 'The Prime Minister is a tool of the Americans... It will probably be the Americans who decide to change him... We don't have a democracy here we have a foreign occupation,' he said.

The surge of violence

The US Defence Department has admitted that the average daily number of attacks on US and Iraqi puppet forces in June was 178, the highest figure since the invasion. More members of the US military were killed in August than in July, though both were down on the peak figure of 126 in May. The imperialists have increasingly turned to the air. In the first half of 2007 the US dropped five times as many bombs as in the first half of 2006 and three times as many as in the

from Jboor reported, 'Each time they bombed our area, civilians were killed by the dozens and houses were destroyed. They could not fight the resistance face to face, and so they take revenge from the air.'

On the ground, the number of patrols by US and Iraqi puppet forces has risen from 1,000 to 5,000 per day since the surge began. They are carrying out brutal house-to-house searches and trying to isolate whole areas of towns and cities. Samarra was placed under curfew in August. In Fallujah all vehicles, except buses and food trucks with special permits, were banned for two months. The local hospitals were running short of medicines. At least three areas of Baghdad were cut off by concrete barriers, without electricity, water or fuel for generators. US troops sniped at local people from rooftops and many were arrested and abused.

Between February and August the number of Iraqis held in US detention



Baquba: Iraqi soldiers escort blindfolded detainees in an army camp in Baquba

second half. Extra squadrons of attack planes have been added to the US force and air reconnaissance flights have doubled.

The consequences have been disastrous for the Iraqi people. There are almost daily reports of Iraqi citizens, including many children, being killed by indiscriminate US air raids. When US helicopters killed at least 18 people in Husseinliya at the end of July, witness Hazim Hussein described the attack as 'a war against civilians inside their houses'. Mahmood Taha

camp rose by more than 50% from 16,000 to 24,500, almost all without charge or access to legal process. One Iraqi government camp had three times the number of detainees it was designed for, many with wounds and diseases that were not being treated.

Petraeus claimed there had been some reduction in casualties since the 'surge' began. Tragically, this claim is ludicrous. Official US figures do not match even those of the Iraqi government or independent organisations. The Brookings Institute says that



Basra demo - banner reads 'We will not stop the resistance till complete liberation'

around 10% of all US patrols result in a firefight. US rules of engagement, for what they are worth, allow US troops to annihilate any civilian if in pursuit of an 'insurgent'. Michael Schwartz, writing in the US journal *Counterpunch*, estimates around 10,000 Iraqis are killed every month by imperialist forces and their stooges, a figure in line with the findings of *The Lancet* survey last year.

The depth of the imperialist savagery is being illustrated by the few prosecutions that have reached the US courts and by statements from former serving US soldiers. They reveal casual murder, kidnap and rape, indiscriminate revenge, covering up crimes by planting evidence, massacre of children and 'dead-checking' - the routine slaughter of wounded Iraqis rather than providing medical help. 'A lot of guys really supported that whole concept that if they don't speak English and they have darker skin, they're not as human as us, so we can do what we want', reported Specialist Josh Middleton of the 82nd Airborne Division.

British troops defeated

When British troops withdrew from the Basra Palace complex to their sole remaining base at Basra airport in early September, the Labour government and British military would have had us believe it was part of the orderly hand-over of security to Iraqi forces in the region. The Iraqi people, however, knew it was an ignominious defeat for the British. 'The British have given up... They are retreating because of the resistance they have faced', said Al Sadr. Anthony Cordesman, from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, pointed out, 'The British decisively lost the south more than two years ago.' In recent weeks British troops have been subjected to around 60 rocket and mortar attacks each day. Resupply convoys were described by one soldier as 'nightly suicide missions'. By early August Ken Pollack of the Brookings Institute was describing Basra as 'out of control... like the wild, wild west'.

The 550 British troops only managed to escape from Basra Palace relatively unscathed under cover of darkness and after an Iraqi general had brokered a truce with local resistance fighters. The British will claim that Iraqi government forces are ready to take responsibility for Basra province later this autumn. In the other three southern provinces where the British have already ceded control, things are not going well for them. Two Iraqi puppet governors and a police chief have been killed in recent weeks.

US reaction to the British move was scathing. The US had been using Basra Palace as an intelligence gathering centre against Iran and worried that any major British withdrawal from the area would leave its supply routes from Kuwait exposed and force it to divert thousands of US troops from the north. The retreat from Basra Palace had already been delayed by six months because of these concerns. US government officials complained of British 'inaction' against the Basra militias and General Jack Keane said the British had allowed the situation to deteriorate into 'gangland warfare'.

Fred Kagan, an architect of the US 'surge', said the special relationship with Britain was under threat because British defence cuts meant they were unable to sustain their commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Former head of the British army General Sir Michael Jackson retaliated by describing US plans for the occupation of Iraq as 'intellectually bankrupt'. Any major rift with the US, however, is inconceivable since British imperialism uses US military power as the vanguard for defending its own global interests. Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown reassured the US that

FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

British forces will not quit Iraq prematurely and 'will continue to have an important job to do'.

It is likely that some of the 5,000 remaining British troops in Iraq will be pulled out in the autumn to reinforce those in Afghanistan but the rest will, as the jargon goes, be 'repositioned' at the Basra airport base. Whatever posture they adopt will not be comfortable, for the airport has received 600 rocket and mortar attacks in the past four months.

Imperialists at full stretch

The problem facing both imperialist powers is that their armies are over-

formation in 1908, despite a big advertising campaign.

The imperialist forces would be even more overstretched were it not for the use of private security firms. There are no official figures for the number of these mercenaries but estimates put the figure at around 50,000. They have the same immunity from prosecution by the Iraqi authorities as do regular troops and have been filmed indiscriminately firing on Iraqi civilians. Billions of dollars have been paid to organisations such as DynCorp, Triple Canopy and Blackwater USA – private armies that rival many national armies in size and strength. British

rate of 2003, 43% of the Iraqi population live in absolute poverty, largely due to massive unemployment. A third of the population need emergency aid. Of five million Iraqis dependent on food aid only 60% had access to the government distribution system because of displacement and military actions. 70% of the population are without adequate water supplies and 80% lack effective sanitation. In Northern Iraq, at the end of August, 5,000 people contracted cholera, which has spread to Baghdad. 2.2 million Iraqis have left the country, including 75% of all doctors and pharmacists. Of these refugees, just 173 were allowed into the US in the first eight months of 2007. Last year Britain rejected 88% of Iraqi asylum applications and granted entry to just over 1,000 people.

Criticism of the war among US Democrat and a few Republican politicians is little more than electioneering. The Democrats refused to block Bush's war budget, which was the only significant opportunity they had of forcing a change of policy. What really fuels any criticism from within the US ruling class of the US government's policy in Iraq is a fear that the concentration of military power in Iraq leaves their wider regional and global interests at risk. Opposition in Britain to the Labour government's wars is feeble.

Legislation drafted by the IMF and western oil multinationals giving foreign companies control of 85% of Iraq's oil reserves has been stalled in Iraq's parliament by opposition from across Iraqi society. Workers have pledged to fight any privatisation or foreign take-over of Iraqi oil. The delay has not, however, prevented the multinationals from continuing to make preparations for their bonanza. Prominent among them is the Anglo-Dutch company Shell. The International Taxation and Investment Centre, a US-based think tank funded by Shell and six other oil companies, is currently in negotiation with Iraqi officials to create regulations that would allow their future oil profits to be free of tax. Shell is also well advanced with a plan to pipe Iraq's natural gas through Turkey to Europe. Shell's executive Jeroen van der Veer said last year, 'We have done our homework on Iraq. I'm not going to speculate on the time, but we are ready to move.' The imperialists are digging in for the long term. We must support the resistance and get them out.

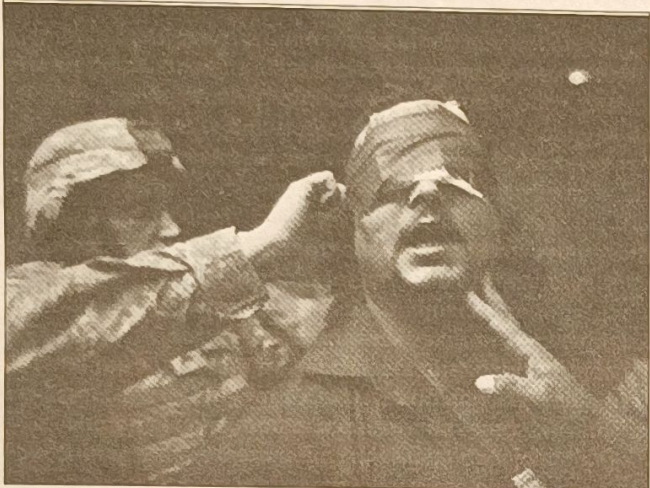
COLOMBIA: President Uribe caught in his own trap

Unable to escape intense international and domestic pressures to negotiate the exchange of prisoners of war with the revolutionary guerrilla movement FARC, President Uribe has desperately invited Venezuelan President Chavez to mediate. Uribe still rejects direct negotiations with FARC and has in the past accused Chavez of supporting the guerrillas. The invitation is aimed at distracting attention from Uribe's own difficulties. Yet it is proving to be no escape and the consequence is that the Venezuelan revolution is extending its influence.

Chavez will meet with Uribe again on 1 October. Uribe has invited a US Congressional delegation to attend a meeting between Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba, Chavez, and the FARC, which is due to take place in Caracas on 8 October.

Politics in the barrios

In Colombia, the new opposition coalition 'Polo Democratico', has organised Venezuelan-style 'Bolivarian circles', which reflects work organised amongst the two million Colombians displaced to Venezuela by the war at home. This brings back



US soldiers blindfold an Iraqi man after arresting him during a night patrol at the Zafraniya neighbourhood, southeast of Baghdad

stretched. Tours of duty for US forces have already been extended from the usual 12 months to 15 months and unprecedented numbers of the National Guard are on active service. Petraeus knew that if he did not announce some troop withdrawals in the next year then tours of duty would have to be further extended. 35% of US soldiers seek mental health treatment after returning home and suicides are at their highest level for 26 years, prompting a 25% increase in army psychologists and mental health staff.

The British army is presently at its smallest since the early 1840s. It is several thousand under strength and experienced troops are leaving faster than they can be replaced. One battalion went on service at only 60% of full strength. The Territorial Army is also smaller than at any time since its

companies Erinys and Aegis Defence Services received \$548 million over three years to protect the US army Corp of Engineers using forces equivalent to three battalions. Armor Group, another leading British mercenary force, is headed by Tory MP Sir Malcolm Rifkind who has also been acting on behalf of oil giant Shell and Australian oil company Biliton. On 16 September Blackwater mercenaries opened fire in a Baghdad street killing 28 civilians. The Iraqi government revoked Blackwater's licence to operate but it is still employed by the US government. Its killers are paid \$600 a day.

Get the imperialists out

According to Oxfam the incidence of child malnutrition now stands at 28% and more than 11% of Iraqi babies are born under-weight – three times the



President Chavez meets Colombian President Uribe, February 2007

Colombia's elite are incensed at the invitation. The press has given unprecedented space to criticising their president, fearing Chavez's 'intervention' in Colombia's politics, working up a 'Chavezphobia' against the 'dictator', 'caudillo' and 'communist'. The pro-government newspaper, *El Tiempo*, writes: 'Chavez will install himself in the heart of Colombian politics'. 'The president has given Chavez a golden opportunity to interfere in our affairs,' says the magazine *Semana*. *El Espectador* states openly that 'it is preferable that the war continues than Chavez be involved in Colombia's affairs'. The magazine *Cambio* says 'Peace in Colombia will advance his [Chavez's] ideas, and that would threaten our institutional stability and our conservative political culture.'

Chavez has received support for his mediating role from Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, 'Lula' da Silva of Brazil, Michelle Bachelet of Chile and Nicholas Sarkozy of France. However, Uribe curtailed Chavez's visit to Colombia in August and he also refused to allow a meeting between Chavez and FARC leader Manuel Marulanda on Colombian soil. Chavez has thrown the ball into the US court, meeting US relatives of FARC prisoners, and he has invited the US to release 'Simon Trinidad' and 'Sonia', two FARC members imprisoned in the US. He has also spoken to Colombian relatives, and on 7 September met National Liberation Army (ELN) representatives and the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace in Caracas.

the Venezuelan revolution's ideas to Colombia. A 'Colombian Bolivarian Current' has united with the Polo Democratico in Barranquilla to stand in the October local elections. There are Bolivarian movements against poverty in at least five Colombian states.

Near Bogota, elections of activists to local councils have led to cooperation agreements with Venezuela, grants of scholarships for workers' children to study in Caracas and free medical care to those who can't afford Colombia's privatised health care.

In the October elections, Colombia's Bolivarian candidates hope to gain more positions on local councils. A national congress is planned to take place in December to decide on issues such as the Bolivarian movement's relation to Polo Democratico, and to elect candidates to contest future Senate and Congressional elections.

Uribe's DAS intelligence service raided a 'Corriente Bolivariana Colombiana' political meeting in Baranosa in May. The mayor received death threats. Fifteen agents arrested visiting Venezuelan Congressional deputy Jose Luis Pirela, who had come to offer scholarships to children, and deported him. 'Colombia does not accept foreign interference from any country', a DAS statement said afterwards. The head of the armed forces has warned that 'Bolivarian circles are spreading all over Latin America, and particularly here in Colombia we want to prevent this from happening.'

Alvaro Michaels

AFGHANISTAN

When British troops left for Afghanistan, the then Labour Defence Secretary John Reid, suggested they might soon return without a shot being fired. Two years on and two million rounds of ammunition later and the present Defence Secretary, Des Browne, has spoken of a 'long-term commitment' of anything from 10 to 30 years, claiming the Labour government 'never underestimated the degree of difficulty we face'. The number of British troops in Helmand is set to rise to 7,700 this autumn.

As in Iraq, differences are emerging between the British and US forces. British commanders have asked that US special forces be removed from their area because the number of civilian casualties is damaging their so-called 'hearts and minds' campaign. A senior British officer stated that the US caused 'the lion's share' of the more than 300 Afghan civilian casualties so far this year. The new NATO commander in Afghanistan, US General Dan McNeil, has aborted agreements made by British forces with local leaders in Helmand Province.

There are differences too over the Afghan poppy crop. This year is expected to see another record har-



Afghan soldier keeps watch next to a burning truck after it was set on fire by the Taliban on the Kabul-Ghazni highway

vest. There was a 17% increase in land under poppy cultivation and output has doubled in two years. Half of it comes from Helmand. Afghanistan accounts for 92% of the world's opium production. Former NATO commander US General James Jones claimed that 'heroin is the crux of the problem... [it] funds the insurgency and corruption'. The US wants a much more vigorous crop eradication programme, but the British claim such heavy-handedness would turn more Afghan farmers, who rely on the poppy crop for their

survival, against the occupying forces.

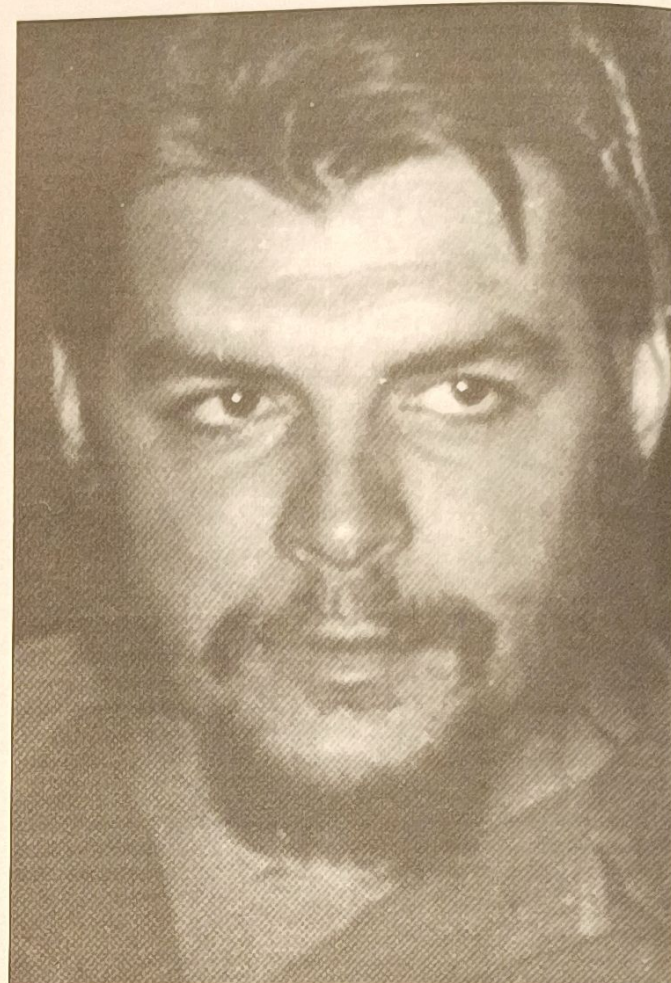
NATO countries, other than the US and Britain are still refusing to increase their combat troop commitment to the forces in Afghanistan. A NATO rapid response force, which was proposed by former US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld, has also failed to reach its full operational capacity of 25,000 because members are reluctant to commit troops. The situation is set to worsen in the next six to 12 months as present troop commitments come to an end.

Jim Craven

40 years on VIVA CHE

40 years after directing the hunt, execution and burial of Ernesto Che Guevara Lynch in Bolivia, CIA operative Gustavo Villoldo is hoping to make a killing once again when a lock of Che's hair, his fingerprints and photos of his corpse are put on auction in Texas on 25 October this year. Villoldo is a Cuban exile who became a CIA agent after his participation in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961. Che was injured and captured on 8 October 1967, when the group of guerrilla fighters he was preparing was encircled by the CIA-trained Bolivian army. He was executed on 9 October on the order of another Cuban exile, Felix Rogriguez. Having cut the lock of hair from Che's corpse, Villoldo buried him alongside three Bolivian revolutionaries in an unmarked grave.

This auction, in US President Bush's home state, is the most recent and crude attempt by the rich and powerful to commodify the memory of Che. His image has been violated and exploited by big business to sell watches, vodka, underwear, pop albums – the list is endless. Most of these have involved the famous headshot of Che, taken by Cuban photographer Alberto Korda at a funeral for Cuban civilians killed by CIA-sponsored terrorists. It is perhaps the most reproduced image in the world. And yet, despite its commercial mass production, the rich and powerful have never succeeded in depoliticising or co-opting the symbol of Che. From the mountains of Colombia to the Palestinian refugee camps, from the factories of the Philippines to anti-capitalist demonstrations in the cities of Europe and the US, Che's image adorns the banners of those who oppose imperialism and millions who struggle for social, economic and racial justice.



Twenty years ago, Cuban president Fidel Castro predicted that 'Che is a figure with enormous prestige. Che is a figure whose influence will grow.' This has proved to be true, not just in Cuba where school children daily pledge to be like Che, but also throughout Latin America. On May Day in 2005, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said: 'Che was more than just a martyr, more than just a heroic guerrilla fighter, he was also a Minister in the Cuban government and developed many ideas on how to build the new socialist society...we must study and learn from his thoughts.' In December 2005, newly elected President of Bolivia Evo Morales also paid tribute to Che's legacy.

Whilst CIA terrorist Villoldo seeks to profit from his role in Che's execution, in Bolivia the anniversary of his death will be commemorated by a new generation of revolutionaries from throughout Latin America. Most importantly, this event will reinforce a process already underway, a re-evaluation and return to Che's ideas of building socialism. This is the most fitting tribute for an Argentinian revolutionary who became an anti-imperialist after travelling through Latin America, embraced communism in Guatemala, helped make the Revolution in Cuba, fought alongside African guerrillas in the Congo and died with Bolivians, Peruvians and Cubans in Bolivia.

Che was central in driving through structural changes which transformed Cuba from semi-colonial underdevelopment to independence and integration into the socialist bloc within two years. He was a key protagonist in the military and political consolidation of the Cuban Revolution, which was a necessary precondition for economic transformation. From January 1959 to January 1961 he was involved in purging the old army, formulating the Agrarian Reform Law, forging unity among internal revolutionary forces and leading the first overseas trade mission of the revolutionary government. He worked as head of the National Bank, where he secretly prepared to change the banknotes to prevent the financing of the counter-revolution and control inflation, and as head of the Department of Industrialisation during the nationalisations.

In February 1961, Che became Minister of Industries. The first half of the 1960s was a tumultuous period: nationalisations, the shift in trade relations, the introduction of state planning, the exodus of managers and professionals, the imposition of the US trade blockade, invasion and the threat of nuclear conflagration. Despite this, under Guevara's directorship, Cuban industry stabilised, diversified and grew – testimony to his capacity for economic analysis, structural reorganisation and the mobilisation of resources.

Before Che left Cuba in 1965, the Ministry of Industries became a giant institution. In four years as Minister he: promoted education and training and devised a new national salary scale; established accounting, investment and supervision systems; set up a system of resource sharing and temporary demotion for directors; founded nine research and development institutes to apply science and technology to production; formulated policies to raise consciousness and commitment to the Revolution, whilst institutionalising psychology as an economic management tool. Among the research and development institutes which Che set up and directed were those for 'green medicine', nickel production, oil exploration, sugar by-products and the chemical industry, all of which continue as strong components of the Cuban economy today. In addition Che introduced computerised accounts to Cuba, promoted workers' inventions and innovations, drove the mechanisation of agriculture, introduced the psychology of social work and created an apparatus for workers' management of industry. Many of these projects have evolved into major areas of economic activity and social organisation in Cuba today.

Twenty years ago, Cuban President Fidel Castro said: 'what I ask, modestly, in this 20th anniversary [of Che's death], is that the economic ideas of Che be known; be known here, be known in Latin America, be known in the world: in the developed capitalist world, in the Third World and in the socialist world.'

On the 40th anniversary of Che's death, we reprint an edited version of an article by David Yaffe summarising Che's economic ideas first pub-

ECONOMICS & SOCIALISM

Che's writings on the economics and politics of the transition to socialism showed that he had a deep understanding of Marx's *Capital* and, in particular, the most difficult chapters on value, money and capital. Moreover, his published works show that he was familiar with Marx's philosophical and political writings – for example, *The German Ideology* and *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* – as well as Lenin's writings on the transition to socialism, the new economic policy, the role of the party and so on. He was also knowledgeable about the debates on the transition to socialism in the former socialist countries, as well as having practical experience of the problems confronting Cuba in its efforts to consolidate socialist development in an economy blockaded by the strongest imperialist power some 90 miles from its shores. In addition, Che was both President of the National Bank and Minister for Industry in Cuba when the

socialist revolution was being consolidated. Such a record speaks for itself.

Che was a remarkable revolutionary – he was prepared to put his hand to anything if the revolution needed it. Fidel reports that when he was appointed president of the National Bank, people would say that we had asked for an economist and Che had volunteered. When asked if he was an economist, Che replied 'Oh, I thought you said a communist'.

Plan and market

Che was a communist who rejected the current fashion of 'market socialism' – that planning has been proved a failure and socialist countries have to use the market. He argued quite differently. Capitalism could only be defeated by a non-market rationality. Che wrote that 'the law of value and the plan are two terms linked by a contradiction and its resolution'. ('Socialist Planning' p563)¹

The law of value governs the development of the economy and the social

relationships under commodity production and has its fullest expression under capitalism with its anarchic 'free' market, with the unfettered exploitation of the working class, plunder of oppressed nations through free trade and export of capital. The building of socialism through the planned economy will gradually destroy the space for its operation and with it the market which gives it expression. As Che put it:

'We can therefore state that centralised planning is the way of life in a socialist society. It is what defines it and is the point at which man's consciousness succeeds in finally synthesising and directing the economy towards its goal, which is the complete liberation of the human being within the framework of communist society'. ('Socialist Planning' pp563-4)

Socialist revolutions have occurred in the less developed countries and not, as Marxists had expected, in the most advanced capitalist countries. Some question whether it is possible to build socialism in countries colonised by imperialism and without any development of their basic industries. Che was very clear on this issue and followed Lenin:

'Within the great framework of the worldwide capitalist system, struggling against socialism, one of its weak links can be broken. In this particular case we mean Cuba. Taking advantage of unusual historical circumstances and following the skilful leadership of their vanguard, the revolutionary forces take over at a particular moment. Then, assuming the necessary objective conditions already exist for the socialisation of labour, they skip stages, declare the socialist nature of the revolution, and begin to build socialism.' ('Socialist Planning' p557)

The relative backwardness of these countries had created even greater difficulties for overcoming the impact of the law of value and the market. Cuba could combat this to some degree with the economic assistance of the Soviet Union before its collapse in 1991, and through more equal and just economic and trade



The Rebel Army in the Sierra Maestra, including Che Guevara, Raul Castro and Fidel Castro

CUBA VIVE!

relations with the socialist bloc. Che, however, realised that the law of value would exert its influence particularly through the international capitalist market dominated by the main imperialist powers with their much superior productivity of labour – but also in the relationship between the state sector and consumers. But he did not see this as something to be welcomed in the interests of some technical efficiency but something that had to be combated by the systematic development of the plan – of the conscious power of a centralised and planned economy. To give greater freedom to the law of value and the market was to facilitate the development of capitalist tendencies within the socialist countries.

That is why Che argued for a different system of managing the state sector of the economy to that which applied in most of the European socialist countries and most Cuban enterprises except those dependent on Che's Ministry of Industry – the budgetary system of financing as against the self-financing enterprise system. There are a number of differences in the two systems but fundamentally in the first the funds for the industry and the 'profits or losses' made went into the same overall state fund, while in the latter each enterprise had its own fund and they competed with each other. Both systems complied with an overall plan but one more directly than the other. Money plays a different role in each system. In the budgetary system it operates as 'arithmetical money', a measure of value, as a price reflection of the operation of the enterprise. It is analysed by the central bodies to exercise control over its operation, in a similar way to that of multinational companies and their subsidiaries. In the self-financing enterprise system, money acts, in addition, as a means of payment – it functions as an indirect instrument of control. Its relations with the banks are similar to those of a private producer in contact with capitalist banks to which they must exhaustively explain their plans and prove their solvency. When Che looked at the latter system in Yugoslavia he said it seemed dangerous 'because competition between enterprises dedicated to producing the same article may introduce factors that distort what the socialist spirit should presumably be'. (Tablada p111)² A different concept of competition in relation to the social interest is indicated here, potentially, that is, in terms of who benefits?

Capitalist mechanisms versus communist consciousness

The social relations of capitalist production, the production for private profit, the exploitation of man by man, produce a definite individualistic consciousness – a motivation based on competition as opposed to co-operation; individual interest and greed at the expense of others. A system based on the collective organisation of social production has to produce people with a quite different consciousness – a consciousness adequate to the new mode of production. However it does not come ready made and has to be created as part of the process of building socialism. Just as capitalist production through the market reproduces capitalist social relations and consciousness, so socialist economic production has to produce and develop socialist social relations and consciousness. However while under capitalism such relations and consciousness are the spontaneous, anarchic product of the market, adequate forms of social consciousness have to be worked for and developed under socialism. Socialism has to produce a different type of human being to capitalism.

Summarising Che's position, Tablada says: 'The point therefore is to discover and sweep away the structures that generate selfishness and personal ambition, replacing them with new social institutions and mechanisms capable of moulding future generations in a different way.' (p86)

Typical was Che's position on the question of material and moral incentives. While not denying the objective need for material incentives as a factor in achieving improvements in productivity and production, he was unwilling to use them as a fundamental driving force.

'Material incentives are something left over from the past. They are something we must accept but whose hold on the minds of the people we must gradually break as the revolutionary process goes forward... We must establish the conditions under which this type of motivation that is operative today will increasingly lose its importance and be replaced by non-material incentives such as the sense of duty and the new revolutionary way of thinking.' ('On Party Militancy' pp343-4)

As opposed to competition generated by the law of value, Che put forward the concept of emulation, fraternal competition based on socialist comradeship as a weapon to increase production. 'Emulation had to fulfil the great task of mobilising the masses.' It is 'competition directed toward the most noble of aims, which is to improve the functioning of each work centre, each enterprise, each unit, and place it in the front ranks of building socialism.' Emulation would have its own incentives, 'moral incentives, such as those that individually or collectively recognise workers in a workplace as the best amongst the best.' It was an incentive mechanism that linked the production of goods with the creation of communist consciousness. (Quotes from Tablada pp200-1)

In this context, Che stressed the importance of voluntary work and the use of mini-brigades in helping to resolve, in a collective way, crucial problems facing the economy – a method of work, however, that went into decline after his death, becoming almost a formality as Cuban economic development became increasingly reliant on precisely those capitalist economic mechanisms that Che had warned against. Material incentives began to be abused, higher wages were paid which bore no relation to what was being produced, contradictions arose between certain economic enterprises and society overall – a trend was developing which would undermine the spirit and consciousness of the working class. The Cuban Communist Party recognised these problems and a rectification programme was begun in 1986 to correct these developments. The working class, the trade unions and other mass organisations were actively drawn into the decision-making processes. Inevitably, it led to a revival of Che's ideas...

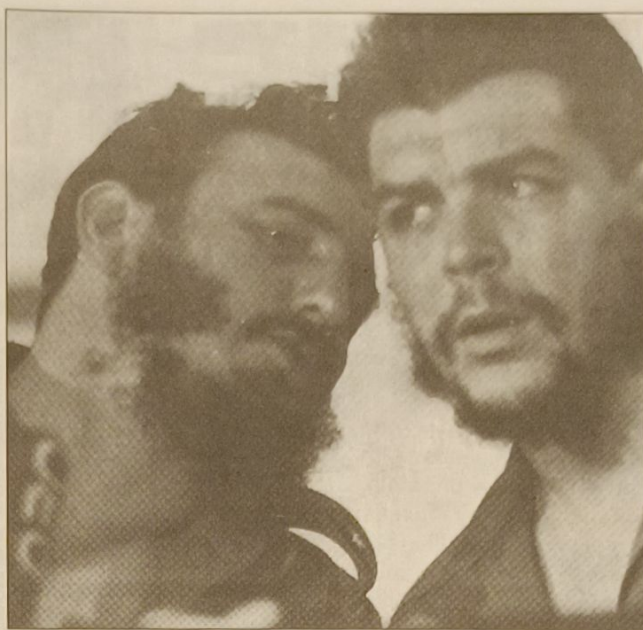
These developments, however, came to an abrupt end with the Special Period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intensification of the US economic blockade.

Today, after years of surviving the Special Period without abandoning its socialist principles, Cuba has been forced to put more reliance on capitalist methods and capitalist market mechanisms. The introduction of the private farmers' markets, the free circulation of the dollar, the greater weight of foreign capital in the Cuban economy, and the wider use of material incentives, all necessary for the recovery of the Cuban economy, however, make the contribution of Che Guevara ever more relevant to the future of Cuban socialist development.

Not only was Che inspired by Marxism but he developed it and turned it into an ever more vital tool for building socialism today – a remarkable intellectual and practical achievement for a person who died aged 39, sacrificing his life to build a society fit for the vast majority of humanity.

1 All references to Che Guevara's writings are taken from *Venceremos! The Speeches and writings of Che Guevara*. Edited by John Gerassi, Panther, 1972.

2 See *Che Guevara Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*, Carlos Tablada, Pathfinder, 1989, pp109-119. For Che's article 'On the Budgetary System of Financing' see *Venceremos* pp409-p441.



Fidel Castro and Che Guevara

POSTSCRIPT

In Cuba, Che's ideas about socialist construction have always been associated with the vitality of the Revolution. The article on Economics and Socialism printed here mentions how, in the mid-1980s, Fidel drew on Che's incisive warnings that market socialism would lead to capitalist restoration. Cuba pulled back from the Soviet model with a return to Che's concepts of the importance of consciousness in the process of socialist construction. Before this process could be consolidated, the Soviet bloc collapsed leaving the Cuban economy to plunge into crisis, with the loss of 85% of its trade. Cubans dug deep to find what they needed to survive, as individuals and as a socialist society. With the introduction of reforms to permit the market to operate in some economic sectors and improved trade relations, the economic situation gradually began to

improve. This has allowed Cuba to rescind some of the concessions made to the markets – for example, the US dollar no longer circulates. Since 2005, Cuba has boasted annual growth rates of 8-12%.

Material recovery has been accompanied by political regeneration in a campaign known as the Battle of Ideas. Having survived the hardships of the Special Period, the Revolution was in a position to begin re-evaluating its achievements and errors, as Fidel said: 'to develop a critical rather than self-indulgent vision of our undertaking and our historical objectives.' This again involved a return to Che's emphasis on socialist consciousness and education, voluntary labour, the exploitation of indigenous resources, diversification of agriculture, centralisation of budgets and finances and investment in science and technology for industrial and medical production. The Battle of Ideas

reflects the essence of Che's concept that education and culture are key tools to create commitment to political ideas, but that these remain abstract if the standard of living doesn't alleviate daily concerns for survival. For this it is necessary to raise Cuba's productive capacity. As Che said, the two pillars on which to construct socialist society are productivity and consciousness.

The success has been tangible. The concepts underlying the Battle of Ideas are now being emulated elsewhere in Latin America. The Bolivarian Revolution led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez began at the same time as the Battle of Ideas and it is likewise a project of national regeneration based on popular mobilisation. The material and political relationships between Cuba and Venezuela, formalised in the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America, a treaty signed in December 2004, have become a mechanism for ideological exchange. 'New' forms of political and economic organisation are emerging under the banner of the Bolivarian Revolution; some are essential components of a socialist society – nationalisation, welfare provision, social production and workers' management. Others draw on Guevara's model: consolidated enterprises, participatory budgets, the co-option of capitalist techniques and technicians for social production and emphasising consciousness while limiting the reproduction of capitalist productive relations.

Sections within the Bolivarian Revolution aim to bolster the domestic capitalist class. Chavez, who leads the pro-socialist tendency, adopts Che's ideas on socialist transition to counter that current. The Cuban left also bases itself on Guevara in opposing those who advocate economic and political liberalisation. Armed with Che's Marxist analysis, Cuba continues to contribute to humanity's historical and cumulative knowledge of how to build a better society, a socialist society which puts consciousness and culture at its centre. The ability to implement those ideas will be decisive in the success of the project to build socialism for the 21st century.

Helen Yaffe



SPEAKING TOUR SPRING 2008 Cuba: socialism into the 21st century

Cuba offers the example of an alternative to the destruction and barbarity that characterise capitalism. In Cuba, socialism is being built, developed and lived out day by day, despite the illegal US blockade against the island. Cuba shows that another world is possible, founded on the interests of the many, not the few.

Cuba's example of socialism and internationalism gives inspiration to those fighting imperialism all over the world, in particular in Latin America, where in Venezuela and Bolivia the working class are united with Cuba raising the banner of the Bolivarian Alternative to the hegemony of the United States and its allies.

From February to March 2008, you will be able to hear the Cuban message for yourself as Rock around the Blockade will be hosting a speaking tour by a number of leading Cuban communists representing three generations of the Revolution: Orlando Borrego, Che's close comrade at the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, who will be speaking in Britain for the first time; Rogelio Polanco, editor of the Cuban daily newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, and a comrade from the youth movement, representing a new generation of revolutionary leaders. The speaking tour represents an exciting opportunity for debate, discussion, information and inspiration all over Britain – don't miss it.

For more information about how you can get involved in building for the speaking tour and hosting a meeting in your college, workplace or community centre, fill in the form below – and see page 14 for details of forthcoming events in solidarity with Cuba.

- ☐ Please send me more information about the **Cuba: socialism into the 21st century** speaking tour
☐ I would like to join Rock around the Blockade and enclose an annual membership fee of
☐ £10 (waged) ☐ £4 (low waged) ☐ £2 (unemployed/student) Enclosed: £

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90
years onTHE RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION

The imperialist wars waged by Britain and the US in Iraq and Afghanistan are destroying the lives of millions. With international capitalism becoming increasingly unstable, the brutal crisis of war and exploitation faced by masses in the 'third world' is set to continue. In Britain millions of working class people remain in poverty, health care and education are being cut back and racist and oppressive laws are piling up. But there is an alternative. In 1917 the oppressed people of Russia brought down the capitalist autocrats who had led their country to war and poverty, declaring socialism and communism as the only route to equality. Led by the Bolshevik Party, the Revolution sent shockwaves through the imperialist powers and inspired millions to fight for a better world. 90 years on and the Russian Revolution is gone, but its ideas are once again being picked up in Latin America. In Venezuela, Bolivia and elsewhere poor people inspired by the gains of socialism in Cuba are fighting for change. The Bolshevik Revolution is as relevant as ever.

Under the Tsar the people of Russia had been dragged against their will into the barbarity of the First World War, forced to fight for Russian imperialism. Thousands starved in the trenches and at home things were hardly better. From 1914 to 1917 the price of bread rose by more than 300% and pork by 770%; essentials like firewood and clothing soared to more than 1,000% of their original price.

In February 1917, 31 months into the war, masses of impoverished workers and sections of the army demonstrated, demanding bread and an end to autocracy and war. Huge strikes and protests were met with violence as the state deployed soldiers and police to confront the crowds. On 26 February state forces massacred hundreds of protestors. The workers fought back and the Duma (parliament) was forced to persuade the Tsar to step down. Following their failure to convince Grand Duke Mikhail to take over, Duma officials formed a Provisional Government under Prince Lvov.

The Provisional Government was dominated by the nationalist Cadets (Constitutional Democrats) supported by the Mensheviks, the opportunist party of the reformist middle class which had split from the Bolsheviks in 1902, and the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, representing the better-off peasants. These forces, claiming to represent the majority of the Russian people, were to play a vicious role in attacking the revolutionary movement.

After February average wages increased by around 500%, but at the same time the price of necessities shot up further and the purchasing power of the rouble slipped by two thirds. By August food prices had risen 51% more than wages, despite strong harvests. Meanwhile the Duma refused to end Russian involvement in the war. It was clear that the bourgeois Provisional Government would be making no radical changes.

The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was set up by the radicalised masses in Petrograd city. Other Soviets (communal councils) sprang up across the country, creating a situation of dual power. In April Bolshevik leader Lenin wrote about Russia in a

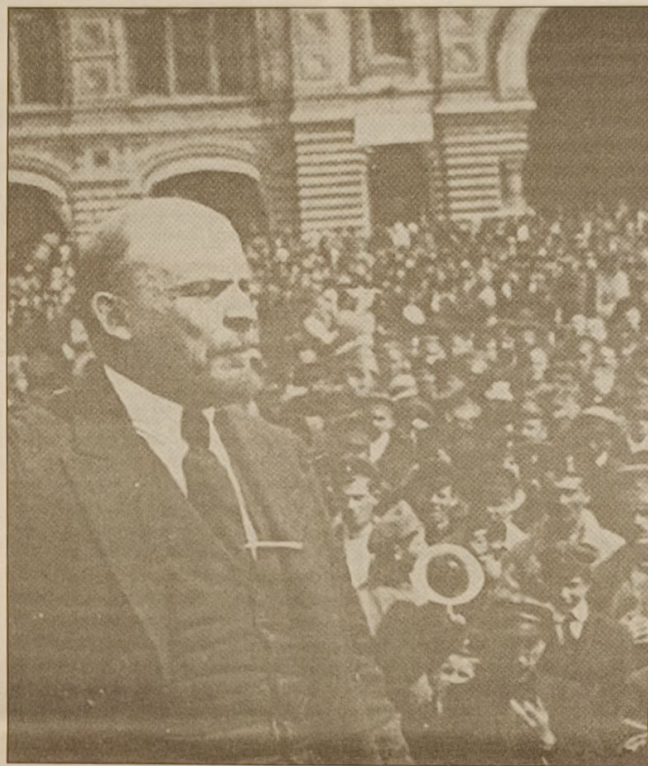
state of transition, urging opposition to the 'would-be socialists' in the government. Real socialism was the only solution:

'the Russian Revolution of March 1917 not only swept away the whole Tsarist monarch, not only transferred the entire power to the bourgeoisie, but also moved closer towards a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. The Petrograd and other, local, Soviets constitute precisely such a dictatorship (that is, a power resting not on the law but directly on the force of the armed masses of the population)...'

In July thousands of soldiers rose up against orders to go to war. Demanding 'All power to the Soviets!' they were joined by hundreds of thousands of Petrograd citizens and were supported by the Bolsheviks. The government responded with brutality and on 4 July 400 were killed. Workers distributing the Bolshevik paper *Pravda* were shot in the streets and the newspaper's offices destroyed. Hundreds were arrested. Alexander Kerensky, a Socialist Revolutionary, was made head of government and General Kornilov was put in charge of the army, declaring that every Bolshevik and Soviet member should be hanged. In September Kornilov led an attempted coup in Petrograd and was repelled by the masses, with many of Kornilov's men won over to the side of the Soviets.

The Bolsheviks responded to government calls to disband the Soviets by calling for a Congress in November to take over the government of Russia. 'The entire machinery set up by the Russian Revolution of March functioned to block the Congress of Soviets' (Reed, p51*). An uprising was on the cards. Things were moving forward, fast.

By October the ruling class was in turmoil, and the masses were becoming more organised. On 10 October the Bolshevik Central Committee voted to organise an armed uprising. Two leading party members, Kamenev and Zinoviev were against, and, along with Riazanov, campaigned against it after the vote. They argued that the Bolsheviks didn't have enough mass support, that the insurrection



Lenin in Petrograd during the Revolution

would be unsuccessful and that they should wait for a Constituent Assembly. Lenin responded vigorously: 'Refusing to rise means to trust our hopes in the good bourgeoisie who have "promised" to call the Constituent Assembly... Either we must abandon our slogan, "All Power to the Soviets", or else we must make an insurrection. There is no middle course.'

On 12 October the Petrograd Soviet established a Military Revolutionary Committee to plan the rising. The soldiers declared: 'The Petrograd garrison no longer recognises the Provisional Government. The Petrograd Soviet is our Government. We will obey only the orders of the Petrograd Soviet, through the Military Revolutionary Committee.' The Committee declared itself ready to resist counter-revolutionary attacks. Leader of the Petrograd Soviet Leon Trotsky said: 'We hope that the All-Russian Congress of Soviets will take... into its hands that power and authority which rests upon the organised freedom of the people. If, however, the Government wants to utilise the short period it is expected to live... to attack us, then we shall have to answer with counter-attacks, blow for blow, steel for iron!'

On 25 October, the opening day of the Soviet Congress, the government was overthrown in Petrograd by the armed working class, with the support of sections of the army and navy; there was little bloodshed. Kerensky fled to organise the bourgeois resistance. Josef Stalin wrote an editorial in the Bolshevik newspaper on the morning of the rising: 'After the victory of the February Revolution, power remained in the hands of the landlords and capitalists, bankers and speculators, profiteers and marauders - therein lay the fatal error of the workers and peasants... that error ought to be corrected at once.' The Revolution spread like wildfire across the country.

Women played an important role, as leading Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai wrote later:

'Who were they? Isolated individuals? No, there were hosts of them; tens, hundreds of thousands of nameless heroines who, marching side by side with the workers and peasants behind the Red Flag and the slogan of the Soviets passed over the ruins of Tsarist theocracy into a new future...'

US socialist John Reed witnessed events in Moscow, where 'the Soviets had voted overwhelmingly to support the action of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Already a Military Revolutionary Committee was functioning. Everywhere the same thing happened... Old Russia was no more; human society flowed molten in primal heat, and from the tossing sea of flame was emerging the class struggle, stark and pitiless...'

Maria Spiridonova, leader of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, then supportive of the Bolsheviks' actions, spoke at the 29 October Peasants Congress:

'Before the workers of Russia new horizons open which history has never known... All workers' movements in the past have been defeated. But the present movement is international, and that is why it is invincible. There is no force in the world that can put out the fire of the Revolution! The old world crumbles down, the new world begins.'

A Russian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared, with decrees on redistribution of land, the right to recall politicians from office, limits on wages of officials, nationalisation of the banks, and equal rights for all nationalities.

Immediately the Revolution was met with political hostility and military intervention from the imperialist powers. Soviet offers of peace, inclu-

ding the right of nations to self determination, were rejected and the Red Army fought back against the invaders. The imperialists, particularly Britain, France, Japan and the US, supported the counter-revolutionary White Russian forces which instigated the Civil War in 1918, and 12 foreign powers invaded Soviet territory; Japanese troops didn't leave till 1922. Lenin affirmed: 'This first victory is not yet the final victory, and it was achieved by our October Revolution at the price of incredible difficulties and hardships, at the price of unprecedented suffering... But the fact remains that for the first time in hundreds of years the promise "to reply" to war between the slave-owners by a Revolution of the slaves directed against all the slave-owners has been completely fulfilled - and is being fulfilled despite all difficulties.'

The Russian workers hoped their victory would be followed by revolutions in the advanced capitalist states of Europe, paving the way for communism internationally. In Germany the 1918 Revolution was defeated and leaders like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered at the hands of the traitorous Social Democratic Party, 'socialists' supportive of the war. The Soviet Union, established following the Bolshevik Revolution, was forced to begin building socialism alone. Lenin wrote: 'We have made the start. When, at what date and time, and the proletarians of which nation will complete this process is not important. The important thing is that the ice has been broken; the road is open, the way has been shown.'

90 years on from the October Revolution the world is still shaking. In the decades that followed the example of the Soviet peoples' struggle for social justice inspired revolutionary movements on all continents, with socialism on the agenda from China to Czechoslovakia. Years on, and never has the contrast between the human progress represented by socialism and the dog-eat-dog barbarity of capitalism been exposed to the world as starkly as it was with the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist bloc. Russia witnessed the sharpest fall in life expectancy on record anywhere in the world and is today the playground of corrupt capitalists, growing fat while many starve. The black north American singer Paul Robeson was once able to write fondly about the lack of racism during his visits to the Soviet Union: 'I feel like a human being for the first time since I grew up. Here I am not a Negro but a human being. Before I came I could hardly believe that such a thing could be. Here, for the first time in my life, I walk in full human dignity.' But now organised fascism and racism are on the rise in Eastern Europe, as right wing reactionaries exploit the run-down state of society and economy.

But there is hope for the oppressed people of the world. Cuba holds the torch of socialism and the legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution. In turn it inspires millions to struggle against imperialism and capitalism for social justice.

Louis Brehony

* *Ten Days that Shook the World*, John Reed, Penguin Classics.

NIGERIA: imperialists' plunder impeded

CHARLES CHINWEIZU

Nigeria is Africa's largest crude oil exporter, shipping 42% of its oil to the US and 19% to the EU in 2006, and overtaking Venezuela and Saudi Arabia to become the third largest oil exporter to the US. However, exports from Nigeria have been cut by up to 40% since 2003 through the actions of armed groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which are demanding greater benefits from and local control of the wealth generated by oil production, and insisting that foreign oil companies leave the country. Over this period, thousands of foreign oil workers have fled, and more than 150 have been taken hostage in the last eight months alone.

Although the origins of MEND lie in the local corrupt Niger Delta elites, there are signs that the organisation has been moving in a more progressive direction, breaking its links with corrupt politicians it has previously defended. In July 2007, MEND was quoted as saying that 'companies are moving away from the Niger-Delta region... The same companies... have been there for nearly 50 years and what have we got from their presence? Pollution and menial jobs for the people of the Delta. They will not be missed. As long as there is oil, I assure you, they will return at our terms... The temporary exit of these dubious oil companies is a very small price to pay for freedom.' The southern Niger Delta region is where all of Nigeria's oil is extracted, generating 95% of government revenues.

MEND is a loose coalition of militants who operate with sections of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Martyr's Brigade and others. From 1999, non-violent organisations, such as the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), emerged to lead the 'struggle for self-determination' in the Delta. However, the IYC split into factions following a leadership crisis. Asari Dokubo, one of its leaders, went on to establish the NDPVF, denouncing the peaceful methods of the IYC as ineffective. Although Asari and the

NDPVF declared 'war' on the Nigerian government in October 2004, they promised not to damage the oil installations themselves, and subsequently agreed to disarm and were paid up to N400m (\$3.2m). Asari was at one time a hired thug for Peter Odili, ex-governor of oil-rich Rivers State in the Delta who embezzled N200bn (\$1.6bn) in state oil revenues. Asari was later arrested and imprisoned on treason charges for 21 months. In February 2006, the government bombed villages in the western Delta killing several civilians, a trigger for the formation of MEND.

At present MEND is directing its attacks at imperialism's main representatives in Nigeria – the oil companies. Sophisticated attacks on heavily guarded facilities since February 2006 in the Western Delta region have forced the Warri and Kaduna refineries to shut down. Oil multinationals have been compelled to pull out staff and stop production in many parts of the region. Nigeria has lost an estimated \$16bn in export revenues between December 2005 and April 2007. In July 2007, Anglo-Dutch multinational Shell claimed to have lost \$1.3bn a month or \$23bn since early 2006. Alongside MEND's actions, state-supported gangs and militias have ravaged large parts of the region with killings, rapes, extortion and shootings, as they act on behalf of local factions of the bourgeoisie.

What's behind the militancy?

The growth of organised resistance has been sparked by the plunder of the Delta region's massive oil resources by imperialist companies such as Shell, the associated pollution, and the rampant corruption of both local and national political leaders. Between June 1999 and April 2007, oil revenues amounting to N2.4 trillion (\$19.2bn) have been embezzled by the southern leaders, and most Nigerians, especially in the Niger Delta, live in squalor, with no access to clean drinking water, electricity, schools, paved roads, medicines or even shelter.

In 1999, 2003 and again in 2007, following decades of direct military



Members of MEND

rule, politicians in the Niger Delta recruited and armed unemployed youth to intimidate their political opponents and rig the elections. Oil company executives provided cash and logistics for their favoured candidates. According to former vice president Atiku Abubakar, there was an agreement in 1999 that the presidency would 'rotate' after eight years between 'North' and 'South'. When former president Olusegun Obasanjo broke this to run for a third term after 2007, sections of Nigeria's ruling class descended into open warfare with Obasanjo and Abubakar and their supporters accusing each other of 'corruption'.

One of MEND's demands was for the release of two corrupt local leaders, Diepreye Alamiesiegha and Mujahid Asari Dokubo. Alamiesiegha is the former governor of oil-rich Bayelsa State, who looted over \$6m into British, US and French banks. He is an ally of vice president Abubakar and so opposed Obasanjo's third term agenda and was subsequently gaoled for 12 years for embezzlement. Both he and Asari were released by July 2007. In a further sign of its political development, MEND has broken its links with Asari, describing him as a 'charlatan', and now describe the release of the politicians as 'peripheral to the main

issue'. There are seemingly different trends involved in MEND some of which are responding to pressures from below and are beginning to articulate the demands of the poorest sections of the Delta. Protests and occupations of oil platforms by unarmed women and villagers receive little media attention but have become daily occurrences.

Meanwhile the Nigerian government has attempted to maintain 'economic activity' in the Niger Delta, that is, the continued plunder of the oil resources together with a massive privatisation of state assets. The Delta is permanently under heavy military occupation with police, army, navy and State Security Service (SSS) officers guarding oil facilities. The Nigerian security forces also use rape to intimidate communities in the Niger Delta and as a means of torture to extract confessions from suspects in custody. The Nigerian government plans to import \$2bn worth of arms to crush the militants.

Imperialists arm Nigerian military

Shell secretly approached the US military in March 2006 to see if it could intervene in the Delta to 'protect our investments'. The Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS)

was established in 2005 by the US and Britain, with Canada, Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland as 'observers'. In December 2005 the US announced it would install a navy maritime spy facility in the island of Sao Tome and Principe. US and British instructors have also been training Nigerian military personnel at the Jaji Military College in Kaduna, northern Nigeria. On 30 August 2006, the US and Britain agreed to provide assistance and a network of radar and communication facilities to assist Nigerian security forces in monitoring territorial waters.

With an era of perpetual war predicted in the Middle East and oil and gas industries being nationalised in Latin America, the imperialists have been searching for diversity of supply, and Africa is being resurrected as a major alternative source. Hence the crocodile tears over Darfur – a prelude to invading Sudan. The US has set up an African Command, Africom, a major military presence in the Gulf of Guinea, to secure access to West African energy reserves. This will begin operations in October 2007. Whilst it is not yet clear what final political direction MEND and its allies will take, anti-imperialists must support their demand for an end of imperialist plunder of Nigeria's oil resources. ■

DRCongo: repression continues

IRENEE KAYEMBE

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) president Joseph Kabila is desperately trying to get international support for his puppet government to give it some legitimacy. That is why in late September, on his way to the General Assembly of the United Nations, he visited Belgium, where he was met by demonstrations of the Congolese diaspora. Not that the Belgian government was a reluctant host: with the DRC's huge natural resources up for grabs, it does not want to miss out on the action, especially as China had just agreed to invest \$5bn in infrastructure and mining. The upshot was that Belgium agreed to send an economic mission to the DRC capital Kinshasa with the aim of boosting Belgian investment in its former colony.

Since Joseph Kabila's inauguration as the DRC president in December 2006, security has been precarious: the regime is using fear and terror to keep the population's mouths shut. The new government's relations with the opposition have resulted in a drift to authoritarianism and urban unrest in the west of the country, while militias continue to clash with the weak

national army in the east, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians, many of whom continue to succumb to hunger and disease. The new governing institutions remain weak and abusive or non-existent.

In early 2007 the population of southwest Congo suffered massive and violent repression with hundreds of deaths after a protest about irregularities in the elections of regional deputies. The UN's human rights office in DRC has just published a report of what has been called the 'massacre of Bas-Congo'. The report underlines the fact that those responsible for the atrocity are known, but no judicial action has yet been taken against them. (<http://www.monuc.org/News.aspx?newsID=15423#top>)

A couple of months later, in March 2007, war blew up in the middle of Kinshasa. Four hundred people were killed, mostly civilians caught up in the cross-fire as they went about their daily and domestic business. The reason for this second massacre after inauguration was to disarm the former rebel JP Bemba, who came second in the presidential election and thus became the official leader of the opposition. Not only was Bemba a threat

because of his militia, but as an indigenous Congolese he had much popular support against Kabila who is still seen as Rwandan in origin. The opposition's capacity to organise remains severely weakened by the recurrent use of force against its supporters and Bemba's exile in April 2007. The government uses force to crack down on its opponents entrenching animosity and creating further urban unrest.

The so-called integrated army, which the United Nations mission (MONUC, in fact a front for US, Belgian, British and French interests) in Congo claimed to merge and train, has become the worst human rights abuser, and no one is doing anything to stop it. In the last week of August, militia chief Laurent Nkunda launched a successful attack on North Kivu; he now controls the Kivus region. Nkunda's troops use rape as a weapon of war, and neither the national army nor the United Nations have succeeded in putting an end to the activities of this former regional commander of the Congolese army. He has 14,000 to 18,000 militiamen and is backed by the Rwandan government.

Although elsewhere the government



A woman carries a child and belongings as she flees the fighting in the east

has used force to crack down on militias, in the Kivus Nkunda remains pow-

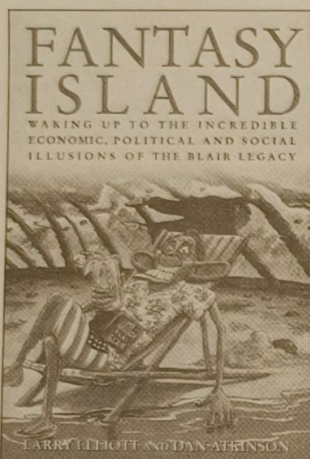
erful, refusing to surrender heavy weapons; there are Rwandan fighters among his troops. Both Kabila and MONUC are ignoring Nkunda's activities; this has led to a rise in anti-Tutsi feeling because the situation demonstrates the alliance Kabila has with both Nkunda and Rwandan president Kagame.

More and more Congolese are being turned into refugees in their own country, especially those living in the east. The population is suffering the consequences of the passivity of the government and Kabila's tacit complicity with the international mafia network determined to plunder DRC forever. This will be exacerbated with the recent discovery of oil in the lake separating Congo and Uganda. With China trying to settle as an alternative super power, US and European imperialist powers will be using every strategy possible to maintain their dominant position in the country.

The good news is that they can fool the entire population some of the time, but not all the time. Things are changing little by little. It can take a long time, but people are definitively determined to free themselves, whether the neo-colonialists like it or not. ■

The Poverty of 'Fantasy Island'

■ Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson
Fantasy Island: waking up to the incredible economic, political and social illusions of the Blair legacy
Constable, London, 2007, 260pp,
£7.99 pbk



'The financial services industry... is, and will always be, of vital importance to this country... We are world leaders and we want to keep it that way'
Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Labour Party Conference, 23 September 2007¹

Britain can be seen as 'one big offshore hedge fund churning speculators' money while asset-strippers draw up plans for the few remaining factories to be turned into industrial theme parks', say the authors of a new book exposing the illusions of the Blair legacy (p74).² They also believe that nothing essential will change under Gordon Brown. He is unlikely to curb the activities of the global financial markets because the UK has actually done rather well out of them, at least in the short term, a point reinforced by the new Chancellor at the recent Labour Party conference. The result of this could well be an almighty financial crash and a 'backlash against the excesses of the financial markets of a kind not seen for 75 years [since the Great Depression]'. While such a backlash, the authors say, would lead to demands to regulate the financial markets, 'the only pity is that [such reforms] now could avoid the crash' (pp230-1). Elliott and Atkinson (E&A) have written this book to warn us of the perils ahead, as a wake up call to take action before the real world goes up in smoke (p238).

The action they have in mind, of course, is not revolutionary. Unless Karl Marx was right about the ultimate crisis of capitalism, they say, the world will recover from even the most serious crash, given time. At what cost and at whose expense is not even discussed. They are correct to argue that there are great similarities between the precarious nature of the global economy now and that in the late 1920s, with the added dimension of an ecological crisis from which 'there may be no coming back'. But their solutions are illusory and reactionary. A moral challenge to the consume-at-all-costs mentality, an appeal for cleaner fuels, more efficient cars, sustainable buildings and a tax system to provide incentives to make this all happen (p233) is hardly going to disturb the course of the financial corporations and multinational companies based in the UK, desperately scouring the world for new sources of profit. Capital must expand or go under, so a challenge to environmental destruction that does not challenge the source of that destruction, capitalism, is a deception. It is a complacent and indulgent simplification by ideological representatives of the commercial and professional middle classes who fear the worst for their own comfortable lives.

Fantasy Island is a 'companion volume' to *The Age of Insecurity* (Verso, 1998), which offered a scathing attack on the neo-liberal policies of Thatcher and the then recently elected Blair government.³ They warned of the dangers ahead and argued, then as now, for a managed, more compassionate capitalism with curbs on the free market. Their warnings went unheeded and now we face dire consequences – a looming crash of the capitalist system. By exposing the dangerous fantasies of the Blair administration they hope, even at this late stage, to avoid catastrophe – hence the full title of their latest book.

E&A argue that among the rather modest solid accomplishments under Blair's 'centre-left' government were a series of dangerous fantasies. The two most serious are the belief that the British economy can be sustained on ever-higher levels of debt and the environment can be sustained on ever-higher levels of growth. The others are: that the decline of manufacturing and a shrinking industrial base do not matter; that prices can continue to fall while wages continue to go up; that an increasingly commercialised public sector is on the verge of becoming 'world class' rather than being on the edge of meltdown; that flexible labour markets can beat off the challenge of China and India yet attract more people back to work; and that Britain can play the part of the world's policeman on the cheap with dangerously overstretched armed forces (px and p26). Finally, the central theme of their book is that the prosperity of the Blair years has been largely illusory (p24).

Whatever happened to British imperialism?

As in their earlier book, E&A fail to see the connection between ideology and economic developments. Monetarism, for example, was not some cultural preference or 'new credo' as they imply, but was the necessary ideological response of the ruling class to the renewed crisis in the capital accumulation process in the early 1970s. That is why it had to be implemented by a Labour government, some years before Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. Callaghan and Healey might or might not have been 'reluctant monetarists' (p29), but, running a government in the service of capitalism, they had no choice. Monetarism/neo-liberalism gave ideological expression to the new requirements of capital in this crisis-ridden period. The financial deregulation, de-industrialisation and privatisation that followed through successive Tory administrations were necessarily appropriated by Labour under Blair and will essentially be continued by Brown.

Britain is a leading imperialist power. The imperialist character of Britain has been decisive in determining all the major economic and political developments in this country. Britain's relative industrial decline has been combined with a dynamic, aggressive imperialist expansion of commerce and finance overseas. That is how it was able to compete with the other rising imperialist powers from the turn of the 20th century. Globalisation was not a political option (p36), but a necessary expression of growing inter-imperialist rivalry in a crisis-ridden capitalism. Britain used its role as the leading international banking centre, through the City of London, to sustain its position internationally as the imperialist power second only to the US. Today this development has reached unprecedented heights. Britain's overseas assets are now more than four times its GDP. No other imperialist country has such a relation with the international capital and foreign currency markets.⁴ Labour's justification for 'humanitarian wars' and its support for military intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan and other areas where Britain retains economic ties are explicable in terms of its need to protect and expand these vital global interests. That is why Britain acts as the junior partner to the United States in policing the world, despite its over-

stretched armed forces.

E&A do not even begin to understand this. In industrial terms, they say, Britain is 'no longer a developed but a developing nation' (p219). Fantastically, they even suggest that, after the Cold War, Britain could have followed the Scandinavian model, reducing the armed forces to little more than ceremonial organisations, using the peace dividend for welfare spending or tax cuts (p216).

In the *Age of Insecurity* the word imperialism was not in the index. In *Fantasy Island* it occurs once. For E&A Blair appears as a self-aggrandising poseur who wants superpower status for Britain on the cheap. They are at a loss to explain the numerous armed interventions abroad under Blair's governments. 'That a British prime minister could have waded into the quagmire of Iraq was bad enough; that a Labour prime minister could have done so beggared belief' (p167). The earlier armed intervention in Yugoslavia (Kosovo) in 1999 was, in fact, the 100th overseas military campaign by British armed forces since World War II. In the lead up to the war on Yugoslavia, the then Labour Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, declared that 'nowhere in the world is so far away that it is not relevant to our security interests'.⁵ Throughout its history Labour has always been prepared to use military power to defend the interests of British imperialism.⁶ The interventions under Blair are simply a continuation of that stance.

Poverty in 'Fantasy Island'

There is very little about poverty in 'Fantasy Island'. The journalist Polly Toynbee's book on the plight of the working poor, arising from her undercover investigations, is as close as E&A get to it. The book they say 'took the reader into a world of which most of us are barely aware, one of dreadful pay and almost zero status' (p149). They report that most employment growth in the UK continues to be at the low-skill end of the service sector, including nearly 1m workers in call centres. So many migrant workers are allowed in, they say, because 'they help to keep wages down and thus please New Labour's business allies' (p159). And there are at least 4m workers in 'service', with the proportion employed by the well-off to do their cooking, cleaning, childcare, and gardening as high as in the 1860s (p76, p79). These are, however, just throw-away comments. They never examine the political, social and class implications of these developments.

This is hardly surprising. E&A believe that New Labour has turned the tide in terms of rising income inequality (p12). 'There have been the minimum wage, and redistribution of wealth through tax credits and other mechanisms' (p23). These are lazy simplifications. Income inequality has actually grown under Labour. From 1996/97 to 2005/06, the share of total income of the top 10% of individuals has risen from 27.8% to 29.5% and that of the bottom 10% has fallen 2.0% to 1.6%. The ratio of the top 20% share to the bottom 20% share of total income has also risen from 7.3 to 7.8. Overall the *gini* coefficient (100 equals perfect inequality; zero equals perfect equality) has risen from 37 to 39 in the same period. Britain is the least equal society in the European Union.

Over ten years Labour has hardly begun to reverse the massive increase

in the numbers living in poverty under the Tories. 12.8m individuals (22% of the population) and 3.8m children (30% of all children) lived in poverty (below 60% of the median income after housing costs) in 2005/06 – a decrease of only 1.2m individuals and 500,000 children since 1996/97, after a period when real incomes rose 28%. The numbers living in poverty are in fact rising again. From 2004/05 to 2005/06 the number of individuals living in poverty rose by around 800,000 and the number of children in poverty rose by 200,000.⁷ So Blair's announcement in 1999 that he would abolish child poverty in a generation is really a fantasy – although not on E&A's list.⁸

E&A believe that without a change in political direction they face two equally unpalatable developments. The first is a serious deterioration to their own comfortable lives – a prosperity, however illusory, of 'plenty of jobs and plenty of money, with friends always popping round for a barbecue, cheap flights to interesting destinations, white wine in the fridge and a flat-panel television to watch the latest British sporting triumph' (p24). The second is that of a highly polarised society threatened with financial collapse and setting into play politically dangerous, possibly revolutionary, forces. They yearn for a middle way 'between the harshness of free market capitalism on the one hand' and what they casually dismiss as 'the cruelties and inefficiencies of communism on the other' (p34). That middle way is the real fantasy. It is the one that graces every page of *Fantasy Island*.

David Yaffe

Prime Minister Gordon Brown: no change



1 Cited in the *Financial Times* 24 September 2007

2 Elliott and Atkinson are the economics editors of *The Guardian* and *Mail on Sunday* respectively. Page numbers in the text refer to the book.

3 See my review of this book in 'The Age of Anxiety' in *FRFI* 143 June/July 1998 (www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frifpages/143.html)

4 See my article 'Britain: Parasitic and decaying capitalism' in *FRFI* 194 December 2006/January 2007 (www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frifpages/194.html)

5 Cited by John Pilger *New Statesman* 2 April 1999.

6 See R Clough *Labour: a party fit for imperialism* Larkin Publications 1992. A new edition is being prepared.

7 All poverty statistics are from DWP *Households below Average Income* 1994/95–2005/06.

8 They do speak of 'ambitious plans' of Brown to eradicate child poverty by 2020, saying that he will have to spend billions of pounds to achieve it (pp225-6).

Prison officers' national strike

At 7am on 29 August members of the Prison Officers' Association (POA) in all 129 state-run prisons in England and Wales began a national strike in protest against the government's insistence that an agreed 2.5% pay rise would be implemented in two stages. The government immediately went to court and obtained an injunction forbidding the POA from 'inducing, authorising or supporting any form of industrial action which would disrupt the operation of the Prison Service in England and Wales'. After a bit of bluster and confusion, during which officers at some prisons went straight back to work while others said they would stay out, the strike came to an end. During the course of the day a prisoner at Acklington, who was locked in his cell because of the strike, killed himself and POA members crossed their own picket lines to repress protests at Liverpool prison and Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institute.

NICKI JAMESON reports.

Some commentators on the left were quick to pronounce prison officers the new vanguard of the working class. The Respect Party's George Galloway's praise was fulsome: 'Everyone should support the POA in this battle... In taking action despite the unjust anti-union laws and in refusing to cave in, the prison officers' union has set an example for the entire labour movement. Everyone must rally to their side.'

There is no doubt that the POA is under attack; with an ever-increasing prison population, the government wants a cheap, compliant workforce to run the machinery of imprisonment. In the light of privatisation in other sectors and the continuing attack on public sector workers, whenever the POA is attacked or takes action, part of the left proclaims the union's progressive credentials and demands that all socialists side with it against the government.

So should socialists 'rally to the side' of the striking screws? Or should we pause for a minute and consider what the POA really is, what kind of 'union' it is, what class forces it actually represents? Can the demands of prison officers for better pay and conditions really be equated with those of teachers, nurses and other public sector workers? And can there ever be common cause between the gaolers and the gaolled?

While both the government/Prison Service and the POA are in the business of locking up prisoners, they do not have the same priorities. However, neither side is progressive and, in defending the interests of its members, the POA has frequently taken up positions that are more reactionary than those of the state. It has an uncompromising, militaristic tradition and has repeatedly eschewed liberal, rehabilitative approaches to imprisonment in favour of open aggression towards prisoners.

Up until the 1980s, whoever was nominally in charge, all British gaols were in effect ruled by the iron fist of the POA. Since then, the union's power has been eroded: the 1987 Fresh Start agreement ended lucrative overtime arrangements and enforced a 39-hour working week; escort and court duties were taken over by private contractors and private prisons are staffed by members of other unions or no union at all. The Tories removed prison officers' right to strike in 1993, formalising this in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. When Labour came to power in 1997 it promised to repeal the relevant clause; however it then made a voluntary no-strike agreement with the

POA on the basis that pay would be decided by an independent review board.

The POA is no ordinary union: it is a vicious, racist, anti-working class organisation, notorious for the brutality of its members against prisoners. Its current claims that its members are overworked and prisons understaffed may appear to have some resonance as the British prison population climbs towards 100,000 but there has never been a time when the POA did not call for more prison officers and proclaim its members were in terrible danger from crazed violent prisoners. In 1983 when 38 Republican prisoners made a spectacular escape from The Maze prison in the north of Ireland, the POA blamed lack of resources even though the prison had 1,000 prison officers for 600 prisoners.

In July 2007 the government gave a detailed reply to a parliamentary question regarding staff to prisoner ratios over the past ten years. This revealed that the ratio of staff to prisoners had fallen slightly in nearly all male prisons, risen slightly in all female ones and that in the three highest security prisons (Full Sutton, Long Lartin and Frankland), although it had fallen very slightly, it remained in the region of one member of staff per prisoner.

As for the dangers faced, former Home Secretary David Blunkett was applauded at the 2003 POA conference when he announced that the minimum life sentence tariff for the murder of a prison officer would be increased from 20 to 30 years. In fact, despite the violent deaths of many prisoners at the hands of prison staff, no prison officer has been killed in an adult prison in Britain since the 19th century.

There have been some superficial changes to the character and role of prison officers over the last 20 years. Although the 1991 Woolf Inquiry into the Strangeways prison uprising refused to investigate allegations of staff brutality, Woolf made it clear he wanted to 'modernise', 'develop' and 'enhance' prison officers' role. This led to the banning of officers' militaristic peaked caps, an expansion of 'personal officer' schemes and more involvement of prison officers in report-writing and paperwork.

This 'modernisation' has been reflected in the union. While in the 1970s open National Front membership was rife among POA members, the union today has a black chairman, Colin Moses.

But underneath it is pretty much business as usual. Indeed report-writing has become a supplementary and

clever method of oppression than the old fashioned brutality of earlier years. Although prisoners are still beaten in segregation units, with longer sentences and more parole and other reviews, any prison officer who wants to can destroy a prisoner's chances of early release with a few well-chosen comments on a form.

The union shamelessly covers up for the brutality of its membership against prisoners. In 2003, when the Prison Service settled civil cases taken by 14 prisoners, who at Wormwood Scrubs in 1995-9 were subjected to sustained beatings, mock executions, choking and torrents of racist abuse by prison officers, the POA complained that its members were being 'scapegoated' and called for a public inquiry to 'clear their names once and for all'.

The POA also continues to campaign for increased weaponry with which to inflict physical pain. In particular POA members in prisons holding children are agitating to be issued with extendable batons.

And it does not protect the weak,



Prison officers on strike

even among its own ranks. In 2005 former POA member Carol Lingard won a record £477,000 payout at an industrial tribunal. She had reported another prison officer for planting material in a prisoner's cell which could lead to him being attacked, and forging another prisoner's records. Management dismissed her complaints and her colleagues bullied her until she resigned.

So, when POA general secretary Brian Caton states that 'every officer has human rights and they include the right to withdraw their labour' and sections of the left rush to voice their support and solidarity, we should remember that prison officers never stand in solidarity with prisoners who take protest action in support of their human rights. In 1990 when prisoners at Strangeways rose up in protest against years of oppression, brutality and degradation, the POA was first in the queue to denounce them, call them animals and tell barefaced lies about their actions, claiming protesting prisoners had committed murder and torture, in order to prevent public sympathy and destroy solidarity.

Most prison officers are from the working class but, like the police, they are hired to protect the ruling class by enforcing its laws and punishing those who do not obey them. They are the defenders of inequality and privilege. They are therefore quite different from state employees who teach, nurse or provide services that benefit the working class. Whilst it is clearly the case that the POA's members' wages and

privileges are currently being squeezed because of the contradictions that the state has to deal with when needing to run a massive repressive apparatus and trying to do so at minimum cost, this does not make their struggle a progressive one, and it should not be supported by socialists.

Solidarity works

As a direct result of the solidarity shown by yourselves and comrades from Anarchist Black Cross, the Scottish Prison Service has now backed down and agreed to return me to an open jail.

Once again, this has shown how the power of solidarity will always prevail even in the face of the most vicious and apparently overwhelming repression.

As far as I'm concerned, however, this particular battle is far from over and I'm going to continue to expose the lies in what took place.

My deepest thanks to you and everyone who supported me through what has been a difficult and often formidable struggle.

John Bowden

See FRFI 197 for a detailed account of the Scottish Prison Service attack on John.

Deaths in custody

The first annual report of the Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody was published on 21 September. The report found there were around 600 deaths in custody in England and Wales last year: in prisons, police cells, approved premises and secure hospitals. A third of these deaths were apparently self-inflicted, and the study by the Forum finds that some were preventable.

The report raised concerns about the number of mentally ill people in custody, and suggested they would be better looked after in psychiatric care. The number of self-inflicted deaths in prisons fell from 78 in 2005 to 67 last year, but the figure is on the rise again this year.

Prison overcrowding has been blamed. The current prison population - 81,133 in England and Wales [as at 28.09.07] - is undoubtedly part of the problem. But, shamefully, prisons continue to be used as 'social dustbins' for the mentally ill, drug and alcohol dependent, homeless, and so on. This abhorrent practice must stop but, until there is a change in penal policy and practice, deaths in custody will continue, along with the shame on Labour politicians.



Pauline Campbell arrested at Eastwood Park

My daughter was severely depressed when she died in prison custody in 2003. She had been led to believe that, if convicted at her trial, she would serve her sentence in a secure psychiatric unit. Instead, she was taken to HMP Styal, and collapsed, dying, while on 'suicide watch' in the prison's segregation block on 18 January 2003. She died several hours later in hospital.

There is, as yet, no evidence

that 'lessons are being learned' - evidenced by the fact that 39 women prisoners have died since my daughter's death four years ago. Inquests continue to highlight unacceptable practice in custodial institutions, but coroners' recommendations are not always implemented. The Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Prisons Ombudsman likewise make suggestions and recommendations which, all too often, are ignored. Yet prisons are not above the law: all inmates are owed a legal duty of care, and have a right to life under Article 2. It remains to be seen whether the government will be shamed into taking any action.

Pauline Campbell

On 24 September Pauline was acquitted at North Avon Magistrates' Court of obstructing the highway outside Eastwood Park prison in protest at the death of remand prisoner Caroline Powell. District Judge David Parsons found that although Pauline was technically obstructing the highway, she had no intention of doing so, particularly given that the prison called the police on the basis she was on their land and was committing aggravated trespass, rather than highway obstruction. The judge accepted that she had gone there to express 'genuinely held concerns over the deaths of women in custody' and that she was 'in the vanguard of public opinion seeking to bring about change'.

FRFI round up

Fight racism! Defend asylum seekers

FRFI supporters have been on the march against racism and in defence of asylum seekers. In Manchester our comrades have been working in the North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG). On 11 August, NWASDG, the Sukula Family, Samina Altaf and Mahoro Must Stay campaigns, No One is Illegal, International Organisation of Iranian Refugees (IOIR), Ethiopia Support Project and Bolton NUT

deportations to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (see page 16). In Glasgow from 27 to 28 August FRFI comrades joined an all-night picket of Brand Street IRC followed by a 150-strong mass protest against deportations to DRC. Earlier, they had joined Cameroonian asylum seekers protesting outside the IRC against an attempted deportation.



1 September: Rally for democratic rights in Newcastle upon Tyne

organised a march of over 100 people. At the open-mic rally that followed an Iranian communist spoke of the brutality refugees are fleeing in countries like Iran, how attacks on immigrants are a tool of capitalist domination and division, and how the fight for asylum rights should be linked to the struggle against capitalism and imperialism, and for socialism. NWASDG is now mobilising for a further march on 3 November.

On 22 September London FRFI joined a No Borders march against the building of a second immigration prison at Gatwick airport. On the same day, TCAR organised a solidarity march through Newcastle. TCAR has also continued with the Pledge of Resistance (see FRFI 195) and organised an emergency demonstration for the first TCAR family to be snatched in Newcastle since the New Asylum Model was introduced (see page 16).

FRFI supporters are involved in regular demonstrations at Communications House (London), Dallas Court (Salford) and North Shields (Newcastle). Immigration Reporting Centres (IRCs) and continue to support the struggle against

Urgent assistance required: On 8 September immigration officers arrested Iraqi asylum seeker Sabah Abdul Rahman Kasim after a NWASDG organising meeting. The officers told him 'we will send you back home' and for four days none of his family knew what had happened. Sabah is now in Harmondsworth and faces deportation to Iraq where he risks being tortured or killed. Please call Harmondsworth on 020 8283 3850 - ask why Sabah is being detained, and for him to be released immediately.

Stop the war

Around the country activists have been keeping up street stalls on a weekly basis calling for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Iraq. On 2 September in Manchester FRFI's Trevor Rayne spoke at a well received public forum on the Middle East. He highlighted the reactionary role played by Britain in Iraq and Afghanistan and reflected on the opportunist actions of the Labour 'left' in preventing any real opposition to the war.

LONDON

Saturday 6 October 12-3pm
Rock around the Blockade (RATB)
Rally to celebrate the life of Che Guevara on the 40th anniversary of his death
North pavement Trafalgar Square, WC2 (Nearest tube Charing Cross)

Sunday 21 October
Rock around the Blockade
Fundraising bike ride
Contact us for details and sponsorship form

Saturday 27 October 12-5pm
London School of Economics (LSE) FRFI student society with RATB
Day of discussion and debate:
Che Guevara and his revolutionary legacy
LSE, Houghton Street, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Tuesday 6 November 1-2pm
Defend asylum seekers!
Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!
Demonstration outside Communications House Old Street, EC1 (Nearest tube Old Street)

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada!
Demonstration outside Marks & Spencer Oxford Street (Marble Arch end), WC1 (Nearest tube March Arch)

For details call 020 7837 1688 or 07790 896 430
Email northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com / eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com

NEWCASTLE

Friday 5 October 7pm onwards
Rebel Music Night: Rebel Rendezvous
The Venue, Northumbria University Student Union, St Mary's Place,

Tuesday 16 October 6-9pm
Public Forum: The oppressed of the world support Cuba - why doesn't the left in Britain?
Stage 2, Northumbria University Student Union

Thursday 25 October 6-8pm
Victory to the Intifada
Demonstration outside M&S Northumberland St

Every Saturday 12-2pm
Street actions or stall

For details call 07858 346 276
Or email frfi_northeast@yahoo.com
Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk

Every Saturday 3pm
Tyneside Community Action for Refugees meeting
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom of Westgate Road.

TCAR 07989 879 310
Email tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Saturday 6 October 12 noon
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group (NWASDG) organising meeting
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street (behind central library)

Sunday 7 October 2pm
Public film showing and discussion

EVENTS

Che Guevara: revolutionary communist
Cross Street chapel, off Market Street, Manchester
Donations on the door, wheelchair access available

Saturday 3 November 12 noon
Anti-Racism March called by NWASDG, International Organisation of Iranian Refugees, Manchester No Borders and others
Assemble Whitworth Park for march to Longsight

Sunday 25 November 2pm
FRFI Public forum and discussion
Viva Cuba!
Cross Street chapel, off Market Street
Donation on the door, wheelchair access available

For details call 07816 547 066
Email mrcgfrfi@fmail.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk

NWASDG 07779 189 794
Email fightback_05@yahoo.com. Website
www.asylum-seekers-defence.org.uk

LEEDS

RCG/FRFI in Leeds is currently planning new activities in the area
Call 07899 983 131
Email frfi_leeds@yahoo.co.uk

GLASGOW

Sunday 7 October 2-5pm
Public meeting
10 years of Labour: a decade of war, poverty and racism
Partick Burgh Halls
Email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Defend the right to protest

On 1 September in Newcastle a Rally for Democratic Rights was organised at Grey's Monument by FRFI and activists from other political campaigning groups. The rally was a response to the increasing police harassment of political activity under cover of council regulations on collecting money. Despite clear exemptions for collections taken at a street meeting in the written regulations, police have regularly demanded names, addresses and dates of birth of activists under threat of arrest and have issued formal

warnings to members of Tyneside Stop the War. On two occasions they have arrested supporters of FRFI and have seized money which has yet to be returned. Despite this, no charges have been brought and no summonses issued. The police are using the regulations on collecting as an excuse to harass activists.

Victory to the intifada

Pickets of Newcastle M&S have continued on a monthly basis in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance and on 6 September a public meeting was held in

the Yours and Mine Community Café in Arthur's Hill. Weekly pickets of the company's flagship store on Oxford Street London also continue.

Student societies

It is the new university year and FRFI has set up student societies at University College London, Northumbria (Newcastle), Durham and Glasgow. There will also be a Freshers Fair stall at the London School of Economics on 4 and 5 October. If you would like more information on these societies or would like to set up a society at your university contact us on 020 7837 1688 or email office@rcgfrfi.plus.com.

RATB round up

Free the Cuban 5!

The Cuban Five have been unjustly locked up in the US for more than six years, political prisoners in US imperialism's war against Cuban socialism. This year Cuba called an international month of action from 12 September to 6 October, with protests organised globally to demand their release. In Britain the Revolutionary Communist Group's Rock around the Blockade campaign answered the call for action.

Action in support of the Five kicked off in London on 15 September. Members of Rock around the Blockade held a lively rally in Trafalgar Square in the centre of London to call for the immedi-

ate release of these prisoners of US imperialism, culminating in a march through the square, holding placards that spelled out the words 'Free the Five'. On 22 September in Manchester activists held a highly visible protest for the release of the Five, with stalls, flags, banners and placards in solidarity with Cuban socialism. More events are planned, including a protest in Scotland outside the US consulate in Edinburgh. As Cuba regularly points out, the international campaign to free the Five must gather strength if these revolutionary fighters are to be freed.

On 28 July RATB supporters in Newcastle organised a 'Celebration of Resistance' in the city centre to mark the 54th anniversary of the attack on Moncada Barracks, which sparked the revolutionary struggle in Cuba. The celebration was supported by rock band OPEN, local DJ Stres, and comrades'

own musical talents. The event was harassed by the police, who wrongly claimed that it was illegal to collect donations. One comrade was arrested. However, the event continued, and a picket of the police station was quickly organised until the comrade was released.

In Glasgow in August comrades held a successful showing of the film *The Revolution will not be televised*, in the working-class district of Govanhill. Local people who turned up to the meeting were inspired to see the power of the masses when they actively step in to politics and history, and a good discussion followed on the nature of the Venezuelan revolution. Activists in London screened *The Cuban excludables*, about the treatment in the US of Cubans who emigrated to the US during the Mariel boatlift. Film showings are an increasingly valuable way of drawing people

into discussion of the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America. Check the events listings for details of other film showings.

At a time when most British people are sickened by the imperialist occupation of Iraq and by British complicity in the torture of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere, while in Britain we are witnessing the creeping privatisation of our health and education systems, the example of the Cuban Revolution shows that a more just type of society is possible when working class people take charge.

This October marks the 40th anniversary of the murder of Che Guevara by CIA-backed terrorists. Rock around the Blockade will be holding meetings and events to demonstrate that Che's revolutionary and internationalist message is as important today as it ever was. We are also building for the

Cuban speaking tour next spring (see page 9), with protests, discussion meetings, film showings and fund-raising gigs, to help raise people's knowledge about Cuba in preparation for the tour. Get in touch and be a part of it! See page 9 for details of how to join Rock around the Blockade.



CHOOSE THE

RCG

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

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

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

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SWP on Ireland

On 31 July 2007 after 38 years, 'Operation Banner' ended in the north of Ireland. 'Operation Banner' was the name given to the British army's role of upholding British imperialism's rule in the north of Ireland. An article the following week in *Socialist Worker* (8 August) written by long-standing Socialist Workers Party (SWP) member Chris Bambery stated correctly that the 'British troops were not sent into Northern Ireland in August 1969 to keep the peace'. However, he failed to tell us that, at the time, *Socialist Worker* had a very different position.

As the British Labour government sent troops into the north to support the Unionist regime and to crush nationalist resistance to British rule, *Socialist Worker* urged the nationalist minority in the north to accept them:

'Because the troops do not have the ingrained hatreds of the RUC and the Specials, they will not behave with the same viciousness.' (21 August 1969)

'The breathing space provided by the presence of British troops is short but vital. Those who call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops before the men behind the barricades can defend themselves are inviting a pogrom which will hit first and hardest at

socialists.' (11 September 1969)

'To say that the immediate enemy in Ulster is the British troops is incorrect.' (18 September 1969)

It was this capitulation to British imperialism which led the SWP to remove the demand for the withdrawal of British troops from abroad from its 'Where We Stand' column. More recently, although the SWP in Ireland has campaigned against British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has remained silent on the issue of British troops in Ireland itself.

British imperialism has not left Ireland. A permanent garrison of 5,000 troops remains in the Six Counties. From 1 August British Army 'Operation Helvetia' allows British soldiers to be used against the Irish people in the event of 'extreme public disorder'. British military intelligence remains whilst the St Andrews Agreement, a document signed last year by all the parties in the north, creates an increased role for MI5. It is having a new headquarters built outside Belfast, and it continues to operate informers and spies in Irish politics. This of course includes the loyalist paramilitary death squads that have long been used to terrorise the nationalist minority.

PAUL MALLON
Belfast

Victory for civil liberties

At a time when the right to protest is increasingly under attack in Britain, the victory of two Animal Aid campaigners against police attempts to criminalise them for a stall on the street is a beacon of light.

Miranda James and Tracey Rawlings won their appeal against a conviction for highway obstruction on 7 September when Judge Mole found that the two had a 'lawful excuse' for setting up their stall – that is, they were

exercising their right to 'communicate with the public on a matter that they regarded as important'. He found that they had made reasonable efforts to avoid interrupting users of the highway and that in any case such an interruption would have to have been 'unreasonable' and 'significant' for an offence to be committed. He commented 'this was a prosecution through which no useful purpose was served'.

A victory for free speech, peaceful protest and civil liberties!

CAT WIENER
South London

Support the Chagos Islanders!

I am writing to you about the struggle of the Chagossian people to return to their traditional islands in the Indian Ocean.

30 December 1966 was the day the Chagossian Archipelago was ethnically cleansed, sentencing its people to a life of poverty and misery; it was the day the Labour government of Harold Wilson signed a 50-year-lease allowing the United States to build on the island of Diego Garcia its most important military base outside the US itself.

The British government 'sanitised' the islands on behalf of the US, creating a new colonial province called 'the British Indian Ocean Territory', to avoid prosecution under article 73 of the United Nations Charter. It then told the UN the residents of Diego Garcia were merely 'temporary

residents' – a blatant lie. To seal the clandestine deal, the US agreed to pay Britain £14 million to help buy the complicity of Mauritius and the Seychelles, as well as paying for Polaris nuclear weapons – thereby breaking a Labour Party election promise.

The islanders were then forcibly removed from their home without any discussion in Parliament. It was only the action of the Chagossians in taking the British government to court that forced this crime out into the open.

In 2006 the High Court in London ruled for a second time that the evacuation of the islanders was illegal; for the second time the British government has appealed against the ruling.

Meanwhile, the islanders are forced to languish in the slums of

Fight cutbacks in mental health provision

I am a college student in Manchester with Asperger's Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I used to get support from an organisation in Manchester set up to help people with Asperger's. This meant free one-to-one sessions with support workers, as well as drop-ins and general activities – people with disorders like mine need to be constantly occupied and focused on doing things.

Recent changes have meant that one-to-ones, drop-ins and walking groups have to be paid for by me out of Disability Allowance (DLA). I don't get enough DLA to afford the support I need. Before, although there were problems, I did have the benefit of regular activity and the support to meet my

needs. But since the organisation lost council funding, individuals with my problems have had to bear the brunt of the cost.

So I applied for direct payments from Social Services. The application was approved by their panel but then refused by their Manchester director. I am now so worried about the future. The time around Christmas is always especially hard as some support is always lost at that time of year anyway.

People with learning difficulties are facing increased attacks from local councils and from the Labour government. Capitalism will never meet the needs of people like me. We need to fight the cutbacks.

ZACH
Manchester

Climate change

In a world overflowing with horrors, how could the *New Statesman* describe a gathering of a few hundred hippies half a mile from an airport as 'the most important protest of our time'? Did they forget about the two million people who marched through London against US imperialism a few years ago? And the millions more around the world? What about Greenham Common, the Aldermaston marches, and all the other far larger efforts to stop us from wiping ourselves out completely?

I'm not sure if there's an accurate measure for the importance of a protest. Presumably it would include the significance of the issue, the size of the protest and the effect it had, weighted and inter-related in some impenetrable manner and then published in an obscure sociology journal, never to be read until, in a thousand years' time, society has again reached the degree of stability necessary to support sociological research, and they start to look into the end of the world, how it happened, and why

only a few hundred hippies tried to stop it.

According to the Tyndall Centre, the UK's leading authority on climate science, the government's forecast for aviation growth means that within a few decades aviation alone will be producing enough emission to keep us on course for catastrophic climate change. What does 'catastrophic' mean? Well, the last time the world heated up this quickly, 251,000,000 years ago at the end of the Permian era, it caused the extinction of 95% of species on the planet. Christian Aid predict that climate change will kill 182,000,000 people in this century in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

The Met Office claims that the average area of land subject at any one time to 'severe drought' has already tripled from 1% in the 20th century to 3% this decade. By the end of this century they expect it to be at 30%.

The generally agreed limit of 'safe' climate change is a two degree rise (averaged over the globe). This is not 'safe' in the sense that no one will die – the death toll from climate change is already in the millions – but 'safe' in the sense that civilisation is likely to be able to adapt and continue. We are already too late to keep to this limit. The situation we face is a choice between the most demanding and difficult period in human history, and the end of human history. It is comparable to the threat of an all-out global nuclear war. The significant difference is that, with climate change, the missiles are already airborne.

GRAHAM,
Plane Stupid
www.planestupid.com/

Free Nelson Mandela

Poor Nelson Mandela, former political prisoner, former leader of the African National Congress and former President of South Africa, has the misfortune not only to have spent 27 years in gaol, but also to have been adopted by British imperialism as a saint in his own lifetime. Parliament Square in London is stuffed full of statues of those who have serviced imperialism in one way or another and now he has joined their ranks – Abraham Lincoln, Lord Palmerston, Jan Smuts, Robert Peel, Emmeline Pankhurst, Winston Churchill etc, etc.

It is not the long battle fought by the black majority in South Africa to defeat apartheid which is being honoured, but Mandela's role in stitching up a compromise deal in the new South Africa in a 'peaceful', 'non-violent' fashion. We are to forget that millions of black people in Africa, including South Africa, live in dire poverty, their communities devastated by HIV/AIDs while multi-national companies continue their super-exploitation. We must forget that the Parliament in Parliament Square is waging bloody war in Iraq and Afghanistan while this 'non-violence' is celebrated. Brian Haw's anti-war demonstration in the Square was carefully hidden from view so that the statue could be unveiled without reality intruding.

Ken Livingstone, whose pet project has become statue-raising, is now proposing another: a statue of Gandhi. A supreme and ghastly irony.
CAROL BRICKLEY
London

Socialist Worker capitulates to Zionism

Professor Alex Callinicos used his *Socialist Worker* column on 29 September to oppose any call on his lecturers' union to debate an academic boycott of Israel. The opportunist coward hides behind Noam Chomsky to argue that a ballot would be 'heavily defeated' because there would be a 'well-funded Zionist campaign' against it, with the left in the union isolated as a consequence. Better, it seems, to abandon any principle in favour of an empty 'maximum unity over the question of Palestine' and hand victory to the Zionists without a fight. What an indictment of 'left wing' trade union politicking!

ROBERT CLOUGH



New careers

The *Financial Times* (21 September 2007), ruminating over the Northern Rock debacle, announces 'a new discipline of emotional finance', drawing on insights that Freudian psychoanalysis offers. Two professors explain: 'We tend to deal with anxiety in one of two states of mind – "depressive" (D) or "paranoid-schizoid" (PS). 'Depressives', we are told, have 'a realistic view' of markets, but 'paranoid-schizoids' separate the excitement at new investments from the pain of potential loss; they 'separate risk and reward and so do not think properly'. A paranoid-schizoid state has prevailed in the markets, all doubts

were dismissed, anxiety that might spell caution was denied, the bubble burst, then anger and blame, but surprisingly little guilt or learning'. 'Distrust and panic can easily become a dominant feature; something noticeable when the queues outside Northern Rock branches did not easily respond to reasoned argument.'

Capitalism is nothing if not conniving and resourceful when it comes to making money. No doubt the professors can look forward to lucrative careers as anxieties abound in the markets; as Freud would tell his patients, 'I am expensive, you know'.

TREVOR RAYNE
South London



**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Campsfield detainees fight back!

On 4 August, 26 detainees escaped from Campsfield immigration prison in Oxfordshire following the latest in a long line of protests. A few days earlier, 160 detainees held a yard demonstration to protest against the appalling conditions in the detention centre. A planned hunger strike was then suspended for a meeting with Home Office representatives; however the meeting failed to satisfy the prisoners' concerns and on Friday 3 August there was a further yard demonstration.

According to the Close Campsfield Campaign, the protest on 4 August started with a fire in a portacabin, which was used as a kitchen. Detainees were evacuated into the yard at about 10.30am due to the risk of gas bottles stored nearby exploding. By 10.45 some detainees had started smashing through the back gate and 26 people had managed to break out and escape. Police in riot gear were brought in and a helicopter, police dogs and a large number of police officers were drafted in to track down the escapees. Twelve were

caught more or less straight away and three more within a few days; however, the remainder have managed to evade recapture.

Campsfield, formerly a Young Offenders Institute, was converted into an immigration prison in 1993. Operated by GEO, a private US company specialising in detention facilities, it has been constantly criticised for its appalling conditions. A statement issued by the prisoners on 31 July said 'Living conditions for detainees are appalling. Campsfield is a health hazard with 70% infection with flu. Paracetamol is the only medicine

made available; two weeks ago even this ran out. Campsfield [is] rife with scabies, but only staff [are] issued with gloves.'

Despite longstanding criticism of the appalling conditions from asylum seekers' support and human rights organisations, Lin Homer, chief executive of the Border and Immigration Agency, was entirely unsympathetic, saying 'If they don't like being in detention centres I just invite them to help us get them their documents so they can go home'. This statement reflects the Labour government's attitude towards asylum seekers, with many not in detention forced to choose between 'voluntary return' or destitution.

The police and government were also quick to smear the escapees and make them sound like dangerous criminals on the run, emphasising that all those still at large had been convicted of criminal offences, served prison sentences and were now awaiting deportation. However, with an



No to immigration detention! On 22 September FRFI joined No Borders march to Tinsley House removal centre

ever-increasing number of criminal offences being created for overstaying, using false documents or working without a permit, asylum seekers and refugees are easily branded as 'criminals' for merely trying to survive and seeking safety from persecution, tor-

ture, genocide, warfare or poverty.

FRFI stands in solidarity with the Campsfield detainees and all immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers fighting back against Labour's racist and inhumane treatment of the vulnerable and oppressed. *Alyse Thompson*

The Uthayakumar family must stay! Stop deporting Tamils to Sri Lanka!

On 5 September immigration authorities snatched a Tamil Sri Lankan family from South Benwell, Newcastle. The immigration police pounded at the door of the Uthayakumar family home at 7am and demanded access. The family were informed that they faced deportation and were made to pack their belongings under the supervision of immigration officials from North Shields Immigration Reporting Centre. The family is suspected by the Sri Lankan government of having connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and would be in extreme danger if deported.

The Uthayakumar family are members of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) and were able to make a phone call to friends, who were also TCAR members, before opening the door. Their friends mobilised people immediately to protest against the dawn raid. The local police prevented protesters from getting close to the house, threatening arrests for breach of the peace.

Political action against immigration snatch squads is costing the Home Office time and resources. For the last few months a group named Snatch-Watch has been monitoring early morning activity at North Shields and attempting to follow vans if they go out on dawn raids. The Immigration Service is now using police back-up and appears to be using decoy vans to avoid being followed.

In January this year TCAR started the Pledge of Resistance (reported in FRFI 195), which calls on local people to stand in solidarity with asylum seekers by getting out on the streets and protesting if a dawn raid happens in their area. The Labour government tries to use dawn raids to snatch families silently, away from public scrutiny. But TCAR members say 'You will not snatch us silently!' Every time a TCAR family is snatched TCAR holds a noisy demonstration outside the Government Offices North East. As a direct result of this political action, many TCAR members have had their cases reported in the press and the vast majority have avoided deportation.

A fresh appeal has now been submitted in the Uthayakumar family's case. The campaign for them to stay is supported by the school attended by 15-

year-old Kawsika Uthayakumar and their story has had local and international news coverage. The family were released from detention on 20 September and headed straight back to Newcastle to join the TCAR march against immigration prisons on 22 September.

Sri Lanka is a former British colony and, although a relatively small island, holds great strategic importance for control of the wider region. Since the early 1970s the LTTE has led the fight for an independent Tamil state in the north and eastern part of the island. This area contains one of the most

prized deep water ports in the region at Trincomalee and imperialist powers like Britain and the US do not see an independent Tamil state as in their interests. They have therefore assisted the Sri Lankan government in attacking the Tamil national struggle. In March 2001 the British government named the LTTE as one of the international organisations that would be banned from operating in Britain under the Terrorism Act 2000. This meant that almost all support for Tamil independence is criminalised.

Annie Richardson



TCAR demonstration for the Uthayakumar family

Stop and search targets Asian people in London

In the past five months police in London have carried out more stop and searches under anti-terrorism powers than in the whole of the previous year. In the year up to April 2007 they carried out 25,374 stops. Between April and August there were 32,395 stops. In July alone, following the failed car bombings on 29 June, there were nearly 11,000 stops. Over a fifth of those stopped were Asian, despite Asian people making up only a tenth of London's population.

Under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, the police may stop and search anyone without suspecting them of a crime, providing they are in an area designated as a potential terrorist target. Currently the whole of London is covered by the powers, meaning the stops can happen anywhere.

The purpose of this is clearly to harass a section of the population and maintain a climate of general fear, rather than to actually prevent crime, with even some of the police questioning the efficacy of high-profile intimidatory tactics that alienate already distrustful communities. Commander Rod Jarman, the Met 'lead on stop and search', says that the power is being used to disrupt terrorist planning - 'Terrorists live, work and blend in to our communities... To complement our covert methods of fighting terrorism we have a more visible presence to deter and disrupt terrorist activity'. However, Assistant Commissioner Andy Hayman, head of Specialist Operations and expert on counter-terrorism, is quoted as saying he is not sure what purpose the stops serve. ■

No deportations to DR Congo!

From 17 to 25 September the Immigration Appeal Tribunal considered submissions that the 'Country Guidance' on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is incorrect and deportations cannot be safely carried out. (Country Guidance is intended to provide immigration judges with information to assist their assessment of asylum claims.) As FRFI goes to press, the Tribunal has heard all the evidence and the three judges have retired to consider their verdict. This could take some months. Whatever the court decides, the view of the many people from DRC who have been demonstrating all year in cities across Britain and who made their presence felt outside the court is clear - DRC is not safe!

In February the Home Office succeeded in deporting 40 men, women and children to DRC on a charter flight. There have been reports that many of them were subsequently persecuted. In 2006 lawyers and activists in the Congo Support Project had already begun collecting evidence and testimonies in order to challenge the standing Country Guidance on DRC. The 26 February charter flight to Kinshasa seems to have been a cynical move by the government to get some asylum seekers out before the Tribunal hearing began. Similar moves have been made against groups of Zimbabwean, Sri Lankan and Sudanese asylum seekers in advance of Country Guidance hearings.

Following a 'directions hearing' in April, the Tribunal was to begin hearing the full case in July; however, faced with overwhelming evidence of the intimidation, torture and imprisonment of asylum seekers who were expelled to DRC, the Home Office legal team pleaded for more time to verify all the information they had been given. This case was then adjourned to September.

In August, freshly appointed Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, anxious to flex her muscles, decided that at the end of the month a charter flight would take failed asylum seekers to DRC. This was successfully challenged in the High Court, which ruled that no asylum seekers should be deported to DRC until after the Country Guidance case had been heard. No-one from DRC was deported but there have been reports that the plane departed nonetheless, op-

portunistically redeployed to take asylum seekers from neighbouring Congo Brazzaville, which was not covered by the decision.

The British government has an interest in keeping up the pretence that 'DRC is safe'. Although Britain has never directly colonised DRC, British companies are deeply involved in the exploitation of the country's mineral wealth. DRC has the world's largest deposits of copper, cobalt, coltan and cadmium, as well as chrome, timber, tin, rubber, oil, uranium, germanium, diamonds and gold. The war that has taken the lives of millions of people in DRC has been depicted in the international media as an 'ethnic war' or a 'civil war'. In reality it is a war for the control of these resources. Since his election last year, President Joseph Kabila has signed lucrative contracts with multinational companies, many with British links.

Every hearing related to the Country Guidance Tribunal has been accompanied by nationwide demonstrations, with Congolese communities in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Nottingham, Newcastle, Middlesbrough and other cities mobilising to get across the message that while Kabila's corrupt regime rules DRC and while imperialist countries and multinational companies plunder the region's resources, it is not safe to return. FRFI has supported and will continue to support these demonstrations and the struggle of the Congolese people against imperialist oppression.

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