

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group Number 205 October/November 2008

(unwaged 50p) 80p

Solidarity
price
£1



Protesters outside Wall Street on 25 September opposing the bail-out plan

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CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

The turmoil in global financial markets has finally forced Labour's smug Chancellor Alistair Darling to face up to reality. In a short period of six months, Britain, according to Darling, has gone from being best placed of the G7 major capitalist countries to withstand global economic turbulence (March), to facing an economic downturn that looked set to be more profound and long lasting than initially expected (mid-July), to confronting an economic climate that is 'arguably the worst in 60 years' (end of August). DAVID YAFFE reports on the impact of the financial storm now hitting the British economy.

To prevent the global financial system going into meltdown, over an extraordinary period of ten days from 7 September, the most right-wing neo-liberal US government ever nationalised the two giant mortgage providers Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; refused to bail out the fourth largest investment bank, Lehman Brothers; helped direct the takeover of investment bank Merrill Lynch by

Bank of America and rescued the world's biggest insurer AIG, by lending it \$85bn in return for an 80% stake, to prevent it going bankrupt. In addition the world's central banks injected some \$550bn into the money markets in an effort to get them functioning adequately again. Finally came a last-ditch US government plan to create a \$700bn fund to buy toxic assets – value unknown – from the

banks in an attempt to ease the credit crunch. This is a desperate effort to socialise the unsupportable debt of a parasitic and decaying capitalism.

British economy rocked by global financial storm

It is the particular parasitic character of British capitalism – its reliance on the earnings of its overseas assets, particularly its bloated and usurious banking sector, and the ever growing importance of financial and business services in the domestic economy – that makes it the imperialist country most vulnerable to external financial shocks. Britain's overseas assets in 2007 were a remarkable £6,486.5bn, 4.7 times its GDP, with 'other investments', predominantly bank loans and deposits by UK banks, 2.74 times GDP – a gigantic usury capital. These assets are exceeded by the UK's liabilities of £6,836.9bn, leaving a net external debt of £350.4bn, 25.4% of GDP. US overseas assets and liabilities, in comparison, are only around

the size of its GDP. Despite its net external deficit Britain still has a positive investment income on its international investment account – it shares this feature with the US. However as funding costs for lending to the UK will increase significantly with the credit squeeze, these earnings will fall significantly, with serious consequences for Britain's rapidly deteriorating balance of payments deficit. This deficit will grow and the pound will continue to fall against other currencies, reducing economic growth and the standard of living of the British people.

Rescuing the banks

The need to defend the interests of Britain's financial sector and the City of London's vast international assets is central to Labour's economic policies and that of any British government in power. The belief, now widespread in sections of the left, that the financial crisis has forced a change in Labour is risible. Larry Elliott

believes the 'Prime Minister has belatedly discovered his party's social democratic roots' (*The Guardian* 20 September 2008). Seumas Milne (*The Guardian* 25 September 2008) argues 'Ministers such as Yvette Cooper, Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and Douglas Alexander have gone out of their way to attack "greed and excess" in the City and call for tougher regulation and greater boldness'. Brown's promise to regulate the City was a real sign that he 'will throw off the shackles of New Labour' said Derek Simpson, joint General Secretary of Labour's biggest trade union affiliate Unite. Fine words butter no parsnips. Ed Balls, two and a half years ago, was telling us that the government has to fight the City's corner not just in Brussels but in New York, India, China and other centres around the world (*Financial Times* 23 May 2006). That was confirmed by Gordon Brown in his speech to the Labour

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CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

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conference on 23 September. Brown also said he wanted transparency, responsibility, sound banking and managed risks in financial transactions, with bonuses not based on speculative deals. But he claims this is to ensure 'London will retain its rightful place as the financial centre of the world'. As we said two years ago: 'Any Labour government elected to run British capitalism has to defend the interests of British imperialism and, in particular, take measures to promote the financial interests of the City' (FRFI 194). The rest is hot air.

The Labour government has representatives of the parasitic banking corporations at every level of government, as ministers and advisors directing its social and economic policies and, in the heart of Downing Street itself, running the office of the Prime Minister. City businesses fund Labour-supporting think tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Social Market Foundation's policy forums. The payback has been a comprehensive opening up of public sector provision to private firms – estimated to be a £79bn industry. Business minister Baroness Shriti Vadera, a UBS Warburg investment banker, for example, forced through the disastrous £16bn Public Private Partnership financing of the London Underground. The influence of the City is all pervasive. The government will always look after City interests, first and foremost, in its increasingly

ineffective efforts to stave off the unfolding crisis.

The Northern Rock crisis broke out just over a year ago and it took five months of frantically searching for a private sector takeover of the bank before the government was forced into a last resort nationalisation in February. Thousands of bank employees lost their jobs while loans and guarantees of around £87bn from the government kept the bank in operation.

The Lloyds TSB £12.2bn takeover of HBOS on 18 September unequivocally demonstrated the government's priorities. HBOS was in deep trouble as its share price plunged around 70% in a week, falling at one stage to 88p, compared with 892p in September 2007. A Northern Rock-style run on the bank could not be ruled out. Its market value had fallen from £32bn a year ago to £7.75bn on 17 September. Yet its total income in the first half of 2008 was £6.5bn. The bank has 22m customers, over 1000 branches and 74,000 employees; it accounts for 20% of the domestic mortgage market and around 16% of the savings market. HBOS has wholesale funding requirements of £278bn which it must renew on the capital markets, 59% of which is relatively short term, lasting less than a year. The credit crunch makes financing these funds increasingly difficult and expensive. In addition its £236.5bn mortgage book is endangered by falling house prices and growing arrears in mortgage payments. This is why its share price plummeted. It was not, as some have made out, primarily the result of

short selling by corrupt speculators, but is the result of the financial crisis hitting the capitalist system. The government banning of short selling is a cynical move to win the popular vote. It distracts from the root cause of the financial crisis – the unwinding of the unprecedented debt throughout the British economy (FRFI 204), which can no longer be postponed.

Lloyds TSB offered 0.83 of its share price for one HBOS share, valuing an HBOS share at takeover at 232p. Cost savings of at least £1bn, the closing of 500 branches of the new bank and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs are being planned. The new merged bank will have links to 40% of homes, a retail deposit base of half the savings market, have around 35% of current accounts, 28% of the mortgage loans, 25% of small business banking, and a huge general

insurance and investment business. This is the creation of a banking monopoly.

The government made it clear that it would disregard competition rules to allow this takeover, creating the largest retail banking group in the UK. It regarded a banking monopoly as far preferable to a Northern Rock-style nationalisation. Lloyds TSB chairman, Sir Victor Blank, thought it a 'wonderful' deal and said it was 'landmark day' for the financial services industry. He held out the prospect of using the new group's financial muscle to expand overseas (*The Observer* 21 September 2008) – a more powerful addition to British imperialism's parasitic banking sector.

Still the financial crisis intensified. On 28 September the government was left with little choice but to nationalise Bradford & Bingley, break up the bank and sell its profitable assets to another banking monopoly, Santander. Can anyone seriously call socialising the debt of failing banks and creating new banking monopolies a return to Labour's 'social democratic roots'?

Heading into recession

The UK economy finally ground to a halt in June. The pound fell to its lowest level against other currencies for more than 11 years. Gross mortgage lending in August was £21.8bn, down by 36% from a year ago. This deterioration in the housing market will feed back on economic activity, with the banks cutting back their lending and raising mortgage rates. Public finances went deeper into the red with the August deficit at £10.2bn, the worst figure for that month since records began in 1993. With the debt of Northern Rock's nationalisation now brought onto the books for the first time, the national debt has reached 43.3% of GDP, well above the government's 40% ceiling. With the addition of the cost of Bradford & Bingley's nationalisation, the budget

deficit this year could reach £110bn, more than two and half times the budget forecast in March. There will be a severe squeeze on government spending.

Unemployment is rising rapidly. The number of claimants rose by 32,000 to more than 900,000 in August. This was the biggest rise since December 1992, having increased for seven months in a row. The total number of unemployed rose by 81,000 to 1.7m, the highest level for nine years. It could reach 2 million before the end of this year. The crisis in the financial sector is worsening the jobs outlook, with 19% fewer job vacancies in the finance and business service sector in the three months to the end of August compared to last year. Redundancies have risen by almost 15% overall and 31% in the construction industry since last year. This situation will rapidly deteriorate as the financial crisis hits home. Inflation has reached 4.7% while real earnings rose 3.5%, so most workers are facing significant pay cuts.

This then is the 'real' economy in which financial services' share of GDP has risen to 9.4% from 6.6% in the mid-1990s and 8.5% in 2005. It accounted for 10.4% of gross value added in 2007 and was the second fastest growing sector of the British economy after oil and gas. 1.04m people work in banking, finance and insurance. The much broader financial and business services sector has grown by 57% since Labour came to power. It accounted for 33% of the gross value added in 2004 and employed more than 6 million people in 2005. Manufacturing has been close to recession throughout the last ten years and its share of GDP is now 13% compared to 21% ten years ago. These are the features of a parasitic and decaying capitalism. The Labour Party is never going to change this but, on the contrary, as the party in power, can only reinforce these developments. ■



Labour opts for more of the same

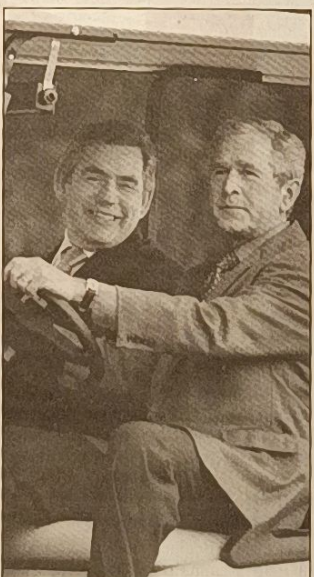
The Labour Party conference took place as if in a state of siege, both physically and politically. Around the GMex conference in the centre of Manchester police had erected a ring of fortified barricades against the supposed threat of a car bomb attack. Delegates had to enter the conference area down walk ways with 10-foot high fences on either side. At the entrance in John Dalton Street, Labour Party officials vetted people for their delegate, press or visitor passes. They were assisted by two policemen toting submachine guns. Such weaponry was very much in evidence elsewhere around the GMex. Manchester's finest were also very diligent in policing the small anti-war march – perhaps 3,000 strong – that wound its way past the conference centre on the Saturday before the conference started. Police cameramen were all over the march. There were attempts to arrest those who were wearing masks. ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

No one expected anything new at the conference. It has no policy-making authority and this time there was not even going to be any votes. It exists solely for the media, to sell personalities, sound bites, whatever commodities can be created from bourgeois politics. That is what Labour's democracy amounts to. As it happened, the media's principle obsession was whether Brown would do enough to cling on to the premiership. They felt he had, for the moment. They also dwelt on David Miliband's speech: would there be any coded challenge to Brown's position? They were more divided on this: some thought he had, others thought he was biding his time. Does it matter? Both are united on key issues of domestic, economic and foreign policy. As it was, the threat of a cabinet revolt faded into nothing.

On the opening of the conference

the *Daily Telegraph* published an opinion poll which confirmed that Labour is still on course for a wipe-out at the next general election, 20% behind the Tories. This was confirmed by a Politics Home poll which suggested that the Tories would win with a majority of 146. In *The Times*, former health minister Charles Clarke has urged Miliband not to equivocate – but then he is amongst a group of senior Blairites including Works and Pensions Secretary James Purnell who would lose their seats.

There is no serious challenge to Labour policy. The TUC conference which met two weeks earlier ruled out one-day national strikes in opposition to the government's 2% public sector pay limit. It called for a windfall tax on energy companies, but delegates listened in silence when Chancellor Alistair Darling ruled this out in his speech. Trade unions may still hold



the purse strings for the Labour Party, but there is no way they are going to organise serious opposition to the government. Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis confirmed this when commenting on Brown's Labour Party speech he said that 'The prime minister has shown his grit today and delivered a powerful speech full of determination and passion...[he] made it absolutely clear that the NHS will remain at the heart of a fair society...He showed clear red water between Labour and the Conservatives.' He is very easily pleased: his members, however, are the ones who are going to suffer with rising food

Torpor grips Convention of the Left

The Convention of the Left met in Manchester at the same time as the Labour Party conference; attracting fewer than 200 at its main sessions, it said more about the weakness of the left than anything else.

The Convention's list of sponsors, those tired hacks who have been responsible for reducing the influence of socialism in Britain to its lowest point for over a century, belied its aim – 'to ask ourselves the essential questions'. There was no chance that an event supported by Labour MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, or by Tony Benn, or by leading members of Respect or the SWP, would ask the one essential question facing socialists today: how can we organise a total break from the Labour Party and

finally bury its stinking corpse? Rather than hold Labour Party members to account for their affiliation to this rotten imperialist, racist and anti-working class party, audiences gave extra applause to those who announced their continued membership, whilst the charlatan Tony Benn received the loudest applause of all at the session he attended.

There was no wish to discuss the imperialist character of British capitalism and how this determines the nature of its current crisis and how socialists should respond. Nor was there any inclination to debate how the left has been reduced to its current level. The Convention, like the Socialist Conferences, Socialist Alliance and Respect that came before, is going nowhere. ■

and fuel prices on the one hand, and wage cuts on the other. Unison gave Labour £1.5 million in the second quarter of this year. Nor was Prentis alone: Unite joint General Secretary Derek Simpson said that 'this was a real Labour speech from a real Labour leader. He showed there is a huge gulf between Labour and the Tories.'

And what of the left? It was completely irrelevant at the conference and, like the TUC, eager to be pleased. In *The Guardian*, Seumas Milne described Brown's speech as 'the most unashamedly left-leaning speech by a British prime minister since the mid-1970s' and then wrote of the

'debate in Manchester' that 'Everywhere, fuelled by the financial crisis, there has been a thirst to discuss government intervention, equality and progressive taxation unheard of at a Labour conference for more than a decade' (25 September 2008). The truth is very different. Labour's solutions for the crisis will always involve making the working class pay. There was no break with the interests of financial capital and the City of London. There was no change in foreign policy, no change in immigration and asylum policy. That is why there can be no solution other than breaking from Labour and creating a real opposition. ■

GOODBYE WALL STREET

'America is more communist than China is right now. You can see that this is welfare of the rich, it is socialism for the rich – it's just bailing out financial institutions. This is madness, this is insanity, they have more than doubled the American national debt in one weekend for a bunch of crooks and incompetents. I'm not quite sure why I or anybody else should be paying for this.'

Billionaire investor Jim Rogers

W-w-what the [bleep] just happened?

In just two weeks, the world's largest mortgage purchasers, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, got nationalized by right-wing conservatives; the last of the large Wall Street investment banks either went bankrupt (Lehman), or got bought by a conventional bank (Merrill Lynch by Bank of America), or turned themselves into regular commercial banks (Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs); the world's largest insurance company, AIG, got an \$85bn loan from the US government in exchange for 80% of its assets; the world's largest retail bank, Washington Mutual (WaMu) failed after depositors had withdrawn \$17bn and was bought by JP Morgan.

That was Wall Street disappearing – at least in the shape of anything resembling the financial orgy of the last two decades. With the disappearance of the huge investment banks has gone the pump which was inflating the financial bubble. The rest of the shadow banking sector, which grew up over the last decade outside the existing bank regulatory system, is now going to start to deflate. It worked by 'leveraging' its assets – borrowing perhaps 30 times its own capital and investing in mortgage backed securities and similar derivative assets. Now that leverage is going to have to unwind, deflating the financial bubble and the rest of the economy in the process.

The reality of the 'real economy'

Through all this, everyone from 'economic experts' to the so-called left keeps assuring us that 'the real economy' – apparently something separate from the financial economy – is 'sound', 'in good shape', 'doing OK' etc. It's as if most of the capitalist economy is functioning well, but over in the financial corner, we're going through some slight disturbance. Stay in your seats and keep your seat belts fastened until we get past this patch of turbulence. Everything else is working just fine, no need to panic, folks.

But what is this 'real economy'? There is no capitalist 'real economy' without money and credit – without finance. Take away money and there is no capitalism. Under capitalism the entire economy is dominated by spending money to produce commodities to get even more money. Capitalism is all about making money, about relentlessly expanding the value of capital.

The 'real economy' is constantly intersecting with the financial economy. For a start a company in the 'real' economy uses bank accounts to post payments it receives, to purchase raw materials and inputs and to pay payrolls. If it exports or imports, it

engages with the foreign currency market. If a company uses large quantities of raw materials, it is engaged in forward trading and hedging to assure supply and control costs. It may be leasing buildings and equipment. It engages in treasury operations to try to earn money from spare cash instead of just leaving it in a bank account. It needs long-term and short-term financing for many reasons – for projects, for expansion, to bridge delays in payments received. At the same time it manages its receivables to ensure prompt or early payment and minimize the extension of credit. It insures its operations in various ways against potential risks.

So there are not two economies – 'real' and 'financial' – just one indivisible capitalist economy which is constantly churning between commodities and money, money and commodities. Money, in its various forms, is capitalism's life blood: when its flow and reflux gets interrupted, the production and sale of commodities gets interrupted and there is a desperate scramble for money, creating a monetary crisis. Which is exactly where we are now:

'Such a crisis occurs only where the ever-lengthening chain of payments, and an artificial system of settling them, has been fully developed. Whenever there is a general and extensive disturbance of this mechanism, no matter what its cause, money becomes suddenly and immediately transformed, from its merely ideal shape of money of account, into hard cash. Profane commodities can no longer replace it. The use-value of commodities becomes valueless, and their value vanishes in the presence of its own independent form. On the eve of the crisis, the bourgeois, with the self-sufficiency that springs from intoxicating prosperity, declares money to be a vain imagination. Commodities alone are money. But now the cry is everywhere: money alone is a commodity! As the hart pants after fresh water, so pants his soul after money, the only wealth. In a crisis, the antithesis between commodities and their value-form, money, becomes heightened into an absolute contradiction. Hence, in such events, the form under which money appears is of no importance. The money famine continues, whether payments have to be made in gold or in credit money such as bank-notes.' Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, Chapter 3

The widespread use of derivatives has resulted in exactly such a 'general and extensive disturbance' of the financial mechanism. Since these exotic assets have no market, they are extremely



Wall Street dealers watching yet another financial institution sink – 'a bunch of crooks and incompetents'

difficult to price and consequently to use as collateral, as security backing for loans. So financial companies have become loth to lend to each other without some deeper assurance. The AIG collapse was the last straw and the hunt for money was on. That week gold prices advanced the most ever. Money market funds, supposedly the safest, most liquid investments suddenly started to empty: the 'Reserve Primary Fund' dropped from \$62.6bn on a Friday to \$20bn on Tuesday as investors yanked out money. The dollar overnight Libor rates – the rate for banks to borrow from each other – shot up from 2.14% to 6.44%, reflecting the hunger for money.

Oh cluck!

Pilgrim's Pride, the world's largest chicken producer, has announced it may have to 'break covenant' (violate the conditions) of the debt it acquired because of bad hedging positions and declines in its ratings. Goodyear Tires, General Motors Corporation, and International Lease Finance Company (an airplane leasing company), all very much part of the 'real economy', have been forced to draw down existing lines of credit to the limit, thanks to the halt in the loan cycle.

Junk solutions for junk finance

The fundamental problem is getting the junk assets out of the system. As we have argued, those assets are junk because the relentless expansion of both government and private credit for the last few decades, combined with parasitic blood-sucking on the rest of the world, have enabled the fundamentally declining imperialist economies to stave off complete collapse by inflating the prices of all kinds of assets. That process is now coming to a halt. Its consequence is a very serious depression. Capitalist 'solutions' to this try to achieve several things: 1) purge the toxic assets; 2) delay the deleveraging process; 3) free up the credit markets; 4) try to maintain the

strength of US Finance Capital compared to its European and Asian competitors and finally 5) offload the costs onto 'the taxpayer' – in other words the middle class and better off workers. At first the ruling class approached each problem as it arose – cutting interest rates, arranging a shotgun wedding for investment bank Bear Stearns, passing a standby solution for Freddie and Fannie. But with the September massacre of the big players of US Finance Capital, it became clear that a solution was needed that would attack the underlying problem.

Hank's plan

'If you've got a squirt gun in your pocket, you probably will have to take it out,' US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson told the Senate Banking Committee on 15 July, describing his standby bail-out plan for Fannie and Freddie. 'If you have a bazooka in your pocket and people know it, you probably won't have to take it out.' The bulge in Hank's pants apparently wasn't as impressive as he thought, so just weeks later, he had to pull out his bazooka and fire, nationalizing Fannie and Freddie, leaving Lehman for the vultures to pick clean and marrying off Merrill Lynch to Bank of America. However, the collapse of AIG showed that Hank needed much more than a bazooka to deal with the problem.

So Hank went to Congress, scared congressional leaders stiff and demanded dictatorial powers, immune from any executive, legislative or judicial review or challenge to spend \$700bn buying dodgy assets from failing banks. Basically, the plan frees up the credit markets and pours huge dollops of cash into the hands of the same people who created this mess and does so in a very obvious way. The Democrats negotiated, trying to get various concessions in exchange, such as limiting CEO pay – a complete red herring (they should simply be sent to re-education camps). Within days it was clear that most American people, of all political persuasions, do not want

to be bled dry to prop Wall Street up. So, with some deft footwork, and in an attempt to boost John McCain's presidential campaign, the Republicans came up with an apparent alternative: the US government would organize an insurance scheme, financed by the industry. The government would only pay for actual failures. This ingeniously sounds as if there would be minimal cost to the taxpayer and much easier to sell politically. However, a moment's thought about insurance makes one wonder how they're going to prevent 'financial arson' – overinsuring toxic securities, engineering some suitable 'credit event' to trigger payment of the insurance. This plan still enables Finance Capital to raid the middle classes, probably even more extensively than under the original plan, yet do so in a way that brings smiles to their faces and loud applause.

Real solution

Whatever plan is used, all it does is free up the credit markets temporarily, and delay the next more violent and deeper phase of the crisis. Already, there have been some 3.5 million foreclosures in the last year – probably affecting around ten million people directly, and, indirectly, several hundred thousand construction workers and others. When the crisis hits home we can expect to see unemployment rise by several million, with a consequent increase in foreclosures. Already conventional economists are expecting recorded unemployment to top 7%, up from 5% just months ago. Descent of the capitalist spiral into deep depression is underway. What would be required in this situation is a complete cancellation of all existing residential family mortgages, replacing them with a complete, just and effective housing program. But in the real world the only solution is to go to the root of the problem and to get rid of capitalism.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

Millions face fuel poverty as Labour backs energy giants

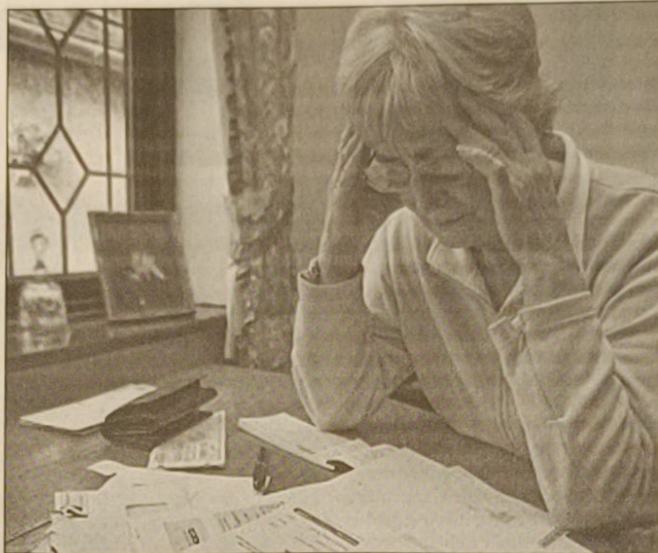
PAUL MALLON

Millions of people will be forced into fuel poverty this winter in Britain as the price of electricity and gas soars. In 2008, every major energy supplier – EDF Energy, British Gas, E.ON, Scottish Power, N Power and Scottish and Southern Energy – announced two separate price hikes averaging a total of 38%. At the beginning of 2008 the average annual household energy bill was around £900; now it will be of the order of £1,250 to £1,350 depending on the supplier. In 2002, the average bill was around £320. It will be the poorest sections of the working class who will be forced to pay the most for Britain's economic crisis.

Fuel poverty, which is defined as spending more than a tenth of household income on energy, is not new. At the start of 2008, one in six households, 4.4 million people, were suffering from fuel poverty, already up from 3.5 million in 2006. The latest rises will bring the total to 5.5 million by the end of 2008, double the number in 2005, and representing a quarter of all households. According to Age Concern, pensioners will face bills averaging £1,262 – 19% of the income for a single pensioner on basic benefits and 12.5% for a couple. Families would have to pay an average bill of £1,340, 14% of the income for a lone parent family and 12% for a couple receiving basic state benefits. With a third of pensioners facing fuel poverty, the number dying from hypothermia this winter – 32,000 on average – is bound to increase as more and more are forced to choose between buying food and heating their homes.

Many poor people face a double whammy. Five million people use prepayment meters for their energy. Their tariffs are anyway higher than for those who have quarterly bills. Customers using meters typically pay £150 more a year than those who pay by direct debit. Metered households will face additional 'catch up' charges as the recent price rises will not be reflected in their meter settings; these have to be adjusted manually by the energy companies. According to consumer body Energywatch: 'If you have not had your meter read for 18 months, say, there could have been at least three price rises in that time. Unless you are keenly aware of gas and electricity bill increases, any shortfall would come as a terrible shock, especially in the face of other rising household costs.'

When the Labour Party was elected in 1997, one of its aims was supposed to be the eradication of fuel poverty and it introduced the Winter Fuel Payment in 1998. Then it covered a third of the average energy bill; now it covers less than a fifth. The increase this year of £50 for those between 60 and 79, and £100 for those over 80, is only a fraction of the £350 increase in average bills. At the same time, energy company profits have soared: from £2 billion for the 'big six' in 2006 to £4.3 billion in 2007. However, when it came to demands for a windfall tax of £1 billion to help offset the increased bills, Labour showed its true colours: it rejected the proposal and instead threw the responsibility on to consumers to reduce energy use with a £910 million package which would provide half-price home insulation for up to two million households and a freeze on bills for a half million of the poorest. The cost of



Millions will struggle to pay bills this winter as energy companies protect their profits and shareholders

home insulation would be borne by the energy companies. However, Neil Marshall of the National Insulation Association said only 150,000 additional households could benefit this winter and the government itself does not think the programme could be complete before 2020. Anyway, as David Porter, spokesman for the Association of Electricity Producers, said: 'Whenever people impose costs on an industry like ours, inevitably the bill to some extent always ends up with the customers... in the end someone has got to pay for this'. In other words, it will be the working class.

Britain is virtually unique in Europe in that energy suppliers have been both privatised and deregulated.

We were told at the time of privatisation that increased competition would mean lower prices. Some chance! Competition breeds monopoly. Six years ago Britain had around 20 energy companies; today the market is dominated by just six. Together they act as a cartel, simultaneously announcing price rises. E.ON has raised prices 41% this year; on 10 September when its Chief Executive Owen-Lloyd was asked how high energy prices could be affected by a harsh winter, he replied: 'It will make more money for us.' Such is the arrogance and contempt of the rich and their Labour hirelings for the poor and working class.

Socialists should be quite clear about the implications of changing the top-up arrangements. It will drive a coach and horses through the principle that NHS treatment should not depend on the ability to pay.

As if by magical coincidence, the EU will unveil plans in October to let drug firms use the media to give information about prescription-only medicines. If this is allowed, patients will start demanding specific drugs they have seen promoted as part of 'patient choice' and reduce doctors' ability to prescribe cheaper and equally effective alternatives. The result? Either a huge increase in the NHS drug bill which is already £11bn, or yet more pressure to extend any proposed relaxation of the ban on top-up payments. Whatever the outcome, it will be the poor who lose out.

Education notes

A logo without the lolly is no use

A question is haunting college and school administrators, a question about money – 'Will our sponsors be ok in the credit crunch? Will our bankers cut off our stream of private funding? Will our private cash cow still give out?' For not only has the Labour government outsourced most of the infrastructure of state education to the private sector, it has also pressurised schools and colleges to adopt a 'business-friendly ethos' in every aspect of educational activity. Today hundreds of charities, schools and community projects in the poorest parts of Britain, but especially in the east London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham next to the City, have come to rely heavily on the largesse, the 'generosity', of City firms and their employees. Advertising and logos bring commerce straight to the students, everything from the local butcher to British Petroleum and the McDonald's Work Experience Programme. There is hardly a school fair, performance or sporting event that is not sponsored by businesses in return for free advertising space in the hearts and minds and pockets of pupils, parents and teachers. The flow of cash from the free enterprise friends of education is serious money. The Southwark-based Kids Company received £100,000 worth of support from Lehman Brothers last year. Gone, all gone with the wind.

Dinner with Gorbys, anyone?

The financier Arpad Busson, founder of Absolute Return for Kids (ARK), which runs seven academy schools, held a fund-raising dinner in 2007. It is said to have raised over £26 million mainly on the back of pledges from Bloomberg, Merrill Lynch and UBS. Guests were entertained by Prince and raffle prizes included a day on the set of the latest James Bond film and dinner with Mikhail Gorbachev. UBS is a Swiss bank that has just written off \$42 billion because of its involvement in the sub-prime market. Merrill Lynch has gone under, some of it being bought up cheaply by Bloomberg, the huge financial data and news Company valued at \$22.8 billion, whose founder Michael Bloomberg is also New York City's Republican Mayor. Wining and dining and raising money for poor kids in 2007 is just not going to be such a big pastime for the wealthy in 2008. On the contrary, under the leadership of the Labour government, it is taxpayers who are going to be bailing out the spirit of free enterprise this year.

Susan Davidson

NHS: No to two-tier health service

HANNAH CALLER

In 1948 the National Health Service brought to an end a system where those who could pay necessarily got better treatment. Except in so far as prescription charges applied, care was to be provided on the basis of clinical need, not the ability to pay. However, Health Secretary Alan Johnson, anticipating the results of an independent review scheduled for October, has indicated that it is very likely that the rules about top-up will be overturned and the ban on people topping up their care by paying privately for medicine while being treated on the NHS will be lifted. Yet another step is being taken towards turning the NHS into a two-tier system.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was set up to stop the postcode lottery by ensuring that all drugs approved by NICE have to be funded by every Primary Care Trust (PCT) in England and Wales with a similar set up in Scotland. Until then, PCTs were under no obligation to agree the prescription of new drugs, particularly new and expensive ones required for cancer treatment. Hence the postcode lottery: whether or not a patient could get such drugs depended on where he or she lived and whether the PCT was prepared to approve.

Before approving drugs, NICE reviews the evidence for both their claimed effectiveness and, inevitably, their cost. However, as this process can take months, patients can appeal to their PCT to be treated as an exceptional case, and so have access to drugs which have yet to be approved. If the appeal fails, those who can afford them can buy such drugs, but they lose the right to free NHS treatment.

Now there is a head of steam behind moves to overturn this arrangement, with many leading figures in the world of health care arguing that top-up must be allowed. They are supported by an extensive media campaign around people dying from cancer who have been denied NHS care after privately buying unapproved life-prolonging drugs. These figures include the NHS Confederation and the chief executive of the King's Fund who feels that the current arrangements are now 'untenable'. Cancer Partners UK, a private provider of cancer services, says that if top-ups are not allowed, people will buy drugs on the underground market. The Liberal Democrats have also jumped on the bandwagon saying that they would give patients the option of paying for drugs without affecting their care.

With all the media hype it is not

surprising a recent survey of over 800 people in Cambridge found that 82% of NHS patients back top-up payments and 90% of doctors and nurses support the payment of supplements for cancer medicines not funded by the NHS. The government's 'cancer tsar' is also investigating the withdrawal of NHS treatment from those who have paid privately for treatment and some Tories are advocating that co-payment should be allowed to access treatment for any condition.

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Palestine

Break Gaza blockade

The six-month long ceasefire agreed between Israel and Hamas on 19 June reached its halfway mark on 19 September. The benefit of a ceasefire agreement for Hamas and the people of Gaza was supposed to be the opening of the border crossings between Gaza and Israel and the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. In reality, Israel has continually closed the border crossings it controls whilst Egypt, following instructions from its imperialist paymasters, has refused to permanently open the Rafah crossing. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum, speaking on the 15 September after Israel had once again closed all the border crossings on the pretext that a single rocket had been fired from Gaza, accused the Zionists of manipulating the ceasefire agreement according to the moods and wishes of their leaders. 'Everybody knows that we agreed on a ceasefire to eliminate Israeli pretexts (for military operations),' he said. 'We wanted to give the Egyptians an opportunity (to help), while we knew from past experiences that Israel would not adhere to the ceasefire.' Islamic Jihad leader, Khalid Al Batsh declared: 'Israel escalates operations in the Gaza Strip in order to end the ceasefire agreement, which they were never committed to.' The closure of all border crossings 'is a normal, expected action by Israel which disregards its truce commitments - lifting the siege, opening border crossings and halting aggression. None of these conditions have been implemented'.

The continued blockade means that fuel is severely rationed with private vehicle owners only allowed to buy ten litres every two weeks and taxi owners 30 to 40 litres every other day. Critically ill patients are still being denied the right to cross into Israel or Egypt for crucial life-saving treatment. At the last count 243 people had died because they were not allowed out of Gaza for treatment. People who have been in the process of applying to leave for life-saving treatment have reported that the Israeli authorities have pressurised them into becoming informers and collaborators on pain of being refused a permit.

Egypt's role in the imperialist blockade is highlighted by its refusal to open the Rafah border crossing for more than a few days at a time. At the end of August, Ehud Barak, Israel's Defence Minister met with Mubarak the Egyptian President. Barak congratulated Mubarak on Egypt's role in closing the border with Gaza, declaring it to 'have visibly been effective'.

This continuing siege of Gaza has led to the desperate situation of people digging hundreds of tunnels under the border. It is estimated that there are up to 900 working tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border in the Rafah area. The tunnels are not used, as the Zionist propaganda would have it, to bring arms into Gaza, but are primarily used to smuggle medicines, children's milk, foodstuffs, vehicle spare parts, fuel and clothes.

The servile role Egypt is playing was exposed once again on 10 September when the Egyptian authorities prevented a solidarity convoy of trucks, organised by the 'Popular Committees to break the Gaza Siege' from crossing the border into Gaza. This came just a couple of weeks after the landing of the ships *SS Free Gaza* and *SS Liberty* on the shores of Gaza after setting sail from Cyprus. This breaking of the siege was organised by the 'Free Gaza Movement' and was an example of direct action that

will inspire more actions against the blockade.

Settlement expansion

The so-called peace talks between Abbas and Olmert have achieved no progress although rumours abound that they have reached a secret framework agreement to be made public later in the year. This agreement will compromise the right of return of Palestinian refugees and give Israel control of most of Jerusalem. Israel's contempt for the talks is shown by the continuing and escalating Zionist settlement growth in the West Bank. According to Tzipi Livni, then the

of September Egypt proposed a new Palestinian technocrat government be formed excluding both Hamas and Fatah. This would still be a government that would follow the dictates of imperialism.

Egypt also proposed that Arab forces be deployed in Gaza to end division and build new 'security apparatuses'. Hamas spokesman Dr Bardawil rejected the proposals, declaring that they were following the Zionist imperialist agenda and that their aim was the removal of Hamas from positions of authority.

The beginning of September also saw the latest attempt of Fatah to undermine Hamas in Gaza. The Fatah-controlled teachers' union, one of their few remaining areas of influence, called a strike, supposedly against the forced transfer of teachers to new schools. Hamas denounced the strike as political and as an attempt to sabotage life in Gaza. This analysis of the situation was confirmed by the subsequent threat of the Palestinian Authority government in Ramallah to dismiss all civil servants who didn't support the strike!



Critically ill patients are still being denied the right to cross into Israel or Egypt for crucial life-saving treatment.

Israeli Foreign Minister, and now the likely replacement for Ehud Olmert as prime minister, 'the peace process is not, and should not be, affected by any kind of settlement activities'.

Peace Now, an Israeli organisation, reported in September that Israel had nearly doubled settlement construction in the West Bank since 2007. At least 2,600 homes are currently under construction in the West Bank, an increase of 80% over last year. In East Jerusalem the number of new government bids for construction has increased from 46 in 2007 to 1,761 so far this year. Another Israeli peace group, B'Tselem says that Israeli settlers have seized hundreds of additional hectares of land around settlements that are beyond the Apartheid Wall in the West Bank. Using the excuse of security, settlers and the army have seized large tracts of land around these settlements, unofficially annexing an extra 460 hectares of land and increasing the size of these illegal settlements by about 240%.

Imperialist pressure on Hamas

The National Dialogue talks being brokered by Egypt are the latest attempt by imperialism to sideline Hamas and impose a pro-imperialist government in Gaza. At the beginning

Ireland

PSNI harasses nationalists

PAUL MALLON

On 4 September the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) reported that, although the IRA Army Council continues to exist, it poses no threat to the peace process. The report comes at a time when the activity of dissident Republicans opposed to the Good Friday Agreement is at a ten-year high, and they are facing increased harassment by state forces.

The IMC was established by the British and Irish governments to monitor the disbandment of the IRA. Its latest report deals exclusively with the status of the IRA and, in particular, the status of the IRA Army Council, the ruling body of the organisation. It states: 'The mechanism which they [the IRA] have chosen to bring the armed conflict to a complete end has been the standing down of the structures which engaged in the armed campaign and the conscious decision to allow the Army Council to fall into disuse.' The report goes on to say that it does not expect the IRA to make any further announcements on the disbandment of the Army Council beyond what it said in 2005 when it declared the end of its military campaign (see FRFI 187).

The IMC report acknowledges that the IRA remains active in gathering intelligence against Republicans still opposed to imperialism in Ireland, but says 'we believe [intelligence gathering]...is mainly for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of any threat from dissident republicans.' This is essential for political stability in the north of Ireland; the IRA, along with Sinn Féin, has long played a role in policing the nationalist community given the widespread opposition to British police in Ireland. Today that policing role has brought those Republicans who support the peace process into open confrontation with Republicans who do not, and who maintain continued opposition to British rule. The rebranding of the RUC as Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has done nothing to convince many working class nationalists that British rule has



fundamentally changed.

Republicans point to increased instances of harassment by the PSNI and other state agencies as evidence that when faced with nationalist opposition, nothing has really changed. The PSNI along with politicians have been keen to point out that the threat from dissidents is now at its highest since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This is the cover used by the PSNI to justify continued harassment of such Republicans. PSNI chief constable Hugh Orde has acknowledged for the first time that those becoming involved in Republican militancy were 'young disenfranchised people' representing a social stratum within the Six Counties. This is an important admission, as up until now Republicans opposed to the peace process were dismissed as unrepresentative criminal elements. No wonder graffiti has appeared declaring 'PSNI - 17% Catholic. 100% Unionist.'

With Sinn Féin leaders fully signed up to supporting police in Ireland, the IMC concludes that 'If another paramilitary organisation were to seek to emerge in future it would have to start afresh with new leaders and a new generation of active members.'

Italy

Immigrants fight back against racist attacks

CAT WIENER

On 18 September, in the southern Italian town of Castelvolturno, northwest of Naples, thousands of mainly African militants took to the streets after gangsters shot six men from Ghana, Liberia and Togo. The protesters tore up street signs and overturned cars and rubbish bins, accusing the police of racism for alleging the six victims had been drug traffickers. 500 soldiers were sent in to disperse the protest.

The same week, in the north of the country, protests erupted in Milan after a young black man from Burkino Faso was beaten to death by a shopkeeper and his son for stealing biscuits from their kiosk at Milan station. Protesters smashed motorcycles and overturned bins,

chanting 'Ignorant white bastards'.

Both the attacks and the spontaneous eruption of anger onto the streets by immigrant communities are a response to a sinister ratcheting up of racist rhetoric and actions by the right-wing, quasi-fascist Berlusconi government which swept to power in April on the promise of controlling illegal immigration and cracking down on Italy's Roma population. Since then, the government has been accused by the UN of creating an environment of 'hostility, antagonism and stigmatisation' in which racism is flourishing. This is a government which, under the pretext of 'tackling crime' declared a 'national state of emergency' to fight illegal immigration, which announced plans for a census and national fingerprinting data-

base of all Roma and their children and which features as a key member of the ruling coalition the Northern League, whose leader Umberto Bossi once said of the boatloads of illegal immigrants arriving on Italian shores: 'I want to hear the roar of canon! Shoot them or this will never stop!'

What is clear is that for Italy's immigrant population, enough is enough. In the same week that the protests took place, 85 mainly Algerian immigrants held at a detention centre in Sardinia launched their own protest, destroying buildings and furniture, to prevent the implementation of a deportation order. They were brutally quelled by 50 police in riot gear accompanied by the paramilitary Carabinieri, but the resistance to intensifying racism in Italy will not end there.

Georgia global tensions erupt

The Georgian attack on South Ossetia and Russia's military response demonstrate that we are in a period of intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry. As in the 19th century's Great Game, played out primarily between Britain and Russia over central Asia, old and new powers now contest an area stretching from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus to the borders of China. Control over this region and its oil and gas supplies are critical to the US ruling class's attempt to achieve global supremacy. Domination of this region should ensure that Western Europe, the Middle East and the Far East are made dependent upon it. By occupying Georgia, Russia's new rulers have shown their intent to resist and reverse the US encroachment into the territories of the former Soviet Union. It is a serious blow to the US ruling class's project and comes amidst a series of reversals of the US and British oil multinationals' plans for the region. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

The economic crisis of capitalism will ensure that inter-imperialist rivalry grows and that the national question will be forced up the political agenda. South Ossetia has fewer than 100,000 people, of whom two thirds are Ossetians and nearly a third Georgians. Georgia's population is below five million with an area a little over half that of England. While they were part of the Soviet Union, South Ossetia and Abkhazia had relative autonomy within Georgia. In 1990 the then leader of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia, sent troops to take over South Ossetia and announced the abolition of autonomous regions within Georgia. Fighting ensued until a ceasefire was agreed in June 1992. Some 1,000 people had been killed and many thousands made refugees. A Russian force then supervised the truce. Georgia had declared independence from the Soviet Union in April 1991 and between 1991 and 1992 Georgia's gross domestic product shrank by 40% and in 1992-93 by a further 32%; industrial output fell 44% in 1992. The country came under the control of gangsters and warlords. Current President Saakashvili took power in 2004 after the US-promoted 2003 'Rose Revolution'. Saakashvili promised to restore Georgia's territorial integrity and to combat corruption. Saakashvili is US-educated and worked as a lawyer in New York. He asked for Georgia's membership of NATO and began a programme of militarisation.

Sabres rattle and clash

Georgia's military budgets were \$84 million in 2004, \$339 million in 2006 and \$1 billion for 2008. Georgia had the third largest foreign contingent of troops in Iraq until the US flew them back to face the Russian forces. US, Israeli and Turkish troops have trained the Georgian military. The US Army magazine *Stars and Stripes* reported on 12 August that 127 US trainers were still in Georgia, plus 1,000 other US troops and marines. Georgian defence minister Kezerashvili is a former Israeli citizen and Israel has provided 1,000 military advisers to Georgia. Israel has investments in property, tourism and arms production in Georgia. Between 13-17 July the US conducted a joint military exercise with Georgian, Azerbaijani, Armenian and Ukrainian troops intended to improve 'combined inter-operability' of the assembled forces. While the US and British governments have favoured Georgia and Ukraine being given NATO membership, France, Germany and Italy have opposed this – as has Russia; Germany receives 40% of its gas and 35% of its oil from Russia and its ruling class has no interest in allowing US ambitions to be the arbiter of its energy supplies.

The Georgian attack had been preceded by skirmishes between South Ossetian and Georgian troops; a Russian plane was shot down by a Georgian drone over Abkhazia and bombs exploded in Abkhazian towns.



South Ossetian troops examine destroyed Georgian tanks in Tskhinvali



With much of the world's attention focused on the start of the Olympic Games, Saakashvili ordered Georgia's forces to attack Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital, and Russian bases on 7 August. No warning was given to the citizens of Tskhinvali before it was hit with heavy artillery and rockets. Initial Russian estimates of the numbers killed were 2,000 civilians, with over 20,000 South Ossetians forced to flee across the border to Russia. Russian soldiers were also killed in the attack. It was over 24 hours after the attack before Russian forces crossed into South Ossetia to drive back the Georgian aggressors. As the Russian troops advanced they occupied large parts of Georgia, coming within 20 miles of the capital Tbilisi, and occupying Gori and other Georgian towns. Russian warships patrolled off Georgia's Black Sea coast.

The Russian response to the attack on South Ossetia was foreseeable. When Chechnya, neighbouring Georgia, declared independence from Russia, Russian troops commenced a campaign that has killed up to 10% of Chechnya's population since 1994. Senior Russian officers from the

Chechnya campaigns have taken key positions in the Russian state. Russia's ambassador to the United Nations said: 'It is hard to imagine that Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili embarked on this risky venture [the attack] without some sort of approval from the side of the United States.' We can conjecture that the US wanted to test Russia's response, that it wanted to provoke guerrilla war as in Chechnya or that Saakashvili and his ministers believed that the US would mount a military response on their behalf. Former Russian President, now Prime Minister, Putin, said that the attack was intended to boost the electoral chances of the US Republican Presidential candidate McCain.

US President Bush told Putin that the Russian response was 'disproportionate'. Vice President Cheney rang Saakashvili on 10 August to tell him that 'Russian aggression must not go unanswered.' When asked for clarification Cheney's office replied, 'This must not stand.' This was the verbal formulation used by the first President Bush when Iraq occupied Kuwait in 1990. For breathtaking hypocrisy the winner must be McCain: 'In the 21st

century nations do not invade other nations.' In this short century the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine would be flabbergasted to hear this. British Labour Foreign Secretary Miliband opined, 'We do not accept the division of Europe into spheres of influence...[We want] to forge the widest possible coalition against Russian aggression in Georgia.' Most of the US and British media parroted the line on Russian aggression as a threat to international relations.

Following the Russian occupation of Georgia, Poland quickly completed the agreement to host the US anti-missile defence system and the US dropped its supposed objection to supplying Poland with Patriot missiles. Ukrainian President Yushchenko ordered commanders of Russia's Black Sea fleet to seek permission before moving ships and aircraft out of Russia's base in Sevastopol. Russia said it would disregard the order. Miliband went to Kiev to express support for Yushchenko. The US flew aid to Georgia and said that it would establish a permanent base there. At the end of August, Russia said it would recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states and post 7,600 Russian troops to prevent any 'repeat of Georgian aggression'. Russia declared that Poland would be a missile target the moment it received the anti-missile defence system and objected to NATO manoeuvres in the Black Sea and US warships delivering aid to Georgia. Venezuela and Russia announced joint manoeuvres in the Caribbean; these will counter the newly resurrected US Fourth Fleet set to patrol the Caribbean and the coast of South America.

For two years the Russian government has been warning against the US attempting to impose its unipolar rule over the world and stationing the anti-missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic. Putin warned that the consequences of the US and Britain recognising Kosovo in February would be dire and now the Russian ruling class has demonstrated that it has had enough of being pushed out of what it considers its sphere of influence, only for them to be turned into military bases with which US imperialism is surrounding Russia. Russia is the only state with a nuclear arsenal to match that of the US and the anti-missile defence system the US plans for Poland and the Czech Republic is designed to neutralise it, leaving the US capable of launching a first strike nuclear attack on Russia. Putin resorted to blunt language in an interview on 11 September when asked about Georgia, 'What did you expect us to do? Respond with a catapult? We punched the aggressor in the face, as all the military textbooks prescribe.' He accused the US of behaving like a 'Roman emperor' and warned about the anti-missile defence system, 'Please do not start an arms race in Europe. It is not needed. What should we do? Sit pretty while they deploy missiles?'

French and German imperialism have no interest in helping the US ruling class to achieve global domination; they have their own regional interests to pursue and mounting a military challenge to Russia is not among them – for now. France currently has Presidency of the European Union and swiftly intervened in Georgia. On 10 August the French foreign minister went to Tbilisi to begin a diplomatic shuffle between Georgia and Russia. French President Sarkozy met with Russia's President Medvedev on 12 August to announce a ceasefire between Russia and Georgia. The agreement included 'international

discussions on the futures of South Ossetia and Abkhazia'; this was later modified to the 'security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.' The agreement was further modified to include a Russian withdrawal from Georgian territory, excluding South Ossetia and Abkhazia, if a European Union peacekeeping force is in place by the beginning of October. In effect, the EU will be policing arrangements agreed between itself and Russia, and not the US.

Competing for oil and gas

'We have access through Georgia...to the oil and soon also the gas that lies not only in Azerbaijan but beyond it in the Caspian Sea and beyond in Central Asia. So, in that sense, it's a very major and strategic asset to us,' Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser to US President Carter, 12 August 2008.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline began operating in 2005; foremost among the consortium that built it is BP. The pipeline is intended to supply oil from Baku, in Azerbaijan, via Georgia to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, then on to Western Europe. Crucially, BTC avoids Russia. A further gas pipeline, Nabucco (presumably after Verdi's opera), is planned from Baku through Georgia to Erzurum on Turkey's Black Sea coast, then forward to Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary to Austria. Gas would be transported from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Europe, thereby reducing European dependence on Russian supplies. China, Russia, Europe and the US have competing interests in these reserves at a time when global oil and gas consumption is rising and existing reserves are being exhausted. China will account for nearly a third of the increase in global consumption in the next five years; it is already the world's second biggest importer of oil. As the US project for global hegemony founders in Iraq and Afghanistan, rival powers have moved to take advantage.

Russian President Medvedev is the former head of Gazprom. Gazprom agreed to buy all of Azerbaijan's gas at European prices after Medvedev visited Baku on 3-4 July. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have agreed to build a new gas export pipeline to Russia as opposed to supplying Nabucco. The viability of the Nabucco project is threatened unless Iranian gas supplies can be accessed through Turkey. However, Iran has said it will block a pipeline across the Caspian Sea linking up with Nabucco. On 22 July Gazprom and Turkmenistan reached an agreement giving Russia control over Turkmenistan's gas exports. Another agreement was achieved with China whereby Turkmenistan will supply China with gas for 30 years starting from 2009. Also on 22 July, Venezuelan President Chavez agreed in Moscow that Russian energy companies Gazprom, LUKoil and TNK-BP will replace the US companies ExxonMobil and Conoco Phillips in Venezuela. Russia and Venezuela are discussing forming a gas cartel to control production and pricing.

In early September, US Vice President Cheney visited Azerbaijan. He was not met at the airport by either Azerbaijan's President or Prime Minister. When he did meet the President, the moment they had finished the President called Medvedev in Moscow. Cheney then failed to appear at an official banquet. Perhaps, at that moment, and with the US economy stumbling from its throne, the US Vice President could feel the gaud of Empire slipping from his hands. ■

Pakistan at a critical juncture

On 20 September, close to 60 people were killed and over 250 were wounded when a suicide bomber targeted the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. It was the 29th suicide attack to have taken place in Pakistan in 2008. Less than a mile away from the site of this latest bombing, Pakistan's newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari had just delivered his inaugural address to a joint session of parliament that had been attended by Pakistan's military chiefs and foreign diplomats. The speech was considered to be significant, not only because it was symbolic of the country's transition towards democracy, but because it addressed key issues facing the government, not least of which were the rising militancy of the Taliban in the country's north, and the repeated violations of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty by US forces based in Afghanistan.

Since coming to power in February, the democratically-elected government, led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which replaced the dictatorial regime of General Musharraf, has reeled from crisis to crisis. In addition to an escalating military conflict with the various elements of the Taliban based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and increasing incidents of terrorism across the country, the government has had to contend with a rapidly deteriorating economic situation and the fallout from the global food crisis. While many of the problems can be attributed to external factors, such as the state of the global economy, as well as the flawed policies of the previous regime, the new civilian leadership's handling of these issues has been inept, giving rise to an increasing disenchantment with democratic rule. Given the weakness of progressive, left-wing political forces in the country, the transition to democracy and away from authoritarian rule was seen

as a positive political development in Pakistan. The failure of the current democratic regime would be disastrous for Pakistan.

The paralysis that has gripped the government stems from its reluctance to make good on promises made regarding the strengthening of the country's judiciary. Having come to power following a popular movement aimed at restoring independence to a judiciary that had been undermined by the Musharraf regime, the PPP has thus far refused to empower the judiciary in line with the aspirations of the lawyers, judges, and activists who spearheaded the movement. Indeed, the PPP's political manoeuvrings on the judiciary are seen to be aimed at preventing judges from challenging the PPP government on questions of corruption or inept governance. As a result the PPP has had to break with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), its major coalition partner at the centre, and arch-rival in the key province of Punjab. With much of the

political activity having been reduced to a tug-of-war between the PPP and the PML-N, with smaller parties attempting to align themselves with either of the two in exchange for access to state patronage, Pakistan's problems have taken a backseat to partisan bickering.

Amidst all of this, the different factions of the Taliban in FATA continue to challenge the state, taking control of territory inch by inch while implementing their strict, parochial version of Shariah Law. Although the government has launched a huge military operation against the Taliban, massive civilian casualties and high levels of displacement and dislocation have characterised the offensive thus far. Given how the Taliban feeds on the deprivation and resentment of the local populace in order to garner recruits, all of this 'collateral damage' has the potential to significantly increase the insurgency in FATA. The threat of worsening militancy in the North is compounded by the US's complete disregard for Pakistan's territorial sovereignty. In the past month, repeated missile strikes by Predator drones, and an actual incursion by US ground forces into Pakistan, both resulting in civilian casualties, have whipped up public sentiment against a democratic government seemingly complicit with the US agenda and the campaign against the Taliban. The US, facing defeat in Afghanistan, has targeted FATA out of a belief that Taliban fighters in Afghanistan operate out of Pakistan's predominantly Pashtun tribal belt.

The real tragedy here is that it is the people of Pakistan who will pay the price for the inefficacy of the government and its inability to deal with the



The ruins of the Marriott Hotel, Islamabad

twin threats of the Taliban and the US. In addition to the suicide attacks that have taken place this year, 56 took place in 2007, with the combined death toll from suicide bombs in Pakistan being higher than that for Afghanistan and Iraq in the same time period. While some of their defenders may claim that the Taliban constitute a form of resistance to the imperialist ambitions of the US, the fact remains that the Taliban is a threat to the people of Pakistan, not only because of its terrorism, but also because of its parochial, intolerant religious ideology that leaves no room for dissent and is at odds with the beliefs of the vast majority of Pakistanis.

Yet, although the Taliban needs to be contained, the government's policy of recklessly employing force in FATA, in collusion with the US, risks inflaming the resentment that has

fuelled the growth of the Taliban. For there to be peace in FATA and an end to terrorism in Pakistan, the government must recognise that in addition to fighting the Taliban, it must dismantle the training camps and mad-rassahs that provide the logistical and ideological basis for the Taliban, replacing them with schools and hospitals that would be part of a 'development' offensive aimed at addressing the neglect that has characterised the area. Furthermore, while dealing with the Taliban, the government must also make a break with the past and refuse to acquiesce to the demands of the US. US involvement in dealing with the Taliban has proved counter-productive, and acting in tandem with the imperialists will not settle the insurgency in FATA.

Hassan Javid

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The rumbling of political discontent

On 20 September the African National Congress (ANC) Executive Committee forced the resignation of Thabo Mbeki as President of South Africa. Mbeki's fall marked the end of a long-running and labyrinthine dispute with Jacob Zuma, ANC President, and came soon after Mbeki's 'starring' role as chief negotiator of a power-sharing deal in crisis-ridden neighbouring Zimbabwe between President Robert Mugabe and opposition MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai. By 25 September ANC Deputy President, Kgalema Motlanthe, had been sworn in as a caretaker South African President until elections in 2009, when Zuma is expected to become President of South Africa as well as of the ANC. The rise and fall of national leaders in these southern African states reflects the political pressures building in the region.

South Africa is the largest and most powerful economy in Africa. Yet despite the radical pretensions of the ANC in the post-apartheid era, the majority of its black population is still impoverished. In 1996 the ANC government imposed a neo-liberal economic strategy, led by Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, called Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) which espoused the free market and privatisation. Since then, despite annual economic growth, millions still live in dire poverty, unemployment, inflation and inequality have grown dramatically and most of the land is still owned by the white minority. These are the fundamental economic facts that underscore the unpopularity of President Mbeki's administration and the decision of the ANC Executive that he must go.

Mbeki's reputation was further undermined by his criminally absurd

stance on HIV/AIDS. Arguing that the pandemic could be cured by alternative herbal therapies, millions of South Africans were denied anti-retroviral drugs and treatment which would prevent mother-to-infant transmission. South Africa now has the second highest rate of HIV infection in the world with 5.5 million people infected. Mbeki's health minister, Manto Tshabalala Msimang, was nicknamed 'Dr Beetroot' by militant opponents (she has been sacked by the new President).

In December 2007 Mbeki was defeated in elections for the ANC presidency by Jacob Zuma, regarded as more left-wing than Mbeki and backed by the trade union federation COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP) - the ANC's long-standing allies. Both COSATU and the SACP have long been critical of the ANC's economic strategy for its failure to promote the

interests of the black working class and have campaigned to see the back of Mbeki as President. In the report to the Communist Party Congress in July 1998 the Central Committee spelled out its objections to GEAR: 'We remain convinced that Gear is the wrong policy. It was wrong in the process that developed it, it is wrong in its overall strategic conception, and it is wrong in much of its detail.'

Mbeki was the architect of his own destruction. The dispute with Zuma began in 2005, following allegations of corruption and fraud arising from a government \$5bn arms deal in 1999. This deal, highly dubious in itself when the country had no immediate need to arm itself to the teeth at great expense, has been at the centre of a range of allegations of corruption against leading ANC figures, including Zuma's financial advisor and Mbeki himself who signed the deal. Initial criminal charges against Zuma filed in 2005 were thrown out a year later when the prosecution failed to present evidence. It was only after Zuma beat Mbeki in the ANC presidential elections at the end of 2005 that the National Prosecuting Authority reopened the case with 16 charges of money laundering, fraud and racketeering. On 13 September the case against Zuma was dismissed in court on a technicality, but, disastrously for Mbeki, with a comment from the judge that the case had been politically inspired. Mbeki denied it but his days were numbered.

Mbeki had managed to make other



Jacob Zuma with Kgalema Motlanthe

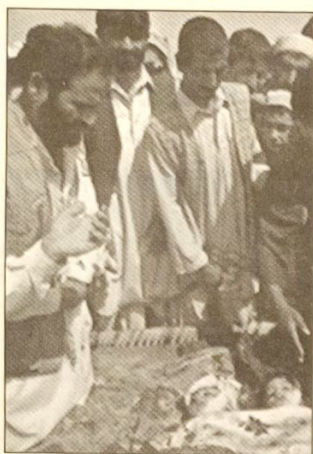
important enemies in the ANC. In 2001 he publicly accused three highly respected leading members of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa, Tokyo Sexwale and Mathews Phosa, of plotting against him. After Mandela had made a statement in support of all three, the charges were not renewed and no evidence ever produced. The *Mail & Guardian* newspaper commented at the time: 'Many observers have dismissed the plot theories as a strategy to warn off potential competitors with ambitions to challenge Mbeki's leadership'. All three accused are now members of the ANC Executive that forced Mbeki's resignation.

The new President Motlanthe has made public promises not to rock South Africa's economic boat. Even if the black majority, COSATU and the SACP are dissatisfied, the multinationals and imperialists are happy about the way their interests have been taken care of. Following Mot-

lanthe's reappointment of Manuel as Finance Minister and promises to carry on as before, the Chamber of Mines praised 'the swift and decisive manner in which President Motlanthe and his fellow leaders in the ruling party brought calm to the markets after the uncertainty of the past week'. Whether Motlanthe and the ANC will be able to keep the lid on the open discontent of the majority in the longer term is open to question.

Meanwhile in Zimbabwe the power-sharing deal which was Mbeki's last political 'triumph' has stalled. Having divided the cabinet between them, Mugabe and Tsvangirai have failed to reach any agreement about which ministerial posts they will each control. This stalemate represents the real state of affairs. The Zimbabwean majority are still caught between a rock and a hard place; neither represents their independent interests.

Carol Brickley



Children have been killed in raids on Afghani villages

AFGHAN WAR ESCALATES

Pakistan under threat

US presidential candidate Barack Obama calls the tragedy in Afghanistan a 'good war', adding 'we must win...there is no other option'. He has promised to send 10,000 extra troops to 'finish the job in Afghanistan'. Far from winning, the imperialist occupation forces are stuck in quicksand and the more forces they throw in the more they will sink. JIM CRAVEN reports.

A poll carried out by the Canadian *Globe and Mail* earlier this year showed that only 14% of Afghans wanted the occupying forces to leave the country immediately. However, more than half wanted them out within three to five years, 74% wanted negotiations with the Taliban and 54% would support a coalition government with the Taliban, indicating that a majority of the Afghan people does not see the war as Obama does; as a war to be won by the invaders. Furthermore, only a small minority of Afghans in the poll saw the Taliban as a united political force. The *Globe and Mail* concluded that, 'The typical Taliban foot soldier ... is not a global jihadist'... but a young man who has had someone he 'knows or loves ... killed by a bomb dropped from the sky' and 'fervently believes that expelling the foreigners will set things right in his troubled country'.

Sonali Kolhatkan of the Afghan Women's Mission agrees with this characterisation of the resistance forces, saying, 'Many (of the fighters that are called the Taliban) are just disgruntled Afghan citizens whose families and loved ones have been killed and/or tortured by US/NATO forces. In parts of the country with the heaviest concentrations of NATO troops Afghans are frequently rounded-up, detained, tortured, bombed or shot by foreign troops just as in Iraq'. (Counterpunch 20 August 2008). Kolhatkan maintains that the occupation forces are killing more civilians than the Taliban and 'that a majority of Afghans now want the US and NATO to leave as soon as possible'.

Kolhatkan, whose organisation works in solidarity with the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, says, 'No matter where you go in Afghanistan, there is utter grinding poverty. People are very frustrated, particularly with the US puppet Hamid Karzai. Those areas controlled by warlords are ruled with an iron hand, where extreme interpretations of Sharia law rule the day, and women suffer rape and degradation'. However, she warns against 'glorifying the resistance', saying, 'Where the Taliban are strong, girls' schools are blown up, civilians killed in suicide bombings, and journalists, teachers and elected officials are harassed and murdered. The vast majority of Afghans are moderate Muslims who strongly disagree with the Taliban's extremist ideology, but they have joined the struggle to bring an end to the occupation.'

The imperialist forces are intensify-

ing their war in the face of advances by the Afghan resistance. Earlier this year the US sent 3,200 of its top marines to fight in the south-east region and moved an aircraft carrier group into the Gulf of Oman to support them. Now the US is set to increase its forces in Afghanistan by over a third by sending another two combat brigades of 12,000 men. The US 'Operation Enduring Freedom' on the border with Pakistan and the NATO campaign in western Afghanistan will be merged under the command of US General David McKiernan. The British force, at more than 8,000, is already twice the size of that originally deployed to Helmand province in 2006. It will be supplemented by a further 4,000, if and when British troops can be withdrawn from Iraq. In the meantime, British special forces, serving as death squads, are planning to assassinate Afghan resistance leaders. The imperialists plan to double the size of the Afghan national army and spend \$20 billion arming it over the next five years.

Pakistan threatened

While expanding their forces in Afghanistan the imperialists are openly extending the war into Pakistan. Both US presidential candidates, together with Hamid Karzai, support this escalation. In fact, the US and NATO have been attacking Pakistan for some time with unmanned drones and artillery. Many civilians have been massacred in these attacks. US special services also have bases just inside the Afghan border from which they carry out clandestine missions into Pakistan. For political reasons these are usually attributed to Pakistani forces.

This July, without seeking Pakistan's authorisation, President Bush authorised cross-border attacks on Pakistan from Afghanistan. On 3 September US troops, accompanied by an AC-30 gunship, killed up to 20 civilians in the Pakistani village of Angoor Adda. The Pakistani Army registered its 'strong objection'. Pakistani soldiers exchanged fire with US troops on 25 August when they said two US helicopters crossed into Pakistan. Pakistani army spokesperson General Abbas explained, 'But after the [3 September] incident the orders are clear. In case it happens again in this form, that there is a very significant detection, which is very definite, no ambiguity, across the border, on ground or in the air: open fire.'

The imperialists say that there are up to 80 training camps for resistance fighters inside the Pakistan border.



Afghans at the graves of their family members, who died in August during a US-led raid in Azizabad that killed 90 civilians

North and South Waziristan are strongholds of the Pakistani Taliban and provide a base for the Afghan Taliban. Together they have between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters. The Bazaar agency in Pakistan is a base for the Afghan Hezb-e-Islami movement led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which provides the main resistance force fighting in the east of Afghanistan.

Although there are tens of thousands of Pakistani troops operating in the border region, the imperialists say the Pakistan government is not doing enough to root out the Taliban and blame it for making peace deals with local tribal leaders. They also claim that sections of the Pakistan army and the intelligence service (ISI) co-operate with the Taliban and that the ISI were responsible for the bomb attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul earlier this year. Andrew Cordesman of the Centre for International Strategic Studies stated, 'Pakistan may officially be an ally, but much of its conduct has made it a major threat to US strategic interests ... [The US] will have to treat Pakistani territory as a combat zone if Pakistan does not act ... The Afghanistan-Pakistan war is a two-country war that cannot be won in Afghanistan alone ... At this time US-NATO/ISAF-Afghan forces are too weak to deal with a multi-faceted insurgency with a de-facto sanctuary along the entire Afghan-Pakistan border ... It seems likely that [the war] will play out over a decade or more.' This carries echoes of the Vietnam war that the US extended into Cambodia.

US pressure on Pakistan

When Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani visited the US in July, President Bush demanded that Pakistan stop the border region being used as a safe haven

for resistance fighters. In return he offered to persuade Pakistan's President Musharraf to stand down. On 18 August Musharraf resigned. The following day General Ashfaq Kayani, head of the Pakistan military, flew to Kabul for talks with General McKiernan and General Bismillah Khan, Afghanistan's chief of general staff. Later Bush phoned Gilani to insist on an intensification of the border campaign. The next day Pakistan forces launched a massive aerial and artillery bombardment together with helicopter gunships to gain control of the border crossing near Loyesan. Reports claimed that civilians were directly targeted and that there were hundreds of dead and wounded. Some 300,000 people had to flee their homes and whole villages were deserted.

Crisis grows for Pakistan

Such actions harden local opinion against the imperialists and those in the Pakistan government who help them. Polls in Pakistan indicate that 55% of the population blame the US for violence in the border region and 71% oppose Pakistani co-operation with the US in Afghanistan. Suicide bombings against Pakistani police and

military targets now occur every two or three days.

The forced resignation of Musharraf was followed by the break up of the already tenuous coalition between Gilani's Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League led by Nawaz Sharif. The ensuing struggle for power will create further openings for the pro-Afghan resistance forces in Pakistan and more problems for the imperialists.

The resistance forces' strategy appears to be to establish areas of control and cut the supply routes of the imperialist forces, setting up their own corridor to the Pakistan border. They could then encircle key towns such as Kabul and Kandahar. NATO officials admitted they were witnessing the highest levels of violence across Afghanistan since the imperialist invasion in 2001. Attacks by the Afghan resistance were up by more than 50% overall on the same time last year and by 70% in the area around Kabul. The threat from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) was four times higher than in April.

NATO 'treading water'

With the planned reinforcements the imperialist forces in Afghanistan would total around 80,000. But the US military's own counter-insurgency manual calculates that a force of 400,000 would be needed to maintain control of the country. The Afghan national army at present has 70,000 members but they have little armour and no air power or medical support. Only two brigades and one headquarters are capable of operating on their own. No one expects the Afghan army to be capable of independent action for several years.

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Sean Rayment described the NATO campaign as 'treading water'. He cited one British officer's summary of the prospects, 'If the size of the force was increased to 200,000 troops, and the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan became the main foreign policy objective of every NATO country for the next three decades, and if the Taliban could be persuaded to give up their arms, then, in 30 years' time Afghanistan might reach a level equivalent to Bangladesh - if we are lucky'.

As we reported in FRFI 202, most NATO countries are refusing to send extra forces to combat areas since they see nothing to be gained by helping the US without any prospect that they might benefit strategically or economically. Only France, pursuing a more pro-US policy under President Sarkozy than it did under Chirac, reluctantly agreed in April to send an extra 700 fighters to the east of Afghanistan. Even this deal was wrapped round in conditions and went very much against French public opinion. On 19 August, ten of these French troops were killed and 21 injured in an ambush at Surobi, 30 miles east of Kabul. It was the single biggest loss of life for French forces since the 1980s. Sarkozy rushed to Afghanistan and

'The vast majority of Afghans are moderate Muslims who strongly disagree with the Taliban's extremist ideology, but they have joined the struggle to bring an end to the occupation.'

promised not to abandon the NATO mission but the incident will make it even more unlikely that NATO countries, other than the US and Britain, will commit more combat troops.

The decision to launch new offensives relying mainly on extra US and British troops was an attempt to settle the political challenges to US hegemony within NATO by 'facts on the ground'. Should these initiatives fail it will be a major blow to US authority over its global rivals at a time when Russia is asserting its own power in Georgia and in the Middle East where it recently signed a weapons deal with Syria. Russia now plans to send a contingent of soldiers to train the Afghan police.

Civilian deaths rise

In August, General McKiernan said, 'There is no magic number of soldiers needed on the ground to win this campaign. What we need is security of the people. We need governance, reconstruction and development, then we shall see results'. The rate at which Afghan civilians are being killed continues to rise. More than 260 were killed in July, the worst month for six years, bringing the total for the year to around 1,000. Given the imperialists' refusal to admit civilian casualties, the true total is likely to be much higher.

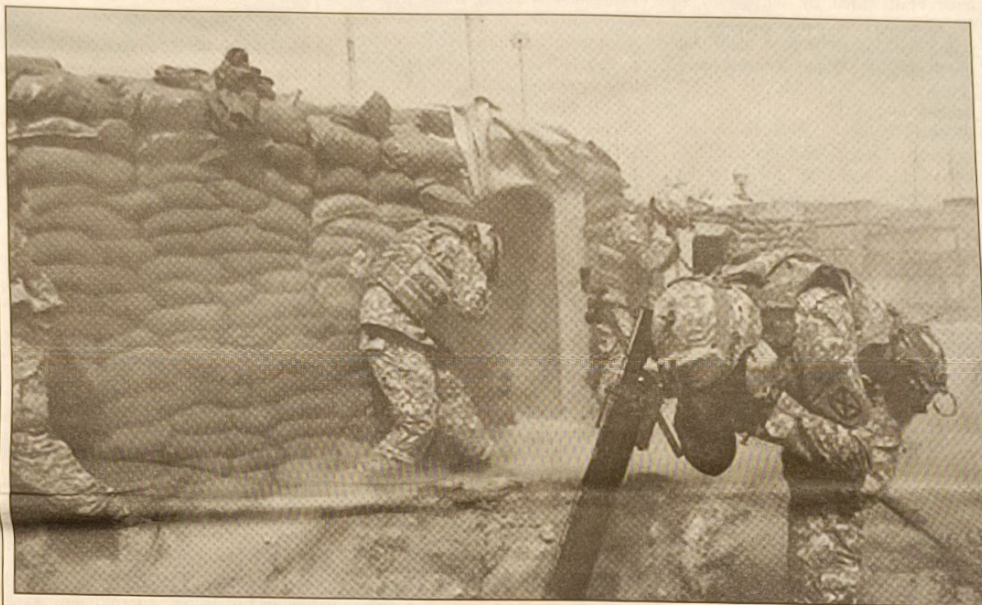
Many of the civilian deaths have been caused by the increased reliance on air power by imperialist forces. The US and British attempt to solve problems by technology - weapons, weapons of increasingly destructive power. Air strikes are up 40% on last year. On 22 August, 90 people, including 60 children, were killed in an air attack on Azizabad in Herat. They were attending a religious ceremony at the time. As usual the imperialists claimed at first that 30 Taliban had been killed. When the truth emerged, Karzai sacked the Afghan military commander in West Afghanistan and the commander of the Afghan commando unit that had called in the US strike. Such incidents are rapidly strengthening Afghan public opinion against the occupation. Ghulan Azrat, the school head teacher in Azizabad told western journalists, 'We don't need your food. We don't need your clothes. We want our children. We want our relatives. Can you give it to us? You cannot, so go away'. When resistance fighters attacked a US base near the Pakistan border, local people are said to have joined the attack in outrage at a nearby air strike in July that killed 22 civilians.

McKiernan's hopes of governance and reconstruction are as distant as security for the people. 80% of the Afghan parliament are corrupt northern warlords and/or drug barons in league with the imperialists. President Karzai's own brother is said to be among the dealers. There are claims that the imperialist forces themselves are involved in the drugs trade. Most of the money supposedly provided for aid and reconstruction in Afghanistan has been stolen by the warlords.

President Karzai recently pardoned three men convicted of rape. The men worked for Mawlawi Islam, a warlord who had been a Taliban governor in the 1990s and became an Afghan MP in 2005. Malalai Joya, a woman MP, has been physically attacked, threatened with rape and suspended from the Afghan parliament for describing the 'war on terror' as a mockery and calling for the warlords to be tried. Another MP, Mir Ahmed Jayenda, stated the police and courts were under the sway of the warlords, claiming 'Karzai, the Americans, the British sit down with them. They have impunity ... and can do whatever crimes they like.' Resentment of the US and NATO occupation forces, their Karzai government and the warlords will increase and ensure that the guerrilla resistance is sustained and grows. Get British and all NATO troops out of Afghanistan now!

IRAQ 'sustained progress' is 'fragile and reversible'

Speaking of Iraq this summer President Bush claimed, 'A significant reason for the sustained progress is the success of the surge'. It is thankfully true that casualties have fallen greatly in the past year, but that is only in comparison with the worst period of sectarian conflict. According to Iraqi government figures there were 851 Iraqis killed in July of this year, 300 more than in June. More than 3,000 people have been killed by Apache helicopter attacks alone in the past year. The imperialists launched 200 Hellfire missile attacks around Baghdad in the early summer compared with just six in the previous three months.



The imperialists claim Iraqi security forces have taken control of areas in Basra, Amara and the Sadr City district of Baghdad previously dominated by militias and that this is an indication of their growing ability to act independently. In reality, the Iraqi forces were deserting and being defeated until US and British forces came to their assistance in May. Even then, the outcome was only decided when the Iraqis brokered a ceasefire and Moqtada Al Sadr agreed to take his Mehdi militia off the streets. By mid-August there were still 1,000 US troops in Basra and a battalion in Amara. If the 'surge' has been so successful, why are there still more US troops in Iraq than before the 'surge', long after they were supposed to go home?

With Iran's help

The so-called progress that Bush speaks of has rather been due to three factors internal to Iraq. Firstly, the sectarian struggle between Shia and Sunni militias was decided in favour of the Shias. The struggle caused a virtual ethnic cleansing of much of the country. Over two million Iraqis had to leave their homes and another two million left the country. There are now few mixed neighbourhoods left. The process was facilitated by the occupying forces who first promoted Shia death squads into the Iraqi police and later divided communities in Baghdad and other major towns with concrete walls and armed checkpoints. Secondly, large sections of the Sunni resistance forces halted their attacks on the occupying forces and sought protection from the Shia death squads by joining Al Sawah, the Awakening Movement, in the pay of the imperialists. Thirdly, Al Sadr, whose Mehdi army had consistently opposed the

occupation and which had defeated the British in Basra, called an extended and unilateral ceasefire.

As the outgoing head of US forces in Iraq, General David Petraeus, warned several times, any apparent improvement for the imperialists following the 'surge' is 'fragile and reversible'. Sunnis in the Awakening Movement hate the Iraqi government and have made it clear they will resume their attacks on the occupying forces if their security and future prospects are not improved. The Iraqi government has drawn up a list of Awakening Movement leaders it wants to arrest. Al Sadr's ceasefire tactics are to avoid a direct confrontation

with US forces, which he believes he cannot win at present without the support of Iran. Such support has not been forthcoming because the Iraqis, like the US, support the Iraqi government. As one Iraqi leader put it, 'People fail to realise that the success of the "surge" was the result of a tacit agreement between the US and Iran.'

But the Iraqis, like the Iraqi government, cannot afford to ignore Al Sadr and his followers. The Iraqi government is dominated by parties representing the interests of the Iraqi elite and merchant classes. They are fearful of Al Sadr's support amongst the Iraqi poor and working classes. Consequently, the Shia middle class is waging a campaign of victimisation against the Sadrists. For the time being, Al Sadr is holding fire. As one of his spokesmen pointed out, Al Sadr is not someone 'to pick his plums before they are ripe'.

Imperialists push for oil

Sadrists ministers and MPs have already withdrawn their support from the Iraqi government partly in protest at legislation aimed at privatising Iraqi oil. The legislation has since stalled but the US is keen to push for an oil law before Bush leaves office. The US admits that the Sadrists are set to win provincial elections scheduled for November in the southern region around the Basra oil fields. This would be a major obstacle to US plans.

In June, five leading oil multinationals - BP, Shell, Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Total - signed the first technical service contracts for Iraqi oil. At the end of the month the Iraqi government announced bidding rounds for medium-term contracts in six of its key oil fields. These would give foreign companies stakes of up to 75% for a period of seven to nine years and are due to be signed in June 2009.

However, these contracts still fall short of the production sharing agreements that the imperialists want in order to give them control of the oil. So, the US government is planning to broker a new agreement between the Kurds and some Shia parties who are keen to start signing oil deals, to offer political inducements for more Iraqi MPs to vote for legislation and to neutralise opposition, especially among the trade unions. Trade unions are banned in Iraq under legislation imposed by Saddam Hussein and still invoked by the new government. Trade unionists have been harassed, arrested and transferred to different parts of the country, along with oil managers who also oppose oil privatisation. As the Iraqi government attempts to assert itself, the prospects of a clash with the Kurdish parties, which enjoy relative autonomy, increases, particularly over Kirkuk and its oil reserves.

US want permanent bases

Last February, a poll by the BBC, ABC and other television companies showed that a large majority of the Iraqi people thought the presence of US troops was making security worse and wanted them to leave the country. This summer, however, the US tried to impose agreements that would have established permanent US bases in the country and control over military activity in the region (see FRFI 204 for details). These so-called strategic framework agreements were rejected by the Iraqi government following widespread opposition by the Iraqi people, not least by the Sadrists, who organised weekly protests against them. As one Iraqi leader pointed out, 'What the Americans were offering us in terms of real sovereignty is even less than the British did 80 years ago.' Even the Iraqi puppet Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki appeared to scorn the proposals.

However, the US has not given up on securing a deal to colonise Iraq. A US official quoted recently in the *Washington Post* said '[the idea is] to take the heat off [Maliki] a little bit, and to re-brand the thing and counter the narrative that he's negotiating for a permanent military presence in Iraq. He is trying to figure out, just as we did, how you can set up an agreement ... but not go through the legislative body'. The Bush administration labelled the deal 'agreement' rather than 'treaty' so it didn't have to go before the US Senate for approval.

Present negotiations propose that US forces should withdraw from Iraqi towns and cities to around 20 bases by 30 June 2009 'if security progresses'. Combat troops should withdraw entirely by 31 December 2011, but final decisions would be made by a joint US-Iraqi ministerial committee leaving plenty of time and scope to establish permanent US bases. The US remains determined to maintain legal immunity for its troops.

Republican presidential candidate McCain has made it clear that he would keep troops permanently in Iraq until 'victory' was achieved. Obama, however, maintains that he would withdraw one combat brigade (roughly 6,000 troops) every month for 16 months. Of course, even this would still leave almost 50,000 US troops in Iraq in two years time. Obama visited Baghdad in the summer. Iraqis interviewed by Patrick Cockburn of *The Independent* were not impressed: 'Why does he come here? What will he do for us? Will he fix the electricity?' said one. 'Obama and Bush are two faces of the same currency' said another. A third Iraqi pointed out, 'He says he'll withdraw his troops from Iraq, but I don't believe that. The Americans planned for a long time to take over Iraq to protect Israel from Iran and seize the oil here.'

Jim Craven



General David Petraeus

Cuba: in the eye of the storm

Between 30 August and 7 September, two Category 4 hurricanes passed through Cuba, wreaking destruction on a mass scale. More than 300,000 homes were damaged, the country's electricity grid was plunged into chaos and thousands of hectares of crops were destroyed, at a cost of around \$5bn. Cuba's development plans have been set back, but through all the turmoil, Cuba's organised response shows how socialism is capable of defending human life. LOUIS BREHONY reports.

Hurricane Gustav

Gustav struck Cuba on the afternoon of 30 August. 60,000 people had been evacuated the previous night. Gustav's 150mph winds damaged or destroyed 90,000 homes and knocked down 80 electricity pylons in Pinar del Rio alone. On the Isle of Youth, the entire electricity grid was brought down. In Cuba no one lost their life to Gustav, but there were 138 deaths in other countries across the Caribbean and the US.

Hurricane Ike

A week later, Hurricane Ike hit. 2.6 million people were relocated, a quarter of

Cuba's population. The heavy rainfall led the Cuyaguatije River to burst its banks, leaving whole towns in western Pinar del Rio cut off.

Seven people were killed as a result of Ike. In the past decade 22 Cubans have been killed by hurricanes. In neighbouring Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, more than 550 people have been killed this hurricane season alone and one million people made homeless.

In the US, the world's richest country, up to 65 people died when Ike hit. Despite the lessons learned from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in

2005, when 1,800 people died, and despite warnings from national weather forecasters that residents of coastal Texas faced 'certain death' if they refused to evacuate, hundreds of thousands were unable or unwilling to move. Although some buses were laid on for the elderly or disabled or those lacking their own transport, most residents were left to fend for themselves. Severe petrol shortages made this impossible for many; others found themselves in bumper-to-bumper traffic jams stretching from Houston to northern Texas. When people did reach help, emergency centres were grossly under-resourced. In Galveston, the area worst hit by Ike, 40% of the population did not evacuate. As *Newsweek* reported (19 September 2008), many were too elderly or infirm to withstand evacuation or too poor to organise it – with no car, no relatives to stay with, no money for a hotel and unable to take extra days off work. *Newsweek* pointed too to a basic mistrust of the authorities after experiences of other hurricanes – the botched evacuation for Hurricane Rita in 2005 killed ten times more people



13 September: a lively rally in Trafalgar Square, London, organised by Rock around the Blockade as part of the International Day of Action to demand justice for the Cuban 5, political prisoners of imperialism, now in their eleventh year of incarceration in the US. For full report, see Roundup, page 14.

POLITICAL SOLIDARITY PRIORITY FOR CUBA

FRFI asked Teresita Trujillo, from the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, how people in Britain can best support Cuba in its reconstruction efforts. We reprint an edited version of her reply.

'At this point our main priority from friends is political. The US administration is using the situation to mount another campaign against the Revolution. Their offer of humanitarian assistance is conditional on sending a mission to assess the damage. They are presenting the situation as if they were desperate to help and the Cuban authorities are refusing their assistance, while they say nothing about the blockade or about our request to get authori-



sation (even on temporary basis) to purchase construction materials from the US. Anti-Cuban organisations in the US, such as the Cuban-American National Foundation, are requesting an increase in the amount of money they can send their 'partners' in Cuba, and are manipulating the US media to present a picture of the situation that suits their interests.

The US authorities say that the Revolution is incapable of resolving the

problems created by the hurricanes and that we are refusing their assessment mission because it will reveal that it was the inefficiency of the system that caused the damage to be so huge.

This is the time for the international community to put pressure on the US administration to end the blockade and to counter the distortions spread by the US. The recovery is going on quite quickly, but obviously part of the damage will have a long-term effect.'

To avoid bank transaction charges, send donations to Rock around the Blockade at BM RATB, London WC1N 3XX and we will forward them to the official Hurricane Damage Restoration account in Cuba. Cheques payable to Rock around the Blockade and marked 'Hurricane Appeal'.

ple than the hurricane itself – and the fear that, as happened after Katrina, if they left they might never be allowed to come back.

Cuba: socialism saves lives

In 2005 Cuba was recognised by the UN's World Disaster Conference as 'a model for hurricane management in developing countries'. The conference highlighted strong commitment by public authorities, public awareness enshrined in the education system from primary school up to university level and the involvement of the whole population so that 'potentially vulnerable populations play an indispensable role in saving other lives and their own'.

This system is overseen by the assemblies of people's power and the revolutionary armed forces. Each house receives an evacuation plan long in advance, and public evacuation drills are held regularly. Evacuations are ordered 48 hours before storms hit.

Schools are immediately turned into shelters, with a doctor in each. Volunteers make sure there are enough blankets, water and food. Hospitals, water pumps and other key services have their own power sources so they can carry on when the grid goes down. This is how socialism protects its people.

Rebuilding despite the blockade

Cuba has a lot of rebuilding to do. 300,000 homes have been affected. Reconstruction work has started on thousands of homes across the island but is hampered by lack of resources. The US government has refused to lift the blockade (see letter from Teresita Trujillo).

Meanwhile, help has been flowing in from Cuba's allies, including Brazil, Russia, China and Venezuela. \$1 million was donated by Trinidad and Tobago, whose ambassador described Cuba as an 'example to the rest of the Caribbean'.

Cuban agriculture: a sustainable path

Roberto Perez, Cuban biologist and permaculturist [permaculture is the study of sustainable, organic, small-scale agricultural production], toured Britain in September with the Permaculture Association to promote Cuba's achievements in organic agriculture and urban farming. While in Britain, he spoke to FRFI.

FRFI: To what extent can the example of Cuba's achievements in sustainable agriculture be applied to capitalist countries?

Perez: I believe that capitalist societies are too based on individualism to allow these necessary changes. But as the crisis escalates, people will be forced to organise in this way. There will be no alternative faced with the combined effects of climate change, biofuels and peak oil [when oil reserves begin to run out]. Extreme climatic events – floods, droughts and rising sea levels – will affect everyone. If business as usual continues, it will exhaust resources. This situation cannot be solved with technological gadgets or market solutions. It's necessary to go down a sustainable path of community-based solutions, social awareness and social justice.

Recent agricultural reforms in Cuba, allowing greater use of land by individuals and families, have been interpreted in the British press as a step towards capitalism. What is going on?

This change is only allowing more people to use land on the basis of usufruct – allowing the use of the fruit to the people that work the land. They are producing food for the people, not to make a lot of profit. Conventional agriculture – using chemicals, heavy machinery, lots of energy – was not guaranteeing the food security that we need under the US blockade. So if right now small producers are more efficient and more sustainable they are also part of the revolution. It's not capitalism. They are revolutionary people and they are helping the country to go forward.

Cuba currently imports most of its food, and increasing domestic food production has been identified as a priority. Will this limit further gains in sustainable development?

To say we import most of our food does not reflect the reality. Cuba needs to import food for social consumption, such as wheat and other food that we cannot produce because of our tropical climate. But we are producing more food than ever before. We eat a lot of



pork and it's all produced locally. Some cities of Cuba produce 70% of the vegetables that they consume. So we are on the road to self-sustainability, but based on efficiency.

We can't produce everything in the country because we only have limited arable land and a lot of our land is degraded as a result of capitalist development up to 1959. 85% of the ecosystem was destroyed and this was exacerbated by the conventional agricultural system that was applied between 1965 and 1991. We need to keep a balance between the exports produced in the country, like tobacco, coffee and other products, and what we produce for ourselves. The blockade limits our ability to exchange goods and because of that we have to keep increasing domestic production.

If the price of food keeps increasing it will be very bad, not just for Cuba but

for any poor country, because people depend on imports to eat. It could make some governments look for conventional alternatives and use chemicals to increase yields in the short term. I think that after 18 years of success in organic farming and urban farms we need to keep persisting. We have proved that sustainable agriculture can feed millions of people. The sustainable agriculture movement will eventually face a challenge in Cuba, because now we have allies like Venezuela that provide affordable oil and oil products. After the hurricanes we need to recover so I think it will be necessary to have a balance. There needs to be an internal discussion in Cuba.

What effect has the Energy Revolution had on Cuba's energy security and emissions levels?

Apart from increasing by 10% forest cover above the 1959 level, thereby making our small contribution to having carbon sinks without the big money of the IMF or World Bank, we have engaged in the Energy Revolution. This included the decentralisation of energy generation so that now we don't depend on big plants for electricity. There are new generators throughout the whole country. They burn oil or diesel, but they are very efficient. They can be switched on or off according to demand and create small closed circuits so that they can guarantee supply after disasters like hurricanes.

We changed all the incandescent bulbs in the country for energy saving bulbs, supplied by the government.

People can also change, at affordable prices, their old inefficient fridges, air conditioning and cooking appliances.

The government is committed to powering the more than 100,000 households that are off the grid with renewable energy, so many family doctor clinics and schools in rural areas are solar-powered. Micro-hydro-electricity is promising in the mountains and wind turbines are being installed as the capital needed to set them up becomes available.

What is your view on the use of bio-fuels in energy generation?

What we are seeing right now are not biofuels, they are agrofuels. Agribusinesses has found a new commodity and they don't care if people are starving. Cuba's position is that this will cause hunger for a lot of people. It's criminal to produce ethanol from cereals like corn because the energy it takes to produce it is more than the energy it will give. Even though Cuba has crops like sugar cane, not one hectare of our land will be used for agrofuels if the food is needed.

Cereal reserves are currently at their lowest level for 40 years, and this practice will make food prices even higher, which is already causing riots for food in some poor countries. You can see how difficult the situation is in Haiti, with people so desperate they are eating mud. If we can use some of the resources that people in rich countries just waste, then we can save a few million people on this planet every year from hunger.

Mass movements frustrate opposition terror campaign

On 10 August the mass of the Bolivian people gave President Evo Morales a resounding endorsement with a landslide 67.4% victory in a recall referendum which also saw the defeat of two ruling class opposition prefects. ROBERT CLOUGH reports on the intensifying struggle that followed.

The result was a body blow to the Bolivian opposition and its imperialist supporters, who desperately hoped that Morales had lost support since he won the presidency with 54% of the vote in December 2005. The response of the secessionist bourgeoisie in the country's four eastern departments was to step up a campaign of terror against government offices and indigenous people and embark on a programme of economic sabotage. On 11 September in the north eastern department of Pando, death squads under the direction of secessionist prefect Leopoldo Fernandez sent mercenaries to massacre 30 peasants as they marched to a meeting in support of Morales. Over a hundred are still missing. The response was an explosion of the masses; 600,000 were mobilised to march on Santa Cruz, the centre of reaction; 20,000 workers and peasants blockaded routes into the city whilst tens of thousands marched in La Paz.

Morales referendum victory

The scale of Morales' referendum victory was staggering. Turnout was an exceptional 83%; in La Paz and Oruro departments, 83% of those voting supported Morales. In the eastern half of the country, 53% supported Morales in Pando department (up from 21% in December 2005) and 50% in gas-rich Tarija (32% in December 2005). In Beni, the proportion voting for him increased from 17% in December 2005 to 42%, and even in Santa Cruz his vote increased from 33% to 38%. Prefects in eight out of Bolivia's nine departments also faced a recall vote: two allied to the opposition in La Paz and Cochabamba were defeated. Manfred Reyes Villa from Cochabamba had already been physically driven out of the department by the masses for his support for secession. However, prefects in four eastern departments were able to consolidate their local support, fascist Santa Cruz prefect Ruben Costas getting 67% of the vote compared to 48% in December 2005.

In the days following Morales' victory the ruling class stepped up a campaign of 'civic disobedience', attacking Morales supporters, organising road blocks and threatening to occupy gas fields in the east of the country. On 15 August Costas announced that Morales would not be allowed to set foot in Santa Cruz, and led a 'civic stoppage' on 19 August to protest at the government's plan to use some of the extra gas taxation to pay for its new pensions plan. He denounced Venezuelan President Chavez' support for Morales in racist terms: 'No to the big foreign monkeys!'

Social advances of the Morales government

Behind Morales' victory lie historically unprecedented social and economic advances. Until Morales' election Bolivia had the highest illiteracy rate in Latin America. A literacy campaign that started in 2006 using Cuban materials with Venezuelan financial support will make Bolivia the third Latin American country after Cuba

and Venezuela to eliminate illiteracy. Nearly 730,000 Bolivian adults had completed the three-month programme by July this year; only 100,000 are still to participate. Alongside this Cuban optometrists have treated 250,000 people with eyesight problems and distributed 200,000 pairs of spectacles.

Economically, the nationalisation of key foreign-controlled oil and gas companies has resulted in a huge increase in state income: from about \$150m per annum in the years before Morales' election to \$1.93 billion in 2007 and \$1.37 billion in the first half of 2008. State control of trade, transport and refining has undermined the position of private intermediaries and subcontractors in Santa Cruz and Tarija departments. The government has also started to invest in the farming sector, manage food prices and intervene in soya bean production and encourage the development of small and medium-sized producers. It has completely eliminated subsidies to large-scale agribusiness worth \$140m per annum. High mineral prices mean that the value of mining exports have risen dramatically: from an annual average of \$280m in the neo-liberal period to \$1,200m by May this year, and mining overall has displaced agribusiness as the second biggest sector of the Bolivian economy. Such developments are eroding the political position of large-scale agribusiness, the principal force behind secessionists in Santa Cruz and the other eastern departments.

Fascists launch terror campaign

The reaction of the opposition to the referendum result was to embark on a programme of economic sabotage through the creation of food shortages through boycotts and roadblocks, but these measures petered out due to the losses suffered by producers and exporters. They therefore moved to direct violence – against indigenous people in Santa Cruz, and against government offices in Beni and Pando. In Beni, prefect Alberto Melgar, gave a 'deadline' of 48 hours for the commander of the army's 6th division, Colonel Fernando Rocabado, to abandon 'Beni territory'. The colonel declined. In Pando fascists seized a Bolivian air force plane and held three soldiers hostage.

On 15 August, when Santa Cruz prefect Ruben Costas declared that Morales would not be allowed to set foot in his department, he also said that he would no longer accept a police commander who was neither from Santa Cruz nor approved by Costas. This was the prelude to the 'civic coup' as Costas attempted to wrest control of the police from the central government. The fascist militia Youth of Santa Cruz attacked police and troops, and organised raids against Plan 3000, where many of Santa Cruz city's poor and indigenous people live.

US support for the secessionists was demonstrated by the activities of its ambassador Philip Goldberg. Earlier this year it was revealed that the US embassy had approached Peace Corps



Workers and peasants blockade Santa Cruz on 21 September.

volunteers (of whom there were about 150 in the country) asking them to inform on the activities of Cubans and Venezuelans in Bolivia, with whom they were working. USAID has spent huge sums of money on projects within Bolivia, \$89 million in 2007 alone, the details of which have been shrouded in secrecy. One project, however, was to 'help build moderate, pro-democracy political parties that can serve as a counterweight to the radical MAS or its successors'. On 25 August Goldberg had a private meeting with Ruben Costas and then with the opposition prefect of Chuquisaca. The US State Department pointedly failed to offer congratulations to Morales on his victory, nor to condemn the opposition's violence. In such circumstances, it was not surprising that Morales declared Goldberg 'persona non grata' on 10 September, nor that the US retaliated in kind, expelling the Bolivian ambassador, withdrawing its 'Peace Corps', and then decertifying Bolivia for aid for its alleged failure to control cocaine trafficking.

However, the US is not in the same position to impose its will as it has been in the past. Only 11% of Bolivia's exports went to the US in 2006; 46% went to Brazil and 10% to Argentina. Bolivian imports tell a similar story: in 2006, 24.6% were from Brazil, 18.8% from Argentina and 12.2% from Chile, with the US accounting for 9.2%. More important in the longer term will be relations with Venezuela, and with countries such as China, South Korea and India whose Jindal Steel company has secured a joint deal with the Bolivian government to mine the world's largest existing reserves of iron and manganese in El Muntun.

Massacre in Pando

On 11 September, a band of fascists which included both Colombian and Brazilian mercenaries machine-gunned a march of peasants in the Pando town of El Porvenir on their way to a mass meeting in support of Morales. Although the international media portrayed what happened as a clash between pro and anti-govern-

ment forces, in fact it was a deliberate massacre. Video on *Indymedia Bolivia* shows both the unarmed marchers and the death squad, armed to the teeth, preparing its attack, and then firing on the peasants as they tried to escape by swimming across a river. The known death toll stands at 30, although dozens are still missing. After the massacre, Morales declared a state of siege and sent in the military to regain control of the department, ordering the arrest of prefect Fernandez who had been denounced for training a paramilitary force in 2006. Fernandez is now in detention in La Paz on charges of genocide. Initial investigations show that he had turned Pando into a private fiefdom, his prefecture armed to the teeth; he has admitted giving orders to forcefully suppress the protesters.

The response of the Bolivian masses to the massacre was immediate. The umbrella organisation of the workers and peasants, CONALCAM (National Coordination for Change), mobilised hundreds of thousands throughout Santa Cruz department, and established a blockade of Santa Cruz city cutting it off from the rest of the country. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Cochabamba where opposition prefects finally agreed to meet with President Morales on 21 September. When the prefects protested at the mass mobilisation, Morales told them that the social movements were not his to control. A situation of dual power has emerged, with the masses determined to ensure that Leopoldo Fernandez faces justice, that no concessions are made to the secessionists during the course of the negotiations, and that there is no sabotage of a referendum on the country's new constitution.

On Monday 15 September, a UNASUR meeting of nine South American presidents in Santiago de Chile pledged 'decisive backing of the constitutional government of Evo Morales', and said they would 'energetically reject and will not recognise' acts which break the constitutional or territorial order of Bolivia. Even Colombia's President Uribe had to agree to the declaration! UNASUR also agreed to send a com-

mission to investigate the Pando massacre. Behind this lies the growing importance of Brazil as a regional power with interests that do not always coincide with those of the US.

Opposition in disarray

The strength of the UNASUR response has rocked the secessionists. A leading Santa Cruz newspaper, *El Deber*, has announced that this must force the opposition to rethink its tactics, whilst another, *El Mundo*, has criticised Costas and his ally Branko Marinkovic for underestimating Morales' drive to retake the departments. Earlier in September a number of representatives of the PODEMOS party were evicted from a meeting of the opposition's National Democratic Council for criticising the violent tactics of the secessionist forces.

As FRFI goes to press, two factors are now crucial: first, the determination of Morales to continue with his government's progressive programme, and in particular the extension of land reform to the east of the country, and second, the continued mobilisation of the anti-imperialist social movements. On 24 September, CONALCAM agreed to suspend the blockade of Santa Cruz as a gesture of good faith in the Cochabamba negotiations. However, the secessionist prefects have tried to play for time, insisting that they will not reach any agreement with Morales unless he concedes some further autonomy in advance of a referendum on a new constitution later this year. On 27 September, frustrated with progress in the talks, the United Federation of Workers of the Indigenous People of Chuquisaca decided to re-establish their blockade of Sucre, the department's capital city. The masses are not prepared to retreat.

Politically the struggle in Bolivia is now of central importance for progressive developments in Latin America. The Bolivian masses are showing that it is possible to construct a new social order, that it is possible to change the world. Socialists must support them and the Morales government.

Venezuela Counter-revolutionary plot exposed

On Wednesday 10 September the Venezuelan state television programme *The Razorblade* revealed yet another plot against the government. Privileged and reactionary militarists were preparing to attack the presidential building, seize public communications centres and clearly aimed to assassinate President Chavez. This dramatically demonstrates the constant aggression directed against Venezuela, as it struggles to escape the clutch of imperialist states' monopolies. US imperialism stands behind all such manoeuvres, ever-anxious to crush Venezuela's democratic gains over the last nine years. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.



PSUV members celebrate the selection of candidates

The TV programme host, Mario Silva, will stand as United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) candidate governor for Carabobo in November. Recordings were broadcast in which both retired and active military personnel discussed a putsch planned for 15 October. These included retired Vice Admiral Carlos Alberto Millan Millan, retired National Guard General Wilfredo Barroso Herrera and retired Air Force General Eduardo Baez Torrealba, who was involved in the April 2002 coup attempt. They named individual supporters of different ranks, their intended control points, strategy and targets. President Chavez immediately announced an investigation. Homes of some military officers were searched by military intelligence officers.

Four of the retired officers implicated by the broadcast made official declarations to the Military Attorney General's office and the Military Intelligence Division the next day. Millan, Barroso, Major Elimena Labarca Soto and serving Lieutenant Colonel Ruperto Chiquinquirá Sanchez Casare – the last two from the National Guard – now await trial. A further 33 have been questioned. The

Military Justice Code provides for a mandatory five to ten years' prison sentence for such crimes.

It is believed that Baez is now out of the country. Several implicated officials fled to the island airport of Bonaire in the Dutch Antilles, off Venezuela's coast. On 14 September, Mario Silva accused the current governor of Carabobo, Carlos Acosta Carlez, and Eduardo Manuitt, governor of Guárico, both ex-PSUV members, of involvement in the plot. A special commission, established by the National Assembly, to investigate the intended coup has uncovered fresh evidence of Colombian military involvement. Ruperto Sanchez handed out 45 security credentials for the Libertador Air Base to civilians and paramilitaries. On 17 September, the commission heard that ex-defence minister Baduel who, since publicly breaking with Chavez last year, has called on the armed forces to act against him, had previously met with Pedro Carmona (leader of the failed 2002 coup against Chavez) and Colombian generals at the Sergio Arboleda University in Bogotá.

The Venezuelan government promptly withdrew its ambassador

from Washington and expelled the US ambassador to Caracas, Patrick Duddy, for supporting these would-be putschists and as an act of solidarity with Bolivia's President Morales; the US has supported the violent reactionary opposition to Bolivia's recent democratic election results. On 12 September, in a pathetic response, the US froze the assets of Ramon Rodríguez Chacín (until recently Venezuela's interior minister) and Hugo Carvajal Barrios and Henry Rangel Silva, both Venezuelan intelligence chiefs, for 'arming, helping and financing the...[Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC]...while they terrorised and kidnapped innocent civilians'. Chacín played a central role in the negotiations with the FARC that secured the release of six FARC-held prisoners. This is part of the Colombian President Uribe-US State Department campaign to discredit all those participating in discussions with FARC and hoping to establish peace in Colombia.

US presidential candidate Barack Obama claimed the Venezuelan decision was taken by a leader who 'rejects fundamental democratic norms' in order to 'distract attention from his increasing incapacity to comply with the basic needs of his people'. On 16 September, for the fourth time in a row, the US put Venezuela on a black list for 'non-compliance' in its 'war on drugs'. Then, on the 18 September, Jose Miguel Vivanco of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundation-funded Human Rights Watch released his ten-year review of Venezuela five months early, attacking the Venezuelan government in a ridiculous fashion.*

Honduran President Manuel Zelaya temporarily suspended the reception of new US diplomats to his country, which has just become the sixth member of ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, himself no stranger to US-backed terror, has refused to attend a forthcoming Central American summit because of Bush's presence.

US imperialism

President Chavez's political strategies now seriously threaten not only US oil monopolies, but provide a striking alternative to over a century of gross US interference in Latin America. Defeated in their attempt to seize control of the National Oil Corporation, PDVSA, in 2003, US oil monopolies were then forced to accept contracts that removed super-profits from their agreements with Venezuela's government, or leave. Exxon was defeated this year in the US and British courts when it attempted to force renegotiation by freezing Venezuela's overseas

assets. The recently nationalised Bank of Venezuela is working to create a new financial-economic system in Latin America. President Chavez's Petrocaribe initiative has already achieved savings for the current 17 member states of \$921 million in loan interest by working with PDVSA – depriving US banks and oil corporations of yet more cash. Venezuela's actions have given support and confidence to all those forces in Latin America determined to free themselves from US interference; September's announcement of an Argentinian-Brazilian agreement excluding the US dollar from their mutual trade is an expression of this new confidence.

Venezuela's example has led to the rejection of right-wing President Calderón's privatisation plans for Mexican oil in the 'national consultation' that finished on 27 August, organised by López Obrador's Party of the Democratic Revolution. This resistance comes at a time when remittances to Mexico from workers in the US are falling, inflation rising and any work is harder to find. Sensing danger, US imperialism is working flat out to get rid of its Latin American opponents. The US Congress has authorised \$1.6 billion in materials (aircraft, scanners etc) and training for a three-year initiative from 2008, for Mexico and Central America to fight drug-trafficking gangs and organised crime that threatens the Mexican government's own monopoly of force. In fact, the aim of the new programme (Plan Mexico) is to lay the ground for defeating the mass protests developing within the working class which represent a much more dangerous threat to imperialism than common gangsters running an illegal, but nevertheless capitalist, market.

Bush's decision in June to revive the US Navy's Fourth Fleet, almost 60 years after it was disbanded, to threaten Venezuela and its links with Caribbean states, reflects US imperialism's growing concern. Venezuela's use of non-US suppliers to build and train its defences represents a steady response to this threat.

The 23 November elections

US propaganda that the Venezuelan 'economy [is a] shambles' rings hollow when it has had 19 consecutive impressive quarters of growth and grew at 7.1% in the second quarter of 2008 – compared to the US's unprecedented economic crisis and contraction. Venezuela's political opposition faces another defeat in November. The planned attack on President Chavez is evidence of deep demoralisation among the wealthy classes and their apologists.

On 23 September the PSUV launched its electoral campaign for the 23 November municipal and regional elections. The creation of the PSUV last year allowed the completion of the internal process of candidate pre-selection in October 2007 and the second round of PSUV selection for legislative councils took place in August. When candidates registered with the National Electoral Council many were accompanied by large marches of supporters. Central to the debate are the 26 July Decrees. The PSUV started a National Plan of Mobilisation, organising around 1,600 assemblies to explain these laws and rebut criticisms of them. The laws offer advantages for small and medium sized companies, help the poor access housing, offer food security, and incorporate the social missions into the state structure. They also promote communal councils.

The Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) and Homeland for All (PPT) are usually allied to the PSUV in the elections, although they reserve their right to support other candidates. In Guárico state, the Electoral Movement of the People (MEP) candidate for governor, Eustaquio Contreras, resigned in favour of the PSUV candidate, William Lara, 'in the spirit of revolutionary unity'. Whilst Lara has the support of the PSUV, Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), PCV and the MEP, the PPT supports Ms Lenny Manuitt.

Locally, issues such as water, transport, health, education, rubbish and safety are central to the campaigns. Opposition candidate Leopoldo Lopez, currently mayor of Chacao, says his candidacy will continue, although he was disqualified for corruption, having engineered a 60 million bolívares (\$106,000) donation to his newly-formed political party, Primero Justicia, from the state oil company in 1998, when both he and his mother worked there. Venezuela's Supreme Court has issued a series of decisions endorsing the Comptroller General's ruling, temporarily disqualifying from public office nearly 300 opposition and pro-Chavez Venezuelans accused of corruption. The opposition says that the disqualifications are intended to prevent its candidates from standing for election. The opposition to the Chavez government within Venezuela is currently splintered and desperate. The US ruling class senses time is against it as revolutionary forces consolidate, hence the resort to coup plots.

* See Edward Herman, David Peterson and George Szamuely: *Human Rights Watch in service to the war party*, 2007, for a clear view of HRW as a virtual public relations arm of the (US) foreign policy establishment.

US election: tossing a double-headed coin

STEVE PALMER, US CORRESPONDENT

Although enormous power and its consequences are being contested, there is little programmatic difference between Senators Obama and McCain. Promises anyway count for little.

Obama has stated that he is ready to attack both Pakistan and Iran and is a friend of Israel, just like John McCain. Domestically his policies are not radical. Both candidates' promises – of expanding health care (Obama) and massive tax cuts for the rich (McCain) have been blown out of the water: Federal funds will have to be spent

propping up US Finance Capital. Neither has a real solution to the collapse of Wall Street. Neither has anything to offer the poor and oppressed and working people.

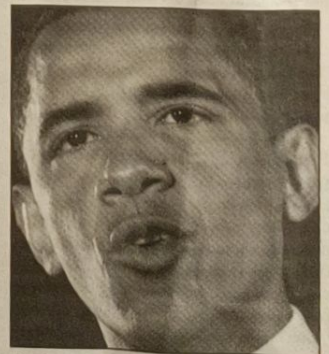
McCain is a self-described 'war criminal' and has been called a psychopath by his fellow prisoners of war. Sarah Palin is staggeringly unqualified and a proven liar. No-one except for the rabidly rightwing take them seriously, but they are extremely dangerous. Obama talks of change, but is surrounded by traditional pro-imperialist Washington politicians and operatives. Joe Biden is an experienced 'realist' fixer of foreign policy.

This pair forms a reliable, predictable 'safe and sane' pro-imperialist ticket. Whoever wins, it will just be more of the same.

The only interesting aspect of the election is the racial issue. We have previously explained how population changes mean that white people will be a minority in the US in 40 years' time, so that the Democratic Party has increasingly to orient itself to communities of colour. Obama's candidacy has aroused enormous interest and support amongst the black community and there have been big increases in voter registration by black people, latinos and Asians. The fact that he has

been able to become a candidate points to a substantial section of the white community who have no problem with race. At the same time there are plenty of Democrats who are going to support McCain, for racist reasons.

National polls about choice of President are misleading: it is the States' representatives to the Electoral College who choose the next President, not the people, so what matters are the 'Swing States'. State polls show that McCain has consistently been getting higher ratings than Obama. So, for what it's worth, it's still a toss-up – with a double-headed coin.



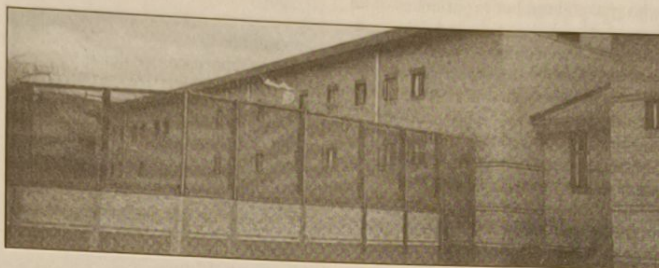
Obama: ready to serve imperialism

Privatising punishment

'I believe people sentenced by the state to imprisonment should be deprived of their liberty and kept under lock and key by those accountable primarily and solely to the state.' Labour party Shadow Home Secretary Tony Blair, 1993

'Labour will take back private prisons into public ownership – it is the only safe way forward.' John Prescott 1994

Within a week of being elected in 1997, Home Secretary Jack Straw reversed Labour's pre-election position and announced that all new prisons would now be privately built and run. Since then punishment has become big business. In September 2008 the press announced that the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO), a charity supposedly committed to campaigning for less use of imprisonment, had joined a consortium bidding to run two new prisons. NICKI JAMESON reports.



Helping prisoners vs 'managing offenders'

In 2004 the government set up the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS is an additional layer of bureaucracy on top of the already bureaucratic Prison Service and Probation Service. It has introduced to the criminal justice system an appalling and insidious new jargon in which, as ex-prisoner and writer Erwin James succinctly put it 'instead of people who need help, encouragement, guidance, support – we have only "offenders" who must be managed and monitored'. However, the main purpose of NOMS is to break down all areas of 'offender manage-

ment', and in particular those functions hitherto carried out by the Probation Service, into chunks for which 'services' can then be 'commissioned'.

Profiting from punishment the corporate way

Repression is a lucrative business. The current main players are:

- **Serco** – a massive company, operational in everything that can possibly be 'outsourced', with contracts everywhere from Brize Norton airbase to the Woolwich Ferry. It runs four prisons, two immigration detention centres, one 'Secure Training Centre' and a tagging scheme.

- **Kalyx** (formerly UKDS) – a subsidiary of French multinational Sodexho, the company which ran the degrading food voucher scheme for asylum seekers, introduced by the Labour government in 1999. It currently runs three prisons, including Bronzefield women's prison, and one detention centre, and is a partner in Addiewell Prison (Holdings) Ltd, which is due to open a new prison in Scotland.

- **G4S** (formerly Group 4 Securicor) – the world's largest security services company, employing 440,000 people. It was formed by the merger of Securicor and Group 4 Falck in 2004 and also owns the US-based Wackenhut Corporation. It runs two prisons in England and one in Wales, as well as three detention centres (see article on Dungavel, page 16), and since 1999 has held the contract for inter-prison escorts.

- **GEO** – currently manages Campsfield immigration removal centre and is looking to expand. GEO Group Inc was founded by George C Zoley, former director of the Wackenhut Corporation, and is keen on bidding to run one of the Titan prisons.

Profiting from punishment the charitable way

In addition to the overtly profit-making private companies, a vast number of 'Third Sector agencies' and charities are already contracted to run a massive number of facets of the criminal justice system, including hostels, housing advice, 'resettlement', employment training and alcohol and drug awareness courses. Even the Howard League for Penal Reform runs 'Barbed', a 'social enterprise' in Coldingley prison, 'intended to generate profits that will be ploughed back into the Howard League [and to] shine the light towards a future when long term prisoners get training, real work experience, pay tax and save for a pension, and build a new crime-free life'.

It was therefore not altogether sur-

prising when it was announced that NACRO and drugs charity RAPT are involved in a bid by G4S and building firm Galliford Try to manage two new prisons in London and Liverpool. A rival bid has also been made by Serco, 'social care charity' Turning Point and 'crime reduction charity' Rainer Crime Concern. The pathetic promise of Chief Executive Paul Cavadino that NACRO 'remains opposed to the government's strategy of expanding the prison system' rings hollow when in the same breath he says that 'the best way of ensuring that we can provide a resettlement service is to be... involved in designing the regime'.

Where there's misery, there's brass

The bidding war for the three planned 'Titan' prisons has yet to begin, although plenty of interest has already been shown by greedy profiteers who see an opportunity for making yet more cash from repression. While the Carter Review of Prisons (see FRFI 201) recommended three prisons for 2,500 men each, the consortia that responded to the Home Office consultation on the Titans have set out their stalls to build prison complexes that will house up to 3,600 each.

Private involvement in state punishment can never be progressive and 'charities' that participate in bids to run prisons line up firmly on the side of those campaigning for more incarceration, whatever gloss they put on it. The current government is charting a course towards more imprisonment and more repression, and is looking for the cheapest way to do it. Any movement against this in the future will not only have to take on the government itself but will have to confront the well-paid lobbyists of the private consortia whose profits are tied up with oppression and who will always argue for more prisons, more detention, more monitoring, more curfews, more controls, as for them misery means money.

US and Britain: partners in torture

'It is a long-standing principle of common law that confessions obtained by torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment cannot be used as evidence in any trial' (Lord Justice Thomas and Mr Justice Lloyd Jones, 22 August 2008).

The case of Binyam Mohamed has exposed yet again the collusion of British security services in torture, as well as the willingness of the British government to ride roughshod over its legal and moral obligations in the interests of preserving its 'special relationship' with the United States.

Binyam Mohamed, the only British resident still held at the US Guantanamo concentration camp, faces trial on terrorism charges carrying a possible death penalty at a kangaroo court 'military commission'. All the evidence is based on confessions extracted through torture. Mohamed was arrested in Pakistan in April 2002, where he was held without access to a lawyer until July; he was then the subject of extraordinary rendition to Morocco, where he was brutally tortured for 18 months – including having his penis slashed with a scalpel – at the behest of the US, before being flown back to Afghanistan, where he spent another nine months in the CIA's 'Dark Prison' near Kabul and the US military prison at Bagram airbase. He arrived in Guantanamo in June 2004 where he has been kept almost permanently in isolation.

In April 2008, his lawyers asked the British government to disclose information which would help prove his case. The government refused, but the defence team sought a judicial



Binyam Mohamed

review. On 22 August, against government arguments that there was a 'national security risk' inherent in releasing material and, outrageously, that Mohamed's rights would be adequately safeguarded by the existing US legal system, the High Court found that that Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, was 'under a duty' to release the requested information in confidence to Binyam's legal team. It ruled that Binyam had 'established an arguable case' that he had been 'subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment on behalf of the US' and 'was subject to torture...by or on behalf of the US'.

The court also noted the sinister involvement of British security forces. Much of the hearing was heard behind closed doors. Witness B from the security services, who gave evidence in secret and at one point refused to answer questions because of possible self-incrimination for war crimes, worked with the US on questioning Mohamed in Pakistan and told Mohamed he would receive no help unless he cooperated fully. After his

rendition to Morocco, the court found, British security services continued to 'facilitate interviews...when they knew BM [Binyam Mohamed] was still incommunicado and when they must also have appreciated that he was not in a United States facility'.

The judgment describes US failure to respond to torture allegations as 'untenable'. But the finding of British complicity is clear:

'By seeking to interview BM in the circumstances described and supplying questions for his interviews, the relationship of the UK government to the US authorities...was far beyond that of a bystander or witness to the alleged wrongdoing'.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made it clear that if the documents were released in full, it would do 'serious and lasting damage to the US-UK intelligence-sharing relationship and thus the national security of the UK'; Miliband concurred. The US has grudgingly agreed to the release of edited versions and the British government has been given more time to argue against the ruling on grounds of national security. Binyam Mohamed asks, with justifiable scepticism, 'Those who tortured, rendered and now try me in kangaroo courts are actually going to hand over evidence of their criminal acts?' Both Britain and the US will continue to duck and dive to conceal their complicity in war crimes and torture.

Cat Wiener

Letters of support should be sent to: Binyam Mohamed, ISN 1458, Camp Delta, US Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Washington DC 20355, USA. For more information go to www.reprive.org.uk



FRFI and No More Prison outside Styal prison in Wilmslow, Cheshire on Sunday 10 August, Prisoners Justice Day, in a protest against all deaths in prison and commemoration of the massive contribution to the struggle against prison brutality made by Pauline Campbell, who died earlier this year. Pauline had fought for five years to highlight the abuses of vulnerable women in prison, following the death of her 18-year-old daughter Sarah in Styal in 2003. Every time a woman died in prison, she would organise a demonstration outside that prison.

IN BRIEF

Scottish prisoner on hunger strike over medical treatment

As FRFI goes to press, William Johnston has been on a hunger strike in Glenochil prison for three weeks in protest about the denial of proper medical treatment. He is suffering from a spinal condition and before his imprisonment had a steel support rod inserted into his back and was prescribed strong painkillers for life. In prison he has been effectively taken off these painkillers, and following an argument a few months ago been denied contact with the doctor. John Bowden, who is also in Glenochil, writes that Willie 'now exists in a condition of continual and severe pain. His treatment, or non-treatment...is fairly typical and there is widespread anger here about the degree of medical neglect that is prevalent here. I'm

quite sure that William Johnston will continue his fast to the death if necessary so it's important that his protest is highlighted and the prison system is made aware that people on the outside know about and support him'.

Please send letters of solidarity to William Johnston (15541), HMP Glenochil, King O'Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire FK10 3AD and of protest to the governor at the same address.

Whitemoor prisoners punished for staying out of way of fire

Part of Whitemoor prison was briefly evacuated in early August following a fire. Prisoners remained outside for a few hours before returning to their cells. 71 prisoners were then given disciplinary charges for refusing an order to come back inside. Some have been found guilty and are appealing; while others continue to contest the charges.

FRFI ROUNDUP

Organising for change

Marx once said: 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it.' Following this spirit FRFI supporters have been active on a wide range of issues, drawing the links between Labour's attacks on the working class and the need to build a new socialist movement.

Fight Britain's racist immigration laws

One of the central issues that we have campaigned on is the defence of asylum seekers against attacks by the British state. In Manchester activists learned about the suicide of Nadir Zarebee, an Iranian refugee, in a park in Longsight. Nadir died after being forced out of his 'support' accommodation by a Home Office-appointed housing company. Comrades from the International Iranian Organisation of Refugees quickly organised two demonstrations in Manchester which FRFI supported. Both protests went to Piccadilly Gardens to speak to the public about the case of Nadir and about the situation facing asylum seekers in Labour's Britain. On the second protest the demonstrators marched to the BBC on Oxford Road, demanding that Nadir's death be reported. An Iranian comrade refused to leave the building and in the end was granted an interview. The BBC, however, has yet to report on the case and further protests are being planned.

In the North East, following the Northern Conference Against Racism in June, many new supporters have joined Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR). A public meeting on 6 September discussed the housing crisis and rising cost of living, and the need for anti-racist unity between asylum seekers and other sections of the working class. These issues will be the focus of the second Northern March Against Racism planned for 25 October in Newcastle.

Contact tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk or 07858 346276 to get involved in organising or sponsoring the march.

On 25 September, FRFI joined a protest called by the Latin American Workers Association and the Campaign Against Immigration Controls outside a meeting hosted in Pall Mall, London by National Physical Laboratories (NPL). NPL employs the cleaning company Amey. Amey took over the cleaning contract in May 2007 and found itself faced with a largely Latin American migrant workforce that had recently unionised – and was taking steps to gain recognition – something afforded to all other NPL staff. Amey's first act was to invite workers to a 'training session', only to hand them over to the Home Office, which deported three of them. It has since suspended five NPL cleaners for union membership and protesting against cuts in the workforce from 36 to 15. The protest, supported by the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, Hands Off Venezuela, London Coalition Against Poverty and the Solidarity Federation demanded that the suspended cleaners be reinstated immediately and that the NPL get Amey to clean up its act.

Stop police harassment and defend democratic rights!

In Newcastle a magistrates' hearing on 18 and 19 August found four FRFI activists guilty of participating in an unlicensed collection at a street meeting at Grey's Monument on 7 May 2007 against the deportation of a Kurdish family to Turkey. Supporters gathered outside the court at the opening of the hearing for a lively demonstration which received good coverage on local television. Magistrates accepted the prosecution argument that as the event lacked a structure it was not a street meeting, and was not

therefore exempt from the regulations. Fines and costs totalling £1,800 were imposed on the defendants. The defendants are appealing the case to the Crown Court, and are stepping up their political activity on the streets against police harassment. Financial contributions can be sent to: Monument 4 Defence Fund c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

On 23 September FRFI organised a public meeting in the West End of Newcastle in an effort to unite resistance to the police. The meeting was addressed by a representative of the Monument 4; TCAR member Mako, who spoke about her experiences of an immigration police raid and detention; Barbara Yusuf-Porter, who is campaigning against the police racism she experienced before and after the murder of her son in South Shields in 2006; Dave Douglass, an NUM official during the 1984/85 miners' strike; and a speaker against ID cards.

Hands off the Middle East!

Activists from around the country have been organising weekly demonstrations against the brutal occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by US and British troops. Despite the mix of silence and propaganda spread by the bourgeois media many people have stopped to sign petitions and show support for the rights of the Iraqi and Afghani people to determine their own future and for troops to be withdrawn.

In London weekly demonstrations have continued every Thursday outside Marks & Spencer's flagship store on Oxford Street. M&S is Britain's biggest retail sponsor of the Zionist regime.

It's time for change – look at our events column and join us in action against the barbarity of the imperialist system!



Supporters in the North East demonstrate to end police harassment of their street events

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 7 October and 4 November 1-2pm

Demonstrate against Labour's racist immigration laws

Outside Communications House Old Street, EC1 (Nearest tube Old Street)

Saturday 1 November 12-5pm

Che Guevara, Cuba and revolutionary Latin America

LSE FRFI Society London School of Economics Houghton Street, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn)

Saturday 22 November 8pm onwards

Break the chains – solidarity with prisoners

Benefit gig with live bands The Cross Kings 126 York Way, N1 0AX (Nearest tube King's Cross)

Every Thursday 6-8pm

Demonstration for Palestine – boycott Marks & Spencer

Oxford Street, WC1 (Nearest tube March Arch)

For more details contact 0207 837 1688 londonfrfi@gmail.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 25 October 12 noon

Northern March Against Racism

Assemble outside the old fire station on Westgate Road

Organised by TCAR www.tynesidecam.co.uk Every Saturday 3pm

Weekly meeting of Tyneside Community Action for Refugees

Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom of Westgate Road. E-mail: tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk Tel: 07989 879 310

Every Saturday 11am-2pm

Street action in Newcastle

For details and for other stalls around the region: call 07858 346 276 or e-mail frfinortheast@goolemail.com Website: www.frfinortheast.co.uk

MANCHESTER

Sunday 2 November 2pm

RCG forum Capitalism in crisis: what is behind the rising cost of living?

at Cross Street Chapel off Market Street

For details of street actions, meetings and other events, tel: 07519 427 093 or e-mail: mrcgrifi@fmail.net

GLASGOW

Thursday 2 October 5pm

Film showing: The Revolution will not be televised

PJ Champs bar 17 Byers Road

Thursday 9 October 5pm

Film showing: Venezuela Bolivariano

PJ Champs bar, as above

For further details see bebo.com/frfi



RATB ROUNDUP

12 September marked the tenth anniversary of the incarceration of the Cuban 5. On 13 September, as part of an International Day of Action to demand freedom for the five Cuban men, held as political prisoners in the US for the 'crime' of investigating terrorist acts against their country, Rock around the Blockade (RATB) held rallies and protests around the country.

In Manchester Rock around the Blockade held a lively protest in Piccadilly Gardens with speeches about what Cuban socialism has achieved in the face of a constant political war against it, led by the US. Hundreds of passers by signed petitions demanding justice for the Cuban 5. The word is gradually spreading around Manchester about this appalling miscarriage of justice; as one local man put it: 'It's ridiculous – they've been locked up just for being communists'.

In London, Rock around the Blockade draped the east side of Trafalgar Square with banners, flags and placards and welcomed speakers from the Marti-Maceo Organisation of Cubans in Britain and the Revolutionary Communist Group. Rock around the Blockade highlighted the hypocrisy of the imperialist so-called 'war on terror', that gaoles freedom fighters such as the Cuban 5 while letting anti-Cuban terrorists such as Posada Carriles walk free.

Comrades in Glasgow and Dundee have been active on the streets campaigning in solidarity with the Cuban 5 and for the closure of the US naval base and torture camp at Guantanamo Bay, with hundreds of people signing their petition.

Meanwhile, the campaign to force Lloyds TSB bank to stop implementing the US blockade continues, with a second demonstration in London outside its Camden branch on 16 August. In June, the bank wrote to its business customers informing them they could no longer use Lloyds to make payments to Cuba. We oppose these bullying and discriminatory tactics and ask supporters – in particular anyone with a Lloyds TSB account – to write letters of protest to Phil Markey, Relationships Manager, Lloyds Bank, 25 Gresham Street, London EC2V 7HN.

Over the summer, alongside regular meetings and street events, Rock around the Blockade also raised thousands of pounds working in the Workers' Beer Company tents at festivals up and down the country. This contributes much-needed funds for

our work in Britain in solidarity with the Cuban revolution, allowing the campaign to expand and ensuring that we are able to donate material aid to Cuba.

Public meetings in Manchester, Newcastle, Glasgow, Dundee, and London have been organised for education and discussion about Cuba's achievements, based on the Rock around the Blockade pamphlet *Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours*. These discussions and debates have touched on health and education, women in the revolution, the fight against racism in Cuba, gay rights in Cuba, the energy revolution and the Special Period and always come round to comparing Cuba to Britain, highlighting what is possible under socialism. In Glasgow and Dundee, RATB is having regular film showings, in collaboration with FRFI, as part of a Rebel Film series. Check our website (www.ratb.org.uk) for details of all forthcoming events, get involved, join Rock around the Blockade!



RATB demonstration in Trafalgar Square for the Cuban 5

EVENTS

MANCHESTER

Sunday 26 October 2pm

RATB film show

Cross Street Chapel, off Market Street

E-mail: manc@ratb.org.uk Tel: 07535 616 325

LONDON

Tuesdays 14 October and 11 November 7.30pm

RATB public meetings

Ring for venue details E-mail: office@ratb.org.uk Tel: 020 7837 1688

DUNDEE

Thursday 23 October 7-9pm

Viva Che Guevara: forward to 50 years of the Cuban revolution!

Film show and talk to mark the anniversary of Che's death in combat in 1967 Room G7, Dundee University Tower Building, Perth Road

E-mail: scotlandfrfi@yahoo.co.uk Tel: 07779 785 529

NEWCASTLE

Thursday 9 October, 7pm

RATB public meeting

For details tel: 07858 346 276

Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours

The fully revised and updated Rock around the Blockade pamphlet, covering everything you need to know about the Cuban Revolution, from Columbus to Batista, the Bay of Pigs invasion to the Battle of Ideas.

Misinformation about Cuba is everywhere, from the mainstream media to the so-called British left. Counter the lies and distortion by informing yourself. Buy your copy today for only £3.95 inc p&p

Fill out the form below and return it to RATB c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Please send me _____ copies of *Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours*. I enclose a cheque for £_____ payable to Rock around the Blockade.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____



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

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London WC1N 3XX

Political activity vital

Thank you for the complimentary copy of FRFI June/July 2008. I particularly enjoyed reading Thomas Vincent's article about Tibet.

It has been a long time since anyone on the political left has succeeded in contacting me. It is impossible for me to know how much of my mail has been intercepted over the last year and a

LETTERS

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

Question time for the Left?

I turned up for the ticket-only final session of the Convention of the Left's grandiosely titled 'Question Time for the Left', to find the hall only three quarters full, about 175 people. The panel included representatives of the worst traditions of the British left such as the Scottish Socialist Party, Communist Party of Britain, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka, Labour MP John McDonnell, Respect and the SWP. The event was facilitated by John Nicholson, one of the main organisers of the Convention.

The organisers had gone to great pains to insist that their 'Question Time' would give as much weight to people in the hall as to the members of the panel. This was to be no panel of experts dictating to a passive audience. However it soon became clear that Nicholson's role, rather than to encourage audience participation, was to protect the panellists from any intervention from the floor that would highlight their role in

supporting Labour imperialism. So he refused to take contributions from supporters of FRFI or the Campaign Against Immigration Controls who wanted to follow up a question to Mark Serwotka and raise the role of members of the PCS in attacking immigrant workers and asylum seekers.

In fact it had been Serwotka who summed up the political position of the Convention organisers in his first answer, when he said that it was 'now time to move on' from the question of 'do we stay in the Labour Party or not?'

As we left, another organiser said she wouldn't have taken us to speak either, accusing us of coming to 'wreck' the event. This dismal and dreary event summed up the whole Convention, insular, sectarian, smug and irrelevant to the building of any new anti-imperialist socialist movement in Britain.

BOB DERBYSHIRE
Manchester

Free Tibet for capitalist development

I was shocked to read your article supporting Chinese imperialism and cultural genocide in Tibet (FRFI 203). Thomas Vincent has little knowledge of the real history of Tibet, nor the current struggles. His information is from the website of the Maoist US Revolutionary Communist Party, whose analysis coincides with the official Chinese government lie...oops, I mean line.

Vincent would have us believe the economy and political history of Tibet were exactly the same as pre-revolutionary feudal China. Note the fabricated stories of oppressed Tibetans calling for the People's Liberation Army to help their struggle against their feudalist oppressors. In actuality, Tibet had a completely different type of economy to China and conditions were not ripe for revolution.

Tibet was first settled in the Stone Age and began developing a separate identity from its neighbouring countries around 3,000 years ago. 40% of Tibetans are still nomadic or semi-nomadic. Genetically, Tibetans are related most closely to the peoples of South East Asia and the Mongols. Their language is one of the Himalayan languages, like Burmese, developing originally from Ancient Sanskrit. The indigenous religion of Tibet is Bon. When Buddhism arrived from India in the 8th century, Bon and Buddhist traditions fused.

Vincent claims the Tibetan ruling class had a 17-point agreement with the Chinese on co-rulership. In actuality, the Chinese government forced the 'agreement' onto the Tibetan government with guns to their heads. The motive for entering Tibet was not liberation of the masses, but land grab. As Vincent points out, Tibet is rich in natural resources and the Chinese wanted them.

Ten thousand Tibetans lost their lives during the invasion of 1950. In 1959 Mao began the 'cultural revolution'. 6,000 monasteries and nunneries were blown up and

half. I am pleased to see that publications such as FRFI are still in circulation. In this time of political and social apathy it is vital that groups such as yours remain active.

MILES COOPER MP9139
HMP Whitmoor, Longhill Road,
March, Cambs PE15 0PR

widespread famine resulted in many deaths. This led to the 1959 uprising against Chinese rule. The Chinese backlash resulted in the massacre of 87,000 civilians; as many again fled the country. Anti-separatist laws mean Tibetans can be imprisoned for wearing traditional clothing, carrying the national flag or saying 'Free Tibet'.

250,000 Tibetans have died in Chinese prisons since 1950, whilst countless more are tortured and subjected to 're-education' classes. The 'autonomous' region is autonomous in name only, with Tibetans denied all access to decision-making or control over their economic resources. Skilled Han Chinese migrant workers are brought to Tibet, while Tibetans are routinely denied employment.

Vincent makes a ridiculous claim that there is no opposition, despite 50 years of resistance, uprisings and protests. The 49th anniversary of the 1959 uprising on 10 March saw monks take to the streets in support of a Free Tibet in 400 cities across Tibet and around the world.

Vincent's analysis of the Dalai Lama is out of date. The Tibetan liberation movement received US support after the Chinese occupation and the CIA even trained Tibetans as freedom fighters up to the early 1970s. It wasn't long, though, until the US noticed that China had a quarter of the world's population – an awfully big market. They took advantage of the split between the Soviets and China, with Nixon meeting Mao in 1972. The Tibetans were dropped like hot potatoes and the Dalai Lama blanked by Western governments for decades. Even now, few world leaders will meet him.

Many on the left admire the 1949 Chinese revolution as a leading example of the overthrow of Japanese imperialism and feudalism in favour of communism. But was it really? China is a brutal, totalitarian state. Marx did not suggest it was possible for a feudalist economy to pass directly to a socialist one without a period of capitalism between. This is why the Chinese, Soviet, Cambodian and other experiments failed and in many cases turned out to be little better (and sometimes worse) than the systems they were intending to replace.

I suggest FRFI subscribers join Free Tibet, who are fully committed to ending Chinese occupation of Tibet www.freetibet.org.

KARINA MCLACHLAIN
London

Racism in hospitals

In April this year the high court ruled that all asylum seekers who have not been ordered to leave Britain are entitled to free health care. This ruling also applies to over 11,000 asylum seekers who have been refused refugee status but cannot leave as they have no safe route out. Previously, government policy was that only GP and emergency care (including departments of sexual health but not HIV treatment) would be available to asylum seekers. The government had been accused of breaching its human rights obligations by denying treatment.

But despite the new ruling, on the ground there are increasing

examples of doctors and managers taking entitlement to medical treatment into their own vile, racist hands. Receptionists and clerical staff are also being dragged into this quagmire. Despite the April ruling, mandatory fields exist on computer systems requiring the patient to answer questions about length of stay in Britain and whether they could prove it before being booked in.

I witnessed recently a shocking display by an A&E consultant, one of the most senior doctors in the department, who openly accused a family of trying to cheat the system, demanding 'Who is seeing the children who have come for a

malaria test? They are health tourists... Only do what is necessary if they are ill'. He was in effect denying medical care to a Somali woman and her two young children who had just spent four months in a refugee camp in Uganda and had arrived in London to join her husband and their father.

As Martin Luther King said, 'Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhumane.'

HANNAH CALLER
North London

POA: hired lackeys of the state or allies of the working class?

I have taken the last two issues of FRFI and been impressed with the quality of the articles, but was very disappointed with the stance of the RCG regarding the POA.

In Britain today most production has moved abroad. Of all the workers only production workers, as a group, have a vested interest in the overthrow of the capitalist state and will naturally develop a revolutionary perspective for it is they that create the surplus value that enables the capitalist class to employ all the other workers.

The other workers are, in one way or another, capitalism's little helpers and have a vested interest in the continuation of capitalism. These workers range from office workers, bank workers, armament workers, workers feeding the lifestyle of the rich right through to the army, police and prison officers.

If production workers are to make a revolution these latter workers must become allies or remain neutral. Therefore when one of these groups, however improbable, comes and says 'we want to be on your side', you welcome them and do not send them away with a set of tests to prove their revolutionary

credentials as Nicki Jameson suggests.

Production in Britain is now more often than not in the hands of non-union immigrant workers. If the RCG wants to change the nature of working class politics and make a revolution it should concentrate on organising these groups and stop attacking trade union structures and revising Marx's ideas by suggesting that it is the unemployed who will lead the revolution (Robert Clough, FRFI).

TOM BURR
Redhill

Dave Alton's letter in your August/September issue ('The POA and the working class'), in which he defends the POA and prison officers, is absolutely typical of these middle-class 'socialists' who have been fortunate enough never to have experienced prison or the brutality of prison staff; maybe a good dose of the reality of what working class 'criminals' have to endure at the hands of a brutal and inhumane

prison system would radically improve people like Dave's understanding of the role of prison officers.

Let's get it straight: prison officers are not what these middle-class idiots describe as 'a section of the working class'. They are hired lackeys of the state who willingly betray their working class roots for financial gain and from perverse pleasure in locking up and brutalising the poorest and most socially disadvantaged people in capitalist society. They are the enemy of the working class.

I am amazed Nicki Jameson lent Dave Alton's reactionary arguments any credibility by systematically answering them. Genuine revolutionaries and those seriously committed to prisoners' rights should not provide a platform for middle-class idiots who have not the slightest understanding of what is inflicted on working class people in prison and who have never experienced the vicious sadism of those who administer and enforce prison repression.

JOHN BOWDEN
Glenochil Prison

Cuban 5: let truth and justice triumph

Thank you for your birthday greetings and your solidarity expressed through your words of support.

Once again we have been denied justice by the court of appeals. It refused to review the unjust and politically prejudiced ruling of 4 June made by a three-judge panel. Our attorneys are now working hard to get our petition to the Supreme Court ready.

12 September marked the 10th anniversary of our unjust imprisonment. The movement in solidarity with the Cuban 5 held numerous events around that date –

a good opportunity for calling attention to the reality of our case and the injustice involved in it.

Aware of the hard work and the efforts contributed by so many good friends, especially for this particular occasion, I want to express my gratitude and my appreciation to you, as well as my certitude in the triumph of truth and justice.

Venceremos.

FERNANDO GONZALEZ
One of the Cuban 5, political prisoners of imperialism
www.ratb.org.uk/Free_the_Five.html

Onder Dolutas: stop extradition

Onder Dolutas, a political activist from Turkey, has been in Rohrbach prison, Germany, since May 2008 facing an extradition request from Turkey. FRFI was active in the campaign to prevent his extradition from Britain in 2006. On 8 September he began a hunger strike to protest against the decision of the German regional courts not to recognise his status as a political refugee, eventually granted by the British government.

In a statement at the start of the hunger strike he wrote: 'On 23 May 2008, travelling on my British passport from London to Germany to visit my relatives, I was arrested and then put into jail.

Since then I have been waiting for the legal process to be completed, but the shocking decision of the Higher Regional Court Koblenz pushes me to use my only tool, the right of hunger strike, in order to protest against that outrageous decision [which] does not conform to the Geneva Convention of 1951...

'As far as [the court] is concerned, being a victim of fascist persecution, being subjected to torture, ill-treatment and unfair trial at a specially designed court are not sufficient reasons to stop the extradition process in my case.' Contact e-mail: onderdolutas.sol.com@googlemail.com

No protection from dangerous drugs

On 4 August my partner died of a massive seizure of the brain, an after-effect of the medication he had been prescribed. He was in a coma for 11 days and medical staff said the damage was irreversible.

Many people have concerns about psychiatric drugs and some of the lethal ingredients which doctors say have benefits that outweigh side effects. I have seen a woman have an epileptic fit after taking anatriptolene, which is now banned.

Under the advanced statement made under the mental health care act of Scotland in 2003, patients can draw up a document listing the drugs from which they wish to abstain – but any doctor can overturn this right, which leaves no protection from dangerous drugs.

Einstein said 'Never stop questioning', but the medical profession will not make themselves available for questioning and run people around in circles with complaints procedures which give no answers.

My ten-year-old has had to say goodbye to a father, knowing he would not get better. The neighbour at the end of my street has lost two sons through similar medical negligence. I have spoken to many people who have suffered even worse. This is what passes in Scotland for medical treatment, where corpses are abandoned for up to six hours on hospital wards.

AMINA SIEGERSON
Glasgow

Resistance to racist repression in France

Since 2 May 2008 the Bourse du Travail, building of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) trade union federation, in Paris, has been occupied by around 800 men, women and children from the *Coordination des sans-papiers 75* (CSP75), in direct challenge to the CGT's attempts to stifle and control the movement. The CGT is closely allied with the social democratic French Communist Party. CSP75 is an umbrella group for all the self-organised *sans-papiers* collectives in the Paris region (the postcode for Paris is 75).

Repression and resistance

Repression of migrants has intensified in the last five years due to France's attempt to control immigration in the face of a growing economic crisis, rising unemployment and falling house sales. Detention capacity has increased from 790 in 2003 to 1,700 in 2008 in France's 22 Centres of Administrative Detention (CRA). In 2007, 35,000 people were imprisoned and 23,000 deported. This is below France's annual 'target' of 26,000 deportations and there are increasing raids on migrant workplaces and areas, with mass roundups of *sans-papiers* for detention and deportation.

Following the death on 21 June 2008 of Tunisian Belkacem Souli, the Vincennes CRA was burnt to the ground and 14 detainees escaped. After years of brutality there is growing resistance and hunger strikes, fires, refusals to lock down for the night and scuffles with police have become common. In August the CRA at Mesnil-Amelot, near Charles de Gaulle airport, was also set on fire.

Treachery and resistance

In November 2007 a new law obliged employers to submit residence permits

An inspirational new anti-racist movement is developing in France, taking on both the state and the opportunist trade unions and aid organisations. France has introduced four new anti-immigrant laws since 2004, leading to increased repression of migrant workers. In response, hunger strikes, demonstrations, workplace occupations and strikes accelerated with thousands marching to demand the legalisation of some 400,000 *sans-papiers* (undocumented migrants). CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

for their workers to the police. This was met by massive resistance, including strikes and workplace occupations, supported both by the CGT and by many employers from the hospitality (restaurant, cleaning), retail and construction industries, who are dependent on cheap labour in order to maintain profitability. Under pressure from the business lobby, the government amended the law in January 2008 to allow post-employment legalisation. An employer who has taken on an 'illegal' immigrant 'unknowingly' can therefore now apply to the *préfecture* (local police authority) for the person's status to be made legal.

After secret meetings with Immigration and National Identity Minister Brice Hortefeux, the CGT and human rights organisation *Droits Devant* accepted the government's insistence on 'case-by-case legalisation' and submitted 600 requests for legalisation of *sans-papiers* who are CGT members to the Paris *préfecture*. CSP75 then attempted to submit a further 1,000 applications but the *préfecture* refused to accept them and the CGT refused to assist, declaring the strike over and the movement terminated.

In response to this sell-out, CSP75 occupied the Bourse du Travail. CSP75 says it supports the CGT's applications

but, 'there are the other *sans-papiers*. Those who do not work, like the housewives, the children, the old, the sick...[and] all those who, despite working, cannot produce valid work documents or pay slips because they have always worked illegally, sometimes for decades, in the darkest/most illegal situations of exploitation.'

The CGT, together with various NGOs and 'left-wing' and aid organisations, tried to isolate the protesters, locking the main hall, blocking milk deliveries for the children and medical treatment, and telling others groups to boycott the 'divisive' occupation. The CGT demands that CSP75 end its occupation before it will take up its 1,000 cases, insisting that the files be handed over one by one to be examined for merit before submitting to the *préfecture*. CSP75 rejected what is effectively case-by-case treatment by the back-door, demanding that its 1,000 dossiers be considered on an equal basis with the CGT's. Some of the collectives within CSP75 take an even more radical stance, stating that they will not end the occupation without achieving total legalisation of all *sans-papiers*.

The *sans-papiers* movement in France is not divided along ethnic or national lines and this unity gives it an immense strength, which is now being



Sans-papiers demonstrate outside the Bourse shortly after the occupation began

built on in the latest stage of the struggle. The migrant workers occupying the Bourse demonstrate an increased level of political consciousness and awareness of the need to break from the opportunist grip of the trade unions. The occupation is well organised, producing a regular newsletter, holding demonstrations outside the Bourse twice a week, staging frequent marches, keeping in touch with other *sans-papiers* collectives across France and mobilising support from every possible quarter.

Victory to the *sans-papiers*!
No to immigration controls!

For more information visit:
<http://bourse.occupee.free.fr/>

ACTION AGAINST DEPORTATIONS

Attempted deportation to 'safe' Iraq

On 15 September, 60 Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers were taken from four detention centres in handcuffs, put into five coaches and driven to Stansted airport. Their mobile phones were confiscated to prevent them calling solicitors or friends. A German aircraft was waiting to take them to northern Iraq. One asylum seeker smashed a window of the plane, leading to violent beatings in retaliation. The flight was cancelled as a result; however the reprieve is certainly only temporary as the British government is desperate to effect successful deportations to northern Iraq to demonstrate that at least part of the country it has been 'liberating' for the past five years is 'safe'. The International Federation of Iraqi Refugees and the Coalition to Stop Deportations to Iraq are demanding the release of all Iraqi asylum seekers, an immediate end to forcible deportation and a boycott of Royal Jordanian Airline and all other complicit companies. For more information contact: Dashty Jamal 07856 032 991; d.jamal@ntlworld.com.

Criminalising Good Samaritans

On 17 March passengers on a British Airways flight to Lagos were appalled at the maltreatment of a Nigerian man being forcibly deported and made their views clear. BA employees called the police and 134 people were ordered off the flight. Passenger Ayodeji Omatode was dragged off by over 20 officers, thrown against a wall and then into a police van, arrested, held for eight hours and charged with threatening behaviour. BA banned him from flying with them, didn't return his fare and only gave him his luggage back a week later - damaged.

The Respect Nigerians Coalition is calling on 'all decent people everywhere' to boycott BA. They picketed the BA AGM earlier this year and demonstrated outside the Harmondsworth HQ of the company on 17 September. More information at <http://respectnigerians.com/>

Good riddance to XL

In February 2007 the government contracted XL Airways UK to deport 40 asylum seekers, including 19 children, to DR Congo. Despite nationwide protests, XL went ahead with the deportation. So we are delighted to learn that XL has collapsed and is no longer flying anyone anywhere.

Brutality at Dungavel removal camp

Dungavel, Scotland's only immigration removal centre (IRC), has for seven years stood as a testament to the British government's disregard for the human rights of society's most vulnerable people.

In June, *The Scotsman* revealed the harrowing story of black Canadian Corellie Bonhomme. While boarding a ferry from Belfast to Scotland, she was pinned down by immigration officials and her two-year-old daughter snatched and placed in care, before being detained in Dungavel. The lack of solicitors and the unyielding bureaucracy inside the IRC left her feeling suicidal. Her case caused widespread consternation. A spokesman for the Catholic Church stated that 'it is almost unconceivable that [such] conditions...can exist in 21st-century democratic Scotland. They display an alarming disregard of any consideration for human dignity.'

Such terrible stories have dripped out of Dungavel and other detention centres for years. However, what is increasingly difficult for the British government to deny is the systematic nature of the immigration system's violence. In July, Bimberg Peirce solicitors, Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns published *Outsourcing Abuse: the use and misuse of state-sanctioned force during the detention and removal of asylum seek-*

ers. The report reveals systemic abuse by private security within the immigration removal process, including physical beatings, psychological and emotional abuse and racist attacks, the detaining of babies, children and torture victims and the denial of emergency medical treatment.

Cases of abuse at Dungavel include:

- a Malawian man dragged from his bed and severely kicked and beaten while pinned to the ground; his head then smashed against a coffee table by seven guards, in full view of an IRC manager.

- a Cameroonian woman transported three times to Hairmyres Hospital to have a lump on her breast examined, handcuffed and under constant guard.

The 300-plus cases of abuse documented are 'just the tip of the iceberg.' The corporate website of GS4, the private company that runs Dungavel, and which also supplies mercenaries to Iraq and Kazakhstan, states 'we pride ourselves on ensuring that all of our detainees are cared for in a safe and secure environment where they are treated with dignity and respect at all times.'

The hellish Kafkaesque reality facing failed asylum seekers was further revealed in a *Sunday Herald* article 'Life inside Dungavel' (6 August 2008), which described 150% overcrowding, persistent staff shortages leaving inadequate cover for suicide watch and the fascistic practice of 'ghosting'.

'They are like ghosts, moved without warning or explanation in the dead of night, transported in unmarked vans. A silent cargo, often handcuffed, frozen by fear and unable to make a call or let their family know what is happening to them.'

In the words of one Dungavel employee:

'I would estimate that they move around 70-80% of detainees at night time. I have seen families arrive who are totally physically exhausted and devastated...Sometimes they are transported long distances in the police cells in the van. These are basically cages inside the vans. They are sometimes handcuffed.'

'But the main reason why they transport so many at night is that, the detainees are often hammering on the sides and shouting and if it was daytime, imagine the outcry if a van like that pulled up at the traffic lights.'

And this is precisely the point. The entire system is organised to artificially separate asylum seekers

Outsourcing abuse

The use and misuse of state-sanctioned force during the detention and removal of asylum seekers



A report by Bimberg Peirce & Partners, Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns. Reprinted by permission.

from the mass of the British working class and prevent solidarity. The brutality of Britain's treatment of immigrants is hidden, while racist lies and manipulation are employed to ensure they are seen as a problem rather than as victims.

Scottish liberals have continually called for an end to the detention of children at Dungavel and the Scottish government, which has no direct say on immigration policy, has stated its opposition to dawn raids and detention. However, the Scottish National Party has yet to take any meaningful action to back up its stated position. In contrast, Scottish people have taken to the streets to protest against the removal of families like the Vucaj family, with demonstrations on housing estates, direct action against dawn raids and protests at Dungavel.

Close down Dungavel! Close down the detention centres!

Joseph Eskovitch