

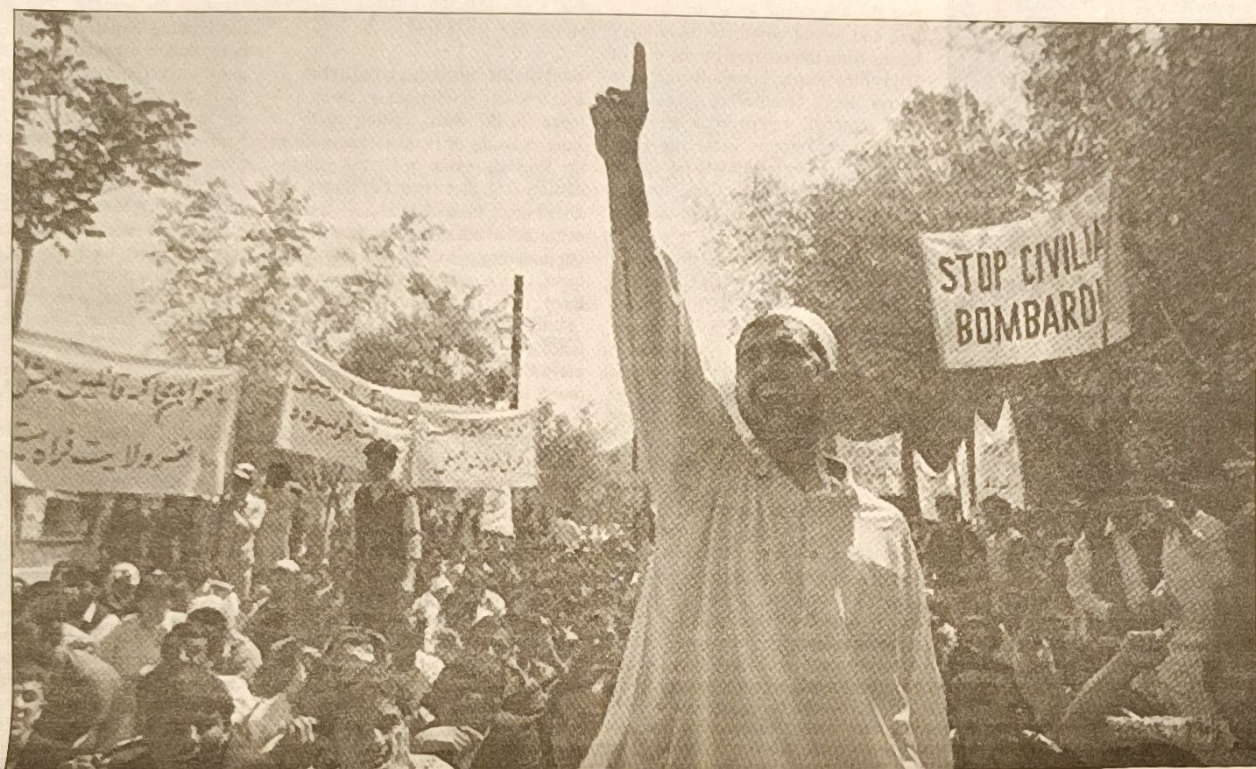
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Demonstration at Kabul university against attacks on civilians at Farah province

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WAR IN AFGHANISTAN DEEPER INTO THE MIRE

'Mr President, I'm not saying we wouldn't get our hair mussed. But I do say...no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops...depending on the breaks.' General Turgidson, *Dr Strangelove*

The clamour for more helicopters and equipment for British forces in Afghanistan and the tears and pomp for British war dead will not reduce the rising number of Afghani and British casualties in an immoral, imperialist war. Thousands of Afghani civilians have lost their lives. More weapons will sink British forces deeper into the mire. The grief of dead soldiers' families is exploited by the government to rally public support for the war. British imperialist forces are employed to kill and, if necessary, to be killed. **ANDREW ALEXANDER** reports on a war that has cost Britain over £4.5bn to date and has implications for an entire region.

Escalating casualties

The Afghani people are being traumatised as they continue to be subjected to brutal occupation by US and British forces. Hundreds of civilians have lost their lives in the past two months and countless more have been plunged into dire poverty with chronic water and food shortages. There are now 68,000 US and approximately 8,300 British troops in the country. It has been a bloody period for occupation forces with British casualties in

Afghanistan now surpassing the casualties in Iraq. Up until the middle of July 2009, 184 soldiers had lost their lives in Afghanistan, compared to 174 in Iraq. 2009 is likely to see the highest rates of deaths yet.

Anti-occupation forces are relying on guerrilla tactics, specifically the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). On 4/5 July three British soldiers were killed and on 6 July two US troops were killed, all by roadside bombs in the southern province of

Zabul, while four others were killed by similar devices in the province of Kunduz, close to Kabul. This tactic has been learned from the resistance in Iraq. In June alone there were 736 incidents of IEDs. Eight British soldiers were killed in the bloodiest day of fighting in Afghanistan on 10 July; amongst the casualties were three 18-year-olds on their first tour of duty. The average age of British casualties in Afghanistan is falling: during a worsening recession it is younger people who are joining the armed forces. 7% of British fatalities in Afghanistan were teenagers, 68% in their twenties. Despite the expressions of grief by the government towards these young people and their families, Brown and his Labour warmongers are still keen on using young soldiers as cannon fodder.

The demand for more helicopters reveals the occupation forces' problems; they are high profile while the anti-occupation forces are low profile: able to merge back into the local population. British and US forces cannot travel overland without being identified. The IEDs slow their manoeuvrability, delaying their response time. As yet the helicopters are protected by

electronic defences. Greater investment in the war increases the occupation forces' commitment and more deaths will follow.

The media exploits the deaths of British soldiers while avoiding mention of the number of Afghani civilians who have died. They try to justify the continuing occupation to an unconvinced public. Brown and his ministers still peddle the lie that the war in Afghanistan is making the streets of Britain safer from terrorist attacks. No one believes this any more, so we are also told that, whether we are for or against the war, we should mute our criticisms and 'get behind our boys'. This echoes the extreme patriotism used during the First World War to whip up public support and cover up the carnage.

Obama shows his war face

Operation Khanjar or 'Strike of the Sword' in Helmand province is the first major operation under President Obama's administration, as 21,000 more US troops are added to those already there. The operation involves 4,000 US troops and 650 Afghan troops. The aim is to tackle Taliban

strongholds and supply routes. US forces seek to crush the anti-occupation forces with daily repression – curfews, roadblocks, searches, identity checks and arbitrary detentions. NATO's counter-insurgency unit, headed by Obama's newly-appointed overseer General McChrystal, is setting up the Joint Special Operations Command, a brutal counter-insurgency unit similar to the one he created in Iraq which was responsible for assassinations and torture. He is preparing for a dramatic escalation of the killing by using methods employed during Operation Phoenix in the Vietnam war and by the death squads in El Salvador. Obama will provide the finance for this brutality and plans to spend \$2.47 trillion on the military budget over the next three years, in addition to the \$514 billion granted to the Pentagon this year.

There are constant calls by the British armed forces for more weaponry and personnel. The government has come under attack with claims that Tony Blair's pledge that 'You will have what you need' is not being met. Gordon Brown has stated he will

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WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

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bring 1,500 troops back after the Afghan presidential and provincial council elections in August, citing cost as the reason, but he will heed the call for further reinforcements.

Elections

The elections are aimed at legitimising Hamid Karzai's government and, de facto, the occupation. The imperialists want to delegate military operations to an Afghan security force. The elections will be one step closer to doing this. However, without a change in material conditions for the Afghan people, and with imperialist attacks encouraging ordinary people to make common cause with the Taliban-led insurgency, the troops will be forced to stay in the country for many years. The imperialists need some degree of stability for economic 'development', such as the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline that will run directly through Helmand province.

Pakistan faces civil war

The war is largely concentrated in Helmand province in south Afghanistan and in the Swat Valley in north-western Pakistan. These are tribal areas where the Pashtun people are the dominant ethnic group. The Swat Valley has seen ferocious fighting between Taliban militias and the Pakistani army, supported by the US. Over a million people have fled the area but tens of thousands of local Pashtuns have remained in Swat. There are no reliable figures for the number of dead and wounded. The Pashtuns in Pakistan face the direst conditions, with basic food and water supplies



President Karzai strikes a deal with NATO

depleted to dangerous levels and electricity and gas cut off in the majority of places.

The Pakistani army is winning in Swat. In retaliation the Pakistani Taliban is extending its war to other areas of Pakistan, using suicide attacks against establishments such as hotels and offices in Pakistani cities. The Pakistani government is feeling the strain of fighting this war. According to the *Financial Times* the conflict costs the country £5.2 billion a year in terms of lost exports, lost investments, increased expenses and lost revenue. This has combined with US incursions and bombings from planes and unmanned drones into South Waziristan, a tribal area in north Pakistan, which have left hundreds of civilians dead. A single attack by an unmanned drone on 8 July killed 60 people. The Pakistan government has found itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. By siding with the US, the Pakistani state is slipping closer to unrest and possible civil war.

Iraq Obama's great vanishing trick

On 4 June President Obama made a speech at Cairo University that was intended to cement 'better relations' between the US and the Muslim world. The cornerstone of the speech was a promise that the US would keep no bases in Iraq and would withdraw its military forces from the country by the end of 2011. Fine words, but reality does not mirror them. Obama has stated that only 'combat' troops will be withdrawn; such troops make up only about a third of the 130,000 US forces still in Iraq. The rest of the military personnel have now been re-labelled 'advisors' so that they can stay on in the areas vacated by 'combat' troops.

Language helps sow the illusion of withdrawal. The imperialist governments and the bourgeois press use such doubletalk to deceive their own public. Iraq is not going to be a client state, they say, but, in the words of General Odierno, the highest US commanding officer in Iraq, it is 'a long-term partner with the United States in the Middle East'. The US embassy in Iraq is by far the biggest in the world, housing not just 'diplomats' and various 'assistants' but military technicians and intelligence chiefs. The US is setting the conditions for a long-term presence in the region.

The US marked 30 June as the date for its 'withdrawal' from Iraq's cities and made a big show. The Iraqi puppet government represented by President Nouri Al-Maliki marked the day as a 'great victory'. A victory for whom? Presumably not the Iraqi people, hundreds of thousands of whom have been murdered, traumatised, and left in dire poverty.

30 June did not mark independence for Iraq. Though US troops may now be less visible on the streets, the US military is still effectively running the country. The Iraqi security force is being directed in all major respects by the pervasive US military advisers still embedded in Iraq.

Sectarian violence returns

Iraq has suffered further sectarian violence. In the week leading up to 30 June, a string of bombs, including in the Kurdish region of Kirkuk and the eastern Baghdad district of Sadr City, killed more than 200 people. A series of further attacks, again mainly sectarian in nature, also followed the 'hand-over'. Such attacks have been fostered, directly and indirectly, by US intelligence services. Sectarian violence can be useful for the US as it plays two roles. Firstly, it thwarts any move towards a unified Sunni-Shia-Kurdish anti-occupation resistance and, secondly, helps the US to justify its continued military presence. This also helps to maintain the view that the Iraqi security forces, though ready to die in military operations, are not yet able to command them.

Let the bidding commence!

'Iraq is the last big, low-cost play in conventional oil anywhere in the world,' says Bill Farren-Price, a Middle East expert and energy director at Medley Global Advisors. Iraq not only has the world's third largest official reserves of oil at 115 billion barrels but, due to three decades of war and sanctions, its vast oil fields are uniquely underexploited. It is no surprise that bidding for drilling licences at the end

of June attracted more than 30 oil companies from around the world.

The licence round was meant to raise Iraqi oil production from 2.4 million barrels a day to 4 million, and provide the lucky winners with huge revenues for years to come. However, the bidding exposed a massive gulf between the expectations of the companies and those of the government, so in the end just one contract was signed. The government needs money for reconstruction, yet its income has plunged due to a collapse in oil prices over the last year. So the government sought to squeeze the oil companies, but they were not open to being squeezed. They walked away from the bidding table promising to return only when a better deal is on offer.

The Iraqi government exerts little control over Iraqi oil revenues. The Development Fund for Iraq, whose revenues are deposited in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, was established under the auspices of the UN after the invasion and receives 95% of the proceeds from Iraq's oil sales. The solitary signed contract was jointly won by BP and China's CNPC to produce oil at the giant Rumaila field near the Kuwaiti border. Whoever wins the contracts in the future, the US embassy will almost certainly be responsible for inspecting and supervising the contract winners, while the US military and private contractors will become guarantors of their security. Fayed Al Nema, the CEO of the Iraqi South Oil Company, said that the contracts, if approved, would 'put the Iraqi economy in chains and shackle its independence for the next 20 years.'

Andrew Alexander

Iran Ruling class divided

Over one million people gathered in Tehran on 15 June to protest against the results of the 12 June presidential election. This was the largest rally in the city since the 1978-79 Iranian revolution which overthrew the Shah. The crowds were drawn from all social classes and they presented the Islamic Republic with its most serious internal challenge in 30 years. However, the majority of the protestors supported the defeated candidate, former Prime Minister Mousavi, who has no intention of threatening the state, but rather seeks to adjust its policies away from those of President Ahmadinejad. A combination of state repression, the intervention of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in support of Ahmadinejad, and lack of leadership, resulted in the protests subsiding – for now.

The Iranian revolution produced a victorious alliance of the bazaar or merchant bourgeoisie and the clerical establishment at the expense of socialists and the working class. Many socialists were killed by both the Shah's regime and the Islamic Republic that succeeded it. New factions of the bourgeoisie have emerged and are competing for power within the state. These tensions surfaced during the presidential campaign and provided a political space in which mass discontent was expressed.

Half of Iran's 70 million people were born after the revolution. Following migration from the countryside 44% of the urban population live in slums. Such conditions, combined with the absence of established political parties, make for a volatile electorate; all the more so as economic hardship has bitten deeply. Inflation is officially 25% but is really far higher. Unemployment is 30% and record numbers of Iranians are living in poverty. Property prices collapsed in 2008, industrial production is close to

half of capacity, debts go unpaid, including from private banks to the state bank. Oil provides 50% of the country's income but falling oil prices have driven it down in the past year. Factions of the ruling class want to encourage US and European investment in the oil and gas industry and view Ahmadinejad as a menace to this because of the positions his government has taken on Israel and imperialism and its strident defence of nuclear enrichment provoking sanctions against Iran.

All presidential candidates were vetted by the cleric-run Guardian Council and all of them were capitalists. Ahmadinejad was supported by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, the three million-strong Revolutionary Guards and the affiliated Basij militia. The Revolutionary Guards have substantial investments in industry and finance. Mousavi's backers included senior clerics, former president Khatami, the mayor of Tehran and notably Ayatollah Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani personifies the 'millionaire mullahs'; his

family is one of the richest in Iran: one brother owns the country's largest copper mine, another heads the state television network, a cousin dominates the pistachio business and his sons control parts of the oil and construction industries. However, Mousavi also had backing from trade unions and sections of the women's movement. For these people Mousavi represented an opportunity to push for democratic reforms and against religious oppression. Mousavi promised pro-business policies, accelerated privatisation and a solution to the housing crisis. He received significant support from the bazaar capitalists.

The votes were counted by the Interior Ministry, led by a supporter of Ahmadinejad, and it reported that 39 million people, 85% of the electorate, had voted, with 63% for Ahmadinejad and 34% for Mousavi. To many Iranians this was implausible and they protested in several cities. The state responded by banning demonstrations, threatening people with execution and sending out thousands of armed Revolutionary Guards and Basijis. At least 20 people were killed, maybe many more, and 4,000 Mousavi supporters were arrested. Foreign journalists were expelled, newspapers and websites were shut down and telecommunications were disrupted. The government claimed that the 'hand' of Britain was behind the protests and nine British embassy staff were arrested. On 17 July Rafsanjani gave a sermon at Tehran University, saying that the regime was in crisis and criticising the repression of the protestors. Crowds chanted 'Death to the dicta-



Protesters on the streets of Tehran, 17 July 2009

tor', 'Death to Russia' and 'Death to China' – Russia and China recognised the Ahmadinejad victory. Rafsanjani made no criticism of Khamenei and must be seeking to pressure dominant clerics against Ahmadinejad and the faction he represents.

US manoeuvres

Between 2005 and 2009 the US Congress allocated \$400 million to 'promote democracy' in Iran. Also, the CIA funds armed groups against the Iranian state. On 27 May the *Daily Telegraph* reported on CIA plans for 'a propaganda and disinformation campaign intended to destabilise, and eventually topple' the Islamic Republic. On 21 June CNN interviewed former National Security Adviser to President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski said of the founding of the Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980, 'I was up to my ears in dealing with it and trying to steer and manipulate it.' On regime change in Iran Brzezinski said that it was desirable and would provide 'greater accommodation' to the US, but it requires 'intelligent manipulation'. Brzezinski additionally played a role in gathering the counter-revolutionary mujahadeen in Afghanistan. He is close to the cur-

rent US government.

US President Obama has dropped the demand that Iran stop enriching uranium before negotiations between the US and Iran can take place. He also apologised for the US and British coup against the democratically elected Iranian government in 1953. The US will seek to encourage elements in the Iranian ruling class whose interests are threatened by economic sanctions and who want closer ties to US and European imperialism to advance their businesses and positions. This will be done covertly. If subtle methods fail, the US will consider force. On 5 July US Vice President Biden said, 'If the Israelis decide Iran is an existential threat, [and] they have to take out the nuclear programme militarily, the United States will not stand in the way... We cannot dictate to another sovereign nation what they can or cannot do...' Senior US military commanders continue claiming that Iran supports the Taliban in Afghanistan. For socialists in Britain we must oppose all attempts by the US and British states to intervene in Iran, oppose all sanctions against the country and military threats from the US, Israel and Britain.

Trevor Rayne

Put Labour war criminals on trial for torture

'The main responsibility lies with those who established the policy of abuse, not with the functionaries who carried out their orders.' Binyam Mohamed

The British government is under pressure. With even sections of the ruling class now denouncing the shadowy, sinister role played in the 'war on terror' by the intelligence services, and demanding to know which ministers knew what when, this Labour government is increasingly unable to hide behind the fiction of 'national security' as more and more evidence of its secret and illegal policy on torture is forced into the public domain. CAT WIENER reports.

'Outsourcing' torture

On 7 July, using parliamentary privilege, Shadow Home Secretary David Davis was able to reveal hitherto secret evidence in the case of Rangzieb Ahmed from Manchester, who is serving a life sentence in Britain on terrorism charges after being detained and tortured in Pakistan. He has consistently claimed that MI5 were involved in questioning him during his detention in Pakistan, ignoring his claims of torture and clear signs of ill-treatment. What Davis revealed was that MI5 and Greater Manchester police had had enough evidence to prosecute Ahmed on serious terrorism charges in 2005. Nonetheless, he was permitted to travel to Pakistan so that he could be detained by the Pakistan security service ISI – notorious for the torture and ill-treatment of detainees – on a tip-off from MI6. As Davis made clear:

'We...know that the intelligence officer who wrote to the Pakistanis did so in full knowledge of the normal methods used by the ISI against terrorist suspects that it holds...The officer would therefore be aware that "suggesting" arrest was equivalent to "suggesting" torture.'

In Pakistan, Ahmed was beaten with cables and rubber whips, deprived of sleep, sexually humiliated and had three fingernails extracted, while facing questions drawn up by MI5 and Greater Manchester Police. He was also visited by MI5.

Pakistani intelligence sources told Human Rights Watch that in another case, that of Salahuddin Amin, convicted in Britain in 2007 on terrorist charges after being tortured into making a false confession, British and US demand for information was 'insatiable' and added that the British and US agents who were party to his detention were 'perfectly aware that we were using all means possible to extract information from him and were grateful that we were doing so'.

Lawyers for Amin and Ahmed are taking legal action to force the Home Secretary to 'establish a public inquiry to investigate the complicity of government employees in the illegal detention and torture' of both men and several others. In April 2009, Rangzieb Ahmed was visited in his cell by MI5 and a police officer who attempted to bribe him to drop the torture allegations.

Davis also cited 15 other cases in the last year of 'British citizens or residents claiming to be tortured by foreign intelligence agencies with the knowledge, complicity and in some cases, presence of British intelligence officers' and decried the government's 'improper use of state secrecy

to cover up the evidence' of British collusion in torture.

'All the way to Number 10'

What is now known is that none of these cases – and this is but the tip of the iceberg – was simply the actions of a few rogue security agents but rather, followed an official, secret new policy on torture that was drawn up after 2001 by senior government lawyers and security services chiefs and sanctioned at the very highest levels of government. As Tony Blair put it, 'the rules of the game have changed'. In direct contravention of the Geneva Conventions, international human rights legislation and British domestic law – which makes it a crime for any British official to even acquiesce to torture – the new guidance made it clear that while agents must be at pains not to be seen to condone torture, if detainees 'are not within our custody or control, the law does not require you to intervene' to prevent torture. And so, through this legal sleight of hand, the policy of outsourcing torture – to Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates – by Britain was enshrined.

The fiction of an all-pervasive 'national security' was invoked at every turn to cover up the fact that suspects were routinely sent to countries where they could be tortured on behalf of the British security services and convicted on testimony extracted through torture. Small wonder that Reprieve director Clive Stafford Smith has argued that the government's ever-expanding fixation with secrecy under



Rangzieb Ahmed arrested on his return to Britain from Pakistan after the British government had colluded in his detention and torture

the guise of 'protecting national security' is in fact a desperate attempt to avoid prosecution for war crimes.

'We now know why the Foreign Secretary was so insistent on keeping this torture policy from the British people,' Stafford Smith said. 'It has nothing to do with national security and everything to do with the Pandora's box of immoral decisions made at the highest level of government.'

Responsibility for this criminal policy goes, he argues, 'all the way to Number 10'. It was approved by then Prime Minister Tony Blair as well as then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and almost certainly then Home Secretary David Blunkett. Craig Murray, who was British ambassador to Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2004, sent reports back to Britain highlighting his con-

cerns about British collusion with the CIA in the torture of suspects. He was summoned back to Britain to be told that 'it is not illegal for us to obtain intelligence gained by torture, provided that we did not do the torture ourselves. I was told that it had been decided that as a matter of War on Terror policy we should now obtain intelligence from torture, following discussion between Jack Straw and [MI6 chief] Richard Dearlove...In conclusion, I can testify that beyond any doubt the British government has for at least six years had a considered but secret policy of co-operation with torture abroad. This policy was cleared by government legal advisers and approved by Jack Straw as Secretary of State'.

When current Foreign Secretary David Miliband – who has twisted and turned to avoid the truth about Binyam Mohamed being revealed – told the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) 'We would never say to another intelligence agency "please get us information about X" and...abandon our legal and ethical commitments in respect of how you find that', he lied. When Blair claims he never authorised the use of torture, he lies, as do Straw and Blunkett and current Labour Prime Minister Brown and all the other compromised ministers who endlessly repeat their stale mantra of how Britain would 'never condone torture': that is exactly what they did.

While Brown has bowed to pressure and said that the policy will be rewritten, David Miliband has appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee to vigorously assert the government's right to keep earlier editions of the policy secret lest it 'give succour to our enemies'. He added that the policy had been reviewed by the ISC, which was fully able to 'square the circle between secrecy and accountability'. This is the same ISC that sits in secret,

its reports to the prime minister published only after being censored in consultation with the intelligence agencies themselves, and it is headed by Kim Howells, himself Labour's Foreign Office minister during the period when much of the torture occurred.

Bring Labour war criminals to justice

In the past, the ruling class has been more than happy to sanction torture to further its imperialist rule of terror, for example in Ireland and Kenya. But years of diligent reporting by journalists such as the *Guardian's* Ian Cobain, who has doggedly followed the trail of government-sanctioned crimes, torture and rendition flights, and Andy Worthington of *Counterpunch*, together with relentless campaigning by detainees, their families and lawyers, have forced evidence of government and security services collusion with torture into the public domain. Establishment voices are calling for an inquiry. Some, such as the military and intelligence figures who form the Institute of Public Policy Research's security commission fear that the use of torture will backfire, providing 'a propaganda coup for radical jihadi groups'; opposition parties sense that the Labour government is fatally wounded and are baying to bring it down.

But whatever inquiry emerges from these manoeuvres will be a whitewash if it does not result in the criminal prosecution of Tony Blair and Jack Straw, who when in office deliberately made torture into official policy, and Gordon Brown, former Home Secretary David Blunkett and Jacqui Smith and Foreign Secretary David Miliband who were complicit in the cover-up. Anyone who can still call for a vote for Labour is no less morally bankrupt than this vile, blood-soaked government of torturers and criminals.

Law Lords condemn control orders

On 10 June, British Law Lords delivered a resounding blow to the government's use of control orders, finding, in effect, that the right to a fair trial overrides 'national security' claims. Following this ruling, on 28 June, the High Court quashed control orders imposed on six Iraqi men living in Britain.

Control orders, introduced in 2005, are a draconian form of house arrest. Suspects are tagged, restricted in whom they can meet or talk to and where they can go, forbidden to use the internet or mobile phones and subject to unannounced raids by the Home Office.

Suspects do not know what they are accused of, and any evidence against them can only be seen by a special advocate – who is not however allowed to discuss that evidence with their client. They cannot work or study, family life is destroyed; some have become suicidal.

In the case of three men identified only as AF, AE and AN, the nine Law Lords unanimously ruled that control orders breach Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to a fair trial. As Lord Hope of Craighead put it 'The fundamental principle is that everyone is entitled to the disclosure of sufficient material to enable him to answer effectively the case against him...If the rule of law is to mean anything, it is in cases such as these that the court must stand by principle.'

Cat Wiener

British murder, torture and rendition

Baha Mousa was working as a hotel receptionist in Basra in 2003 when British troops surrounded the building and arrested him along with six other men. They were taken to a British barracks, hooded and beaten. Two days later Mousa was dead. His family was given \$3,000 and rejected a further \$5,000. What they wanted was justice. Like countless other Iraqi families they are still waiting for justice. The Ministry of Defence faces hundreds of claims for abuse and torture of Iraqi civilians by British soldiers. As Andrew Johnson in *The Independent* states, 'Lawyers say emerging evidence of abuses, including use of electric shocks, points to a systematic policy of sensory deprivation and beatings throughout the occupation of Basra, which must have been authorised by senior officers and politicians and known to hundreds of soldiers.' It is inconceivable that

the government was not aware of such systematic abuse. The government has also been forced to reluctantly agree to an inquiry into the massacre of 20 civilians.

Meanwhile interviews by the BBC with 27 prisoners held at Bagram airbase in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2008 reveal a regime of routine beatings, noise torture and shackling in 'stress' positions. There is evidence that Britain has rendered at least two prisoners in its custody to that base.

No prisoner in Bagram has been allowed to see a lawyer, or challenge his detention. The US justice department argues that because Afghanistan is an active combat zone it is not possible to conduct rigorous inquiries into individual cases and that it would divert precious military resources at a crucial time.

Andrew Alexander

Socialists and the fight against the British National Party

The collapse of the Labour vote in the 4 June European election has created a crisis on the left. With 15.7% of the vote (22.9% in the 2004 European election), Labour came third behind the Tories (27.7%) and UKIP (16.5%). The number voting BNP (943,500, 6.2%) was three times the number voting for the Socialist Labour Party (173,000) and for No2EU (153,000) together, and enabled it to win two seats. The Scottish Socialist Party obtained a mere 10,000 votes.

The left's response has been to issue yet further calls for electoral unity, this time focusing on the general election which has to take place by May 2010, arguing for example that 'In the first instance, we need to build the broadest possible unity in action to isolate and drive back the BNP' (Alex Callinicos, *Socialist Review*, July/August 2009), a call echoed by many others. In presenting the need to fight the BNP as the priority for socialists, however, the left is both over-playing the strength of fascism, and under-playing the strength of racism that is the norm of bourgeois politics in Britain today. Within the European Parliament, for instance, UKIP MEPs have made a great show of shunning the BNP. Yet they have formed a bloc with viciously racist organisations such as the Italian Liga Nord, whose leader has suggested opening fire on boats of illegal immigrants landing on Italian shores; the openly anti-Muslim Danish Folkeparti and the anti-semitic Greek Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos. The Tories have also organised their own grouping which includes the homophobic Polish Law and Justice Party, and the Latvian Fatherland and Freedom party, whose members have honoured Waffen SS veterans. Bourgeois politics and racism in Britain go hand in hand.

But it is Labour which makes racism respectable in the working class. At the end of June, the government published *Building Britain's Future*, trailed as its future election manifesto. It says that 'in every community, our national policies such as managing migration or building and allocating social housing, are tangible, real, and seen to be fair.' The link between immigration and housing is quite deliberate, pandering to the widely-peddled racist myth that immigrants and asylum seekers jump the queue for council housing. In fact fewer than 2% of social housing tenants have arrived in this country over the last five years according to a July report from the Institute of Public Policy Research. Continuing, *Building Britain's Future* says 'migrants must con-

tribute and play by the rules' and that 'in tough economic times it is right to be more selective about the skill level of migrants, and to do more to put British workers first. It is even more important that communities see those who come to Britain contributing, and embracing our sense of fair play – working hard, respecting our way of life'. Continuing the pretence that there is some connection between immigration and social housing allocation, the document says 'we will change the current rules for allocating council and other social housing, enabling local authorities to give more priority to local people.' The racism is naked.

So when Callinicos and the rest of the left call for the 'maximum possible unity' to defeat the BNP, they are inviting us to join a coalition of racists, which in the case of the SWP's Unite Against Fascism includes Zionists, Tories and Ulster Unionists as well as leading members of the Labour Party. What they self-servingly ignore is that it is Labour which has the power to make the lives of black people, immigrants and asylum seekers a misery in Britain today far more than the BNP. It is Labour which is driving asylum seekers to destitution, incarcerating and deporting them – not the BNP. It is Labour which uses police to harass black people and Muslims on a daily basis. More than that: it is Labour which defends police murders such as that of Jean Charles de Menezes, and which sanctioned their use of violence against Kingsnorth and G20 demonstrators. It is Labour which murders Afghan people. It is Labour which turns a blind eye to rendition flights and sanctions torture. It is Labour which has built fewer than 2,500 council houses in the last 12 years. It is Labour which has reduced unemployment benefit by 25% in relative terms since 1997 and made it even more difficult for the unemployed to live. Labour has powers which the BNP can only dream about.

In saying that fighting the BNP is the priority, the left is downplaying the culpability of the Labour Party in order not to disrupt its cosy relationship with Labour's left wing. Undoubtedly socialists have to fight against fascist attacks, but it has to be part and parcel of organising a movement against state racism. The priority now is to build that movement, one which brings together those fighting against deportation of asylum seekers or immigrant workers, those fighting police racism attacks, but it has to be part and parcel of organising a movement against state racism. The priority now is to build that movement, one which brings together those fighting against deportation of asylum seekers or immigrant workers, those fighting police racism attacks, but it has to be part and parcel of organising a movement against state racism. The priority now is to build that movement, one which brings together those fighting against deportation of asylum seekers or immigrant workers, those fighting police racism attacks, but it has to be part and parcel of organising a movement against state racism.

Robert Clough



Socialists have to fight against fascist attacks, but it has to be part and parcel of organising a movement against state racism.

Why does the British left attack Cuba?

On Saturday 11 July, Rock around the Blockade (RATB) supporters were subjected to a stream of anti-Cuban prejudice when the organisation debated the case for Cuban socialism with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL). RATB agreed to the debate because we recognise that as the crisis deepens, it is the urgent task of socialists to confront imperialism and build an anti-imperialist movement in this country. Cuba is in the forefront of that struggle world-wide and its stance is recognised by progressive and revolutionary forces throughout the world. As it continues to denigrate Cuba's achievements and its principled standpoint, the Trotskyist left in Britain, always completely hostile to Cuban socialism, is now playing a counter-revolutionary role.

For the AWL, Paul Hampton rejected any suggestion that Cuba was socialist, arguing it was impossible because the Cuban revolution had not been an act of 'working class self-emancipation': 'no socialism is possible without the conscious active role of the working class'. The AWL say Cuba is a class society – 'Stalinism' – where 'the state owns the means of production, and a totalitarian bureaucratic ruling class controls the state and extracts the surplus product from workers and peasants'; the Cuban revolution is an 'historical abortion'.

Hampton's position, in essentials the same as the rest of the Trotskyist left, is that Cuban society is not socialist but capitalist: there is no mode of production which Trotskyists can call 'Stalinist' without making a nonsense of Marxism. When this was pointed out in the debate there were guffaws: Marx had not been alive at the time of Stalin, so who could imagine his views about the Soviet Union or Cuba? This reduces Marxism to empiricism. The give-away is that Hampton focused on the mode of distribution of the surplus product and evaded the more fundamental question of the mode of production.

In opening the debate, Helen Yaffe for Rock around the Blockade exposed the left for its mechanistic view of revolution: Cuba's 'original sin' was that the revolutionary movement had not been led by the trade unions. She explained why this had been the case – the corruption and gangsterism of Cuban unions under Batista – and then gave many examples of Cuban working class involvement in the struggle. She pointed out that the British left dismiss Cuban sources of information about the revolution, and instead bases its arguments on material provided by Cubanology, a collective term for academic opposition to the Cuban revolution sponsored by the US government and corporations. Particularly valued as Cubanologists, she said, are those who attack Cuba while claiming to be socialist: for example, Samuel Farber (see www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frifpages/198/FRFI_198_far.html).

Hampton's example of the 'lack' of working class freedom in Cuba was the fact that 'in 1983 when an independent trade union along *Solidarnosc* lines tried to form, it was crushed and its members threatened'. Yet the main purpose of such an 'independent' trade union, in Cuba as in Poland, would have been to organise for the restoration of capitalism. As one RATB supporter said in the debate, socialism is class rule: seizing state power is the first step; retaining it is an altogether more difficult proposition and requires the suppression of counter-revolutionary forces. The AWL's concept of democracy – soviets, workers' councils – is purely formal: in Cuba, the mass organisations have taken a different form but are still organs of working class power.

During the debate one AWL supporter melodramatically suggested that

'if anyone in Cuba raised our politics they would be a walking corpse' – rich for an organisation that supports the Labour Party, responsible for millions of very real corpses. Another declared that although she was 'not an expert on Cuba' she was an 'expert on revolutionary struggle' – an 'expert' whose concept of revolutionary struggle is to call for a vote for the racist, imperialist Labour Party. A third said that gay pride was banned in Cuba – a fiction possible because of AWL's reliance on Cubanology.



May Day in Havana: tens of thousands of Cuban workers demonstrate their support for the revolution

A Cuban supporter of RATB said 'I am a Cuban, and I am working class, my whole family is working class. How can you prove the government is exploiting us? I am proud to be working class; I can be involved in the Cuban revolution as much as I want to be. How can you prove what you say?' This is the essence of the problem. Once you have decided that Cuba is not socialist then you will twist facts to prove it. In his summing up, therefore, Hampton gave as an example of how his 'Stalinist ruling class' expropriates the surplus product the fact that agencies employing people who work in the tourist industry are paid in dollars, but the government takes the dollars and pays the workers in pesos. Socialists, however, understand that this both funds universal social welfare and limits the inequalities that would arise if the workers were paid hard currency direct.

Hampton and his supporters say there was no single event that could be called a socialist revolution in Cuba. Yet there was a socialist revolution: not in one single act, but in a series of stages through to 1962. In her summing up Helen Yaffe cited Lenin's conception when he replied to left opponents (including Trotsky) who criticised the 1916

Dublin Easter Rising:

'To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression...to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution!' (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 22 pp355-56)

Overall the AWL and the Trotskyist left raise a wholly implausible concept of a Cuban working class in complete subjection to a rapacious and ruthless ruling class. Yet they cannot cite an instance where the army has been used against the Cuban people since the revolution. They cannot cite death squads, concentration camps, disappearances, all manifestations of class oppression in Latin America in the past decades. Truly it is a peculiar form of class rule which seeks and achieves the highest

educational and cultural standards for the people, and which actively supports democratic anti-imperialist movements. How can this be? Why did Cuban workers not rise up during the worst years of the Special Period? How were they terrified into submission? Where was the repression, the overflowing jails? The stance of Samuel Farber and his Trotskyist disciples is little more than chauvinism: the Cubans should have waited for a socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries because they were incapable of making their own.

The standpoint of the AWL is petit bourgeois socialism, whose theoretical premise is the rejection of Lenin's standpoint on imperialism, and whose politics are undying support for the Labour Party or Old Labour. It organises amongst a privileged stratum of the population whose affluent lifestyle depends on the parasitism of British imperialism, and whose privileges the Labour Party was established to defend, along with the interests of British imperialism. It is typical that Hampton focuses so much on the distribution of the social product in Cuba: how much of the social product falls to the petit bourgeoisie was ever their principal concern.

Robert Clough

Education notes

'Those are my principles – if you don't like them I have others' GROUCHO MARX

Alan Milburn and James Purnell are two Labour cabinet ministers who resigned earlier this year as revelations about expenses claims and payments for outside jobs accelerated the decline of electoral support for Labour. Since then both men have criticised Labour's record – not a difficult task. Purnell – who wants to charge the unemployed 26% interest for crisis loans – argues that 'we will be a more successful country if we open up to free trade; we need to say that immigration is good for the country'. Milburn – who supports the privatisation of the NHS – takes the line that personal education vouchers of £5,000 are necessary to 'unleash aspirations' for education and training for those whose parents are not rich (the Tory voucher scheme). This thrashing around for soundbite politics is not just the noise of those who are leaving a sinking ship. It is the sound of electoral opportunism as Labour manoeuvres to win the next election. For Cabinet Minister John Denham the problem is just that 'the number of people who sign up to a traditional egalitarian view of society is simply too small to construct a strong, viable and inclusive electoral coalition'.

Education in the unplanned economy

Disagreement over electoral tactics is one thing, but what are we to make of contradictory statements that come



Ed Balls and Gordon Brown with school students

out of the mouth of just one minister? Cabinet Minister Ed Balls' July statement on the future of education is just such a mess. First he decreed the death of Key Stage 3 SATS, and then announced the end of the National Strategies on numeracy and literacy because the government wants 'to move away from a central view of school improvement' – at the same time as announcing a new set of directives based on 'a central view of school improvement'. These include a national

standard school report card, grouping schools into federations and relicensing teachers every five years. This parcel of new initiatives is gift-wrapped with the vision thing: 'parents are to be guaranteed an education tailored to their child's needs'. In fact Balls can say anything he thinks his audience may want to hear because, in the final analysis, the future of state education in Britain is at the disposal of economic interests that Labour is not prepared to challenge.

Passing the buck

Indeed, on winning the 1997 election, Labour opted to sell off government responsibility for education provision on a huge scale with a massive privatisation and outsourcing programme. It produced central government management targets and national dictates for the public service sector but at the same time broke up big spending government departments like education and health and to a large extent dismantled local government control. Its favoured vehicle for running the public sector is the quango. A quango is a half-government, half-business organisation, or 'quasi-autonomous non governmental organisation'. The Tory government of 1979-1997 encouraged the growth of quangos as a deliberate policy to undermine what it regarded as 'big government'. Labour seized on this and accelerated this move with the result that today there are an estimated 1162 quangos employing about 700,000 workers at a cost to the government of about £64 billion a year. These groups are nominally independent but rely on government funding – for example the British Council and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Today teacher training, public payroll services and prison security are just some of the functions that are privatised or quangosed. Job Centre Plus has 70,042 staff and an income of £3.5 billion to provide employment services. Hundreds of smaller quangos support a bureaucracy that makes special bids for selected clients, like City Spaces or Addaction. Together they undermine the principles of universal benefits, replacing this with the anarchy of the market place.

Quangos rule

Quango directors are unelected, usually very well paid and are often 'insiders' – retired politicians, people in the know. This has been described as the 'revolving door' between government and business. David Blunkett, the MP for Sheffield Brightside

and former Secretary for Work and Pensions, is also a director of A4e, a leading employment and training firm that is bidding for multimillion pound contracts in the UK from his former department and is expanding its business around the world. There was a fuss over Blunkett's delay in registering a paid trip to South Africa in his record of members' interests. A4e's income is paid for by the government according to the number of people they get back into employment. The system is ripe for corruption and creative accountancy. Another quango, Train to Gain, gets government money to offer employers free training schemes in local colleges. Recently Further Education college heads have seen their income dry up because Train to Gain has been accused of paying employers 'inappropriate incentives' (money) to join the scheme which then limits the places available because college budgets have been diverted into the pockets of private business.

Today it is impossible for the government, any government, to plan the state provision of education with even the appearance of accountability and democratic involvement. The ideological attack on state welfare has led to chaos where government policy must be mediated through private sector business interests, unaccountable quangos and authoritarian ministries. The system thrives on the vested interests and the financial success of thousands of education 'providers'. Conservative leader David Cameron is setting out his election stall and although he announced a 'bonfire of the quangos', Tory plans would mean setting up 17 new quangos, including two for further education and an all-age careers service. Whatever the result, we can be sure of one thing: forthcoming cuts in public spending will be deep and attack the working class and their children.

Susan Davidson

Lindsey oil dispute – workers win victory against victimisation

TOM VINCENT

In direct retaliation for the successful strikes by engineering construction workers in February, on 11 June 51 workers employed by contractor Shaws at Lindsey Oil Refinery were made redundant without consultation or the national industry norm of the opportunity to transfer to another of the site's contractors, and with only a week's pay in lieu of notice. At the same time another contractor at the site took on 60 new workers to perform similar work. According to the GMB union, a senior manager at the Total site blamed the refusal of the option to transfer on 'an unruly workforce who had taken part in unofficial disputes and who won't work weekends'.

Following an appeal from a mass meeting at Lindsey on 16 June for solidarity action across the industry, on 19 June contractors, with the backing of Total, announced the sacking of a further 647 workers for participating in unofficial strikes. Total initially agreed to talks with unions and ACAS, but then failed to turn up. The 647 workers were given the option to reapply for their jobs with a deadline of 5pm on 22 June, a clear attempt to weed out leading trade unionists. Workers responded by publicly burning their dismissal notices. By the end of 22 June thousands of workers across over 20 sites had come out in solidarity, including Polish workers at Drax in



Construction workers burn their dismissal notices

North Yorkshire, with 900 contract workers at the Sellafield plant in Cumbria stopping work for three days.

Faced with such unity, the employers almost immediately began to back down, with Total issuing statements on 23 June expressing a hope that its subcontractors at Lindsey would soon reach an agreement allowing work to resume. On the same day, as 2,000 workers rallied outside Lindsey, Unite and GMB officially endorsed the strikes, with GMB pledging a £100,000 hardship fund. By 29 June workers voted to return to work on the basis of an agreement reached between Unite and GMB and the man-

aging contractor Jacobs, including the full reinstatement of all sacked workers for at least four weeks, following which national terms would be followed for any further redundancies. However, as of 10 July the Lindsey strike committee reported that Jacobs were still stalling over full implementation of the agreement.

The danger of a chauvinist direction to the actions in the industry, which reared its head in the early days of the January strikes with the use of the slogan 'British jobs for British workers', has still not disappeared. Although sections of the left involved in the strike claim that the slogan 'An injury to one

is an injury to all' has replaced it as the dominant slogan, 'British jobs for British workers' continues to form the front page of the strikers' *Bearfacts* website, and individuals within the strike leadership have begun to post openly racist articles from the *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* on the website's forum. The RCG joined a demonstration called by Campaign Against Immigration Controls under the slogans 'No redundancies! Workers of the world, unite!'

The victory at Lindsey demonstrates that the anti-trade union laws can be challenged. Faced with deter-

mined and independent action by workers, the unions had little choice but to give unofficial support, if only to end the dispute. Criticism of the unions, and in particular their support for the Labour Party, has continued to be vocally expressed by strikers, with a GMB shop steward at a mass meeting on 23 June feeling compelled to call on the workers present to refrain from heckling national officials. The strike committee at Lindsey has played a crucial role in maintaining a degree of independence for the strike from the trade union leadership in order to drive the action forward. It remains to be seen how this will be affected by the inclusion in the 25 June agreement of the appointment of a full time union official at Lindsey. ■

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Gaza: 22 days of death and destruction

Six months after the 18 January ceasefire which ended the Israeli assault on Gaza, Amnesty International published *Operation Cast Lead: 22 Days of Death and Destruction*. The report details the Israeli use of overwhelming firepower and modern arms technology against defenceless Palestinian civilians. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has also reported on the human effects of the continuing Israeli siege.

The Amnesty report gives comprehensive accounts and examples of Israeli war crimes – the use of banned weapons such as white phosphorus, the use of human shields and the targeting of medical workers and vehicles:

'White phosphorus... was repeatedly fired indiscriminately over densely populated residential areas, killing and wounding civilians and destroying civilian property. It was often launched from artillery shells in air-burst mode... Each shell ejected over a hundred felt wedges impregnated with highly incendiary white phosphorus, which rained down over houses and streets, igniting on exposure to oxygen and setting fire to people and property.'

The report uses the testimony of survivors to give many concrete examples of the indiscriminate massacre of Palestinian families:

'In the afternoon of 4 January 2009, members of the Abu Halima family were shot by Israeli soldiers as they were taking to hospital relatives who had been injured in a devastating white phosphorus attack on their home in the

on fire and was holding her baby girl Shahed, who was completely burned. Her husband and some of the children were dead and others were burning. Ambulances could not come because the area was surrounded by the Israeli army. We put some of the injured in a wagon tied to the tractor to take them to hospital... As we got near the school, on the way to Al Atatrah Square we saw Israeli soldiers and stopped, and suddenly, the soldiers



A child victim of an Israeli white phosphorus attack

Sayafa area, in the northwest of Gaza. Matar Abu Halima, 27, and his cousin Muhammad-Hikmat Abu Halima, 19, were both killed. Matar's mother, Nabila Abu Halima, told Amnesty International: 'After Sabah's house was shelled I ran over there. She was

shot at us. My son Matar and Muhammad-Hikmat were killed.'

Amnesty details the devastation caused by the onslaught to the Palestinian economy and agriculture with between 600-700 factories, workshops and businesses destroyed or

damaged, with the Israelis targeting cement and construction factories, bakeries, chicken farms and Gaza's only fish farm. According to UN agencies between 35 and 60% of the agricultural sector was destroyed:

'Animal pens and greenhouses were smashed and cultivated orchards were churned up by bulldozers. Not only were the farms destroyed but the animals were also killed. In Izbet Abed Rabbo and other areas in the east of Gaza the fields surrounding the crushed animal pens were littered with dead cows, goats and sheep, some crushed by bulldozers, others seemingly killed as they ran away.'

The Zionists aimed to destroy the agricultural economy of Gaza so that its population would become completely dependent on food imported through the border crossings the Israelis control.

The ICRC report says that 'restrictions on imports are making it impossible for Gazans to rebuild their lives. The quantities of goods now entering Gaza fall well short of what is required to meet the population's needs. In May 2009, only 2,662 truckloads of goods entered Gaza from Israel, a decrease of almost 80 per cent compared to the 11,392 truckloads allowed in during April 2007, before Hamas took over the territory.'

Israel has completely blocked the import of any construction material into Gaza. Houses cannot be built or repaired to accommodate those whose homes were destroyed in the onslaught. Basic infrastructure of Gaza cannot be properly repaired, so that, for instance, 'Every day, 69 million litres of partially treated or completely untreated sewage – the equivalent of 28 Olympic-size swimming pools – are pumped directly into the Mediterranean.'

Bob Shepherd

West Bank settlement expansion

In the West Bank, Israel continues to increase the size of its colonial settlements. A June report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that Israel has expropriated nearly 30% of the West Bank as closed military zones and for nature reserves. Together with Israel's more than 100 illegal settlements, home to approximately 500,000 settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Israel has stolen approximately 40% of the West Bank. OCHA also reported that during the last few months building restrictions have tightened for Palestinians in areas in and around the West Bank's Jordan Valley, as well as Bethlehem and Hebron. About 300 Palestinians, including 170 children, received evacuation and demolition orders from the Israeli army in May alone.

The Zionists plan to build over 73,000 new housing units in the illegal West Bank settlements. At the beginning of July, Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak met with George Mitchell, Obama's special envoy dealing with Israel. Barak declared that Israel would demolish 23 illegal outposts in the West Bank. This is a sham: the same promise was made five years ago without any real action. The disagreements between Israel and the US over settlement expansion are about appearances: Obama wants Israel to tone down its arrogance and give the appearance of listening to the concerns of imperialism's allies in the Middle East, whilst for the moment Israel is refusing to make even this gesture.

Palestinians in Israel Zionists step up racism

Palestinians in Israel face a threat to their existence from the racist Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu. More than ever they are feeling the intensity of institutionalised persecution and oppression. Yet they are determined to resist, as FRFI reports from Palestine.

Since the February 2009 Israeli elections, fascist parties such as Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel is our Homeland), led by the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Avigdor Lieberman, whose electoral campaign was run under the slogan of 'No loyalty, no citizenship', have proposed a series of racist laws criminalising Palestinians in Israel. The head of The Committee for the Defence of Land and Home in Wadi Arah region told FRFI that while the Zionist state of Israel has always been racist towards its Palestinian citizens, it now has a 'thirst to implement racist policies'.

Yisrael Beiteinu and its Habayit Hayihudi allies have proposed three laws to the Knesset targeting Palestinians. One is the Nakba bill which Yisrael Beiteinu submitted in May and which would outlaw Palestinian commemoration of the Nakba with a jail term of up to three years for those who violate the ban. The Nakba, the Catastrophe of May 1948, brought the destruction of Palestine and the establishment of Israel. The fascists also proposed a loyalty oath, which would make citizenship conditional on swearing loyalty to the state. The newspaper *Haaretz* quoted Yisrael Beiteinu Knesset



member David Rotem saying that 'during recent years, it has emerged that citizens of the state of Israel are not loyal to the state... This bill aims to link loyalty to the state, its symbols and values, and mandatory military service, to being a citizen of Israel.'

Although the second bill has been rejected for the moment, the Knesset has approved the first with some amendments. The 'softened' bill, as Lieberman calls it, bans funding for activities which could harm state symbols such as the national flag. The third bill, which was also approved by the Knesset, criminalises anyone who publicly denies the state of Israel is a Jewish state; they face up to a year in gaol.

In an attempt to erase the Palestinian existence and memory, the Minister of Transport, Yisrael Katz of the Likud, has decided to Hebrew-ise road signs in Israel so that the Arab names of cities, towns and villages will cease to exist. For example, Jerusalem which is Al Quds in Arabic and Yirushalaim in Hebrew, will be rewritten as Yirushalaim both in Arabic and English.

House demolitions and planning policies: an oppressive apparatus

Zionist settlements are being created and extended inside the Green Line in Israel as well as in the West Bank. The Ministries of the Interior and Housing are planning to build a new settlement for 150,000 ultra-nationalist religious Jews in predominantly Palestinian Wadi Arah which connects central and coastal Israel to its north. The planned city, which will be on Palestinian land, violates the same planning and zoning rules which are the pretext for demolishing Palestinian houses in the area. It will also strangle the expansion of local Palestinian towns and villages.

Palestinians in Wadi Arah are facing a vicious campaign of house demolitions, a policy which aims at 'transferring us', FRFI was told by a Palestinian whose commercial store was demolished recently. In Wadi Arah there are more than 70 houses and buildings which are threatened with imminent demolition. There are many thousands more, which, according to the Israeli

planning authorities, have been built without a permit and are therefore illegal. In reality, the regional planning authorities do not approve master plans submitted by the Palestinian local authorities. This leaves no alternative for Palestinians but to build on their private unauthorised land.

According to the National Master Plan, on either side of Wadi Arah are green areas, which means that Palestinians cannot build homes there nor develop them as a commercial zone. The city of Umm el Fahem, the largest in Wadi Arah, submitted plans to the regional planning committee to approve its entrance as a commercial zone. As expected, the committee refused, and instead there will be only two commercial centres along the main road of Wadi Arah, both in Jewish kibbutzim. This will channel business to Jewish settlements and lead to the underdevelopment of Palestinian areas. Many commercial stores in Umm el Fahem which attract Palestinians from Wadi Arah and the Galilee are threatened with demolition. Suq Al Saa'di was one of a number of stores which were demolished on 1 July 2009. An eyewitness on his way to work was shocked to see that at 3am there were loads of police and special units in the store entrance:

'They were standing one next to the other...like a military parade... I thought they came to occupy the city...I started screaming from my car asking hysterically in Arabic what is happening here...then as I turned my head to the left I saw the demolishing machines.'

Another said 'they came like thieves': locals believe that the authorities fear resistance so they work under cover of darkness. The people set up a protest tent on the demolished site and immediately started to rebuild it, under the slogan 'You demolish

and we build', declaring a general strike in the region. Two days after the inauguration of the rebuilt site, the authorities demolished it again. Clashes left 17 Palestinians injured. The decision is to rebuild yet again.

Minister of Housing Ariel Attias said on 2 July 2009 that 'efforts must be made to stop Arab expansion in the Nahal Eeron/Wadi Arah area of northern Israel'. All these provocative actions, says the Popular Committee for the Defence of Land and Home, reveal 'the desire of the government to implement the biggest demolition campaign' in recent years and aim at threatening the very existence of Palestinians on their own land.

The Palestinians in Israel are not alone: the Druze and Cherkess who serve in the Israeli Army have been on strike as their local authorities are on the verge of collapse. They suffer from severe discrimination as well; their land has been confiscated and annexed to Jewish settlements. By using the many laws and Emergency Rules inherited from the British Mandate, and through the martial law imposed from 1948-66, the Zionists have confiscated most of Palestinian land, leaving only 3% of the total land in Palestinian hands.

Despite these racist attacks, Palestinians resist and Palestine will always remain Palestine. As Umm Kammil, who together with her disabled husband was thrown out of their East Jerusalem house at 3am on 9 November 2008 – he died a week later – said: 'Oppression has its day but right is until the last day!' Umm Kammil still lives in her protest tent, despite all the harassment from settlers and soldiers who have not only occupied her house but torn down her tent six times: she is still steadfast, strongly believing that oppression will be defeated.

MM

Regional tensions surface in China

TREVOR RAYNE

The Chinese government said that 156 people were killed in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, on 5 July. By 16 July the figure for deaths in the region had risen to 192 killed and 1,721 wounded, with over 1,400 people arrested. Xinjiang, in North West China, accounts for one sixth of China's territory but has only 20 million of China's 1.3 billion people. It is now caught up in the geo-strategic struggle for control of Central Asia between the US, and Russia and China.

Uighurs, a Turkic and Muslim people, constitute approximately 45% of Xinjiang's population. The Han make up 37%, but they form 92% of China's total population. The Chinese government has encouraged Han migration to Xinjiang and last year 1.2 million new workers arrived in the province. Similarly, the government has encouraged Uighurs to work in the coastal provinces. From early May 2009, 818 were brought to work in a toy factory in Guangdong owned by a Hong Kong-based tycoon. On 26 June an internet posting claimed that two Han women workers had been raped by Uighur migrant workers. Two Uighur workers were then killed at the factory. On 5



Protest and counter-protest turn violent in Xinjiang

July the Uighur people in Urumqi protested that nothing had been done to bring the killers to justice and the protest turned into an attack on Han people and their businesses. The Chinese state responded by sending 25,000 police and soldiers onto the city streets and blamed 'three forces at home and abroad' (religious extremists, separatists and terrorists) for the trouble, and named the World Uighur Congress (WUC) which is based in the US.

Xinjiang has one third of China's domestic oil reserves and 40% of its coal, and it produces industrial crops like cotton. However, it is Xinjiang's geographical location that is critical. Key oil and gas pipelines from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan pass through Xinjiang to the Chinese coast. Kazakhstan's Kashagan oil field is the largest outside the Middle East and China has made considerable investment in it. There are proposals to build

a gas pipeline from Russian Siberia through Xinjiang. These fuel supplies are critical to China if it is to avoid dependence on oil that passes through the Malacca Strait which can be cut off by the US fleet.

A regional alliance between Russia, China and Central Asia with Iran is viewed by the US ruling class as challenging its plans for global hegemony. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) comprises Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The SCO has called for the withdrawal of US bases from Central Asia. At a SCO meeting on 29 April, Russia and China announced 25 joint military manoeuvres for the coming year. The WUC is funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED), one of whose founders, Allen Weinstein, told the *Washington Post* in 1991, 'A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.' The NED has lent a hand in the so-called 'colour revolutions' in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and, more recently, Iran. On 18 May it hosted a conference in the US entitled East Turkestan: 60 years under the Communist Chinese Rule. The Republic of East Turkestan was established between 1944 and 1949 and East Turkestan is the name that Uighur separatists give the region. On 1 July the Munich office of the WUC issued a call for demonstrations against China around the world.

In 1997 there were clashes between Chinese state forces and Uighur separatists with fighting in three Xinjiang cities. In 2007 China said its troops killed 18 people when they raided a training camp. This April two Uighurs were executed for attacks in

2008 that killed 16 police officers in Xinjiang.

As China has proceeded further down the capitalist road so inequalities have increased: between the coastal regions and the interior; between urban and rural populations. The *Financial Times* reported the income gap between Xinjiang's rural Uighur population and Han urban residents of the same province as having grown from 2.1 times in 1980 to 3.24 times in 2007. While natural gas production in Xinjiang grew twenty-fold from 2000 to today, Xinjiang receives a small fraction of the revenues compared to the central state. As the influence of Marxism has declined and the state resorts to a more nationalist ideology to legitimise itself, so the threat of competition between workers and nationalities increases. As Professor Jian Junbo, from a Shanghai university, explained, 'In China, political equality based on class equality has collapsed. For the past 60 years, this idea of class equality was a basis on which all common people, including minorities, could maintain an identity as one member of the Chinese political community. Now, the economic and political marginalisation of ethnic minorities is destroying the foundation of some ethnic groups' Chinese identity. At the same time this marginalisation is deeply misunderstood by many of the Han ethnic group. The shared identity of the Chinese – as socialist labour – is gradually falling to pieces. The resulting riots in Urumqi may be just the start of something, much, much bigger.' ('Ghost of Marx haunts China's riots', *Asia Times*, 8 July 2009) This possibility will have occurred to the US strategists.

North of Ireland – sectarianism and racism

PAUL MALLON

'No sympathy for foreigners, get out of our Queen's country before our bonfire night and parade day [or] your building will be blown up. Keep Northern Ireland white. Northern Ireland is only for white British.' Letter sent by youth wing of the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Defence Association to Belfast Islamic Centre, Polish Association and Indian Community Centre, 10 July 2009.

Recent events in the north of Ireland in the lead-up to the loyalist summer marching season served once again to expose the sectarian and racist character of the loyalist tradition. In June, 100 members of Belfast's Romanian community were forced to leave their homes and flee the country following racist attacks. In July loyalist marches across the north led to widespread disturbances as nationalist youth fought with police to defend their areas.

Rising racism

Race hate in the north of Ireland is nothing new. In 2004 we wrote 'the Six County statelet is now the race hate capital of Europe' (FRFI 177) and in 2007 research by the University of Ulster revealed that over 90% of race hate crime occurred in loyalist areas. Loyalism is by definition a racist, supremacist tradition which for generations, backed by British imperialism, has attacked and discriminated against Irish nationalists and the Catholic minority in the north of Ireland.

On 15 June 2009 local media began to give coverage to the plight of the Romanian community in south Belfast,

following a spate of racist attacks on their homes in the loyalist Village area. Over 100 Romanians, including small children and babies were moved into emergency accommodation following days of violence. Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) inaction fuelled the attacks with police taking up to an hour and a half to respond to emergency calls. Sinn Féin called for support for the PSNI. The Romanian families were later provided with flights to Romania paid for by the Northern Ireland Executive.



Romanians leave their homes in the north of Ireland after racist attacks

No let-up in sectarianism

According to Dr Peter Shirlow of Queen's University Belfast, a leading expert on sectarian attitudes in the north, there are at least three sectarian incidents every day and only 10% of religious hate crimes reported to the PSNI are solved. Commenting on the loyalist murder of Catholic Kevin McDaid on 24 May (see FRFI 209), he said: 'It's all very well for politicians in the Northern Ireland assembly to condemn [such] murders. But there is no serious attempt to tackle sectarianism at its roots... no serious effort is being made to encourage communities to confront the issue of why there is still so

much sectarian division in our society.'

On 13 July loyalists marched triumphantly throughout the north in the annual round of supremacy and intimidation which some call the 'orange-fest'. In Derry, Rasharkin (County Antrim), Armagh City and Ardoyle (north Belfast) nationalist youths led the opposition to the police incursion into their areas to facilitate the loyalist marchers. The PSNI used water cannon and plastic bullets against nationalists opposing the loyalist parades. In Ardoyle, the most serious disturbances in five years took place. Sinn Féin attacked the nationalist youth for 'sectarianism' and blamed 'so-called dissident groups' for stirring up trouble, but said nothing against the PSNI and made only the mildest criticisms of the Orange Order. Brendan MacCionnaith, general secretary of Republican group Eirigi, said Sinn Féin's sug-

gestions it orchestrated the rioting were 'a transparent attempt to divert attention away from the outrageous actions of the PSNI' and challenged Sinn Féin to produce evidence. He went on 'Sinn Féin needs to take a reality check and ask themselves why they are now acting as apologists for state violence against the nationalist community.'

The north of Ireland is an endemically racist and sectarian society created and sustained by British imperialism. FRFI upholds the rights of nationalists to organise against loyalist intimidation and of the victims of sectarian or racist attacks to defend themselves.

Tamils held in camps

SAM MCGILL

Since 18 May, when the Sri Lankan government claimed a total defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), 300,000 Tamil refugees have been held in camps throughout Sri Lanka. President Rajapakse's government banned the media from reporting on the conditions in these camps. However, on 10 July senior international aid workers reported an average of 1,400 people dying every week in the giant Manik Farm camp alone.

In FRFI 209 we reported the barbaric assault on the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. This came after unprecedented global demonstrations that MPs and politicians worldwide paid lip service to, then ignored as thousands were slaughtered. David Miliband, the Labour government's Foreign Secretary said he was 'gravely concerned' by the conflict. However, Britain continues to license sales of arms and military equipment to the Sri Lankan state and the UN Security Council agreed to a \$1.9 billion loan which will aid the genocide further.

The 300,000 Tamil refugees are held in 42 concentration camps surrounded by barbed and razor wire. While Rajapakse terms these 'welfare villages', the high death toll is the result of water-borne diseases, starvation and inadequate water supplies. Around 30,000-35,000 children are held in Manik Farm alone, 15-20% of them are suffering from acute malnutrition according to non-governmental organisation reports. Poor sanitation and drainage are spreading dysentery and diarrhoea with an average of 70 people sharing one toilet, a problem that approaching monsoon rains will exacerbate. Rajapakse's government has also demanded that the Red Cross scale down its operations in Sri Lanka

and has recently prevented them from gaining access to the Manik Farm camp.

On 8 July the Sri Lanka government produced five doctors it had detained in the area where the LTTE leadership had retreated. The doctors had given eyewitness accounts of the slaughter and targeting of hospitals and clinics. Since May they had been held incommunicado but, presented to a select media, they retracted their previous statements and claimed that they had been coerced by the LTTE into giving false reports. However, they remain in detention and the state rejects all calls from the United Nations and other international bodies for their release.

Sri Lanka has not escaped the global economic crisis and, in the first quarter of 2009, 190,000 industrial, apparel and construction workers were made redundant, with others suffering harsh cuts in pay. Over 200 factories have shut down over the past year and the military victory over the LTTE has encouraged ruthless attacks on jobs and working conditions of the Sinhalese working class. Many of these workers toil in Export Processing Zones surrounded by barbed wire fences patrolled by security guards with little press access. It is clear that after crushing Tamil resistance, the Sri Lankan state will not tolerate any dissent from the poorest sections of the Sinhalese as it pushes the burden of the economic crisis onto the working class.

Socialists in Britain must stand in solidarity with the Tamils and their struggle for self-determination and demand an end to British arms sales to Sri Lanka. We must support the call for a boycott of Sri Lanka until all prisoners in the camps are freed. Self-determination for Tamils!

US: Green shoots will become rotting weeds

Since Spring we have been hearing about the economic 'green shoots' sprouting forth, supposedly announcing an anticipated recovery. Yet, month after month, something seems to be just preventing them from turning into vigorous new growth. Sure, stock market prices have risen – but that's just people guessing about and gambling on the future. What is really going on with the US economy? US correspondent STEVE PALMER reports.

US economy

First, domestic production has been in decline for the last three quarters and prices have generally been falling too. After peaking at 10.5% in 2006, rates of return for non-financial companies fell to 9.4% in 2007 and to 8.1% in 2008. This decline in profitability is reflected in a fall in the amount of profit too: after hitting \$1.59 trillion in the first quarter of 2008, profits fell to \$1.26 trillion in the fourth quarter. Although they rose slightly to \$1.31 trillion in the first quarter of 2009, this was only due to a huge drop in repatriation of profits by foreign capitalists. This collapse in profitability is reflected in a drop in productive investment which has been declining, at a steadily faster pace, since the beginning of 2008. This decline in capital accumulation expresses the steady decline of capital.

Second, as well as the profitability crisis, we still have a banking crisis: the famous 'toxic assets', which are the core of the problem, are still on the balance sheets of the banks. Officially sanctioned accounting tricks have made them seem to disappear, but these time-bombs still lie in the vaults, ticking away. Right now Citigroup is teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, threatening to intro-

duce fresh instability into the financial markets. In addition, the commercial real estate market is heading for deep trouble. The decline in retailing and financial services means that many commercial landlords no longer have the income needed from shops and offices to service their loans and are starting to default. There is \$3.1 trillion of commercial real estate debt and 4.1% of all these loans are now delinquent (more than three months late on payments). This may not sound much, but it is 2.2 times higher than in March 2009 and 3.5 times higher than in December 2008. In addition, there are maturing loans, estimated at some \$450 billion, which are unlikely to qualify for refinancing. A total of \$2 trillion will mature over the next four years. This is going to create another financial crisis in the not-too-distant future.

US government borrowing on the hook

Third, the US government is creating financial problems of its own. Including the stimulus efforts as well as the various banking rescue packages, the US Government has spent, lent or committed \$12.8 trillion – almost as much as the entire US domestic production last year. Much

of this has to be financed by borrowing. This year, in order to finance these commitments as well as to refinance existing government debt which is falling due, the US government must borrow some \$3.25 trillion, a colossal and unprecedented sum – almost \$9 billion a day.

This borrowing is so large that there has been considerable uncertainty about whether the US Treasury can sell all its bonds at a good price. A bond generally is a financial instrument which pays a fixed amount of interest – the 'coupon' – at predetermined intervals. Bond prices move in the opposite direction to interest rates. If interest rates are up, bond prices are down; if interest rates are down, bond prices are up.

The Treasury sells its bonds by auction and there has been uncertainty over its ability to get a good price for the huge amounts of securities it has to get rid of. Since the interest rate on US Treasury Bonds moves in an opposite direction to bond prices, if the Treasury gets higher prices for its bonds, then the yield will be lower; a lower price gives a higher yield. If there is a lack of demand, prices will be lower and yield higher.

Since US Treasury Bonds are generally treated as if they are risk-free,



In New York Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase are making vast profits from trade in bonds, credit default swaps and other derivatives

with no chance of default, their rate is treated as if it is a 'pure' interest rate, untainted by any risk premium, unlike corporate or financial bonds. Many other interest rates are therefore defined by so many percentage points difference from the rate on, typically, 10-year Treasury Bonds. This difference, called a 'spread', exists because these securities are thought to be more risky than government bonds. So, the success or otherwise in financing government borrowing has effects on much of the rest of the financial markets. If the Treasury can't get good prices for its bonds, then interest rates on mortgages, corporate bonds and other loans will increase, making recovery more difficult. In recent

weeks, the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, has stepped in and purchased Treasury Bonds with the effect of putting a floor under their price and thus helping keep interest rates down. Ahead lie shoals of uncertainty – will the Treasury be able to sell its securities? Will former lenders switch to Euro securities? Can the Fed effectively keep interest rates down?

And the really big question is: how, in the longer term, will all this borrowing be paid for, since this sort of borrowing has limits, even if the borrower is the US Government. To pay it all back supposes that first, the economy has been restored to health, second that it is so healthy that it can produce sufficient to pay off the mas-

Parasitism remains at the heart of British capitalism

How ironic that, at this time, there should be a call by London Citizens, an alliance of community organisations, for a campaign to reinstate historic usury laws, repealed in the nineteenth century, restricting interest rate charges made by financial institutions. After all, British capitalism, as we have argued over a long period of time, with its bloated and usurious banking sector sustains the high standard of living of its citizens precisely through the income generated by the financial services sector of the economy and the 'gigantic usury capital' of its parasitic banks and financial institutions based in the City of London.¹ DAVID YAFFE shows that the deepening crisis has not altered this, with the imperialist banks clawing their way back to business as usual.

In a recent article (*The Guardian* 9 June 2009), George Monbiot argues that the current political crisis facing the government in this country arises because our economic system can no longer extract wealth from other nations. He says that: 'The great British adventure – three centuries spent pillaging the labour, wealth and resources of other countries – is over.' It is because we cannot accept this, he argues, that we seek 'revenge on a government that can no longer insulate us from reality.' It is almost unheard of for a columnist in a mainstream British newspaper to point out the imperialist and parasitic nature of British capitalism. For this reason Monbiot's article is to be welcomed. We also have pointed out the vulnerability of British capitalism to external financial shocks, given its dependence on the earnings from its vast overseas

assets and particularly its parasitic banking sector. However, Monbiot underestimates the determination of the ruling elite to ensure that the British economy remains a 'world centre of finance' (Alistair Darling, Budget April 2009) in order to sustain its imperialist interests. So the great British adventure is not yet over – at least not without an almighty and undoubtedly bloody battle to resolve the crisis and maintain Britain's imperialist position at the expense of both the working class in this country and the masses in the oppressed nations throughout the world.

That is why Bob Ainsworth, Labour's Secretary of Defence, could tell us on 8 July that there were 'compelling reasons' for Britain's war in Afghanistan. He said that: 'It goes to the heart of this country's national security and to the core of our national

interests...The entire region in which Afghanistan sits is of vital strategic importance to the United Kingdom.' On 19 July Lord Mandelson added defence (meaning war) to the list of 'essential frontline services' that Labour will protect from spending cuts.

Banks return to business as usual

The result of the financial crisis, government bail-outs and mergers of banks has been a much higher degree of concentration in banking. The investment banks are back on the make. In New York Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase are making vast profits from trade in bonds, credit default swaps and other derivatives. Goldman Sachs reported record earnings of \$3.44bn for the second quarter of 2009 on revenues of \$13.76bn, a 65% rise on the same quarter last year.



Royal Bank of Scotland chief executive, Stephen Hester, laughing all the way to the bank

If that growth is maintained, its staff could share total pay and bonuses of \$22bn (*Financial Times* 15 July 2009). In London, Barclays and Nomura are hiring and poaching staff and paying out high bonuses again. Barclays is paying tens of millions of pounds to its investment bankers as a result of huge profits from trading government debt, derivatives and foreign exchange. Barclays Capital, the bank's investment arm, has become so profitable that it could account for around two-thirds of Barclays' overall profit for 2009. Barclays is expected to announce an interim six-month profit of £3bn in early August. Despite these results, Barclays will scrap the final

salary pension scheme for its banking employees and has cut hundreds of jobs since the financial crisis broke out in 2007. The union Unite is organising a ballot for strike action. The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), 70% owned by the British government, is offering a potential payout to its chief executive, Stephen Hester, of £9.6m, on condition that certain shareholder return targets are met and the share price returns to 70p within three years. RBS lost £36bn last year.

The banks, however, are not lending to households and businesses on anything like the scale needed for economic recovery. Despite government ministers pleas with banks to increase

CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

sive debt presently propping it up. What will be necessary for the economy to recover?

Attacking the working class

The ruling class talk about a 'crisis of confidence': if only people believed that the economy was improving, it would improve. Others, apparently more 'objective', are expecting 'emerging markets' (China, India) to pull the US economy out of the recession. In fact there is nothing psychological about this crisis, nor is it a matter of restoring demand: the problem lies much deeper as we have seen – in the decline of profitability. It is the lack of profitability which has created the crisis of confidence and which accounts for the decline in accumulation and the resulting lack of demand. To restore profitability, capital will try to cut costs which don't 'contribute to the bottom line' – that means pushing down wages, intensifying the working day and firing workers.

This process is already underway:

- Since December 2007, employment has fallen by 6.5 million. Since June 2008 employment has fallen by 4.1% – the largest yearly decline for 50 years.
- The average working week has fallen to 33 hours – the lowest since records began in 1964.
- Construction employment has fallen by 1.5 million from its peak – the largest decline in this sector since 1939.
- Manufacturing employment has fallen by 1.9 million since the recession began and is now less than 11.9 million – the lowest since April 1941.
- The total of registered unemployed, those forced into part-time work, and others who want to work is now 16.8% of the total workforce.

States in crisis

As a result of the crisis and recession, State revenues have fallen by almost 12%. However most States, unlike the Federal government, have constitutional provisions which mandate a balanced budget. This means that most States have to trim budgets or increase revenue to achieve this. This means increasing taxes, cutting services or some combination of the two. Even in cases where States can borrow, the cost of borrowing has risen dramatically.

State	Budget shortfall	Share of budget
California	\$53.7 billion	58%
New York	\$17.9 billion	32%
Illinois	\$9.2 billion	33%
New Jersey	\$8.8 billion	30%
Oregon	\$4.2 billion	30%
Connecticut	\$4.1 billion	23%
Arizona	\$4 billion	41%
Washington	\$3.6 billion	23%
Alaska	\$1.35 billion	30%



California's budget crisis threatens the existence of thousands of people

California has started issuing IOUs in place of cheques, cutting state aid to school districts, cutting student enrolment in the State's universities by 10,000, wiping out opticians and dental services for many elderly residents, closing 220 State parks and many, many other cuts. Similar cuts are being enacted elsewhere – pay cuts for State employees, cuts in school spending. In some States, even if you drop dead, you won't get a break – Illinois has stopped paying \$1,655 per funeral for indigents.

The combined effect of the crisis and these cuts is horrific. Recently released figures show that the number of homeless families has increased from 473,000 in 2007 to 517,000 in

2008. A growing proportion of the homeless are in rural areas – 32% in 2008, up from 23% in 2007.

Along with homelessness and unemployment comes poverty and hunger. In New York, 1.3 million residents have to resort to emergency food – soup kitchens, food pantries and similar programmes, according to the New York Food Bank. Worse, some 4 million residents – half the city's population – are having difficulty affording basic food. In Los Angeles, a quarter of the city's popu-

been an easily manageable condition may now have matured into an illness which is difficult, expensive or even impossible to treat.

The effects of the crisis extend beyond the US. Money sent home by immigrant workers is very important to some countries and regions. According to the Bank of Mexico, these remittances were down 20% in May compared with the previous year. Some areas of Mexico are so dependent on this money that the people are no longer able to afford eggs, milk or

meat, and are reduced to eating beans – or even boiled cactus leaves. Although these remittances ran to \$25 billion last year, that was just 2% of the country's production. Other countries are far more dependent: remittances to El Salvador run to over 18% of total production, in Honduras to over 21% and in Haiti to a staggering 30%.

If the ruling class is seeing 'green shoots' it is because its arrogant delusions blind it to the realities of the capitalist crisis which are being experienced in the worst possible form by workers throughout the US. The crisis is preparing a stinging backlash which, when it comes, will shake this country to its roots.

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Court victory for San Francisco 8

The San Francisco 8 are Black Panthers accused of the 1971 murder of a San Francisco police officer, one week after the murder of George Jackson in San Quentin Prison. Charges against the men were originally thrown out in 1975 when a judge ruled that their incriminating statements had been made under torture. In 2007, the eight were arrested, held in shackles and bail set at millions of dollars.

In July Herman Bell and Jilil Muntagim were sentenced to probation and time served, after Herman agreed to plead to voluntary manslaughter and Jilil to conspiracy to voluntary manslaughter. All charges were then dropped on Richard Brown, Hank Jones, Harold Taylor, and Ray Boudreaux, with the prosecution admitting it had 'insufficient evidence' against them. Charges had already been dropped against Richard O'Neal last year. This leaves Francisco Torres as the last remaining defendant, who will appear in court on 10 August.

Jilil's guilty plea was a difficult and heroic decision since, although he is innocent (he was not in San Francisco when the officer was killed), it meant that all charges against four other defendants would be dropped. It was decided that it was just too risky to take a chance with the racist US justice system.

The campaign has been not simply in defence of the SF8 but has used the case to call for anti-torture legislation, an investigation of the government COINTELPRO surveillance operation in the 1970s and a truth and reconciliation commission. In its 18-month fight, the campaign has drawn in and educated young activists about the nature of state repression and how to struggle against it.

The final push is now on to get charges dropped against Francisco Torres.

Victory to the San Francisco 8!

Steve Palmer

their lending, net bank loans to businesses contracted by £3.4bn in May after a fall of £6bn in April. Businesses filing for bankruptcy increasingly blame the banks. The banks are rebuilding their balance sheets and restoring profitability, so they steer away from lending to companies they see as uncreditworthy. Over the year to June 2009, mortgage lending was down 48%. Monetary policy in all its various forms, from near-zero short-term interest rates, massive liquidity injections into the banking system, to quantitative easing have, so far, had little impact on the production of goods and services, or on reviving the housing market.

Banking capital – the engine of British imperialism

Given the score-settling between the political parties, the dispute between the Bank of England and the government, and the differences between the European Union and Britain over regulation of the financial sector and banking capital, it is important to restate some fundamental points about financial capital and British capitalism.

- The massively increased role of financial capital, increasing speculation, and the ever expanding credit bubble built on a relatively declining productive base, which were the forerunners of the crisis, were the result of the overaccumulation of capital in the heartlands of capitalism. 'Financialisation', to use fashionable terminology, is the product of a crisis of profitability in the capitalist system, the lack of profitable investment opportu-

nities for capital. The expansion of the financial sector does not produce additional value but appropriates/plunders a greater and greater proportion of the value produced by the productive sectors of economies throughout the world.

- Britain's relative industrial decline has been combined with a dynamic, aggressive imperialist expansion of commerce and finance overseas. This development has now reached unprecedented levels.

- This crisis of capitalism has seen the underwriting of the debt of the banks and financial institutions by the state on a scale like never before. The process has entered a new phase. The City of London has always been at the heart of the British state. The crisis has strengthened this bond to a new level of intensity. The result of the crisis has, therefore, seen a further consolidation of finance capital and the state – that is, the further development of state monopoly capitalism (imperialism).²

This is the context in which to understand British government policies with regard to banking capital and its opposition to serious regulation and control.

At the end of 2008, more than a year into the present crisis, Britain's overseas assets reached a staggering £7,135bn, an increase of 11.75% on 2007 and 47% on 2005. These assets were an unprecedented 4.9 times Britain's GDP. 59.7% of these assets, £4,261bn or 2.95 times Britain's GDP, listed under 'other investments' are mainly loans and deposits abroad by

UK banks – a gigantic usury capital.

Britain's foreign assets are nearly matched by foreign liabilities of £7,042bn, giving overall net assets of £93bn.³ Net earnings on Britain's international investment account were £27.6bn, a 28% increase on 2007.

In 2008 Britain had a balance of payments deficit of £25.1bn, spending 1.7% of GDP more than it earned. The deficit on trade in goods reached a massive £92.9bn in 2008, 6.4% of GDP. Without the large surplus on services trade of £54.5bn, with financial services responsible for more than 70% of this, and the income flow from the international investment account, the standard of living of British people would have significantly fallen.

Is it not surprising, given this reality, that Alistair Darling and the government rule out any radical changes to the financial institutions based in the City of London demanded by the opposition parties and the Bank of England. There are around one million people working in the financial services sector in the UK, and in the past nine years the sector has contributed tax receipts of £250bn. There will be no caps on bankers' pay or breaking up the largest City institutions. In addition it is clear that the government will resist regulations from the European Union aimed at cutting the City of London down to size.

The crisis deepens

The crisis is already hitting the most vulnerable sections of the working class both in this country and elsewhere, especially in the underdeveloped

oped nations. The World Bank says that the world's poorest countries will see \$1,000bn drained from their economies this year. Underdeveloped countries are expected to grow by only 1.2% in 2009 after 6% growth in 2008. If China and India are excluded, growth in the remaining countries is expected to contract by 1.6% in 2009. Hundreds of millions more people in those countries will be driven into abject poverty.

Britain experienced the worst fall in output for 50 years when GDP fell 2.4% in the first quarter of 2009. The second quarter to June saw an additional fall of 0.8%. Recent revisions to statistics now show that the recession began in April 2008, and that the British economy has suffered five quarters of negative growth, a cumulative fall of 5.7%, almost on a par with a comparable period of the 1930s slump. A fall in output in the manufacturing sector has reduced factory production to its lowest level for 17 years. Manufacturing output is 13% lower, and industrial production is down 12.3% in the first quarter of 2009, compared to the same period in 2008. The number of workers in manufacturing continues to fall, down 201,000 in the past year to an all time low of 2.67 million. Fewer than 10% of workforce jobs are now in manufacturing. Such are the characteristics of a parasitic capitalism.

Unemployment rose by 281,000 in the three months to May 2009. This is the largest quarterly increase since records began in 1971. 7.6% of the workforce are now unemployed.

Unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds is at a 16-year high of 726,000, a rate of 17.3%. 528,000 workers have been unemployed for more than 12 months, the highest level for 11 years. Jobs in education, health and public administration have actually increased by 2.1% over the past year. This reality, however, will rapidly change after the general election, when the real cuts in public services demanded by international investors get underway, no matter who wins the election.⁴

These then are the features of British capitalism, where banking capital will be sustained and promoted by the government as the dominant sector of the British economy at the expense of the working class.

1 See David Yaffe 'Britain: parasitic and decaying capitalism' FRFI 194 December 2006 /January 2007, www.revolutionarycommunist.org/downloads/FRFI194_07_10_parasitic.pdf

2 All these points have been made in a series of articles on Capitalism in Crisis accessible on our website at www.revolutionarycommunist.org/crisis_statement.html

3 This is a significant change on previous years, when Britain's external account was in deficit. The fall in the pound against other currencies, the revaluation of assets resulting from the ongoing crisis and the withdrawal of foreign investments from the UK have led to this change. All statistics come from the relevant UK national statistics and are provisional for the latest years and tend to be revised over time.

4 See David Yaffe 'Years and years of austerity ahead' FRFI 209 June/July 2009. On our website at www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frfi/209/FRFI_209_cri.html

Cuban socialism shows the way for biotech and pharma

With far fewer resources, socialist planning has achieved results to match those of the biggest capitalist powers and has, in some instances, even exceeded them. Without prior expertise, and beginning in the 1961-1965 period, Cuba began to develop a pharmaceutical and biotechnological industry that now rivals those of the advanced industrial capitalist countries. This is the result of the priorities and planning to meet society's needs.

CHARLES CHINWEIZU reports.

This industry has been developed despite the US blockade, with the support of the socialist bloc, and with the prime objective of enabling Cuba to develop its socioeconomic prospects and improve the health of its population. Cuba has also helped to develop the biotechnological industries of India (prime manufacturer of generics for the 'third world'), China and Malaysia, boosting the sovereignty of these underdeveloped countries via 'south south' technology transfer.

Health crisis

A health crisis is engulfing the underdeveloped countries of the world. Ten million children under five died in 2006; two million die within the first 24 hours, four million within the first month of life.

Despite the hysteria over the Influenza A(H1N1) virus, vastly more people die every week from seasonal influenza (9,600) than have died from swine flu (800 deaths by 24 July 2009).

90% of deaths from infectious disease are caused by six infections – tuberculosis, pneumonia, diarrhoea, measles, malaria and AIDS – which are most prevalent in less developed countries. The number living with HIV/AIDS grew to 33 million in 2007; 70% get no antiretroviral drug (ARV) therapy. Despite the relatively low cost, only 8% of HIV-positive children and 11% of women in 'low and middle income' countries were receiving ARV medication in 2005. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 67% of all people living with HIV and for 72% of AIDS deaths in 2007. There were 2.5 million AIDS-related deaths in 2007. Measles kills 0.9 million people and malaria 2.7 million annually. Bacterial pneumonia kills more children under five (two million) than any other disease – more than HIV, malaria and measles combined. 73% of the 151 million cases of childhood pneumonia each year are concentrated in 15 countries, mainly in Africa.

1.7 million people die annually from TB, a curable disease. XDR-TB (Extensive Drug Resistant TB), a new particularly virulent strain, is so dangerous that patients die even before doctors receive results of tests and leaves patients, including those living with HIV, virtually untreatable using current anti-TB drugs. Southern Africa is the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS and TB pandemic. XDR-TB has now developed in 37 countries since 2003.

Cancer rates will double between 2002 and 2020 with 60% of new cases in underdeveloped countries. Diabetes has risen from 30 million to 230 million cases between 1986 and 2006, again with most new cases in underdeveloped countries. Vaccination provides one of the best means for preventing, rather than treating, infectious disease. Lack of access to health care, especially medicines and vaccinations, is the main cause of these easily preventable deaths, but medicines are kept out of the reach of the poor by high drug prices, intellectual property

rights and all the other schemes of imperialism, hidden behind a bogus philanthropy egged on by exasperatingly vacuous liberals.

Structure of Cuban biotech industry

In stark contrast, in another underdeveloped nation, Cuba, health care provision for all its citizens is among the best in the world, as reflected in its infant mortality rates and life expectancies. Cuba has developed a pharmaceutical and biotechnological industry that has provided its national health care system with over 160 products. Cuba's biotech industry is wholly state owned (funding is determined by national need and peer review – a defining feature of Cuban biotechnology). There are no private hospitals and no private profit; all pharmaceuticals are publicly owned and all investment comes from the state. Cuba earns at least \$400 million a year from its total pharmaceutical and biotechnology exports, possibly its fourth biggest export earner. All profits are reinvested in the biotechnology sector. Cuba produces approximately 80% of the drugs and medicines used by its 11 million people – the strategy is straightforward: the government develops the drugs and vaccines according to the demands of Cubans. It then tests them and dispenses them across the population through a network of neighbourhood family doctors, polyclinics and hospitals.

Cuba's extensive commitment to biotechnology began soon after the start of the revolution. Like the Soviet Union, the Cuban government believed that science would benefit the health and socioeconomic prospects of the people. In 1960, Fidel Castro said 'the future of our homeland must be that of men of science'. But the blockade of Cuba by the US made it impossible for Cuba to import the drugs its impoverished citizens needed, especially as Cuba was not rich in oil and mineral resources. At Castro's insistence, Cuba therefore decided to establish a National Centre for Scientific Research (CNIC), which opened in 1965, followed by the Centre for Molecular Immunology (CIM), the Finlay Institute and finally by the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), which are now a part of the 'Scientific Cluster' of western Havana – a complex of 53 applied research centres and their industrial offshoots – that makes up the bulk of Cuba's biotechnology industry. There are 14 such 'scientific clusters'. In total, the country has more than 120 scientific research centres, employing about 30,000 people. Hence biotech is not concentrated in the capital Havana, avoiding the creation of inequalities in Cuban society.

Most research and development (R&D) centres also have their own production plants and marketing arms for both domestic distribution and export. However, the R&D centres consult and collaborate with each other and share resources. Interdisciplinary cooperation by Cuban scientists



In its 2004 Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, the Bush administration laid out its vision for Cuba after 'regime-change'. This included a plan to vaccinate all Cuban children under the age of five, despite the fact that this is already guaranteed under Cuba's socialist healthcare system. This Cuban poster reads, 'Thank you Mr Bush, but we are already vaccinated!'.

is encouraged and establishing links with foreign research centres is a policy of the Cuban government. Scientific research, innovation and product development, production and marketing are all integrated under the same roof, or at least in the same institution, preventing unnecessary waste of time and duplication of work a common feature of science in capitalist countries. This is only possible due to state monopoly of industry in Cuba and control of the R&D centres whose projects and priorities are not determined by short-term profits.

In 1981, the government stepped up its biotechnology initiative – its scientists developed the leukocyte interferon (for the treatment of several forms of cancer and HIV/AIDS) from human blood in six weeks flat. Cuban scientists first discovered it was far more efficient to produce interferon via genetic engineering than by extracting it from blood, so it was first made this way in Cuba, and is now the common method in the labs of the developed capitalist countries. Even during the worst period of economic crisis after the fall of the Soviet bloc, Cuba invested over \$1 billion between 1992 and 1996 (1.5% Gross National Product) in the 'Scientific Pole', and sent its scientists to labs in Latin America, Sweden, Spain, and Germany to continue research collaborations. New scientific disciplines, such as bioinformatics and computational sciences are constantly being developed to obtain results that directly impact upon Cuban society (Tirso Pons et al, 'Computational biology in Cuba', 2007, ploscompbiol.org).

Concrete accomplishments of Cuban biotech

Cuba can count among its many attainments: a genetically engineered cholera vaccine; a cholesterol-lowering drug derived from sugar cane; bone implants for reconstructive surgery that are made from coral; an extensive array of recombinant proteins (recombinant means material produced when segments of DNA from different sources are joined to give new combinations of genetic material) such as interleukin-2 (for cancer treatment); synthetic peptides; monoclonal antibodies (MABs, for cancer therapy); alpha and gamma interferon; streptokinase (world's most advanced anti-coagulant for breaking up blood clots in heart attack victims designed and produced in Cuba); erythropoietin (a hormone that regulates red blood cell production); and several animal and human vaccines. These

include:

- a Hepatitis B vaccine that has virtually eliminated the disease in Cuba (it afflicts an estimated 300 million people worldwide)
- the world's only effective Meningitis B vaccine
- a Hib (Haemophilus influenza type b) vaccine – the first fully synthetic vaccine to succeed in all clinical trials
- a vaccine against a specific type of cancer that has been licensed for use in the US, despite the blockade.

Cuba developed the first synthetic vaccine for the prevention of pneumonia and meningitis, which is much cheaper than what is offered by Western pharmaceutical companies. The Finlay Institute alone has developed seven vaccines for Cuba's health system, including against typhoid, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and Meningitis B and C.

Cuba has developed antigens enabling it to routinely screen blood products for HIV and hepatitis viruses, pregnant women for neural tube defects in the foetus, and newborns for certain biochemical birth defects and sickle cell anaemia. Cuba also has in development recombinant vaccines against HIV, Hepatitis C, and Dengue fever.

Most of Cuba's vaccines are produced using recombinant (genetic engineering) technology. Advantages of recombinant vaccines are that the vector can be chosen to be not only safe but also easy to grow and store, reducing production cost. The only recombinant vaccine for the Hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccine currently in use in humans is Cuban. Although the US and France also manufacture a Hepatitis B vaccine, according to Baretta, former head of Canadian pharmaceutical firm Aventis Pasteur, 'What they [Cuba] have done there is truly remarkable. Their work on hepatitis is likely to become the standard for the rest of the industry.' (*Financial Times*, 14 June 2002).

Cuba's record boasts 26 inventions with more than 100 international patents already granted since the Revolution. By 2009 Cuba was also exporting its products to over 58 countries around the world, earning vital foreign currency for the blockaded island; but, as Cuban chemical engineer Sonia Gonzalez said, 'All the products we produce are applied in the first place in our own country. Our national health care system provides these vaccines free to our people... We believe it is an important programme for the nation.'

But although the US has granted Cuba 26 patents, the blockade has so far prevented Cuba from selling any of its products there. Each year in the US, there are 1,700-3,400 cases of meningococcal meningitis, now increasingly resistant to most common antibiotics. In 1986 a vaccine with proven effectiveness against Serogroup B (and subsequent trials have shown effective against subtypes A and C) was developed in Cuba by the Finlay Institute. Since then, 55 million doses have been administered in Cuba and other countries and it is registered for use in 15 countries, but not the US. From January to March 2009, at least 1,500 people died of the deadly brain disease meningitis in two countries of Africa's 'meningitis belt'. There are no vaccines for the strain (Serogroup A) found in Africa.

Traditional vaccines are preventative, but Cuba has also led the way in the production of therapeutic vaccines which produce an immune response to treat patients with pre-existing conditions. According to Cuban government predictions, cancerous diseases in general will become the first cause of death in Cuba by 2010 and it is rapidly developing more advanced therapeutic cancer vaccines. Cuba has developed an asthma vaccine, stem cell treatment for diabetic ulcers on the feet (which usually lead to amputation), the world's first halal vaccine for meningitis, and there are at least 40 products in development at the CIGB. Cuba's biotech industry concentrates on the diseases affecting the poorest countries of the world. The US and Britain's biotech and pharmaceutical industries concentrate on areas of profitability. Setting aside the gutter attacks from Cuba's enemies on its 'knock-off drugs', or Bush's assertion that Cuba was developing biochemical weapons, there have been more sophisticated attacks on Cuba's quality management and control, despite the fact that Cuba's biotech industry and companies have been successfully evaluated by the World Health Organisation and other international bodies up to ISO 9001 quality and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) standards.

None of this would be possible without socialism, which is the driving force for these developments since the start of the revolution. Meningitis B now accounts for 90% of cases in Britain; current vaccination protects against Hib meningitis, Meningitis C and pneumococcal meningitis but there is no Meningitis B vaccine in Britain. Cuba has the Meningitis B vaccine – why don't we? End the blockade of Cuba!

Peru – indigenous peoples fight back against imperialism

ALVARO MICHAELS

For 58 days in April, May and June, some 3,000 indigenous peoples from 356 communities in the north and central part of the Peruvian department of Amazonas peacefully occupied oil installations and blocked roads and waterways in protest at their exclusion from decisions about the use of their historic lands. On 5 June, heavily armed police attacked them at a section of the Fernando Belaunde Terry highway in Bagua province known as 'Devil's Bend'. By the evening of 6 June, up to 70 civilians and police had been killed and some 115 wounded in the bloodiest single attack on indigenous peoples by the state since President Fujimori's death squads and forced sterilisation campaign in the 1990s.

More than 70% of Peru's Amazon rainforest was divided into concessions for oil and gas extraction between 2003 and 2008. The latest protests are against 11 presidential decrees applying the 2006 US-Peru Free Trade Agreement which affect hundreds of thousands of indigenous people, and fast-track large-scale farming, logging and the private acquisition of land in the Amazon. The legislature revoked two of the eleven decrees in August 2008 after locals blocked highways, waterways and a state oil pipeline. In Congress, President Alan Garcia simply boycotted debates on reports recommending the removal of the remaining nine.

To force negotiations over investments, indigenous people have resorted to seizing police, guards or even plant managers. By May 2009 there had been 268 officially recorded con-



Indigenous people protest in Bagua, north Peru, June 2009

flicts between state and indigenous peoples, compared to 83 in 2008. In May, protesters blocked the Napo river to stop boats from Perenco, an Anglo-French oil company and a major gas supplier to Britain, from moving into a proposed indigenous reserve in northern Peru. Perenco intends to build new platforms and wells involving massive airlifts, admitting that contamination of soil and water will be the consequence. Garcia sent the navy to break the blockade. Only two weeks after the Bagua massacre, Perenco got the go ahead to drill for oil in this site of international biological importance.*

Attempt to decapitate the indigenous leadership

During the 5 June attack, the police gassed, beat and shot protesters as they retreated. Local indigenous lead-

er Santiago Manuin was shot repeatedly as he approached police trying to persuade them to stop firing. Residents from nearby Utcubamba and Bagua, hearing radio accounts of the attack, ran angrily to the blockade with sticks and stones and a few machetes. They gathered at El Reposo crossroads, where they were also shot and gassed. In Utcubamba a mass of people surrounded the police station in protest. Around 11pm the police began shooting into the crowd, killing and wounding many. In Bagua police attacked protesters; 47 people were admitted to hospital by the evening of 6 June, most with bullet wounds.

The police prevented anyone looking for the dead or wounded until they left Devil's Bend on 6 June. Journalists later found five bodies, shot in the back, beaten and burned in a crude attempt to conceal the murders. Some

bodies were thrown into the river, others were taken away. The up to 70 dead included 23 police officers. Garcia sent police reinforcements to Bagua and imposed a state of emergency in Bagua and Utcubamba provinces, lifting it on 23 June. On Sunday 7 June Garcia accused the protesters of 'barbarity and savagery', saying that their opposition to oil and gas 'development' impeded 'progress' and was due to 'elemental ignorance' or manipulation by unnamed foreign (meaning Venezuelan) interests.

The leader of Peru's national Amazon indigenous organisation AIDSEP, Alberto Pizango, went into hiding on 6 June after a warrant was issued for his arrest and four other leaders on trumped-up sedition charges. Seven congressmen and women have been suspended, the local radio that covered the violence at Bagua has had its licence withdrawn, and moves are afoot to clamp down on NGOs. The coordinating body for Andean Indigenous Organisations has called for solidarity with the Peruvian Amazon peoples with pickets in front of all Peruvian embassies and consulates until the repression ends and the free trade agreements with the USA are derogated. It has also called for Garcia and his government to be put on trial in an international court for genocide. Panicked, the Peruvian Congress voted on 10 June for a 90-day suspension of two decrees. On 11 June, riot police fired tear gas to keep protesters away from Congress as thousands marched in favour of the Amazon people.

On 22 June the country's central highway was blocked by mine workers from the La Oroya mine, Junin. 3,500 struck after work was suspended due to lower exports and in solidarity with the victims of the police attacks. In the southern districts of Apurimac, a general strike continued for 11 days and road blocks were

set up by the workers in Cusco. Apurimac is the site of a huge planned iron ore project pumping iron ore slurry to the coast, inevitably with huge damage to the forest and massive water demands. On 23 June the military was sent to Apurimac, Cusco and Junin 'to assure the function of public and private services'.

The National Front for Life and Sovereignty declared a three-day strike from Tuesday 7 July against Garcia's economic policies. The government offered workers who stayed at work 20 soles (\$6.6). Thousands of police were deployed in Lima and next day over 156 demonstrators were arrested, mainly in Lima. The strike had 100% support in the southern provinces of Huancavelica, Puno and Cuzco; it took place in the midst of a serious government crisis that forced Garcia to advance a planned cabinet shuffle.

The Bagua bloodbath represents an attempt to destroy Peruvian indigenous movements. Garcia speaks of 400,000 people preventing 28 million Peruvians from benefiting from the wealth of the Amazon, as if the vast majority of the Peruvian people could ever benefit from imperialism. Following Bagua this majority has turned against Garcia, but the bourgeoisie is preparing for a yet harder fight. April showed the first monthly GDP decline since mid-2001. Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of Peru's imprisoned ex-president Alberto Fujimori, has emerged as an early leader in the campaign for the 2011 national elections. Already 21 parties have registered for the presidential elections while others seek the 145,000 signatures needed to stand – including former Prime Minister Simon and former armed forces minister Antero Flores Araoz.

*<http://www.conservation.org.pe/ci/hotspots/index.html>

Honduras: masses mobilise against coup regime

LUKE LUCAS

On Sunday 28 June, Honduran military leaders led a coup against President Manuel Zelaya on the orders of the reactionary Supreme Court. At dawn, over 200 troops went to the President's home and told him to surrender or they would shoot him and his family. The soldiers seized him and he was exiled to Costa Rica. In the weeks since, the coup regime has increased repression of the Honduran people, hundreds of thousands of whom have been demonstrating on the streets for Zelaya's return. The two-faced response of the US has made clear their role in the coup, while Zelaya has been supported by the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA) of which Honduras is a member.

Zelaya was originally elected as a representative of the business elite; he is a member of the Liberal party in a country which has strong military and economic ties with the US and, as Fidel Castro said, he 'cannot be accused of being either a Marxist or a communist'. However, since the end of 2007, he had begun to adopt some more progressive positions, clearly under ALBA's influence. With ALBA's help, Zelaya had brought 500,000 Hondurans out of poverty, begun a reforestation campaign and was aiming to eradicate illiteracy in the country by January 2010.

The Honduran ruling class organised the coup because it could feel its power slipping away under Zelaya's presidency. Zelaya had planned a non-binding referendum on 28 June to ask Hondurans whether they wanted to vote in the November general elec-

tions on a constituent assembly to rewrite the 1982 Constitution. The ruling class feared that this would put more power into the hands of the masses. These fears are real: vibrant grassroots movements have been created by Hondurans over the past years which have pushed Zelaya to bring in reforms that reflect the interests of the poor and oppressed. When a Honduran who has been demonstrating on the streets was asked why she supported Zelaya, she replied:

'He raised the minimum wage, gave out free school lunches, provided milk for the babies and pensions for the elderly, distributed energy-saving light bulbs, decreased the price of public transportation, made more scholarships available for students, fixed the roads, put schools in remote rural areas that never had them before and let anyone go into the Presidential Palace and converted it from an elite residence to the people's house. That's why the elite classes can't stand him and why we want him back. This is really a class struggle.'

The coup could not have happened without Washington's approval. The Honduran military and transnational corporations rely on US support. While Obama has publicly joined the rest of the world in condemning the coup, he has been applauding it under the table. A *New York Times* article showed that the US government knew about the planned coup 'several days' before it happened. The Obama administration says it was in negotia-

tions with the plotters. If the US had really wanted to prevent the coup, it would have informed the Honduran government of the situation and told the plotters that if the coup went ahead the US government would cut off all economic aid and blockade Honduras. It did neither.

The US has declared the military's action illegal, but has avoided calling it a coup because that would mandate an immediate suspension of all military and economic aid. The National Endowment for Democracy, created by US Congress, has been and still is providing approximately \$49 million a year to 'think tanks' and 'pressure groups' in Honduras. The majority of these are organisations directly linked to the coup. Two of the coup leaders, Romeo Vasquez and Luis Javier Prince Suazo, like many leaders of the 2002 Venezuela coup, are graduates of the US School of the Americas which has been a training camp for dictators and repressive forces in Latin America.

The Honduran working class has co-ordinated massive protests against the coup. A general strike has been in effect since 29 June, universities have been occupied and over 100,000 people have been demonstrating in support of Zelaya in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, alone. The Organisation of American States gave a deadline to the coup regime to reinstate Zelaya. On Sunday 5 July, after the deadline expired, Zelaya, accompanied by the Secretary General of the United Nations Miguel D'Escoto, returned by plane to Tegucigalpa airport. Over 100,000 Hondurans marched to the airport, intending to greet him on arrival. Instead what greeted them was military repression. The army and police, most of whom have

been loyal to the coup regime, shut down all the nation's airports and surrounded the one in Tegucigalpa. They prevented the people from getting inside and blocked the runway with military vehicles and armed soldiers, preventing Zelaya's plane from landing and eventually forcing him to divert to Nicaragua. Meanwhile, as the massive crowd of people cheered on Zelaya from outside the airport fence, a soldier pointed his weapon directly at the crowd and fired. A woman reported that 'A young boy was hit right in the head, his brains gushing out. He was killed instantly. His mother came running, screaming, "My son, my son, they've killed my son." Others in the crowd were wounded and another person was killed.'

A report from the Honduran Committee of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared, a human rights organisation, says that in less than three weeks the coup regime carried out four political assassinations (including the murder of two activists who were leading the demonstrations in support of Zelaya), issued 16 death threats, injured 59 protesters, closed or censored 13 media outlets, detained or deported 14 journalists, and arrested 1,046 demonstrators. The regime has also brought in repressive laws which attack civil liberties, enforce a curfew from 6.30pm at night and restrict the freedom to assemble. However, this has completely failed to defeat the mass movement. On Friday 24 July, troops forced Zelaya back from the border when he tried to return to the country; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described his action as 'reckless', demonstrating clearly whose side the US is on.

Victory to the Honduran resistance!



Demonstrators supporting President Zelaya in Tegucigalpa, 18 July 2009

Close Yarl's Wood and all immigration prisons

Yarl's Wood immigration prison opened in November 2001. It cost £80-100 million to build, and was planned to hold 900 men, women and children awaiting deportation, making it the largest immigration detention centre in Europe.

As soon as the centre opened, detainees began to protest about lack of medical treatment and access to telephones, poor food, and arbitrary handcuffing. There were a series of protests and hunger strikes, culminating on 14 February 2002 in a protest during which a fire spread rapidly through the centre and it quickly became apparent that the prison, whilst equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance and anti-escape equipment, did not have a sprinkler system. To make matters worse, it took an hour for the guards from Group 4 (the private security firm then running the centre) to allow the Fire Brigade access to tackle the blaze.

The protest and fire were followed by four different inquiries by Bedfordshire Council, Bedfordshire police, Group 4 and the Home Office (later taken over by the Prisons Ombudsman), all of whom appeared to be

mainly motivated by blaming one another. However, all parties were unanimous in their condemnation of the detainees. In a statement to Parliament on 25 February 2002, Home Secretary David Blunkett said: 'I am not prepared to let government policy be determined by those intent on creating disorder and destruction. Having removed asylum seekers from prison, we now find that our reward is the burning down of a substantial part of the facility. This is deplorable... It is now clear that a small number of people will take any step to prevent their removal from this country. We therefore have no option but to toughen the regime and instruct the immigration and nationality directorate further to speed up removal of those in the centres to their country of origin.'

Despite the plethora of inquiries, many detainees who could have given evidence to them and the subsequent



Yarl's Wood detention centre burned down during a protest by detainees in 2002 against harsh conditions

criminal trials were deported before they had a chance to do so. Thirteen men were charged with arson, violent disorder and assault. After a four-month trial in 2003 two were found guilty of violent disorder and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Another two had already pleaded guilty to minor charges. The remainder were acquitted, despite Group 4

hiring professional coaches to train its witnesses in presenting their evidence. In time-honoured fashion, the British state exacted revenge on those the criminal court declared innocent by re-arresting them under immigration law. Soon after the trial, Yarl's Wood, which had continued to hold a small number of detainees in parts of the

centre unaffected by the fire, was officially reopened to house single women and families. It currently holds around 400 such prisoners, including babies. There have been repeated protests and hunger strikes, and the centre has been strongly criticised in reports by the Children's Commissioner and Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Nicki Jameson

Our fight to avoid John Freddy's deportation

John Freddy Suarez Santander arrived in this country along with his family more than 15 years ago, when he was only six years old. Unfortunately, when he was 17 he committed a criminal offence and was sent to a young offenders' institute for seven months. Two years after his release, the government implemented a law to the effect that immigrants with criminal records should face deportation. John Freddy was arrested and served with a deportation order. With the support of his family he then began a long legal battle, which is now awaiting judgment in the European Court of Human Rights.

There are various arguments being presented to the Court:

- He is being punished twice for a criminal act that he has already served time for by being sentenced to prison and then being given an additional punishment of deportation.
- It is against the principles of international law for a law to be applied retrospectively. The British government law to deport people with criminal records was passed a year and a half after John Freddy was sentenced.
- The European Court has said that criminal acts committed by youngsters should not be treated as a criminal record, but as the basis on which to rehabilitate them into society. Five years on from his sentence, John Freddy has committed no further criminal offences and has been completely rehabilitated.

All his family (parents, brothers, aunts and uncles, grandfather etc) are now British citizens. John Freddy has never returned to Colombia since leaving as a child and has no relatives there. In addition, he is now father to a baby boy who is almost three years of age and lives in Britain.

As a family we campaigned against John Freddy's deportation. On 28 May, as a last resort, we went to the airport with a letter addressed to passengers on the flight that he was going to be deported on, appealing to their consciences and asking them to refuse to board because the flight was being used to deport a young man whose rights were being violated.

We met at the airport three hours before the flight departure, wearing white T-shirts with John's picture. Many of the passengers took our letters, including passengers on other flights who approached us for them. But problems soon began. The police arrived and gave us an order to leave in 15 minutes. We told them why we were demonstrating and that we were determined not to move until the deportation order was cancelled.

A while later the police informed us that John Freddy would not be on that flight. This was excellent news, but we did not completely believe it so continued our demonstration until John Freddy himself called us to confirm his deportation order had been cancelled. There was loud applause in the airport, and between tears and shouts we all hugged each other. It was hard work but we had achieved our objective and the deportation order had for now been cancelled.

On Monday 15 June, after waiting all day in court, John Freddy was released on bail and was able to return to his home, to the joy of his young son and all his family. His case has not yet been fully resolved; we're looking forward to the European Court ruling and hope to make the British government recognise the rights of John Freddy to stay with his family.

The Suarez Santander family calls upon everyone to fight against deportations, not only for John, but for all of us immigrants. It is our duty to unite with our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted and victimised to defend our rights.

Elizabeth Santander

johnfreddycampaign@googlemail.com

Solidarity against detention and deportation

On 15 June 2009 families in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) began a protest and hunger strike. They were angered by their treatment and conditions but their central demand was an end to the detention of children. They asked for a representative of the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) to speak to them as Serco, the private company contracted to run Yarl's Wood, did not have the power to release the children. Steve Umoro, one of the parents involved, later told FRFI that the protest was peaceful at all times: 'We were not there for ourselves. We were fighting for the sake of our children.' No-one from UKBA came to see the detainees, so the parents moved their mattresses into the corridors and said they would remain there until someone came to discuss their concerns.

This passive resistance was met with violence. On 15 June Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR) received a phone call from Laureine Tchuapo, whose struggle against deportation to Cameroon they had been supporting. Laureine said a big group of guards had entered the section, dragged men from their families by force, and stripped two women naked. She said she had never seen such a violent assault. FRFI then spoke to Juliet Umoro, who graphically described the sudden, unprovoked attack, in which, as her husband was dragged away, her baby fell from her back and was trodden on by guards.

Four men and two women were taken to the solitary confinement part of the detention centre and handed notices stating that they were ringleaders of the protest. All but one was then moved to other detention centres and issued with removal directions. Those labelled 'ringleaders' were, in



FRFI Speak Out against Racism and Deportations, 13 June, London

the main, detainees who had spoken to the press about the protest, although Steve Umoro appears to have been targeted because in March this year, when the immigration police raided the Umoros' home in Barnsley for the second time, he staged an eight hour roof-top protest, which attracted local publicity. The Umoros had been in Barnsley since 2005 and had significant support from the local church and their son's school.

Steve was moved to Colnbrook IRC and held incommunicado until campaigners began complaining to UKBA. Juliet and others continued the protest in Yarl's Wood. Although the mainstream press all but ignored both the protest and the attack on it, anti-racist activists mobilised in support of the detainees. FRFI, TCAR, No Borders, SOAS Detainees' Support Group, Feminist Fightback, Cam-

paign against Immigration Controls, National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and other organisations telephoned and visited the detainees and tried to generate support for their struggle. Demonstrations were organised outside Serco's London office and at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre. Laureine Tchuapo, who, with the support of TCAR, had succeeded in getting her removal directions cancelled and been released on bail, came to London to speak to demonstrators at Communications House and on a march against ESOL cuts about the harsh reality of life in detention.

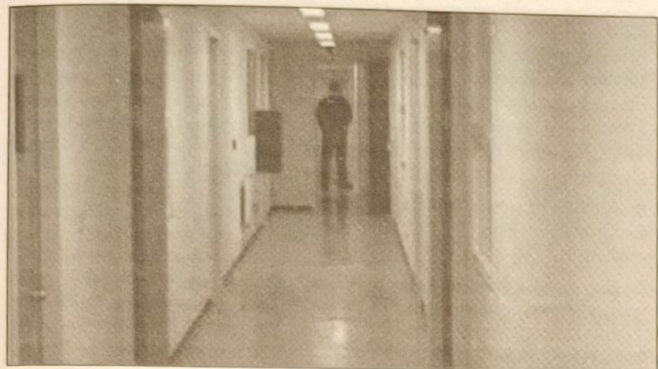
This solidarity with the Yarl's Wood protesters was carried over into opposition to the charter flight deportation to Nigeria on 30 June. An Omni Airlines flight picked up 96 Nigerians, including 21 children, from various

places in Europe, before flying to Lagos. The Umoro family were among those on the flight. Protesters from the Stop Deportations network managed to delay the flight by blocking the entrance to Yarl's Wood, so the coach carrying deportees could not leave. On the plane, protests by the prisoners held up the flight a bit longer. And while these actions did buy some time for a few people with emergency injunctions being heard in the courts, they were not able to prevent the flight going ahead. Steve and Juliet and their children were dumped in Lagos with no support and ended up sleeping in a churchyard, from where Steve sent this text message: 'they succeeded in taking us to Nigeria, am crying all day, don't know what to do, don't have place to stay, only a church and I fear for the kids. I don't know if we will survive, we know you all tried your best, they hardened their hearts, please do anything you can still do to bring us back'.

On 6 July Immigration Minister Phil Woolas responded to a parliamentary question about the cost of deportations over the past four years. In 2008-2009, £8,227,553 was spent on charter flight deportations and another £18,562,162 on scheduled flights. Last year Woolas boasted the government was deporting one person every eight minutes and in March 2009, before she was replaced as Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith issued an unequivocal declaration of war against immigrants: 'The message is clear - whether you're a visa overstayer, a foreign criminal or a failed asylum seeker, the UK Border Agency is determined to track you down and remove you from Britain.' As the capitalist crisis intensifies, this attack will be stepped up still further. A far stronger solidarity movement in opposition to detention and deportations needs to be built urgently!

Nicki Jameson

Campaigning against deportation – an inside story



What on earth made anyone come up with the concept of 'illegal human beings'? It should be illegal to have such a concept about people.

A month ago my partner and I were taken to a detention centre because the Home Office refused the asylum application we had been pursuing since our arrival in this country four years ago. During this time we have been given accommodation in north London and, because we are not allowed to work, we have been at college, firstly to learn English, and now my partner is a year away from her media diploma and I am about to finish a higher national diploma in fine art. Every week, while trying to lead a normal life, we have been signing on at Communications House at Old Street, where there is a constant danger of being taken prisoner and being deported against our will.

We left our country because of dangers resulting from our political activities and if it wasn't for this, we would be living where we were born. We left out of a necessity for peace and the fear of suffering persecution. But we came up against the political agenda of the British government, which is to attack the constitutional rights of migrants, despite the existence of international human rights legislation.

At the detention centre we saw children and pregnant women. The psychological situation of these families is extremely traumatic. There are playgrounds and even a library but the walls of the detention centre are identical to the walls of a prison. There is a horrible irony in this picture with room walls painted with multicolour smiles and blue skies in the foreground, while on the horizon you can see police, wire, and the gigantic walls outside.

Many people have been taken to airports by the authorities, who, for example, tried to split up a family of four, who we met. Many of them have come back to the detention centre after their commercial flights were cancelled because people refused to travel with a person who was shouting and telling everyone how his family

had been split up without his consent. They showed us the scars of their battles with the migration agents and told us about police brutality – about being hit and kicked on the floor in front of their children. An Algerian we met told us that he, his wife and two children had been in Yarl's Wood for nine months and they had tried to deport him four times. He had been living in the UK for 11 years and the children were born here. He has tried to contact the media without any response.

Six hours before our flight, when we had exhausted every legal possibility, we had to think about what we would do if we were forced onto a plane, and plan how to protest against this. A few days before our departure was due the family and friends of John Freddy Suarez had waged a successful campaign to stop a commercial flight, by distributing information to the people who were due to board the plane, informing them about his situation. While we were inside, lots of information was circulated about our case and people from Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! (FRFI) were all ready to go to the airport and protest there, as John Freddy's family did. They had prepared a document in English and Portuguese, informing passengers about our case and planned to petition people to stop the plane leaving until we were safe. Fortunately our case reached the court in time and at the last minute our deportation was cancelled and we were released, seven days after being detained at Communications House.

We have to thank comrades from FRFI who helped us throughout our time in detention by finding us a lawyer, visiting us and calling us constantly. Throughout the time we were inside, we knew our comrades were working outside.

Our experience proves to us that detention centres are racist and should be closed down. It also shows us that solidarity and direct and co-ordinated action can overcome the isolation that asylum seekers face and that campaigning can prevent people being deported against their will. We can exercise our right to stay!

Marcelo Duchon



Marcelo speaks at a meeting about Cuba and Bolivia shortly after his release from the detention centre

Reply to Ben Gunn

In 2002, legal action by then prisoner John Hirst forced the Prison Service to accept that Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of association) meant prisoners had the right to form 'representative associations'. The Association of Prisoners (AOP) had been set up shortly before this but did not become active; however, in April 2009, Ben Gunn announced that he was the AOP's new General Secretary. In the last issue of FRFI Ben set out his vision of how the AOP could further the struggles of prisoners. We invited other prisoners to respond. The contribution below is from long-term prison resister, **JOHN BOWDEN**.

If the history of the struggle for prisoners' rights shows anything, it is that the dynamism and strength of that struggle has always been primarily expressed by prisoners themselves. Certain individuals and groups of a reformist nature based outside prison that have claimed to speak on behalf of prisoners and represent their interests have always tended to pursue an agenda based either on self-aggrandisement or an eventual collaboration with the institutional interests of the prison system. John Hirst's AOP, devoid as it really is of any organic connection with prisoners in struggle, yet seeking as it does to assume a position of leadership over them, will either wither on the vine of his own personal ambition or, worse, be embraced by the prison system as a useful safety valve and means of legitimising its own authority.

Ben Gunn's article (which in my opinion was given undue prominence and priority over the news of Comrade Ronnie Easterbrook's tragic death) revealed both the ideological weakness of the AOP and its total naivety about the true nature of state power as enforced against prisoners. Ben writes: 'The essence of prison is power. And at the heart of the AOP's agenda is a rebalancing of that power and a calling to account of those who use it to misuse prisoners.' So how is

this to be done? Well, in the opinion of the AOP, not by old strategies of resistance and solidarity, not by uprisings and direct confrontation (or 'reform riots' as Ben calls them) which are apparently obsolete because of the prison system's greater effectiveness in containing and neutralising such forms of protest. According to Ben, the 'landscape' of power in prisons has now fundamentally changed and thuggish prison officers have been replaced by a sophisticated mechanism of offending behaviour programmes, sentence planning boards and behaviour modification privilege schemes, all of which render old forms of resistance worthless.

Instead, power should now be negotiated through 'representative associations' and a sort of democratic process, underpinned by the legal right to organise, which prison bosses will have no choice but to co-operate with, or 'grin and bear it', as Ben claims. This is of course a nonsensical analysis of how power operates and reveals complete ignorance and inexperience of how the prison system responds to prisoners challenging its control over them.

Certainly, the European Convention on Human Rights might allow prisoners an abstract right to set up 'representative associations' but only within the established parameters of 'good order and discipline', as defined by the prison authorities. Real power,

who wields it and over whom it is exercised is decided not by abstract rights or peaceful negotiation, but by the very nature of the prison system. In the final analysis, prisons represent a form of absolute state power that, along with the police, judiciary and army, has a single primary function and role outside of democratic control and influence – to maintain and enforce the capitalist status quo by whatever means necessary.

If the landscape of power in prison has changed, it is not to one where plain brutality has been replaced with a manageable strategy more responsive to formalised prisoner representation, but rather to one where absolute control and containment are imposed with even greater psychological and physical violence. And, contrary to Ben's claim that the old strategies of prisoner solidarity and resistance are no longer relevant to deciding and furthering prisoners' rights, it is in reality the virtual disappearance of such forms of struggle that has allowed prison administrations to enforce regimes even less tolerant of these rights.

Ben says that the broad aims of the AOP do not necessarily differ from those of established prison reform organisations, which suggests there is nothing fundamentally different about its analysis of prisons and the limitations of prisoner empowerment from that of middle class groups like the Howard League or Prison Reform Trust. Indeed, the main campaigning ambition of the AOP seems to consist of winning voting rights for prisoners and propagating the fallacious belief that the capitalist political system, currently shifting dangerously to the hard right, will somehow be responsive to votes from a savagely scapegoated minority whose very existence has been used to popularise right wing politics and the power of the state. If the AOP is seriously suggesting, especially in the current social and political climate, that the struggle of prisoners will ever be represented by corrupt bourgeois politicians, then it is going absolutely nowhere.

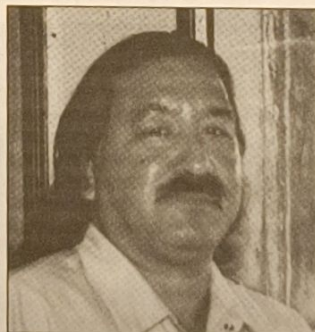
John Bowden, HMP Glenochil

Free Leonard Peltier!

'Much of the government's behaviour at the Pine Ridge Reservation and in its prosecution of Mr Peltier is to be condemned. The government withheld evidence. It intimidated witnesses. These facts are not disputed.'
US Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals

Leonard Peltier was born in 1944 on the Anishinabe (Chippewa) Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota. He grew up in poverty and survived many traumatic experiences resulting from government policies aimed at forced assimilation of native peoples. At the age of eight he was taken from his family and sent to a government-run residential boarding where students were forbidden to speak their own languages and were subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

As he grew older, he travelled as a migrant farm worker, following the harvests, and staying at different reservations. During this time, he came to learn that relocation, poverty, and racism were endemic and affected tribes across the US. By the early 1970s he had become involved with the American Indian Movement (AIM), eventually joining the Denver Colorado chapter. Involvement with AIM



led Leonard to assist the Oglala Lakota people of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

On 26 June 1975 a shoot-out took place at Pine Ridge. Leonard was accused of the murder of two FBI agents and, convinced he could never have a fair trial in the US, fled to Canada. However, he was caught and the FBI

knowingly presented the Canadian court with fraudulent affidavits, resulting in his being returned to the US for trial.

Key witnesses were banned from testifying about FBI misconduct and important evidence, such as conflicting ballistics reports, was ruled 'inadmissible'. Although the prosecutor, failed to produce a single witness who could identify Leonard Peltier as the shooter, he was given two life sentences.

In 2000, it was rumoured that then President Bill Clinton was considering freeing Peltier, leading to demonstrations by FBI agents and their families outside the White House. Leonard Peltier has now been in prison for 32 years and as FRFI goes to press, he is due to have his first full parole hearing since 1993.

Danny Masuka

For more information see <http://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/>

FRFI SUMMER 2009 CAMPAIGN

Seize the time – join our summer campaign

With the deepening economic crisis, and the political disarray within the ruling class, it is vital that socialists in Britain build on the opportunities that now exist to create a new anti-imperialist working class movement. There is real urgency: chances such as this do not come often, and we must seize them with both hands. Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! urges its readers to join with us in a summer of campaigning activity to help extend and deepen the influence of our trend, taking a stand on the streets against war in Iraq and Afghanistan, in support of socialist Cuba, in defence of the Palestinian Intifada, alongside those fighting racism and deportation or factory closures or public sector cuts. Below are details of just some of the activities we have done so far – become a part of future ones.

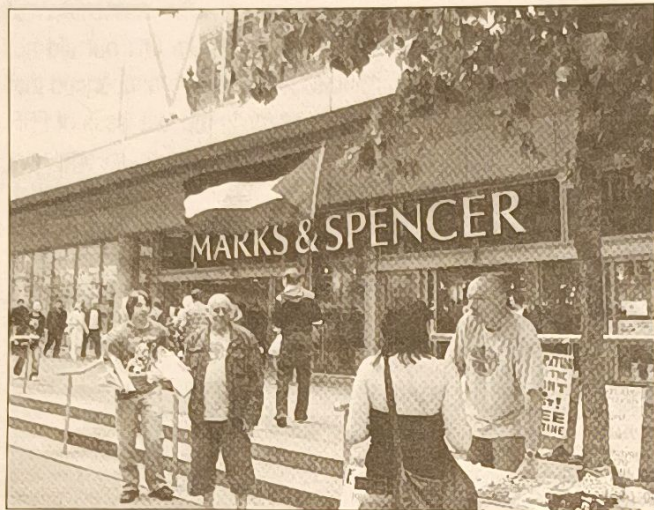
Fight racism!

On 13 June at Angel, London FRFI organised a Speak out against Racism and Deportations. Our message was clear: that we must stand together to fight the racist policies of the Labour government. We were joined on the demonstration by the family and friends of John Freddy Suarez, whose deportation was prevented at the last minute on 28 May when the family went en masse to the airport and protested against his deportation, and by Bolivian activists Diana and Marcelo with whom we campaigned to prevent their deportation. (For more information on both these campaigns see pages 12 and 13.) London activists have also supported the struggles of cleaning workers such as those sacked by the Mitie company after joining a union and fighting for basic working conditions, such as a living wage. The fight for decent working conditions has become intrinsically linked to the fight against Britain's racist immigration laws. Both the Mitie workers and cleaning staff at SOAS have recently been subject to immigration raids, resulting in detentions and deportations. Their struggle continues.

On 20 June in Newcastle FRFI comrades participated in the Northern March Against Immigration Prisons organised by Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR). The march was planned to fall during Refugee Week to expose the reality of how refugees and other migrants are treated in British detention centres. However, due to the horrific attacks on peaceful hunger strikers in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre during the previous week, the march had a specific focus of solidarity with those detainees.

Around 50 anti-racist protesters assembled in front of the Centre for Life in Newcastle, while fascists at Grey's Monument (the destination of the rally) had assembled, kicked over a stall and tried to rip down a banner. A fascist banner read 'Stop Immigration'. The police were aware of the likelihood of a fascist counter-demonstration. Despite this, police presence was slight and their evidence gatherers seemed more interested in filming the anti-racist protesters. The march carried on undeterred with chants of 'Together! Together! Together we are Stronger!'

When the march reached Grey's Monument we began the rally, inviting all anti-racists to come and speak. The fascists, who had run ahead of the march, were standing on a corner of the monument, but as more people



FRFI supporters demonstrate at Marks & Spencer, as part of rolling picket, 27 June

joined us and the speeches began they soon left. Activists spoke about the government's actions in attacking the working class and how we need to stay united to challenge this.

Justice for immigrants! Freedom for refugees!

Victory to the Intifada!

In Manchester on 27 June, Armed Forces Day, we held a rolling picket in solidarity with the people of Palestine, who continue to suffer at the hands of a brutal Israeli state armed and supported by the British Labour government. The protest began outside the Co-operative Bank, which has colluded with the government's policy to prevent aid being sent to the Gaza strip. We then moved on to protest outside Schuh, a shoe shop which sells Caterpillar boots – the same company which provides Israel with the bulldozers it uses to demolish Palestinian homes. The Palestinians continue to resist. They are an inspiration to us all.

Viva Cuba!

Around the country Rock around the Blockade (RATB) has held and attended meetings about Cuba, arguing in support of the socialist revolution. We went to confront lies and distortions first at Marxism, the annual Socialist Workers' Party conference, and then a week later in a debate with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. (For details see page 4.)

On 6 June in London members of Rock around the Blockade gathered outside the US embassy in London to protest at the unjust imprisonment of the Cuban 5, five political prisoners

held in US gaols. The demonstration was part of an international day of action to support the five men and to demand that they be freed immediately.

In Manchester RCG activists held a stall in Hulme and Moss Side, just south of the city centre. Local people were very interested in the comparisons we were making between recession-hit Britain and socialist Cuba where the priorities of the revolution are social welfare provision and educational development.

Stop school closures!

In Glasgow on 27 June the RCG joined parents and pupils at St Gregory and Wyndford primary schools protesting against the city council's closure of the local schools. Parents and children occupied the school and blocked the entrance to prevent vans full of educational material leaving the premises, while in turn the council cut off gas and water supplies to those inside. The parents were militant and defiant, fighting to defend Maryhill's working class community from the attacks of a shameless Labour council.

Throughout this summer the RCG will be working on all these issues – fighting back against state racism, supporting immigrant workers' struggles, defending the Palestinian people, supporting the Cuban Revolution, campaigning for affordable housing, protesting against school closures, as well as denouncing the brutal occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan on the streets of Britain. Now is the time to get active, all of us have a role to play and a responsibility to act. Join us in action!



Anti-racist protestors confront racist counter-demonstrators in Newcastle, 20 June

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 4 August and 1 September 1-2pm

Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!

Demonstration at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre Old Street, EC1
Nearest tube Old Street

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Victory to the Intifada

Picket Marks & Spencer, Oxford St, WC1
Nearest tube Marble Arch

Sunday 23 August

Sponsored fund-raising bike ride
Contact us for sponsorship form and route details

For more details call 020 7837 1688 or email londonfrfi@gmail.com

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 1 August 12-2pm
Tyneside Community Action for Refugees

Speak out against racism
Grey's Monument

Sunday 23 August all day
Sponsored walk up Scafell Pike, the highest mountain in England!

Tuesday 25 August 6pm
Public meeting: Corrupt economy, bankrupt politics: Don't vote, organise to fight back!
Allendale Community Centre, Allendale Road, Walker

Wednesday 26 August 7pm
Punx Against Prejudice fundraising gig
Dog and Parrot, Clayton Street
Near Central Station
£4 on the door

Every Thursday 5-7pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Victory to the Intifada
Picket Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

Every Saturday 3pm
TCAR weekly meeting
Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop, bottom of Westgate Road

SUNDERLAND

Wednesday 29 July 7-9pm
Public meeting: What can we do about unemployment?
Royalty Pub, Chester Road

For details of other stalls around the region call 07858 346 276 or email frfinortheast@googlemail.com

MANCHESTER

Sunday 9 August 2pm
Public meeting: Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?
Cross Street Chapel, off Market Street

Saturday 15 August 12pm
Rolling picket
Support the people of Palestine!
Assemble at Co-operative Bank, next to the Printworks, City Centre

Sunday 16 August 2pm
Palestinian film showing
Cross Street Chapel

For details of Saturday street stalls call 07519 427 093 or email mcrcgrfi@fmail.net

LIVERPOOL

Tuesday 8 September 7.30pm
Public meeting: Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?
Methodist Centre, Bold Street (next to News from Nowhere)
For details call 07956 458 331

GLASGOW

Tuesday 11 August 7.30pm

Public forum: Divide and rule – the fight against racism
Langside Hall, 1 Langside Avenue

Tuesday 1 September 7.30pm
The struggle for democratic rights on the street today
Langside Hall

Tuesday 15 September 7.30pm
John MacLean and the revolutionary tradition in Glasgow
Langside Hall

Tuesday 29 September 7.30pm
Ireland and Britain: the Marxist tradition
Langside Hall

On 13 September FRFI is entering a team in the annual Glasgow to Edinburgh 50-mile cycle ride to raise money towards our fighting fund. To take part or sponsor us call 07779 785 529.

September 14-20
FRFI stalls at Glasgow University freshers' week

DUNDEE

Thursday 13 August 7-9pm
Public meeting: Corrupt economy, bankrupt politics: Don't vote, organise to fight back!
Conference Room, Wellgate Library

For further details of events and activities in Scotland call 07779 785 529 or email frfiscotland@yahoo.com

RATB EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesday 11 August and 8 September 7-9.30pm
Discussions on Che Guevara: the Economics of Revolution
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Rd, WC1
Contact us to purchase a copy of the book (£15)

For details call 020 7837 1688 or email office@ratb.org.uk

MANCHESTER

Sunday 6 September 2pm
Film: Mission against terror about the imprisonment of the Cuban 5 in Miami
Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street
For details call 07940 988 203 or email manc@ratb.org.uk

EDINBURGH

Saturday 12 September 12-2pm
Street meeting: Free the Cuban 5! US imperialism out of Latin America!
Duke of Wellington Statue, Princes Street
then march to US Consulate for protest

DUNDEE

Thursday 17 September 7-9pm
Public meeting: US hands off Latin America! No more coups! No more death squads!
Room G3, Dundee University Tower, Perth Road

NEWCASTLE

Sundays 2, 16 and 30 August, 13 and 27 September 3-5pm
Che Guevara: the Economics of Revolution book group
Settle Down Cafe, Thornton Street
Near Central Station

Wednesday 5 August 7pm
Film: Hunger
The Salsa Club, 89-93 Westgate Road
Near Central Station

Wednesday 19 August 7pm
Film: The Weather Underground
The Salsa Club

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

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email _____

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Group 4 brutality in detention centres

My name is Valter Bruno Ribeiro and I am an EU citizen. I am writing to share with you a very bad experience in the hands of the G4S officers [officers at detention centres]. On 21 June I was badly assaulted and verbally abused by the G4S officers in Brook House where I was detained.

After this incident I called the police to report it. The police came to interview me and after I explained to the officers what had been done to me, they replied 'Who do you think they are going to believe? 15 men who work for the government – or a convicted criminal like you?' I share this with you so you can have an idea of what really goes on in detention centres across the UK.

VALTER BRUNO
Brook House Detention Centre

Non-Stop Picket censored

Between June and September 2009, the Museum of London is hosting an exhibition entitled *Forward to Freedom*, a history of the anti-apartheid movement in Britain, and particularly in London. Opened by Bob [now Lord] Hughes, former chair of the official Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain in the 1980s, it appears to censor all mention of the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy which was at the heart of anti-apartheid protest in London in the 1980s, a point FRFI supporter and long-time picket member Jon Kempster raised with the curator. We reprint his letter.

Dear Annette Day

The Museum of London is my favourite museum in the world, but I am disappointed with your

exhibition on the anti-apartheid movement in Britain.

No mention was made of the most significant and successful anti-apartheid action to have ever taken place in the UK, and it happened here in London. I am referring to the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy which was maintained in Trafalgar Square, day and night, for four years from 1986 until Mandela's release in 1990.

I have hundreds of photographs, artefacts and audio material from the demonstration, including an interview with the South African exile Norma Kitson, one of the leaders of the picket. I would gladly have made this material available for your exhibition if asked.

You missed an entire subplot – that of the split between the Labour

Party and TUC-supported 'official' Anti-Apartheid Movement and the smaller, but more active, radical and broad-based City of London Anti-Apartheid Group. It is a very important, if slightly uncomfortable story, and I wish you had researched more widely in order to tell it to Londoners.

I have to say that amongst colleagues and friends, regardless of their political persuasion, if asked about their memories of the anti-apartheid struggle in this country, the first thing they mention is the Non-Stop Picket. It is a great shame that not one word was given over to the picket in your exhibition.

Yours sincerely,

JONATHAN KEMPSTER
East London

Durham miners in solidarity with Cuba



FRFI with representatives from the Cuban teachers' union in Durham

On 11 July, as part of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! North East, I attended the Durham Miners Gala. To commemorate 50 years of the Cuban Revolution, a representative from the Cuban teachers' union, Anne Margarita Fuertes spoke from the platform. She was by far the most inspiring speaker there. Anne gave details of the thousands of doctors and teachers from the poorest countries in the world being educated for free in Cuban universities and of the 1.5 million people internationally who have received free eye treatment at the Milagro hospital and the brigades of health workers volunteering abroad. She demanded our solidarity and support against the

incarceration of the Cuban 5 who remain imprisoned in the US after ten years for the crime of trying to stop terrorist acts against their country. Anne also called for our solidarity against the illegal blockade and recognised the support from unions and organisations all over the world when Cuba was suffering economic hardship during the special period. It was great to see the NUM in Durham standing in solidarity with Cuba and recognising the formidable achievements of 50 years of the Revolution. Viva Cuba! Viva Durham miners!

SAM MCGILL
Newcastle

Visas for families of Cuban 5

As a member of Amnesty International and Rock around the Blockade, I am appalled by the refusal of the US authorities to grant temporary visas to Adriana Perez and Olga Salanueva, whose husbands are serving prison terms in US gaols. I am also appalled that the US Supreme Court has refused their husbands the right to appeal against their convictions for spying and conspiracy to commit murder when in reality, as Cuban nationals, they were simply observing and reporting on the activities of right-wing terrorist organisations in Florida who have been for many years launching attacks on Cuba with the full knowledge of the US authorities.

I am talking of course of the Cuban 5, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero, who as your readers will know are five Cuban men who did not get a

fair hearing at their rigged trial in the heart of the counter-revolutionary Cuban community of Florida.

Please support these two women in their quest simply to visit their husbands by appealing to the US government to grant them temporary visas. By delaying these visas, the US is imposing unnecessary and additional punishment on these prisoners in contravention of International Human Rights standards. I and many others in Amnesty have written appeals and are awaiting replies. Please write to: Stephen McFarland, Office of Cuban Affairs, US Department of State 2201 C Street NW, Washington DC 20520, USA with copies to Mr Robert Holmes Tuttle, Embassy of the USA, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1A 1AE.

ROBERT REDFORD
Lincoln

Solidarity from the lock-down

I write to request that you put me on your mailing lists for FRFI.

I am currently on lock-down, on basic as per usual for the slightest breach of rules, on £2.50 a week. The lads look after me.

As soon as I'm off basic (not for the foreseeable future, I'll bet!) I will send a postal order in solidarity to FRFI. Last time I was in prison (full time, in the blocks) I used to send donations to Rock around the Blockade. I tried getting to Cuba – and I will one day!

JASON DARNALL PD7640
HMP Full Sutton

Prison messages: hungry for justice

This prison has withheld my last two copies of your publication. Will they ever learn?

DAVID BRIGHT J84191
HMP Wakefield

I got a letter today from my solicitor – the Criminal Cases Review Commission has finally approved DNA testing on the forensic samples taken from the body of the woman whose murder I am falsely imprisoned for. Yippee! Happy days. Thank you for your support over the years.

TERRY ALLEN L55957
HMP Coldingley

Congratulations on an excellent paper!

JON KEELER KB7106
HMP Long Lartin

UK Border Force propaganda TV

In July, Sky TV announced it had commissioned production company Steadfast Television to produce a second series of *UK Border Force*. Billed as 'a revealing new documentary series, which takes you behind the scenes at Heathrow Terminal 3, Dover and out and about with diligent enforcement teams – all cracking down on illegal immigrants', what viewers actually get is pure government propaganda, an entirely uncritical examination of the immigration system. Steadfast's other credits include *Traffic Cops*, *Sky Cops*, *Cars Cops* and *Criminals*, *CCTV: you are being watched* and *Brit Cops: Frontline Crime*.

The language used both in the programmes and on the Sky website is often racist and patronising. In one episode, viewers are shown the work of immigration officers at Calais who use sophisticated technology to detect mainly Afghani and Iraqi men who are hiding in lorries. The carbon dioxide and heart beat monitors are described as 'extra tools' in an 'armoury' to combat

the 'flood' of illegal immigrants. The immigration officers are portrayed as compassionate but firm as they wage their heroic war against 'illegals', while the migrants are dehumanised. The narrator describes their plight with a detachment reminiscent of nature programmes: 'The clandestines are cunning and their hiding places imaginative'. The audience is of course not told how many people have died of suffocation in the lorries in the last few years.

The new series will be showing scenes from Nigeria, where 'undercover officers risk their lives trying to stop people boarding flights to the UK on fake passports'. No doubt the cameras will not be on when charter flights of asylum seeking families, who have been gathered up from cities across Europe, handcuffed, trussed up, beaten into submission and flown to Lagos are pushed through the airport and dumped on the streets with nowhere to go and no means of support.

ANNABELLE RICHARDSON
Newcastle

Fighting global health inequality

I want to draw your attention to a new book by Theodore H MacDonald, *Removing the barriers to global health equity* (Routledge Publishing 2009, 289pp, £25.95). The Alma Ata Declaration of the World Health Organisation in 1978 identified economic and social factors as the issues for global health and the solutions as political. Over 30 years on, the gap between rich and poor continues to widen under imperialism, with the paradox of incredible medical advances yet so few benefiting globally. The pharmaceutical corporations have played an enormous role in combating disease, however, the good they have done in the third world is incidental to them making a profit.

As MacDonald writes, 'While children in their millions die through use of polluted water or through lack of water altogether, corporate owners of the water companies responsible for supplying those people sit in boardroom meetings where clean bottled water is routinely available in abundance to slake the thirst of the very people profiting from the deaths of those children.'

The role of the World Bank, the IMF, Structural Adjustment Policies, the repayments of loans in US dollars leads to enforced sacrifice of health and education. Tragically, the WHO Health For All 2000 programme's 38 targets

were never achieved and there is no prospect of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

MacDonald also explores the migration of doctors and nurses from poor to rich countries, acknowledging the disastrous impact on the poor countries and the severe shortages of staff. Africa has 11% of the world's population, 25% of its disease burden and 3% of its health workers. On a global scale, 4.3 million health workers are needed to meet the needs of over 1.3 billion people lacking any kind of access to health.

The author is clear: trillions spent on armaments cannot ensure our security, medical advances are in the hands of corporations intent on profit at any human cost, healthcare workers are seen as legitimate trade under imperialism, further depleting desperate countries, food and water shortages are on the increase, international bodies are increasingly tied to the World Bank and IMF. Significant sections of the planet's population are facing disaster. But what he also shows is that human beings will resist. I strongly recommend this book as it leaves you ready to be part of that global resistance.

HANNAH CALLER
North London

Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution

Helen Yaffe Palgrave Macmillan, March 2009

Based on fascinating new archival research and interviews with his contemporaries and colleagues, this book records Guevara's contribution to industrial organisation, economic management and socialist political economy debates as a member of the Cuban government. It rescues the history of his work as President of the National Bank, head of the Department of Industrialisation and Minister of Industries from 1959 to 1965.

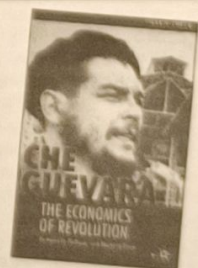
'Using fascinating new sources, Yaffe gives us a detailed and knowledgeable picture of a different Che... a valuable contribution to our understanding of Guevara but also to debates on the Left.'

Tony Kapcia, Professor of Latin American History, University of Nottingham

'The passion of an activist and the erudition of an academic'

Enrico Tortolano, Tribune

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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Housing: Labour sets racist agenda

As the economic crisis intensifies, the Labour government is stoking the fires of racism. In a sinister echo of his call for 'British jobs for British workers', on 29 June Prime Minister Gordon Brown demanded 'British homes for British families'. BARNABY MITCHELL reports.

The Labour Party's relaunch document, *Building Britain's Future*, says the government will 'change the current rules for allocating council and other social housing, enabling local authorities to give more priority to local people and those who have spent a long time on a waiting list', fuelling the lie that 'local [ie white] people' are being forced out of social rented housing by migrants, asylum seekers and others. In reality, local authority waiting lists already prioritise people with a local connection. Brown's announcement is a piece of classic Labour demagoguery, pandering to racist concerns about immigration that was seized on with glee by sections of the media: Writing in the *Daily Mail* on 30 June, Andrew Green, chair of the racist think tank Migration Watch, claimed that 'white working class people were indeed being leapfrogged by new arrivals with large families'. On 2 July, the *Daily Express* ranted about the 'socialists' long-held discrimination in housing against 'the indigenous population'.

In 2007 Margaret Hodge, Labour MP for Barking and Dagenham, called for 'indigenous' people to be given priority over migrants to housing and public services. In January 2009, then Communities Secretary Hazel Blears called for 'white working class grievances' to be heard, with Labour MP Frank Field adding: 'Hazel Blears says that people on council estates feel ignored. That is exactly our point. And not only on council estates - 80% of the public want to see a substantial reduction in immigration, but the government refuses to address the issue.' And, in words that would not have been out of place on a BNP leaflet, he continued: 'If Labour wants to influence the outcome of the next general election, it had better start addressing white working-class concern about immigration, not simply reporting on it.'

As the housing crisis deepens, Labour is increasingly worried about losing voters to overtly fascist parties such as the BNP and UKIP. It peddles lies and misinformation to cover up the truth: that the housing crisis is entirely of its making and that housing practice in this country is racist and discriminatory.

Debunking the lies

The truth is that both today and historically, migrants live in the worst housing conditions. 90% of those living in England who arrived in the last two years live in the private rented sector, often in substandard housing. Figures published on 8 July by the Equality and Human Rights Commission showed conclusively that only 1.8 per cent of those who have migrated to Britain in the last five years currently have access to council housing, with 87.8 per cent being let to those born in the UK.

For many migrant workers, accommodation is provided by employers, employment agencies or gang masters, with rent generally subtracted from their wages. If these workers lose their jobs they become homeless. A Trades Union Congress survey published in September 2007 claimed that migration has reintroduced the 'tied cottage' into the British labour market. Individuals reported that they had little control over working excessive hours because their employment was linked to their accommodation, and more than half of those who described their living conditions as poor or very poor were in accommodation provided through their employer.

In some cases, conditions are so bad that they meet internationally agreed definitions of forced labour. (*No place like home* discussion paper, Shelter, October 2008)

Far from 'jumping the queue', asylum seekers have no rights to mainstream housing or benefits at all, and are provided for under an entirely separate system run by the Home Office, often ending up housed in the worst possible accommodation. There is also increasing evidence of destitution among migrants and according to the official government street count figures for rough sleepers in July 2008, 20 per cent of rough sleepers are now migrants from the EU.

Not only migrants, but black and minority ethnic (BME) groups overall face disproportionate levels of homelessness and housing problems. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) ethnic minority households are roughly three times more likely to become statutorily homeless than the majority white population. DCLG research into overcrowding also shows that BME groups are significantly more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, especially in London. For white people the national rate of overcrowding is 1.8 per cent, but for BME groups it is 11 per cent. In London the rate for white people rises to 4 per cent, and for BME groups to 13 per cent.

Racist propaganda about preferential access to housing is therefore based on a vicious and divisive lie.

Crisis of affordable housing

In the current housing crisis, there is no shortage of houses per se - the last 10 years have witnessed a construction

share in the joys of a property-owning democracy. Privatisation, right to buy, cheap loans and mortgages, key worker schemes - sections of the working class were assisted to get their feet on the housing ladder with the promise of security. With the credit crunch, it is a dream that has turned sour for many; for thousands, redundancy or wage cuts bring the threat of repossession (there were 142,743 repossession orders issued in 2008, the highest since 1991) and eviction, and ever greater pressure on the rented housing market.

This is exacerbating the problem that decades of attacks on council housing and continuing privatisation by both Conservative and Labour governments have resulted in a massive shortage of affordable housing in the UK. In the 1950s local authorities built as many as 245,000 units a year. In the 21st century, in some years as few as 60 council houses were completed across the country. Access to the council housing which remains is rationed according to need. Today demand far outstrips supply and unless you are actually homeless, have multiple social problems, disabilities and dependent children you may well be destined to sit forever on a local authority waiting list with little hope of ever securing a social housing tenancy; it is estimated that five million people will be on the waiting list for social housing by 2012. The London borough of Islington, where housing is run by an Arms Length Management Company (ALMO), will complete only 10 new council houses this summer, but has a waiting list of 15,000 for social housing. The Labour government has tried to use different means to ration council housing: in early 2008, the then Housing



The shortage of adequate social housing means that many working class families end up in poorly-maintained tower blocks. Six people, including children, died in the fire that swept through this estate in Camberwell, south London in July 2009

Homeless numbers have jumped by 15% in the last year. Broadway charity for the homeless has shown that 4,672 rough sleepers were counted in the capital, up from 4,077 last year. 60% were UK nationals. This figure is likely to increase as young people who refuse a job or training offer have their benefits cut under Labour's new proposals.

Under Labour's *Building Britain's Future* proposals, local authorities will be allowed to retain rent from council housing and receipts from right-to-buy purchasers, rather than the money going

for an extra 139,000 'affordable' homes over the next decade, but given that currently, despite government pledges in 2007 for an extra 70,000 affordable homes a year by 2010-11, only 56,450 dwellings (of which only 13,500 will be council housing) are now likely to be built, only time will tell whether this is just more New Labour hot air.

Dividing the working class

As the economic crisis intensifies, the British ruling class and its representatives in the Labour government are intensifying their scapegoating of migrants and minorities and the policy of divide and rule of the working class. As living standards are cut and increasing numbers of people are faced with insecurity and poverty, the state and ruling class need to ensure that anger is channelled not at its cause, a capitalist system in crisis and the ruthless exploitation of workers, but instead at migrants and minorities.

The grievances of working class people about the lack of decent housing, poverty wages, increased crime etc are a direct result of Labour and Tory government policies which have attacked working class living conditions for decades and subsidised the middle and millionaire classes.

Socialists and campaigners need to fight to dispel the racist myths surrounding the shortage of decent housing for working class people and turn all the anger and resentment against the Labour government and their property speculating friends.

We should learn from the example of the squatters who occupied the empty home of Labour MPs Ann and Alan Keene, aka 'Mr and Mrs Expenses'. The squatters made the point: 'We want to get back something that has been taken from us in the expenses scandal. There are 10,000 people on the housing waiting list in Hounslow alone - and people like the Keenes are spending our money on keeping houses empty.'

'Everyone who needs housing should occupy empty buildings, but as Ann Keene voted in favour of the war in Iraq, the house will hopefully become a refugee centre and home to some of the people she made homeless through poverty and war.'



Squatters occupied the empty home of Labour expenses-scandal MPs Ann and Alan Keene

boom. However under capitalism, housing is a commodity built for exchange on the open market. Housing is allocated by the market, not on the basis of need. In England alone approximately 720,000 properties stand empty, over 80% of which are in the private sector. The housing crisis is not a crisis of supply - it's a crisis of distribution.

During times of economic prosperity and rising house prices, property speculation was a route to wealth for the middle classes as Labour encouraged ever wider swathes of the population to

Minister Caroline Flint suggested that unemployed people in council housing could risk losing their homes if they couldn't prove that they were looking for work. By the end of the year, as the crisis really hit home, her replacement, Margaret Beckett was considering proposals that there should be means tests for council tenants and periodic reviews of tenants' financial situations. Should their income exceed a certain level, they should either pay a higher rent or be 'encouraged' to move into the private sector.

to the Treasury. However, this extra money will result in a mere 20,000 extra homes being built over the next two years, of which only 3,000 will be council housing. Much of the rest will be part-rent/part-buy which is too expensive for the majority of those on the housing waiting lists. A survey published in April by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment revealed that 83% of affordable housing schemes were judged of average or poor design quality. Since then, on 6 July, the government promised funding