

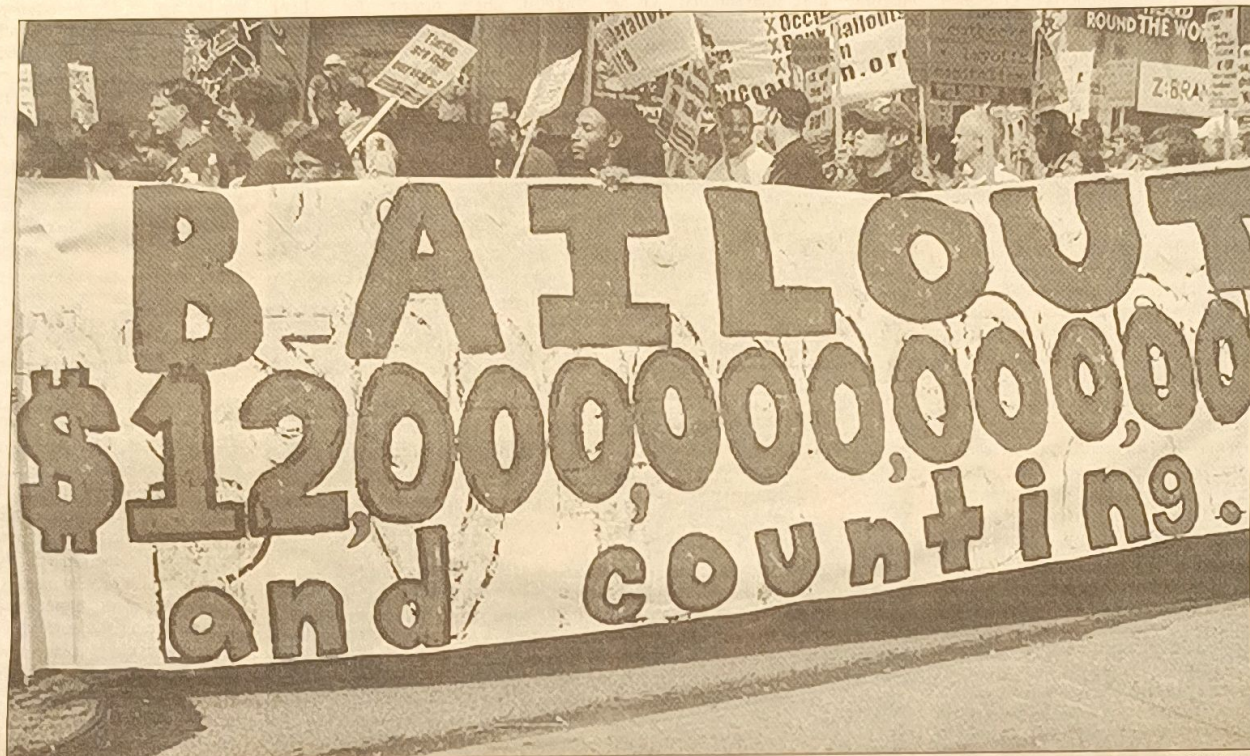
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group Number 211 October/November 2009

(unwaged 50p) 80p

Solidarity
price
£1

www.revolutionarycommunist.org



G20 summit, September 2009, Pittsburgh, US: President Obama promised the demonstrators that there would be regulation for banks and financial institutions – no effective regulation has been agreed. The focus in Britain has turned to cuts in public spending and in the US corporate hostility is blocking healthcare reforms (see page 8).

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BRITAIN'S CRISIS PUBLIC SERVICES UNDER ATTACK

The financial panic is apparently over. Those investment banks that survived the crisis are back to business as usual, making huge profits from buying and selling stocks, bonds and commodities. Large bonuses worth millions of dollars are being doled out to bankers. Stock markets are rising again. The French, German and Japanese economies began to grow again in the second quarter of 2009. In mid-September Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, said that the US recession is 'very likely over' and the governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, told MPs that the UK economy may have already started to grow. Finally Dominique Strauss-Kahn, head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has declared that 'The global economy appears to be emerging at last from the worst economic downturn in our lifetimes.' The immediate crisis might be over for the rich and powerful, but, as DAVID YAFFE reports, it still has a long way to run for almost everyone else.

The IMF reported in April 2009 that total support for the financial system from governments and central banks of the US, the eurozone and the UK had reached an unprecedented \$8,955bn – \$1,950bn in liquidity support, \$2,525bn in asset purchases and \$4,480bn in guarantees (*Financial Times* 16 September 2009). The sheer scale of this intervention explains why

financial meltdown has been averted. But the economic crisis is by no means over. The overaccumulation of capital in the main imperialist countries, the lack of profitable investment opportunities globally for capital and the rivalries between the main imperialist powers that underlie the crisis have not even been addressed. What has occurred is that the losses of

financial institutions have been socialised and transferred to government balance sheets. These will eventually have to be paid back. This deleveraging process – cuts in state welfare, tax increases and rising interest rates – has barely begun and when it does eventually get underway it could tip the main capitalist economies back into recession.

'Socially useless banks'

The impact of the global crisis on the British economy has been accentuated by the central importance of financial services and particularly the City of London to British capitalism.¹ There is public anger at the bonus culture, greed and arrogance of City bankers. This reality is even causing divisions in the British ruling class. The head of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), Lord Turner, in a remarkable interview in *Prospect* magazine at the end of August described some of the innovative activities of the City, such as credit default swaps, as 'socially useless'. A former banker himself, Lord Turner said that the financial services sector had 'grown beyond a socially reasonable size'. The FSA should, he said, 'be very, very wary of

seeing the competitiveness of [the City of] London as a major aim', arguing that the City has become a destabilising factor in the British economy. If higher capital requirements are insufficient to curb excessive profit and pay in the sector then he is prepared to consider a global tax on financial transactions. His position is in direct conflict with that of the Labour government, whose central priority is to ensure that the British economy remains a 'world centre of finance'² the financial arm of British imperialism. In response to Turner, Treasury aides to the chancellor said that no such taxes on financial transactions were under consideration, and that Mr Darling insists that the City should continue to play a leading role in global finance (*Financial Times* 27 August 2009).

George Magnus, senior economic adviser at the Swiss corporate bank UBS, took Turner's side on the excessive influence of the City. He pointed out that between 2005 and 2007 financial and housing sector-related activity made up 60% of the growth of the British economy. 'Banks were using money to make money in a kind of casino fashion that has no socially

useful purpose'. Karel Williams, professor of accounting and political economy at Manchester University, also sided with Turner, saying: 'The final measure of the social uselessness of the City is that it has wrecked the public finances for a whole generation'. Richard Lambert, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, hit back a few days later, arguing that the City is a vital part of the UK and not a 'bloated excrescence' that unbalances the economy. He used the opportunity for a gratuitous attack on the public sector. Playing down the importance of the financial sector in the British economy – no more than 8% of gross value added – he said that the total pay of financial services employees represents a bit less than 4% of GDP. He continued: 'For comparison, the public sector equivalent is over 16%. Which figure is too big?' (*Financial Times* 29/30 August and 4 September 2009). Two weeks later Peter Levene, chairman of Lloyds, joined in attacking what he called 'dangerous talk' from those who seek to limit pay and reduce the size of the financial sector. 'There is a very real danger that we

continued on page 3

Education notes

No surprises in summer exam results – only pain

Summer 2009 saw the usual media headlines as GCSE and A level results came out. They swung between celebration at rising pass levels to criticism about the standard and value of different subjects and exam boards. Overall, the published results confirmed that money for private education and selection of the brightest pupils is the key to success. A report from the Joint Council for Qualifications on GCSE results showed that private schools have extended their lead over comprehensive schools, with more than half of GCSE exams taken by students at fee-paying schools awarded an A or A*, compared with 17.3% from comprehensive schools. Selective Grammar school pupils outperformed students in private schools, with 55% achieving A or A*, compared with 53.7% at private schools. Exam results A*-C were awarded to 95.3% of Grammar school pupils, compared with 91.8% of pupils at private schools and 64% at comprehensives.

There are 3,211 state-funded secondary schools in the UK which are attended by 93% of pupils. Of these, 164 are Grammar schools which select pupils by exam entry at 11. Private fee-paying schools, also known as independent schools, where fees can be over £20,000 a year, are attended by 7% of secondary school pupils.

Climbing the education ladder

Statutory education in the UK ends at 16, after GCSEs. There is then a complicated structure of exams and qualifications which rations access at every level of further and higher education, leading to the goal of university admission. Even universities are graded, with Oxford and Cambridge still dominant, together with 18 others

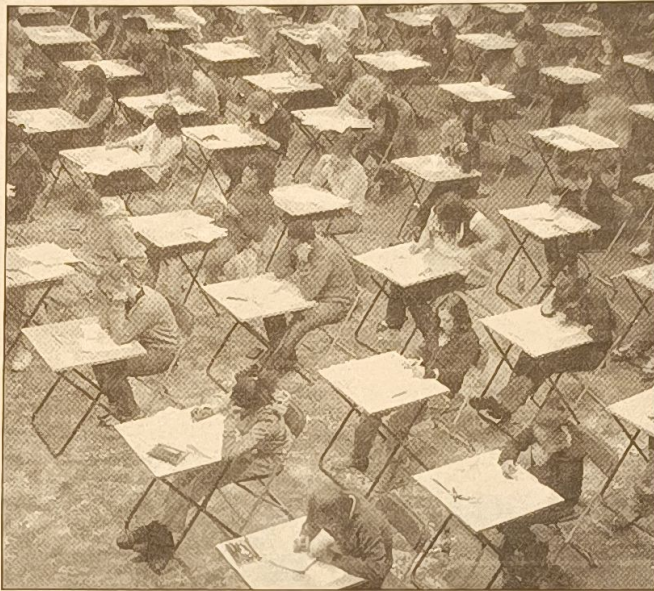
that make up the elite Russell Group. Between them, these 20 universities supply the largest cohorts of graduates for the top jobs in the legal profession, banking, the armed forces and the Civil Service.

In 2007 the Labour government set Oxford and Cambridge a target of enrolling 77% of students from state schools. That would leave 23% of places for the 7% of pupils from private schools. In fact, although in 2007 Oxford reached 53.4% of state school admissions, this has now dropped to 50%, much the same as Cambridge. Significantly, Grammar school pupils, who out-perform private pupils at GCSE, count as state sector students. This is because the small number of Grammar schools are funded like other state schools, even though their pupils are selected by admissions exams for an academic education, often excluding local children. Indeed, 33.4% of Grammar school applicants to Oxford and Cambridge have a chance of getting in, compared to 31.5% from private schools and 25% from comprehensive schools.

As increasing numbers of students gained GCSEs, including good GCSEs (five A-C grades), another story was being told behind the scenes. Exam boards are now a big part of the education business and schools can choose the one that offers the best 'product' for their pupils. It is rumoured that some exams are much easier, or the marking scheme more generous, and that this is why two-thirds of GCSEs were graded at least C and one in five scored A or A*. There is also a hierarchy of GCSE subjects, which is revealed by the distribution of entries. Comprehensive students made up 90% of entries for media, film and television studies, while privately-schooled pupils represented 60% of candidates for Latin and Ancient

Greek. Half of independent school pupils do not sit maths GCSE, instead entering the International GCSE which is similar to traditional O levels and eases transition to A level sciences. In 1996, 61% of five GCSE A-C results included English, maths, a science and a modern foreign language compared to 41% in 2009.

including English and maths, at GCSE. Meeting this target is now the biggest single priority for school heads. Pupils begin exam courses early to sit GCSEs at 13 or 14, or are entered with two or three different exam boards for the same subject; predicted D grade pupils get booster lessons in the holidays to get them a C



Exam results rule the school

Each year, examination results are published as if all students had been running the same race. In reality, poor children start far behind and can rarely catch up with those who have had the many privileges that money can buy to enrich childhood. Secondary schools face the threat of closure or loss of funding if they fail to produce the government target of 30% of candidates achieving five A-C grades,

grade. This concentration on results has led to a pass rate of nearly 100% for GCSEs, with only 1.4% of candidates failing. However, schools tend to enter only pupils who are predicted to pass GCSE. The others disappear off the school register in various ways. Of children receiving free meals, the official (but by no means definitive) indicator of poverty, 22% of boys and 15% of girls leave school with no GCSEs.

Not a race but rationing

Winning certificates for hard work and learning is, of course, a worthy reward and public recognition of young people's achievements. But exam results are primarily a passport to the earning power of the young worker in the job market at the age of 16 or to improved wages and conditions by moving on to further and then higher education. There are increasingly fewer opportunities for retakes. Once beyond the statutory school leaving age of 16, government funding for further education colleges is being cut and courses closed down. There is also a cap on student numbers to cut public spending at university entrance level, despite record numbers of students with A and A* at A levels. This summer there were 14 applicants for each place on a degree course, up 10% from last year. Government funding has been increased for an extra 10,000 places only in maths and science.

Neets grow

The number of 'Neets' – young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who are 'not in education, employment or training' – has surged to one in five of the age group. There are 947,000 Neets – up from 730,000 last year. Although Neets are characterised as underachievers and drop-outs, this group is in fact made up of young people with no qualifications, those who gained some GCSEs, those who are waiting for or who have completed short-term work experience placements, A-level students who failed to gain a university place and young workers made redundant by the recession. Labour government statements swing between fear of this group as a socially disruptive force and contempt. It is well-known that 'non-participating' young people are, by the age of 21, more likely to experience depression and poor physical health. The 1997 slogan 'education, education, education' has been exposed as a shabby election trick. The sharp rise in Neets, now at a 16-year high, matches that of Thatcher's Tory government. Britain's education system continues to ration education for the working class with or without examination results.

Susan Davidson

Health matters

The privatisation of health care in Britain

Health care for London

'The days of the district general hospital seeking to provide all services to a high enough standard are over', said Sir Ara Darzi, responsible for the ten-year plan for reorganising health provision in London. Commissioned by Gordon Brown in 2007 and promoted to a ministerial post in the Department of Health, he resigned in June this year.

The NHS Next Stage Review Interim Report, published in June 2008, showed there were significant variations in access to and quality of primary medical care services across Britain. The Equitable Access to Primary Medical Care programme was launched to address this. This includes at least one GP-led health care centre in each Primary Care Trust area.

Darzi's plan was to shift work from hospitals into polyclinics and urgent care centres. 150 polyclinics (GP-led health centres are linked to this model of service), with long opening hours, would provide community-based care at levels between GP practices and district general hospitals, including pharmacy, dentistry, social and mental health, x-ray and ultrasound services, blood tests and minor surgery.

Darzi's changes opened the way for

private companies to bid to run these centres. The Department of Health expects Primary Care Trusts to commission 15% of their services from the private sector. NHS London's timetable included inviting suitable providers to tender by April this year and sign contracts for the preferred provider by December 2009. 'Suitable providers' include GP practices, NHS bodies, private sector companies and 'third sector organisations' such as charities. Clearly GP practices cannot compete equally with multinationals in such a bidding process, and whilst health centres may continue to be described as 'GP-led' for public consumption, they will in fact be run for profit by health care multinationals and consortia.

Fifty 'GP-led' health centres have already opened around Britain. In 17 of these, up to 80% of the GPs are newly qualified or are just finishing GP training. Once private companies take over, information about what they are doing may become commercially confidential.

On 31 July, Camden NHS awarded a £20 million contract for running its new GP-led health centre in north London to Care UK, a company that

in April 2009 was criticised for the poor quality of its elderly home care. Yet again, the decision was made two months before the conclusion of a public consultation. A legal challenge is being mounted.

US multinational United Health currently runs three GP practices in south Camden, despite local opposition. In August, Connect Physical Health Ltd (CPH) was awarded a three-year contract to provide physiotherapy services at the Royal Free Hospital, to treat over 11,500 people a year. The pay of staff who choose to stay will be protected but they will not be able to add to their NHS pension. Camden physiotherapy will now be fragmented while CPH manages the referrals, records and appointments from a central database in Northumberland, 350 miles away.

In Hackney, two 'GP-led' health centres are planned and again, sticking to the minimum legal requirement for consultation, it is clear that the Primary Care Trust in Hackney has not adequately informed local people.

Private finance and the crisis

The cost of private finance for hospital building has increased with the



Protesters outside Royal Free Hospital, Camden

global financial crisis. Guarantees for repayments of capital to bond holders are now more risky and so this method has become more expensive. However, bank loans have also become more costly. Before the crisis, interest rates on bank loans were between 0.6 and 0.8% above basic bank borrowing rates; they are now 1.5-1.6% above this rate. The government's plan to increase public borrowing to support the banking sector means that the public sector is locked into making Private Finance Initiative (PFI) repayments to banks at these higher rates. As Alyson Pollock of the Centre for International Public Health Policy at the University of Edinburgh says: 'Having bailed out the banks at taxpayers' expense, the government is further conflicted because in allowing the banks to charge an excessive premium for finance it is protecting shareholders' and investors' interests at the expense of the taxpayer, the citizen and public services.'

Cutting NHS staff

Management consultancy firm McKinsey has come up with solutions to the financial shortfall and reduction in NHS budgets. Commissioned by the Department of Health in England, it is advising a cut of 10% in the workforce by 2014. This will drastically affect health care provision. Money is however being wasted on the administration of the increasingly privatised system: it now represents 12% of the total NHS budget, compared to 6% in 1991 before the introduction of the internal market.

As the NHS is progressively broken up and its services sold off, concepts such as efficiency and productivity become paramount whilst universal health care and needs-based planning fall off the agenda. Competition in this context prevents resources being directed to where they are needed. The privatisation of the NHS must be opposed for the health of us all.

Hannah Caller

Public services under attack

'Class politics in this country can only be rebuilt by a militant movement coming on to the streets and involving millions of working people, young and old, in work and unemployed, determined to resist the destruction of public services. This will be necessary whichever party is in power after the election.'

continued from page 1

shall end up doing irreparable damage to one of the strongest sectors of our economy.' He said he was proud to be part of the City of London because 'financial services are something at which we British excel' (*Financial Times* 18 September 2009).

Cutting the public sector down to size

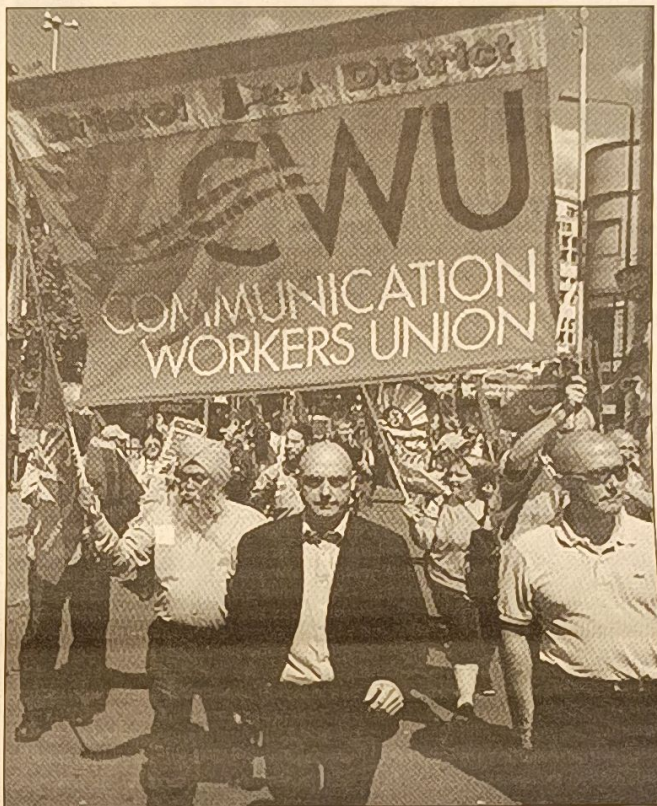
The 'dangerous talk' from Lord Turner about the bloated size and social uselessness of the financial services sector in the British economy was very quickly drowned out by an ideological assault on the public sector. Suddenly the most dangerous threat to the British economy became not the bloated financial sector, the banks and the bankers, but the debt of the public sector. This was given expression through an orchestrated campaign in the media with politicians of all persuasions rapidly and willingly following this lead. At least on this issue the ruling class could be united. What followed was almost a public auction by the main political parties over the cuts in public spending necessary to tackle the 'unsustainable' public sector deficit. The banks and bankers were off the hook.

With a general election due next spring, the political parties had previously been very cautious about their plans for the public sector. There is massive support within the country for public sector services and state welfare. Elections are decided by the votes of the better off sections of the working class and middle classes. They too rely on state services and public subsidies to sustain their higher standard of living. So the campaign against the public sector took some time to take off. It was directed not at public services but at 'unsustainable' public borrowing that had to be brought down.

Historically, the Tories are ideologically opposed to a large state sector. However, since he became leader of

the party, David Cameron has tried to soften this Thatcherite image in order to win the centre ground back from Labour and make the Conservative Party electable once again. He has consistently refused to be drawn on his spending plans, while criticising the government for 'losing control of the nation's finances'. Previously he even said that he would not support a freeze of public sector pay, arguing that 'I don't think that is the way we do pay in this country' (*Telegraph.co.uk* 7 July 2009). He plays for the popular vote telling us he would cut ministers' pay and end subsidised food and drink in the House of Commons, but admits that such savings are a 'pinprick' in relation to the overall amount of money he wants to save to bring the public deficit under control. His soft man approach is accompanied by the hard line, less cautious Tory shadow chancellor George Osborne. He keeps pressure on Labour over its 'out of control' public finances. A leaked Treasury document was published by the Conservatives in mid-September showing that earlier in the year, when Labour was accusing the Tories of planning 10% public spending cuts, the government had been planning to cut departmental budgets by 9.3%. Osborne declared that Gordon Brown's attempt, at that time, to contrast Labour's investment in public services to Tory cuts was dishonest: 'he was not telling the truth'. Osborne himself has apparently ordered the Treasury's permanent secretary, Nick Macpherson, to find savings of nearly 30% in departmental budgets, which would come into effect if the Tories gain power (Peter Osborne *MailOnline* 12 September 2009).

Over a couple of months the pressure had been gradually building up on Labour to come clean over its planned cuts in public spending or lose any remaining credibility. Following a softening-up speech by Labour's business secretary, Peter



Postal workers fighting against threats of privatisation and loss of jobs

Mandelson, at the London School of Economics a day earlier, Brown used the TUC conference on 15 September to tell trade unionists bluntly that sustainable public finances demanded: 'cutting costs where we can, ensuring efficiency where it is needed, agreeing realistic public sector pay settlements throughout, selling off the unproductive assets we don't need to pay for the services we do need'. His claim that frontline services would not face cuts under Labour is spin. This is the neo-liberal cost-cutting and privatisation agenda, which has been a central feature of Labour's programme since 1997. Soon after this speech, Andy Burnham, the health secretary, said that the NHS has to find 'efficiency savings' of £15-20bn and Ed Balls, the minister for children, schools and families, £2bn from the school's budget. Chancellor Alistair Darling is discussing with other ministers what cuts could be announced in the pre-budget report in November.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg soon joined the fray, telling *The Guardian* (19 September 2009) that Britain needs 'bold' and 'savage' cuts in current spending to bring down the public deficit. Liberal plans include a long-term freeze in public sector pay, cutting future public sector pensions and withdrawing tax credits from the middle class.

Government borrowing in August reached a record £16.1bn for that month, bringing public sector net debt to £804.8bn, 57.5% of GDP. Around £141bn of this debt, 10% of GDP, results from public sector intervention to rescue the banking system, a point that has been buried in the rush to cut

public spending. All the ruling class political parties are now speaking with one voice. Far from the crisis being over, for the overwhelming majority of the British population it has barely begun.

The crisis deepens

Throughout the world the crisis is destroying the lives of millions of people. The OECD predicts that unemployment in the world's 30 richest nations could reach 10% in 2010, with 25 million jobs lost in the downturn. For the underdeveloped countries the situation is far worse. The World Bank estimates that the crisis has driven a further 90 million people into extreme poverty; living on less than \$1.25 a day.

In Britain unemployment continues its relentless rise. In the three months to July unemployment rose by 210,000 to 2.47 million, 7.9% of the labour force, the highest level since 1995. The number of people under 25 out of work rose dramatically to 947,000 in the same period, 20% of the age group, the highest since records began in 1992. With the British economy set to decline around 4.7% this year, unemployment will continue to rise.

The outlook is bleak. In August the Bank of England had surprised the City with a £50bn extension of 'quantitative easing' up to £175bn, breaking the limit of £150bn originally set by the chancellor Alistair Darling. This is the scheme by which the Bank of England creates 'new money' through buying assets, particularly government bonds, from banks and financial institutions, in the hope that these institutions will make more funds

available for businesses and households to spend. So far the scheme is having very little impact, with the banks using the funds to rebuild their balance sheets, while restricting the availability of credit to the broader economy.

In July the net flow of lending to businesses fell by a record amount as companies paid back £15.5bn in bank debt. Companies paid off more debt in August. This follows a dramatic fall in investment in the British economy, which looks likely to continue. Business investment in the second quarter of 2009 fell by 10.2% compared with the previous quarter, and a fall of 21.8% compared with same quarter in 2008. This is the largest decline in business investment since records began 40 years ago.

This situation will rapidly deteriorate after the general election next spring when the planned cuts in public spending, demanded by international investors and willingly accepted by all the ruling class parties, get underway. At the TUC conference, the TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, warned that spending cuts could drive the British economy into a 'double-dip' recession that would push unemployment up to more than four million, leading to the threat of industrial action by millions of workers, and riots on the streets last seen in the 1980s. 'Last time we suffered slash and burn economics we had riots on the streets here in Liverpool', he said, as though this threat would deter the ruling class from their course of action. The ruling class remember very well that during the uprisings ('riots') of black and white youths on the streets of British cities in the early 1980s, the then TUC general secretary, Len Murray, condemned them, saying: 'Violence is no solution to the problems of the inner cities and I condemn those who have used it'. He was joined in this condemnation of violence by Tony Benn of the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and an assortment of Trotskyist groups.³

Class politics in this country can only be rebuilt by a militant movement coming on to the streets and involving millions of working people, young and old, in work and unemployed, determined to resist the destruction of public services. This will be necessary whichever party is in power after the election. Such a movement will have to confront the traditional forces of the organised British Labour movement, which will do everything necessary to limit any challenge to the ruling class and the capitalist system which it sustains. ■

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! Fighting Fund 2009

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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 Darling made this point patently clear in his Budget speech in April 2009. See David Yaffe 'Years and years of austerity ahead' FRFI 209 June/July 2009 www.revolutionarycommunist.org/frifpages/209/FRFI_209_cri.html

3 This was reported at the time in FRFI 12 September 1981 and FRFI 14 November 1981.

Asian youth fight racist provocations

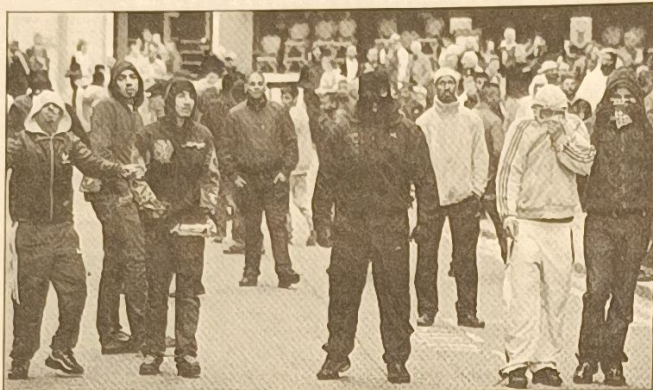
TOM VINCENT AND ROBERT CLOUGH

Since May 2009, racists under the banner of the English Defence League (EDL) have organised a number of demonstrations and rallies against 'Islamic extremism'. A march in Luton in May was followed by two demonstrations in Birmingham on 8 August and 5 September, a rally at a mosque in Harrow on 11 September and a counter-protest to the annual Al Quds march through central London two days later. The EDL is planning further events in Manchester, Leeds and Bristol.

Although the EDL purports to be a non-racist, non-fascist organisation dedicated to opposing what it calls 'Islamic extremism', it has close links with the British National Party (BNP) and its supporters have shown themselves to be virulent racists. They are acting as unofficial auxiliaries of the BNP which wants to retain the aura of respectability it has achieved with the election of two of its leaders as MEPs in the 5 June European poll.

Luton

The first EDL rally took place in Luton, a BNP stronghold and scene of a widely-publicised Muslim-led anti-war protest in March 2009. On 24 May, scores of racists descended on the town and rampaged through Asian areas, attacking people and smashing up shops. When the EDL announced a further demonstration for 19 September, 'Hope not Hate', an anti-fascist group associated with *Searchlight* magazine, organised a letter-writing campaign calling for it to be prohibited. This was supported by the local council and the police. On 20 August, the Home Office granted a ban under the Public Order Act which prohibits 'any procession or march involving members or supporters of, but not limited to, the English Defence League, UK Casuals United, March For England and United People of Luton' from marching in the town without having made a formal application to Luton Borough Council. Weyman Bennett, Unite Against Fascism



Asian youth prepare to confront racists on the streets of Birmingham in September

(UAF) joint secretary and leading SWP member, welcomed it, saying 'What we have proved is that where we, as a multiracial group, organise and stand up, the EDL can be defeated.' (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2009).

However, the 'but not limited to' provision in the order gives the council *carte blanche* to ban any march or protest, including those organised by anti-racists. As if to underline this point, two young Muslims were arrested on 30 August as hundreds took over the streets in the Bury Park area of Luton because of rumours of an EDL mobilisation. No fascists were arrested. If the Luton ban were repeated elsewhere, all the EDL would have to do is announce a march in a particular city for all protests, whoever organised them — trade unions, anti-racists, socialists — to be prohibited there as well.

Birmingham: SWP faces both ways

On 8 August EDL supporters tried to organise a rally in Birmingham city centre but were met by hundreds of Asian youth and anti-racists who rapidly dispersed them. When the EDL announced that they would return on 5 September, the local UAF split on how to respond. The majority refused to organise a counter-mobilisation and instead asked to hold a rally outside Birmingham Council House as 'Birmingham United'. The council refused.

In the event, Asian youth once again took to the streets, and once again put the racists to flight. Councillor Salma Yaqoob of the Respect party, who had joined with the police in calling for a ban on the EDL march, later wrote in the *New Statesman* 'If the violence of the EDL was predictable, it was also predictable that some Asian youths would ignore calls for restraint from myself and others.' It was Respect and its allies who ensured that the UAF would oppose the demand for a counter-protest. Although the SWP, one of the main founders of both the UAF and Respect, then broke ranks and joined with the Asian youth, the report in the following week's *Socialist Worker* did not mention the stance the local UAF had taken.

Harrow: giving a platform to Labour racists

The EDL event in Harrow was timed to take place on the anniversary of the Twin Tower attack. There was no evidence that EDL supporters ever appeared; such was the response of the Asian community. According to FRFI supporters who were present, any time there were rumoured sightings of the racists, dozens of Asian youth would rush to the supposed location to find nobody there. This was despite the presence of hundreds of riot police. In contrast to Birmingham, UAF did organise a counter-protest. Yet they chose

to give a platform to local Labour MP Tony McNulty, a defender of state racism and a persecutor of the unemployed and those on benefits (see box).

It is impossible to square UAF's claim to anti-racism with this act. McNulty was for a period Labour's main orchestrator of state attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers. How can he be seriously presented as a recruit to the fight against fascism? *Socialist Worker*, in its account of Harrow, chose to ignore McNulty's record. A couple of days later, the UAF's website reported with approval Labour Secretary of State for Communities John Denham's suggestion that the situation with the anti-Islamic groups today was comparable with that of the 1930s when fascists marched against Jews. It did not comment on McNulty's dismissal of this as 'stupid analysis', a view echoed by Home Secretary Alan Johnson. Labour is concerned not with the EDL but with the prospect that its actions will kindle resistance to the crisis where none exists at the moment.

The victories in Birmingham and Harrow show that despite police protection, the fascists are not yet able to mobilise a significant number of supporters on the streets. On 13 September, fewer than 100 EDL followers joined Zionists in opposing the Al Quds march in support of Palestine. However, the left, especially the SWP, are being forced to face two ways at once: towards their Labour racist allies in the UAF on the one hand, and towards the Asian youth on the other. For genuine socialists, it is the actions of the Asian youth which are starting to point the way forward; it follows on from their militant participation in demonstrations in defence of the people of Gaza during the Zionist onslaught last December and January. Self-defence is no offence!

Tony McNulty MP: Labour racist

Tony McNulty became Minister of State for Immigration in May 2005, boasting how the government was cracking down on illegal immigrants, and deporting more and more failed asylum seekers. His Immigration and Asylum Bill published in June that year proposed that asylum seekers should have just one chance to appeal, and that, if that appeal failed, all their benefits would be stopped and their children taken into care. It became law the following year. In May 2006, he took over responsibility for policing and crime, security and counter-terrorism, implementing the Identity Cards Act, and, in 2008, the Counter-Terrorism Bill which proposes to extend the maximum period of detention to 42 days. In October 2008, he became Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform, being proud to crack down on benefit fraud. 'We are doing more than ever to tackle benefit fraud... we're closing in on benefit cheats.' (4 December 2008). In March 2009, McNulty was revealed to have claimed £60,000 in 'second home' expenses for a house occupied by his parents in his constituency in Harrow, 11 miles from Westminster, and six miles from his claimed primary home in Hammersmith. 'Everyone does it' was his defence.

Unite Against Fascism

Unite against Fascism (UAF) was set up in 2003 as an alliance between the SWP and black members of the Labour Party organised in the National Assembly against Racism with support from trade unions. Its stated objective is to 'campaign with the aim of alerting British society to the rising threat of the extreme right, in particular the BNP, gaining an electoral foothold in this country'; in practice this means its priority is to shore up Labour's disintegrating vote. It refuses to campaign against state racism since its supporters include leading figures in the Labour Party such as Peter Hain, who spoke at its 2007 conference when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the current Solicitor General Vera Baird and Ken Livingstone who is UAF's Chair. Others are the likes of Tory leader David Cameron and prominent Zionists such as Liverpool Labour MP Louise Ellman and Henry Guterma, who supported Zionist attacks on FRFI pickets of Manchester Marks and Spencer.

How the left failed in Birmingham

During and after the events of 8 August in Birmingham, it was apparent that certain groups on the left and so-called Muslim leaders had no appetite to build a counter-demonstration against the English Defence League (EDL), as ASSED BAIG of Birmingham UAF reports. They let down the Muslim community. When the EDL demonstrated in Birmingham with a police escort, what was our response? The only group to call for a counter demo was the SWP and some independent, non-affiliated Muslims.

Groups on the left were content to pay lip service to fighting fascism and standing up for the Muslim community, but failed to support Muslims as they prepared once more to defend their streets from the fascists. What this displays is the bureaucratic quagmire the left have got themselves into, where they are more concerned with electoral politics than actually standing on the streets, shoulder to shoulder

with the Muslim community. They roll out Muslims when they wish to display their 'diversity' and talk about defending multiculturalism, but these individuals are nothing more than token Muslims, used to gain support from the Muslim community.

The lack of left support for a counter demonstration in Birmingham indicates a deep-rooted fear of the Muslim community. Even our Muslim 'community leaders' are scared of Muslims taking matters into their own hands when the fascists are on the streets, because it is at critical times like these that people stop listening to fluffy sell-out politics and realise there is a fight to be had. Certain left groups only seem happy to engage the Muslim community if it serves electoral and recruitment purposes. They have no interest in engaging the Muslim youth, who are fed up with increased Islamophobia, racism and lack of support from other sections of society, and have no other choice but to come out on the streets. The left's efforts con-

centrated on getting the EDL demo banned, but when this failed they seemed to fizzle away, unable and unwilling to take other action.

Muslims turned out on Saturday 5 September regardless, but the very fact that a counter demonstration was not called undermined the leadership of those of us who have attempted to get the Muslim community engaged in left politics. The youth will see no difference between their sell-out Muslim Labour councillors and MPs and the leaders on the left who talk the talk but fail to walk the walk.

I can fully understand that there are two battles taking place. The first is to fight fascism on the streets and the second is to win hearts and minds around the country. The Muslim community has the will and the numbers to beat fascism on the streets, but we need support of the diverse groups on the left to win over hearts and minds.

The demonstration was a success with the EDL pinned down in a pub, loaded onto buses, flagged by more



Racist English Defence League demonstrators fly the Zionist flag

than 20 police vehicles and taken out of town and chased out by Asian youth in their cars lobbing bricks and other projectiles at the convoy until they were out of Birmingham. The EDL have announced that they will

not be returning to Birmingham in the near future, a victory for the real anti-fascist campaigners and a defeat for the EDL and those who wish to restrict organising and campaigning to Facebook and writing letters.

Ireland

Celtic Tiger no more

PAUL MALLON

Ireland is suffering its most severe economic crisis since the foundation of the state in 1922. In October 2008, it became the first country in the Eurozone to officially enter recession; the IMF has said it faces the deepest crisis of any advanced economy in the world. The resulting social and political crisis now threatens the very stability of the state.

In the first quarter of 2009 Irish Gross National Product (GNP) was down 12% on the previous year.¹ The 2009 budget deficit stands at €8bn. Figures released in September by the Central Statistics Office reveal that unemployment has more than doubled in the past year to 264,600 or 11.6%² and is forecast to rise to almost 17% in 2010. The Economic and Social Research Institute predicted in April 2009 that 'Ireland's economy will contract by around 14% over the three years 2008 to 2010...this is a truly

dramatic development.' The construction sector saw over 72,200 jobs lost in the past year alone.

In response, the Irish government has introduced a number of measures – all of which have so far failed. In the past year, two budgets forced strict cut-backs on public spending whilst increasing taxation. In January, the government nationalised Anglo Irish Bank and injected €bn into the country's two biggest lenders, the Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks. That recapitalisation – the equivalent of 4% of GDP – barely filled the hole in the banks' books.

A new plan, set out in September by Brian Lenihan, the Irish finance minister, proposes to take bad loans with a face value of about €7 billion off the balance-sheets of the country's biggest banks and create a new agency, the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), to take over toxic loans in exchange for €4bn in government-backed bonds. In August

former Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald warned that otherwise Ireland could fall 'into the hands of the IMF'.

Celtic Tiger no more

It was not supposed to be like this. Ireland was said to be the neo-liberal success story, with a year-on-year GNP growth between 1994 and 2000 ranging between 6% and 11%, transforming the country from one of the poorest economies in Western Europe to one of the richest. The 'Celtic Tiger', as it became known, raised Irish living standards to unprecedented levels: everyone was supposed to be basking in the success. Fuelled by bank lending, house prices and property speculation reached massively over-inflated highs.

From 1956, successive Irish governments had pursued low taxation policies in a bid to increase investment and open up the economy to the international market. In 1973 Ireland joined the European Union. By the late 1980s political barriers were relaxed; Ireland was for sale and foreign direct investment stock rose from less than €6bn to over €60bn; more recently, €5bn flowed into the country in 2007 alone.

Housing: the great collapse

Prior to the collapse, house building represented around 12% of the Irish

economy in GDP terms, about twice the typical share in other advanced economies. Between 2000 and 2007, 75,000 new homes were built every year; with a population of just over four million, this was equivalent to 1.2 million houses a year in British terms. Between 1997 and 2007, house prices rose by 251% – double that of the US and higher than any other developed nation.³ According to *The Economist* almost a third of this increase had no basis in economic reality.

The Irish population grew as a baby boom took place alongside an influx of foreign workers who, assisted by European integration, flocked to Ireland to work in the construction sector. Irish builders had so much work they simply had not enough workers. The boom also fuelled Sinn Féin illusions in a peaceful, almost seamless, transition towards an all-Ireland economy. It had a significant impact on the north: in 2006 house prices in the Six Counties rose by 48%. However, in 2008, as the bubble burst, prices fell by 40%, while in the Twenty Six Counties the average house price has fallen by 10% in the past year to €70,493.⁴

Attack on living standards: resistance appears

Faced with financial crisis, the Irish government brought forward its 2008

budget from December to October. Among the measures were more taxation and privatisation. Particularly affected were pensioners. Until then, everyone aged 70 or over had been entitled to free medical, dental and optical treatment. The budget proposed to introduce a means-tested system. Over 20,000 people on the Pensioners Medical Card scheme were forced to hand back their cards. The government also abandoned a €0 million scheme to vaccinate 26,000 12-year-olds against cervical cancer by September 2009.

Thousands have already protested across Ireland against public sector cuts, including a march of 100,000 in Dublin in February. On 7 April 2009 the Irish government announced new cuts in state spending. These have inevitably resulted in further resistance and political instability.

1 Central Statistics Office, Dublin, Quarterly National Accounts, Quarter 1 2009, <http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/economy/current/qna.pdf>

2 Central Statistics Office, Dublin, Quarterly National Household Survey Quarter 2 2009 http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/labour_market/current/qnhs.pdf

3 *The Economist* 5 April 2008

4 http://www.esri.ie/irish_economy/permanent_tsbesri_house_p/

South Africa

Liberation betrayed

CAROL BRICKLEY

Next year, on 11 February 2010, will be the 20th anniversary of the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in South Africa and the start of negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the apartheid regime which culminated, in 1994, in the first democratic elections that brought the ANC to power and made Mandela President. BBC Radio 4 recently broadcast *The Reunion*, a programme to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela. The main participants in secret talks between the ANC and the apartheid regime prior to Mandela's release were invited to reminisce. This broadcast raised many issues about the role of the ANC. It is time to look back at the aspirations the black majority in South Africa had for freedom 20 years ago and measure how successful they have been.

Their struggle was a long one, spanning most of the 20th century. Thousands of people were killed in a bitter bloody battle to win liberation, not least at Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976. Throughout the 1980s the black working class escalated their opposition to apartheid in the mines, factories and townships, built new representative organisations like the United Democratic Front (UDF) to lead their struggle on the ground, with the aim of making South Africa ungovernable. In 1986 in Alexandra township near Johannesburg the residents defended their community against attempts to demolish it: the local councillors were sacked, street committees and people's courts were formed. The regime trembled as the uprisings spread across the country.

In response the regime declared a State of Emergency, unleashing new waves of barbarity and oppression, detaining thousands without trial and bankrolling gangs of vigilantes to undermine the integrity of the struggle. At the same time, international



Student protest, Soweto 1976

pressure against the apartheid regime was mounting (with the memorable exception of the British government led by Margaret Thatcher). International capital was feeling the pressure: reform of the apartheid system would be preferable to an intensification of repression and resistance. Apartheid had become an obstacle to the business of profit-making.

This was a watershed. Like all critical turning points in history, movements and people reveal their real class interests and intentions. In the history of working class struggle there are many examples, good and bad – on the one hand, the capitulation of the Second International to the interests of their national bourgeoisies at the outbreak of the First World War; the failure of the Labour Party and trade union movement to block Britain's role in the invasion of Iraq in 2003; on the other hand, the determination of unarmed Soweto school students to march through the streets against the armed might of the apartheid state in 1976. Most of the participants in the struggle against apartheid had no idea of the secret talks taking place behind their backs. In 1985 at the height of the township battles, senior members of the

South African government began secret talks with Nelson Mandela in prison. It is not clear what they hoped to achieve, and it is by no means certain that they knew themselves. What is clear is that, over the next five years, Mandela was moved to progressively better prison conditions, ending up in the deputy governor's cottage at Victor Verster prison, with its own swimming pool and gym. This is not, however, a simple question of buying collaboration.

The regime may have thought it could recruit Mandela to play a role similar to 'tribal' leaders like Mangosuthu Buthelezi, but Mandela was made of sterner stuff. What did happen was that, over time, the aims of the ANC were revised and moderated in secret. The goal of liberation, expressed at its simplest in the 1956 Freedom Charter, was watered down to the achievement of majority rule – bourgeois democracy.

The task of assuring the regime that Mandela was not a red-blooded revolutionary committed to communism was not pursued by him alone. A network of communications was established so that at least some of the ANC leadership in exile in Lusaka, Zambia, were aware of what was hap-

pening. Most of Mandela's fellow prisoners, like Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, from whom he was now separated, and certainly the local leadership in the UDF, were kept in the dark. On the government's side, the chief negotiators were Kobie Coetsee, Minister of Justice, and Niel

talks if they knew about them.

Reporting back to his brothers in the Broederbond, Wimpie de Klerk wrote: 'The essence of my message was "Look boys, everything is OK. We can do business with the ANC. They are not that radical."' Allister Sparks, journalist and another participant in the *Reunion* programme, recalls in his book of 1994, 'one afternoon in January 1990, as the participants gathered in the bar for a sun-downer, the conversation turned to the international sports boycott against South Africa and specifically to a series of demonstrations then disrupting a boycott breaking tour of South Africa by an English cricket team led by the England Test captain, Mike Gatting. One of the Afrikaners asked Mbeki, "Why don't you chaps stop all that nonsense? All we want to do is watch cricket." This triggered a discussion of the boycott, during which it was suggested... that they should negotiate an agreement – to stop the demonstrations in exchange for abandoning the second leg of the Gatting tour, following which the ANC undertook that if a political solution to the South African conflict were reached it would give its full support to South Africa's re-entry into international cricket.'

The small treachery against anti-apartheid demonstrators internationally – among whom the Revolutionary Communist Group is proud to have featured – is insignificant compared to the bigger picture. The future of an entire nation has been sold out. Bourgeois democracy over the last 16 years in South Africa has created a small black bourgeoisie and a black political elite, entrenched in the corruption that accompanies treachery like the stench that follows a corpse. South Africa has the second highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in the world thanks to the backward leadership of Thabo Mbeki. Johannesburg is the crime capital of the world. Despite being the richest country in Africa, unemployment stands at about 25% and has barely changed since the apartheid era. The black majority still lives in shanty townships in dire poverty with no hope of change. The majority of the land is still owned by white people. What the ANC negotiated away was liberation: a socialist future for the South African people. That is still their only hope for change.

*Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is another country*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1994.

Palestine: UN accuses Israel of war crimes

Following a number of investigations and reports into Israel's barbaric 22-day onslaught on Gaza that ended on 18 January 2009, the UN published its own damning official report on 15 September. The report states that Israel 'committed actions amounting to war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity' in Gaza and that Israel's operations 'were carefully planned in all their phases as a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorise a civilian population'. Israel's military operation 'was directed at the people of Gaza as a whole'. It found that, contrary to Israeli denials, white phosphorus shells had been fired at a UN compound in Gaza. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

Gazan reconstruction 'impossible'

The UN investigation, led by Justice Richard Goldstone, accused Israel of imposing a blockade on Gaza 'amounting to collective punishment' carried out as part of a 'systematic policy of progressive isolation and deprivation of the Gaza Strip' in the run up to the onslaught. This Israeli policy, supported by Britain and the US, continues to this day, so that eight months after the end of the onslaught the UN report states that 'families are still living amid the rubble of their former homes after the attacks ended, as reconstruction has been impossible due to the continuing blockade'.

While being forced to concentrate on Israel's 'serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law' by the fact that Israel's war machine killed over 1,400 Palestinians, including approximately 400 children, the report also inevitably attempts to equate Palestinian resistance with the Israeli occupation and onslaught. It condemns the Palestinian resistance in Gaza for firing rockets into Israel. Ezzet Al Resheq, a political leader of Hamas in Gaza, welcomed the report but condemned the equation of the actions of the occupied and the occupier. He said that if the UN was condemning the firing of rockets into non-military areas, then 'we tell them to give us advanced weapons that could be guided, and we will guarantee that only military targets will be targeted'.

The report concludes that both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in Gaza should investigate the allegations of war crimes and report to the UN Security Council within six months. If this does not happen, then the Security Council should refer the situation in Gaza to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, it is clear that the US and Britain



Israeli phosphorus shells strike a UN school in Gaza in January 2009

would use their vetoes on the Security Council in favour of Israel and to prevent any possible trial. They would of course have no such scruples for members of the Hamas administration in Gaza.

Plight of Gazans remains desperate

The continuing desperate situation for the people of Gaza was spelled out in the Ramadan appeal for funds put out in August by the UN Relief and Works Agency. Its press release states:

'Seven months after the Israeli Operation Cast Lead and three years into a stifling siege, life for the one million refugees in Gaza - 70% of the population - is characterised by chronic unemployment, infrequent access to power and water, health hazards stemming from inadequate sewage system, and sub-standard housing with thousands living in tents or the rubble of their former homes, dispossessed of all earthly belongings.'

No reconstruction has taken place. Of the billions pledged for reconstruction, nothing has reached Gaza. The ban placed by the Israelis on the entry

of construction materials for all but a tiny fraction of needs has blocked any large scale reconstruction, and severely hampered even modest repairs to housing, schools, factories and roads. Only a fraction of the hundreds of millions of dollars raised in public campaigns during the war has reached the refugees.

Gazan water supplies critical

The day before the UN report into Israeli war crimes was published, another UN department, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), issued its own report on the impending collapse of underground water supplies in Gaza. The underground aquifer is the sole water source for Gaza's population of approximately 1.5 million people, but only 5-10% of the water is considered fit for human consumption. Due to a number of reasons which include the deliberate destruction of the system by Israeli military action, regional drought and over-extraction brought about in part by Israel drawing water, the aquifer has become contaminated by seawater, sewage and toxin-contaminated

agricultural overflow. This is inevitably affecting the health of people, particularly the young and the sick; Munther Shoblak, from Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water Utility, says 'we have noticed an increase in people suffering from kidney diseases from water contaminated with toxins, as well as babies born with an unnatural blue tinge'.

The UNEP report states 'Gaza's underground water system is in danger of collapse after recent conflict compounded by years of overuse and contamination'. During Israel's onslaught on Gaza it is estimated that about \$6m worth of damage was caused to major water and sanitation infrastructure that was already in a serious state of disrepair due to the siege. Over 30km of water networks were damaged or destroyed by the Israeli military, in addition to 11 wells operated by the water authorities. More than 6,000 roof tanks and 840 household connections were also damaged. There is an urgent need for cement, pipes, pumps, transformers and electrical spare parts to repair and replace the water and sewage systems. Some 1,250 tons of cement are currently needed for the repair of water storage tanks alone but Israel's blockade continues to prevent cement from being brought into Gaza.

UNEP estimates that more than \$1.5bn may be needed over 20 years to restore the aquifer back to health: 'unless the degradation trend is reversed now, damage could take centuries to reverse'.

West Bank

During September George Mitchell, the US envoy to the Middle East, made a number of visits to Israel in an unsuccessful attempt to get the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to agree to a freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank. This is seen as a precondition to restarting the peace negotiations between Abbas and Netanyahu which the imperialists would like to see back on track. Abbas, though, needs some gesture from Israel to allow him to resume talks; the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank is undermining all the arguments being put forward by Abbas and his Fatah allies in favour of peace negotiations and the eventual formation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The last round of talks between Mitchell and the Israeli Defence Minister Barak on stopping settlement construction in July (see FRFI 209) had seen Barak agree to demolish 23 so-called illegal outposts in the West Bank. Unsurprisingly, not one of them had been demolished by the time these new discussions started. At the beginning of September Netanyahu and Barak authorised the construction of 455 new housing units in settlements across the West Bank including what is in reality a new settlement, Maskiyot, in the Jordan Valley. This followed on from their decision to go ahead with the completion of 2,500 units already under construction. Netanyahu refused to agree to any freeze. The most he would consider was a temporary freeze for six months which would not include the units under construction or approved, or any building activity in East Jerusalem. By the time Abbas and Netanyahu met US President Obama on 22 September, it was evident that the imperialists were no further forward in forcing through a deal.

Isolate Israel

Following the Zionists' murderous assault on Gaza, the international campaign to isolate Israel has taken some steps forward:

- In Brazil the Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Relations and National Defence has recommended that parliament should not ratify the Free Trade Agreement between Mercosur and Israel until 'Israel accepts the creation of the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders'.
- In Canada at the Toronto International Film Festival film makers, actors and academics condemned the Festival for showcasing Tel Aviv in its city-to-city spotlight.
- In Britain the TUC, although equating the armed resistance of the Palestinian people with the barbarism of the Israeli occupation and then condemning both, voted to support a boycott of goods produced in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and called for an end to all arms trade with Israel.

What the TUC decision amounts to, given its complete inability to organise a struggle against the Labour government, will be very little. FRFI therefore urges its readers to join it in building a real movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people that calls for the complete isolation of the racist Israeli state and a boycott of all Israeli goods - see page 14 for details of Marks and Spencer pickets in London and elsewhere.

Zionist settlements: ethnic cleansing

Committed to its colonial project, Israel has destroyed any prospect of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank. Since 1967, it has been employing brutal colonial policies in the Occupied Territories to change the demography of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Up to late December 2008, it had built 233 colonial settlements in the Occupied Territories, which are now home to 497,500 settlers.

In March 2009, the Israeli group Peace Now revealed in a report on settlements that Israel is planning to build more than 73,302 housing units for settlers, of which 5,722 are in East Jerusalem. Peace Now estimates that if all these units were built, it would double the number of Israeli settlers. The report says that some settlements, including the two largest, Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim, would double in

size. These settlements already consume more than 80% of West Bank water, and their further expansion would in reality mean the destruction

of the Palestinian agricultural economy.

Palestinians in Jerusalem are facing a threat to their existence. A report



Demolition of a Palestinian home in the West Bank

published by the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in May 2009 reveals that about 60,000 Palestinian residents face the threat of having their houses demolished as Israel refuses to give them building permits.

Since its occupation in 1967, the Jerusalem municipality has granted only 4,000 building permits to its 270,000 Palestinian residents. On 2 August 2009, three families of 53 Palestinian refugees were forcibly evicted from their houses in the prestigious neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah at 5am. The houses are a stone's throw from the American Colony, where Tony Blair, as the Quartet's Middle East Peace Envoy, has his offices, and very close to many UN offices, European and American Consulates, including that of Britain. The special security units which broke into the houses made way for racist settlers to take over.

The Palestinians thrown on to the streets were determined to stay put outside their houses, despite being harassed by settlers guarded by the

police. Two families took shelter under the olive tree on the other side of the street and another built a protest tent. The families are still there and are determined to remain until they can return to their homes. Amal, whose house is among the remaining 24 houses in the neighbourhood which are threatened with eviction, made a plea for international solidarity: 'With the complete silence of the international community, the Islamic world and local people... what we are experiencing in Sheikh Jarrah is ethnic cleansing. It is not only about Sheikh Jarrah but the whole of East Jerusalem... Where are the leaders? Where is the European Union? Where on earth do people have to have permits to get to their own houses, their own neighbourhood?... We are human beings - where is the solidarity? Enough with silence... all we have is our strong will and steadfastness, but that is not enough.'

*No to ethnic cleansing!
Disband the settlements!*

AFGHANISTAN

Imperialist propaganda cannot mask paralysis

The imperialists intended the 20 August presidential elections to give a cloak of legitimacy to the Afghan government and their forces' occupation of the country, but the outcome has further undermined the credibility of both. Ballots from over 600 polling stations have been quarantined and there are 720 major charges of electoral fraud. President Karzai is exposed as a cheat. In September US General Stanley McChrystal's report to the Pentagon on the situation in Afghanistan was leaked; it describes a failing military endeavour, a corrupt government without popular support and time running out fast for the invaders. Despite deploying extra troops and launching intensive campaigns over the summer, the occupying forces have been fought to a standstill. On 21 September the 217th British soldier was killed in Afghanistan since 2001; more than in the Iraq war. In August 77 NATO troops were killed, and by 21 September a further 55 were dead. Many more Afghan people were killed. The US and British states are on the road to disaster in Afghanistan. **JIM CRAVEN and TREVOR RAYNE** report.

By means of their superior fire power, the imperialists had hoped to clear areas of Taliban and other anti-occupation forces. The plan was to hold these areas while pushing back the Taliban still further so that the cleared 'oil spots' gradually spread and coalesced into larger regions under imperialist control, a tactic sometimes called 'clear, hold, build'. The anti-occupation forces, however, are guerrilla fighters, able to withdraw from conflict whenever they consider the enemy too strong. They can simply melt back into the mountains or the villages and people from whom they receive support and later direct their attacks elsewhere. When some British troops were pulled out of Sangin in the summer to join Operation Panther's Claw in Helmand, the Taliban redirected attacks to Sangin, killing 14 British soldiers in five weeks. Even when the imperialist forces are able to engage and kill the anti-occupation forces there is a supply of recruits ready to replace their lost fighters. In a remarkable interview in *The Times*, a Welsh Guards officer spoke openly of the physical and psychological pressures of fighting in Afghanistan, the officer said, 'They (the Taliban) come back undaunted to the same firing points despite our overwhelming fire power. We will not be able to reduce their numbers to a level where they are tactically defeated.'

The imperialists do not have sufficient forces to control areas they do capture. They need the support of tribal leaders and the local people. But local leaders often prove unreliable allies, ready to switch allegiances, either for safety or to line their pockets. And among the Afghan people support for the Taliban is widespread, many finding them preferable to the corrupt and incompetent Afghan government. Polls demonstrate that more than half the Afghan population is now opposed to the imperialist occupation. In Pakistan nearly two-thirds of people polled regarded the US as an enemy.

Movement paralysed

Having to constantly switch between one battle zone and the next, to defend ground and pursue the enemy, the imperialists depend on rapid movement of their inadequate resources together with maintaining the lines of communication and supply that such movement demands. The anti-occupation forces have paralysed this movement by the simple expedient of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) – mines and booby-trapped bombs. At



Afghan women in Kabul protest against the new family law, 15 April 2009

times, US/NATO convoys are reduced to a snail's pace because they must be preceded by bomb detection teams working on foot. Many of the recent casualties have been caused by IEDs that weren't found. Speaking of these horrific deaths the Welsh Guard said, 'Each death is zipped up in a mental body bag. However, unlike a real body bag, which fortunately disappears, that mental body bag remains in the morgue of your subconscious.'

Mentally paralysed

More airpower would help overcome these problems for the imperialist forces, but they do not have enough helicopters. Because of equipment shortages, troops expend an enormous number of hours and manpower just standing still. In an army where recruits are led to expect their superior armaments will ensure easy victories and rapid advances, such impotence is bound to undermine morale. It appears the imperialist troops are becoming psychologically as well as physically paralysed. As Mao pointed out, in guerrilla warfare the mindset of the enemy, not weaponry, is the determining factor for victory.

Air strikes have increased since President Obama took office, but they carry with them further problems for the imperialist strategy. Indiscriminate bombings have massacred thousands of Afghan civilians and become a major source of opposition to the occupation. On 4 September, 119 people, including scores of children and other civilians were killed in a fireball when a German commander called in US F-15 fighters to attack two hijacked oil tankers in Kunduz. *The Guardian* described it as the 'deadliest military operation by

Germany since the end of the Second World War'. President Karzai said, 'What an error of judgment!' Overall, civilian casualties increased by 25% during the first six months of this year. An estimated 30,000 Afghan civilians have been killed so far.

General McChrystal intends the occupation forces to change strategy and fight a counter-insurgency war with 'less armour and less distance from the population... personnel must be seen as guests of the Afghan people and their government, not an occupying army'. The concept of US and NATO armies being 'guests' would be laughable if it were not so tragic. Anti-occupation forces will exploit any attempt by the occupiers to get close to the population and will use civilians to move material, as the Vietnamese did against the US. The occupiers will be very visible and their opponents close to invisible to them. McChrystal wants the Afghan Army and Police Forces (ANSF) to more than double in size, quickly. This is absurd as a central plank of strategy given the composition and corruption of the puppet state with its shifting coalition of warlords; it will not function in a unified, coherent way and will galvanise forces against it.

War propaganda and electoral farce

With the almost weekly return of dead servicemen and women, the failure to make military progress and the ongoing criticism of equipment and strategy, support for the war is dwindling in the imperialist countries. Polls show that more than half the US population is now opposed to the war and that in Britain 47% want troops withdrawn.

Consequently, the imperialist propaganda machine has gone into overdrive. The returning dead are lauded as heroes whose deaths must not be in vain – 'the old lie' – so more young people must die, whose death in turn must be honoured by still more deaths.

Attempts to present the war as a means of bringing democracy to the country are patently ludicrous. The presidential election in August, described by the Afghan woman MP Malalai Joya as a 'show... put on by and for the West to legitimise its future puppet in Afghanistan', is a propaganda nightmare. 100,000 occupying troops and 180,000 Afghan army and police were unable to prevent attacks by the anti-occupation forces right into the heart of Kabul, even firing mortars at the Presidential Palace. Anyone opposed to the occupation was not able to stand for election.

To bolster his support, President Karzai invited home from exile in Turkey the brutal Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, who is alleged to have murdered 1,000 Taliban captives in 2001 by incarcerating them in metal shipping containers placed in the baking sun. One of Karzai's vice-presidents elect is Mohammed Fahim, suspected of murdering prisoners of war in the 1990s, together with kidnappings and other crimes. Karzai also promised jobs to several other warlords guilty of multiple human rights abuses. His electoral adviser was Abdul Sayyaf, the man who first invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan. Karzai's brother, Ahmed, himself a leading drugs baron, toured Kandahar offering local leaders \$20,000 to support Karzai. On 17 September the ballot, in which about one third of the electorate participated, gave Karzai 54.6% and former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah 27%; a candidate needs 50% of the votes to be declared outright winner. Abdullah Abdullah threatened street demonstrations 'like those in Iran, only with Kalashnikovs', if Karzai was declared the winner. The US government announced that it would wait until the investigation of claims of fraud was completed before acknowledging a victor or determining whether a second round of voting should take place.

Women's barbaric treatment

After eight years of imperialist occupation conditions remain grim for the Afghan people with among the worst poverty, illiteracy, health, infant mortality and malnutrition in the world. But life for Afghan women is even worse. 85% of them have no formal education. According to Women for Women International, 80% of Afghan women are affected by domestic violence, almost half are forced into marriage before the age of 16 (some as young as nine) and 47% say they need their husband's or family's permission to walk down the street. Where women are allowed to work, their wages are just one third of men's. In rural areas, up to 90% of women have no health care. Life expectancy is 44 years. The maternal mortality rate is between 1,600 and 1,900 deaths per hundred thousand live births, which means one Afghan woman dies in childbirth every 30 minutes. In areas controlled by the Taliban there are reports that girls are not allowed to attend school nor women to work and that there are severe punishments for women who contravene Sharia law.

Probably the most abhorrent aspect of Karzai's election campaign was his agreement to pass the Personal Status Law to placate Shia religious leaders. The law legitimises rape. It allows Shia men to deny their wives food and sustenance if the women don't submit to the men's sexual demands and it permits rapists to avoid prosecution by paying 'blood money'. The law also grants the guardianship of children exclusively to fathers and grandfathers and gives husbands the right to forbid their wives from working or even

going out of the house. The law contradicts the so-called Afghan constitution and international treaties that Afghanistan is supposed to be party to.

Given the vacuity of any claim to be bringing democracy and human rights to Afghanistan, the imperialist propaganda machine has returned to the theme of preventing terrorism at home in order to justify its war. Gordon Brown spoke of 'a chain of terror linking Afghanistan and Pakistan to the streets of Britain' and President Obama told a recent meeting of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 'If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which Al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans.' Of course, even if there were any truth in these claims, they beg the question why the people of the Middle East and Central Asia would want to hit back at the US and Britain. Hardly surprising, while the imperialists continue to attack, occupy and exploit their countries. General Sir Richard Dannatt, until recently head of the British army, supported the anti-terrorism excuse for the war, despite previously pointing out that the majority of the anti-occupation fighters were not terrorists but sons and brothers from Afghan and Pakistani families killed and damaged by the war. Former major Eric Joyce, a parliamentary aid to Labour Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth, resigned his post in September saying the war in Afghanistan has nothing to do with the defence of Britain against terrorism and called for a timetable for troop withdrawal.

Strategic commitment

The imperialists show no signs of pulling out. Afghanistan is crucial to them as a strategic centre for dominating the region and for access to the oil rich Caucasus. General Dannatt said British troops face at least five more years of intense fighting. He and his successor, General David Richards, have spoken of a 'commitment' to Afghanistan for 40 years – could there be a greater indictment of the entire enterprise? They want 2,000 more British troops in the country. US commander General McChrystal wants 30,000 more US troops. Speaking to the US Veterans of Foreign Wars, President Obama boasted that he would maintain increased military spending and revamp the US military to better serve US global domination: 'We need to keep our military the best trained, the best led, the best equipped fighting force in the world... and that's why we've increased the size of the army and the Marine Corps two years ahead of schedule.' The new military would be designed to respond to multiple conflicts simultaneously, be lighter, more high-tech and ready to deploy quickly all over the world.

In stark contrast, the US military and NATO appear ever more bogged-down and futile in Afghanistan and their credibility is being strained. Disenchantment is reflected among leading US Democratic Party members and the NATO allies; some are seeking an exit strategy. The US government has said it will assess McChrystal's proposed strategy before posting more troops. The Netherlands and Canada have said respectively that they will reduce and pull their troops out soon. The spectre of the humiliation in Vietnam still haunts Washington. In early September British Prime Minister Brown, French President Sarkozy and German Chancellor Merkel called for an international conference to transfer responsibility for the war on Afghanistan to the United Nations. As the ground gives way beneath the occupation armies in Afghanistan, so divisions within the ruling classes and between the imperialist powers are likely to increase; a substantial anti-war movement could then be decisive in ending this carnage – but it still does not exist, neither in Britain nor the US.

The US healthcare debate

Popular demand for healthcare reform was one of the reasons Barack Obama was elected President of the United States last year. Now the time has come to deliver on the promises – and it turns out something rather different from healthcare reform is going on. Anyone in Britain watching the US healthcare 'debate' might be forgiven for believing that US politics has become completely mentally unhinged. While the right wing certainly is using some very disturbed and ignorant people, that's not the root of the problem. Far from the healthcare issue being a battle of sanity versus lunacy, or the people versus Capital, what is happening is largely an argument within the capitalist class.

The failures of the US healthcare system are well known – 45 million people have no health coverage; somewhere between 20,000 and 100,000 people die annually as a result of screw-ups in the 'care' they receive; half of all bankruptcies are caused by illness or medical bills. Although the US is first in the world on health expenditure per head, the World Health Organization ranks it 14th in male life expectancy, 23rd in male infant mortality and 37th in overall health system performance.* Today, the US healthcare industry has grown to 16% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – about \$2.1 trillion. This is up to twice the share compared to other imperialist countries with universal health schemes. On its own, this would make the US healthcare industry the rival of Italy for seventh largest economy in the world, and amounts to the entire annual income of the combined population of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated that it will grow to 20% by 2015. At this rate by 2050 half the US working population will be providing healthcare to the other half.

How did things get this way? The modern history of United States' healthcare begins during the Second World War. In order to help pay for the war, wage rates were frozen for the duration. As a result, in order to attract scarce skilled labour, capitalists competed by offering benefits in kind, notably healthcare insurance. After the war, this became institutionalized in a deal between the better-off unionized skilled workers – the labour aristocracy – and the bigger employers which provided for collectively-bargained health plans. Inevitably, these plans were extended to cover similar non-union workers. These kinds of plans were, at that time, both politically necessary in order to bribe the labour aristocracy and economically possible thanks to high rates of profit for US capitalism which emerged triumphant from the war. This set the trend for healthcare down to the present.

In addition to private healthcare, the US Government Veterans Health Administration provides coverage to past and present military personnel. The other major state health programmes are Medicaid and Medicare, both introduced in 1965. Medicare provides healthcare for over 65s; Medicaid provides healthcare for limited groups of poor people: children, pregnant mothers, parents of eligible children, and the disabled, provided they are US citizens or legal residents.

Contradictions of capitalist healthcare

How come, despite under the supposedly super-efficient discipline of the market, capitalist healthcare is so expensive, compared to state-supplied healthcare? Healthcare constitutes part



Demonstrators outside the White House, Washington DC

of the value of labour-power, even when paid by the employer. When healthcare is supplied directly, provided by the state, its value includes the cost of buildings, equipment, supplies and the wages of health workers. But when supplied privately, it also includes surplus-value – the capitalists' profit – and the charge for private healthcare provision is therefore inherently more expensive.

Under a universal healthcare scheme, the state can pay all the costs directly. But when healthcare is provided privately, it must inevitably be provided via an insurance scheme, in order to even out differences in services used between individual members and over time. This is not just an insurance fund, but capitalist insurance, which, again, must make a profit and is part of the whole mechanism of finance capital. So, on top of the actual costs of healthcare, and the providers' profits, the profits of the insurance companies have to be included as well.

But the escalation of costs does not end there. The insurance companies, to increase profits, must cut costs by minimizing the provision of services, and maintain an army of workers dedicated to finding flaws in claims so they can be denied. The degree of bureaucracy beggars belief and poisons the healthcare system to its roots: the average doctor's surgery has a small army of clerical workers to fill out the hundreds of different forms. The system is so complicated that colleges offer one-year courses in medical billing! The result is that administrative costs eat up 30% of healthcare spending in the private sector compared to around 4.5% for the state Medicare scheme.

The inherent waste and expense of capitalist healthcare extends to medicines. The pharmaceutical industry, which under a state scheme would have to negotiate prices with a single buyer, is faced with hundreds of private plans and can largely charge whatever price it wants. For example, a course of Lanzoprasol, widely used as a gastric secretion-reducing medicine, costs \$329 in the US and \$9 in Europe.

Since there is little interest in preventative healthcare – who is to pay for it? – the system virtually guarantees unnecessary suffering. Conditions which could be prevented or treated quite cheaply early on, are therefore left to develop into full-blown illnesses, the costs of which either have to be met later by a private healthcare plan, or by the state when

the uninsured patient finally shows up at the hospital Emergency Room. In the worst cases, of course, disability and death can result.

Healthcare costs are a loss to capitalism in general because they reduce the surplus-value which might otherwise be pumped out of the working-class. In addition surplus-value is diverted away from the capitalists directly engaged in exploitation into the hands of the insurance companies and pharmaceutical industry. This comes at a time when US capitalism is experiencing a severe decline in the rate of profit and needs to cut costs. Yet the same tendency has also led the insurance companies to increase the premiums they charge, and pharmaceutical and medical supply companies to increase their prices.

We have a crisis of healthcare coverage, quality, and costs: everybody agrees that clearly something has to be done about this lumbering monstrosity. The questions are: what? In whose interest?

Phoney Reform

There is strong popular support for reform and the introduction of a government-backed system with broader coverage – though considerable confusion about what precise shape it should take. Universal healthcare is known in the US as a 'single-payer' system and there are attempts to introduce a single-payer healthcare bill in Congress. But it's not going to get anywhere, given that there is no militant campaign to support it. The US left has failed to build a movement in support of healthcare reform. Although it would be demanding reform within the capitalist system, like the demand for an 8-hour day, it would start injecting some class politics into US political life.

Several competing bills are now on the table. What the main ones seem to have in common are:

- Force everyone to purchase private health insurance, except for the very poorest who will receive some kind of second-class coverage.
- Some form of employer mandate
- Cumbersome, ineffective and bureaucratic 'solutions' to containing costs
- Exclusion of undocumented workers
- No coverage of abortion

Without an independent alternative, the legislative struggle has been left to capitalists. And here we see the results of the contradictions of capitalist healthcare. Employers' organizations are lobbying to avoid an 'employer

mandate' in the legislation – a provision that would make it a legal requirement that employers pay for health insurance. Healthcare providers are trying to avoid measures that would cut into their profits. The healthcare insurers are trying to ensure that there is no public insurance option to compete with. Industry groups are spending staggering sums of money to ensure that US 'democracy' does what's necessary: they spent \$167.7 million in campaign contributions in 2008 and a further \$484.4 million on lobbying. The 'teabaggers' – the various vociferous right-wingers who have been quite effectively performing their antics on television news – are just part of this lobbying initiative. Other facets have included spreading the most ludicrous distortions about the British National Health Service and other uni-

versal care systems.

What we're going to get, at this rate, is reform of health insurance to force everyone to buy this rotten product, increasing the market by about 33 million new subscribers; no serious reform of the healthcare industry; racist exclusion of undocumented workers. Nothing proposed is going to improve the quality of healthcare; nothing is going to reduce costs; nothing is going to remove the bureaucracy. The only development that can change this is a mass movement for real healthcare reform and the introduction of universal healthcare. So far there are no signs of that happening.

Steve Palmer
US correspondent

* World Health Report 2000, Annex Tables 1 and 2.

Ecuador closes US base



Demonstration outside the US Embassy, London, celebrating the closure of the US base

US interventionist policies in Latin America have determined the politics in a region that the US has always considered to be its backyard. The people and their leaders who have dared to challenge Yankee imperialism have had to pay a high price, since the US has not hesitated in taking military action to secure geostrategic control of the region.

During the second half of the 20th century, Cuba was almost alone in its heroic battle for sovereignty and self-determination. However, a new era has arrived in Latin America and countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador are advancing with revolutionary anti-imperialist processes that, together with Cuba, work towards regional integration without US control. An example of this is the removal, after ten years, of the US military base in the port of Manta, Ecuador. The government, led by Rafael Correa, has fulfilled its promise not to tolerate a US military presence in Ecuador.

In 1999 the US got the then puppet Ecuadorian government to sign a humiliating treaty in which the most bellicose and powerful army in the world could be present on Ecuadorian soil. This was part of its geopolitical strategy and related to the so-called Plan Colombia that seeks US military control of the region as a strategic entry into the bio-diverse Amazon, its natural resources, water and the air which the planet breathes. The pretext for the base at Manta was supposedly the need to prevent drug trafficking in the area. The military communication technology equipment at the base, however, allowed most of the Amazon basin to be monitored. The logistics, presence of trained personnel

and dimensions of the landing area, were clearly geared towards launching military action at any moment. In fact, it is suspected that the base at Manta provided logistical support to Colombia when it attacked Ecuador in March 2008.

Official reports indicate that 7,726 monitoring missions were launched from Manta base in the last ten years, without a single air attack against drug-traffickers. This exposes the real role of the base. On the other hand, the base was 'successful' in stopping naval fishing boats and Ecuadorian immigrants. Human rights organisations have denounced the interception and sinking on the high seas of dozens of boats by US naval ships and the disappearance of hundreds of people whose families have no knowledge of their whereabouts. Responding to the allegations, the US Ambassador stated that 'the US reserves the right to capture any vessels of any country in international waters.' This constitutes a flagrant violation of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which qualifies such actions as piracy.

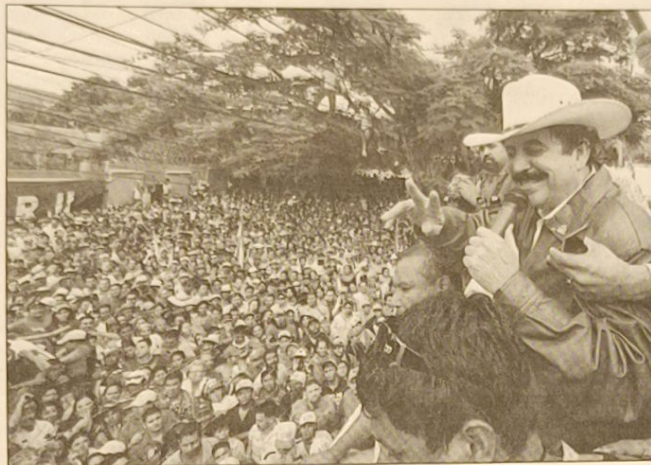
Ecuadorians around the world are celebrating the recovery of their sovereignty and can look at their future with optimism, more than ever now that the new constitution declares Ecuador to be a peaceful territory and categorically prohibits the presence of foreign troops. In London, the Movement of Ecuadorians in the UK (MERU) organised a symbolic action in front of the US Embassy to say to the pirates 'Hasta la vista Baby!' whilst sending president Correa the revolutionary message 'Hasta la victoria siempre!'

Fidel Narváez
MERU

President Zelaya returns to Honduras

On the night of Sunday 20 September, after two days of travelling secretly through the mountains and countryside of Honduras, elected President Manuel Zelaya returned to the capital city of Tegucigalpa. His appearance in the Brazilian embassy, 86 days after he was ousted in a military coup on 28 June and expelled from the country, has electrified the mass of the Honduran people who rushed to surround the embassy before being forced away by the rubber bullets and tear gas of the coup regime's police and military.

Zelaya's return represents a humiliating defeat for US imperialism: for its intelligence services, who knew nothing about the plan for his return; for US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose department had given the coup government tacit support, and for President Obama, who had been unable to restrain the hawks in his administration. The Reuters view that, by opening its door to Zelaya, Brazil is placing 'a high-risk bet that could harm its regional leadership ambitions' completely misses the point: had Brazil not done this it would face marginalisation within the Organisation of American States and other groups where the US now holds little or no sway. As Brazil's President



President Zelaya addresses the crowd outside the Brazilian Embassy, Honduras

Lula told the UN General Assembly on 23 September:

'The international community demands that Mr Zelaya return immediately to the presidency of his country and must be alert to ensure the inviolability of Brazil's diplomatic mission in the capital of Honduras.'

Zelaya's return follows nearly three months of political struggle by the mass of the people. As we go to press

he remains inside the Brazilian Embassy, while the people continue to demonstrate their support.

The coup was orchestrated by Honduran businessmen and military leaders and came as a response to the growing social movements within Honduras. Zelaya came into office as a right-wing politician but was pushed by the Honduran people to bring in social reforms and had started to play

an active role in ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, of which Honduras was a member. The benefits of this for the Honduran people were literacy campaigns, a 60% increase in minimum wage and Zelaya's proposal for a referendum to ask Hondurans if they wanted to vote on a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the reactionary 1982 Constitution.

The Honduran people reacted strongly against the coup despite violent repression. Progressive groups, activists and other civilians quickly came together under the banner of the National Front of Resistance Against The Coup and began organising protests in support of Zelaya around the country. Strikes, human road blocks, university occupations and marches, reported to number over half a million people, have been met with batons and tear gas from the military and police.

Before his clandestine return, Zelaya had already twice been prevented from re-entering the country: first in a plane which tried to land in Tegucigalpa Airport and, after that failed, on foot through the Nicaraguan border. The coup regime has been responsible for the murder of at least nine resistance members, thousands of arrests of demonstrators and the censorship of and physical attacks on the independent media. While Zelaya was

at the Nicaraguan border the body of Pedro Mufios, a demonstrator, was found on a roadside showing signs of torture. More recently the military has been using football stadiums to detain and sometimes 'disappear' protesters.

The international community, led by ALBA members and other Latin American nations, have shown their solidarity with the Honduran people and only one country in the world, Panama, will recognise whoever is chosen as President in the elections the coup regime are hoping to hold on 29 November.

Although nearly all the world's governments condemned the coup, the United States was seen to be taking steps to legitimise it. Ten days after the coup Clinton announced there would be 'negotiations' between Zelaya and the coup leaders, mediated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. Arias presented both sides with a seven-point proposal which aimed to resolve the crisis. This proposal would have allowed Zelaya's return to presidency but stripped away all his power and that of the people. However, the coup regime rejected the proposal and Arias declared the mediation failed.

US support for a regime in Latin America is now no longer a guarantee for its future. The international isolation of the coup regime has further emboldened the resistance who are now clear that the only way forward for their country is not just Zelaya's return to the presidency but a Constituent Assembly to rewrite a Constitution which currently serves the interests of the rich.

Luke Lucas

Colombia: a new phase in US global militarisation

Expelled from its Manta military base in Ecuador from 18 September, the US has reorganised its military infrastructure in South America so that Colombia becomes the regional hub for operations. On 14 August, it concluded a secret deal with Colombian President Uribe, allowing US Southern Command the use of seven military bases – three naval, and two each for the US air force and army. South American states immediately called an emergency meeting of UNASUR to discuss their response to this threat to their security.

Military changes

The new agreement increases the 250 US military operatives now officially in Colombia to 800 plus 600 'civilian' contractors. The Palanquero air base will support P3 surveillance and E3 early warning aircraft, and C17 military transports, able to reach across half the continent without refuelling. The Puerto Salgar air base will be capable of receiving more than 2,000 soldiers, its runway will be the longest in Colombia at 3,500 metres. Three airplanes will be able to take off simultaneously. It will have its own casinos, restaurants, supermarkets, theatres and hospital.

All of this is part of a build-up of US military power in the region. Between April and May 2006, the US Navy conducted exercises involving four ships with 60 fighter planes and 6,500 soldiers. The US Fourth Naval Fleet, disbanded in 1950, was reactivated in 2008, shortly after Colombia's military incursion into Ecuador, with 'responsibility' for the Caribbean, Central and South America.



Latin American heads of state at the UNASUR summit in August

In May 2008, US soldiers of the Task Force 'New Horizons' arrived in Peru, the US's only other close ally in the region, under the pretext of humanitarian operations. In October 2008, heavily armed soldiers from the Task Force with Chinook helicopters supported 990 US soldiers in an operation 575 kilometres southeast of Lima, where the US is negotiating for a military base. Meanwhile, the US has requested that Uruguay and Paraguay allow US forces to operate from bases in the two countries.

Venezuelan President Chavez is clear that the US intention in Colombia is to expand its covert intelligence operations across the region and control natural resources. The US has already supported three coups d'etat in Latin America since 2000: Venezuela in 2002, Haiti in 2004, and most recently, Honduras.

Despite an initial refusal, Uribe attended the UNASUR summit hosted by Argentina on 28 August. Its aim was to strengthen South America as a 'peace zone.' During the discussion, Chavez brandished 'The White Book

of Aerial Mobility Command and the Global Strategy of Support Bases of the United States' prepared in April 2009 and based on the US's doctrine of 'Global Engagement'. The final UNASUR statement agreed that its Defence Council would study it. Afterwards Chavez said that, 'The Colombian representative had the audacity to excuse themselves for not presenting the document of agreement that they have signed with the United States, saying they couldn't show it because they needed the permission of the US government.' Since the start of Plan Colombia in 2000, the Colombian army has received \$4.35bn, making it South America's best equipped army.

On 16 September the defence and foreign ministers of UNASUR agreed in Quito to exchange military information, make their defence spending transparent, consult about military activities in border areas, both consult and cooperate around unanticipated military action, and fulfil previous agreements. Uribe rejected the first three – slavishly saying, 'Colombia

needs the United States more than the United States needs Colombia.' He objected to President Correa's motion at UNASUR asking US President Obama to explain the agreement.

As far back as 2002, Brazilian army intelligence identified 6,300 US soldiers constructing runways and outposts in a militarised 'belt' around Brazil and concluded that this diminished Brazil's military options, especially in the Amazonian region. Before 2004 Latin America was the region that spent the smallest proportion of its GDP on arms. To fend off US threats this is changing and countries are buying arms from non-US sources: Venezuela, for instance, from Russia. In 2008 Brazil announced a new defence strategy and has negotiated a \$12.5bn deal with France for submarines, aircraft and land vehicles, notably advanced technology.

The economic question

Every imperialist state depends on oil imports. The US receives 25% of the oil it consumes from Andean countries; antagonism towards its extrac-

tion and competition compels the US to prepare for physical intervention. Venezuela and Brazil have enormous oil reserves which make them more independent. Further, the US has deteriorating trade relations with Latin America. Between August 2008 and May 2009 Brazil reduced its investment in US bonds by 17% – the largest reduction made by any of Washington's 15 biggest creditors, further weakening the US's grip on the most powerful country in Latin America. Argentina had already relieved itself of US debt through the help of Venezuela and China. Bolivia has followed suit.

China has now leapt to first place in Brazil's export partner league. The growing relationship between China and Brazil, with goods passing through the Andes to Ecuador on the Manta-Manaus highway, is a strategic concern of the US. China's growing investment, trade and influence throughout South and Central America causes further alarm. China has offered \$10bn to Venezuela to exploit the Orinoco oil fields, a sum not far short of US recent annual foreign direct investment (FDI) in Venezuela. The Chinese presence in Panama is so huge that the Congress there passed a law making the teaching of Mandarin obligatory.

However, it is not just the US that is a threat to South American peace and prosperity. European investments and the profit they extract distort and poison the development of the continent. The EU is making every effort to displace the US in every possible market. Net flows of FDI into Brazil between 1997 and 2008 saw the US's 21% eclipsed by that of four European countries (Netherlands, Spain, France and Italy) at 43%. For Argentina, between 1997 and 2006, US share of FDI inflows was 27%, Spain's was 43% and France, Netherlands and Italy together a further 19%. The US's dominant position in investment, loans and trade has been eroded by EU states over the last 10 years. In this we find the explanation for US imperialism's new military strategy.

Alvaro Michaels

TAKING THE SIDE OF SOCIALISM

Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, Verso, 2005, 416pp, £25

9 November will mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. We can expect a barrage of propaganda proclaiming the failure of socialism and triumph of democracy and capitalist markets. It is not an accident that, precisely when capitalism is in open crisis and the working class is put under attack, the former Soviet Union and Cuba are targeted with insults and lies.* For the Soviet Union was an example, however problematic, of the only viable alternative to capitalism and that is socialism; Cuba represents that hope today. TREVOR RAYNE reviews Moshe Lewin's analysis of Soviet history.

September's 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War was the occasion for bourgeois historians and eastern European political leaders to blame the Soviet Union for the war and to equate Stalin with Hitler in the annals of crime. This shameful distortion seeks to conceal the fact that since 1917 imperialism had connived at the destruction of the Revolution and to thwart every effort to construct socialism. The imperialists, including Britain, were content to see the Soviet Union invaded in 1941, just as they had invaded Russia in 1918. If the Red Army had not driven the Nazi forces back to Berlin, much of Europe might remain under fascist occupation today.

The final collapse of the Soviet Union in August 1991 was a heavy blow for the working class and oppressed worldwide. Not only did it harm socialism as a force in the world and provide capitalists with a means to discredit Marxism, it unleashed capitalism's most barbaric tendencies: attacks on welfare, privatisation of services and key industries; the growth of racism, religious fundamentalism and reactionary political movements; intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries and increased readiness to wage war. The Soviet Union and socialist bloc provided a counter to imperialism in the world and a barrier to imperialist penetration: almost one-third of the world's population were closed to imperialist exploitation. The Soviet Union supported and inspired anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles and it was critical to the survival of the Cuban revolution and Vietnam's victory. We can say that it could have done more and that it sometimes backed national bourgeoisies at the expense of the oppressed but, on balance, it was a progressive force in the world and a restraint on imperialism.

Its demise turned the balance of global class forces against the working class and for that the capitalists are grateful. With the Soviet Union gone, the US ruling class has made a bid for global hegemony; launching wars in the Balkans, Middle East and Central Asia, resulting in an increase in militarism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist bloc was also a tragedy for these countries' working classes. Between 1990 and 1999 the former Soviet economy shrank by more than 50%. In the early 1960s Soviet life expectancy matched that of Western Europe and the US. Male life expectancy in Russia dropped from 65 years in 1987 to 57

years in 1994, female life expectancy declined from 75 to 71 years in the same period. The health system was being destroyed and the population demoralised. Russia's suicide rate rose 57% from 1990 to 1994 and the homicide rate rose by over 50%. In 1994 Russia had almost as many automobile deaths as the US, but with just 1% of the vehicles! Deteriorating roads and a decline in police discipline were responsible. Corrupt and virulently anti-working class regimes took power.

Stalin-Trotsky dichotomy

Professor Moshe Lewin was born in Poland, served in the Red Army, worked on a collective farm and is a foremost academic on the Soviet Union, holding posts at French, US and British universities. He has written influential books including *Lenin's Last Struggle* (1967), *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power* (1968) and *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates* (1974). *The Soviet Century*'s strengths are its weakness: it draws on archive material from government sources made available since the collapse of the Soviet Union and from Russian academics with access to these previously undisclosed records, but in doing so it neglects the context in which the evidence was produced. The focus is on Cheka, GPU, NKVD, MVD and KGB (state security forces') documents. They are important, no doubt politically selective, but the book reads as though an exploration of Metropolitan Police Special Branch reports would tell us what was driving London for 70 years. As for a Soviet century, there is no analysis of the struggle for survival against imperialism, no analysis of the relationships between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, no mention of Vietnam or Korea; China appears on one page and Cuba is referenced as the 'Cuban missile crisis' only. Without examining the existence of the Soviet Union in the context of imperialism it cannot be understood, and the Soviet Union's contribution to the world is neglected.

Much of the left's analysis of the Soviet Union derives from the Stalin-Trotsky dichotomy of the 1920s. Out of these analyses are produced theoretical positions that are used to interpret experiences as diverse and particular as those of China and Cuba. This is both ahistorical and Eurocentric, and it is not a scientific approach: the point is to test and develop theories against new evi-



May 1945: a Red Army soldier flies the hammer and sickle flag over the Reichstag Building, Berlin

dence and to recognise that social forces are not homogenous across countries or time and that history is dialectical and not recurrent – it changes. To characterise the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and others as 'Stalinist' is to either propose that there was a conjunction of class forces in the Soviet Union in the 1920s that was replicated across the world and in time, or that a set of ideas and political institutions determines society, in this case Stalin's ideas and institutions – and this is idealism. To his credit, Lewin shows that the Soviet state was always in a process of change: it was not 'Stalinism' from the 1930s onwards to its downfall. However, despite this recognition, Lewin's loathing for Stalin draws him towards a form of reductionism. 'A label is not an argument,' Che Guevara is reported to have said; the label 'Stalinism' is used to prevent analysis and often covers up for an alliance with social democracy, opportunism and downright reaction. Fidel Castro said that 'blaming Stalin for everything that occurred in the Soviet Union would be historic simplism, because no man by himself could have created certain conditions...I believe that the efforts of millions and millions of heroic people contributed to the USSR's development and to its relevant role in the world in favour of hundreds of millions of people.' Lewin verges on this simplism and his important work subsequently provides ammunition to those, like the contemporary Trotskyists, who would defame all efforts at building socialism.

Oriental despotism

Lewin writes that the Soviet Union saved Europe from Nazi domination and says that Tsarist Russia could not have done this. 26-27 million Soviet people died achieving victory in the Second World War. This is profoundly important for humanity. For Lewin,

what he calls 'Stalinism' 'rested on two historical imperatives: catching up with the West industrially as a precondition for building a strong state' (p149). But these were also the preconditions for defeating the Nazi invaders and for the Soviet state's survival against imperialism's constant threat. They could not have been achieved without a series of Five Year Plans, commencing in 1928. However, Lewin does not analyse the functioning of the plan in Soviet society – a major omission.

Lewin seeks to trace the historical changes in Soviet society that explain 'why the regime disappeared from the historical stage without firing a single shot'. He says that it was not a failure of socialism 'because socialism was not there in the first place' (p308). Instead he compares the Soviet Union with Karl Wittfogel's concept of 'Oriental despotism'; a bureaucratic system with a central role for a priestly caste (the party) headed by a monarch with supernatural powers. At its social base is a vast rural proletariat. Lewin says he prefers the depiction of 'agrarian despotism' because of the priority given to industrialisation and he finally decides on 'bureaucratic absolutism': 'The term "bureaucratic absolutism"...is borrowed from an analysis of the Prussian bureaucratic monarchy in the eighteenth century, wherein the monarch was in fact dependent on his bureaucracy despite being its head. In the Soviet case, the party's top bosses, putative masters of the state, had actually lost any power over "their" bureaucrats' (p383).

Lewin is not defining a mode of production in the Marxist sense. For Lewin and for many Trotskyists there was no attempt to build socialism in the Soviet Union, just an extension of Oriental or agrarian despotism. Asiatic revolutions cannot be real revolutions since they perpetuate Asiatic despotism. The term

nomenklatura, used by Lewin and others to describe a self-serving bureaucracy, is taken from Wittfogel. Lewin says, 'Socialism involves ownership of the means of production by society, not a bureaucracy.' However, the bureaucracy did not own the means of production. Evidence Lewin produces shows the Soviet state in transition and he argues against his own conclusions, thus, 'After [Stalin's] death [5 March 1953], what happened to it [the bureaucracy] can best be described... as "the emancipation of the bureaucracy"' (p217). The question is that if the bureaucracy was emancipated, from what was it emancipated? The answer must be, as Lewin's evidence indicates, from the Communist Party and the working class.

Lewin presents elements in the state apparatus emerging as a class for themselves; state ownership of the means of production was eroded into a series of fiefdoms inside ministries. 'This process must be called by its name: the crystallisation of a proto-capitalism within the state-owned economy... it emerged through the pores of central planning... Thus it was that the *nomenklatura* metamorphosed from covert owner of state property into its overt owner' (p369-370). As the bureaucracy did not own the means of production, what socialists need to understand is how did elements of the bureaucracy achieve control of their use for their own interests, rather than those of the mass of the people? For these elements to become capitalists they had first to disrupt the operation of the Five Year Plans, usurp their role and then destroy the state. We ask, how did they emerge and why did they begin to flourish?*

Lewin's description of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s shows that the Communist Party and state apparatuses were drawn from the work-

ing class. Lewin specifically notes that 'the broadly plebeian orientation of this recruitment remained a source of strength throughout the 1920s. The policy of comprehensive industrialisation in the 1930s brought the party additional popular strata with a stake in the regime and were also instrumental in the victory of 1945' (p290).

Party and state apparatuses

Lewin quotes Nikolai Bukharin in 1928: 'The party and state apparatuses have merged and it is a calamity.' This fusion has deliberately been avoided in Cuba. Addressing the Eleventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in 1922, Lenin said that the Party must free itself from administrative tasks and concentrate primarily on political leadership. Until the end of the 1920s the battle against 'bureaucratisation' of the state administration was officially authorised. Many seasoned Bolsheviks were killed in the 1918-22 Civil War when a dozen foreign armies invaded Russia and up to nine million people died. By the end of the 1920s the Party had over one million members. However, between 1922 and 1935 approximately 1.5 million members had left the Party. This high turnover of members had a detrimental impact on political consciousness and discipline.

The average industrial worker in Russia in 1929 had 3.5 years education rising to 4.2 years by 1939. In 1929 just 3.2% of urban dwellers and 0.3% of the rural population had any higher education. With the drive for industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation from 1928 onwards there was a shortage of people capable of functioning effectively in the state apparatus. From 1926 to 1939 the Soviet Union's urban population grew by almost 30 million. Approximately 450 new towns were created in 13 years. This was a break-neck speed of development, creating massive problems for housing, water supplies, sewerage and administration. Subsequently, given the shortage of educated and trained people, there were pressures for the Party and administration to fuse. This reduced the ability of the Party to lead in ideological debates and make self-criticisms of the Revolution. Lewin's evidence confirms this analysis.

Material incentives

The principle of the 'Party maximum', whereby a Party member could not earn more than a skilled worker, was dropped in 1932, as an incentive to encourage people to seek promotion in the state apparatus. Membership of the Party became a means of career promotion and income enhancement. The emphasis on material incentives as a source of weakening consciousness and jeopardising socialist construction was identified and analysed by Che Guevara (see Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: the Economics of Revolution*). Guevara's criticism of using capitalist methods to try and build socialism is an important contribution to socialism; he developed it from a study of the Soviet Union and from Cuba's own experiences.

Lewin focuses on the security services and their persecution and imprisonment of those dubbed opponents of the state. He does not discuss the constant efforts of imperialism and its class allies within the Soviet Union to subvert the state. Lewin recognises that from the Civil War onwards the workers were engaged in a life or death struggle to preserve the state, but he castigates that state as being insufficiently democratic. Lewin's detailed description of its authoritarian methods is misused by Trotskyists and social democrats to denounce the Soviet Union, but this is a trend that hailed *Solidarnosc* in Poland and the *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan as being on the side of freedom and applauded the collapse of the Soviet Union; Lewin does not. *** Democracy is a concrete question: democracy for whom? For as long as imperialism exists the ability to construct socialism will be limited and the socialist state must retain a repressive ability if it is to survive. For the Soviet Union, with a relatively undeveloped economy at its inception, compared to the imperialist countries, class opponents of socialism had a natural ally abroad. In 1920 Lenin said that, 'Our existence depends, first, on the existence of a radical split in the camp of the imperialist powers.' After 1945 the imperialist camp was united against the Soviet Union, but this does not figure in Lewin's analysis. The necessary diversion of considerable resources into defence ('the arms race') restricted the ability to advance social-

ism in the socialist countries, exactly as imperialism intended.

The fusion of the Party and state apparatuses contributed to removing checks on Stalin's and the security services' powers. Lewin dwells on the abuses of these powers, including extra legal excesses, but often describes them in terms of their being a function of Stalin's personality, that of the quintessential Oriental despot. Repression in the Soviet Union cannot be understood without considering the failure of the working class movement in Europe and the strength of opportunism and anti-Soviet parties in the West. Any weaknesses in the Soviet system made the state doubly vulnerable; authoritarian measures were used to suppress class enemies, but did not remove their source.

From January 1953 to January 1959 the numbers of people detained at various institutions in the Soviet Union fell from 5.223 million to 0.997 million; numbers classed as 'counter-revolutionaries' dropped from 580,000 to 11,000. By the early 1960s arbitrary persecution ceased to be widespread, restraints were introduced into the legal system and prisoners given the right to challenge the prison administrators.

The imperialist ruling classes were forced to provide their own working classes with welfare services and concessions in order to maintain their loyalty against socialism and the Soviet Union as it achieved economic and social advances.

Demise

Lewin describes a country where the planned economy begins to stall by the 1970s: factories are paid bonuses for exceeding targets of products that are not wanted and state resources are siphoned off into private hands. In the 1970s, '90% of cadres accused of breaking the law got off with a light reprimand from the Party' (p364). So, even the attempt to suppress proto-capitalist elements was dropped. To try and boost production, bonuses would be paid to administrators and engineers equivalent to six years' of their normal wage. Party secretaries and other officials 'wanted their share, like other people, even if their actual contribution to production was virtually nil'. Favourite perks and privileges included going to seminars and conferences in Moscow, banquets and parties, elite and separate health care, education at home for children and the dachas. A privileged lifestyle was anticipated by the successful Party and state functionaries who were far from being socialists. All of this added to the demoralisation and demobilisation of the working class.

As the demise approached, 'such was the style of the system, in which everything functioned via personal contacts, exchanges of services, deals, promotions and so on'. Around the official and visible economy was a network of providers and sellers; 'a shadowy proto-market economy'. This network enveloped agriculture, industry and construction; in house building and home and car repairs, it was estimated to amount to 30-50% of the work done. One fifth of the work force was engaged in this shadow economy (pp361-376). Unofficial and parallel elites emerged and maintained close links with the official elites, lobbying and pressuring for their particular interests. At the end they no longer had to pretend to be capitalists, they became capitalists. ■

*The *Financial Times* has recently carried reviews of books on the Soviet Union and socialism: David Priestland, *The Red Flag: Communism and the making of the Modern World*, and Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* each providing it with the opportunity to slander the socialist alternative.

** This analysis and critique of *The Soviet Century* draws upon some of Che Guevara's own analyses and practice.

*** See *The Legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution* (1992), (ed. Eddie Abrahams) available from Larkin Publications.

Iraq US occupation under threat

Despite President Obama's much vaunted pull-out from Iraq, there are still 134,000 US troops in the country, occupying 320 outposts and bases. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said he will maintain an average of 100,000 troops in Iraq during the next fiscal year and at least 50,000 throughout 2011. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has reiterated that US troops may stay beyond the 2011 deadline. In addition, there are around 133,000 military contractors in the country, 36,000 of whom are US citizens.



Baha Mousa in September 2003 after the sadistic attack by British soldiers

US combat troops were supposed to have withdrawn from Iraqi cities by the end of June, according to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Several city bases were able to remain, however, by simply redrawing city boundaries to define them as being outside. British television has also shown US troops continuing to operate within the cities in full combat gear, with guns at the ready supposedly undertaking reconstruction missions.

Rising violence

Both the US and its Iraqi puppets are aware that the recent relative peace and improvement in security is very tenuous. On 19 August, 95 people were killed and over 500 injured in bomb attacks on Iraqi government buildings. The Foreign Ministry and Parliament building in the Green Zone were damaged, as were the Finance Ministry and the Reuters News Agency. The Baghdad Provincial Government building also came under mortar attack. The Iraqi government was subsequently forced to curtail its programme of removing the concrete blast walls erected by the US occupiers.

Another simmering area of renewed violence is the Kurdish north. The Kurds have been pushing for greater autonomy and control of their oil reserves ever since the start of the occupation. A more confident central government seeks to assert itself against the Kurdish claims. In the last provincial election, Sunni parties, standing for the first time, made substantial gains. Violence was threatened from both sides and the Iraqi government was forced to send troops to the region in order to maintain control. US com-

mander in Iraq, General Ray Odierno has requested more troops to be sent to the region. In September US Vice-President Biden visited Iraq and met with Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talibani. US forces have now been stationed between Kurdish and Arab forces and intend joint patrols with Iraqi government soldiers and Kurdish militias. The US claims that these patrols do not conflict with the SOFA as they are joint patrols.

Torture continues

Elsewhere, Human Rights Watch has reported a campaign of torture and murder against homosexuals by Iraqi militias linked to the government. Thomas Cruise, a US adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, has admitted that torture is still being used by Iraqi security forces, stating that, 'Torture is part of Iraqi society'. Victims have given evidence of beatings, the use of cow prods, castration, electric shock, whipping, threats to rape sisters and daughters, gouged-out eyes, severed limbs and damaged organs. Judges have freed those suspected of torture and there has been no pressure from the US or Britain for the Iraqi government to stop the torture. Gordon Brown's human rights envoy to Iraq, Labour MP Ann Clwyd, said, 'I think the Iraqis have made remarkable progress.' As we go to press the public inquiry into the death of hotel receptionist Baha Mousa in September 2003 in Basra reveals horrendous sadism committed by British soldiers, six of whom had been acquitted at a court martial in 2007. Torture remains an integral part of the armoury of the British state (see FRFI 210).

Jim Craven and Trevor Rayne

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.

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

Enrico Tortolano, *Tribune*

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Demolishing the Berlin Wall, 1989



Cuban socialism: 'To be educated is to be free'

For 50 years since the Revolution of 1959, Cuba has shown what can be accomplished in the fields of education and culture by a society that puts people before profit, promoting cooperation not competition. Its democratic planned economy has made possible remarkable achievements that have benefited the entire Cuban population and, through Cuba's internationalism, millions of poor people around the world. REBECCA RENSTEN and HELEN YAFFE report.

Education in Cuba is regarded as a human right and a duty for all citizens: for better child care and family life; for handling the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood; for improving health, diet and hygiene; to satisfy cultural needs and produce well-rounded individuals; for providing the political understanding to withstand cultural imperialism and brainwashing; for reducing privilege and relative poverty, and the social exclusion, crime and anti-social behaviour that stems from them. Within Cuba's planned economy, education acquires three functions; education as culture, political education and education for production;* combined, these functions create a varied and well-rounded education system that has succeeded where capitalist provision is failing, leaving millions uneducated and unemployed.

Educated for capitalism

Back in 1779, US President Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track system for the 'labouring and the learned' with the aim of 'raking a few geniuses from the rubbish'. The separation in schooling was established to instil obedience, patriotism and passivity in the working class, and so it remains today in Britain as well as in the US.

The plethora of titles under which Britain's education system is organised, such as beacon colleges, comprehensive schools, academies, selective schools, independent schools, public (private) schools, do not disguise the fact that education perpetuates the class divide. Private or 'independent' schools provide better facilities and attention, and significantly increase the likelihood of success in educational qualifications, employment and wealth. Research by Halifax Financial Services calculates average annual fees for private education at £10,239, but the national average median income of UK households in 2007/08 was £20,436. Clearly only a minority can afford these luxuries. Success and power or poverty and lack of education are largely determined from birth in Britain. Even within state schools pupils are often streamed according to test results – beginning the process of social stratification. As students become workers they are allocated a position according to the demand for labour within the capitalist production process.

Education in Cuba

Pre-revolutionary Cuba exemplified the class divide in education. In the 1950s there were only 82 high schools and two universities nationwide. 90,000 students were enrolled in private schools. 60% of the population lacked schooling and 41.7% of the population was illiterate. Only 3.5% had received high school education and just 1% had university education.

Inequality in education was regarded as a legacy of colonialism, slavery and imperialist domination by the

Movement for the 26 July (M26J), the revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro in the struggle against the Batista dictatorship from 1952. In the late 19th century, Cuba's national independence hero, Jose Martí, stated: 'To be educated is to be free'. The slogan was adopted by the M26J whose revolutionary programme declared: 'We believe that true democracy can be attained only with citizens who are free, equal, educated and have dignified and productive jobs.' The link between democratic participation, education and production could only be realised under a socialist system.

From January 1959, the revolutionary government took steps to create a free and more productive education system. The 1960 literacy campaign recruited 300,000 young Cuban volunteers to live in the poorest rural areas teaching peasants and rural workers to read and write. Within a year every Cuban had achieved basic literacy. 37 schools were built in the first year of the revolution, compared to one school built in the previous 57 years.

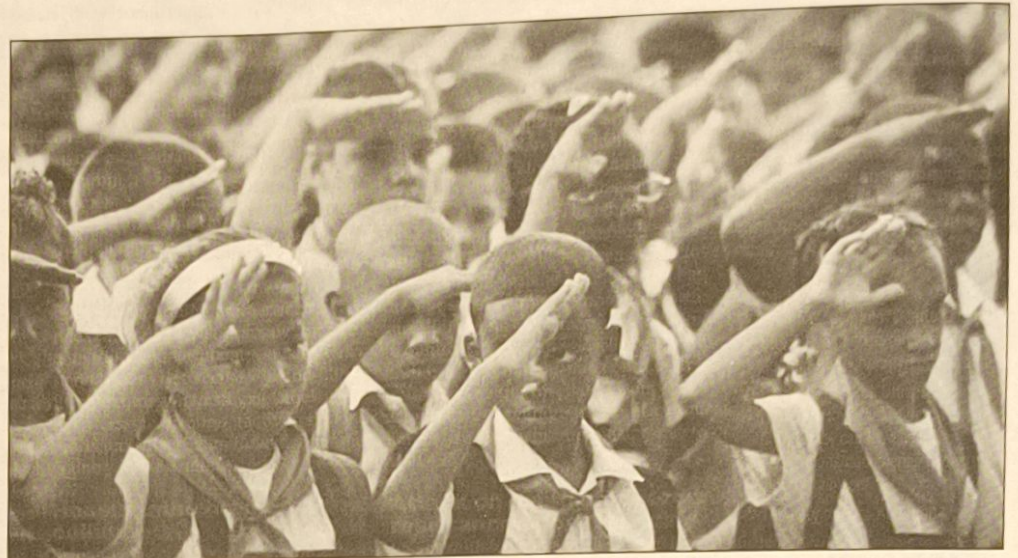
Education as culture

The Constitution of Cuba establishes that the government: 'orients, foment and promotes education, culture and science in all their manifestations and specifically espouses the freedom of artistic creation, the defence of Cuban cultural identity, and the conservation of the nation's cultural heritage'. This concept of cultural education and education as culture is overseen by the Ministry of Culture and there are cultural centres, music clubs, book groups, chess clubs and free after-school educational activities in every municipality throughout the island.

In 2003, Fidel Castro said: 'I qualify what is currently taking place in Cuban education in search of higher objectives as a profound revolution. It is the total transformation of society itself, one of whose fruits will be a general integrated culture accessible to all citizens. The very material future of our people is to be based on knowledge and culture.' He was referring to measures introduced under the Battle of Ideas, a campaign initiated in 2001 to consolidate socialist principles and improve material conditions in Cuba.

Political education

In December 1961, 'Schools of Revolutionary Instruction' were set up to emphasise the importance of theoretical education alongside practical work. Political education was integrated into schools at every level. As well as teaching Marxist theory and Cuban history, high school students study other countries' histories and political systems. Emphasis is given to Cuba's national heroes, with the revolutionary writings of Jose Martí being studied by every child. This education in international affairs provides the ideological basis for Cuba's remarkable proletarian international-



Cuban school children: 'We will be like Che!'

ism – the solidarity it expresses for people around the world.

Education for production

After the adoption of the planned socialist economy, production was no longer a means to exploit the working class for profit but to meet people's immediate needs and to fund new social programmes for universal benefit. Work is understood as a social duty, not for private enrichment. An individual raising their skills level leads to improvements in living standards for everyone. Education and training are integrated into workplaces and ministries.

Che Guevara noted that under capitalism students don't take qualifications in relation to society's needs or what job roles are available. Often careers are chosen for the earning capacity of the qualifications. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, there were many qualified lawyers but few geologists, chemists or engineers; the kind of skills necessary to develop the economy, which was dominated by the US. Under socialism, Che insisted, careers should be studied according to the national development strategy and the needs of the nation. He emphasised cooperation not competition in education and training.

Today in Cuba every graduate has the opportunity to work because their qualifications are in direct proportion to the amount of employees in the specific field that are needed. Students entering universities list subjects they would like to study in order of preference. Whether they get their first choice depends on the need for people qualified in that area, compared with the number of applicants. Course places are allocated according to grades and student performance. It is unrealistic and impractical for everybody to be able to study their first choice and would lead to unemployment as it does under capitalism.

The Cuban education system also enshrines the principle of the importance of engaging in manual and intellectual labour. Many students attend boarding schools in the countryside where their time is divided between academic study and agricultural or other manual work. Students frequently volunteer to carry out extra productive work, because they realise that their contribution helps to fund these institutions and other social investments.

With the Battle of Ideas in 2001, the

government opened emergency training schools to combat deficiencies in five areas: social work, primary teaching, nursing, cultural education and IT instruction. The campaign incorporated thousands of young people who had been marginalised from the revolutionary process, being outside education and employment, as a result of the economic crisis generated by the collapse of the Soviet bloc. It also responded to the demand to improve standards of social provision; improvements made possible by economic recovery from the Special Period. The first new training school was opened in Cojimar, near Havana, to teach social work intensively for three months (soon expanded to a year). Students could then choose to enrol on a university course, on the condition that they practised social work on Saturdays during the course. Six hundred students enrolled immediately. Hundreds of similar schools were set up throughout Cuba and by 2004, 21,000 social workers and 10,135 primary school teachers had graduated on the scheme.

By 2007 there were more than 7,000 projects initiated as part of the Battle of Ideas: more new schools were built to continue reducing class sizes, hundreds of adult education and technical training courses were started, including a television-based 'university for all' programme, it was ensured that every classroom on the island had access to a TV and video player, computers were put in every school, and a national network of video and computer clubs was created.

Between 2002/3 and 2008/9 the number of classroom teaching staff was increased by nearly 60,000 to 270,053. Of those, 81,975 are primary school teachers, which explains how it is possible that 94% of primary school pupils are in groups of less than 20. The Cuban average retention and graduation rate for high school students is 97.5%, compared to 52% in the 50 biggest US cities and 25% in Detroit. The number of Cubans who complete all educational levels went up from just over 500,000 in 2002/3 to 640,000 in 2007/8. The increase was most significant in higher education, or university level, up from 18,412 in 2002/3 to 44,738 in 2007/8. Since 1987 over 2,100,000 Cubans have graduated from computer courses at the Youth Computing and

Electronics Club which is now open in all 167 municipalities, including 39 in the mountains. Government expenditure on education rose from 6.9% of GDP in 2000 to 12% in 2008 and adult literacy is 99.8%. Education is free and available for everyone.

Education for humanity

Through Cuba's outstanding internationalism, its educational achievements have benefitted poor people around the world. The Revolution's educational assistance overseas began with a literacy campaign in Angola, 1978 to 1981. In 1980, Cuban teachers joined the Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua. Building on the success of its teaching method, they developed a literacy programme for adaptation into different languages and by communities around the world. By June 2008, the 'Yes, I can' (Yo Si Puedo) Cuban method was being applied in 28 countries coordinated by Cuban specialists. Over 3,600,000 people from 23 countries, from New Zealand to Nigeria and Guatemala to Equatorial New Guinea, had learned to read and write using the programme and another 330,000 illiterate people in 17 countries were being taught by Cubans. Over a dozen different versions of the programme have been devised including in Quechua and Aymara (for Bolivia), Creole (for Haiti), Tetum (for Timor L'Este) and Swahili (several countries in Africa). This contribution was recognised by UNESCO in 2006 which awarded Cuba for their international literacy work. Cuba also provides free education on the island to tens of thousands of students from Africa and Latin America.

The Cuban education system is constantly evaluated and improved. These amazing achievements in education are not coincidental; socialism in Cuba is evident in these overwhelming successes which are down to a system that values its people now, while also planning for and investing in future generations. Socialism is the only sustainable way of securing a genuine education and good standard of living for everyone. Education ensures that socialist Cuba stays free.

* See Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan 2009.

DEBATE

Indeterminate sentences for public protection – 'lifing off the working class'

In FRFI 209 Ben Gunn wrote about the relaunched Association of Prisoners (AOP) and how he sees it furthering the struggles of prisoners.

In FRFI 210 John Bowden replied.

DERMOT DONOVAN writes from Parkhurst prison in response to their contributions.

Thank you for your excellent paper which, I'm pleased to say, has done more for my political education than I can say in this letter. I'm also pleased to say it is enjoyed by other inmates I pass it on to, some who didn't know their left from their right at first! Of course it was denied to me to start with, but I cited my right to freedom of expression and what with my knowing when it arrived due to you sending it recorded delivery, I always get it now!

The reason I write now is about the Association of Prisoners (AOP). John Bowden's response to Ben Gunn was brilliantly put and I could not possibly improve upon it. If my memory serves me correctly, Gunn has already written in *Inside Time* about how ardently he is opposed to socialism (see 'Diversity...bring it on!' *Inside Time* February 2009), so how can he champion something (the AOP) which by any logic would be modelled on socialist theory?

I don't know if it has gone unnoticed but the Labour Party, with its 'tough on crime, tough on the causes' pledge has launched the biggest assault on the working class in living memory. By introducing the Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (ISPP) they have effectively made 153 offences punishable by life, as an ISPP can only be released on tariff by a kangaroo Parole Board.

This has now led to thousands of working class young men languishing in prison due to not being able to lower their so-called risk, simply because there are not enough places on re-education offending behaviour courses.

It appears the lot of the ISPP cons has gone over the heads of the AOP. I would imagine that, all things considered, none of them give a shit about not being able to vote.

For the record, like Ben Gunn, I am a lifer, as opposed to an ISPP prisoner, but I can see the issues that have impacted on inmates a lot more than anything this so-called AOP appears to be raising. I should also point out that the massive number of ISPP prisoners with short tariffs (typically 30 months) and the speed with which they therefore reach their tariff expiry dates is resulting in delays in Parole Board hearings for all lifers and indeterminate sentence prisoners.

So all this begs the question as to what is the position of the AOP on these very real issues that are impacting on a significant percentage of the prison population (nearly 10% are on some kind of life sentence!)

For what it's worth, I don't want to

hear bullshit about entering into talks with HMPS. Let's get it right; we didn't get improved conditions through talks did we? No, it was the events of 1990 that brought in-cell toilets etc.

ISPPs have been in use since 2005. Labour changed the law in 2008 so courts can't now give out tariffs of less than 24 months. And it's obvious the courts have slowed down in handing them out. But mark my words, Labour's war on the working class will come home to them when, a few years hence, prisoners who are years over tariff – often in prison for something that before 2005 they would have copped two or three years for – will explode.

Up and down the country, ISPP cons are the biggest disaffected group and quite rightly so. I honestly believe Labour knew full well the implications of the ISPP. To all intents and purposes, they are lifing off the working class! To give you an example of how shocking it is. A fellow I know was given an ISPP with a tariff of 16 months for 'threats to kill' someone who owed him money. No actual violence was involved. So far he has been in prison for four years.

His first parole – overdue – gave him a two-year knockback as he had not completed enough 'offending behaviour work' to lower his risk. He's due another parole hearing some time this year. He already knows he will likely get another two-year knockback due to failing drug tests. Some might say that's his fault but his head is in bits and you can't blame him for trying to get through his time in gaol. He will be lucky if he gets out at the six-year point. And when he does he will be on

Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection

The Labour government's Criminal Justice Act 2003 changed the entire criminal sentencing structure. Its measures included a provision, which came into force in 2005, whereby anyone convicted of a violent or sexual offence for which the maximum sentence was ten years or over and who the court determined to be 'dangerous', received an indeterminate sentence. Any previous violent/sexual offence automatically rendered you dangerous and in some cases not even that was necessary. The minimum period ('tariff') of imprisonment was determined by the facts of the

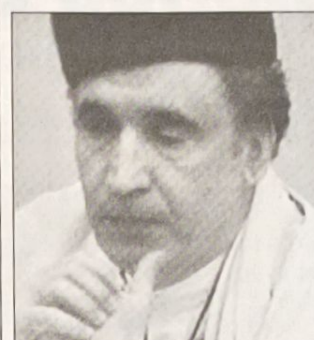


Prisoners on the roof during the Strangeways prison protest

licence for a minimum of ten years. Probation can recall anyone to prison without a new conviction – just not being 'of good behaviour' is enough. This of course applies to everyone who is on any kind of licence but, given ISPPs and lifers can expect another two-year knockback once they have been recalled, you begin to understand why this class of convict feels trapped in Labour's Criminal Justice System. ■

case but once that period expired release was at the discretion of the Parole Board. This led to ridiculous situations for prisoners, some with tariffs of a few months, whose cases were not considered by the Parole Board until well after their tariffs had expired, and who by then had not even begun the 'offending behaviour' courses, which, despite no concrete evidence that they actually work, are the system's favoured yardstick for determining 'reduction of risk'. In 2008, following legal challenges, the 'dangerousness' test was amended and the law changed so that anyone whose crime warranted a sentence of less than two years no longer received an indeterminate sentence; however this was not retrospective and lots of short-tariff ISPP prisoners continue to languish in gaol.

INSIDE NEWS



No compassion

On 20 August terminally-ill Libyan prisoner Abdel Baset Al Megrahi was released from prison in Scotland. Al Megrahi, convicted of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing of a Pan-Am jet in which 270 people died, has always maintained his innocence and was disgracefully forced to drop his appeal in order to be released. Two weeks earlier, 79-year-old Ronnie Biggs, convicted of participating in the 1964 'Great Train Robbery', who is also terminally ill, was released from prison in England, after his lawyers successfully contested an earlier refusal to free him. Furore has surrounded both releases but Al Megrahi and Biggs are being afforded a basic dignity which most seriously sick prisoners are denied in the final months of their lives. FRFI remembers many examples, such as framed Irish prisoner Giuseppe Conlon, who died in Wormwood Scrubs in 1980, and Chris Tierney, who was released from his life sentence in 2005 with a brain tumour only to be accused of swearing at a nurse in a hospice (an action clearly associated with his condition) and recalled to prison to die. Only recently we heard of the death of FRFI reader and thorn-in-the-side of the prison system, Doreen Francis, who died in Frankland prison of heart and renal failure on 10 July, following months of being shuttled between prison and hospital.

No care

On 23 September a coroner condemned the 'appalling and unacceptable conditions' at privately-run Rye Hill prison where Alexsey Baranovsky bled to death in 2006. While medical care in state prisons is provided by the local NHS, private prisons subcontract to private 'health providers', such as Primecare, which provided the woefully inadequate service that contributed to Alexsey's death. He was the third Rye Hill prisoner to die in a 15-month period. The suicide of Michael Bailey in the segregation unit in 2005 led to charges of manslaughter by negligence against three members of staff – the first time prison staff had ever been charged with this offence. The officers were acquitted – their defence being that the whole prison administration was so bad and they had been so poorly trained that they could not be held individually responsible. So why is the private company that is responsible for this disgusting prison not being brought to trial?

No legal advice

In July the Legal Services Commission announced the impending introduction of 'fixed fees' (ie big cuts) for legal representation at Parole Board and disciplinary hearings. Immediately these changes were finalised, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) published a consultation paper, proposing further cuts. *Legal Aid: Refocusing on Priority Cases* suggests, among other measures, ending virtually all civil legal aid for anyone who is not a UK citizen. In relation to prisoners it proposes wholesale abolition of funded legal advice and assistance for 'Treatment Matters', which it describes as 'relatively trivial' and lists as including 'mail, visits, food, property, healthcare and telephones'; prison lawyers say the cut will also end

funded advice on: prison work, pay, education, segregation, exercise, sanitation, data protection and the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme. Anyone can respond to the consultation which is open until 8 October. Write to Mandy Banks, Ministry of Justice Legal Aid Strategy, 4th floor 102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ; fax: 020 3334 4296; email: mandy.banks@justice.gsi.gov.uk. Copies of the consultation document can be obtained from the same address or at www.justice.gov.uk/index.htm.

No to censorship of FRFI!

Over the last few months we have had reports of subscribers in prison being refused FRFI; in particular we have had repeated calls and letters from Wakefield and Woodhill high security prisons. We therefore wrote to both prisons and the Prison Service, reminding them that in 2005, following threatened legal action by prisoners in Belmarsh, the Prison Service accepted that prisoners have a legal right to receive FRFI. We received this response from Wakefield:

Dear Sir/Madam

I can confirm that at present HMP Wakefield does not issue the publication Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism; this is due to concerns over the content of some articles within the paper.

I am aware that other establishments within the High Security Estate have, on occasion, decided not to allow offenders copies of particular issues due to their content.

As an example of our concerns, issue 208 has been reviewed by our Operations Department and it contains an article about the Close Supervision Centres in prisons which is clearly inaccurate and misleading. It reinforces negative stereotypes and suggests that staff use excessive force as a matter of course. Nothing could be further from the truth, staff strive to build up relationships with offenders in the CSC and actively encourage them to achieve behavioural targets that are set.

As such, I do not want to commit to censoring each issue for suitability; in essence a publication should either be suitable or not. Given the concerns I have raised, HMP Wakefield does not consider this publication to be appropriate for issue to offenders.

Yours faithfully

S HOWARD, Governor

Ironically, the FRFI article cited as 'an example of our concerns' was also published in the widely distributed prisoners' newspaper *Inside Time* and will therefore have been read throughout the system. The editor of *Inside Time* has confirmed to FRFI that the Prison Service did not complain about that article and that, as far as he is aware, no prison banned that issue of *Inside Time* for any reason. Wakefield's refusal to let prisoners receive FRFI on this basis is therefore irrational and its only effect is to prevent access to the political material in FRFI on subjects other than prison, which are not covered by *Inside Time*.

FRFI is strongly committed to maintaining a readership within prisons and takes all instances of censorship very seriously. We have replied to the Wakefield governor, stating that we consider the decision to ban FRFI to be irrational and unlawful, and making it clear we will take legal action if needed. We encourage prisoners who have the paper stopped to submit complaints to the Prison Service and Prisons Ombudsman (who has found in our favour in the past). Readers outside prison can also complain to the Directorate of High Security Briefing and Casework Unit, Room 618, Cleland House, Page Street, London SW1P 4LN.

FRFI ROUND UP

FRFI launches October speaking tour

Over the past two months Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! activists have held a summer campaign to raise anti-imperialist consciousness and action. With the economic crisis and the political divisions that now exist within the ruling class, it is essential that we use this opportunity to build resistance to imperialism. FRFI has been active around the country from across London, to Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee.

Defend socialist Cuba! Free all political prisoners of imperialism!

In London, on Saturday 12 September 2009, to mark the 11th anniversary of the incarceration of the Cuban 5, we protested with supporters in a busy shopping street as part of an international day of action. The five Cubans are political prisoners held in the US for trying to prevent terrorist attacks against their country.

FRFI helped organise the event called by Rock around the Blockade which works in solidarity with socialist Cuba and against the US blockade. Under the title *Break the chains: free the Cuban 5, free all political prisoners of imperialism*, the rally highlighted the use as a torture camp of Guantanamo Bay, in illegally occupied Cuba, to hold prisoners of the imperialist 'war on terror'. Speakers also exposed the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain, thousands of whom are daily detained and deported under Britain's racist immigration laws. Detainees include nearly 500 children.

People spoke passionately on the megaphone about the unfair trial of the five as well as the CIA's involvement in training and supporting known terrorists such as Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch. Protesters also spoke out against other recent crimes of imperialism and its allies, such as the military coup in Honduras and the continued occupation of Palestine and Afghanistan. The event was supported by comrades from the Movement of Ecuadorians in the UK (MERU) and other left-wing groups, as well as passers-by who joined in to hand out leaflets with information about the Cuban 5. Similar protests were held in Manchester, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

Troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq!

We have also been campaigning against the brutal occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Weekly stalls have been held in major cities calling for an end to the invasions and for the immediate withdrawal of troops. There has been endless propaganda from the Labour government and media in an attempt to gain public support for the war. Despite this the response that we have received from members of the public has been largely positive, with people eager to sign petitions that demand the immediate withdrawal of troops and for the Labour government to be put on trial for war crimes. In Glasgow activists have held a successful series of meetings at Langside Hall, Queen's Park. These have discussed the major political issues from FRFI such as imperialist divide and rule – the fight against racism, the struggle for democratic rights on the streets today and the legacy of Scottish revolutionary John MacLean. Meetings will continue and the start of the academic year has seen



London rally for the Cuban 5, 12 September 2009

the successful launch of an FRFI society at Glasgow University. This society will show films, organise discussions and encourage students to be active on the streets.

Fight Labour racism!

The Labour government is engaged in a systematic attack on refugees and migrant workers. Challenging this state racism is one of FRFI's main political priorities. In Newcastle we are working in Tyneside Community Action for Refugees, which mobilises and co-ordinates resistance to immigration raids and deportations of local people and around the country we organise regular stalls and Speak Out against Racism and Deportations street events.

Speaking tour

The climax of our summer campaign will be an inspiring speaking tour. FRFI has already held a series of successful meetings titled 'Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?' in which we debated the immediate challenge facing socialists trying to build a new movement in Britain. The speaking tour has just got underway and there are further meetings planned in London, Newcastle, Sunderland, Liverpool, Manchester, Dundee and Glasgow. All of these meetings will focus on the crisis of capitalism, the struggle against imperialism and discussions on socialist Cuba and revolutionary movements in Latin America (see the Events column for

full details).

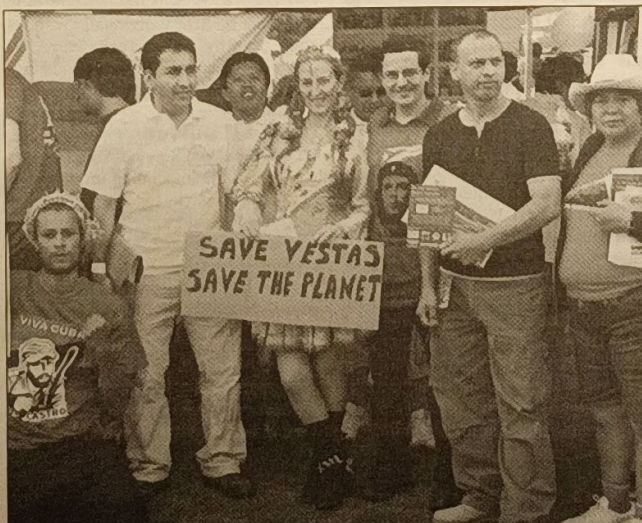
Fundraising

Members have been finding different ways to raise money to help finance the summer campaign and future work. Some comrades climbed Scafell Pike, the highest mountain in England. In Scotland FRFI members participated in the annual Pedal for Scotland cycle from Glasgow to Edinburgh to raise money for the FRFI Fighting Fund. The 55-mile cycle is the biggest of its kind in Scotland. Please send any cheques to 'Larkin Publications' if you wish to donate.

The time for action is now. On this page you will see a list of our forthcoming events and meetings. The momentum from our summer campaign is continuing into the autumn with a range of meetings and actions. Get angry! Get active!

CALLING ALL STUDENTS!

Just started university? Want to set-up a Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! society? Wish to hold an anti-imperialist meeting? Contact us at 020 7837 1688.



RATB and MERU activists at London's Carnaval del Pueblo, August 2009

FRFI SPEAKING TOUR

Saturday 3 October 1-5pm
Crisis of capitalism
The struggle against racism
Northumbria University, Stage 2,
Northumbria Students Union
Sandyford Road, near Haymarket Metro
Newcastle

Sunday 4 October 4-7pm
Crisis of capitalism
The fight against Labour racism
Upstairs in the Royalty, Chester Road
Sunderland

Saturday 10 October 2-5pm
Crisis of capitalism
The Bistro in the Casa, Hope Street
Liverpool

Sunday 11 October 1.30-5.30pm
Crisis in capitalism
Socialist Cuba

Cross Street Chapel, off Market Street
Manchester

Saturday 17 October 12-5pm
Crisis of capitalism
Revolutionary Cuba
Bolivar Hall, 56 Grafton Way
Nearest tube Warren Street,
London

Saturday 24 October 2-5pm
Socialist Cuba
The struggle against imperialism
Room T4, Dundee University Tower
Dundee

Sunday 25 October 1.30-5pm
Crisis of capitalism
Revolutionary Cuba
Jury's Inn Hotel, Jamaica Street,
Glasgow

EVENTS

LONDON

Every Thursday 6-8pm
Demonstration for Palestine – Victory to the Intifada
Picket Marks & Spencer
Oxford Street, WC1
Nearest tube Marble Arch

Wednesday 30 September 7.30pm
Public meeting: Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?
The Exmouth Arms, Starcross Street, NW1
Nearest tube Euston

Saturday 3 October 3-5pm
Public meeting: Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?
Café Mondo, 3 West Ham Lane, E15
Nearest tube Stratford

Sunday 4 October 5-7pm
Readers and Supporters Group – Discussion of Palestine article in FRFI 211
Upstairs at The Compass, Penton Street, N1
Nearest tube Angel

Tuesdays 6 October and 3 November 1-2pm
Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!
Demonstration at Communications House Immigration Reporting Centre
Old Street, EC1
Nearest tube Old Street

Wednesday 14 October 7.30pm
Public meeting: Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?
Union Tavern, 146 Camberwell New Road, SE5
Nearest tube Oval

Saturday 24 October 12-3pm
Demonstration: Free Palestine!
Marks & Spencer, Marble Arch, Oxford Street WC1

Saturday 21 November 12-3pm
Speak out against racism and deportations
Brixton (near tube station) SW9

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

NEWCASTLE

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

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

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

MANCHESTER

Saturday 7 November 12pm
Rolling picket targeting businesses that support Israel
Assemble at Co-op Bank, Corporation Street

Sunday 8 November 2pm
FRFI Forum – Palestine under siege
Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel

For information on weekly stalls and other actions contact, mrcrgfrfi@fsmail.net
07519 427 093

GLASGOW

Tuesday 13 October 7.30pm
Public meeting: Capitalist crisis – the need to fight back
Langside Halls, 1 Langside Avenue,

Wednesday 4 November 7.30pm
'Stand up for Justice' comedy night
Maggie Mays, 60 Trongate G1 5EP

Tuesday 10 November 7.30pm
Public meeting: Afghanistan – troops out now!
Langside Halls, as above

Sunday 29 November 2pm
Celebration of the life of John MacLean
Pollokshaws Burgh Halls, 2025 Pollokshaws Road

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

RATB EVENTS

LONDON

Film showing: *Che part 1*
Thursday 8 October 7.30pm
Bolivar Hall, 56 Grafton Way, W1

Discussions on *Che Guevara: the Economics of Revolution* 7pm
Tuesday 13 October: The Perseverance, Lambs Conduit Street, WC1
Wednesday 4 November: The Compass, Penton Street, N1

MANCHESTER

Saturday 25 October and Sunday 6 December 2pm
Film showings
Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel

NEWCASTLE

Saturday 10 October 12-3pm
Che day: street celebration
Greys Monument

Saturday 24 October 11am-3pm
Honduras solidarity action
Greys Monument

JUAN ALMEIDA BOSQUE



'¡Aquí no se rinde nadie!' 'No one surrenders here!'

On Sunday 13 September the Cuban flag was lowered to half mast across the island to mourn the death of Juan Almeida Bosque, aged 82, who died of a heart attack two days earlier. Tens of thousands of people paid their respects in every province in Cuba, led by Raul Castro in Revolution Square in Havana.

Almeida had participated in the revolutionary struggle against Batista from the outset in 1952, becoming a Commander of the Revolution, a member of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) since its formation in 1965, a delegate in the National Assembly and a vice president of the governing Council of State; positions he held until his death. He was also president of the Association of Combatants, founded in 1993 for veterans from the 1950s struggle and from Cuba's military interventions in Africa and elsewhere in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Born in Havana in 1927 to a poor black family of 12 children, Almeida began work at the age of 11. In 1952, when Batista carried out his coup, with US support, Almeida was working as a bricklayer, a porter and in the ticket office of the spa in Havana University, where opposition to the dictatorship was organised. Almeida joined an underground resistance cell with fellow construction workers and teamed up with Fidel Castro and others planning the attack on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953. The attack failed and Almeida was captured and stood trial. During the court case the judge accused him of wanting a revolution so that he could give orders. He replied 'I want the Revolution to triumph so the people can give orders...the moment has to arrive when it is the people...who are in charge'.

Freed in May 1955 as part of a general prisoner amnesty to quell public outcry, the Moncada attackers went into exile in Mexico from where they trained for guerrilla warfare and planned their return by boat. The parting

love song written by Almeida for a Mexican woman, 'Lupe', became the song of the sea-sick journey on the overcrowded, leaking boat, known as the Granma expedition.

Three days after landing, the expeditionaries were ambushed. Shot in the neck, Che Guevara sat down to contemplate death. 'No one surrenders here!' shouted Almeida, above the din, responding to one rebel's suggestion that they do just that.* Almeida urged Che up and taking control of a group of survivors, he set off to find Fidel and the others. It took them over two weeks to reunite.

In March 1957, Almeida was seriously wounded by a shot in the chest. Having recovered, a year later he took command of a new column and set off to create the Rebel Army's Third Front, at the same time that Raul Castro created the Second Front. In January 1959, as the Revolution swept into power, Almeida entered Havana alongside Fidel Castro, and immediately took up positions of military command. In 1963, he became First Vice Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and Commander of the Central Division of the Army.

In addition to his military and political contributions, Almeida was an accomplished poet and wrote 12 books and 300 songs, many of which are national classics. In an interview given shortly before his death he said 'The Revolution is an irreversible, tangible fact, made concrete and material by our plans in education, health services, our culture, scientific-technical developments, improvements in the conditions of life...the Revolution is not a work of perfection, but it is ours, and we have developed it with love and in favour of our people.'

Viva Juan Almeida Bosque!
Viva the Cuban Revolution!

* Che mistakenly wrote that it was Camilo Cienfuegos who shouted this, but it was Almeida.

LETTERS

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

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name

Address

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e-mail

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Free Irish Republican Socialist prisoners!

Recently Pearse McCauley and Kevin Walsh were released from Castlereagh prison, having served a sentence for the manslaughter of Detective Garda Gerry McCabe, killed during an armed robbery. Whilst we are happy that these men will be reunited with their friends and families, the release serves to highlight the plight of four fellow Republicans currently serving sentences for a similar offence. Between them they have served over 100 years within these prison walls, with no sign of release on the horizon.

Michael McHugh of Co Armagh and Noel Callan of Co Monaghan were convicted in December 1985 by the Special Criminal Court of the murder of Garda Sergeant Patrick Morrissey at Tallansworth, Co Louth on 27 June 1985. They were both sentenced to death, which was later commuted to 40 years' imprisonment. Patrick McCann of Waterford and Colm O'Shea of Cork were convicted at the Special Criminal Court in 1980 of the murders of both Detective John Morley and Garda Henry Doyle who died during an armed robbery in Ballaghandreen, Co Roscommon. They also were both sentenced to death, commuted to 40 years' imprisonment.

Subsequently, as the peace process progressed, these men were asked to sign up to the Good Friday Agreement in recognition of the fact their convictions for scheduled offences in a political Diplock-style court qualified them for release under the terms of that agreement. Over ten years later, they still languish here in Portlaoise gaol, left to rot by the Irish government.

You have not heard, nor will you, other signatories of the Good Friday Agreement such as Martin Ferris of Sinn Féin calling for parity of justice for these four men. You will not see Martin Ferris standing in the Dail chambers denouncing their continuing detention. An obvious case of seeing nothing, hearing nothing and doing nothing as Sinn Féin's quest for an Ireland of equals continues to exclude those not under the Provisional banner.

Michael, Noel, Paddy and Colm are political prisoners and are entitled to release as outlined in the agreement reached on 10 April 1998, in which the Irish and British governments committed themselves to an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside the north, for similar offences.

Their continuing incarceration is akin to state victimisation when it is taken into account that four Provisional IRA Garda killers were released under the agreement. Michael, Noel, Paddy and Colm have petitioned successive Ministers of Justice over the past ten years with no success. They have also undertaken High Court action to seek their release under the Good Friday Agreement, also to no avail. These men are 'legally' entitled to their freedom, yet it seems unless fellow Republican socialists who seek justice, fairness and equality, rally round and highlight their continuing incarceration, they will be left to rot in Portlaoise.

We appeal to those in the Republican family, irrespective of their party allegiance, to do everything in their power to put pressure on the Justice Minister Dermot Ahern to release these men by raising public awareness of these men's plight by organising pickets, protests and leaflets in a united, orchestrated campaign to seek their freedom.

In solidarity and struggle,

NEIL MYLES

On behalf of IRSM prisoners,
E4 landing, Portlaoise Gaol,
Portlaoise, Ireland

'Holy war' against slavery

16 October is the 150th anniversary of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. John Brown waged 'holy war' against slavery up and down the Kansas border, executing slaveholders and attempting to free slaves. In 1859 he planned to raid the armoury at Harpers Ferry and to issue the arms to freed slaves. Due to a number of tactical mistakes, he was unable to complete his plan and he and his men were surrounded, fighting bravely against both militia and US marines. On 17 October, marines overran John Brown's position and captured him and his remaining men. John Brown was found guilty of treason against the

Commonwealth of Virginia and he was subsequently hanged, going to his death unrepentant and with great bravery.

The heroic sacrifice by Brown and his men is an example to us all. At the time, Marx wrote: 'In my opinion the biggest things that are happening in the world today are on the one hand the movement of the slaves in America, started by the death of John Brown, and on the other the movement of the slaves in Russia...the signal has now been given' (11 January 1860).

STEVE PALMER
Los Angeles, US

Arrogant voice of imperialism

Thanks for the latest FRFI. Like many others I am grateful for your support of Cuba.

Two things in the media are especially irritating. The first is that they seem to be aware only of people on £50K+ per annum, and assume they are the mass of the population. Whereas, in reality, six million households have incomes well below £15,000 and some no more than £200 per week.

The second thing is the incurable arrogance of the so-called experts.

'What are we going to do about Burma?' is their latest foray, as though the ruins of Iraq and Afghanistan were not enough of a reproach to the ferocity of imperialism. But no: their steady, callous, insolent voices seem resolved forever to lecture us into acceptance of their low, mean values.

JOHN O'HIGGINS
Leicester

Still struggling against state oppression

This message is to let you soldiers know that I am still alive and well.

This message is to let you soldiers know that we gunslingers on this end are still operating inside of the people's struggle against state oppression, and we are doing well.

This message is to let you soldiers know that we soldiers on this end dig that people's struggle paper that you have been sending to us over the years, and this message is to let you know that we dig it and you are to continue sending that Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! paper to us.

Be cool,

The Old Man JOE-JOE (JOSEPH BOWEN)
AM-4272, 1 Kelly Drive, Coal Township, PA 17866-1021, US.

Political prisoner Joseph 'Joe-Joe' Bowen is a member of the Black Liberation Army. He has been in prison since 1971.

ERRATUM

I am surprised to see the word 'Afghani' used throughout FRFI 210 to refer to the people of Afghanistan and their nationality. The proper word is 'Afghan'. 'Afghani' is the name of the currency used in that country.

You damage your credibility and reputation by using wrong terminology about such a prominent country.

ANDREW D GRANT
North London

Justice for Peter Hakala

Many thanks for having me on your mailing list for FRFI, where I always locate truth and enjoy solidarity.

Also I thank you and each supporter on Facebook Support Peter Hakala and trust that with your help truth will surface and justice will be done, but am hoping it will be sooner rather than later. I

have been wrongly locked up for over 23 long years and held as a hostage. I have a solicitor trying to get my case back to the Royal Courts of Justice with new evidence. In the prison I have been treated as a second class citizen and been lost in the system because I am not guilty and for this reason will not admit guilt and the prison authorities have not and are not giving me an easy ride.

In 2005 my paper work was sent to HMP Whitemoor, which made an assessment to see if I fit the criteria for Dangerous and Severe

Personality Disorder (DSPD). Their multi-disciplinary team made their assessment in my absence; the outcome was that I do not fit the DSPD criteria. A little later all my documentation was sent to HMP Frankland, where their multidisciplinary team confirmed that I do not fit the criteria.

Then on 20 July 2007 I was sent here from HMP Wakefield and told, firstly, that they were going to make an assessment on me in August. Then the date was moved 12 months, then 18 months and

finally I have been given the unwanted assessment. On 7 August 2009, the psychologist stated that I now fit the DSPD criteria. I am not happy as under EU law no-one can be retried on a sentence if he has served his sentence in full or part in another country, or have an additional punishment added.

I am a foreign national and there is a deportation order on me on completion of my sentence, but I can't receive parole as that would mean accepting guilt. I am totally lost in this sad system and can't see

even a ray of hope. Overseas, I have a long criminal record but I have never committed a crime in England. The psychologist here has made an assessment of me based on my Australian record but I'd like to know under what law.

I am glad to receive FRFI and all the readers' support. All support is most welcome and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. No peace until justice.

PETER HAKALA L44089
HMP Frankland, Braxside,
Durham DH1 5YD

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

FRANCE:

Law of the Jungle

At daybreak on 22 September, more than 500 police officers encircled the migrant squatters' camp known as 'The Jungle' outside the port of Calais in northern France as police helicopters hovered overhead. Despite protests by migrants and their supporters, who shouted out 'Shame on France' and held placards reading 'We need shelter and protection, we want peace', 278 migrants, half of them children, were rounded up, with riot police cordoning off the area to pick up any who tried to escape, and herded onto buses. The tents and tarpaulins, including a makeshift mosque, were razed to the ground with bulldozers and flame-throwers.

Calais is a focal point for undocumented migrants desperate to get to Britain – what campaign group No Borders, which has been active in defending the camps, calls 'the bottleneck of Fortress Europe'. Because Britain refuses to sign up to the Schengen agreement (which allows free movement between European countries), these migrants are corralled in a no-man's land, forced to attempt to secretly board trains and lorries destined for British ports, often risking their lives; some have been there for months or even years. Until 2002, the Red Cross provided facilities for such migrants – many of them young, many of them traumatised by their experiences – at Sangatte, where there was access to food, shelter, clean water and medical care. Then, under pressure from Britain, the Sangatte

Racist Europe tightens screw on migrants



A man is dragged away by police during the break up of the camp at Calais

centre was bulldozed. With nowhere to go and no means of supporting themselves, makeshift camps began to spring up in woodland all along the northern coast. Lacking sanitation and running water, these camps are inevitably squalid, crowded places where disease is rife. Despite appeals by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Britain has flatly refused to take any of the Calais migrants.

Although under French law it is a

crime punishable by up to five years in prison and a £25,000 fine to 'aid or facilitate either directly or indirectly the arrival, circulation or residence of illegal immigrants in France', all over the Pas-de-Calais region local groups have been providing food and other essentials, sometimes with the tacit support of local authorities, and defending camps against harassment from police, who regularly destroy dwellings, tear-gas woodland and arrest and detain

people. In early September 2009, in a dawn raid, police detained 85 migrants at a long-established camp in Angres, destroying the camp and all their possessions. After the migrants' release from the detention centre in Coquelles, local people set up a new camp in the square outside the town hall, with the full support of the town's mayor.

This wholesale onslaught on the Jungle, described by French Immigration Minister Eric Besson as an attempt to clamp down on 'human traffickers' and make Calais 'watertight' against migrants, marks the start of a new, harsher strategy, part of a deal drawn up in July by the French and British governments whereby Britain will allocate an extra £15 million to new scanning equipment, dog controls, lorry searches and a processing centre while France steps up deportations and obliterates the Jungle by the end of 2009. Although France has gone through the motions of promising that each migrant will be offered the option of voluntary repatriation or a chance to make an asylum claim in France (a opportunity many migrants say they have been denied until now), with forced removal reserved for failed claims, it is planning to charter a record number of 'repatriation flights' from northern France, mainly to Afghanistan and Iraq, and to build a second detention centre to supplement the existing cen-

tre at Coquelles. This new centre will be located on a carved-out 'British control zone' in Calais; this will allow Britain and France to circumvent French courts, which have been refusing to send illegal immigrants back to countries where they may face persecution. It will be what No Borders describes as 'an "off-shore, on-shore" detention centre that exploits legal systems and evades European and international law on immigration and asylum in order to fast-track people out of Europe, no questions asked'. In addition, those seeking asylum who travelled via Greece or Italy will have been finger-printed and will be sent back to those countries to make their claim. In the last year, Greece has not accepted a single asylum claim from either Afghanistan or Iraq; recently Italy has been turning back boatloads of refugees from Africa without even giving them a chance to claim asylum.

But even these vicious measures will not stop the migrants. The 22 September attack had been widely heralded, and the majority of the camp's 1,000-2,000 inhabitants, mainly Pashtun young men and boys fleeing the war in Afghanistan, but also including Iraqis, Somalis, Eritreans and Palestinians, had already melted away to join other camps along the coast or lie low until the raids were over before trying again to make the last, desperate leg of their journey to Britain. As long as imperialism continues to condemn the majority of the world's population to poverty and insecurity, as long as the brutal occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq continues and as long as Britain refuses to open its borders to those fleeing the appalling global conditions it has helped create, these 'jungles' will continue to mushroom along the northern coast of France.

ITALY: New law criminalises immigrants

Under a law passed by the Italian government on 8 August, it is now a criminal offence to be an 'illegal' immigrant in Italy. Such immigrants will face a court appearance, an eviction order and a fine of between 6,000-€10,000, with imprisonment for those who cannot pay. Given that the vast majority of migrants who land on Italian shores are destitute refugees from north Africa, this is a cynical manoeuvre to lock up migrants for terms that can now stretch to six months. In addition, the law makes it a criminal offence – punishable by three years' imprisonment – to rent accommodation to 'illegal' immigrants; those who help such migrants in any way will be punished. Teachers and other state officials are legally obliged to inform on immigrants they suspect and – in a sop to the far-right Northern League, who helped draft the proposals – President Berlusconi has agreed to the formation of vigilante patrols to sniff out suspected 'illegals'. The quasi-fascist uniformed Italian National Guard has already announced its intention to patrol the streets. Parents registering a birth must prove they are both legal residents, otherwise their child will be denied access to public services. Already, there is marked drop in attendance at hospitals and clinics by migrants, who fear being denounced; homelessness is soaring. Perhaps most shocking, where once fishermen rushed to help migrants lost at sea in makeshift rafts, at the end of August 73 Eritreans died in a boat in Italian waters when their motor failed and dozens of fishing boats refused to answer their calls for help. The one boat that did stop threw food to them but was too afraid of the consequences to let them board. As a West African resident in Italy told Afrik.com, 'this is reminiscent of the Nazi era except that it is aimed at those of us who are black... we live in fear'.

Cat Wiener

Latin American workers: fighting for our rights

The Latin American community in Britain is increasingly involved in actions that are laying the foundations for a new political culture. FRFI has been active in solidarity with many of these activities. ROGELIO SALGADO, an activist with the Latin American Workers' Association (LAWA), has written this article for FRFI.



Latin American workers demonstrate for their rights

Around 95% of Latin American workers are employed as cleaners of office buildings, bars, public transport and roads. We appreciate being part of this advanced consumer society. However, it is vital we remember that, while we live in a system that has all the trap-

pings of democracy and that allows us certain rights, there are other rights we have to fight for.

Politically, the growing community of Latin American workers in London plays an important role. Many asylum seekers from Latin America bring with them a wealth of trade

union experience which sharpens the class consciousness of workers' struggles in Britain at a grass roots level, even if some of those involved in the existing union structures here would prefer to slow such developments down.

LAWA and Justice for Cleaners

Hundreds of the workers who today make up the Justice for Cleaners campaign organised by the Unite union originally became involved via LAWA. LAWA has actively supported the work of Justice for Cleaners, demanding not just rights as workers but also the right to stay in Britain.

But in our search for recognition as a group of cleaning workers who are fighting for our rights, we seem each day to be losing support and commitment to our struggle from certain members of Unite, one of the most powerful unions in this country. Take for example the case of Alberto Durango who, despite being a Unite member, has been denied adequate support after being victimised for his union membership by cleaning company Lancaster; as if that were not bad enough, Unite is even threatening to suspend him because he challenged the union bureaucracy.

At the beginning of 2009, the Mitie cleaning company sacked five cleaners who worked at the Willis building in the City of London. The workers requested support from Unite, but the union refused to support them on the basis that they had not exhausted the negotiation process and that, with support from LAWA, had decided to

launch protests and demonstrations without official authorisation from Unite. For Unite, this appears to have been the final straw as far as LAWA was concerned. From then on, day by day we found ourselves increasingly marginalised and subjected to growing constraints imposed by Unite.

Faced with this hostility, LAWA had no option but to build grassroots support within the Coordinadora Latinoamericana [the London-based umbrella group of radical Latin America solidarity organisations] and distance itself from the trade union bureaucracy.

LAWA will continue to fight and to organise wherever solidarity is needed in action, not just words, and wherever progressive forces are to be found so that we can one day create a real union, one that is truly inclusive and representative. LAWA can be contacted at latin_americanworkers@hotmail.com

REINSTATE JUAN CARLOS!

Juan Carlos Piedra Benitez is an activist with LAWA and the Movement of Ecuadorians in the UK (MERU) who has supported many workers' struggles in London. While working for Office and General, the cleaning contractors at University College, London, he faced a disciplinary meeting for his union activities and for informing other workers about their rights. When he continued his political activities, he was made redundant.

Support the campaign to reinstate Juan Carlos – protest on Thursday 1 October at 1pm, University College London main quad, Gower Street, London WC1.