

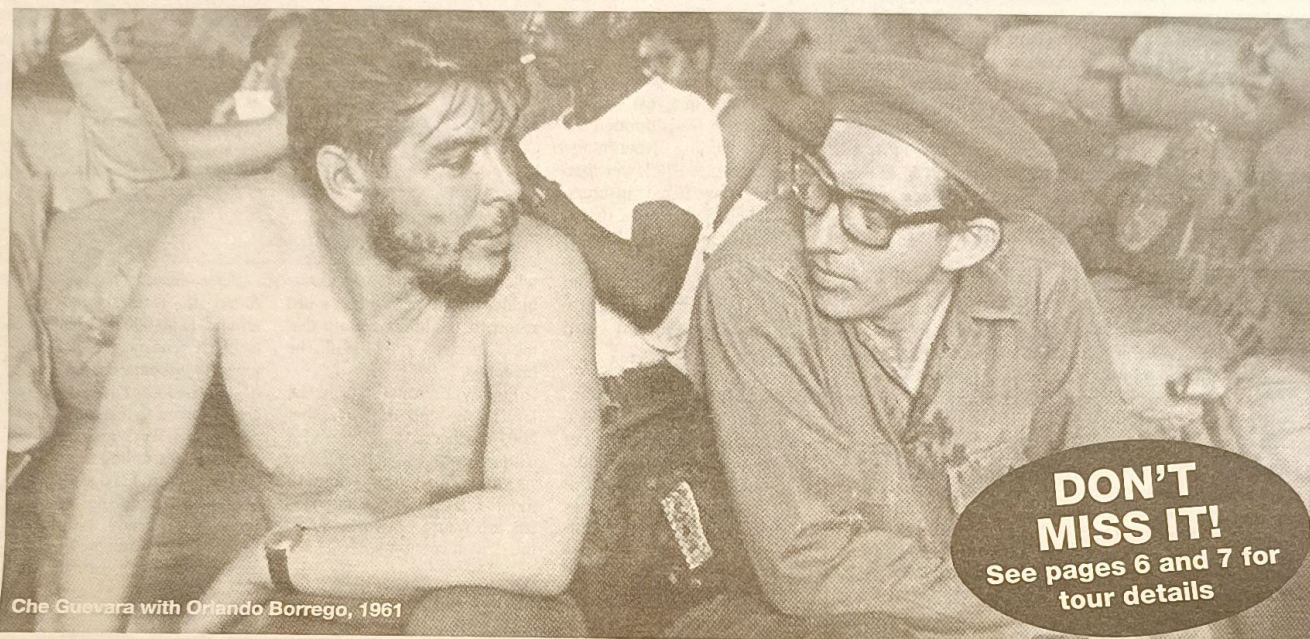
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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Che Guevara with Orlando Borrego, 1961

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MISS IT!**
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CUBAN SPEAKING TOUR 21 FEBRUARY-7 MARCH BORREGO-GARCIA-RUFIN

TROUBLE AHEAD FOR BRITISH CAPITALISM

■ 'In the new era in which we live, capitalism is not even a useful instrument. It is like a tree with rotten roots, from whence only the worst forms of individualism, corruption and inequality spread.'

Fidel Castro

14 January 2008

The latest global financial crisis, triggered by the rapid downturn in the US housing market, threatens to halt the relentless expansion of credit that has been the driving force behind economic growth in the major capitalist countries over the last 60 years. It took the largest cut in interest rates in the US for 25 years, a \$150bn tax-cutting fiscal stimulus and the news of a possible rescue plan for the major bond insurers, for the dramatic falls on the stock market on Monday 21 January to be halted and partially reversed. The rumour that it could have been a lone rogue trader, causing a record £3.6bn loss at a French investment bank, who precipitated the fall, has further aided the recovery of the stock markets. Confidence, whatever the source, is everything when the foundations are so rotten.

The British government, directing the major capitalist economy most vulnerable to external financial shocks,¹ trotted out the usual ministers to offer reassurance that the British economy could withstand global turbulence. Low interest rates, low inflation and a forecast to be the fastest growing economy in the G7 this year would provide insulation against problems anywhere in the world (*The Guardian* 23 January 2008). There will be a payback for this wishful thinking.

A housing bubble

The British economy suffers from a housing bubble even bigger than that in the US. Over the period 1996-2006 US real house prices rose by 127% while in the UK they rose by 144% and have continued rising. Outstanding mortgage debt in the UK at £1.17 trillion is around 130% of disposable income, far higher than in the US at about 104%.² House prices are now starting to fall in the UK removing a significant stimulus to economic growth.



The debacle at Northern Rock was inevitable given its business model of borrowing short-term to lend long-term. It was responsible for 20% of the UK home loan market in 2007. Once the fall-out from the sub-prime mortgage crisis hit the financial markets, Northern Rock could no longer raise funds from the capital markets and Britain suffered the spectacle of the first run on a British bank since 1866. To stop the rot the government was forced to give an extraordinary guarantee of 100% backing to savings

deposited at the bank, and the Bank of England stepped in as lender of last resort to keep the bank afloat. More than four months later the government, desperate to attract a private buyer and avoid nationalising the bank, has said it will subsidise shareholders by turning the Bank of England's £28bn loan to Northern Rock into bonds guaranteed by the government and backed by Northern Rock's mortgages and other loans. On this news, share prices of Northern Rock

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Welcome...

'In the last few years, I have discovered Che the thinker, the reflector, Che the critical thinker, Che the transformer of the economic system, Che of the stage of industrialisation in Cuba...all of which [Orlando] Borrego has been elaborating upon with an expertise and loyalty to the thought of Che...'

—Venezuelan President Chavez, October 2007.

Readers and supporters of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* have the exceptional opportunity to hear Chavez's teacher when Orlando Borrego tours Britain between 21 February and 7 March 2008, in a speaking tour organised by Rock around the Blockade, a solidarity campaign in support of the Cuban Revolution (see pages 6/7). Borrego worked with Ernesto 'Che' Guevara to develop an approach to socialist transition which placed human beings at the centre of society, focusing on collective consciousness and workers' democracy. They rejected dependence on capitalist mechanisms: profit, interest, credit, material incentives, self-interest. Borrego will be accompanied by Jesus Garcia, philosopher, elected local government representative and author of five books on socialism and democracy, and by Yoselin Ruffin, a young woman leader of Cuba's Federation of University Students.

In the last issue of FRFI, we reported on important debates underway within Cuba about structural reforms to the economy and social organisation. Capitalist promoters outside Cuba have scurried to give a platform and prestige to the handful of Cuban academics who have been seduced by the myth of 'free market' efficiency. By inviting Borrego, Garcia and Ruffin, Rock around the Blockade is providing an international forum for communists who represent true human progress; a rejection of the brutal capitalist logic of exploitation and production for profit not people's needs.

This revolutionary approach to development is reflected in the growing strength of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an alliance

embracing Cuba, Venezuela (see page 5), Bolivia and Nicaragua in trade and social cooperation in every sphere, from medical care to telecommunications. ALBA is based on solidarity and mutually beneficial exchange, opposing the imperialist exploitation that has trapped underdeveloped countries in downward cycles of debt, poverty and despair. As FRFI goes to press, the sixth summit of ALBA in Caracas, Venezuela, will set up the Bank of ALBA, a vital step to promote equitable and sustainable development, and protect ALBA countries from world financial and stock-exchange volatility.

What began as a mortgage crisis in the US has snowballed, toppling financial and corporate institutions, as the domino effect on credit expansion reveals the inherently crisis-ridden nature of capitalism (see page 3). Britain is also in for troubled times, with its over-valued housing market and the centrality of its parasitic financial sector (see pages 1/2). The implication is clear, the US position as dominant imperialist power is under threat. The US ruling class will not accept its decline without the most vicious fight to retain domination over the world. Inter-imperialist rivalries are intensifying in the struggle for control of the world's resources, essential to stave off the collapse of the system. Over a year ago scientists, alarmed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons, moved the hand of the doomsday clock from seven to five minutes to midnight. Midnight represents the end of civilisation (see pages 10/11).

The brutal wars and occupations led by the United States and Britain are part of that battle for domination (see page 12). Last year over 6,200 people were killed in Afghanistan, while estimates for civilians killed in Iraq since the invasion in 2003 stand at 1.25 million. As a proportion of the population that would be equivalent to three million dead in Britain – within four years. Iraq is a catastrophic human tragedy created by the ruthless greed of the imperialist US and Britain. Join supporters of FRFI calling for the British Labour

government to be put on trial for war crimes (see page 14). Meanwhile in Israel, the US and British governments give support to Zionism's deadly divide and rule tactics to crush the Hamas-led Palestinian resistance (see page 5).

Imperialist brutality is reflected domestically by racist repression of immigrants and asylum seekers, who are chewed up and spat out according to the needs of British capitalism (see page 8/9). Immigrants constitute a reserve army of labour. They are part of, in Karl Marx's words: 'A class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.' Asylum seekers in Britain are part of the most oppressed section of the working class. FRFI both supports and reports on the struggle of asylum seekers to win the right to live and work in Britain (see pages 14 and 16). This is an essential part of defending the interests of the entire working class. Those who criminalise and marginalise asylum seekers, forcing them into destitution, locking them up and deporting them, are from the same ruling class which plans to build more prisons for controlling the entire working class (see page 13) and which is privatising our health and education systems, undermining the principle of free universal provision (see page 4).

Defending our rights in Britain means defending socialist principles: production for people's needs, not profit; social provision not the fetishism of the market; solidarity and integration, not alienation and antagonism. Now into its 50th year of revolution, socialist Cuba has shown that this is a fight that can and must be won. ALBA has shown that the example is spreading. Read FRFI, arm yourself with that knowledge, join us campaigning for a better world. Socialism not barbarism!

Send your contributions to:

TROUBLE AHEAD FOR BRITISH CAPITALISM

continued from page 1

rose 46% to 94.25p. This shambling will turn to catastrophe if the economy seriously deteriorates and defaults on mortgages rise substantially. According to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, 123 people could lose their homes every day – nearly 45,000 in a year – as the credit crunch feeds through the British economy. New mortgage lending is 8% lower than a year ago. Three insurers, Norwich Union, Aegon (Scottish Equitable) and Friends Provident, have already put a freeze on withdrawals from their commercial property funds by investors and small savers.

Debts all round

At the end of 2006 Britain had a balance of payment deficit of £50.2bn, a 60% rise on 2005. The country spent nearly 4% of GDP more than it earned. By the third quarter of 2007 this had dramatically worsened reaching a record 5.7% of GDP. A year ago we said:

'Without the surplus on services trade of £23.8bn and the net income flow on the international investment account of £29.8bn sucked in from surplus-value produced in every corner of the world, the standard of living of British people would have significantly fallen.' (FRFI 194)

In 2007, while the surplus on services trade increased, the net income flow on the international investment account turned negative and by the third quarter there was a deficit of £3.75bn or 1.1% of GDP. At the end of 2006 Britain had a net external debt of £338.1bn, 26% of GDP, an increase in the external debt of nearly 90% on 2005.¹ This is no longer sustainable.

Between April and December 2007 the public sector current deficit, which excludes investment spending, was £28.1bn, an increase of £9.6bn on the deficit over the same period in the last financial year. The government has had to borrow £43.6bn so far to finance public spending, up from £32.3bn in the previous financial year. This brought the government's net debt at the end of December 2007 to £536.5bn, equivalent to 37.7% of GDP. It will get worse as tax revenues from the City and financial sector, hit by the global financial crisis, rapidly decline. Growth in the City accounted for more than half the growth in the economy in the last financial year. But over the last six months business volume in the financial sector was falling at its fastest rate since the early 1990s' recession. Given the government's neo-liberal spending restraints – the so-called 'golden rule' that net debt is below 40% of GDP – there is little leeway for a US-style fiscal stimulus to limit the downturn in the British economy. In addition it is likely that the loan and guarantees given to Northern Rock will have to be brought on to the public accounts. So,



whether it is sold to a private bidder or nationalised as a last resort, it is almost certain that the 'golden rule' will be breached.

Finally, personal debt in the UK at the end of November 2007 reached a staggering £1.4 trillion, greater than the GDP, a rise of 9.5% on the previous 12 months. Bankruptcies and bailiffs are future growth areas of the British economy.

Who will be made to pay?

Writing in the *Financial Times* (25 January 2008) Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for a 'manifesto for successful globalisation'. 'That manifesto needs to stand behind free trade, open markets, flexible economies and investment in people as the only way forward for rich and poor alike.' That means more of the same.

It won't be his rich friends in the City who will be made to pay for this. On 23 January 2008 he announced that Jeremy Heywood, a former managing director at investment bank Morgan Stanley and aide to Tony Blair, will become his chief of staff at Downing Street. City bonuses increased by 30% in the last financial year to a record £14bn. Bonuses throughout the economy rose 24% to £26.4bn. The rich have prospered under Labour with the top 10% taking home 40% of all income earned in Britain. Britain acts as an offshore banking centre for a large proportion of the world's capital. It borrows short and lends long and massive funds pass through the City making lots of bankers, traders, accountants, lawyers and various types of spiv and rogue very rich. This is not about to change. In January 2008 Brown visited China and urged China's new £100bn sovereign wealth fund to use London as a hub for its international operations. He contrasted Britain's 'open door' policy with protectionist attitudes in the US, France and Germany.

Labour will not make the rich and powerful pay more tax. One third of the 700 largest corporations in Britain pay no tax at all, while another third pay less than £10m each. Chancellor Darling has already backed down, in the face of corporate lobbying, on his proposals to increase the capital gains tax on 'entrepreneurs' selling business assets or holding a substantial stake in a company. So who will be made to pay?

Peter Hain, who obscenely found it necessary to raise around £200,000 for his spectacularly unsuccessful campaign to become deputy leader of the Labour Party, was recently forced to resign his cabinet post as Work and Pensions Secretary for failing to publicly declare some £100,000 of it. While in office he attacked those who already live on the bread line and toughened even further Labour's brutal reactionary 'welfare to work' regime. Under the guise of 'reigniting the jobs campaign', Hain announced last July that those on 'inactive' benefits – lone parents with children over seven, those on incapacity benefit, the unemployed 16-24 year olds not in education – will be cajoled, bullied and starved into what are essentially jobs which pay poverty wages. No wonder that nearly six in ten (57%) officially poor households actually have someone in work, up by 10 percentage points since Labour came into office.

The government has announced that public sector pay will increase by less than the rise in the cost of living over the next few years. So while Northern Rock shareholders and depositors are subsidised, millions of public sector workers will have their pay cut. That is Britain under a Labour government and it is going to get worse.

'Recession in the developed world is inevitable' says the multi-millionaire, international financier George Soros. It's a warning we should heed. The British working class will soon be made to pay for this state of affairs by a Labour government whose first commitment is defending British imperialist interests in every part of the world. The capitalist system is not a useful instrument – it's time to get rid of it and the real parasites that live well off it.

David Jaffe

1 See 'Britain: parasitic and decaying capitalism' in FRFI 194 December 2006/January 2007 for details on the state of British capitalism. Available online: www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frfi/194.html

2 Martin Wolf *Financial Times* (FT) 5 October 2007 and later articles. In his articles he gave the debt statistics incorrectly as a percentage of GDP instead of disposable income. A correction was made in the FT on 15 January 2008.

3 All these statistics are provisional and tend to be constantly revised over time. Nevertheless the trend is very clear and that is what is important for our analysis.

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FRFI Fighting Fund

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! reports on and supports the struggles of the oppressed resisting imperialism throughout the world. It is the only newspaper in Britain to expose the true nature of Labour imperialism. We work with all those who want to build a movement which represents the interests of the working class and oppressed. Your support throughout the year remains vital. Please continue to dig deep. Send your donations, payable to Larkin Publications, to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

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Time to face the music

On the morning of Tuesday 22 January, the world's stock exchanges – which had already dropped by several percent on Monday – seemed to be teetering on the edge of a catastrophic decline, plummeting stock values into an abyss. Then, suddenly, an hour before the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) opened, the US Federal Reserve Bank made its largest interest rate cut for over 25 years, slashing the Federal Funds rate by 75 basis points to 3.5%. Although a slew of sell orders initially forced the NYSE down over 400 points on opening, it bounced back up, to close some 128 points down; the Asian and European exchanges rebounded dramatically. Capitalists breathed a sigh of relief. Crisis seemed to have been averted.

What caused this sudden, violent and dramatic bounce? What created the panic? What made it subside? Is that the end of it or will it recur? If it recurs, can they keep doing this forever? If not, why not?

What's going on?

First the write-downs of debt by major banks, due to the subprime mortgage crisis, continued. In January it was the turn of Citigroup (\$18.1bn) and Merrill Lynch (\$15bn). Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce wrote off some \$2.8bn, Washington Mutual \$1.6bn, Sovereign Bancorp \$1.6bn and JP Morgan had losses of \$1.3bn. Bank of America reported a fall in net income of 95% after write downs of \$5.28bn, Wachovia reported a drop in net income of 98%. Even Wells Fargo bank, which had minimal exposure to subprime mortgages, had a fall in net income of 38%. According to the Wall Street Journal's scoreboard, \$107bn has now been written down by the banks since the crisis began.

Second, despite the bluster by politicians about the supposed 'underlying strength' of the US economy, Citigroup and Merrill Lynch had to turn to foreign capitalists to help prop them up. The Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, the Kuwaiti Investment Authority, Prince Al Waleed bin Talal of the Saudi royal family, the Korean Investment Corporation and the Mizuho Investment Bank of Japan coughed up several billion dollars to help out.

Third, the crisis is spreading beyond mortgages to consumer debt such as credit card and car loans. Capital One, a huge consumer loan company, announced loan loss provisions for the last quarter of 2007 of \$1.9bn (\$5.9bn for the whole year) and American Express set provisions at \$440m. These indicate a larger problem, and are omens of the recession which is underway.

Deep roots of the credit crisis

The fact is that, while buying time, capital has not and cannot fix the deeper problems which the stock market falls reflect. Capitalists are starting to wake up and realise that, sooner or later, they have to face the music. The more prudent and far-sighted representatives of capital already grasp this: following the Fed cut, billionaire speculator George Soros remarked that 'the current crisis marks the end of an era ... the culmination of a super-boom that has lasted for more than 60 years ... Everything that could go wrong did.'

From its start, the RCG has insisted on the inherently crisis ridden nature of capitalism, not merely rhetorically, but theoretically. It has consistently explained why capitalism's inherent tendencies to crisis have not manifested themselves significantly in the

developed capitalist countries – by grinding down the living standards of billions of the poorest people in the world, by successfully destroying most socialist countries and by a relentless expansion of credit.¹ This expansion of credit was initially undertaken by the state, as war-shattered European imperialist powers rebuilt themselves, but as soon as the capitalists could stand independently, without state aid, they embarked on an orgy of 'deregulation' and 'privatization'. Unable to expand profits through expanding production, a complete shadow banking system has sprouted alongside the formal, tightly regulated banking system. This shadow banking system has devised wild and exotic financial instruments, particularly 'derivatives', to assist its speculative activities. It has created unregulated institutions, such as hedge funds and private equity. These developments have pushed debt and credit off the balance sheets of conventional financial institutions into the casino-like world of shadow banking.

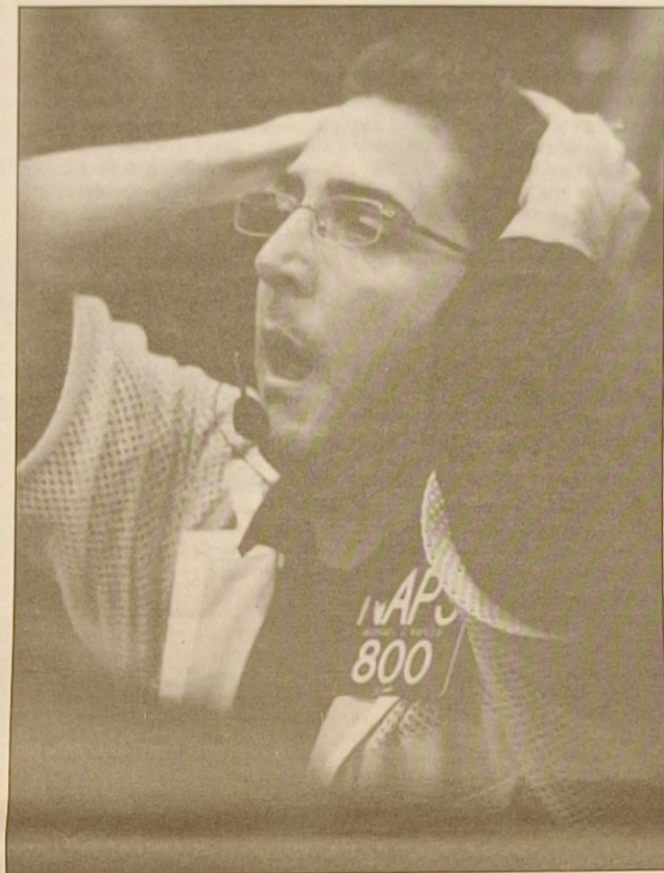
Shadow banking unravelling

It is these instruments and institutions which are unravelling now as they reach the limits of their ability to garner profits and interest. Subprime mortgages are collapsing. 'Structured Investment Vehicles' (SIVs) are falling apart and the wreckage is moving into the orthodox banking system and onto its balance sheets. As a result, the crisis has spread beyond loans to consumers – first for housing, now for credit cards and cars – to strike right at the heart of the credit system: lending between capitalists. We had a first taste of this with the collapse of the 'Asset Backed Commercial Paper' market last year (see FRFI 199).

Now a much larger and more serious pile of credit is threatening to collapse: Credit Default Swaps (CDS). A 'swap' is a financial contract where two parties agree to exchange liabilities at prices that make the deal advantageous to each other. In the case of bonds, the swap seller promises to pay a substantial sum to the buyer in the event that the bond defaults or undergoes a major fall in value. In return, the buyer makes quarterly payments to the swap seller. If the events don't happen, the swap just expires when the bond is sold.

Yet, there are no guarantees that the seller can actually pay the buyer in the event of a default: there is no regulatory requirement that the seller hold any kind of reserve funds to cover this happening. The buyer doesn't even have to own the bond: it's just a fancy name for a bet on what's going to happen to the bond. Since the value of the swaps change with changes in perceived risk, they can be bought or sold as a speculative asset.

The entire pile of CDS is about \$45 trillion – three times the US GDP,



about equal to the entire world's annual production, or over half the dollar value of all bank accounts. Obviously, there's a risk that, when an event happens, the seller of the swap can't pay up. This 'counterparty risk' threatens to bring down a large chunk of the CDS pile, thanks to the activities of the bond insurers.

Bond insurers buckle

Bond insurers provide insurance on the principal and interest of a bond – if the bonds fall in value, the insurers pick up the tab, the interest continues to flow, the value is covered and the fluctuations would not appear in earnings. Traditionally bond insurers have insured municipal bonds, typically states, cities, local governments, prisons, hospitals, and school boards. By purchasing bond insurance, the bond effectively acquires the same credit rating as the bond insurer – AAA – since, in the event of default, the insurer should cover any loss.

The bond insurers used to be relatively conservative financially, but, as shadow banking developed, their investors began to get restless and the insurers branched out into the subprime market. Consequently, their actual and expected losses have risen dramatically. This has led the ratings agencies to review their rating, normally AAA. The agencies cut the rating of one of the main insurers, Ambac, to AAB. Its stock price plunged by 70% in two days, down 88% on last year's high. Both events meant that it was quite incapable of raising any capital to continue its activities, though it could continue to collect on its existing insurance policies. MBIA, the other large bond insurer, managed to raise capital, but that may not be enough. Its stock price fell by 93% on last year's high.

The potential consequences spread far beyond the insurance company. Bond insurance would become more difficult to obtain and more expensive,

constraining new bond issues. Existing bonds worth \$556bn covered by Ambac's insurance would now risk having their ratings cut, since the ability of Ambac to cover losses is put in question. Since many of these down-rated bonds are owned by companies that maintain a prime investment quality AAA portfolio, they would have to be sold, driving their price down and creating further losses and write-downs. Many of the affected bonds are not directly related to subprime at all – just raising money for road building, education and prisons – but would still suffer the consequences. This would reduce the value of assets held by a variety of lenders who would cut back lending or have to find new sources of capital. With the seven major bond insurers covering \$2,400bn, the consequential write-downs could reach \$200bn.

With bond insurance apparently about to evaporate, bond issuers have been turning to Credit Default Swaps as a form of insurance. One of the



Federal Reserve Bank head, Bernard Bernanke, slashes Federal Funds rate

principles of traditional insurance is to maintain a certain percentage of the value of insurance contracts in the form of assets used to meet anticipated claims, but with CDS there's no such assurance. And even if there were, nobody has yet had to unwind CDS in large amounts or swiftly and it clearly isn't going to be easy.

As a result, the prospect opens up of an abyss which threatens not only to swallow up further losses, but also unwind the leverage which has been responsible for the expansion of the shadow banking system. It was this possibility which drove stock markets to the edge of a precipice.

Stay of execution

Even the Fed rate cut was not enough to push the NYSE back up. It was only when the New York State Insurance Commissioner, Eric Dinallo, announced that he was trying to get the major banks to give \$15bn to rescue the bond insurers that the markets bounced back. So huge is the extent of denial about the depth of the crisis and so great the fear of its consequences that the vaguest suggestion of a solution was enough for speculators to hear what they wanted to hear and give themselves reassurance.

But they're deluding themselves: the bond insurers are not going to get rescued anymore than the SIVs got rescued last year. Why should the very banks who bought the insurance rescue the failed insurers? And, given their recent performance, where are they going to get the capital to do so? Even if they had it, \$15bn is not nearly enough to save the industry – it needs at least \$200bn. Certainly attempts will be made to rebuild a bond insurance sector, with a much more stringent collateral requirement and restrictions on its ability to speculate. But this will take time and also capital which is just not available right now. There will be further rate cuts by the Fed. But they won't provide a permanent fix but only, as the *Financial Times* put it, 'a stay of execution'. Superficial calm has been bought for a few weeks – but the losses and the slide will soon resume.

Consequences

Soros pointed out the longer-term consequences of the collapse of this credit expansion. It 'marks the end of an era of credit expansion based on the dollar as the international reserve currency.' This is likely to bring about:

'[a] radical realignment of the global economy, with a relative decline of the US and the rise of China and other countries in the developing world. The danger is that the resulting political tensions, including US protectionism, may disrupt the global economy and plunge the world into recession or worse.'²

'Or worse'? These extraordinary words can only mean...international conflict, world war. Soros dares to think what for most other capitalists – and for the wretched so-called Left – is presently unthinkable: the collapse of the shadow banking system and its strategic consequences: the decline of US imperialism and all that implies.

Steve Palmer, US correspondent

1 See 'Inflation, the crisis and the post-war boom', *Revolutionary Communist* 3/4, at www.revolutionarycommunist.org; FRFI 192, 'Mr Parasite goes to Washington'.

2 'The worst market crisis in 60 years', *Financial Times*, (Asian edition) 23 January 2008, p9, our emphasis.

EDUCATION NOTES

Carpet and maternity leave discounts

Lord Harris, the carpet and flooring magnate, is also the proud owner of six academy schools. The Harris Federation offers its academy teachers a 20% discount from his chain of shops, while at the same time reducing paid maternity leave for teachers by half. This 'win some, lose some' approach – good for the carpet business, bad for mothers and babies – is not restricted to the contracts of a few hundred teachers. The impact of the new academies – so-called private/state schools – now affects thousands of parents and pupils in particular areas of the country. By 2009 the London Borough of Southwark, for example, will have three Harris Federation Academy Schools but only one community school (run by the local education authority). Out of a total of 16 secondary schools in Southwark, eight will be academies and six are schools of religious denomination. Parents have little choice but to send their children to so-called faith schools or to one of the borough's privately-sponsored academies.

Faith schools the only choice

The Church of England has the target of sponsoring 100 faith schools including plans for the first multi-faith Christian and Muslim academy in Oldham, Greater Manchester. Of the existing 84 academies, 24 are faith schools. The overall number of privately-sponsored private/state schools is a small percentage of the over 2,000 secondary schools in England but in cer-

tain areas, like Southwark, they dominate the secondary school scene, in some areas imposing only religious-based schools on the local population. Norwich, which has the highest proportion of avowed atheists in England at 37%, is to have a very large new 'Christian ethos' academy to replace current schools. West Sussex also has low levels of Christian adherence – church attendance is at 3.9% among 15-to-19-year-olds compared to a national figure of 5.3%. Nonetheless, three community schools are due to be closed to make way for academies backed by Woodard Schools, another organisation with a 'strong Christian ethos'.

Choices, lies and selection

The Labour government attacks the public sector, dismantles it for privatisation and preaches that the customers (parents and students) want choice. It's not working. Either there is no choice of schools and colleges in a given area – or there is a scramble for 'the best' places. The unplanned market in schooling, in which the middle classes buy their way into privilege by tutoring their children to win, has smashed up the state sector. The chief civil servant, the Schools Adjudicator, told MPs that allowing families to decide what schools they apply for was 'leading to social, religious and ethnic segregation'. British public education was never as good or as comprehensive as it was claimed to be, but now the Labour government has created a disaster.

Susan Davidson

HEALTH MATTERS

HANNAH CALLER

Health Secretary Alan Johnson and Prime Minister Gordon Brown have announced a new NHS constitution which will mark the July celebrations for its 60th anniversary. Johnson says that this would commit the NHS to providing 'equal access to care, available at the point of need, regardless of ability to pay, personal to the individual patient and achieved within a tax-funded system that demonstrates value for money'.

Johnson has also declared that competition is good for the NHS and that he intends to continue the expansion of the private sector into primary care with plans for 250 GP-led health centres, many run by private organisations with GPs as employees. Such business opportunities were discussed at a recent meeting with representatives of 400 private companies, of which Richard Branson's Virgin group was one.

'I am convinced that the decisions [on competition] I have taken would have been taken by Patricia Hewitt', Johnson said. No doubt he approves of former Health Secretary Hewitt's new jobs. She has been employed as a special consultant for pharmacy group Alliance Boots and as a senior adviser to the private equity firm Cinven. A few days a year of her time, and yet she will allegedly pocket over £100,000. Alliance Boots has been given the right to open GP surgeries in its shops and Cinven has recently taken over 25 BUPA hospitals in Britain.

With devolution there are now distinct differences in health provision in England, Scotland and Wales. The Welsh Assembly has so far resisted the involvement of big business in their public service. In Scotland there has

been much more opposition to the opening up of GP services to large corporations. No commercial contracts have yet been awarded in Scotland and public campaigning has prevented the Harthill practice in Lanarkshire from being contracted out to PFI giant SERCO. However, when Tayside Health Board refused an application by a GP practice in the remote area of Kinloch Rannoch to stop providing out-of-hours service, the practice appealed and won. When a local resident applied for legal aid to appeal against this decision, they were turned down. Residents are now travelling miles to seek health care out of hours. Grampian NHS Trust has set up G-Med which in turn subcontracts agencies such as Cherry Tree Medical which has recently moved to Poland to recruit Polish doctors who travel to Scotland to do out-of-hours GP work for £80-200 per hour.

Ama Sumani

The barbarity of the government's decision to abolish free NHS treatment for failed asylum seekers was demonstrated by the case of Ama Sumani, who was deported to Ghana in early January in the middle of life-saving treatment for terminal cancer in a Cardiff hospital. This will not be available to her in Ghana. Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights forbids degrading and inhumane treatment. Judicial rulings have found that deporting those undergoing medical treatment does not amount to inhumane treatment. Lin Homer, chief executive of the Borders and Immigration Agency defended the decision to deport Ama: 'it is one of the things that makes being a caseworker in the agency an incredibly difficult job'.

Down with privatisation!
Health care for all!

Pakistan: instability deepens

HASSAN JAVID

In the days following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi on 27 December 2007, Pakistan was brought to a complete standstill as thousands of protesters demanded that Bhutto's killers be brought to justice. Much of the agitation was directed against the state, with Musharraf being blamed for not taking security measures that could have prevented the assassination. Indeed conspiracy theories swiftly circulated directly implicating the regime in the incident.

This is very doubtful. Bhutto and Musharraf had been on the verge of striking a political deal that would have seen Bhutto's PPP come to power with Musharraf as President following general elections scheduled for 8 January. The widespread protests at Musharraf's crackdown in 2007 questioned the regime's ability to maintain its hold on power. In the face of waning international support and rising domestic opposition, reaching a power-sharing agreement with a popular mainstream party like the PPP was one of the few means through which Musharraf could hope to cling on to power.

While the Musharraf government cannot, therefore, be directly accused of masterminding Benazir's assassination, it was responsible for a domestic environment in which militancy and violence have flourished. Pakistan's military and intelligence services still have links with the militant Islamist groups they trained to fight in Afghanistan against the progressive government during the 1980s, and the regime's attempts to combat militancy have been ineffective. This is through lack of will rather

than means as Pakistan has one of the largest militaries in the world. In his quest for legitimacy, Musharraf has been willing to work with Islamist political parties and, in return for their support in parliament, has been hesitant to move against militant Islamist groups. Additionally, by suppressing political parties and groups opposed to the regime, and by limiting the political options available to the people, Musharraf has cre-

ated conditions under which violence and militancy seem to be the only viable means to challenge the state amidst rampant poverty and rising inequality. Following her assassination, the media portrayed Bhutto as a champion of democracy. In reality, Bhutto was no more a democrat than any of her political rivals, leaders of opportunist political parties



that will not bring about any change in Pakistan if brought to power. However, it is the military that is responsible for dismantling the political process in Pakistan and fostering the violent instability that is currently wracking the country. It is therefore imperative that free and fair elections be held and that all political parties be allowed to compete for power in the interests of removing Musharraf and limiting the role played by the military in

Pakistani politics. It is only through popular participation in politics that Pakistan will be able to free itself of dictatorial rule and while Musharraf has, in the wake of the assassination, postponed the elections to February at the earliest, it is only a matter of time before the momentum generated by months of protest and opposition finally dislodges him.



ROBERT CLOUGH

As we go to press, there is as yet no resolution to the crisis that has engulfed Kenya. More than 1,000 people have died in the fighting that followed the disputed result of presidential elections on 27 December. The incumbent President, Mwai Kibaki, has claimed victory and has used police and troops to quell opposition; meanwhile his opponent in the election, Raila Odinga, has launched protest mobilisations in an effort to have the result annulled. Although it is almost certain that Kibaki rigged the election, Odinga is no representative of the poor and oppressed: he is a multi-millionaire, and his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) is modelled on the similarly-named movement in the Ukraine which received heavy backing from imperialism. He was also, for a time, a minister in Kibaki's government.

Much of the violence has taken on an ethnic character: Kibaki is from the

Kikuyu, a backbone of the Mau Mau liberation struggle of the 1950s against British colonial occupation. Odinga is Luo; his father, Oginga Odinga, was vice-President to Jomo Kenyatta in the first post-independence government in 1963. Together they were regarded as safe pairs of hands by the British to manage a neo-colonial settlement following the brutal crushing of the Mau Mau. To this day Britain remains the largest foreign investor in Kenya, with 60 companies having operations in the country worth about £1.5 billion; US investments are £150 million. Although the Chinese are seeking oil deals with the Kenyan government, their investments in the country are worth a mere £25 million. Kenya is the 20th poorest country in the world: 56% of its population live in absolute poverty, whilst annual average per capita income is £350.

The struggle between the two leaders is currently in stalemate. In simultaneous elections, Odinga's ODM won 99 out of 210 seats in the Kenyan parliament, whilst Kibaki's PNU won only 43.

This in itself casts doubt on Kibaki's claim to have won the presidential vote, claiming a majority of 230,000 out of 10 million votes cast. Odinga is using his parliamentary position to organise boycotts, demonstrations and other forms of protest. As president, Kibaki controls the police and army, and he is prepared to use them ruthlessly. The US is alarmed at the situation: 'For the eastern portion of Africa, Kenya is critical' according to retired Marine Lt General Michael DeLong, former deputy commander of US Central Command, responsible for US military operations in the area. Kenya has allowed the US to use bases in its efforts to re-establish control of the Horn of Africa, and its army is active in various peace-keeping forces supporting US policy. 'In that region, they are a very competent army', according to DeLong. At present, however, efforts at mediation involving Ugandan President Museveni – seen as a Kibaki supporter – on the one hand, and former UN General Secretary Kofi Annan on the other, have yet to bear any fruit.

Palestine: Gazans break the blockade

On 23 January, Hamas militants blasted a huge hole in the border fence between Gaza and Egypt, allowing tens of thousands of Palestinians to break the intensified Zionist blockade and stock up with essential provisions. As Palestinians celebrated the victory, however, the US insisted that Egypt move immediately to seal the border once more. The Mubarak government meekly submitted to this flagrant US interference and started to erect a barbed wire barrier on 25 January. They failed. Thousands of Palestinians confronted Egyptian riot police, who could not contain them as Hamas fighters used a bulldozer to make further holes in the border fence. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Israeli forces have been unable to stem Qassam rocket attacks on border towns such as S'derot, averaging more than 40 a day in mid-January. Although they have not killed anybody in 2008, and only two in 2007, these attacks represent the defiance of the Palestinian people, and as such are intolerable to the Zionists. Their response has been a campaign of terror in which they killed over 70 Palestinians during the first three weeks of January, and then, on 17 January, Israel sealed all border crossings with Gaza, cutting off the import of food, medicine and fuel supplies.



A bulldozer is used to make further holes in the border fence

Annapolis conference

The Annapolis conference in November 2007 aimed to project Palestinian President Abbas as a statesman-like figure on the world stage. But in Palestine itself his Palestinian Authority (PA) government banned all demonstrations against the conference. This did not stop widespread protests across the West Bank, all of which were attacked by PA security forces using batons and teargas; hundreds were arrested. In Hebron PA forces killed a demonstrator. In Gaza a mas-

sive demonstration of over 100,000 people, supported by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the PFLP, heard Hamas leader Mahmoud Al Zahar declare, 'We are here to assert that Palestine belongs to the Palestinians, that Jerusalem is a red line and that the right to return to Haifa and Jaffa is a fixed and inalienable right that nobody under the sun is authorised to give up.' The conference's final agreement was an empty non-binding document

that did not mention Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem or the dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Its only commitment was for Abbas and Olmert to hold fortnightly meetings and to 'make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008'. Israeli prime minister Olmert commented that 'the declaration reached almost did not include any Israeli concessions'.

To prove the point, on 4 December

Israel's Housing Ministry announced the building of 307 new housing units in Har Homa, a Jewish settlement in occupied East Jerusalem. This project is part of the Zionist plan to separate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank making it impossible for East Jerusalem to be the capital of any future Palestinian state. Responding to accusations that Israel was breaching the conditions of the US Roadmap, Israeli government spokesperson Mark Regev declared: 'Israel will abide by all its obligations under the Roadmap. Its obligations apply to the West Bank, Jerusalem is different, Jerusalem is our capital. It is Israeli sovereign territory.' However, Israel's 1967 annexation of Jerusalem is completely illegal, and has never been recognised by any international body.

A further conference on 17 December co-chaired by Tony Blair discussed aid to the PA. Over \$7 billion was pledged to bolster PA institutions and the security forces. A commitment to build a new sewage system in Gaza was expressly designed to bypass the Hamas government. A Hamas spokesperson called the conference a 'declaration of war'.

Bush's visit

Bush's mid-January visit to Jerusalem and Ramallah was a further step in the process of nullifying Palestinian resistance to imperialist plans in the region. In his joint press conference with Abbas on 10 January, Bush highlighted the role the US is playing in developing the PA security forces into a reliable force able to confront the Palestinian resistance: 'General Dayton [US adviser to the PA] is spending a lot of time trying to help the President and the Prime Minister develop security forces that are effective.'

Bush also made clear that UN resolutions on Palestine were now irrelevant, saying that 'the UN deal didn't work in the past and so now we're going to have an opportunity to rede-

fine the future by having a state negotiated between an elected leader of the Palestinian people, as well as the Prime Minister of Israel'.

Onslaught on Gaza

The visit also gave the green light to Israel's onslaught on Gaza. After meeting Bush in Jerusalem, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu said: 'I came out of that meeting... comfortable with his pledge to provide a cover for any military activity in Gaza. If matters were left to this president he would not allow any Palestinian terrorist to remain alive.'

Throughout January Israel launched continuous attacks on Gaza using tanks, helicopter gunships, F-16 fighter planes and missiles, killing over 80 Palestinians including a large number of civilians and children. On 3 January five members of one family were killed when Israeli troops opened fire on their home in Khan Younis. On 16 January three civilians, including a five-year-old child, were killed when an Israeli missile blew up their car. On the morning of 15 January 12 Hamas fighters and five civilians were killed by an Israeli incursion force in the east of Gaza City, and on 17-18 January 13 Islamic Jihad militants were killed in air strikes.

On 17 January Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak ordered the complete closure of all Gaza border crossings, stopping all fuel and humanitarian supplies, and three days later, Gaza's only power plant shut down plunging homes into darkness and drastically affecting hospitals and water pumping stations. Health Ministry official Moaiya Hassanain said: 'We have the choice to either cut electricity on babies in the maternity ward or heart surgery patients or stop operating rooms.' With at least 80% of Gazans dependent on food aid to survive, disaster threatened. Although the Hamas action has provided a temporary reprieve, the utter barbarity of the Zionists has been exposed once again.

Venezuela: Chavez leads

'Enough with betraying the people. We have arrived here to make a real revolution or die trying', President Hugo Chavez, 14 January 2008, addressing the founding congress of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), formed in 2007.

Opening the congress, Chavez spoke of the need for the PSUV to become a party that would subvert the historic capitalist model of the bourgeois state. Referring to the recent, narrow defeat in the 2 December 2007 referendum to give Venezuela's present radical bourgeois constitution a decidedly socialist content, he announced the need for the PSUV to go on the offensive as 'the spearhead and vanguard' of the revolution, to ensure that '2 December never happens again'.

The defeat in the referendum was the first electoral setback to the president in nine years of office. However the result was not a vote against Chavez, nor a victory for the opposition, but reflected political uncertainty among workers, very large numbers of whom abstained. They were affected by the overwhelmingly anti-government media in Venezuela and the threats of private industrialists, whose tactics included creating severe food shortages. 80% of all broadcasting and nearly all 118 papers are privately owned. The reactionary RCTV, whose domestic license has expired, is still received by satellite and cable from Mexico. In response to government price controls, the agribusiness and food distribution sector hoarded basic food items and redirected milk supplies. Supplies of milk were already in short supply due to the closure of Italian company Parmalat's large Venezuelan plant. For weeks long queues formed in the *mercales* (gov-

ernment-subsidised markets). Inevitably, the oligarchs responsible for the crisis blamed socialism, even trying to scare people into believing that a socialist government would take away their children and homes.

Behind this was the CIA's 'Operation Tenaza [Pliers]', whose activities included financing the reactionaries through USAID, setting up fraudulent polls, distorting information about the referendum in the private media and arranging violent street protests to create a climate of 'ungovernability' and so provoke military intervention. The deepening financial crisis in the US made the urgency of the proposed constitutional changes quite clear. The Venezuelan government must deepen democracy to secure a political base to deal with further economic and political threats from the imperialist states.

Essentially the referendum was lost because the PSUV has yet to establish itself firmly as the party of the working class. Its founding conference was postponed from November to January in order to fight the referendum, but the national debate over the changes was too brief. Lessons have been learned; Chavez argued at the January 2008 conference that social movements in the country must transform themselves into a political force capable of driving forward the revolution.

President Chavez recognised the result, saying 'for now, we could not do it'. 8,883,746 valid votes were counted in the two-part referendum.



Block A contained the government's proposal to reform 33 articles, plus 11 changes proposed by the National Assembly. Block B contained another 25 articles which the National Assembly had accepted as popular proposals. Block A was defeated by 4,504,354 votes (50.7%) to 4,379,392 (49.3%). The defeat for Block 'B' was 51.05% to 48.94%. 44.11% or 7,107,225 out of 16,109,664 registered voters abstained.

In the December 2006 presidential election, 7,309,080 voted for Chavez (63% of vote, with 25% abstentions). Thus we saw a dramatic reduction in the government's vote by 2,929,688, but the difference in the two parallel votes was less than 200,000. That 49% of the votes cast were for a socialist constitution represents a real step forward. Such ideas have never been placed on the political agenda in Venezuela before. They revealed extensive and well-thought-out principles for a continued transition to a new type of state and economy.

The new PSUV, unifying over 20 organisations, has reported almost six million members over 16, although

those under 18 could not vote in the referendum. The result has deprived 16 and 17-year-olds of a chance to vote in this year's regional elections.

'Prepare yourselves because a new offensive is coming,' Chavez said on state VTV television after the vote: 'These reforms are not dead.' Current law prohibits a second attempt by referendum to change the Constitution, but this could still be achieved through 'popular initiatives' where each reform would be voted on by Congress after acquiring signatures of 15 percent of the electorate. Once approved they would become law if endorsed by a majority of voters. At the moment such changes could also be implemented legally through a series of decrees, but given the President's sincere reconstruction of a real democracy, this is unlikely. Meanwhile the opposition is reduced to stunts such as its second application to the Supreme Court in five years to declare Chavez insane. It has no seats in the National Assembly and only one state governor.

With continued economic growth - 8.4% in 2007 - despite inflation, and

with the successful introduction of the new currency, the *Bolivar fuerte*, this January, the key issue facing the government remains the effective industrialisation of the country and the reduction of import dependency for so many of its final goods. Chavez has called for 'revision, rectification and re-booting the revolution', to ensure political and economic progress in the next period. The Parmalat milk plant has been nationalised and agricultural reform is being pushed ahead so that by 2009 Venezuela will become independent in food. In 2008, Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA) will invest \$15.6bn to consolidate the 'Priming for Oil' plan and to assure the achievement of production goals of 5.8m barrels per day by 2012.

International solidarity

International solidarity is constantly being strengthened against US interference in Latin America. During his January meeting with President Ortega of Nicaragua, President Chavez proposed a new association of Caribbean nations for the production and distribution of food in the region - 'Alcaribe' or Alimentos del Caribe (Food of the Caribbean).

As a member of ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America), Nicaragua will soon be receiving more 60-megawatt electric power generators from Cuba to complement those delivered in 2007. Another 120 megawatts of power generation will be delivered by the end of 2008. Earlier, Chavez met Honduran president Zelaya and agreed that Honduras should join Petrocaribe. This is an energy association that Venezuela started in 2004 for Caribbean nations which allows them to part-pay for Venezuelan oil over 25 years at 1% interest. On 27 December Venezuela cancelled Honduras's entire \$30m debt to Venezuela.

Alvaro Michaels

CUBA

SOCIALISM INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Between 21 February and 7 March representatives of three generations of revolutionary Cubans will be speaking around Britain. They bring with them direct experience of a working class in power. Cuban socialism has placed human beings at the centre of society and development. Cubans enjoy a system of social welfare provision which is among the best in the world. They have created a system of democratic

representation which gives an active role to all sectors of society. The Cuban revolution has become synonymous with international solidarity, sending doctors and educators around the globe. All this achieved despite nearly 50 years of military and political aggression from the United States, including a brutal economic blockade.

Cuba's example is an inspiration to those fighting imperialism all over the world.

Now a united front has been formed in Latin America. Governments representing the working class and oppressed of Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua have united with Cuba to create the Bolivarian Alternative, directly challenging the regional and global hegemony of the US and its allies.

While the British Labour government wages a brutal war against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, undermines

democratic rights, implements racist policies to impoverish, imprison and deport asylum seekers and other immigrants, and privatises essential services, Cuba demonstrates what an alternative to capitalism can look like.

Come along to a meeting near you, listen to what the Cubans have to say and get involved in building a movement in Britain against racism and imperialism, and for socialism.

the cubans are coming

ORLANDO BORREGO

Orlando Borrego was born in 1936 to a peasant family who identified with the Orthodox Party, a progressive, anti-corruption party led by Eduardo Chibas. In March 1952, weeks before the general election which the Orthodox Party was expected to win, General Fulgencio Batista carried out his coup d'état with support from the US administration.

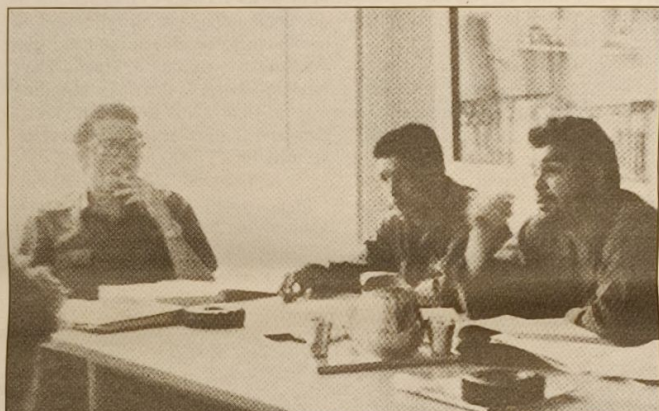
Secondary school students rebelled. Among them was Borrego, who joined the 26 July Movement led by Fidel Castro, which went on to attack the Moncada Barracks in Santiago on 26 July 1953. When Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's Rebel Army column arrived in the Escambray Mountains in central Cuba in October 1958, Borrego joined them, becoming a first lieutenant by the time of the triumph of the Revolution on 1 January 1959.

In late 1959, Che was named head of the Department of Industrialisation within the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) – formed by the first Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959 as the principal vehicle for pushing through revolutionary change as old state institutions were dismantled. While members of the liberal bourgeoisie officially ran the government, INRA was under control of the revolutionaries, backed by the armed force of the Rebel Army of workers and peasants.

As director of the Department of Industrialisation, Che took with him only three individuals from his guerrilla column, one of whom was Borrego. A month after the Department officially began work Che was named President of the National Bank. Borrego was left to run the Department of Industrialisation, which grew in importance as businesses, factories and plants were appropriated and nationalised by the revolutionary government. Borrego had regular midnight meetings with Che in the bank offices to discuss progress.

In February 1961 the new Ministry of Industries (MININD) was inaugurated with Che as Minister and Borrego as Vice Minister of Basic Industries. As Che's responsibilities expanded, along with the ministry, Borrego was named First Vice Minister, dealing with most of the daily management of the ministry.

Borrego was part of Che's inner circle of vice-ministers and advisors in MININD. He was one of a small team involved in weekly *Capital* reading seminars with Che, taught by a profes-



Left, Orlando Borrego at a meeting with Che Guevara in the Ministry of Industries

sor sent from Moscow, who was pushed to the limits by analytical debates with Che. Borrego was central to the development of the Budgetary Finance System (BFS), an alternative economic management system for transition to socialism in the concrete conditions of 1960s Cuba. This system set out to prove that it was possible to build socialist consciousness simultaneously with the productive forces in the initial stages of transition to socialism.

In June 1964 Borrego became Cuba's first Minister of Sugar, in a country dominated by the sugar industry. He took the BFS to the new Ministry of Sugar (MINAZ), working closely with Che to improve the system. MINAZ carried out innovative projects at a national level to assess the correlation between consciousness and production. In April 1965, Che left Cuba to fight in the Congo, leaving behind three volumes of Marx's *Capital* for Borrego with a note that read: 'Borrego, this is the source, here we learnt everything together, in fits and starts, searching what is still barely intuition... Thank you for your firmness and your loyalty. Let nothing separate you from the course. A hug, Che.'

The campaign in the Congo failed and Che went underground in Tanzania and Czechoslovakia. During this time he wrote his critical notes on the Soviet Manual of Political Economy. His intention was to write an alternative manual for the transition to socialism, appropriate to Cuban and, perhaps, Latin American conditions. Che sent his notes back to Borrego to guard in Cuba. In 1966, Borrego caught up with Che, who had entered Cuba in secret and was preparing his group of guerrillas for the cam-

paign in Bolivia. During this period of preparation, Borrego visited Che to discuss socialist political economy, the critique of the USSR manual and the BFS.

Today Borrego is adviser for the Minister of Transport. Since 2004, he has been invited to Venezuela on several occasions to lecture economists, revolutionaries and policy makers about Che's economic management system. Borrego's book *Che: El Camino del Fuego*, 2001 (*Che: The Path of Fire*), about Che's work as a member of the Cuban government and his ideas on socialist transition, has since been published and widely circulated in Venezuela, leading President Chavez to declare in 2005:

'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.'

Since then, Borrego has written a book of anecdotes which captures the rich human experience of working with Che and another book analysing the seven different economic management systems adopted in Cuba since 1959, *Rumbo al Socialismo*, 2006 (*Heading to Socialism*). Borrego's importance and contribution lie not just in being a comrade and companion working under the leadership of two great revolutionary communists: Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. His intimacy with, and insight into, the problems, contradictions and possible solutions in socialist construction, means he has a great deal to offer and debate. He remains sternly principled yet anti-dogmatic in upholding Guevara's approach to revolutionary socialism. ■

JESUS GARCIA

Jesus had just turned seven at the triumph of the Revolution in January 1959. He graduated with a degree in physics at the University of Havana in 1973, before carrying out research into magnetism, and marine and atmospheric physics, between 1974 and 1980. He studied philosophical sciences at the Academy of Sciences in the USSR, being awarded a doctorate in 1986.

Since 1982 he was a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy, part of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment. In 1986, Cuba initiated a period known as Rectification, a push to improve and deepen Cuban socialist development, pulling back from the Soviet model and returning to the essence of Che Guevara's concepts of socialist construction. Jesus was involved in studies examining the state of Cuban society and development, focusing on dialectical relationships between the economy and the political sphere; the Cuban state and the development of democracy; government and popular participation. He has led national studies by Cuban experts examining the interrelationships between socialism, political economy, democracy and governance. In 2005 he joined a group of researchers convened by the Communist Party to study the causes and characteristics of corruption in Cuba.

Jesus gives postgraduate courses to both Cubans and foreigners on the development of Cuban society. He is a

postgraduate professor at the Cuban University of Computer Sciences. He has travelled abroad to Europe and Latin America giving courses and conferences on economics and politics in socialist development in general, and analysing the Cuban experience in particular. He cooperates closely with the revolutionary government, academics and policy-makers in Venezuela.

Jesus is the academic coordinator of the international conference on the work of Karl Marx and the challenges of the 21st century hosted in Havana at two yearly intervals. He is the author of five books and dozens of articles about the Cuban economy, the state, and interactions between these and the analysis of Marx, Engels and Lenin on capitalism, revolution and leadership in transition to socialism. His work has been published in the former Soviet Union, Chile, France, Brazil, Mexico, Spain, the US and Cuba.

Jesus is also a political activist and representative in Cuba's grass roots democratic system. At 18 he became an activist in the Union of Young Communists (UJC), where he had diverse responsibilities for 13 years, as well as being a trade union leader. In the 1980s he was elected by his neighbours for six consecutive years as the President of his local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. He was elected as his area's delegate to the Municipal (borough) Assembly of People's Power from 1986 to 2000, and re-elected between 2005 and 2007. Between 1989 and 1998 he has also represented his municipality on the Provincial Assembly for the City of Havana and served as the President of the People's Council in his area. During this time he has continued to participate in permanent study commissions. ■

YOSELIN RUFIN

Yoselin began training as a teacher at university in Matanzas Province in 2000 where she joined the movement of student assistants and became the general secretary of the UJC in the Humanities Department.

When Cuba launched a campaign to reduce class sizes to 20, Yoselin answered the call for emergency teachers and began practical work as an Integrated General Teacher whilst studying in her second year at one of the new micro-universities set up at municipal level.

Yoselin was elected president of the Cardenas municipality Federation of University Students (FEU) and remains president today. She has received many awards as a distinguished student and graduated with a Gold Diploma.

Since 2004, Yoselin has been a member of FEU's National Council and in 2006 she was on the national organising commission for the 7th FEU Congress. She has continued as a member of the UJC and in 2007 became one of the youngest members of the Cuban Communist Party. She is a member of the government's Permanent Commissions for Candidacy, Recreation, Social Prevention and Drugs. ■





SPEAKING TOUR

ITINERARY
21 FEBRUARY-7 MARCH

LONDON

Thursday 21 February
6.30pm, Public meeting Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1T 5DL, hosted by the Venezuelan Embassy in partnership with the Cuban Embassy.

Tel: 07964 814 365
E-mail: cubansarecoming@yahoo.co.uk

NOTTINGHAM

Friday 22 February
2pm, Meeting Cuba Research Forum, University of Nottingham NG7 (contact CRF on 0115 951 5800 to attend)
7pm, Public meeting and social event, venue tbc contact us for details

LIVERPOOL

Saturday 23 February
2-6pm, Public meeting El Rincon, Roscoe Street (off Hardman Street), Liverpool, L1 followed by social evening 8pm till late
Tel: 07956 458 331 E-mail: thecubansarecoming.liverpool@gmail.com

MANCHESTER

Sunday 24 February
2pm, Public meeting Mechanics Institute, Princess Street/Major Street. Doors open 1pm
Tel: 07940 988 203 E-mail: ratb@riseup.net

Monday 25 February

12 noon at Manchester Metropolitan University, The Wesley Centre, Crewe Campus. Speaker: Yoselin Ruffin

2pm at the University of Manchester, Theatre 5, Stophord Building, Oxford Road. Speakers: Orlando Borrego and Jesus Garcia

LEEDS

Monday 25 February
7pm, The Common Place, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7QE

NORTH EAST

Tuesday 26 February
12-3pm, Public meeting hosted by North East NUM, Miners Hall, Red Hill, Durham DH1 4BD

7-10pm, Public meeting Murray House Community Centre, Diana Street, Fenham/Arthur's Hill, Newcastle NE4 6BQ

Tel: 07858 346 276 E-mail: cubansarecoming@yahoo.co.uk

Wednesday 27 February

1-4pm, Public meeting Northumbria University Student Union, Stage 2, Sandyford Road, Newcastle NE1 8SB

6-8.30pm, Public meeting ACANE African Community Centre, 1 Raby Cross, Byker, Newcastle NE6 2FF

9-11pm, cultural event, Star & Shadow Cinema, Stepney Bank, Newcastle NE1

GLASGOW

Thursday 28 February
7.30pm, Public meeting Central Hotel, Central Station, Glasgow (corner of Hope Street and Gordon Street). Followed by cultural evening.
Tel: 07877 691 825
E-mail: cubansarecoming@yahoo.co.uk

Friday 29 February

1-3pm, Public meeting Glasgow University, Lecture Theatre 1, Boyd Orr building, University Avenue.

LONDON

Saturday 1 March
12 noon-6pm hosted by FRFI society, London School of Economics, New Theatre, East Building, Houghton Street, Holborn, London WC2A

For other events in South East see website
Tel: 07964 814 365
E-mail: cubansarecoming@yahoo.co.uk

Tuesday 4 March

2.45pm, schools' meeting, hosted by Pimlico School, Lupus Street, London SW1V (NB: invited schools only - email cubansarecoming@yahoo.com to request places)

5pm, The Revolution at 50: Cuban Revolutionaries Reflect, Institute for the Study of the Americas, Room 11/12, 35 Tavistock Square, WC1.

Organisations sponsoring the Cuba: socialism into the 21st century tour include:

Communications Workers Union (Manchester); CPGB-ML, FRFI-LSE Students' Society; National Union of Mineworkers (North East Area); National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), Northumbria Students' Union, Northumbria University FRFI Society; Revolutionary Communist Group; RMT (Liverpool); RMT (Manchester South branch); Tyneside Socialist Forum; UCATT (Liverpool).

PEOPLE POWER

Cuba goes to the polls

2008 is an election year. Early in the new year, the US presidential election campaigns were front-page news in the British media, keen to show the merits of 'democracy', as candidates of war, poverty and bourgeois rule compete for power. The election doesn't take place until November 2008 - billions of dollars will be spent on the whole charade and millions of working class people in the US will see no reason to vote. Meanwhile in Cuba, the opposite has been taking place. Under a system known as People's Power, Cuba's recent local and national elections involved the vast majority of the population taking an active part. Real democracy is alive and kicking in Cuba. LOUIS BREHONY reports.

Local elections

Under socialism in Cuba elections involve the masses in every step. The election of representatives to the 169 municipal assemblies of people's power took place on 21 October 2007, but the process began on 1 September. Over the course of 26 days, more than 50,670 meetings took place in community halls, centres and on streets to nominate candidates to stand in the election. Over 7 million Cubans took part in debates about who should represent their area. On 27 September it was announced that 37,328 candidates had been nominated for election, with a significant 17% rise in women nominees.

In terms of election campaigning, the Cuban system works to prevent the kind of self-serving vote-grabbing that characterises capitalist elections. The decision to stand a candidate comes from the community, not the individual. The only publicity allowed is a photo and biography detailing the candidate's background, education, membership of mass organisations and work history. To be elected as a local representative is seen as a sacrifice - officials are unpaid and carry on their ordinary jobs at the same time. All elected leaders in Cuba can be recalled from office at any time by the population.

The next step was to prepare for the election itself. 186,400 citizens volunteered to join one of 37,280 electoral 'colleges', each made up of a president and four more members. Half a million students from primary and secondary schools symbolically guard the ballot boxes. With the members and volunteers of the electoral commissions of each district and municipality in charge of the organisation and control of the voting, nearly one million Cuban citizens were involved in facilitating the election.

In the 21 October 2007 municipal elections 8,176,085 Cubans voted out of an eligible total of 8,473,833. 320,000 young people exercised their right to vote for the first time. Far from the imperialist propaganda about Cuban leaders 'clinging' to power, 51% of the

people voted in were new to their posts. 26% were women, a figure which has continued to rise since the figure of just 7.9% in 1976. On 28 October a second round of voting took place in areas where no-one received the minimum 50% of the local vote.

National elections

With the municipal elections barely over, Cuba began to prepare for the 20 January 2008 elections to the Provincial Assemblies and the National Assembly of People's Power, Cuba's national government. Half the candidates were first nominated as representatives in their voting districts and later elected to the local assemblies. The rest were chosen by mass organisations, including the street committees (CDRs), trade unions, farmers' unions, the Women's Federation, and student organisations.

From early December until 15 January, local meetings were held to discuss candidates. Under Cuban law candidates participate as a group in these events and cannot speak on their own behalf. In all, 614 citizens were nominated for seats in the National Assembly and 1,201 for Provincial Assemblies, selected from among a broader list of 55,000 'pre-candidates'.

Of the national candidates, 60.91% were born after the revolution in 1959 and more than 63.22% are newcomers to the national government.

Debate

Throughout the whole democratic process Cuban writers and leaders have put forward for debate important issues around the history of elections in Cuba and about the nature of class rule in Cuba and in other countries. Before the October election, the newspaper of the UJC, *Juventud Rebelde* (Rebel Youth), did surveys in four cities across the island to find out the attitudes of young people towards elections and, though the views put forward are quite critical, they show an engaged and conscious young population, involved in developing ideas about the future. Rafael Aguilar from Havana commented that

Cuba deepens revolution

2008 began with the announcement that Cuba achieved 7.5% economic growth in 2007 and an infant mortality rate of 5.3 per 1,000 live births. These are real successes - hard won in the face of US imperialism's fierce and intensified economic war against Cuba. Between 2004 and 2007 accumulated Gross Domestic Product in Cuba has risen by 42.5%. The infant mortality rate is below that of the US and is the American continent's lowest, along with that of Canada.

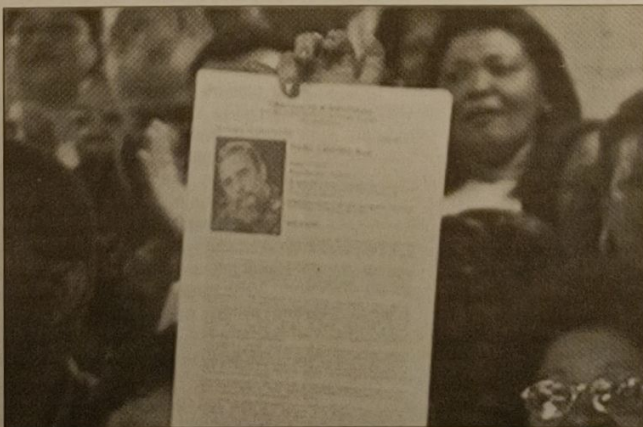
When Fidel Castro became ill in August 2006 the imperialists and counter-revolutionary gangs in Florida began to celebrate in anticipation of getting their hands on Cuba again. The Cuban communists and Cuban people responded calmly, collectively and with assurance. In 215,687 meetings they have discussed the country's economic and social problems and how to solve them - this process is ongoing. This January they have voted in Provisional and National Assembly elections with a 96% turnout. Fidel Castro was re-elected as a National Assembly delegate. The Cuban people's reply to the excitement in Washington and Miami is to deepen the revolution and build socialism. This is the real testimony to the leadership of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party, now in 'Year 50 of the Revolution'.

Trevor Rayne

'youth should assume the range of challenges to guarantee the continuity of the Revolution. Older people who now run Popular Power and other structures were once young like us; they learned on the job. The same thing applies to us now.' Alina, a student from Matanzas, talking about youth participation in Cuban elections, said 'It doesn't matter how old a person is, what's key is their ideas, and ideas have no age.' From the election results it is clear that young people have a big part to play in leading Cuba's effort to build socialism.

In December Raul Castro remarked, 'Our enemies speak of democracy, criticise us because, according to them, there are no elections here, but if all the countries of the planet were to be studied one by one, you could say that some of them do have a democracy adjusted to their class system, but not that any one of them is more democratic than ours.' In the US, he said, much is made of the 'democracy' of having two parties, yet a Republican president organised the Bay of Pigs invasion and a Democratic leader immorally executed it.

Considering their usual concern for 'democracy', ruling class politicians in the US and Europe have hardly muttered a word about the Cuban elections. Their media henchmen have ignored them outright. President Bush said in October that unless there is a 'multi-party democracy', free rein for businessmen, and access to grants and loans (presumably from the US), then 'elections are only cynical exercises that give dictatorships a legitimacy they do not deserve.' From 1 October 2007 to 9 January 2008 the *New York Times* carried 36 articles and reports about Cuba. There was no mention of the local election and the only brief references to the national election were in four very brief reports speculating on whether Fidel Castro would retire. Similarly, in Britain, *The Guardian* carried 29 articles about Cuba, mentioning the election three times, again only in reference to Fidel - one headline reading 'Castro gets chance to hold on to power'. The silent treatment given to Cuba's democratic process says it all: socialism is the kind of democracy the imperialists fear the most. ■



A woman holds up Fidel Castro's resumé at an election meeting

■ 'We have found migrant workers to have a very satisfactory work ethic, in many cases superior to domestic workers.'

— Sainsbury's, 2007

■ 'Unemployment has not been rising in the parts of the country where migrant workers have moved to... We reject the fallacy that there is a fixed amount of work to go round... Migrant workers have filled many hard-to-fill vacancies, in some cases vital work in areas of the economy such as education, health, social services, transport in the public sector and in agriculture, construction and hospitality.'

— Trade Union Congress, June 2007

Immigration and the reserve army of labour in Britain

At the September 2007 TUC conference, as the ruling class geared up for a possible autumn election, Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown courted the racist vote, promising 'British jobs for British workers'. However, by the end of 2006, foreign-born workers already made up 12.5% of the UK's working-age population. Migration to Britain has increased significantly in the last five years as the central and east European countries of the ex-socialist bloc joined the European Union (EU). In 2005, there were an estimated 1.5m foreign workers living and working in Britain. Britain has issued 2.5m National Insurance (NI) numbers to migrant workers since 2002. There is now an estimated net annual migration to Britain of 189,000.

Total revenue to Britain from migration has grown from £33.8bn in 1999/2000 to £41.2bn in 2003/04. Migrants now add in the region of £6bn to economic growth annually. An October 2006 analysis by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research in Britain indicated that immigration since 1997 has increased total UK output (GDP) by about 3%. Due to the nature of exploitation of migrant labour, the true figure may be far higher.

The reserve army of labour

Marx described how capitalism relies on the existence of a pool of cheap labour, 'a mass of human material always ready for exploitation'. This 'reserve army' is an ever-ready supply of labour when needed by capitalism, the existence of which keeps wages low for the mass of the working class and maintains workers in a state of uncertainty and instability, knowing they may be hired and fired as needed.

With the development of imperialism, the reserve army ceased to be necessarily located in the same country as the capitalists who use it, and the pool of cheap labour exploited by oppressor nations was increasingly drawn from the countries which had been underdeveloped and oppressed by imperialism.

In Britain in the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s, Caribbean and Asian workers from the countries earlier part of the British Empire were encouraged to come to Britain to do low-paid jobs. But even as the government recruited these workers, it was introducing controls and fostering racism to ensure the workforce would remain largely itinerant and not be encouraged to settle in great numbers if no work were available.

In 1979 the Revolutionary Communist Group wrote 'Racism, Imperialism and the Working Class',* a detailed study of the situation and treatment of the black and immigrant working class in Britain. We wrote that black immigrant workers formed a specific oppressed layer of the working class and described how racism and imperialism

were inextricably linked. Although the details have changed, the fundamentals of this analysis remain true today.

Labour Party's capitalist immigration policy

Britain's immigration policies today are racist and class-based. Prior to 2000, the Labour government grudgingly welcomed a small number of asylum seekers into Britain, whilst attacking the majority of would-be refugees as selfish, greedy 'economic migrants' pretending to flee persecution in order to increase their income or improve their life-style. This was then completely turned on its head and now, after seven years of propaganda about 'managed migration', we have a tiered immigration policy, organised to meet the needs of capitalism.

At the top of the pecking order are skilled workers and professionals who are encouraged to settle in Britain. They are often headhunted from poorer countries, regardless of the detriment caused to their country of origin by their migration, which is often permanent.

Then there are the lower paid workers from EU 'Accession' states who are allowed into Britain to seek work but whose welcome is far from assured. In the main they do temporary and insecure jobs at a low wage, keeping British workers' wages down and increasing profits for capitalism.

At the bottom of the ladder are asylum seekers, who are defamed, detained and deported, and who are officially forbidden from working while their claims are processed. However, as they are either paid only the lowest level of state benefit or provided with no means at all, a sizeable number are forced to work illegally. Their labour, along with that of the undocumented immigrants whose presence here is not officially registered, also contributes to the profits of British capitalism. They are paid the lowest wages and have no access to free health care or other welfare provision.

The British economy

The British economy faces a variety of problems which migrant labour is either helping to solve or mitigate:

■ **Wage rises** According to the *Report on Jobs*, a monthly survey of the British labour market, in October 2007 there was a rise in average starting salaries for the 51st consecutive month. The use of cheap migrant labour is helping to keep a lid on these wage increases, thereby maintaining profitability.

■ **Labour shortages and skills shortages** Overall there are about 660,000 job vacancies, up from 550,000 in 2004. From 2010 onwards, the number of young people reaching working age will begin to fall by 60,000 every year and 2.1m new workers will be needed by 2020.

There are specific shortages in areas such as construction, engineering, food, agriculture and horticulture, child care,



Low-paid cleaners in the City of London, where dealers get bonuses worth millions, demonstrate for better pay and conditions. Many of the cleaners are immigrant workers

teaching and health. In London, 10,000 skilled construction staff are sought annually and an estimated 45,000 extra people are already needed by the NHS. 150,000 NHS nurses will retire between 2010 and 2016 leading to shortages for some time to come. In 2003, there were 30,000 vacancies for gas installers and a further 10,000 in the water utilities industry. There were over 152,000 sales and customer support vacancies in January 2006.

Skills shortages in professional and associate professional and highly skilled trades (manufacturing, construction, health and social care and business services) were estimated at 109,000 in 2005. 56% of all skills shortages were in these occupations and affected 4% of all establishments.

■ **Skills gaps** Skills deficiencies in the existing workforce, were said to relate to 1.26m employees in 2005 and affected 16% of businesses (National Employers Skills Survey 2005). Britain is ranked 17th out of 30 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on low skills and 11th on high skills. Britain and Ireland have two to five times more young people aged 16-35 in the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy than other EU competitors. Even if current targets are met, Britain's skills base will still be inferior to many other advanced capitalist countries.

Although the number of economically active people with no qualifications fell from 45% in 1979 to 12% in 2000, and the proportion with degrees rose from 9% in 1989 to 17% in 2000, Britain is still behind its EU neighbours on skills. The number of apprenticeships in 2006 was 250,000 – the lowest in many years.

In London 50% of companies admit

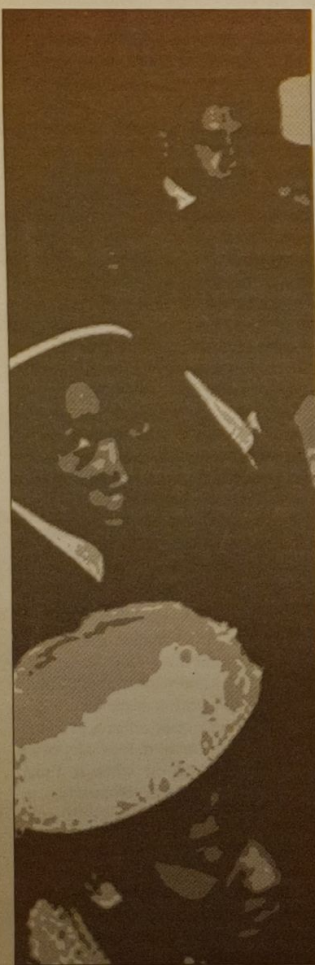
to relying on EU migrant workers and 37% had hired non-EU migrants. Across the UK in a June 2005 survey, 40% of businesses reported using 'non-UK residents' to fill posts, and in the public sector this rose to 44%. In a 2001 Employers Skill Survey only 50% of businesses who claimed to experience skills' shortages indicated a willingness to raise wages.

Professional and skilled migrant workers

The main route of migration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) in recent years has been through the issuing of Work Permits (WP). 89% of WP approvals are for managerial, technical professional and associate professional occupations. These highly skilled workers, many from south Asia, constitute a professional elite, whose presence in Britain often represents a brain drain in their countries of origin.

WP approvals and extensions have increased dramatically in the last ten years: 139,410 were issued in 2004 – up from 32,704 in 1995. India (33.9%) and the US (10.7%) were the main nationalities in 2005; 26% to the health and medical services and 18% to the computer services sector.

2008 sees the introduction of the single biggest change in migration policy of recent times, a points-based management system to 'simplify' the current over 80 different routes of migration from outside the EEA into Britain, such as the Highly Skilled Migrants Programme, Sectors Based Scheme and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme. The new system will rate all immigrants according to their age, qualifications and skills and experience and direct them to specific sectors of the British economy.



1948: cheap labour from the British Empire

FIGHT RACISM!

The National Health Service

The NHS is the world's third biggest employer. Labour's NHS plan published in 2000 followed a two-year period in which its adherence to Tory spending plans had brought the NHS to near collapse. The main purpose of the plan was to expand NHS capacity to reduce waiting lists (over one million) and waiting times for NHS operations – thousands were waiting more than 18 months and tens of thousands more than a year. From 2002/03, NHS funding in real terms expanded substantially, whilst government targets required a rapid increase in the clinical workforce. The gap between demand and supply from universities and other training establishments had to be met in the short term by immigrant doctors, nurses and professionals allied to medicine. In 2002 nearly half the 10,000 new entrants to the General Medical Council register were from abroad. In 2003 this figure had risen to more than two-thirds of 15,000 registrants. Most of the growth was in doctors from non-European countries. Of the 34,627 additional nurses and midwives recruited in 2003/04, 14,122 (40.8%) came from outside Britain, whilst overall in 2005, 23,000 work permit applications were granted for people in health and medical services. Most were on time-limited contracts. Britain and the EU actively recruited migrant workers from poor countries. South Africa, for example has spent \$1bn on training health workers who have since migrated. Thousands of Filipino nurses were recruited, often being reduced to penury by unscrupulous agencies.

As training programmes in Britain started to produce qualified staff, competition for clinical posts began to emerge between British-born and immigrant applicants. By August 2007, a quarter of junior doctors who had failed to find posts were home-grown trainees. The government started to turn off the tap: NHS employers were required to show that they could not recruit a resident employee before a work permit was granted to someone from overseas.

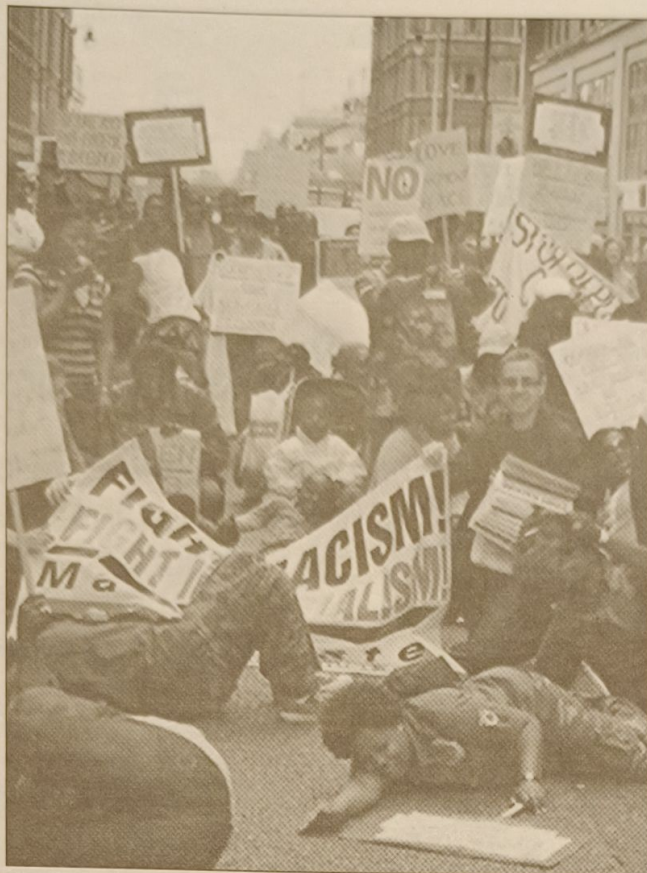
Cheap labour from the expanding European Union

While in the post-war years British capitalism relied on a pool of cheap labour from the British Commonwealth (Empire), today it is relying on workers from the former socialist 'Accession' countries of the EU. In May 2004 the EU massively expanded its membership, with ten new countries (A10 countries) joining the existing 15. Of these, eight (A8) were former socialist countries in east and central Europe.

In 2007 Romania and Bulgaria (A2 countries) also became members of the EU, bringing the total number of new, and poorer, countries in the enlarged EU to 12 (A12). All these countries had seen a rapid polarisation in wealth since the end of socialism and thousands of trained and unemployed workers now looked to the richer nations in the west of the EU for employment.

Initially most of the wealthier countries put up barriers to prevent an influx of cheap labour but almost immediately these barriers began to be reversed in the face of a generalised labour shortage across the EU. In nearly all EU countries, populations are expected to fall by about 10% due to declining or stagnant birth rates, and the dependency ratio (ratio of non-working age population to working age population) is expected to double by 2050. This is affecting Germany, Europe's biggest economy, particularly hard, with 100,000 engineering positions forecast to remain vacant till 2014.

Holland relaxed restrictions in September 2006, directing workers to 16 sectors of the economy, including metallurgy, social services and retail business. France has opened 61 sectors of its economy to thousands of A8 migrant workers. By September 2006 A8 migrants made up 0.6% of the population of Austria (compared to 0.4% in Britain). Under pressure from multinational companies like Siemens and



Congolese asylum seekers and supporters demonstrate in Manchester

DIHK, even Germany, which supposedly remains closed, has in fact issued permits to half a million A8 workers.

Only Britain, Ireland and Sweden did not introduce any form of immediate control to prevent mass migration in search of work from the countries that joined the EU in 2004. The British state made a strategic decision both to recruit cheap labour from the EU and to grab markets in the extended Europe. Unlike the Commonwealth immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s these European immigrants have the additional benefit for the racist state of being white.

Workers Registration Scheme

Following the expansion of the EU in 2004, Britain introduced the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS). It applies only to workers from A8, ex-socialist, countries. Workers from the other two countries which formed the A10 accession states (Cyprus and Malta) have had no restrictions placed on them and do not have to register under the WRS. WRS was introduced specifically to monitor and control A8 employment and reduce access to benefits. A8 workers were each required to register with the Home Office for £50 (now £90) before taking up work. Many A8 workers didn't register. Self-employed workers who had £20,000 each were exempt.

In contrast to the highly skilled migrants from outside the EEA, 82% of the East European workers who come to Britain and seek employment through the WRS occupy low-skilled jobs. WRS workers are a clearly defined reserve army of cheap labour.

An initial promise by the Labour government that A8 workers would have no restrictions placed on their residence in Britain was changed at the last minute to exclude them from out-of-work benefits and access to council housing for at least the first 12 months of working in Britain. These restrictions will remain in place at least until April 2009, after which they can be renewed.

About 689,000 A8 workers have entered Britain under WRS since May 2004. In 2005, 61.5% were from Poland where national unemployment is 19% and up to 40% in some areas. About 73% of A8 migrant workers in the construction industry and 61% in the hospitality sector are on self-employed visas according to a 2004 survey.

Migrant workers in Britain from A8 countries are mainly young and single; 82% are aged 18-34 and only 8.4%

have dependants. The majority are in good health, and well-educated, with their countries of origin having borne the cost of raising and training them.

713,000 A12 workers registered for NI between 2004/05 and 2006/07; half of A8 workers were short-term migrants and have returned home, but 74,000 remained as long-term migrants in 2005/06 – up from 20,000 in 2003/04. East Europeans still only made up 16% of long-term immigration in 2005/06; while migration from the Indian sub-continent made up 26%.

A8 migrant workers are used predominantly in industries that require unsocial hours and shift-working, such as health, childcare, factory and warehouse work or food processing. The top five sectors of A8 workers, who officially registered with the government between May 2004 and June 2006, were in administration, business and management (ABM), food processing, manufacturing, agriculture and hospitality, making up 79% of the total. The top five occupations were process operatives (37%), warehouse operatives, packers, kitchen and catering staff and domestic staff (cleaners) making up 67% of the total. In reality the numbers working in these labour-intensive, low-paid jobs will be a lot higher. 82% of jobs in the ABM sector are temporary, so they are easier to fill because the migrants are easier to fire. 75% of A8 workers earned £4.50-5.99 per hour in 2004-2006, ie at or below the minimum wage; only 20% of British workers earn below £6 per hour.

While A8 workers must register but are not prevented from seeking work wherever they can, workers from Romania and Bulgaria are generally not permitted to begin work without permission and are only allowed to work in certain sectors. The rules are very complex and many construction workers claiming the status of self-employed workers have been heavily fined for breaching the rules, unlike their employers.

Capitalism is gangsterism

While many immigrant workers are employed in lower-skilled and lower-paid occupations, sometimes lower than their own skills levels and qualifications demand, thousands are exploited even further. Deception, intimidation, trafficking, withholding of documents and pay, excessive charges for overcrowded accommodation and transport, and working weeks of up to 60 hours

are forcing many into a kind of modern day slavery via forced or bonded labour, with businesses, especially agriculture, using immigration status and threat of deportation to maintain control. The government collaborates in this exploitation. In August 2007 it emerged that 40 terrified Bulgarian workers were not paid for 35 days, threatened with deportation if they didn't pay £100 deposits, and forced to scavenge for food in fields. Their Cornish gangmaster was allowed to continue trading by the government's Gangmaster Licensing Agency (*The Guardian*, 14 August 2007).

In 2006 thousands of Eastern European immigrants, including 3,000 in each of London, Dublin and Glasgow, were homeless and destitute.

Racist attacks have increased sharply across Britain in the last two years. Those under attack include Middle Eastern and Asian people targeted as a result of the government's racist 'anti-terror' campaign against Muslims. But central and east European workers are also increasingly targeted. In 2005 it was estimated that there are 49,000 racist attacks a year in Britain.

Hidden migrant labour

Migrants now make up over 12.5% of the British working-age population, as opposed to 8.1% of the population. This does not include the thousands of au-pairs who come to Britain every year, who officially are not 'workers' but on 'cultural exchanges' for a maximum of 24 months. A 2004 survey showed 86% of au pairs were female; 50% worked eight hours a week unpaid 'overtime' and most worked two or three jobs. The figures also do not include those registered as 'self-employed' or the 157,000 overseas students who came to study in Britain for over a year in 2006 (over 25% of total estimated migration). Foreign students pay double in tuition fees and (in addition to visa fees) are a lucrative source of income for British universities. Foreign students work to make ends meet and so add to the labour force in an unquantifiable way.

Nor does the official figure for migrant workers include the illegal and super-exploited labour of asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. The

government's much vaunted 'crack-down on illegal migrant working' has meant in effect a crackdown on migrants themselves. Between 1998 and 2004, thousands of raids on businesses (1,098 in 2004) resulted in only 17 employers being successfully prosecuted for illegally employing migrants – half those convicted in 2004/05 were fined less than £700, four were fined the maximum £5,000, but thousands of migrants were prosecuted, imprisoned and deported.

Divide and rule

Migrant labour is deliberately used by the British capitalist class to attack the living standards of the working class. However the British working class is not a homogeneous whole, but is split between better-off, privileged workers, on the one hand, and the mass of the working class, including large numbers of low-paid, poor and unemployed workers on the other. The privileged section, the labour aristocracy, actually benefits enormously from immigration as migrant workers help to maintain the profits of British capitalism and keep down the costs of state services.

This is not a new phenomenon. Lenin described the importation of unskilled labour into imperialist countries: 'The exploitation of worse paid labour from backward countries is particularly characteristic of imperialism. On this exploitation rests, to a certain degree, the parasitism of rich imperialist countries which bribe a part of their workers with higher wages while shamelessly and unrestrainedly exploiting the labour of "cheap" foreign workers.'

The poorest sections of the 'indigenous' working class do not benefit in the same way and in time-honoured fashion are encouraged by right-wing politicians and media to blame exploited immigrants for the government's attacks on their living standards. This has contributed to a rise in racist attacks on immigrants. An 'indigenous' working class that opposes immigration is of great benefit to the ruling class. Firstly, it makes it easier to continue to privatise council housing, run down social services and reduce access to health care, if immigrants, rather than the government, are blamed, and secondly whenever there is a downturn in the economy and some of the reserve army is expelled, there is already a vocal body of support for the shift.

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

The answer to the very real problems faced by the poorer sections of the British working class does not lie in attacking immigration but in the fight for decent wages, affordable housing and free health care and education for all, irrespective of nationality or race. Such a struggle is in the interests of the whole working class and oppressed. The labour aristocracy only fights for its own narrow privileges; the rest of the working class must fight for its own rights, side by side with exploited migrant workers against the British capitalist system and the racist, anti-working class Labour government that runs it.

Charles Chinweizu and
Nicki Jameson

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2008: cheap labour from Poland

FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

Part five

The military-industrial-science complex

Capitalism made science into a productive force in the service of capital. Monopoly capitalism has turned scientific research into a more organised process than ever before and has done so in the pursuit of private profit and power. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

The cost of developing the atomic bomb (\$26 billion at 2007 prices) exceeded all that had been spent on scientific research in previous human history. This sum was itself exceeded by spending on rocket and missile research; the means of delivering nuclear bombs. As scientific knowledge progresses so the products of that knowledge have become more powerful, with potentially disastrous impacts for humanity and the planet, both intended and unintended. Reflecting on the consequences of his theoretical discoveries, Einstein remarked, 'The release of atomic power has changed everything except our way of thinking...the solution lies in the heart of mankind. If only I had known, I should have become a watchmaker.'

Under capitalism, the means of production that can potentially liberate human beings from misery, want and disease are turned into means of enslavement that threaten human existence; the liberating capacities of science and technology are made into means of repression and extermination. Scientific research is a form of capital investment and, like other productive resources, is subordinated to the dominant class relations. The direction of scientific research is increasingly determined by monopoly corporations in combination with the state, and it is these that are primarily responsible for the militarisation of science. In 2004 the governments of the industrialised countries spent \$85 billion on military research and development (R&D), \$50 billion on health and environmental protection R&D and less than \$1 billion on renewable energy R&D. In 2004-05 British government spending on military R&D was £2.6 billion compared with £1.4 billion spent on health and environmental protection R&D. The British government's Department for International Development research budget was under 4% of government military R&D spending. For science to serve humanity it will require the removal of the capitalist ruling class from power.

From 1940 to 1997 the US spent \$5.8 trillion on nuclear weapons and adds to that amount about \$35 billion a year at 1997 prices. This expenditure exceeded combined total US federal government spending on education, training, employment, social services, agriculture, natural resources and the environment, general science and space research, community and regional development (including disaster relief), law enforcement and energy protection and regulation. Corporate beneficiaries of this spending whose names readers might recognise include Atlantic Richfield (now part of BP), Babcock and Wilcox, BNFL, (these three all British), Westinghouse, General Electric Corporation, Lockheed Martin,



The atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945 killing over 73,000 people

Bechtel, Union Carbide, Monsanto, Dow Chemicals, Du Pont de Nemours, Goodyear and Rockwell International. Together they helped to build 70,000 nuclear weapons with an explosive force equivalent to over 120,000 Hiroshima bombs. A single hydrogen bomb would wipe out a city like London or Beijing and produce nuclear fallout lethal within an area of 6,000 square miles. It would cause genetic mutations across the entire planet. The use of science to enhance human power may result in the devastation of the species – the productive forces are turned into destructive forces for all humankind.

Militarism

Monopoly capitalism, 'which finally matured in the twentieth century, is by virtue of its fundamental economic traits, distinguished by a minimum fondness for peace and freedom, and by a maximum and universal development of militarism'. VI Lenin. In four centuries Britain unleashed 230 wars to seize foreign lands and enslave other peoples. In FRFI 200 (December 2007/January 2008) we identified 129 separate British military overseas interventions since the Second World War; this is the condition of imperialism: unending war. These wars serve to divide the world

into spheres of rival imperialists' interests and into oppressor and oppressed nations.

World military spending in 2006 exceeded \$1.2 trillion. In 2000 it was \$810 billion. The US government's planned military expenditure for 2008 is \$717 billion or over 100% bigger than its 2001 sum, and this even as the US economy founders. Britain has the world's second-biggest planned military expenditure for 2007-08 at £33.4 billion, a real rise of 1.4% per year since 2004; the highest sustained growth in 22 years. In 1997, when the Labour government was elected, Britain spent £24.3 billion on the military annually. These growing arms budgets have proved especially lucrative to the monopoly corporations: the increases in the values of contracts awarded by the US Department of Defense from 2001 to 2006 include Lockheed Martin up 81%, Northrop Grumman up 223%, BAE Systems up 442%, Boeing up 52% and Halliburton up 1,325%! Shares in US arms manufacturers have almost tripled in price since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Britain's largest manufacturing company, BAE Systems, is now the fourth biggest military contractor in the world and sixth biggest supplier to the US Defense Department. The US and British gov-

'In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence...by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist,' US President Eisenhower's farewell speech in 1960. Eisenhower had already authorised the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

The Doomsday Clock

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.

ernments signed the US and Britain 'Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes' agreement in 1958; it was renewed by the Labour government in 2004. This agreement provides guidelines for US and British military collaboration. British and US companies and governments develop 'inter-operability' of the two nations' weapons systems, to the benefit of US and British corporate profits.

The increasing expenditure on weapons and the development of their capacities reinforce an increasing use of force and the threat of the use of force in the imperialist nations' foreign relations, with disastrous consequences. The proportion of civilian to military deaths has risen from 10% in World War I, to 50% in World War II, to 70% in Vietnam, to 80-90% in Iraq and Afghanistan. In World War II scores of European and Japanese cities that had taken centuries to build were destroyed; that devastation is exported by imperialism to the underdeveloped countries. Approximately 600,000 people were killed by bombing in Europe during World War II and a similar number were killed by bombs in Japan; the death toll ran into millions from the bombing of Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia. Today, 'precision' and high-powered hi-tech weaponry increases the ratio of children to adult deaths compared to, for example, firearms and roadside bombs. It is noteworthy that during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, hi-tech weaponry caused more deaths among the invading soldiers through 'friendly fire' than were killed by the Iraqi forces. This is the consequence of refining the means to kill.

In 2001 the US government withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Every year for four years Russia and China have gone to the United Nations and offered to ban all weapons in space, and each year the US rejects this initiative. The US military seeks 'full-spectrum dominance' in battle capacity; dominance on the land, at sea, in the air and in space.

With the so-called 'Revolution in Military Affairs', the US and British military prioritised the role of computer systems, information and communication technology and robotics. Strategists deluded themselves that they could fight wars with almost zero-deaths for the imperialist troops, that 'Shock and Awe' would subdue their Iraqi foes with scarcely a blow landed against the invading armies. The British Defence Industrial Strategy published in 2005 states that the 'UK's battle-winning military capability remains heavily dependent on the development, exploitation and insertion of world-class technology'. Of course, this emphasis is most suitable for the arms companies who encourage it and profit from it.

The militarisation of science

'A monopoly, once it is formed and controls thousands of millions, inevitably penetrates into every sphere of public life, regardless of the form of government and all other "details".' VI Lenin.

Scientific knowledge has always been put to military use. For example, Galileo's achievements in understanding motion were taken up by cannon engineers. However, the systematic organisation of science for military purposes is the achievement of monopoly capitalism. During World War I science grew in importance as aeroplanes, wireless, medicines and gases were developed. In World War II science was central from the outset in developing aircraft, rockets, radar, code breaking machines, the atomic bomb and for directing operations. Practically the entire scientific communities of the rival powers were turned over to the war. British government spending on military research rose from £1.5 million in 1937 to £246 million in 1962. By 1962 64% of British government spending on science was for military purposes, involving 52% of British government scientific personnel. Research was concentrated into



Trident missile

laboratories ostensibly run by universities, but really under the control of monopoly corporations and the government. In 1937 pure scientific R&D and industrial R&D exceeded military R&D. By 1962 military R&D exceeded both pure science R&D and industrial R&D.

Today, despite record military budgets, the armed forces and others clamour for more spending. In November 2007 a report for the so-called left-leaning think tank, Demos, by two British academics, complained, 'Overstretch and under-resourcing are a matter of fact', and that the 'military covenant' between nation and service personnel 'has been damaged almost beyond repair'. The report describes 'an addiction to expensive high-technology equipment'. Equipment costs now account for over 40% of the British defence budget, says the report. What the academics are describing are the consequences of prioritising weapons development and production to the benefit of the multinational arms companies.

Arms production is the largest part of British manufacture, employing 345,000 people out of approximately three million manufacturing workers. Over a quarter of Europe's aerospace workforce are in Britain: 124,000 workers. In 1999-2000 the British government employed 29,677 research and development personnel of whom 12,047 (40%) were employed by the Ministry of Defence – about the same proportion obtains today. In 2007 Britain was the third biggest spender on military R&D, after the US and Russia. US government military R&D spending is expected to have reached \$78 billion in 2007, a 57% increase on the 2001 figure and 30% higher than the US's Cold War peak. This demonstrates the US ruling class's increasing reliance on military, as opposed to economic, power to assert its will.

A Labour government white paper (policy proposal) of 1998 called *Our competitive future: building the knowledge driven economy* encouraged universities to work 'effectively' with business. The higher education funding councils had to 'ensure that higher education is responsive to the needs of business and industry'. The Labour government's Defence Technology Strategy, launched in 2006, aims to increase university involvement in military research and development. Also in 2006, the British Ministry of Defence Research Acquisition Organisation introduced the 'Competition of Ideas' to seek from academia 'ideas and innovative research proposals' for achieving military objectives, with funds set aside for the prize winners. The British government's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, funds 60 British universities. Additional university funding for military purposes comes from BAE Systems, Qinetiq, Rolls Royce, research councils and directly from the Ministry of Defence; the corporations support university posts and fund post-graduate research. BAE Systems funds about 60 universities world-wide and sells arms to about half the governments of the world. Research projects in-hand include robot vehicles, the psychology

of people in war, computer data handling and electro-magnetic remote sensing to improve the detection of people and vehicles at longer ranges and in adverse weather – presumably in order to destroy them. The US government funds weapons research at British universities through the Departments of Defence and Energy and the Office of Naval Research.

British universities are reluctant, to the point of refusing, to disclose where funding comes from and how it is used. A rising proportion of academic papers are tied to money making interests. Military and commercial pressures restrict openness and accountability in research, debate is stifled and information distribution suppressed as intellectual property; the 'liberal' British university succumbs to the embrace of the monopolies, academic freedom is being bought. With the closure of 46 physics, chemistry and engineering departments, British universities are increasingly turning to military contracts for survival. The content of science is modified by the class relations that direct it: 'public funding [of R&D] has become so centrally controlled that novel, groundbreaking research is becoming a distant memory' (Peter Cotgreave, director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering, *Financial Times*, 16 May 2007). This is a manifestation of imperialism, monopoly capitalism, as moribund and decaying capitalism.

The military-industrial complex is demonstrated in the rotation of individual careers from senior civil servant to corporate executive, from military officer to university academic, from politician to company adviser. Alan Garwood, head of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Export Services Organisation, is on secondment from BAE Systems. Former Conservative government defence secretary Michael Portillo went on to serve as a director of BAE Systems, having awarded

the company a lucrative contract to upgrade Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft while he was a government minister. In 2002 the directors of BAE Systems included directors of Nat West Bank, the Independent Television Commission, BP, P&O, British Energy plc, Deutsche Bank, Babcock International, Alcoa, Pilkington, Burmah Castrol, Orange and Imperial College. The US board of BAE Systems included a former Commander-in-Chief of US Central Command, a former deputy director of the CIA, a former Commander of the US Fleet, a former director of the US National Security Agency and the co-chair of the US's 9/11 Commission. Key lobby groups shaping British policy are the Defence Industries Council, the National Defence Industrial Council and the Society of British Aerospace Companies. Here the representatives of BAE Systems, Qinetiq, Rolls Royce etc mingle with government officials and senior military officers to shape military spending and ensure an adequate yield on research investments.

Should imperialism last much longer, the future of humanity and all the species looks bleak. High on imperialism's list of priorities is suppression of revolt. The British Medical Association recently produced a report on The use of drugs as weapons; this was its third report on the militarisation of medicine. Research on urban surveillance and crowd control is a priority and so is brain scanning. 'The US military has acquired an arsenal of "sonic bullets" for use as non-lethal weapons. One plays backward the sound of a baby crying at 140 decibels, well over the threshold of pain. But even when noise is accidental it is still part of a war: the war waged by the forces of economic progress on the individual.' (*Financial Times*, 10 September 2007). Currently, over 4,000 robots are serving in Iraq. The US Congress has set a goal of having one-third of ground combat vehicles unmanned by 2015. Israel and South Korea deploy armed robot border guards (The Guardian, 18 August 2007). The current British Labour government adopted a nuclear first-use policy in the event of attack by biological and chemical weapons. Given that high-yield nuclear weapons are difficult to use from any cost-benefit perspective, the production of lower-yield, tactical nuclear weaponry is underway. The cabinet of horrors is being stocked with the instruments of genetic warfare. All roads are leading to hell.

The resistance

In April 1975 US Colonel Harry Summers was sent to negotiate with a

North Vietnamese colonel the terms of US withdrawal from Vietnam. Summers reported the following exchange: "You know, you never beat us on the battlefield," I said to Colonel Tu. He replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant".

Israel is used as a laboratory and testing ground for imperialism's weapons and tactics. When the Israeli invasion and aerial bombardment of Lebanon failed to defeat the Hizbollah resistance in August 2006, the Israeli air force resorted to dropping 4.8 million US-made cluster bombs over 36.6 million square metres as the Israeli forces retreated back into Israel. This form of devastation was the ultimate recourse, short of a nuclear bomb, of the Israeli forces – to render the land uninhabitable.

The Vietnamese liberation forces beat the US imperialists politically by demonstrating to the invaders that they could not win militarily. With the first Gulf War in 1991 and the blitzing of Yugoslavia in 1999 the imperialists believed that their weaponry was irresistible and able to ensure them victory. What was called the 'Vietnam

of General Petraeus as US commander in Iraq in January 2007, the US state signalled a change of tactics and readiness to placate critics from within the US ruling class. Rumsfeld advocated the 'revolution in military affairs', while Petraeus is billed as a 'counter-insurgency expert'. The imperialists may adjust their methods but the military-industrial corporations will not recede and neither will their pervasive influence decline for as long as capitalism rules.

For over 100 years the mass media has been developed and deployed by the monopoly corporations. Before the invention of television Franz Kafka said, 'The cinema involves putting the eye into uniform.' In 1984 George Orwell foresaw the way that the ruling classes would use the media to condition and control people. More recently, Fidel Castro described the bourgeois media thus, 'It is the most sophisticated media ever developed by technology, employed to kill human beings and to subjugate and exterminate peoples.' The monopoly media is used to both prepare populations for future wars and to acclimatise

Qinetiq

The Labour government has raised over £52 billion from asset sales since 1997 and intends to sell off a further £30 billion of fixed assets between 2004 and 2011. Qinetiq was formed out of Ministry of Defence research laboratories and employs 8,000 people in Britain. It owns military contractors in the US and Australia. The US private equity group Carlyle bought a 34% stake in Qinetiq in 2002. The new company was floated on the stock exchange in 2006. Within five years Carlyle's £42 million investment was worth £300 million. Qinetiq's top ten managers made a 19,900% return on their £0.54 million investment; that is almost £200 for every £1 invested. Prime Minister Gordon Brown rejects criticism of Qinetiq's privatisation. Qinetiq's staff take up professorships and lectureships at British and overseas universities.

syndrome', inhibiting the scale of US military engagement abroad, was supposedly erased from the US ruling class mind. However, even as the invading armies routed the Iraqi army in 1991, the commander of the US forces, General Schwarzkopf, cautioned, 'Intelligence which relies on high technology, on electronic eavesdropping and satellites is all very well, but we cannot hit the terrorists if we don't have human information.'

The failures of the allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in August 2006 have resulted in criticism of the imperialists' war fighting methods from within the imperialists' ranks. Those methods are, in part, inscribed in the class relations governing the military-industrial complex and the dominant position of the monopoly corporations in those relations. It has been in their interests to promote the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' as real and effective; the first Gulf War and the attack on Yugoslavia were used to lobby for more spending and more R&D. However, 'The prophets who called for a "revolution in military affairs" and focused on conventional fighting and high technology forces as a substitute for manpower and force numbers have been proved terribly wrong... Being biggest and spending the most money is not enough.' (Anthony Cordesman, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, *Financial Times*, 18 February 2005).

Writing in the May 2007 edition of the *US Armed Forces Journal* under the heading 'A failure in generalship,' Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling says that the US focused on winning a high-technology conventional war in Iraq in 2003 and was 'checked by a form of war they did not prepare for and do not understand'. Yingling argues that the US depended on technology to win types of wars the US command were familiar with: 'If our operations produce more enemies than they defeat, no amount of force is sufficient to prevail.' With the removal of Rumsfeld as US defence secretary in December 2006 and the appointment

people to war as a normal condition. The media is used to administer fear and thereby pave the way for the construction of a repressive apparatus to halt any opposition to militarism. The removal of the rights to assembly and association, the ending of freedom of speech and expression, indefinite detention and torture, these crude dictatorial measures, are all justified in the so called US and British 'free press', run by a handful of corporations.

We have no option but to get informed and to organise against the monopoly corporations and their political parties and governments. We who live in the imperialist countries must make solidarity with those in the oppressed countries who resist imperialism. We must support and learn from the Cubans who have resisted the mightiest imperialist power for so long and have begun to build a better world that inspires hundreds of millions of people in Latin America and across the globe. Above all – we must organise.

Special acknowledgement must go to Scientists for Global Responsibility and their publications *Soldiers in the Laboratory* (2005) and *More Soldiers in the Laboratory* (2007), both by Chris Langley, from which much of the material on military R&D was drawn.

In previous issues

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. Part four (FRFI 199) revealed the deteriorating economic condition of US imperialism undermining its global ambitions.



The Talon robot made by Qinetiq on patrol in Iraq

IRAQ – resistance beyond the ‘surge’

‘Surge’ – what improvement?

Those vaunting the success of the ‘surge’ point to the reduction in violence, the returning refugees and the former Sunni resistance fighters who have now joined forces with the imperialists. General Petraeus, however, may not be waving but drowning. By his own admission, progress was ‘tenuous in many areas and could be reversed’.

The number of US soldiers killed in December was the second-lowest monthly total of the occupation. The number of Iraqis killed was also well down on the figures for July and August. However, the slaughter goes on. According to Iraq Body Count, who list only those deaths that have been doubly verified, over 900 Iraqis were killed in December. The true figure will have been much higher. 60% of all Iraqi families have had one or more of their members killed. In addition, the ‘surge’ has caused a huge increase in the number of prisoners being held in US military and Iraqi jails. The Red Cross estimates there are now 60,000 of them, almost all being held without charge.

Much of the reduction in casualties can be explained by the ethnic cleansing that has reduced opportunities for sectarian violence. The ‘surge’ accelerated this process. More than two million Sunnis have left the country and another 2.2 million have been forced to flee their homes within Iraq.

In October, the Iraqi government claimed 46,000 refugees had returned, but this figure turned out to include anyone who had crossed the border for any reason. The 1,600 families a day that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki claimed were taking advantage of the free bus service to return turned out to be more like 50. The UNHCR pointed out that, although 25,000 internally displaced refugees took up a government grant of \$800 and went back to Baghdad that month, a further 28,000 left. In November, the UN estimated a net 1,000 Iraqis a day were returning from Syria. However, a survey by UNHCR found that over 70% were returning because they could not afford to live in Syria or could not get a visa, and only 14% because they thought security had improved in Iraq.

The ‘surge’ has been credited for some 80,000 Sunnis starting to co-operate with US forces who previously opposed the occupation. One reason cited for the about-face was that the Sunnis turned against the methods being used by fighters associated with Al Qaida. However, this process began long before the ‘surge’. Sergeant Joe Colabuno of the US military psychological operations division recently admitted he had spent 18 months turning Sunni residents against Al Qaida. His tactics included provoking Al Qaida to, as Colabuno put it, ‘over-react’. In other words the US military facilitated unnecessary death and destruction to win support. The US administration refers to these new supporters as ‘concerned citizens’. In fact, many of them are former supporters of Al Qaida. They have been formed into the evangelical sounding ‘Awakening Force’, trained and armed by the imperialists and each paid between \$300 and \$600 a month – a fortune in a country where more than a third of families are trying to survive on less than \$100 a month.

‘Surge’ – a strategy to ensure war

The true purpose of the ‘surge’ was to deflate the growing anti-war pressure in the US and to disarm those in the US ruling class who were concerned that the complacency of the Bush administration was threatening the credibility

The media have been feeding us images of life returning to normal in Iraq. They would have us believe that the US ‘surge’ has turned the tide and that perhaps the invasion and occupation have been worthwhile after all. The *Daily Telegraph*, alongside a picture of the man smiling and waving, voted General Petraeus, architect of the ‘surge’, their ‘Person of the Year’. It said, ‘Where once Iraqis saw the glass as virtually empty, now they can see a day when it might be half full’ – a cruel metaphor at a time when fewer than a third of the Iraqi people have access to safe water, cholera has broken out in the poorest parts of Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan and water-borne diarrhoea is the second-biggest killer amongst Iraqi children. More than nine million Iraqis are living below the poverty line. Women and children have to beg or prostitute themselves to feed their families. The number of items available on government rations has just been halved. One in five children has stunted growth because of malnutrition. What sort of warped humanity gains comfort from these conditions? Only those longing for just enough improvement to begin the plunder of Iraq’s oil and resources. **JIM CRAVEN** reports.



Mosul, northern Iraq, January 2008: bomb explosion kills 34 and injures more than 200

of US imperialism’s global hegemony. The ‘surge’ was intended to keep US troops in Iraq, not to leave it. In these respects, it has been a success. Bush will complete his presidency without provoking a domestic political crisis, the Democrats have been allowed to quietly bury their promises to bring the boys home and an attack on Iran is once more on the cards.

The ‘surge’ has also marked a change in strategy. Imperialists normally look to back a strong dictator, as they did with Saddam Hussein before he began to have independent ambitions. But, having executed Saddam, disbanded his state apparatus and humiliated the Iraqi government, and with its military too overstretched to establish control alone, the US has to find new allies. Enter General Petraeus, co-author of the US army manual on counter-insurgency. Petraeus’s ‘oil spot’ strategy is based on that of the French colonialist operations in Tonkin and Madagascar. The aim is to secure small areas and clear them of resistance fighters by whatever brutal means necessary. These enclaves are then to be held by a combination of concrete barriers, guard posts, curfews etc, but above all by recruiting tribal sheikhs and other corrupt local leaders eager to feather their own nests. The imperialists hope that these ‘oil spots’ of ‘security’ will then spread into a sufficiently stable Iraqi network.

Problems mount for the imperialists

Unfortunately for the imperialists, they have no reliable allies; hence Petraeus’s pessimistic assessment. As the

British found in Basra, enlisted local militias have a habit of booting out erstwhile allies if their own ambitions are frustrated. According to one Sunni commentator, many of those who have allied themselves with US forces have done so only temporarily because they could not fight the occupation and defend themselves against Shia death squads at the same time.

Internal problems for the US military also continue to mount. The Bush administration has called for an extra 92,000 recruits but standards for recruitment have already been reduced just to maintain numbers. 20% of the present armed forces would not have been accepted before 2003. Democrats have suggested some form of conscription may have to be introduced. To add to US difficulties, British troops will shortly be reduced to 2,500 and the new Australian and Polish governments have announced their contingents will be pulled out by the autumn.

End the occupation

Despite the problems, however, the US has no intention of leaving Iraq. In November, President Bush and Prime Minister Al Maliki ‘agreed’ a treaty for permanent US military bases that could be used for striking at neighbouring countries and would permit the arming of Iraqi forces with weapons of mass destruction. The ‘agreement’ also gave preferential treatment for US multinationals in Iraq and called for the ‘transition to a market economy’, meaning the privatisation of Iraqi state resources and the opening up of Iraqi oil. The Iraqi government has annulled the contract with Russia’s Lukoil, made by Saddam Hussein, for the massive West Qurna oil fields, leaving them available for imperialist exploitation but will rely on Saddam’s oil laws to initiate oil service contracts with western multinationals.

The ‘surge’ has not opened a new era of peace. The resistance to imperialist occupation will continue. A survey for the US military found that Iraqis believe the invasion of their country was the primary root of violent differences between them and that the departure of occupying forces is the key to national reconciliation.

Afghanistan – imperialists in confusion

The imperialists are beginning to admit there can be no purely military victory in Afghanistan. For years they have labelled all those resisting the occupation as Taliban, and insisted there can be no talking with such ‘terrorists’.

A year ago, in FRFI 195, we wrote that ‘it is not beyond the realms of possibility that the US would try to reach a settlement with the Taliban again if it suited its purpose’. In fact, it is the British who are championing such talks. British government officials are admitting that the ‘Taliban’ is not just the remnants of the previous regime but a variety of Afghan groups opposed to the occupation. When Gordon Brown visited Afghanistan in December he insisted that what he called ‘hardline’ Taliban would not be included in any talks, but Afghan President Karzai said he was already talking with aides of the former Taliban leader Mullah Omar and former spokesman for the Taliban government, Mohammed Nizawi. Karzai admitted he had been relaying messages to the Taliban in Pakistan for months. Publicly, the US administration opposes the development because, as one of them put it, talking to the Taliban would be ‘radioactive’ to voters in a presidential election year. But it is inconceivable that the British and the Afghan government would have gone so far

without the agreement of the US. General Dan McNeil, US commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, has agreed that some Taliban forces could be recruited.

The old imperialist tactics of divide and rule

The imperialists’ aim is to split the resistance by playing on old rivalries between sections of the resistance and by bribing tribal leaders. Senior British officers confirmed they have had direct contact with the ‘Taliban’ and that money had changed hands. One such meeting led to the assassination of resistance leader Mullah Dadullah by members of the Special Boat Service. The attack on Musa Qala by British forces in December was preceded by the defection of Mullah Abdul Salaam, after Karzai promised Salaam control of the town. The taking of Musa Qala was hailed as a great victory. In fact, after four days of heavy aerial and artillery bombardment in which four civilians, including two children, were killed, the resistance fighters, as is the nature of guerrilla warfare, simply ‘melted away’.

The British are hoping to build alliances with local tribal leaders. Gordon Brown announced a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign involving ‘security, economic development and political

co-operation’ with cash incentives for Afghan farmers to grow wheat instead of opium poppies. The US is critical of the plans. They point to the failure of Britain’s previous deal with leaders in Musa Qala in October 2006, which ended with resistance fighters re-entering the town four months later. Few people think the alliances can work because, as Ehsan Zahine, director of the Tribal Liaison Office in Kabul put it, ‘It’s unlikely tribes would be willing to fight for a government they no longer trust.’

Resistance attacks, running at an average of 550 per month, were 20% higher in 2007 than in 2006. The Afghan army, which was meant to be 70,000 strong by 2010, is only half that figure, with retention rates at just 50%. The imperialists are relying on 10,000 armed private security agents. NATO forces are at least 4,000 under strength and are short of crucial equipment such as helicopters. Most NATO countries are adamantly refusing to increase their commitment. In Pakistan, presently an ally of the US but where support for the Afghan resistance is widespread, instability has increased following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The imperialist forces are overstretched and their commanders cannot foresee an end to the fighting; time is not on their side.

Labour government plans to build yet more prisons

In December 2007 Minister of Justice Jack Straw published the *Lord Carter Review of Prisons* and announced plans to build yet more prisons and create 96,000 prison places in England and Wales by 2014. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

Lord Carter - Labour's peer of choice

Labour peer Lord Patrick Carter of Coles is one of the government's favourite chairs of review committees, advising the Labour Party over the last five years on everything from the Commonwealth Games and Wembley Stadium to Payroll Services, Criminal Records Bureau, Offender Management, Public Diplomacy, and Pathology. He is hated by lawyers for his review of the legal aid system, which has paved the way for the government to make sweeping cuts to the provision of free legal representation and advice to the poorest people in society.

Carter is a businessman, who in 1985 founded private health provider Westminster Health Care, which he then sold in 1999 to Chaitanya Patel, one of the Labour Party donors investigated in the cash for honours scandal in 2006. He is an old buddy of Jack Straw and was best man at his wedding.

Carter's review is entitled *Proposals for the efficient and sustainable use of custody in England and Wales*. It was carried out behind closed doors and it is very unclear who was consulted, although the Prison Governors' Association and Chief Inspector of Prisons have complained that they were not.

The key announcements made by Straw as a result of Carter's recommendations relate to increasing capacity in the system and building more prisons. In response to massive overcrowding and the exposure by legal challenge of systemic failure in its sentencing structure, the government has also been forced to announce some sentencing changes.

Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection

Since coming to power in 1997, Labour has introduced over 3,000 new criminal offences. In its early years in government it brought in electronic tagging and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, breaches of which result in imprisonment, as do breach of probation, drug testing orders or parole or non-parole licence conditions. However, the greatest change came in the 2003 Criminal Justice Act which contained wholesale changes to prison sentencing. This came into force in April 2005.

Almost everyone sentenced to imprisonment for a violent or sexual offence now receives an extended sentence, an Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP) or a discretionary life sentence. IPPs are in themselves virtually indistinguishable from life sentences and the courts are required to give them to anyone convicted of an offence for which the maximum penalty is ten years or over and whom it has assessed as potentially dangerous, irrespective of the facts of their individual situation. The gravity of the specific offence committed is then reflected in the length of the minimum term, ie the part of the sentence which must be served in custody before release can be granted. In general these periods are short - the median length IPP tariff as of April

2006 was 30 months. They are reminiscent of the most punitive type of US sentencing. Black revolutionary prisoner George Jackson was sentenced to serve a 'one-year-to-life' prison sentence. By the time he was murdered by the state in San Quentin prison in 1971 he had been behind bars for 12 years.

Release at the end of the minimum term is not mandatory but at the discretion of the Parole Board. By September 2007 only 13 IPP prisoners had been released. The Parole Board will only grant release if it is shown 'evidence' that the prisoner presents less of a risk of committing a similar offence than s/he did when sentenced. This almost always takes the form of 'offending behaviour courses' completed in prison.

circumstances in which the mandatory custodial element had expired and a prisoner was kept in gaol on the basis that he posed a continuing risk, but in which it was impossible to work towards changing that risk or meaningfully assess if it had been changed, could amount to arbitrary, unreasonable and unlawful detention.

The government is appealing against the verdict. However, in a bid to head off further legal challenges, Straw announced that the law would be changed to ensure that only those whose minimum term would be two years or more will receive IPPs in future. This has now been incorporated in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, which is currently going through parliament.



18 January: protest against deaths of women prisoners (see page 14)
Carter paid lip-service to imprisonment being 'a last resort' for 'female offenders' but the likelihood is women will just be moved into older, more decrepit prisons

However, due to overcrowding, bureaucracy and too few places on these courses, many prisoners stand almost no chance of having completed them by the time they come in front of the Parole Board.

For example, Nicholas Wells was convicted in 2005 of an unsuccessful robbery attempt on a taxi-driver and given an IPP with a 12-month tariff. The papers were not even prepared for the Parole Board to consider until six months after the tariff had expired, and when the Board did finally look at his case in May 2007 it concluded he could not be released as he had not taken the required courses, which were not even available in the prison he was in.

A judicial review application by Nicholas Wells and another prisoner in a similar situation took place in June 2007. The court heard that in the year after the implementation of the CJA 2003 sentencing changes, the number of prisoners serving life sentences (including IPPs) in England and Wales increased by 31%, yet an official from the Public Protection Unit in the National Offender Management Service gave evidence that the legislation had been expected to be 'resource neutral' and no extra money had been allocated to fund all the courses that were needed. The court found that cir-

Determinate sentence prisoners

Straw also announced that prisoners convicted under the 1991 Criminal Justice Act to determinate sentences of four years or more for non-violent, non-sexual offences will have their sentences brought in line with prisoners sentenced under the 2003 CJA. Currently CJA 1991 prisoners have to apply for parole at the half way point in their sentence; if refused they have to serve up until the two-thirds point.

CJA 2003 prisoners are released automatically after half their sentence.

The downside to the proposal is that those released will then be on licence, and therefore living in fear of recall for the smallest thing, for the whole of the remaining part of their sentence, instead of only up to the three-quarter point, which was the case for them previously. This is very likely to be challenged in the courts.

Building more prisons

When the Carter report was published, some in the media and Conservative Party fumed about the suggestion that future sentencing policy should take into consideration prison capacity, as though this meant that thousands of violent criminals would now be released who should otherwise be in prison for want of available space. However the 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' brigade have nothing to fear. Carter proposed and Straw agreed to the rapid building of new prisons on ex-military bases, in particular the MOD base at Coltishall, Norfolk, the conversion of the open prison at HMP Wealstun into a closed prison and the commissioning of a new prison ship. (It is only three years since the Prison Service decommissioned HMP Wear, the last prison ship.)

In addition it is proposed to build new blocks on existing prison sites, increase capacity, reduce cells out of commission and bring forward existing projects. In the managerial speak of Carter's report he talks of 'extending existing operational flexibility in population density' and reviewing 'the current key performance indicator on overcrowding to allow for greater operational flexibility'. In plain English this means cramming more prisoners into each small cell.

Straw announced a 'new for old' strategy, claiming that 'smaller and older' prisons would be closed as new ones are built. In reality it is highly unlikely any will close unless they are in areas such as north London where their sale would be extremely lucrative. Instead new prisons will be built to accommodate more male prisoners and some older ones converted to house women or children.

Noel Maguire - political hostage

The Irish government has rejected the latest application of Irish political prisoner Noel Maguire for repatriation to an Irish gaol. Noel was convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions as part of the Real IRA bombing campaign in England in 2001. He and his co-accused Robert and Aiden Hulme all denied the charges. No evidence was ever produced at their trial in 2002 to suggest any of the three had actually planted any bombs. They were convicted on the flimsiest of evidence and two other men at an earlier trial had admitted responsibility.

After being sentenced to 20-22 years, Maguire and the Hulme brothers applied for transfer back to an Irish prison, as is their right as Irish citizens. Both the British and Irish governments frustrated any attempt to build a campaign for the repatriation back to Ireland by constantly claiming that transfer was 'imminent'. The Hulme brothers were finally repatriated in December 2006.

Noel Maguire is the last remaining Irish political prisoner still incarcerated in an English prison. In October 2005 he was hospitalised

Clash of the Titans

Most frightening of all is the announcement of the building of three new 'Titan' prisons, housing around 2,500 prisoners each. According to Carter each of these mega-prisons would comprise five living units of 500 men from 'different segments of the prison population'. The prisons would be built on 'cost-effective designs' with 'optimal sight lines which would result in better staff utilisation', 'centralised support services', 'economies of scale in the capital cost outlay with standard design allowing off-site prefabrication construction' and 'new technology built into the fabric of the building (for example biometric scanning, bar coding, electronic door operation)'. Each Titan prison is to have an in-built court.

Carter does not dwell in detail on whether these enormous prisons are to be state or privately run, but does say they will 'provide an opportunity to incentivise modernisation of working practices and stimulate a competitive market through a large-scale building programme' and there is a general emphasis throughout the report on the 'marketisation' of the prison system, with 'service level agreements with public sector prisons [to be] put on a similar footing to the commercial contracts currently in existence between the government and private sector'. He is also quick to point out that the government can bypass normal planning permission procedure in order to get the new gaols up and running, and envisages their completion within five years.

Labour's clampdown

Since Labour came to power in 1997 the prison population of England and Wales has increased from 61,000 to 79,700. In Scotland it rose from 6,000 to 7,215. Out of every 100,000 people, 148 in England and Wales and 142 in Scotland are now in prison. This compares to 93 per 100,000 in Germany and 85 in France. On 23 November 2007 the total UK prison population was 90,248. Britain has more life sentenced prisoners than Germany, France, Russia and Turkey put together.

Despite the lip-service paid by Carter to the idea that 'custody should be used as a last resort when dealing with female offenders' and that 'many non-dangerous offenders with mental health or drug problems may receive better treatment and rehabilitation outside of prison' there is no suggestion from any quarter that Gordon Brown, Jack Straw and their government are in any way going to cease treading the path towards more imprisonment.

following an unprovoked, life-threatening knife attack.

Families visiting republican prisoners in England have often arrived to find that their relative has been 'ghosted' to another prison many miles away without their having been informed. Relatives have also been subjected to strip-searches and been held under emergency laws.

For more information on the campaign email politicalstatus@aol.com. Send letters and cards of support to: Noel Maguire, HMP Full Sutton, Stamford Bridge, York YO41 IPS.

Paul Mallon

FRFI round up

Fight racism! Fight imperialism!

The British state continues to terrorise communities both in Britain and in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, which remain under brutal occupation. FRFI activists have been on the streets around the country in support of asylum seekers, in defence of our democratic rights and against the war.

End the occupation of Iraq and Palestine!

We call for the immediate withdrawal of imperialist troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and for the Labour government to be put on trial for crimes against humanity. We have found lots of support among the public. We also maintain regular pickets of Marks & Spencer, Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel, in support of the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom. On Saturday 15 March we will be forming an anti-imperialist contingent on the national Stop the War Coalition demo. To join this contingent and other activities contact regional branches (see Events).

Fight racism!

On 29 November 2007 activists working with Northumbria University FRFI Society in Newcastle mobilised in response to the BNP National Student Organiser

gees (TCAR) into Newcastle city centre, demanding freedom to work, freedom to stay, and the end to the criminalisation and impoverishment of immigrants.

Several people who, with the help of TCAR, have successfully fought government attempts to deport them, came to show their support for those still confronting the racist British government's immigration policies. These included Joy Bowman, whose campaign against deportation to Jamaica received national publicity, and Kurdish asylum seeker Guler Akdogan, whose long fight against the deportation of her family to Turkey has finally been successful.

The demo stopped outside Government Offices North East, where TCAR and the UDPS opposition party from Democratic Republic of Congo spoke. The end rally at Grey's Monument was addressed by TCAR, Newcastle FRFI/RCG, North West Asylum Seekers' Defence Group (NWASDG), South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group, Support the Harmondsworth 4 Campaign, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Tyneside Stop the War, the University and College Lecturers' Union and Tyneside Socialist Forum. The demo was attended by contingents from Durham, Carlisle, Doncaster, Sheffield,



TCAR demonstrators at Grey's Monument in Newcastle city centre on 19 January

standing in union elections. The meeting to propose a 'No Platform' motion had the highest attendance ever recorded by the union, with a strong representation of black and international students, and passed the motion by 135-54 votes. The FRFI society followed this with a public meeting on racism on 12 December. On 19 December FRFI had a stall at a *Love Music Hate Racism* gig in Newcastle. The promoters gave permission for the stall, but comrades were later thrown out on the insistence of a leading SWP member because we called for a complete break from the racist Labour Party.

On 19 January 150 people joined a militant demonstration organised by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees

Manchester and Middlesborough, and by No Borders, Antifa, Amnesty International and the Socialist Workers Party.

In London, FRFI has been active in the campaign in support of the Harmondsworth 4 (see page 16). FRFI activists in Manchester attended the TCAR demo with NWASDG and plan future protests and meetings to fight against the Labour government's insidious war against refugees and asylum seekers.

Support prisoners!

On 16 and 18 January FRFI in London and Manchester attended protests outside Holloway and Styal prisons organised by Pauline Campbell. Pauline campaigns to highlight the mistreatment of

EVENTS

See page 7 for Cuba speaking tour events.

LONDON

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Boycott Marks & Spencer
M&S, Oxford St (Marble Arch end)

Tuesdays 5 February and 4 March, 1-2pm
Demonstration: Defend asylum seekers! Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!
Communications House, Old St, EC1 (Nearest tube Old Street)

Tuesday 5 February 7pm
Democracy & Revolution: Cuba and Venezuela – meeting with Jorge Trujillo
2nd secretary of the Cuban Embassy
LSE FRFI Student Society
S75, St Clement's Building, London School of Economics (LSE), Houghton Street, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Tuesday 11 March 6.30pm
Film screening: Cubal Africa! Revolution!
LSE FRFI Student Society
Room S54, St Clement's Building, LSE

Tuesday 18 March 6.30pm
Cuba – the streets are ours
First in a series of educational
LSE FRFI Student Society
Room S78, St Clement's Building, LSE

For further details call 020 7837 1688
Or 07790 896 430
Email northlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com/
eastlondon@rcgfrfi.plus.com
frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

NEWCASTLE

Wednesday 5 March (contact for time)
Rally outside full meeting of Newcastle City Council against attacks on the right to accept donations at street meetings
Newcastle Civic Centre, Sandyford Road

Saturday 8 March 3pm
RATB Regional Campaign Meeting

Northumbria Student Union, Training Room,
Sandyford Road / St John's Church Hall,
Grainger Street

Thursday 13 March 7pm
FRFI Readers Group discussion on 'Health Matters'
Contact for reading material
Culture Café, Mary's Place

Saturday 15 March 12 noon
Street theatre and protest part of national day of action to mark fifth anniversary of invasion of Iraq
Grey's Monument, City Centre

Thursday 27 March 7pm
FRFI Readers Group discussion on 'Notes on an Education Scandal'
Contact for reading material
Culture Café, Mary's Place

Saturday 29 March
RATB regional day of action
12-3pm: Free the Cuban 5 rally and street theatre
Grey's Monument
6pm: Fundraising meal
Culture Café, Mary's Place
9pm-2am: Rebel Music fundraiser
Venue to be confirmed.

Every Saturday 3pm
Weekly meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR)
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom of Westgate Road. Monthly general meetings in St Thomas Church, Haymarket.

Every Saturday 1-2pm
Street action or stall
For details call 07858 346 276
email frfinortheast@googlemail.com
Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk
TCAR: tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk
07989 879 310

GLASGOW

Saturday 16 February 12-4pm
Street event: the Cubans are coming!
All welcome, open megaphone

Help publicise the speaking tour and defend socialist Cuba!
Top of Buchanan Street, near Donald Dewar statue, city centre
Tuesday 19 February 5pm
Film showing: Salud! about Cuba's health revolution (free entry)
Boyd Orr Building, University Avenue, Glasgow University

DUNDEE

Thursday 14 February 7-9pm
Film showing: Erroll Flynn and the Cuban Revolution
Cuba libres, music, quiz and raffle
Suggested donation £5
Room G9, Dundee University, Perth Road

Thursday 28 February 5pm leave – returning 12 midnight
'Take this bus to Cuba!'
Transport leaves Dundee for Glasgow speaking tour rally, £10/donation
Meet at Braes Bar, Perth Road

For further details email
frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk or go to
www.bebo.com/FRFI

MANCHESTER

Wednesdays 6 February and 5 March, 7.30pm
Rock around the Blockade organising meetings
Upstairs at Mother Mac's pub, Back Piccadilly (behind Wetherspoons)

Thursday 7 February 7.30pm
North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group campaign meeting
Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street (behind Central Library)

For details call: 07519 427 093
Email mrcrgfrfi@fsmail.net
Website: www.manchesterfrfi.co.uk
RATB: 07940 988 203
ratb@riseup.net
NWASDG: 07779 189 794 or 07976 719 786 / fightback_05@yahoo.com

women prisoners and demonstrates outside prisons every time a woman dies in custody. 18 January marked the fifth anniversary of the death of her 18-year-old daughter Sarah in Styal prison.

Defend democratic rights!

On 6 December two police officers, one from Special Branch, turned up at an FRFI meeting on 'Police, racism and the state' in Govanhill, Glasgow. They demanded to sit in on the meeting, have copies of the talks and agendas and be notified of all future public meetings – needless to say, we refused! This follows attempts to prevent FRFI comrades from using the room, despite it being booked.

In December the Dundee Heathfield Defence Campaign held a city centre rally to publicly denounce the violent arrest of an FRFI member, while selling FRFI and handing out leaflets outside a meeting with a mainly Muslim audience. He was charged with disorderly conduct

and the police claim he 'lashed out with arms and legs'; however video evidence completely vindicates the comrade's statement that the police arbitrarily and illegally assaulted him. The rally gained wide support from other organisations and individuals, including the Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity, Scotland Against Criminalising Communities and Craig Murray, Rector of Dundee University, where the arrest took place.

Newcastle FRFI continues to fight attempts by the city council and police to ban collection of donations at campaign street meetings. The court case of four activists charged with participating in an unlicensed collection is on 11 March. Regular organising meetings have been held to bring together different groups to unite against these attacks. Councillors have been contacted and petitions are being collected on the streets and online to submit to a full council meeting on 5 March. A rally will take place outside the

meeting. To sign the online petition visit: <http://tinyurl.com/yqjtl>.

In Liverpool, FRFI supporters have defeated attempts by the city council to prevent protesters handing out leaflets, selling newspapers, setting up stalls or using a megaphone in the city centre. This follows months of harassment of the left by Street Crime Wardens. On 29 December five such wardens forced three comrades to take down a stall advertising the Cuban speaking tour, claiming it was illegal. Immediately FRFI emailed the city council quoting the relevant law and arguing that the wardens had no legal authority for their actions. On 12 January FRFI joined a series of protests by the left to show solidarity with animal rights' protesters, who have been constantly harassed by the council. The following week the council responded to FRFI, completely backing down, and on 19 January supporters held a stall unmolested by the wardens.

RATB round up

The Cubans are coming

Not only is another world possible but another world already exists: a world free from exploitation, poverty and racism. That world is Cuba. Rock around the Blockade (RATB) activists around the country have been preparing for the **Cubans are Coming speaking tour** in February and March (for details see p6/7) on the streets and through public meetings. In London and Manchester we showed the excellent documentary: *The power of community: how Cuba survived peak oil*, illustrating how only a planned socialist economy can deal with the huge problems relating to energy and the environment.

In Newcastle two highlights have been an education meeting on the ideas of Che Guevara and a Celebration of Resistance in the centre of the city, with music from DJ Stress, to publicise and raise money for the tour. Similar musical fundraisers have been organised by Rebel Music in London which included a 12-piece Ska band, and in Manchester involving local bands Fraser King and Death to the Ghosts, as well as the

newly-formed Rebel Music Allstars, set up by musical comrades and supporters to play revolutionary Latin American songs.

Around the country we are holding organising meetings for the tour: come and share your ideas and be a part of the urgent work that needs doing. If you or your organisation would like to sponsor the tour contact us.

RATB has also just released the second edition of *Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours* – an invaluable source of information about the Cuban Revolution and the ideal companion to the speaking tour. It is available for £4 (inc p&p) – order your copy now!

There's no time to lose: the opportunity of a lifetime to see three generations of Cuban revolutionaries is almost here. The aim of the speaking tour is to help build an anti-imperialist movement in Britain in solidarity with socialist Cuba. The work doesn't begin or end with the tour – join Rock around the Blockade and get involved!

REVOLUTIONARY CUBA: THE STREETS ARE OURS

updated and expanded 2nd edition

SPECIAL OFFER: Join RATB today for a year's membership, including subscription to *Viva Cuba* newsletter and a copy of the new booklet at the special price of £10 or £5 low waged/concessions.

- ☐ Please send me copies of *Revolutionary Cuba: The streets are ours**
- ☐ I would like to like to join RATB and receive the new booklet at the special price**

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____ E-mail _____

Donation _____

* I enclose a cheque/PO payable to Rock around the Blockade for £4 including p&p.

** I enclose a cheque for/PO payable to Rock Around the Blockade for £10/£5 conc.

Please return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

Visit our website: www.ratb.org.uk



CUBAN SPEAKING TOUR

Socialism Into the 21st Century

Help us reach our fundraising target of £10,000

We still have £2,000 left to raise. If you have not yet contributed, please send us a donation today to help make the tour the success it deserves to be.

Please send cheques/POs payable to 'RATB Speaking Tour 2008' to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

www.cubansarecoming.org

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

email _____

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Two communist fighters remembered

On 23 January, 10,000 people marched through the streets of Berlin to commemorate Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. They carried a banner that read 'Luxemburg – Liebknecht – Lenin: No one is forgotten! Get up and resist!' During the day 70,000 people visited the Luxemburg and Liebknecht memorial. The neo-fascists (NPD) planned a counter-march which was forbidden by the authorities. Apparently there is a counter-memorial just opposite dedicated to 'the victims of Stalinism'. The leaders of the Left Party stood for a while in front of this memorial as well – a sop to the current anti-communist zeitgeist.

ALI, North London

LETTERS

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

Putin: patriot or traitor?

For years I have been reading and much enjoying your articles in FRFI. However, your article in FRFI 199 (October-November 2007) 'Five minutes to midnight part four: On a burning platform', somewhat disturbs me, as it appears (true or not) that you naively swallow Mr Putin's posing as a Russian patriot ready to fight off Russia's encirclement by US bases and his occasional 'sabre rattling for show only' against the US and de facto Bush regime.

Enclosed is an explanatory article in *North Star Compass* exposing who Putin really is: a traitor both to the ex-USSR (selling military secrets = weapons of hi-tech to NATO), and today ready to sell Russia – like part or all of Siberia and its mineral wealth – to the US, with Japan and China getting some crumbs.

ANA LUCIA GELABERT # 384484
1916 W Hwy 36 Bypass
Gatesville, TX 76596, USA

Reply

President Putin is not a 'Russian patriot', but neither is the Russian ruling class 'posing' when it opposes the proposed stationing of US anti-missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, when it sells anti-aircraft missiles to Syria and Iran and conducts joint military manoeuvres with China. Putin represents a Russian ruling class intent on exerting regional influence and that means it must come into conflict with US plans for global hegemony. Inter-imperialist rivalry will intensify and the Russian state will shift alliances between the US, EU, Japan and China as that rivalry mutates. We recognise that Putin is a representative of a capitalist ruling class and as such will authorise the sale of Russia's resources to Russian and foreign capitalists when the profits are deemed sufficient.

Trevor Rayne

Bourgeois rubbish

A book for soft-soaping bourgeois brains has, to my annoyance, been presented to me by a bourgeois acquaintance who assured me that the author was Head of European Thought, and hence one of the glories of the London School of Economics.

He is John Gray, who assures us that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been undertaken in the noble attempt to establish liberal democracies in those benighted lands. The book is called *Black Mass* – a title hinting at an account of wrongly-pursued ideals. A great deal of the author's effort is used to explain to the imperialists that their sheer goodness has in these cases been misapplied.

John Gray is, however, not without a solution for the insurgencies. Britain's dealing with Ireland seems to him a near-perfect model and he solemnly recommends it.

It is difficult to abide such utter rubbish, but as an example of bourgeois intellectuality it is excellent.

JOHN O'HIGGINS
Leicester

Against our common enemy

I just wanted to take this opportunity to express in words something I have felt over many years.

I have now spent almost two decades in prison. I have seen many changes, not only in the system but in myself too. Throughout that time you have been my second in this duel, reminding me not only how rotten the system is and in uniting the oppressed behind the one banner to confront the common enemy, capitalism, and its favourite pastime, exploitation, but also

Prison social worker lies discredited

In late December 2007, following a lengthy investigation by Perth and Kinross Council into my complaint that social worker Matt Stillman had deliberately lied in a critically important parole report about my involvement with what he had claimed was a 'terrorist organisation', the council has issued the following response:

'The complaint concerned two specific statements in the report for the Parole Board that was completed by Matt Stillman.'

Statement 1: That Brighton Anarchist Black Cross website was a website for eco-terrorists or paramilitaries, and that you were involved with this organisation. On investigation, there is no evidence to substantiate the claims made in the report to the Parole Board. Our conclusion is that the website, although clearly political is not paramilitary or eco-terrorist, therefore the statement to the Parole Board is incorrect.

Statement 2: That the prisoner (John Bowden) whilst in Edinburgh Prison received visits from terrorists. On investigation the officer could find no evidence to support this allegation in either

Social Work or Prison files.

Therefore again we conclude that this statement is incorrect.'

Inaccurate reporting is commonplace in parole reports but rarely has such a report prepared by a social worker contained such a dramatic allegation. When Stillman's report was submitted last April the consequences were extreme. Just a month before a crucial parole tribunal to decide my suitability for release after 25 years in prison, I was suddenly thrown into solitary confinement and then transferred from Castle Huntly open prison to maximum-security Glenochil. Local newspaper, *The Dundee Courier*, screamed across front-page headlines, 'Castle Huntly killer has terrorist connection', and published verbatim Stillman's ludicrous claim that Anarchist Black Cross (ABC), a perfectly legal and legitimate prisoner support group, was composed of terrorists and paramilitaries, some of whom had visited me in prison.

The prison system itself, against which I'd campaigned for years in furtherance of prisoners' rights,

jumped at the opportunity to bury me. The only thing I was able to marshal in my defence was the support of friends and comrades on the outside who protested and campaigned tirelessly to expose Stillman's lies. Their efforts forced the Scottish prison system to take a more defensive position and distance itself from Stillman's ridiculous claims.

Stillman's lies cost me six months locked-down in maximum-security and at least another year, possibly more, in prison. However, despite being clearly guilty of malpractice in deliberately presenting lies as fact in an official parole report, Stillman remains employed by Fife Social Services and to date hasn't been subject to any form of disciplinary action. The matter, however, is far from closed.

The Scottish Social Service Council is also conducting an investigation into Stillman's conduct following a complaint from me. Should the SSSC accept the decision of the Perth and Kinross investigation then the removal of Stillman's social work licence on the grounds of misconduct should, by any

standard of natural justice, follow. I intend also to pursue legal actions against both Stillman's social work employers and the Scottish Prison Service. I would ask all supporters to write letters of complaint to the following:

• Dave Roberts, Executive Director of Perth and Kinross Council, 5 Whitefriars Crescent, Perth PH2 0PA, demanding that proper disciplinary action be taken against Stillman and Christina Brown, his line-manager, who approved the report;

• Stephen Moore, Head of Social work at the Social Work Office, South Street, Glenrothes, Fife, KY7 5NL demanding that he explain why Stillman continues to be employed at Fife Social Services;

• Scottish Prison Service HQ, Communications Branch, Room 338, Calton House, 5 Redheugh Rigg, Edinburgh, EH12 9HW demanding that Christina Brown, still employed at Castle Huntly Prison, be dismissed.

JOHN BOWDEN

HMP Noranside, Fern By Forfar, Angus DD8 3QY

Bank employees on the rocks



There has been, and continues to be, a huge amount of media comment and speculation, which many of you will have seen and read. I am very aware that this is unsettling and many of you are concerned and anxious about our future and about jobs.

I will update you again, as much as I'm allowed, when I can. Adam Applegarth, Ex-Chief Executive of Northern Rock, 9 October 2007

Northern Rock employees have largely been kept in the dark over its problems and drilled with the mantra: 'we are not in a crisis'. It is only when the media speculates on the situation that any light is shed on the bank's and staff's future – and even that light is shone through murky glass.

'It remains my fierce intention to protect jobs. If there is to be any contraction in the company, we aim to deal with that not through compulsory redundancy, but through natural turnover.' Adam Applegarth, 9 October 2007

Since this information has been made available to the clerical level some of those on temporary contracts of employment have had their term at Northern Rock cut short. As there has been no global

email publication of this we must assume that this falls under 'natural turnover'. But to those who have been let go, and to those who are not trying to put a spin on the crisis, it can be more plainly seen as being laid off.

Loss of jobs will become inevitable when the bank is taken over, if the new owner is to make a decent return, or if it is the Bank of England, get back what they are owed. Another major development which hints at this is the uncertain future of Northern Rock pensions. With reference to the value which is placed on the assets and liabilities in the Pension Scheme, Andy Kuipers, Chief Executive, had this to say: 'If the current conservative approach to investments is maintained, the valuation will show a deficit.' In other words Northern Rock has been gambling with the pension fund in order to fund its activities and as a result not only are staff losing jobs but they may also lose the security they had set aside for retirement.

Northern Rock is also involved in dodgy dealings with Southern Pacific Mortgage Limited and their sub-prime mortgage products.

'SPML will be the lender for all of

our Specialist Lending mortgage products. Northern Rock will distribute these products as well as underwriting and processing all applications through to the point of completion.'

In FRFI 198 we read about the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US where 'mortgage lenders turned to those who normally found it impossible to get a mortgage – the poor and risky borrowers'. Capitalism's frantic foraging for scraps of profit led the US to its crisis, and because Northern Rock borrows wholesale from the capital markets to finance its lending, capitalism has led it to crisis also, and continues to lead it down the same crumbling path as the US.

When capitalism is thriving the workers must be exploited in order for the ruling class to profit and in situations when capitalism is in crisis it is always the workers who suffer most. Therefore it is necessary for the working class to be organised in the workplace and to organise on the streets so that we can rid ourselves of this exploitation.

MARK
Newcastle

Close down Guantanamo

In January, four of the British residents still held in Guantanamo, Jamil el-Banna, Omar Deghayes, Abdenour Samur and Shaker Abdur-Raheem Aamer were released after up to six years. However, two British residents remain incarcerated, along with at least 300 other nationals.

Binyam Mohammed Al Habish, a refugee from Ethiopia who came to Britain in 1995, now faces the possibility of a US kangaroo court 'military commission'. Allegations against him are based on a confession extracted under torture from an Al Qaida suspect. After being captured in 2002, he was 'rendered' to Morocco where he was tortured on behalf of the US for 18 months, including having his penis cut with razor blades.

The government has also refused to act on behalf of Algerian refugee Ahmed Belbacha, on the basis that he was not technically a British resident at the time of his capture. Ironically, during his detention at Guantanamo, he was granted indefinite leave to remain in Britain.

The British government must be forced to demand the release of both these men – and the closing down of the concentration camp. Please e-mail Foreign Secretary David Miliband at parliament.uk. You can write also to Binyam Al Habish and Ahmed Belbacha at Camp Delta, PO Box 160, Washington DC 20053, USA.

Jamil el-Banna and Bisher Al Rawi – framed by MI5 after Al Rawi refused to work as an MI5 agent and released in August 2007 – have been re-arrested to face extradition to Spain.

The allegations, concerning the men's membership of a Madrid Al Qaida cell, were dismissed as fraudulent by Spanish investigators early on in their detention. It is clear that Spain is now under US pressure to continue the pretence that the men are guilty. Both have had curfews and electronic tagging imposed on them. Please show your support at their next hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court on 14 February.

CAT WIENER
South London

ERRATUM

In FRFI 200, there was a typesetting error in the review of Michael Moore's film *Sicko*, where 'Sicko' appeared as 'Sick' and 'Moore' as 'Moored'. The name of the author, Andrew Alexander, was also missing. A correct version of the article appears on our website.

Harmondsworth 4 on trial

The trial of four men who were in Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre at the time of the protest on 28 November 2006 opened on Monday 14 January 2008 at Southwark Crown Court. As FRFI goes to press it has been underway for two weeks and is expected to last at least until the end of February.

The court has been hearing from prosecution witnesses, mainly detention custody officers (DCOs). They have described how, on the night of the protest, tensions were running high. Detainees were distressed about the news of the publication of the Chief Inspector of Prisons' report into Harmondsworth and angry at their treatment in general. Earlier in the day a detainee had been 'restrained'. Whilst their testimony is, of course, focused on the damage done and the mayhem in the centre during the protest, it is peppered with references to detainees loudly demanding freedom, justice and an end to immigration detention, and complaining about their human rights being abused and about being 'treated like animals'. During the uprising, over a hundred detainees were forced out into the prison yard because parts of the centre were on fire. Some refused to go out because it was so cold, but once there, according to one DCO, they refused to come back inside unless Tony Blair was brought to the centre to speak to them. The detention centre staff then called in a prison riot squad to end the protest by force.

Before the trial opened, two of the defendants, Alexey and Andrey, wrote to FRFI about how they are being made

scapegoats for the racist immigration system: 'During the time which we spent in this country as immigrants we have felt ourselves all those injustice and discrimination from the government and Home Office. Even in prison we constantly clash with it. The government... wishes to blame us and to persuade the public that we're potentially dangerous people. They don't want to talk about the main reasons of that riot in there like treatment, discrimination and racism.'

The 2006 Harmondsworth protest is not an isolated incident. In 1998 the trial of nine asylum seekers charged with riot and violent disorder at Campfield House in August 1997 collapsed after it was clear the prosecution witnesses were inventing their evidence. In 2002 the newly-opened Yarls Wood detention centre was wrecked and half the centre burned to the ground. In 2004 there was a protest at Harmondsworth, following the death of detainee Sergey Baranyuk, and in 2005 a mass hunger strike at

Yarls Wood. In 2007 there were repeated revolts and protests at Campfield, the most recent on 17 December. In addition there have been many small-scale protests and hunger strikes. Asylum seekers and immigrants are resisting the British state's attacks on them and deserve maximum solidarity from all anti-racists.

The Support the Harmondsworth 4 campaign is supported by All African Women's Group, Barbed-Wire Britain, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!, Iraq Solidarity Campaign, London Anarchist Black Cross, London No Borders, National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, North West Asylum Seekers Defence Group and Women of Colour in the Global Women's Strike.

The campaign is monitoring the trial every day and demonstrating outside the court each Monday morning 9-10.30am. For further information contact: harmondsworth4@riseup.net

Nicki Jameson



Harmondsworth 4 demonstration outside Southwark Crown Court, 14 January 2008

'Legacy' asylum cases – myth and reality

'200,000 asylum seekers to get amnesty' *Daily Mail*, 3 March 2007

'Secret "Amnesty" for 500,000 asylum cases' *Daily Express*, 6 August 2007

'Shambolic Home Office grants another 100,000 asylum seekers amnesty to stay in Britain' *Mail on Sunday*, 21 December 2007

December 2007, Lin Homer, chief executive of the Border and Immigration Agency, reported that out of an initial 52,000 cases dealt with, 18,000 had been granted leave to remain, 16,000 had resulted in people being deported and 17,000 case files had been closed because of errors or because they were duplicate files.

It is important to understand the legacy cases review in the context of the resistance to deportations by asylum seekers and their supporters. In an answer to the Home Affairs Select Committee, Lin Homer quoted a statistic which claimed that 6% of deportations failed because airlines refused to carry the person. Still more deportations are halted due to last minute legal interventions or because of the ill health of the deportee. The most militant political resistance in the last few years has come from asylum seekers and 'failed' asylum seekers who are awaiting deportation.

The legacy cases review has succeeded in diffusing this political protest to some extent by encouraging hope in the legal process. However this policy should not be understood as an act of kindness by the Home Office, but rather as an attempt to clear the backlog so that new cases can be dealt with and deported more 'efficiently' under the New Asylum Model (reported in FRFI 198).

Under NAM many asylum seekers do not even get the chance to leave a detention centre before they are deported, let alone get involved in a political struggle for asylum rights. This will make it more important than ever for anti-racist activists in Britain to support the struggles that are taking place within immigration detention centres.

Annabelle Richardson

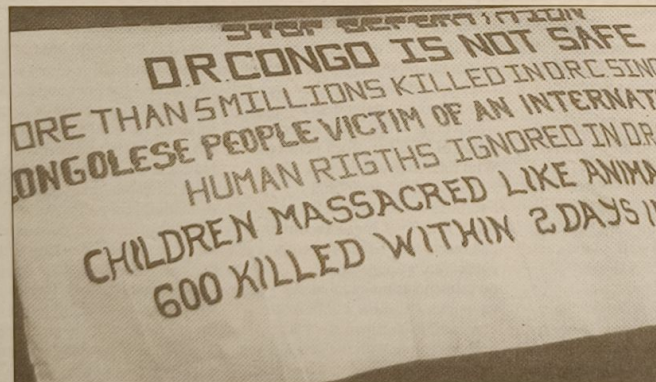
No deportations to DRC – the struggle continues

In December 2007 the long-awaited judgment of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal case on the Country Guidance for Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was finally published. The case had been underway in one form or another for nearly a year, with every hearing marked by nationwide demonstrations highlighting the danger of deportation to DRC. However, while Congolese people in Britain remain united in their insistence the country is unsafe, the Tribunal did not agree that the existing guidance should be changed. NICKI JAMESON reports.

It is abundantly clear to any observer that DRC is a dangerous place. The country has been ravaged by imperialism and war. According to a recent survey by the International Rescue Committee an estimated 5.4 million people have died as a result of 'conflict and humanitarian crisis' since 1998, and up to 45,000 continue to die every month. The supposedly 'democratic' election last year of President Joseph Kabila has not brought peace and the east of the country in particular continues to witness killings, rape and plunder on an unprecedented scale. 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; yet the mass of the people live in absolute poverty, while multinationals steal these resources, using private armies to quell any opposition, secure in the knowledge the international media will never inquire too deeply into what it has labelled an 'ethnic conflict'.

However the Tribunal was not interested in any of this. Aside from the specific details of the individual who had initially brought the test case, the court was concerned 'solely with the purely factual issue of what is likely to happen to failed asylum seekers when they arrive at N'Djili airport in Kinshasa and thereafter'.

While focusing on this very specific point, the court accepted all manner of contentions that in themselves render any deportation to DRC an appalling prospect. For example the evidence from an expert witness, which the Tribunal largely accepted as accurate,



covered general matters, including: 'the acute poverty, in which the vast majority of population of 50 million people live on the equivalent of US\$0.2 per person per day and consume less than two thirds of the daily calories needed to maintain good health; approximately 70% of the population has little or no access to health care; 1.6 million Congolese have critical food needs; decades of armed conflict have resulted in 3.3 million deaths and have created a serious humanitarian situation with as many as 2.5 million internally displaced persons... The justice system lacks independence from the executive power. The security services do not respect legally binding procedures. All prisoners, to different degrees... are the object of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (whipping, beatings, and torture). Rape of women is common practice in the detention centres. Torture is very common in detention.'

The government barrister conceded 'that for the purposes of this appeal conditions in DRC prisons and detention centres were contrary to Article 3'. Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights outlaws torture and inhuman or degrading treatment and the admission means that it would be a breach of the Human Rights Act to deport anyone who it was reasonably likely would be sent to a detention centre or prison.

The case therefore revolved entirely around whether failed asylum seekers sent back from Britain, other than those facing arrest or persecution for some specific additional reason, would be routinely detained, tortured or raped at the airport itself, or sent to a detention centre where this would take place. The three judges disbelieved all the testimony to the effect that such treatment was the norm, stating that it was not credible and came in the main from people who had left DRC for

economic reasons, 'with the help of illegal migration networks', exaggerated their own political involvement in order to claim asylum in Britain, been disbelieved by the authorities, and who now had a vested interest in alleging the mistreatment of failed asylum seekers in order to prevent their own return.

The lawyers in this case have appealed and some attempts to deport people to DRC have been prevented on the basis that they should not go ahead until after the appeal has concluded.

The distinction between political and economic refugees is a false one. Flee-

ing a regime like that of Kabila, which, backed by imperialism and hand-in-hand with the multinationals that operate in the region, many of them British, both impoverishes and politically oppresses the Congolese people, is both economic and political.

FRFI opposes all restrictions on immigration and will continue to support all initiatives by the DRC community in Britain against deportations, and in particular to highlight the connections between imperialist plunder of Africa by Britain and other western nations and the racist treatment of asylum seekers who flee that oppression.