

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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Kabul, Afghanistan: demonstration against imperialist attacks, May 2009

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AFGHANISTAN WAR UNWINNABLE

The successes of the anti-occupation forces in Afghanistan and concern at the rise in casualties among the occupying forces are creating divisions within the ruling classes of the imperialist countries. Pressure to bring the troops home is being held in check only by a massive public relations campaign to 'support our heroes', which in Britain reached almost hysterical proportions around Remembrance Day. Polls indicate that 58% of US people are opposed to the war. Two-thirds of people in Britain believe the war is 'unwinnable' and 35% want an immediate withdrawal. Despite these conditions, the anti-war movements in both countries remain hopelessly weak because their organisers refuse to break with the governing parties that defend their privileged lifestyles. JIM CRAVEN reports.

The International Council on Security and Development reports that anti-occupation forces in Afghanistan now have a permanent hold on 80% of the country, up from 54% two years ago. Attacks increased by 60% between October 2008 and April 2009 and in August new fronts were opened in the north and west of the country. The rate of casualties among the occupiers is higher than in the most intense period of the war on Iraq. 59 US soldiers were killed in October. At the present rate, more than 100 British soldiers will have been killed during 2009 and

over 400 wounded. As of 21 November 2009, 235 British troops have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001. The thousands of Afghans killed are not recorded.

Counter-insurgency plans

According to the *New York Times*, President Obama will be sending a further 34,000 troops to Afghanistan. 34,000 US troops would mean Obama has more or less come down on the side of General McChrystal, US commander in Afghanistan. McChrystal, an expert in undercover assassination

operations, wants an extra 40,000 troops to wage a counter-insurgency campaign to 'clear, hold and build' small strategic areas that could then spread and join to create larger areas under their control. Bribery is integral to the spread. This 'oil spot' strategy has been used in previous colonial campaigns, but, with the possible special exception of the British in Malaya (1948-60), without success. Each additional 1,000 US troops cost \$1 billion a year in a country where 70% of people live on \$1 or less a day. McChrystal will no doubt point to the relative stability following the US 'surge' in Iraq. Notwithstanding the fact that security in Iraq remains volatile (see article on page 3), the situation there was quite different, with an elected (if sectarian) government having the tacit support of the majority and resistance forces quelled by a combination of sectarian conflict and bribery by the occupying powers.

In Afghanistan the occupying forces find it impossible to hold any areas they clear. Soldiers sardonically refer to their operations as 'mowing the lawn' because the anti-occupation forces simply retreat and return. The US Brookings Institute has estimated that it would require a force of around 500,000 to sustain a successful

counter-insurgency campaign. The US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are presently less than 100,000 combined. Consequently, McChrystal wants a massive increase in the Afghan army and national police, to total 240,000 and 160,000 respectively over the next few years. The imperialists admit, however, that even the present Afghan army will not be ready for independent action in the foreseeable future. The Afghan police, underpaid, poorly trained and unreliable, have been accused of murder, rape and corruption. For the imperialist forces, they are part of the problem rather than the solution; vividly demonstrated in November, when an Afghan policeman shot dead five British soldiers following a joint patrol.

The 'hold' part of McChrystal's strategy depends on winning the trust of the local people and having a national government working for their benefit. Neither could be further from reality. As McChrystal admits, 'The weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by various officials and ISAF's own errors, have given Afghans little reason to support their government.' ISAF's 'errors' include at least 450

civilian deaths at the hands of the imperialist forces in the first six months of 2009.

Fraud and corruption

The Afghan people see the occupying forces as complicit in the corruption and abuse of the government. Following the fiasco of the presidential election, things are set to get worse. Only a third of the Afghan people were recorded as bothering to vote and millions of those votes were fraudulent. The imperialists sacked UN deputy representative Peter Galbraith for suggesting a full inquiry. Hoping to salvage some credibility for a 'democratic Afghanistan', the imperialists then humiliatingly forced President Karzai to agree to a run-off vote with second placed Abdullah Abdullah, expecting a compromise coalition agreement rather than risking another divisive election. In the end Abdullah withdrew and Obama and Brown were left to telephone their congratulations to Karzai, whom they had attacked as incompetent and corrupt; winner of an election the whole world knew to be a fraud. This was in stark contrast to their vitriolic attitudes towards the election of Hamas in Palestine (2005),

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which observers agreed was generally free and fair.

So, the imperialists have no option but to work with Karzai, for the time being. But Karzai has little power outside the capital. To 'win' the election he had to make deals with brutal warlords such as Rashid Dostum and Mohammed Fahim, who will demand their cut of the cake. Dostum has already been reinstated as head of the Afghan army on a salary of \$80,000 a month. Karzai's running mates were drug trafficker Muhammed Qasim and war criminal Karim Khalil. Following Karzai's victory, Obama and Brown publicly insisted that Karzai must promote good governance. Brown said, 'I am not prepared to put the lives of British men and women in harm's way for a government that doesn't stand up against corruption.' But one of Karzai's first announcements upon victory was that he would not be sacking any corrupt officials. Daoud Sultanzy, an Afghan MP, said, 'It's a free for all. From now on Mr Karzai is not going to be accountable. The distance between the government and the people will widen.' Malalai Joya, an Afghan woman MP, previously pointed out, 'Your governments have replaced fundamentalist Taliban rule with another fundamentalist regime of warlords.' With more US troops Karzai may consider his position as a political underpinning of the occupation strengthened.

Despite their moral posturing, the imperialists have no qualms about working with warlords. To protect convoys the occupying forces frequently hire 'security' organisations which are the private militias of warlords, among them Hashmat Karzai, the President's brother. In October, the New York Times revealed that Ahmed Karzai, another brother, was on the CIA payroll. He is a leading

drug trafficker and organised much of the electoral fraud in the south of Afghanistan. As in Vietnam and Nicaragua, and with the Miami Cuban mafia, the US has always tolerated and empowered drug barons in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

Ruling classes split

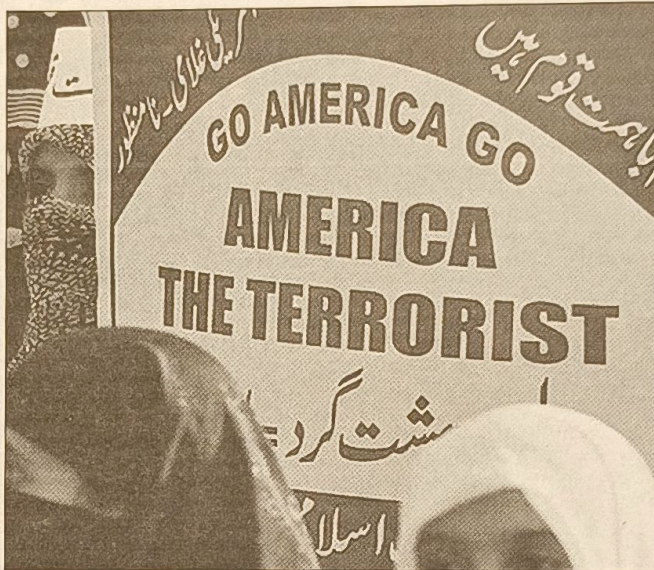
McChrystal's strategy has split the US ruling class. He has the support of General Petraeus and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but was reprimanded by Obama's national security adviser, General James Jones, for publicly promoting his plans. Vice-President Biden, speaker of the house Nancy Pelosi and chair of the armed services committee Carl Levin oppose the counter-insurgency campaign and 'nation building' and favour fewer troops and greater use of air power and special forces in a more focused counter-terrorism campaign. In November, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, former US commander in Afghanistan, said no more troops should be sent to the country. Others have jumped ship entirely. Matthew Hoh, US representative in Zabul Province, resigned in October, saying 'the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by the unrepresentative government in Kabul'. Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen, Petraeus's counter-insurgency adviser in Iraq, described the air attacks on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border as 'not moral'.

In Britain, Prime Minister Brown has said he wants a further 500 British troops in Afghanistan and insists that British forces are well equipped. The Conservatives have signed up former British Army chief General Dannatt, an ardent critic of government policy, as a special adviser. General David

Richards, head of the British Army, wants another 1,000 British troops and expects a commitment of up to 40 years in what he calls a 'noble conflict'. However, Kim Howells, former Labour minister and chair of the parliamentary intelligence and security committee (and agent of the ruling class during the miners' strike), stated

US force new onslaught in Pakistan

In October, after months of pressure from the US, the Pakistani Army launched a major offensive against the Taliban and other anti-occupation supporters in the Waziristan border region. 30,000 troops are backed by helicopter gunships and F-16 fighters.



Demonstration in Islamabad, Pakistan, against US attacks

that it was time to bring the troops home. Former head of the armed forces in Helmand, Major General Andrew McKay, has resigned, saying there was insufficient emphasis on reconstruction in Afghanistan.

US Defence Secretary Gates expressed the imperialists' dilemma, 'How do we signal resolve and at the same time signal to the Afghans and the American people that this is not open ended?'

The attack was preceded by weeks of intense bombardment by US drones. The Pakistani Army has sealed off the area to the media and cut phone lines but some of the 250,000 refugees fleeing the fighting report that civilians are being targeted, houses, mosques and shops bombed and roadblocks and civilian curfews being enforced. According to one analysis, the Pakistani Army is operating a pincer movement to push the Taliban into a small zone between Ladha and Maheen where they plan to kill up to 15,000 militants and occupy their former bases and training camps. Other reports say that the Taliban have been joined by Kashmiri and Punjabi fighters and others from former Soviet Republics like Tajikistan and that they have re-taken towns such as Kotkai, and are moving back into parts of the Swat Valley cleared by a previous Pakistani Army offensive.

Despite the offensive, there is massive hostility towards the US among the Pakistani ruling class and the people. According to a Pew Global Attitudes survey, 80% of the population oppose co-operation with the US and 64% regard the US as an enemy. Many in the Pakistani Army are angry that the US is promoting the interests of India with special nuclear and arms deals. They see Afghanistan and the Taliban as a strategic rearguard defence in their dispute with India. They were outraged when, in announcing a \$7.5 billion aid package to Pakistan, the US imposed the condition that it regularly certifies Pakistan is fighting Islamist extremists, closing training camps and preventing nuclear proliferation. Hillary Clinton stoked the anger when visiting Pakistan she said she found it 'hard to believe' that the Pakistan government did not know the whereabouts of Al Qaeda and could not 'get at them if they really wanted to'.

The Pakistani offensives in Waziristan and previously in the Swat Valley have led to an escalation of bloody bombings in several Pakistani cities. Taliban targets have included the Army and the intelligence service

headquarters and civilians. The US seems determined to drag Pakistan into the turmoil. They are building a massive embassy complex in Islamabad and growing numbers of Blackwater/Xe Services personnel are being employed. The whole region is being destabilised by US actions.

No more excuses

The imperialists are running out of excuses for invading Afghanistan – capturing Bin Laden, building democracy, establishing human rights, emancipating women, constructing a better life for the people, ending the drugs trade, have all proved to be lies. Now, they are reduced, as Brown said, 'to protecting our nation from global terrorism'. But attacks on western targets have been in response to the imperialists' global onslaught, not the cause of it. They have been and could be planned anywhere in the world, though none have originated in Afghanistan.

General James Jones admitted there were only about 100 Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan. A US intelligence report stated that 90% of the so-called Taliban are 'a tribal localised insurgency (who) see themselves as opposing the US because it is an occupying power', and went on to say that they have no goals beyond Afghanistan's border.

As we have pointed out in FRFI over the past few years, the imperialists will talk, indeed already are talking, to the Taliban. Their opposition to fundamentalist Islam is just another posture. After all, they created and armed the mujahideen, for anti-Soviet purposes, from whom the Taliban originated. They feted the Taliban in the 1990s when they wanted an oil pipeline through Afghanistan; they cosy up to the fundamentalist regime in Saudi Arabia. But while a leaked British government document and Chief of Staff Sir Jock Stirrup both agree 'we want to talk to all the people fighting us', the British Prime Minister hastily denies they would talk to anyone but those willing to lay down their arms.

Never ending war

The imperialists have woven such a tangled web of deceit that they no longer know which way to wriggle. When asked what success in Afghanistan would consist of, special envoy Richard Holbrooke could only reply 'we'll know success when we see it'.

The wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as in Iraq, have nothing to do with fundamentalist ideology, terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. They are part of the US strategy to maintain global domination and the exploitation of resources in the face of possible challenges from rising economic powers such as Europe, China, Japan and Russia. Such wars will continue and expand until such time as the working class and the poor and oppressed of the world are strong enough to reclaim the world in their interests rather than those of the rich minority.

In the world of imperialist mystification, it takes a more honest bourgeois commentator to admit this truth. Anthony Cordesman of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies expects casualties in Afghanistan and Pakistan to more than treble. He says President Obama must tell the American people how wars being fought by US troops affect 'the broader challenges of regional stability in the west, north and east'. Cordesman concludes, 'We must stop taking the easy route of focusing on international terrorism...any form of victory in Afghanistan and Pakistan will be part of a much longer struggle...that will endure indefinitely into the future.'

If the US commits 30,000-40,000 more troops to Afghanistan it will be to prevent the imperialists losing the war – they cannot win. Political movements in the US and Britain against the war are needed to end this carnage.

Iraq

Tensions threaten to explode

Several large bomb attacks on Iraqi government buildings this autumn have demonstrated that the war there is far from over. The Iraqi government, which had begun to remove the US-built concrete blast walls, has been forced to start rebuilding them. 1.6 million internal refugees are still unable to return to their homes because of the violence. The attacks have highlighted the inability of Iraqi forces to maintain security and thus throw into doubt whether US forces will pull out according to the schedule promised by President Obama.

There are still 120,000 US troops in Iraq, supposedly away from the towns and not in combat roles. In reality, town boundaries have been redefined to allow US bases to remain nearby and US troops have been accompanying Iraqi forces on combat missions re-labelled as 'reconstruction'. US forces are supposed to fall to 50,000 by 31 August 2010. Any delay will affect US options in Afghanistan.

Power in Iraq is contested by four major blocs: the mainly Shi'ite national government; the pro-Iranian Shi'ite groups in southern Iraq; the

Kurdish regional government in the north; and the mainly Sunni groups still fighting the occupation and the collaborationist government. Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, tribal leader of the Al Sahwa movement has refused to support national Prime Minister Maliki's election coalition. Al Sahwa consists of Sunni resistance fighters who agreed a ceasefire in return for US pay and protection from sectarian attacks. The potential for further civil war or the division of Iraq remains. Tensions between the Kurds and the central government over control of oil are heightening. It has proved impossible to agree on a national hydrocarbon law, so the Kurds have made unilateral agreements with foreign firms.

In the first national auction for petroleum rights last June, BP and China's CNPC took the right to develop Rumala, Iraq's largest oil field. Others shied away from the Iraqi government's terms. However, knowing that Iraq is one of the few places where they can expand, since 80% of the world's oil is now protected by their owners, the oil giants came back to the negotiating table. Shell is hold-

ing discussions in Baghdad, while the Russian/USLukoil/ConocoPhillips consortium is negotiating for the West Qurna field. A consortium led by Italy's Eni has been given the go ahead to develop the Zubair field but was forced to ditch the Chinese state company Sinopec as one of their partners, because it had a stake in one of the outlawed Kurdish agreements, not recognised by the Iraqi government.

The multinationals may be rubbing their hands at the prospect of exploiting what they expect to be the world's second largest oil producer, but their plans could flounder in a new bloodbath. Despite the dangerous situation that remains in Iraq, Britain is deporting Iraqi asylum seekers, claiming the country is now safe!

In Britain the inquiry into the Iraq war has been safely neutered at the outset with the government and the carefully selected inquiry panel agreeing that the government can stop publication of material which would 'cause harm or damage to the public interest'. In other words, the government will censor the inquiry into its own conduct.

Palestine: Clinton humiliates Abbas

BOB SHEPHERD

Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), has refused to restart peace talks with Israel until all construction in the illegal settlements of the West Bank and East Jerusalem stops. This followed the public humiliation he suffered at the hands of Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, on her visit to the Middle East at the end of October.

Speaking at a press conference in Jerusalem on 31 October, standing next to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Hillary Clinton declared that stopping the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank should be considered as part of resumed peace talks, and not a precondition. Praising the Zionists for making 'unprecedented concessions' over the issue, she said that 'There have never been preconditions. It's always been an issue within the negotiations'. Not even former President Bush went this far: in words he recognised that settlement activity had to stop if there were to be serious negotiations between the Zionists and the puppet PA.

What Netanyahu's 'unprecedented concessions' amount to is only a moratorium on any new construction work in the settlements. It does not include work already started, work on infrastructure such as roads, or any work in East Jerusalem which

Netanyahu considers to be an integral part of Israel. These 'unprecedented concessions' would still mean that work on over 3,000 housing units in the settlements would go ahead.

Then, on 17 November, the Jerusalem Municipal Planning Committee approved plans for 900 new housing units in the Gilo settlement in East Jerusalem. Other building plans in various stages of approval would mean around 4,000 new housing units being built in the Gilo area in the coming years. Expressing typical Zionist contempt for the Palestinians, a Gilo council member, responding to widespread outrage at the planned expansion, said: 'I have never thought of Gilo as a settlement'. In East Jerusalem there is a continuing process of driving out the Palestinian population. At least 600 Palestinians have been displaced by evictions and house demolitions since the beginning of 2009; a recent UN report showed that there are about 1,500 pending demolition orders against Palestinian homes which when implemented would expel around 9,000 people.

The pro-imperialist advocacy of participation in US-sponsored peace talks by Abbas and his Fatah allies is becoming more and more untenable. The imprisoned Marwan Barghout, a member of Fatah's central committee and the leader of the more militant wing of Fatah, has demanded that Abbas stop depending on peace talks to achieve an independent Palestinian state,



Hillary Clinton and Benjamin Netanyahu on 31 October 2009 in Jerusalem

'Whoever thinks that the occupation will leave through unequal negotiations in seven-star hotels is completely wrong; it is always required to combine between negotiation and resistance on the ground'.

The settlement advance in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is completely undermining the position of Abbas and his allies. That is why Abbas has to talk 'tough' and demand a settlement freeze as a precondition to begin talks with Netanyahu again. On 17 November Abbas launched a desperate appeal for international support to press the UN to recognise an independent

Palestinian state. Hamas leader Khalid Meshaal criticised this, saying: 'The proclamation of a Palestinian state should be the result of the resistance putting an end to the occupation...and not a decision taken by the PA to fill the void after the political option has failed.'

The combination of his humiliation by Clinton and his U-turn over the Goldstone Report has pushed Abbas into declaring that he will not stand as a candidate in the next Palestinian Presidential election, due in January 2010. It remains to be seen whether he makes a U-turn on this as well.

Gaza: one year on from the Zionist onslaught

BOB SHEPHERD

Israel's barbaric onslaught on Gaza, which began on 27 December 2008, has been condemned by several human rights groups but the most significant political blow has come from the Goldstone Report which was commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) and found that Israel's operations in Gaza 'were carefully planned in all their phases as a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorise a civilian population' (see FRFI 209). It concluded that Israel had 'committed actions amounting to war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity'.

The report also highlights the continuing blockade of Gaza which prevents the people from rebuilding their destroyed homes: 'reconstruction has been impossible due to the continuing blockade'. Yet in a clear capitulation to the US by President Abbas, the Palestinian UNHCR delegate asked for any debate on the report to be postponed until March 2010. This action triggered massive protests at all levels of Palestinian society. Demonstrations in Ramallah and East Jerusalem called for Abbas and the Palestinian Authority government to resign. The massive opposition forced Abbas into a humiliating U-turn and allowed the report to be considered at the October UNHCR meeting, where it was endorsed by a majority of the member countries. Unsurprisingly the US voted against, whilst Britain absented itself.

At the beginning of November the report went to the UN General Assembly where an overwhelming majority, 114 to 18, voted to endorse it. Britain this time abstained. The vote also called for the report to go to the Security Council.

The devastating human results of the continuing blockade of Gaza, acknowledged by the Goldstone Report, are evident. 80% of a population of 1.5m are now dependent on food aid from the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) and other charities. Around 850,000 people receive food aid that provides 60% of their daily calorie input. According to UNRWA, since the onslaught on Gaza, the number of the 'abject poor', those who have no means whatsoever of supporting themselves, has tripled to 300,000. UNRWA now provides the total daily food input for such people as well as small amounts of cash as they have nothing to support themselves with.

The Israeli blitzkrieg left tens of thousands of people living in tents and damaged buildings. A report issued at the beginning of November by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Maxwell Gaylard, and associated NGOs called on Israel to lift the siege of Gaza, declaring:

'The winter will be particularly hard on the children of Gaza, whose capacities to withstand the rigors of a cold, wet winter has already been severely undermined by a marked deterioration of basic services and decent into poverty...The people of Gaza share with everyone else the right to dignified lives, free of indiscriminate and prolonged suffering. They should not be subjected to this continuation of collective punishment brought on by the blockade'.

*Defend the Palestinian people!
Boycott Israeli goods!*

Pakistan: military fight against Taliban counterproductive

HASSAN JAVID

As the military operation launched by the Pakistani government against the Taliban in the northern areas of the country enters its eighth month, there are several fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the Zardari government's approach to dealing with the Taliban. While there can be no doubt that the Taliban and its millenarian vision must be challenged in Pakistan, the state's response has been insufficient and misguided.

Military force

Following abortive attempts at appeasing the Taliban at the start of 2009, the government and military establishment have initiated and sustained a military campaign against the Taliban in the Swat Valley and South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). While the military has retaken control of Swat from the Taliban and dislodged it from key towns in FATA, the human cost has been tremendous. Over three million people have been displaced and now live in makeshift refugee camps scattered across the rest of the country. Information from the battle zone is tightly controlled by the military, making it virtually impossible to independently verify government claims of success, or to determine the number of civilians killed in the conflict, or the extent of the damage to cities, towns, and villages in the region.

For the government, and those sections of the liberal elite that have endorsed its use of military force in the north, such costs are outweighed by the prospect of eliminating the Taliban. However, it is far from clear that the



Students in Islamabad demonstrate against US strikes

use of force against the Taliban signifies a radical shift in the worldview of the state and military establishment. The Pakistani military has historically enjoyed a close, symbiotic relationship with militant Islam. The military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq trained and equipped the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s; this infrastructure was retained by the military to produce groups that could act as proxies in Afghanistan and Kashmir during the 1990s and has not yet been dismantled. The military remains reluctant to completely sever its ties with militant Islamic groups that it believes could be used to pursue its broader strategic objectives. Although the Taliban is seen as a threat to the state, we should remain sceptical of the military's relationship with Islamist groups that do not directly challenge state power.

The role of the US

The prominent involvement of the US in the fight against the Taliban is deeply unpopular across Pakistan. The US has used its influence and power, clothed in the rhetoric of 'fighting terrorism', to pressurise Pakistan into using force against the Taliban as part of its broader imperi-

alist project in Afghanistan. This assault on Pakistan's sovereignty is compounded by the use of US drones to attack Taliban targets within Pakistan. While proponents of US involvement vaunt the success of drone strikes in eliminating key Taliban figures, the resulting tremendous loss of civilian lives has made them incredibly unpopular. The resulting anti-US sentiment has in turn strengthened support for the Taliban and provided it with ideological justification for continuing its own fight against the state and its imperialist patron.

Root cause of militancy

Decades of neglect, low levels of socio-economic development, and the absence of any space for political participation have created both deprivation and resentment that is used by the Taliban to shore up support. In the absence of any credible government commitment to ameliorating the lives of the people living in the region, and caught between grinding poverty and a US-sponsored military assault, many feel only the Taliban can challenge the status quo. This does not mean that the Taliban represents any

kind of popular political alternative. The ability to tap into popular resentment does not make the Taliban any less anti-people or any more anti-imperialist. Indeed, levels of support for the Taliban remain low in the north, and have declined as evidence emerges of its reactionary ideological vision. Nonetheless, the Taliban's ability to claim that it is an anti-imperialist, anti-systemic movement has been key to their garnering legitimacy. As the military conflict wreaks ever-increasing death and destruction in the north, increased opposition to the state and military, as well as to the US, could well result in greater support for the Taliban.

The absence of a viable left in Pakistan has created a political vacuum that has been occupied by political Islam. Successive regimes in Pakistan have used Islam as a means to legitimise their rule, making it a central feature of the country's political discourse. This helps explain why the state has tolerated the existence of groups that propagate the particularly virulent religious outlook that informs the Taliban ideology. While a broad consensus may have been reached in Pakistan over the need to fight the Taliban, primarily because of the dozens of bombings and suicide attacks they have carried out over the past few years across Pakistan, a broader debate on the role of religion in Pakistan has yet to take place. This means that even if the military operation succeeds against the Taliban today, the ideological climate which allowed it to emerge in the first place will remain fundamentally unchanged and groups with an ideological framework similar to the Taliban will continue to emerge.

It is the responsibility of the left to propose an ideological alternative that recognises the reactionary nature of the Taliban while simultaneously attacking the role played by the state and imperialism in creating the circumstances that allowed the Taliban to emerge in the first place.

Who is more dangerous – the BNP or the Labour Party?

In the June 2009 election to the European Parliament, the openly racist British National Party (BNP) won 6.2% of the vote, giving it two seats. On 22 October BNP leader Nick Griffin appeared on BBC television debating show *Question Time* alongside Labour Party Minister of Justice Jack Straw. Griffin's appearance was greeted with widespread and understandable outrage. At a series of meetings around the country the RCG posed the question 'Who is more dangerous – the BNP or the Labour Party?'

Anti-racists, the Muslim community and all progressive people were right to be angry that the overtly racist BNP was given public air time but, by concentrating entirely on Griffin, Unite Against Fascism (UAF), which organised the demonstration outside the BBC on 22 October, allowed Straw and the others to get away without any criticism of their own racist programmes.

Griffin and Straw have both made headlines with their hostility to immigrants, Muslims and Travellers. The BNP demands the deportation of illegal immigrants and 'foreign criminals', financial incentives for immigrants to return to their countries of origin, an end to new immigration except in exceptional circumstances and the rejection of the applications of asylum seekers who have passed through safe countries to get to Britain. But most of these demands have already become law during the Labour administration in which Jack Straw has played a leading role. The latest round of restrictions on economic migration was announced by Prime Minister Gordon Brown on 12 November.

While Griffin was grilled by the *Question Time* panel and audience, Jack Straw sat unchallenged. Yet Straw was Foreign Secretary when Britain invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, and Home Secretary when 58 Chinese immigrants died in the back of a lorry trying to get past punitive immigration laws he was responsible for introducing. He allowed murderous Chilean dictator General Pinochet to escape extradition, vetoed publication of documents that could have proved the illegality of the Iraq war, refused to call for the US torture camp in illegally occupied Guantanamo, Cuba, to be closed and covered up British government collusion in torture. As Minister of Justice, he presides over a massively overcrowded prison system and an immigration service which boasts of deporting one person every eight minutes.

Unite Against Fascism

The European election saw Labour come third behind the Conservatives and the United Kingdom Independence Party and the next general election looks increasingly likely to be won by the Conservatives. This is causing a panic on the left, mainly taking the form of calls for unity and a focus on 'defeating the Nazis'. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the driving force behind the UAF, has put out the call for 'the broadest possible unity in action to isolate and drive back the BNP'. (*Socialist Review* July/August 2009). In essence the SWP and its fellow travellers are building an electoral bloc to support a future Labour vote.

UAF sponsors include nearly 60 Labour MPs, nine MEPs, 20 trade unions, the editors of *Tribune*, *Red Pepper* and the *Morning Star* and



Demonstrators outside BBC Television Centre

political editor of the *Daily Mirror*, as well as Ken Livingstone, Tony Benn, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber and Leroy Logan of the Black Police Association. Its main spokesperson Weyman Bennett is a leading SWP member. The UAF national statement says that the BNP builds on racism, the attack on multi-culturalism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and the vilification of refugees and asylum seekers. It warns that an electorally successful BNP would be a threat 'to all those dedicated to freedom and democracy'.

Labour's lack of freedom and democracy

However UAF is silent on the record of the last 12 years of Labour government on 'freedom and democracy' and, in fact, protects Labour and covers up this record. This Labour Party in power, like those of the past, is a loyal servant of British imperialism. The militaristic and parasitic character of British imperialism defines its relations with the rest of the world. We are living in the longest period of British military mobilisation for a hundred years.

Draconian immigration laws, accompanied by increasingly strident racism and hostility, are used to contain and control asylum seekers, who are the victims of Britain's imperialist wars, and to regulate the supply of cheap migrant labour, encouraging temporary immigration when needed and expelling it when no longer required by capitalism. But former immigration minister Tony McNulty was invited onto the UAF platform at the mobilisation against the English Defence League (EDL) in Harrow on 11 September (see FRFI 211).

Despite legislation against race discrimination and the creation of an entire 'race relations industry', a handful of facts show that the double oppression of black and Asian people, racially and as workers, continues. The all-round rate of employment for white people of working age is 75%, for those of African-Caribbean origin

it is 60% and for Pakistanis or Bangladeshis it is less than 50%. In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets two-thirds of Asian children live below the official poverty line.

British income inequality is the highest in the EU – higher than under Thatcher and the highest ever recorded. Labour's years in power are concluding with a massive bail-out of the banking system topped off by big cuts in public spending and unemployment predicted to reach three million, with 18-24 year-olds hardest hit. The unemployment rate for black men, already higher than for white men, has risen over the past year to 18.2% – for white men, it has risen from 5.2% to 8.3%.

Jobseeker's Allowance has been reduced by 25% in relation to average wages over the past 12 years; as few as 130 council houses have been built in each year of the 21st century and the chaos of privatisation, deregulation and outsourcing continues to channel public funding to Labour's business friends. The prison population has increased by 20,000 since 1997 with 27% of prisoners from minority ethnic groups compared to 11% of the overall population.

In representing the interests of imperialism, Gordon Brown plays a two-faced role – placating the electorate while acting in support of British capital's international interests. So he signs up to extend the movement of cheap labour from Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and calls for British jobs for British workers on the other.

Labour has not needed to be pushed to the right by the BNP. It is Labour that uses police to harass black people and Muslims. It is Labour that is driving asylum seekers to destitution, incarcerating and deporting them. It is Labour that colluded in rendition flights and sanctioned torture in the name of 'the war on terror'. Yet this state racism is ignored by UAF and anyone who insists on talking about it as part of confronting the BNP is put down as sectarian and against 'unity'.

The British National Party

The UAF not only fails to acknowledge institutional state racism, it also fails to explain any racism whatsoever, despite saying that racism has risen sharply 'in the last decade'. It displaces all responsibility for the rise of racism onto the 'Nazi' BNP and makes no attempt to explain the shift in class forces that has given it electoral support.

The BNP has undoubtedly taken root among sections of the working class as unemployment rises and public spending is cut. Its platform is essentially petit bourgeois, in so far as it is spelt out. White supremacy is at its core although it was forced to back down when legally challenged on its whites-only membership policy. The BNP romanticises small-nation capitalism. It wants industrial jobs for British workers. It calls for repatriation of immigrants from Britain, repatriation of capital investment back to Britain and state control of the banks and finance sector which it regards as being dominated by Jewish interests. It is authoritarian in tone, promoting a strong law-and-order line, as if the 3,600 new criminal laws introduced in the course of the Labour government and increasing restrictions on civil rights were not enough.

Fascism and capitalism

The thuggish BNP are not the inheritors of Hitler and Mussolini, whatever delusions of grandeur Griffin and others may harbour about themselves. Historically, fascism arises in times of impasse between the competing interests of the ruling and working classes. Proletarian mass movements hinder imperial expansionism, which is capital in search of profitability, and chal-

lenge the power and authority of the capitalist class. However, this does not mean that we should stand around idly while the thugs of the BNP, EDL and others carry out attacks. We support the slogan 'self-defence is no offence' and salute those who saw off the EDL in Birmingham and Harrow.

Although the state does not need auxiliary racist forces to defend it at this stage, it will inevitably move to crush any serious resistance against fascist groups. Black people, Asian youth and anti-racists will therefore find themselves once again up against the police, the courts and the media. The need for defence campaigns in support of those arrested is, as always, a central task for the left.

Banning orders – whether instigated directly by the state or as a result of misguided interventions such as that of 'Hope Not Hate' which campaigned for an EDL demo in Luton to be banned, resulting in a three-month ban on all demos – will be used to silence protest and an increasing part of the struggle will be to insist on the right to demonstrate at every level.

Large sections of the British working class benefit from British imperialism's extraction of super-profits from the oppressed nations of the world. The standard of living, terms of employment and welfare state are rewards imperialism has allocated to the better-off sections of the working class. This is why the British trade union movement continues to be loyal to the Labour Party (with the notable exceptions of the RMT and FBU). The unions provide over 70% of Labour's funding. The GMB has given £5.8m since the last election; between January 2008 and September 2009 Unite donated £6.5 million.

However, as the crisis deepens the capitalists need to drive down the standards of the working class as a whole. They target migrant workers first and then move on to attack further sections of the working class. Divisions within the working class are extraordinarily useful to the capitalist class. The Labour Party has been adept at encouraging sectional interests. They have turned the population into consumers with competitive interests.



Two racists – Jack Straw and Nick Griffin with David Dimbleby on *Question Time*

lenge the power and authority of the capitalist class. The working class is not strong enough to seize power but the ruling class cannot crush it. The state responds by unleashing fascist gangs and other forces of reaction onto the streets and the capitalist state takes on the form of the fascist state.

We are not in that situation today. British financial capital reached such a position of dominance in the global economy that the City of London became the leading money centre in the world. British financial capital is parasitic to an unprecedented degree and Britain's major 'industries' are banking, insurance and financial services, producing nothing and living off the sweat and raw materials of people across the globe. The protectionist 'small island' nationalism of the BNP is irrelevant to the interests of the rul-

No unity with the murderous state

FRFI will work with any organisation that stands against racism at any and every level and we supported the demonstration outside the BBC during *Question Time*. However, experience has shown us that no socialist movement can go forward that does not challenge its own ruling class. It is dishonest and cowardly to displace responsibility for racism from the government onto a political fragment – from the Labour Party to the BNP. In the end, it is a question of power. The imperialist British state has the power. The Labour government directs that power. The BNP are abhorrent racists but they are far from being the greatest danger or threat in Britain today.

Ann Eliot and Nicki Jameson

Unite Against Fascism backs Labour racists

PAUL MALLON, LOUIS BREHONY AND ROBERT CLOUGH

FRFI's criticism of Unite Against Fascism (UAF) as no more than a vehicle for shoring up Labour's disintegrating electoral support, was confirmed by the announcement that the UAF will support Barking MP Margaret Hodge against BNP leader Nick Griffin at the next general election. It comes after the UAF and its joint secretary Weyman Bennett, a leading member of the SWP, have cosied up to reactionaries and opportunists in a series of protests against the English Defence League (EDL) and Scottish Defence League (SDL) and undermined effective opposition to racism and fascism. On 14 November, BNP leader Nick Griffin announced he would stand against Labour Culture Minister Margaret Hodge in her East London constituency of Barking at the forthcoming general election. The BNP is the second largest party on the local council, having won 11 seats in 2006. Hodge, a millionaire, is notorious for claiming in 2006 that eight out of ten of her constituents would consider voting for the BNP, and for writing an article in *The Observer* (20 May 2007) in which she argued that 'indigenous' (ie white) people should have priority in the allocation of social housing:

'We prioritise the needs of an individual migrant family over the entitlement others feel they have... We should look at policies where the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by the new migrants. We should also look at drawing up different rules based on, for instance, length of residence, citizenship or national insurance contributions which carry more weight in a transparent points system used to decide who is entitled to access social housing.'

This was a deliberate concession to racist arguments about housing. In reality, neither immigrants nor asylum seekers have privileged access to social housing. The real problem, and one which Hodge covers up, is that the Labour government has continued to sell off council housing and refused to build any to replace it.

Within 48 hours of Griffin's announcement, the UAF had published a statement from Hodge on its website under the headline 'We'll make sure Griffin's MP bid for Barking is a failure, anti-fascists vow'. In it she declared that 'The BNP have no place in democratic politics and Labour will campaign against them across the country.' Weyman Bennett echoed her: 'The vast majority of people in Barking hate Griffin and the BNP... We want to mobilise that majority to drive Griffin's vote down – and drive the BNP out of town.' This open call to vote Labour in Barking was endorsed by Steve Hart, Unite the Union's London and Eastern regional secretary, and opponent of Latin American workers' self-organisation.

Bennett's statement represents a clear commitment by the SWP/UAF to support Hodge in the general election. Ironically, Anindya Bhattacharyya, writing in *Socialist Worker* (29 April 2006) following Hodge's comments about BNP support in Barking, said that 'Talking up the BNP is dangerous – but viewed as useful for Labour.' And how! It has put the SWP/UAF into a position where they will be willing canvassers for Hodge come next year.

The reactionary standpoint of the SWP/UAF in relation to the fight against racism and fascism has been revealed time and again. During a protest against the racist EDL in Harrow on 11 September, they invited local Labour MP and former immigration minister Tony McNulty to speak on the platform. Weyman Bennett



Crowds determined to defend Harrow Mosque against the EDL

later claimed that the UAF had 'achieved something big' with this. At an organising meeting to oppose a similar EDL event in Manchester on 10 October, Bennett stressed the importance of having a speaker from the Labour council at the anti-EDL rally. The Manchester protest itself was completely ineffectual: the SWP/UAF made no attempt to confront the EDL, being content to remain within police lines. The UAF chair – a Labour Party member – refused to allow angry Asian youth to speak on the megaphone.

Three weeks later, on 31 October, the EDL were in Leeds. The UAF lobbied for a ban, a move that would have prohibited anti-racist demonstrations as well. Large numbers of EDL supporters managed to get past the police and march in the direction of the city's gay bars, while the cops 'kettled' the anti-fascist demonstration and Bennett and the UAF organised speeches to a frustrated crowd. Leeds bin workers had been on strike against the council

since 11 September against a proposed £4,500 pay cut, so when the obligatory council representative, a member of the Liberal Democrat majority, came to speak; the crowd objected. The response of a UAF steward was that 'you don't have to be in favour of strikes to be against fascism!'

On 14 November the openly racist SDL had planned a rally outside a Glasgow mosque. Instead of galvanising local opposition, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) led hundreds of anti-fascists away from a pub in which SDL supporters had congregated, to a rally organised by a middle class coalition, Scotland United, where speakers included Scottish Tory leader Annabel Goldie, Scottish Nationalist Party Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, and discredited Labour millionaire MP Mohammad Sarwar.

In the weeks leading up to 14 November, FRFI supporters had led opposition to attempts by lawyer Aamer Anwar to prevent any counter-

demonstration to the SDL. Anwar, who had unilaterally established Scotland United, completely failed to justify his actions when challenged. Meanwhile, the SWP/UAF were unable to decide whether to side with Anwar and his coalition of the respectable, or with those determined to mount a proper anti-fascist demonstration, who had come together under the banner of Glasgow Anti-Fascist Alliance (GAFA). Only at the last moment, on 12 November, did they decide to join the GAFA action; a couple of days beforehand they had been defending the Scotland United platform, even if the speakers were 'not quite as good as you might want'.

On the day itself the SWP parachuted in substantial forces, including the ubiquitous Weyman Bennett, together with other opportunist forces, in order to hijack the GAFA demonstration and lead it away from the fascists, leaving behind a small number of anti-fascists, including FRFI comrades, who were determined to continue the opposition to the SDL. This is just what the SWP did with the Anti Nazi League when the National Front demonstrated in Brick Lane in 1978.

Let us be clear: the claims of the SWP/UAF to be in the forefront of the fight against fascism are bogus. Weyman Bennett and the rest of the SWP leadership have shown that they will ally themselves with open racists and reactionaries to prevent any real anti-fascist or anti-racist movement from developing. They have covered up for those in Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow who actively tried to stop Asian youth from confronting the EDL or SDL. They have rejected anti-racism as the basis for a real struggle against fascism. Talking up the dangers of the BNP, they are preparing to back Labour at the forthcoming general election. This is not socialism: it is crude opportunism. Anti-racists can have no truck with it.

SUPPORT THE POSTAL WORKERS



The decision by the leadership of the Communication Workers Union to abandon the postal workers' strike action in the run-up to Christmas was an abject capitulation and handed the initiative back to a ruthless Royal Mail management. With 16,000 jobs at stake, and further casualisation of employment and privatisation of postal services in prospect, there is little doubt that action will have to resume in the New Year. Victory to the postal workers!

Latin American workers sold out by trade union

Over the past three years FRFI has regularly supported the struggles by low-paid cleaning workers in London for better wages and living conditions. These battles have overwhelmingly been led and organised by the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS), which has consistently linked this economic struggle to the fight of all workers against capitalism and of immigrants against Britain's racist immigration laws. Now this principled stance has meant LAWAS has come under attack from the opportunists who control the union Unite.

LAWAS brings together a wide range of highly political comrades: some who have fled repressive regimes like that in Colombia, where state and paramilitary forces constantly threaten trade unionists with imprisonment and murder; others from countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador which are moving in a progressive direction and directly confronting imperialism in the region.

The task of organising and representing Latin American workers in London is not an easy one. Even the precise size of the community is difficult to estimate. Research indicates

that it could be anywhere between 31,211 and 258,605 depending on which sources and statistical methods are used. Estimating the undocumented population is even more difficult since it is by definition below the radar. In a recent survey of 413 Latin Americans in London 22% had a European passport and 19.6% a British passport while 17% said they had no valid documents. 50% said they earn less than £1,000 per month.

As reported in the last FRFI, although LAWAS was initially supported by the trade union Unite, the relationship began to deteriorate when Unite refused to support several workplace struggles – in particular that at the Willis building in the city of London. In September 2009 Unite ordered LAWAS to vacate its office in the union's southeast region HQ. In November LAWAS issued a detailed statement, setting out how it has been progressively undermined and attacked by Unite. The full statement is on our website at www.revolutionary-communist.org/index.php/editorial-welcome/1588-latin-american-workers-sold-out-by-opportunist-british-trade-union-movement.html

El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!



Britain's economy Shadow-boxing through the crisis

■ British capitalism, with its bloated and usurious financial sector, has proved to be the most vulnerable of the main capitalist countries to the financial crisis. It will almost certainly be the last of those countries to pull out of recession. Contrary to all forecasts, the British economy failed to grow in the third quarter of 2009, with GDP falling a further 0.3% – the sixth consecutive quarter that the economy has been in recession. Over the last year GDP has fallen by 5.1% and since the recession began by almost 6%. The political class is impotent in the face of this crisis and so has now turned its focus on fighting the general election due in spring 2010.

DAVID YAFFE reports.



In 2008 customers rushed to Northern Rock to withdraw their money. Secret loans to HBOS and Lloyds Bank at the height of the financial crisis in autumn 2008 have just been made public. The government and Bank of England feared a run on the banks

The November conference of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) saw the two main party leaders testing out their battle plans for the coming election. As we pointed out in the last issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, the ruling class is united on the need to cut public spending – the ‘unsustainable public sector deficit’ – down to size.¹ They differ only on tactics. Hence the shadow-boxing displayed at the CBI conference.

Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown attacked the Tory opposition plans for an immediate cut in Britain's deficit, arguing that it would derail recovery. ‘Turning off the life support of our economies prematurely would be fatal to British jobs, British growth and British prosperity for years... People need certainty. They need to know if there is a stable path of deficit reduction they can see will take place’.

The Conservative leader David Cameron rejected Brown's arguments and was adamant that the budget deficit must be reduced much sooner. ‘Dealing with this deficit is not an alternative to economic growth – the two go hand in hand. If investors see that there is no will at the top of government to get a grip on our public finances, they are going to seriously doubt our country's creditworthiness.’ Dealing with the deficit promptly was necessary said Cameron and he announced that if the Conservatives win the election, they will introduce an emergency budget 50 days after coming to power to deal with the deficit (*The Guardian* 24 November 2009).

In reality there is very little difference between the parties. In the Queen's Speech, a few days before the CBI conference, it was announced that Labour would put forward a fiscal responsibility bill which would bind the government to cut the deficit year-on-year and halve it within four years. This would require a drastic cut in spending and significant tax increases. Yet much of the rest of the speech

contained a series of ‘populist’, if limited, measures, some of which would involve increases in public spending, for example, free personal care at home for around 280,000 elderly and disabled people in severe need and various employment guarantees for unemployed young people. Again this is shadow-boxing with the opposition, with an eye to the coming general election.

In October there has usually been a budget surplus as a result of corporation tax payments. However, this year the public sector deficit increased by £11.4bn. The cumulative deficit reached £87bn in the first seven months of the financial year, with net public sector debt at £829.7bn or 59.2% of GDP, with more than £142bn of this, 10% of GDP, accounted for by public sector intervention to rescue the banking system. The cumulative deficit is expected to be around £175bn by the end of the tax year, with net public sector debt reaching about 65% of GDP. By 2013-14 the net public sector debt, on present projections, could amount to 76% of GDP.

Such figures are not unprecedented, given the severity of the economic crisis. In the early 1920s the level reached almost 200% and in 1956 the ratio was just under 150% of GDP (*Financial Times* 2 October 2009). Today even a right-wing German government has made it clear that it will not cut public spending until the country has safely emerged from the economic downturn. In Britain ruling class parties, whether Labour or Conservative, of necessity, have a quite different agenda. They have to sustain Britain's financial sector and the City of London's vast international interests and connections to ensure the British economy remains a ‘world centre of finance’. That is why the deficit will be cut as fast as political conditions allow, for that is what the City and international investors demand.

It is clear who will be at the receiving end of the inevitable cuts in public services. Recent research for the

Public Services Trust 2020 has shown that the main net beneficiaries of public services are working households with children in the bottom half of the income scale, who receive more than half their income from the state annually (on average a net £9,109), and around 80% of retired households (*The Guardian* 14 November 2009). The cuts in the public sector deficit proposed by the main political parties will reduce the standard of living of the relatively poorer and more vulnerable sections of the working class.

‘The result of the crisis has been a further consolidation of finance capital and the state – that is, the further development of state monopoly capitalism (imperialism).’

Banking on the state

As we have pointed out in numerous articles over the last year and a half,² this crisis of capitalism has seen the underwriting of the debt of the banks on a scale like never before. The process has entered a new phase. The City of London has always been at the heart of the British state, just as Wall Street is at the heart of the US state. The crisis has strengthened these ties to a new level of intensity. The result of the crisis has been a further consolidation of finance capital and the state – that is, the further development of state monopoly capitalism (imperialism).

A recent publication from the Bank of England has updated statistics showing the scale of intervention to support the banks in the US, UK and the eurozone during the current crisis. This now totals over \$14 trillion or nearly a quarter of global GDP; this includes liquidity and capital injections, debt guarantees, deposit insurance and asset purchase. Such an intervention is without historical precedent. It indicates the central importance of financial capital in these economies. The UK is a special historical case. The ratio of UK bank assets to GDP since 1880 remained at around 50% of GDP for almost a century. From the early 1970s this changed dramatically and by the start of the 21st century were more than five times annual UK GDP, a tenfold increase in this ratio over around 30 years. Support packages in the UK have reached \$1.71 trillion (£1.04 trillion), around 74% of GDP.³

These remarkable statistics make it clear who is calling the shots. It matters little who wins the next election. The interests of financial capital are overriding. That is why the Bank of England had little option but to extend £61.6bn in emergency funds to the Royal Bank of Scotland and HBOS at the height of the financial crisis in October and November 2008. The loans were paid back by January 2009. Yet this operation was kept secret and only revealed on 24 November 2009, more than a year after the funds were loaned to the banks. The shareholders of Lloyds and HBOS were unaware of this operation when the merger of the two banks took place in January 2009. The Labour Chancellor Alistair Darling justified the secrecy, saying that he shared the Bank of England's assessment that disclosing details of the lending ‘would seriously jeopardise the financial stability of the system as a whole’. More than a year later, it now appears that there is no longer need for secrecy. Clearly they feel they have stepped back from the precipice.

Financial services contributed £12.4bn in corporation tax, 27% of the total, and £18.7bn in employees' PAYE, 15% of the total in the year before the financial crisis (*The Observer* 1 November 2009). Britain had a large surplus on its services trade, £54.5bn in 2008, with financial services responsible for 70% of this. Most significantly, Britain's overseas assets were £7,135bn in 2008, an unprecedented 4.9 times Britain's GDP. Nearly 60% of those assets, £4,261bn or 2.95 times Britain's GDP, are loans and deposits abroad by UK banks – a gigantic usury capital. Net earnings on Britain's international investment account in 2008 came to £27.6bn. Without those earnings and the large surplus on services trade the standard of living of the British people would have fallen significantly.⁴

No ruling class government, whether Labour, Tory or Liberal Democrats, is going to take steps to rein in and control the financial services industry, particularly the banks. That is why the Labour government appointed a banker, Sir David Walker, to carry out a review of the banking industry. His recommendations, published on 26 November 2009, are risi-

ble. Large banks will have to disclose how many of their UK employees are paid more than £1m and half of the bonuses paid to employees should be deferred for three to four years. There are recommendations concerning the election of the board, and the creation of ‘board-level risk committees’ (*Financial Times* 26 November 2009). The government said it would quickly implement the recommendations. The bankers must be quaking in their boots!

Despite owning 43.5% of Lloyds Banking Group, the government is releasing the banking conglomerate from the government's toxic asset insurance scheme by allowing it to raise funds on the capital markets. In November Lloyds launched the UK's largest rights issue to raise £13.5bn of new capital at a massive discount of 40% on its present share price. This amount is well over half the bank's market capitalisation of £24bn. In addition it has agreed with bondholders to swap £9bn of bonds for equity, in all raising a huge £22.5bn to add to its balance sheet. The rights issue will involve the taxpayer sinking an extra £5.8bn into the bank in order to maintain its present shareholding. The investment banks will make millions managing this exercise. Lloyds will abandon its original project to put £260bn of toxic assets into the government's scheme, which would have cost Lloyds £15.6bn over five years, payable in shares, increasing the government's stake to over 60%. Lloyds is determined to release itself from state control as quickly as possible and is being helped towards this end by the government. Lloyds has recently announced that it will cut 5,000 jobs.

The banks are clearly having a field day. On 25 November Britain's new Supreme Court ruled in favour of the banks on overdraft charges and thwarted the action by the Office of Fair Trading to assess such charges on the ground of fairness. Millions of people who have paid usurious charges will get no redress.

Finally let us return to the outstanding issue of the public sector deficit. The governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, told the House of Commons Treasury Committee, on 24 November 2009, that Britain's credit rating could be at risk unless the government came up with a ‘credible’ plan to tackle the deficit. That is what the bankers need to hear and the state will comply, whichever party wins the election.

1 See David Yaffe ‘Britain's crisis: public services under attack’ in FRFI 211 October/November 2009. Online at www.revolutionarycommunist.org/

2 See www.revolutionarycommunist.org/index.php/capitalist-crisis.html

3 From P Alessandri & A G Haldane *Banking on the state* Bank of England November 2009. The actual amounts are dependent on exchange rates and exactly what is included as state support.

4 See David Yaffe ‘Parasitism remains at the heart of British capitalism’ in FRFI 210, August/September 2009 on our website at www.revolutionarycommunist.org/index.php/capitalist-crisis.html

Labour's new Poor Law

Labour's draconian Welfare Reform Bill became law on 12 November 2009. The Act scraps entitlement to benefits based on need, forcing those aged 16-24 and people who have been unemployed for two years or more onto a workfare scheme. If you are not able to find employment you will be forced to work for 30 hours and take part in 'work-related activity' for 10 hours a week, all at the equivalent of £1.60 an hour for six months. Labour classes this as 'intense work experience' to 'improve employability'. Work-related activity can include compiling CVs, doing countless job searches, attending work-focused interviews and being made to work in the worst, often temporary, jobs with bad pay and conditions. This is despite the fact that there were only 428,000 job vacancies during the three months to October 2009 whilst unemployment stood at 2.47 million by the end of September 2009. Failure to comply with the workfare regime can lead to benefit sanctions, tipping people who already have to struggle to survive on Jobseeker's Allowance (£50.90 per week if you are under 24 or £64.30 per week if you are over) into destitution.

These workfare schemes will be piloted in Greater Manchester, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk from October 2010 and will be run by private companies. One such company is Action 4 Employment (A4E), whose owner Emma Harrison is worth £55m (*Sunday Times* Rich List). A4E already runs similar contracts; one, aimed at getting people back to work under the 'Benefit Busters' programme, is worth £700 million over five years. This has helped A4E become worth £145m, a value which Harrison expects to reach £500m by 2014.

The Act legalises the use of unemployed people as cheap labour; since it is deemed to be a supportive employment programme, it does not fall under minimum wage or hours rulings. It will therefore be used to drive down wages and undermine the conditions of those already in employment. It abolishes Income Support and Incapacity Benefit and replaces them with Employment Support Allowance (ESA). If you are deemed well enough for normal work by a doctor working for a private company, you will be moved onto JSA. Even before the Act was passed, a harsh new medical test meant that unsuccessful Incapacity Benefit claims were running at half the rate of successful ones (*Financial Times* 13 July 2009).

The Act forces single parents to attend work-focused interviews and take part in work-related activity (which includes numeracy and literacy training) when their youngest child reaches the age of one. Until the age of three, the requirement will be to attend a periodic interview at the Jobcentre; from three to six there will be a requirement to take part in training or other preparatory activities that fit within available childcare; and from seven there will be a requirement to look for work. Again sanctions will be implemented for non-compliance.

The regime that Labour has introduced harks back to the old Poor Laws which required people to enter the workhouse before they could receive any money or help. The underlying principle is the same: the poor are to blame for their poverty, and should be punished for it.

Mark Moncada

US economy Rotten to the core

Superficially, the US economy looks as if it might be improving. The stock market has bounced up by over 30% this year, breaking through the 10,000 mark on the Dow Jones index. Indexes of this and that economic factor seem to show something positive – even if only to tell us that things are getting worse less fast. And everywhere in business circles and on the nightly news is the talk, talk, talk of recovery. STEVE PALMER reports.

Behind the scenes, the economy continues to rot away, tossing hundreds of thousands into a dustbin of unemployment, homelessness and poverty – and not just in the US. The contradictions of the US economy are preparing new financial bubbles in Asia and 'emerging economies', like Brazil. Fresh instability lies ahead.

First there is the huge debt, which continues to swell – some \$52.8 trillion, almost four times the annual production of the US – about \$185,000 for every man, woman and child, or about \$750,000 for a family of four. Government spending continues to add to the pile of debt. After posting a record \$1.4 trillion budget deficit for the 2009 fiscal year, October opened with a deficit of \$176.4 billion. Individual states are in a serious debt crisis too. California's revenue falls short of its budget needs by 49%, Illinois by 47%, Arizona by 41%, Nevada 38%, New York 32%. All this debt is a time bomb, ticking away, which one day will have to be reckoned with. For the moment, the debt is able to grow, by borrowing from the rest of the world.

The financial sector has done extremely well out of the crisis, having almost wrecked the entire system (see Table 1).

The success of the financial companies has been due to the massive intervention of the US government and the Federal Reserve Bank. Apart from direct donations of billions of dollars, government-backed loans are responsible for 99% (about \$1.5 trillion) of purchases of mortgage-backed securities, up from about 80% before the crisis: the private secondary market has completely collapsed.

The main beneficiaries of the crisis have been a handful of the very largest banks which have benefited at the expense of the rest. JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and Citibank now issue half of all mortgages and about two-thirds of US credit cards. They are each allowed to hold more than 10% of the nation's bank deposits.

At the other end of the scale, smaller regional banks are failing at an increasing rate (see Table 2). The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation had 552 banks with \$345.9 billion in assets on the confidential problem list as of 30 September, a 33% increase from 416 lenders with \$299.8 billion in assets at the end of the sec-

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2008	2	2	9	12
2009	21	24	50	

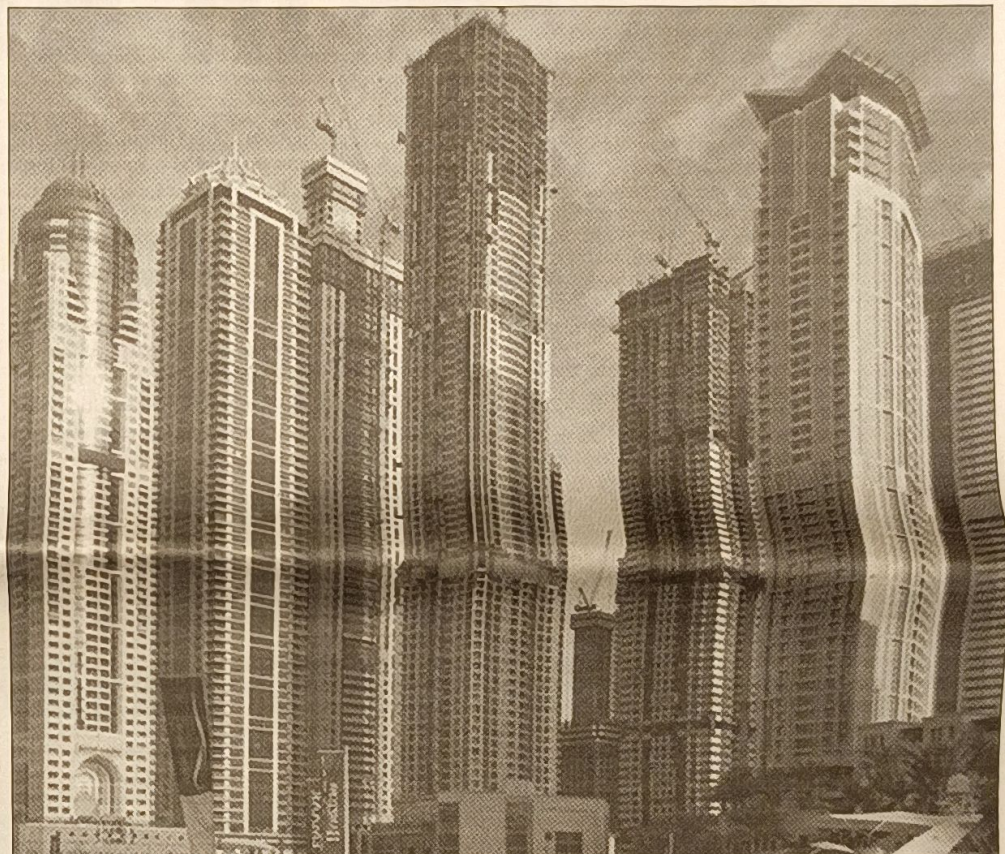
ond quarter, while its insurance fund has a \$8.2 billion deficit, its first negative balance since 1992.

Even the non-financial sector profits may be fictitious. Various accounting tricks are surfacing. Assets bought at inflated prices before the crisis are being held on some companies' books at those prices – as 'goodwill'. This inflates the value of the company. The Huron Consulting Group shows \$506.5m of goodwill – more than 65% of its assets. More than 20% is regarded as exceptional, yet 12% of large companies have goodwill above this

in the labour force' but want a job, bringing the unemployment rate to 13.8%. By the broadest official measure of unemployment, which includes those forced to work part-time, the rate is 17.5%. The burden of unemployment is unevenly distributed: among white people, the official rate is 9.5%; Hispanic people – 12.4%; black people – 15.7%. Among youth: white youth – 25.3%; Hispanic youth – 35.6%; black youth – 41.3%.

The Mortgage Bankers Association reported that in September, 14.1% of borrowers – around 10 million loans –

ber of Americans receiving food stamps rose to a new record of 36.5 million people – one in eight of the US population and an annual increase of 24%. If all those eligible for food stamps collected them, 54.8 million Americans would be receiving. About 49.1 million people – one in six – were 'food insecure' in 2008 meaning that they ran out of money to buy food, could not afford balanced meals, or skipped meals. At the same time, food prices jumped by 5.9%, the biggest increase since 1980. All this in the richest country in the world, where



Tower blocks in Dubai Marina: a symptom of the rotting core of capitalist economies

Table 1
Profits – \$bn

	2008 4th quarter	2009 1st quarter	2009 2nd quarter	2009 3rd quarter
Financial companies	30.5	59.5	66.6	90.8
Non-financial companies	167.4	157.3	164.8	168.0

level. Some companies are recording transactions when the sale is made, not when it receives the cash. They can also delay paying suppliers. Although the normal period is 30 days, the internet giant Amazon is taking 65 days to pay suppliers. This practice boosts the company's cash flow – on paper; this amounted to 70% of the company's cash flow in the last year. These kinds of tricks will continue until the day the bills really do need to be paid in cold hard cash.

Despite the talk of recovery, the suffering and misery of American working people continues to grow. Since 2008, some five million jobs have disappeared. In the months since the Obama administration supposedly began to stimulate the economy, 2.8 million jobs have disappeared. Official unemployment is at 10.2%, while other measures show the real rate to be much higher. In addition to the 15.7 million registered unemployed, a further 5.6 million are classified as 'not

were either delinquent on their mortgage or in foreclosure, the highest levels since recording began in 1972. Over half these loans are 'prime' loans – not the 'sub-prime' loans which triggered the current crisis. Many of these borrowers are going to end up homeless. At any one time in the US in 2008, there were believed to be around 700,000 homeless, sheltered and unsheltered, but in the course of a year, some 1.6 million people used some form of homeless shelter. It is expected that 1.5 million additional Americans will become homeless in 2009 and 2010.

Census figures for 2008, the latest available, show that the poverty level rose to 13.2%. The absolute number was 39.8 million, the highest since 1960. Among whites, the level was 8.6 per cent; Hispanics – 23.2%; blacks – 24.7%. 14.1 million children under 18 were living in poverty – one child in five. Median household income fell by 3.6% in 2008. In August the num-

they hand out millions and millions in bonuses to already overpaid financial maggots.

Exporting the crisis

The record low US interest rate combined with falling prices means that core US interest rates are effectively negative. This has resulted in the dollar 'carry trade' soaring: borrowing cheap US dollars to buy risky non-US assets while the dollar is trading at a 15-month low. This 'hot money' has been pouring into Asian countries, inflating property prices, pushing up local stock exchanges and encouraging local financial bubbles. MSCI's emerging-markets stock index has risen 71% this year, an extraordinary performance. International commodity prices have risen some 37% since March. The Brazilian stock exchange equity index has grown by 84% since March. At some point, this dollar carry trade is going to end abruptly, whether through inflation or increased interest rates in the US. At that point, these asset bubbles are going to turn into a new crash in Asia and the 'emerging economies' and a renewed financial crisis. The recent crash of Dubai World is an example of such overblown asset values and may well trigger a more serious crisis. Truly a system rotten and rotting to the core!

■ Building socialism for the 21st century in Ecuador

In April 2009, Rafael Correa was elected to his second term as President of Ecuador with 51% of the vote. This gave him a mandate to continue and deepen the programme of reforms and structural changes initiated since he first became president in November 2006. In three years Correa's government has introduced an unprecedented social and

economic programme of reforms – the Citizens' Revolution – to reverse the poverty and exploitation suffered by the majority of the population in a country which has been ravaged by neo-liberalism (see FRFI 210).

Correa has announced that Ecuador is building socialism for the 21st century and joined the Bolivarian Alliance for the

Americas (ALBA). In late October 2009, he made a brief trip to London, speaking at universities and to over 1,000 Ecuadorians living and working in London, en route to a formal state visit to Russia.

Helen Yaffe had the privilege of interviewing President Correa during a boat trip on the River Thames and a translation appears here.

Helen Yaffe: In what way is ALBA distinct from previous attempts by Latin American countries to develop mutually beneficial trade and investment strategies?

Rafael Correa: In every way because it is integration based on fraternal solidarity, not between competitors, which has been the great mistake in the past. The integration that we have sought, above all in recent years, has been orientated towards trade, to having larger markets and competing between us. In ALBA we don't talk about competition, we speak of coordination in energy, finances and even in defence, but coordination, not competition.

HY: In 1965, Che Guevara said, 'there should be no more talk about developing mutually beneficial trade based on prices imposed on the backward countries by the law of value and the international relations of unequal exchange that result from the law of value... We have to prepare conditions so that our brethren can directly and consciously take the path of the complete abolition of exploitation...'. How does ALBA trade and the formation of supra-national companies achieve this – constraining commercial exchanges based on profit – particularly given that, with the exception of Cuba, the means of production in the ALBA states are predominantly in private hands?

RC: The question of value is perhaps the most difficult and complex economic problem. It is clearly very difficult to remove the question of monetary prices when large parts of the means of production are in private hands. But with ALBA we are experimenting with other forms of exchange, not necessarily based on market prices but on mutual compensation, collaboration and bi-national enterprises. For example, since the beginning of my government I have sent crude oil [to Venezuela] and they refine it and charge me the cost.

So, Che was right, and you are right, it is difficult to remove the law

of value, basically monetary prices imposed by the market, when the means of production are in private hands and are guided by the logic of capitalism, the logic of profit. But at the level of countries something can and is being done. For example, Chavez has a lot of experience with petrol in the area of the Caribbean where he gives petrol without considering the market prices but considering the costs and the need for help and other circumstances. We are doing a lot of this. We are seeking food sovereignty and sovereignty in health, producing our own medicines, guiding ourselves by planning and coordination, without competition and without this relationship to the market.

Let me state something clearly, Marxism has not overcome this question of value either. It is very difficult. Sometimes you can remove monetary prices set by the market, other times you cannot. You have to try to prevent speculation and the power of the market.

There is the problem of what value is, and the problem of utility also – the markets try to respond through supply and demand. Supply expresses the costs of production and the social costs of producing; demand expresses preferences, the usefulness to the consumer, but in practice with an unequal distribution of income, price represents anything, not the intensity of preference. So the problem is there and no-one has been able to convincingly solve it. In its trade the Soviet Union also used money prices, not necessarily set by the market, but not compensations based on equivalent values either.

There are alternative proposals, like the one for equivalent values presented by Heinz Dietrich who works on socialism for the 21st century, but all these alternatives are insufficient and inapplicable.

HY: This term 'socialism for the 21st century' is sometimes used as a way of rejecting all the antecedents, all previous struggles...

RC: There are things which should be

superseded – I have spoken with Raul and Fidel about Cuba – for example, state ownership of all the means of production. Of course there should be a certain space for private property and obviously the strategic sectors, certain areas which are fundamental for food sovereignty and so on, should be controlled by the state. But in the 21st century, it is difficult to sustain state ownership of all the means of production.

HY: It is also difficult if you permit small private production. What controls are there to prevent the accumulation of capital or speculation?

RC: This is easier than directly managing everything.

HY: Announcing the Plan for Land Distribution, Ecuador's Minister of Agriculture said that the land was 'not considered to be a commodity, but for its social function, as a means of production, a place for settlement and a way of living'.

RC: This is important. There are things which are not commodities – the earth, water – that have to be under state control – their exchange has to be controlled. We are introducing a law where the state has to authorise the sale and purchase of land to avoid what has occurred in the past – peasants cheated and left without land. But the land is going to be theirs and the communes'; it is not going to belong to the state. Under control of the state – that's another matter.

HY: It is similar to the new campaign in Cuba to distribute lands in usufruct. They have to produce, if they don't produce, the land will be taken back.

RC: Yes. We are also going to distribute 130,000 hectares of state land and we are drawing up an inventory of all the unproductive private lands to distribute – around one and a half million hectares. This is why they are desperate to destabilise us so quickly.

HY: Che Guevara believed in using



Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution

Helen Yaffe Palgrave Macmillan, 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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the technological advances and managerial methods of capitalism but with different social objectives... You were trained in economics in the US and you have spoken about the poor quality of university education in Ecuador. How does your government plan to train skilled workers, while at the same time forging a political commitment to social development and the Citizens' Revolution?

RC: What Che did was common sense. Technology cannot be the patrimony of capitalism - there is no capitalist technology, just technology. Of course it uses the human resources formed by capitalism. The Cuban Revolution benefited from the human resources formed by the Soviet Union, China and so on. For the development of our countries we have to emphasise technology and this is linked to human resources. We are not referring to having technology without the human resources capable of using and generalising it, so we are introducing major reforms in education that have generated resistance from the groups which have always appropriated the education system.

Public education in Ecuador is very bad, we need to make a huge effort to improve it and higher education is also terribly bad. We have a new law which, among other things, obliges universities to carry out research. At present, half of the universities don't spend 20 centavos on research. Their argument is that resources are scarce. But there is Cuba, with few resources, carrying out research. Resources are always going to be scarce, but these universities have invested in expensive extensions instead of funding research. We have strong programmes to improve education, the law of higher education, scholarship programmes, to train people in other countries, and clear policies to invest in science and technology despite the scarce resources.

The development of revolutionary consciousness and commitment depends on various factors. I believe that

part of this education is about social commitment, without it being partisan. I also believe that when leaders are seen to have enthusiasm and a real desire to change the country, people support this desire for change. The future professionals, who will be trained because of this change, are going to have this revolutionary consciousness. With this dynamic period Ecuadorian society is living through - along with the opportunities that we are creating - we believe that all these new professionals who are receiving scholarships, who go abroad to train, will develop this revolutionary consciousness. But you are probably right that we have to work more directly on this. We are already training people, but what you said about revolutionary consciousness is more difficult to achieve. We have political education schools, but we lack structure in the Movimiento Pais [the political organisation which Correa heads], we lack consolidation and this is perhaps the great challenge that we face.

HY: The next question is about the SUCRE - how will it function?

RC: It is very easy, we are going to start pilot operations to test it. It is a system of compensation. It is for commercial or private trade. It will not be pegged to the dollar. We are going to create an electronic currency and we won't have to use any [US] dollars.

HY: If the aim of the SUCRE is to replace the dollar in trade between ALBA countries, is the goal eventually to replace the dollar as the national currency of Ecuador?

RC: No. We are minimising the need for dollars. Unfortunately, Ecuador adopted the dollar as the national currency [in 2000]. It is very difficult to undo dollarisation; it could create a total social cataclysm.

HY: How can the ALBA countries defend themselves against the kind of reaction seen with the coup in Honduras?

RC: Well, there is no infallible

defence, but, for example, Telesur is a great assistance - in providing information - imagine, before that the news came from CNN - as is having strong relations between countries for mutual support. But there is nothing that guarantees that this cannot happen in Ecuador, in Venezuela, in Bolivia. We must be very well organised. You know that our governments have great popular support, but we are not organised to defend our process from any intent at destabilisation. They tried to do this in Ecuador a few days ago and unfortunately indigenous people and teachers collaborated. A small group of teachers called a totally unjustified indigenous uprising and the right wing began a campaign in their newspapers claiming that the popularity and credibility of the president had fallen. They are also preparing mobilisations in Guayaquil. They had everything ready when we managed to resolve the problems, but perhaps not next time. Basically every country has to organise its internal structures.

HY: Recently you spoke about socialism for the 21st century in Ecuador combining elements of 'classical socialism', the socialism of Mariategui and liberation theology, and socialism based on Ecuadorian conditions. Can you expand on these concepts?

RC: Socialism for the 21st century is a process of construction which tries to take the best of traditional socialism, but also of other socialisms that have existed, like Andean socialism, agrarian socialism and also, at least in Ecuador, you note the social doctrine of the church, liberation theology. We are a Christian continent. In Cuba, they declared the state to be atheist when the people were believers. This created big conflicts and impeded, perhaps pointlessly, significant support because there were many Catholics committed to the Revolution. They recognised the mistake and rectified it decades ago. A much better and legitimate strategy is to guide religion to be revolutionary also. This is

what liberation theology did. Basically the message was 'enough with this theology that tells us to endure exploitation in life because after death you are going to have the Kingdom of Heaven'. No, the Kingdom of Heaven must be made here - it is the kingdom of justice. You have to struggle against injustice. 21st century socialism is based on this search for social justice, and it coincides with the social doctrine and liberation theology. This project can be joined by atheists, practising Catholics - because I am a practising Catholic. It doesn't contradict my faith which, on the contrary, reinforces the search for social justice.

Socialism for the 21st century seeks this change through democratic processes and the vote, we have become accustomed to this in Latin America, it is no longer through armed struggle. There are things in traditional socialism which we agree with; the primacy of human labour above capital, the need for collective action, the need for planning, the role of the state in the economy, the search for justice in all its dimensions, social justice, gender justice, ethnic justice, international justice. But we are obliged to reject some elements of traditional socialism which are not feasible or desirable; class struggle, violent change and dialectical materialism itself. This will grate with you as a Marxist, but any attempt to explain processes as complex as the advance of human society with simple or simplistic laws will fail. Just as it is simplistic to say that the motor for the advance of society is individualism, abstracted from culture, the community, etc, it is also a simplification to say that it is class struggle, the opposition of forces within the productive system.

A technological revolution can create more social changes in the revolutions in production than by supposed dialectical materialism, the conflict between oppositional forces. Not only this, dialectics takes as an infallible law thesis, anti-thesis and a synthesis which emerges and is better than what you began with. It doesn't have to be

that way. You can have a thesis that is true, you present an antithesis that is erroneous, and the synthesis can be worse than the thesis. This is the reality we have lived in Latin America. We propose something that is correct, we are told some nonsense in the name of democracy, of dialogue, and we have united the two proposals and produced a synthesis, but the synthesis is worse than what we had before. We have to improve all these things, it is necessary to be objective, it is not necessary to be romantic.

HY: Doesn't what happened in Honduras, or before that in Venezuela, demonstrate the importance of class struggle?

RC: We completely agree that the great challenge in our countries is to change the relation of forces and pass from a state which is captured by certain powers to a state that represents popular power. This is the first step in Latin America, but to go from that to believing that this change in the relation of forces will resolve everything is a mistake in my view. There are many important things to consider. The technological base, cultural changes; also be careful about how you identify the poor. The poor have many values, but they often make mistakes. It is not certain that the masses, the proletariat, are always right. You can convert a bourgeois state into a popular state, but that does not mean that it is going to take all the right decisions. For example, Latin America has to make huge cultural changes. Among the indigenous people, who are so mythologised, is where there is most interfamilial violence, but these things are not spoken about. So the point is not only about transforming the structures, it is also about transforming the family, people, transforming culture, transforming technology. There are many factors which generate social advance. It is a very complex process. This is a difference. We do not reject dialectical materialism, but neither do we accept that the idea that it is fundamental for us, as the motor for society, producing class struggle which means violent changes.

Perhaps the greatest error that traditional socialism made was in not disputing the notion of development proposed by capitalism. They sought the same, via a faster and supposedly more just route, but the same, in the Soviet Union - industrialisation, mass consumption, accumulation - this was a mistake. It is impossible to generalise the western development model. If all the Chinese people achieved the standard of living of people here in London, the world would explode. Traditional socialism never presented an alternative notion of development. Today we are presenting this alternative.

HY: To what extent can we say that the welfare-based development model of socialist Cuba, and its global status achieved through its internationalist health and education programmes, was the inspiration to ALBA.

RC: Cuba has great things and obviously ALBA was started by Chavez and Fidel. A great example provided by Cuba is that in its poverty it has known how to share, with all its international programmes. Cuba is the country with the greatest cooperation in relation to its gross domestic product and it is an example for all of us. This doesn't mean that Cuba doesn't have big problems, but it is also certain that it is impossible to judge the success or failure of the Cuban model without considering the [US] blockade, a blockade that has lasted for 50 years. Ecuador wouldn't survive for five months with that blockade. Of course ALBA is largely inspired by the good things of the Cuban model, like solidarity, trade between peoples based on solidarity, not for profit, cooperation for development. Of course ALBA is inspired by the successes of the Cuban model.

Helen Yaffe

ALBA: New dawn for Latin America

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) was initiated in 2004 with a set of trade and cooperation agreements between Cuba and Venezuela. Its immediate origins lie in the famous barter trade between the two countries which began in 2000. Cuba sent thousands of educators and medical personnel to Venezuela, which in turn sold 53,000 barrels of oil a day at below world market prices to Cuba. This was followed in 2001 by an agricultural cooperation deal. In December that year, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez first proposed a 'Bolivarian Alternative', to counter the neo-liberal Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), known in Spanish as ALCA. ALBA means 'dawn' in Spanish.

Between 2006 and 2009, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras (under Zelaya), St Vincent & the Grenadines, Antigua & Barbuda and Ecuador joined ALBA (with Paraguay intending to join at the end of 2009), and the 'Alternative' was consolidated as an 'Alliance'; a 'trade treaty of the people'. ALBA's institutional framework is established, with secretariats, work commissions, councils, bi-national corporations and so on. It provides co-operation agreements between governments, without imposing changes to domestic institutions or social-relations, whilst providing ideological and material support for radical internal reforms. Principally, ALBA is building a barrier to US domination and European capital penetration, buttressing the most radical governments (Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecua-



Celebrations in Honduras at the gift of 100 tractors from Venezuela under ALBA

dor) while offering other countries in the region concrete examples of the benefits of trade relations based on south-south cooperation and the potential for welfare-based development.

By April 2009, there were 100 ALBA-projects underway, promoting non-market, non-profit based exchanges with the aim of keeping resources and surpluses in the region. ALBA projects use member-states' resource strengths to promote domestic development focused on eradicating poverty and breaking traditional patterns of economic dependence, exacerbated by neo-liberalism. This bloc has the potential to become increasingly important in the context of the global financial crisis, highly unstable world commodity prices and recession in the most developed capitalist countries with devastating consequences around the world. The Bank of ALBA,

inaugurated in December 2008, operates without loan conditions and with the consensus of members. Early in 2010 a new virtual currency, the SUCRE, will be introduced for exchanges within ALBA, undermining the leverage of the US dollar and international financial institutions.

ALBA is inspired by the welfare-based development model of socialist Cuba, with its medical and educational internationalism. ALBA in turn has removed from Cuba the obligation to completely insert itself into the international capitalist economy. It has provided the Revolution with an alternative export strategy that is consistent with its socialist principles, reaps the benefits of the Revolution's investments in education and healthcare and is not obstructed by the US blockade.

The April 2009 the ALBA Declaration of Cumana, *Capitalism Threatens*

Life on the Planet says: 'it is necessary to develop and model an alternative to the capitalist system. A system based on: solidarity and complementarities; not competition; a system in harmony with our mother earth and not plundering of human resources...in summary, a system that recovers the human condition of our societies and peoples and does not reduce them to mere consumers or merchandise.'

Although at present the economic impact of ALBA is limited, its regional political and social implications are already significant. The emergence of an independent, alternative alliance in a region rich in hydrocarbons, metals and agricultural land is seen as a threat to US domination and European capital investment in the region. ALBA's relations with Brazil and Argentina are increasingly fraternal, as it draws them towards its operational principles (trade between Brazil and Argentina is no longer carried out in the US dollar, but by a system of payment in local currencies), and unites with them in a defensive bloc against the Colombian regime, which will host seven US military bases relocated there after the expulsion of the US from La Manta base in Ecuador.

The future consolidation and expansion of ALBA will take place in the context not only of growing US hostility but also of a global recession. Whatever the difficulties, socialists and progressive people everywhere should celebrate the example and achievements of ALBA. Three Latin American countries have eradicated illiteracy in the last five years (as Cuba did in 1961): Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua, while Ecuador will achieve this historical goal soon. This is testimony to the revolutionary solidarity promoted by ALBA.

REVISIONISM: the Soviet Union in the Second World War

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

The capitalist crisis is now manifest: a financial crisis, economic decline, attacks on public services, rising unemployment, the spread of racism, increased militarism and readiness to wage war. As the economic and social bases of privilege within the working classes are undermined, so the bourgeoisie intensifies its ideological assault on socialism. On the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall the same underlying messages were dinned into people's ears: 'socialism does not work' and 'life is better under capitalism'. It is precisely when capitalism demonstrably cannot meet people's needs that we get this barrage. Now the history of the Soviet Union's role in defeating fascism is being revised to equate the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. During the Second World War the Soviet Union broke 80% of Germany's armoured divisions and lost 25-27 million people in doing so. If it were not for the determination, organisation and sacrifice of the Soviet people the fascists would not have been defeated when and where they were and humanity may not have survived the extermination machine. TREVOR RAYNE reflects on Russia and the Soviet Union.

Baltic states are redefining Nazi collaborators as 'anti-communist combatants' and their historic participation in anti-Semitic pogroms are justified as 'patriotic anti-communism'. In former socialist states calls for gay rights are branded as a communist plot to undermine national morale. A statement issued in Lithuania by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, equating Stalinism with Nazism for being equally guilty of war crimes, genocide and human rights abuses, is condemned in the 13 September 2009 issue of Cuba's *Granma International*. The European Parliament proposed that 29 August, anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939 Soviet-German Pact) should be declared a day of remembrance of the victims of Stalinism and Nazism. This is done while the official unemployment rate is 14% in Lithuania and 16% in Latvia, when the average Gross Domestic Product in the former socialist countries has declined by 6.2% this year alone – down 18.4% in Lithuania, 16% in Latvia, 14% in the Ukraine, 8.5% in Russia, 6.5% in Hungary etc. Economy after economy in the former socialist countries has not seen such contraction and chaos since 1945.

Russia's industrial output is down almost 20% in a year. It is indicative that the total length of paved roads in Russia has fallen by almost a third since 2000; disrepair, weeds and forest return. In the former socialist countries governments discourage the media from reporting the scale of the crisis. The ruling classes are afraid.

Cuba, a living example of the struggle for socialism, is subject to a deluge of lies, chorused by much of the British left. Any changes that the Cubans make are misrepresented as concessions to capitalism and markets. Raul Castro was presented as a 'realist' as opposed to the 'dogmatist' Fidel Castro and realism is presented as mimicking capitalism. The success of the Chinese revolution and Chinese

economy, likely to surpass Japan's as the second biggest in the world within a year, is attributed only to China's embrace of markets and capitalism, and never to the fact that the Chinese revolution, with Chinese Communist Party leadership, had established a strong, coherent and popular state able to withstand the worst predations of multinational corporations.

It is necessary to counter the falsification of socialist history and learn lessons that one day the working class in Britain will implement in the construction of socialism.

The defeat of fascism

The bourgeoisie say that the Soviet Union and socialist countries were failures because they collapsed. The Soviet Union was not a failure for the working class – it was a victory! The Soviet victory over fascism was a victory for workers around the world, particularly in Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist countries was a victory for the imperialist bourgeoisie and its class allies within the socialist countries over the working class in the socialist countries and internationally. It was also a victory for the petit-bourgeois socialists who claim Marx's legacy, but who celebrated imperialism's triumph, as with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

2009's Remembrance ceremonies in Britain were amplified as the state needs to rally people round the flag as the failing endeavour in Afghanistan sows doubt; poppies galore. We are told that the US and Britain fought for freedom and democracy in two world wars and won, and that they fight for freedom today. The June anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy has been turned into a media event, a memory magnified at the expense of a sober reckoning of the Second World War (although survivors, like the last combatants of the First World War, often express their disgust at war).

The Second World War was a continuation of the First World War; expressing monopoly capital's constant

drive to divide and re-divide the world, with competing imperialisms fighting for markets, resources and spheres of control. All the major capitalist powers underestimated the Soviet Union's ability to resist and, more so, its ability to defeat German imperialism: a major miscalculation. That ability was won by decades, even a century, of revolutionary ferment in Russia; the exchange of ideas, the coming and going of political parties which eventually produced Lenin and the Bolsheviks.



Hundreds of thousands died in the firestorm following the RAF bombing of Dresden

Marx and Engels understood the revolutionary significance of the Russian working class and peasantry. In 1870 Russian émigrés in Geneva asked Marx to represent them on the General Council of the International Working Men's Association. That year Jenny Marx said of Karl, 'He has been studying Russian as if it were a matter of life or death.' In the 1882 Preface to the second Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels state, 'Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe.' *Capital* was translated into Russian in 1872, its first translation into another language. (See August Nimtz, *Science & Society*, October 2009)

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, more than a dozen foreign armies invaded Russia including 40,000 British troops, over 13,000 US troops, 70,000 Japanese, 12,000 French,

12,000 Poles – over 155,000 foreign soldiers on Russian soil to, in the words of Winston Churchill, then British Minister for War and Air, 'strangle it [Bolshevism] at birth'. Churchill primarily directed the invasion armies. They were defeated by the Red Army led by the Bolsheviks.

Hitler told General Rumstedt before the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, 'You have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down.'

The Nazis and other imperialists believed the Germans would win a quick victory with its *Blitzkrieg* (lightening war) – the Shock and Awe of its time. Six months before his execution in the 1937-38 Red Army purges, Marshal Tukhachevsky addressed the Soviet General Staff Academy and emphasised the political and moral character of the war to come, 'As for the *Blitzkrieg*... this is directed towards an enemy who doesn't want to and won't fight it out. If the Germans met an opponent who stands up and fights and takes the offensive himself, this would give a different aspect to things. The struggle would be bitter and protracted; by its very nature it would induce great fluctuations in the front on this side and that, and in great depth. In the final resort, all would depend on who had the greater moral fibre and who at the close of operations disposed of reserves in depth.'

Three months before Germany launched its June 1941 assault on the Soviet Union, Hitler told his generals, 'The war against Russia will be such that it cannot be conducted in a knightly fashion: the struggle is one of ideologies and racial differences and will have to be conducted with unprecedented, unmerciful and unrelenting harshness. All officers will have to rid themselves of obsolete ideologies. I know that the necessity for such means of making war is beyond the comprehension of you generals but... I insist absolutely that my orders be executed without contradiction. The commissars are the bearers of ideologies directly opposed to National Socialism. Therefore the commissars will be liquidated. German soldiers guilty of breaking international law... will be excused. Russia has not participated in the Hague Convention and therefore has no rights under it.'

By the summer of 1942, 80% of the German army was in Soviet terri-

fought on and had to be killed before the ground they held could be secured.' (John Keegan, *Barbarossa*, 1970) The French ruling class had, in part, been ambivalent about fighting fascism. Destroyed Red Army formations were replaced by people's militia. German reports tell of the stubborn refusal of Red Army soldiers to lay down their arms until they ran out of ammunition. In Stalingrad the Red Army fought with Soviet workers at their side. The battle was street by street, house by house, guerrilla war driven by a moral and political commitment to the Soviet state and its people. This was the achievement of a century of revolutionary ferment and political education.

The Battle of Stalingrad was fought between July 1942 and February 1943. It halted and reversed the fascist advance. In this single battle the Soviet Union suffered 487,741 killed or missing, more than all US or British dead throughout the Second World War. Red Army soldiers pointed to the ruins of Stalingrad all about them and told their German foes, 'One day, Berlin will look like this'.

The Siege of Leningrad claimed 630,000 Soviet lives. Between 22 June 1941 and 1 February 1942, 2.8 million Soviet prisoners of war died, conforming to Hitler's directive. At the Battle of Normandy the western allies lost 35,000 killed; one fourteenth of the Soviet casualties at Stalingrad. This is not to belittle those who fought fascism on its western front nor those who fought within its own lines as partisans. However, it should be noted that the western allies' leadership did not mobilise for the western front until the Red Army was pushing the fascists back towards Berlin. As Soviet forces approached Dresden, Churchill ordered the RAF and USAF to bomb the city. The RAF and USAF dropped 700,000 phosphorous bombs on almost 1.2 million people. The city 'turned into a single column of flame. More people died there in the firestorm, in that one big flame, than died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.' (Kurt Vonnegut) Tens and even hundreds of thousands of people were burned to death in the resulting firestorm. The US and British demonstrated to the Soviet Union what they were capable of and left the advancing Red Army nothing but ruin. History and the working class must recognise the contribution that the Soviet Union made to the twentieth century and to humanity.

The imperialists' attempt to strangle Bolshevism at birth, the threats and German-led invasion, the imperialist encirclement and sabotage of the Soviet economy profoundly affected the character of the Soviet state. In particular, the failure of the European working class movement to spread the socialist revolution after 1917 and then to sufficiently defend it against attack, compounded the difficulties faced by the Soviet people. A single party system was necessary, as was a powerful army and repressive apparatus if the state was to survive and stand against imperialism – and the Soviet working class knew that.

Yet the question has to be answered: 'How was a working class that could defeat the fascist invaders so demoralised and demobilised that it could allow the Soviet and other socialist states to be destroyed?' We will explore what happened and why in future issues of FRFI.

Estimated number of armed forces personnel and civilians killed in the Second World War and as a % of 1939 national populations.

Country	Numbers killed	% of population
UK	386,000	0.8%
USA	405,000	0.3%
Soviet Union	25-27 million	14.2%
China	15 million	3.5%
Germany	7 million	8.8%
Japan	1.8 million	1.8%
Poland	6 million	17.2%

Berlin: behind the Wall



Gorbachev embraces FW De Klerk, the last President of apartheid South Africa, in Berlin

TREVOR RAYNE

Behind the facade of grinning reunions like those of Gorbachev and Walesa we should look to see what they were celebrating on 9 November 2009 on the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The cost of German reunification is up to £1.45 trillion, equivalent to £4,341 per person per year in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) – East Germany. The objective is convergence of West and East German societies. Unemployment in the East is officially 14.7%, twice that in the West. There are two million fewer people in the East than there were in 1989. Half of all former GDR workers work for below the German low wage threshold of 9.20 euros an hour. Unit labour costs are 20% lower in the East than in the West. The number of workers employed in productive industries is a quarter of what it was in 1989. The failure of capitalism to develop Eastern Europe is of profound significance, demonstrating its inability as a system to meet people's needs.

An iron curtain

In February 1945, with the Red Army closing in, Nazi propaganda chief Goebbels wrote an article warning of what would happen if Germany was disarmed. He said that 'an iron curtain' would divide Europe behind which the Soviet Union would rule. The Nazis still hoped for a coalition with the US and Britain against the Soviet Union. On 5 March 1946 Churchill made his own 'iron curtain' speech at Fulton, Missouri, US, launching the Cold War and signalling that West Germany and West Berlin would be the front line in the battle against socialism. Korea would be the front-line in the east.

At the July-August 1945 Potsdam conference the Allies (including the Soviet Union) agreed that Germany and Berlin would be placed under the authority of four zones (Soviet, US, British and French). In defiance of the Soviet Union and without the agreement of the German people, Britain, (under a Labour government), the US, France and the Benelux countries announced in June 1948 that they were establishing a separate West German government. They issued and secretly printed a new currency for circulation in the western zones of Berlin. This currency manoeuvre was intended to destabilise the Soviet zones and allow the imperialists to swallow up all of Berlin and Germany. The Soviet response was to control traffic flows from West Germany to West Berlin. The US and Britain responded with

the 'Berlin Airlift', ferrying in supplies, although the Soviet Union said it would ensure the supplies itself. This lasted from June 1948 until May 1949. The US and Britain tried and tested the use of air transport for strategic purposes.

With the US possessing a nuclear arms monopoly, the British Labour government allowed the US to station a military airbase in East Anglia, from which the Soviet Union could be threatened with nuclear attack. NATO was established as a military pact against the socialist countries in April 1949.

Britain's Labour government colluded in incorporating Nazis into the new West German state. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin explained to the 1947 Labour Party Conference, 'It is true that the Germans are a very effi-

dom. Before the Wall was built some 60,000 East Germans commuted to the West to work each day – and they returned home to the East each evening.

West Germany had a policy of recruiting skilled workers and professionals, educated at the expense of the East, and this caused labour and production problems in the East. Additionally, from the 1950s onwards, the US CIA mounted a campaign of sabotage and subversion against the GDR. It financed groups and individuals to commit sabotage, terrorism and delinquency. Power stations were blown up, factories and other buildings burned down, port facilities, bridges and transport attacked. Farm animals were poisoned and children's school milk adulterated. The World Youth Festival in



Lech Walesa inaugurates the commemoration

cient people, but I would impress upon you that many of the most efficient were Nazis, whereas the people we have to bring back from the concentration camps and to put into certain positions, are very good men, but a man does not feel quite as good after he has been in a concentration camp for three or four years. That does interfere to a very large extent with the efficiency of Germany, and therefore it is necessary to exercise some patience in that field.'

Just how much patience can be gauged by noting that as late as 1959 there were approximately 800 of Hitler's Special Court Judges and Military Judges in positions of authority within the West German judiciary. These were judges proven to have passed death sentences on German and non-German anti-fascist activists during Nazi rule.

In March 1950 Churchill called for the re-arming of West Germany to confront the Soviet Union, much as he had in 1918 when he directed the invading armies against the Russian revolution.

The Berlin Wall

It is a myth that the Communists built the Berlin Wall in 1961 to stop people escaping from Communism to free-

dom. Before the Wall was built some 60,000 East Germans commuted to the West to work each day – and they returned home to the East each evening.

East Berlin was attacked with fire-bombs and explosives. The CIA issued forged documents, including ration cards. These are all practices familiar to Cuba. The GDR and Soviet Union complained to the British and US governments, but to no effect.

Ten years after the Berlin Wall fell, the newspaper *USA Today* reported, 'When the Berlin Wall crumbled, East Germans identified a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier under communism.' (Thanks to William Blum and *Counterpunch*).

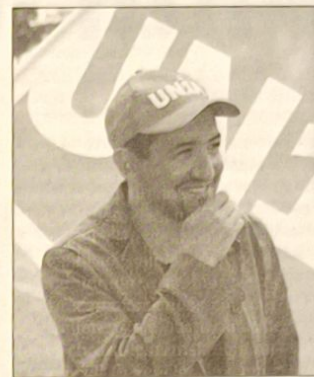
The Socialist Workers Party held meetings to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the socialist states. Like many others on the British left they supported Lech Walesa's *Solidarnosc* in Poland, which the US now acknowledges it advised and directed. Abusing the name of socialism the left aligned with imperialism. Within a year of the fall of the Berlin Wall the US and British armies were waging the First Gulf War and have been in a permanent state of war ever since. Such is the adverse effect of the collapse of the socialist countries on the global balance of class forces and it is nothing for workers to celebrate.

Free Murad Akincilar – stop the criminalisation of trade unionists in Turkey

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is supporting the campaign by Swiss trade union UNIA to free Murad Akincilar, who is currently in prison in Turkey awaiting trial on unspecified charges. FRFI has known Murad since he was a Masters student at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1991-2.

Murad had been living in Geneva for eight years, having fled political repression in Turkey and sought refuge in Switzerland. He was employed full time by UNIA as a trade union organiser when he returned to Istanbul this summer for an extended holiday. Despite having received an assurance from the Turkish Ministry of Justice prior to returning that he was not wanted for anything, on 30 September 2009 Murad was arrested at his home by plain-clothes police. Four days later he was taken to court and remanded in custody. Although the precise details of the accusations against him remain shrouded in secrecy, Murad has been accused of being involved with an illegal organisation – a charge which is strenuously denied.

The Turkish state is well known for repressing its political opponents and for imprisoning and murdering socialists, communists, trade unionists and supporters of the Kurdish liberation struggle. Murad's comrades and friends are therefore deeply concerned about his detention and, in particular, about his health, as he is suffering from a serious eye complaint, which has al-



Murad Akincilar

ready resulted in his having to be taken from prison to hospital. The campaign for Murad's immediate and unconditional release is supported by trade unions and other organisations throughout Europe, including the European United Left group within the European Parliament. In London FRFI has been gathering support from students at LSE, where Murad was a student. We encourage readers to send letters of protest to the Turkish Ambassador to Britain Mehmet Yigit Alpogun by fax to 020 7393 0066/9213 or post to 43 Belgrave Square London SW1X 8PA or by email to turkish_emb@btclick.com.

Long live international solidarity!

Ireland: 'normalisation' challenged

PAUL MALLON

The activity of Republican militants opposed to the peace process has increased in the north of Ireland as the political wrangle between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party over the devolution of policing powers to Belfast continues. The British strategy of normalisation, to treat the Six Counties that make up Northern Ireland as a normal part of the United Kingdom, is being undermined by the activities of those opposed to British imperialism in Ireland. In response the British army has increased covert patrols and the harassment of Republicans has intensified.

On 21 November a 400lb bomb outside the headquarters of the Police Board failed to explode. Later that night in the Fermanagh border village of Garrison, gun shots were exchanged between Republican militants and British security forces. These latest attacks do not come in isolation. In late September the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) revealed that the threat posed by Republican militants had led the British army to attend 750 bomb alerts in the past two years. In the first six months of 2009 there were more than 130 bomb, weapon or ammunition finds across the north.

On 16 October, a relative of a police officer was injured in a car-bomb attack in a Unionist area of East Belfast. This marked increased tension in Belfast and other nationalist areas. Police are now as a matter of routine wearing full ballistic body armour, and foot patrols by British army undercover soldiers attached to the Special Reconnaissance Regiment have increased in Republican areas. In late November a Belfast newspaper reported that the list of Republicans under surveillance in Belfast has grown threefold in the past two months alone and across the north around 200 are under routine surveillance. On 3 November Irish Republican Socialist Party members leaving the party's Belfast office had their car surrounded by four undercover PSNI vehicles with armed and masked PSNI members screaming demands at them. Police were so aggressive that one of the men reported that he thought he was going to be shot. On 17 November, leading Belfast Republican Marian Price was arrested as part of the ongoing investigation into the Republican attack on the British army base at Massereene in March (see FRFI 208); she was later released. Her crime appears to be her status as an articulate outspoken critic of the political process pursued by Sinn Féin.



Gordon Brown, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness at Stormont after two British soldiers were shot dead in March 2009

Venezuela Chavez calls for a Fifth International

ALVARO MICHAELS

An international conference of over 50 left parties from 31 countries held in Caracas on 19-20 November heard President Chavez call for the creation of a Fifth International. It passed a resolution to form a committee to prepare a global conference of left parties in Caracas in April 2010 to discuss its formation.

Support came from a number of Latin American parties, including the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) of Bolivia, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) of Nicaragua, and Alianza Pais of Ecuador, plus smaller parties and groups such as the Proposal for an Alternative Society (PAS) of Chile, New Nation Alternative (ANN) of Guatemala, and Australia's Socialist Alliance.

1990. This includes various Latin American socialist, labour, social democratic and nationalist parties such as the FSLN, FMLN, MAS and PSUV, as well as the PCV and the Communist Party of Cuba, but not the FARC.

The 'Caracas Commitment'

The conference also passed the 'Caracas Commitment' to reaffirm our conviction definitively to build and win a Socialism of the 21st Century. It expressed 'solidarity with the peoples of the world who have suffered and are suffering from imperialist aggression, especially the more than 50 years of the genocidal blockade against Cuba...the massacre of the Palestinian people, the illegal occupation of part of the territory of the Western Sahara, and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, which today is expanding into Pakistan.'

Global mobilisation from 12-17 Dec-

First Extraordinary Congress of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)

On 21 November, in his inaugural speech to 772 delegates representing two million members, President Chavez argued that the global economic crisis was an opportunity to accelerate the dismantling of capitalism and to construct socialism internationally. He asked PSUV congress delegates to consider his proposal to create a 'Fifth Socialist International as a new organisation that fits the time and the challenge in which we live... that can become an instrument of unification and coordination of the struggle of peoples to save this planet,' continuing:

'The epicentre of revolutionary struggle is in our America. Venezuela is the epicentre of this battle. It is up to us to assume the role of the vanguard...[to] realise and become aware of the huge responsibility we have on our shoulders...The capitalist system has managed to impose a destructive mode of production and development that is destroying the planet and threatening the survival of the human species...yet the big capitalist countries like the United States that are the most responsible [for the ecological crisis] do not want to assume responsibility.'

The next decade will be an era 'of great definitions' in global politics, Chavez said, arguing that by 2019, Venezuela must be a 'socialist country' with 'socialist values' based on the 'social ownership of the means of production.'

Chavez called on the PSUV to debate with the PCV and Patria Para Todos (PPT) in preparation for the National Assembly elections scheduled for September 2010. The PCV and PPT support Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution but ran alternative candidates in the 2008 elections. Citing Lenin's *State and Revolution*, Chavez argued for the necessity to 'eliminate the parasitic bourgeois state' in Venezuela 'in order to create a new revolutionary state from below that is a real mechanism for the construction of Socialism of the 21st Century.' For this it was necessary to increase the consciousness of the working class and consolidate the alliance between the PSUV and working class; the PSUV should 'assume the role of vanguard' and the union structure be transformed.

Chavez called for the party to be alert to and put an end to the 'vices of the old political class' that 'aim to infiltrate themselves into the government' and 'into the centre of the party,' which 'aim to neutralise and put a brake on the revolutionary movement'.

Honduras: mass resistance to sham elections



LUKE LUCAS

The Honduran people have organised a boycott of the coup regime's sham elections due on 29 November. They reject a US-brokered deal which calls for 'reconciliation' and requires the coup regime's 'President' Roberto Micheletti to step down for the four days before the elections in an attempt to make the poll seem legitimate. Organised through the National Front Against the Coup, the people demand a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the constitution, which currently represents the interests of the rich companies and landowning elite. Mass resistance has made it impossible for the regime to consolidate its power; it remains isolated internationally.

The US supports the regime militarily and financially, but has failed to legitimise the coup. Under its 30 October deal, both ousted President Zelaya and the coup regime agreed that Zelaya would return to office before the election. But there was no formal timetable set for the required Congress vote, and the Congress president announced the decision would be made after the election. The US State Department insisted that this decision did not undermine the accord. 'Since the accord never actually gave any kind of deadline...scheduling the vote on 2 December...isn't necessarily inconsistent,' a US spokesperson said. With Zelaya now also calling for an election boycott, hundreds of candidates have withdrawn from the process. Amongst them is the independent left-wing presidential candidate Carlos H. Reyes who said he will not participate in a fraudulent process, leaving two pro-coup candidates to contest the presidency.

Protests, strikes and road blockades have been a daily occurrence since Zelaya was ousted in June, with some days seeing hundreds of thousands marching in cities around Honduras. At least 21 activists have been killed. Some of their bodies showed signs of torture or rape. 3,500 people have been detained. The military has repeatedly

fired on unarmed demonstrators, and implemented a curfew for 45 days before the elections, annulling practically all rights and individual freedoms. Israel Salinas, a leader of the National Front Against the Coup, said 'this struggle is peaceful, organised, and is not getting desperate. The coup leaders are getting desperate - they haven't been able to govern a single day in tranquility and we will defeat them.'

The Front is composed of different progressive forces. Key components are the women's rights organisations which had led the push on Zelaya to call for a referendum on a Constituent Assembly. Bertha Caceres, a women's rights activist and Front leader, said a new constitution 'would be able to establish a precedent for the emancipation of women...this process of a new constitutional assembly leads to a real process of liberation.'

The Front has called for an international boycott of the US multinational Chiquita, formerly United Fruit Company, which played a major role in the coup. Chiquita has exploited the Honduran people for years and criticised Zelaya when he raised the Honduran minimum wage by 60%. The company is notorious for sponsoring the CIA coup against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, and has strong ties with the Honduran coup regime. Hondurans call for people around the world to stand in solidarity with their resistance to US imperialism, and to boycott Chiquita in particular.

Much to the dismay of the US, the coup regime has been unable to overcome its international isolation. Progressive forces in Latin America organised in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) have been crucial in ensuring that the Rio Group, the Organization of American States and the United Nations will not recognise the 29 November elections. The Rio Group, which includes all of Latin America and most of the Caribbean, declared it would consider the elections to be illegitimate if Zelaya were not first reinstated and in a further letter stated that 'the US cannot afford to maintain its deafening silence regarding the innumerable and grave human rights abuses committed by the coup government in Honduras - a silence that has become a conspicuous international embarrassment.' The only countries to date that have said they will recognise the outcome of the elections are the US and its allies Colombia, Panama, Peru and Costa Rica.

In the days before the election the coup regime has stepped up its attacks on the people. Micheletti has said any persons who by any means impede access to the electoral locations will be gaoled. Any election victor will have no legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Honduras or the rest of Latin America.

*Victory to the Honduran resistance!
Isolate the coup! Boycott Chiquita!*



A Cuban Communist Party representative described the proposal as 'excellent', although the party has made no formal statement. Other organisations such as Portugal's Bloco de Esquerda, Germany's Die Linke, and France's Parti de Gauche expressed interest. This proposal will force a serious debate among the many organisations claiming to be socialist across the world. Chavez emphasised inclusivity, saying that the April conference had to be much bigger than November's. He emphasised the error in having no revolutionary organisations from the US present.

Many communist parties, including those from Greece and Brazil, expressed strong opposition, whilst the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) expressed strong reservations. The Workers Party of Brazil immediately declared its priority to remain with the Sao Paulo Forum, which it launched in

ember will oppose US military bases in Colombia, Panama and around the world. Solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution in the face of permanent imperialist attacks will be organised. It will campaign for an 'international trial against George Bush for crimes against humanity, as the person principally responsible for the genocide against the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan'. It demanded an 'immediate and unconditional end to the criminal Yankee blockade' of Cuba and for the 'immediate liberation' of the Cuban Five - the five anti-terrorist activists imprisoned in the US.

It also called for solidarity with the people of Honduras in their opposition to the coup regime and demanded the return of the Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide 'kidnapped and removed from his post...by North American imperialism.'

US can't ignore Cuba's advances in health

CHARLES CHINWEIZU

The US is under pressure from sections of its ruling class to moderate the blockade of Cuba. In November, a high-level science delegation travelled to Cuba to 'explore research issues and multilateral science values that might be conducive to US-Cuba scientific cooperation'. The delegation included Anthony Rock, CEO of the Association of Science-Technology Centers and former acting Assistant Secretary of State for

Science, Technology, Environment and Health Affairs, and professor Lawrence Wilkerson, chief of staff to ex-Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2002 to 2005.

In September, a Cuban drug aimed at combating cancer, Nimotuzumab - monoclonal antibody (mAb) therapy, where the mAb is developed to specifically bind to target cells - underwent clinical trials in the US. This is a first, since previously US and British pharmaceutical companies have tested Cuban drugs in the US but not carried out clinical trials.

Ironically, if the clinical trials prove successful, the US blockade will mean that Nimotuzumab cannot be sold in the US, because 20% is owned by the Center of Molecular Immunology, the bio-

technological institution in Havana that developed the drug (and which channels all financial benefits back to the Cuban state).

The US regulatory body, the Food and Drug Administration, has approved mAb drugs for treating neck and head cancers, manufactured by Biotech Pharmaceutical in Beijing, for use in the US.

In September 2005, a year after the visit of Hu Jintao (General Secretary of the Communist Party of China) to Cuba, two factories for producing recombinant vaccines using Cuban technology started up, one of them in Changchun in China's northeastern Jilin province and one in Beijing. 'We put in the science, production and quality and our Chinese colleagues sell, administer and take care

of marketing,' said Eduardo Ojito, the Cuban head of production. According to Biotech Pharmaceutical director Xianhong Bai, 'Many Chinese companies choose foreign partners...Cuba is a country with a special view of technology.'

This September, Cuba and China renewed, for a further five years, an existing memorandum of intent for mutually beneficial biotechnological cooperation between the two countries.

Cuba's dedication to science as a social product and not one for private profit has resulted in the tiny blockaded island being at the forefront of medical research. The US can no longer ignore its success, and US interest exposes the absurd contradictions of the blockade itself.

'Ghosting' prisoners around the system is nothing new

In October 2009 reports by Chief Inspector of Prisons Ann Owers revealed that a number of vulnerable and 'difficult' prisoners were transferred out of Wandsworth and Pentonville prisons just prior to inspections last summer. The revelations are remarkable only because they provoked such wide media focus on a practice that has a long established history in the management of 'disruptive' prisoners. **JOHN BOWDEN** reports.

Owers revealed that the reciprocal exchange of 'difficult' prisoners was intended by senior prison management to subvert the inspections and influence her findings. She also found that the transfer, or 'ghosting', of some of these prisoners exposed them to serious risk and mistreatment. Her report describes the horrific reality of what took place:

'Together the prisons planned to swap a small number of prisoners for the duration of their respective inspections which, in the case of Wandsworth, was to remove five prisoners perceived to be potentially difficult. The consequences at Wandsworth were particularly serious. Three prisoners from the segregation unit and two from the vulnerable prisoners' wing were summarily told on the weekend before the inspection that they were to move to Pentonville. One was new to the prison and already identified as in need of protection. The others would miss medical appointments for serious conditions. Both were so distressed that they self-harmed. One, with a previous history of self-harm, tied a ligature around his neck, cut himself and was forcibly removed from his cell. He was taken to reception, bloody, handcuffed and dressed only in underwear. He attempted to self-harm a further three times immediately after the move to Pentonville. The other took an overdose of prescription drugs and needed to go to hospital. On his return he was nevertheless taken by taxi to Pentonville.'

Following the inspection of Wandsworth the prisoners were immediately transferred back to the prison.

The Prisons Ombudsman is separately investigating the suicide of another prisoner who was moved to Pentonville the week before the Wandsworth inspection and held there over the inspection period.

There is a conspicuous silence in Owers' report about the role of the prisons' doctors in the transfer of these vulnerable and self-harming prisoners, although prisoners well accustomed to medical neglect and the collaborative role of prison doctors in brutalisation would not be surprised by the compliance of prison medical staff in such a brutal practice. Neither is it surprising that Wandsworth, in particular, would resort to such inhumanly cruel methods to subvert an official inspection. Owers politely describes Wandsworth as 'a prison which has been struggling to change a negative staff culture, and where levels of use of force by staff are still of concern'. Prisoners more accurately refer to Wandsworth as 'The Hate Factory', a jail where staff violence and brutality are endemic and are condoned by



Wandsworth Prison

senior management and ignored at Prison Service headquarters level.

Owers concludes that: 'The attempts at managerial level to subvert the inspection process at the expense of prisoners' well-being is deplorable, not only because of the effects on prisoners, but because of the underlying mindset: that prisoners are merely pieces to be moved around the board to meet performance targets or burnish the reputation of the prison concerned.'

The real horror of what Owers uncovered (which in fact was initially exposed by the prisoners concerned themselves) can be measured by how uncharacteristic and rare it is for the current Chief Inspector of Prisons to be so critical of any prison. Owers was appointed by New Labour following the abrupt termination of David Ramsbotham's tenure as Prisons Inspector after a series of scathing reports about the treatment of prisoners. She has dutifully fulfilled her role as government lapdog by being consistently anodyne in her reports, up until the recent revelations.

Such was the media impact of Owers' reports that Justice Secretary Jack Straw, certainly no supporter of prisoners' rights and in fact a zealous advocate of more oppressive prison regimes, was forced to order Prison Service head Phil Wheatley to conduct an internal investigation. There was of course not the slightest possibility of Straw allowing an independent inquiry or even appointing someone independent to chair an investigation. Indeed, the subsequent report, by Deputy Director General Michael Spurr, concluded that two

managers at Wandsworth should be given formal written warnings but exonerated the governing governors of both prisons - Prison Service high-fliers Ian Mulholland and Nick Leader. Leader, who was governor of Pentonville, is now in charge of high security Whitemoor. Mulholland, who was Wandsworth's governor, is Prison Service Area Manager for Wales. There were no sackings.

In media interviews Wheatley feigned 'deep regret', but emphasised that the practice of ghosting 'unmanageable' prisoners for convenience was unprecedented and totally at variance with official Prison Service policy. Of course he knew full well that ghosting 'difficult' prisoners around the system was a long established practice because he himself had employed the strategy during his long career as a prison governor. In Gartree prison during the 1980s Wheatley, then an Assistant Governor, was renowned for his use of the 'lay-down' system - the temporary transfer of 'disruptive' prisoners for a 'cooling off' period. But Wheatley and most other governors at that time were merely implementing official Prison Service policy in the form of Circular Instruction 10/74, which authorised prison staff to temporarily transfer 'difficult' prisoners 'in the interests of good order and discipline'. The official sanctioning of such a method of control and punishment allowed authoritarian zealots to abuse their positions of power over prisoners and resulted eventually in the sort of treatment highlighted by Owers at Wandsworth and Pentonville.

An even more cruelly refined form of the 'lay-down' system was the 'Continuous Assessment' circuit or 'ghost-train', where prisoners who were considered especially 'disruptive' were transferred continuously between prison segregation units every 28 days. Many prisoners were kept on the circuit for years in a deliberate attempt to psychologically break them. None were medically or psychologically monitored during their long, brutalising punishment, and some already mentally damaged prisoners were completely destroyed by it. Irish Republican prisoners were especially targeted, as were those considered to be politically motivated in their 'subversive activities'.

Probably even more nauseating than Wheatley's fake concern over Owers' revelations was the handwringing regret

of middle class liberals like Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, who described Mulholland and Leader as 'good people' and as governors 'known to be caring and competent', while Harry Fletcher, head of the National Association of Probation Officers, described them as 'progressive'. Prisoners unfortunate enough to have shared a jail with Nick Leader, especially, have a radically different view, based on direct experience. As an Assistant Governor of Long Lartin and Whitemoor in the 1980s and 1990s, Leader earned a reputation for excessive use of the 'lay-down' system as an arbitrary punishment against prisoners he perceived challenged his authority. In 1995 he was complicit in a successful campaign of harassment against a senior medical officer at Whitemoor, who had voiced complaints about the treatment of prisoners in the segregation unit. She eventually resigned.

It is inconceivable that prior to her inspection of Wandsworth and Pentonville, Owers knew nothing of the practice of ghosting 'difficult' prisoners for disciplinary reasons, and her outrage was obviously because she considered it a blatant attempt to undermine her own authority.

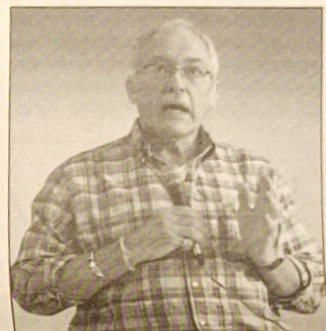
John Bowden is at HMP Glenochil

No solidarity from the POA

Brian Caton, General Secretary of the Prison Officers Association (POA) has recently left the Labour Party and joined the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW). On 7 November, proudly wearing a Remembrance Day poppy, Caton addressed both SPEW's annual rally *Socialism 2009* and a conference organised by the RMT union. At *Socialism 2009* he spoke of the POA being 'shackled' by anti-union laws and at the RMT meeting, describing the POA's treatment by Labour and Tory governments, said Labour is like 'the prisoner who kicks you in the face - and apologises'. (Presumably the Tories are like a prisoner who kicks POA members in the face and is unrepentant.)

Caton's inappropriate metaphors aside, it is sickening, though unsurprising, to watch the Socialist Party fawning over its new member and proclaiming the POA as the vanguard of left trade unionism. The POA has never supported the struggles of prisoners for their rights; on the contrary its spokesmen have taken every opportunity to attack and vilify prisoners and to play on fears and stereotypes to fight its own corner.

Just days after addressing these two meetings, Caton and POA Chair Colin Moses issued a press release, condemning a compensation payment to a prisoner who had apparently successfully sued the Prison Service for £1.4 million for his becoming addicted to drugs while in prison. The POA was incandescent. Moses said: 'This level of payout is beyond belief... Jack Straw, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Justice, said he would get tough in relation to the Human Rights of prisoners and if this is his idea of tough measures it is no wonder he is at the helm of a Service in crisis... This has to stop', while Caton chimed in:



Brian Caton

'If the Ministry of Justice and Home Office believe that it is right and proper to pay this level of compensation out to someone who took drugs in prison, then you have to ask why do our armed forces personnel have to fight for compensation when they have been severely injured whilst serving their country? Why do POA members and victims of crime have to pay for treatment due to a draconian compensation scheme that is in place to rob money from the victims of crime under the guise of the CICA [Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority] Scheme?'

Nowhere in this outburst does the POA tell us that the claimant was an innocent man who served 11 years in prison for a crime he did not commit, who did indeed become addicted to heroin while in prison, and who after his release suffered a stroke, which has left him with impaired speech and limited use of one arm. It is this scenario, not the one that the POA describes, that led Ellis Sherwood, who, along with Michael O'Brien and Darren Hall, was framed by South Wales police for the murder of a Cardiff newsagent, to sue for compensation.

Nicki Jameson

Fighting censorship

In the last issue of FRFI we reported on attempts to prevent subscribers in Wakefield and Woodhill prisons from receiving the paper. We sent letters of complaint and made it clear we will take legal action if FRFI is censored. We have now received letters from both prisons and from the Directorate of High Security Prisons backing down. The Prisons Ombudsman has also upheld a complaint about the censorship in Wakefield.

Unfortunately, the fight on this front is never over and it has already been reported to us that even after Wakefield

had written to us accepting that they could not impose a blanket ban, they still initially withheld the last issue of FRFI on the spurious grounds that it was 'not suitable for distribution on the wing due to the sensitive content of certain articles' and only issued it following further complaints.

We will always respond to attempts to censor FRFI and ask all our readers in prison to notify us any time the paper is stopped, and to provide us with copies of any correspondence (such as judgments from the Ombudsman) which will be useful on future occasions. ■

FRFI ROUND UP

Fight racism, fascism and imperialism

British capitalism is in crisis and British imperialism is facing a severe test in Afghanistan. The ruling class is divided over what direction is best to take, but is united in one thing – its attack upon the working class. It is urgent therefore that we build a revolutionary movement on the streets of Britain. Over the past two months FRFI has been actively campaigning to do just that, from London to Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, below are details of just some of the actions that we have been involved in.

Fascists off our streets!

FRFI activists have joined the thousands confronting the fascist English Defence League (EDL) on the streets of Britain. In September, EDL thugs were outside a mosque in Harrow, north London, an area with a significant Muslim population and were present again in Manchester on 10 October. They plan to hold more 'demonstrations' and FRFI members will continue to join those confronting them. In Glasgow, the Scottish Defence League (SDL)



Activists from FRFI, TCAR and others protest against the BNP's presence in Newcastle city centre on 28 November.

marched on 14 November (see page 5). After the protest FRFI supporters took a lead in organising a meeting of those who had been involved in the protest. Nearly 50 people attended on 17 November. There was intense criticism of the role of the SWP/UAF in the events of 14 November and the meeting

formally established Glasgow Anti-Fascist Alliance, which will campaign on an anti-racist basis. The following day the UAF's own meeting was far less well attended, showing that their opportunist politics, far from building a 'united front', have driven people away.

Fight Labour racism!

FRFI comrades also attended the demonstration outside the BBC's Television Centre in West London on 22 October when Nick Griffin, BNP leader, was invited onto *Question Time*, where we distributed our leaflet 'Who is more dangerous – Labour or the BNP?', making the point that Labour is the most dangerous as it is the one with state power and should be the focus of anti-racist activism.

In Newcastle FRFI continues to play an active part in Tyneside Community Action for Refugees (TCAR). Recent months have seen a process of exhaustive discussion and open debate within TCAR on the network's future direction, culminating in a revised set of principles voted in at a General Meeting on 10 October. These discussions arose from the links which mem-

bers have increasingly been making between the situation of asylum seekers and others in Britain also under attack from racism. Collaboration began with the first Northern March Against Racism organised by TCAR in January 2008 and followed by two further marches, a regional conference attended by over 130 people, and more recently a string of successful 'Speak Out Against Racism' events. The new principles set out in detail TCAR's wide-ranging opposition to all forms of racism, and make explicit TCAR's longstanding opposition to imperialism and support for the right to resist. As the principles conclude: 'Self defence is a human right!'

In Sunderland a regular FRFI group has begun to meet for political discussion, education and action, currently building towards a second Sunderland Speak Out Against Racism on 12 December. Comrades also attended a protest organised by Congolese asylum seekers outside Brand Street Immigration Reporting Centre in Glasgow in November, following the detention of three people by the Home Office.

Speaking tour

In October FRFI organised a speaking tour around the country. In London on 17 October David Yaffe spoke about the capitalist crisis and the growth of inter-imperialist rivalries, while in a second session, there was a detailed analysis of how Cuba survived periods of economic crisis without betraying its socialist principles. Meetings on the crisis were held in Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sunderland and Glasgow. A central theme was the parasitic character of British capitalism, and how this determines social and political developments in the country – for instance, the declining influence of the left, and its movement towards opportunism. The weakness of the left is as much ideological as numerical: it provides its members and supporters with an appalling level of political education. Recognising this, Liverpool FRFI has organised a series of educational 'What is capitalism?' There have been five meetings to date, starting with the political significance of a sound understanding of Marxism, and then following the first chapter of Marx's *Capital* to lay the basis for a solid grasp of today's crisis. The series will continue in the New Year with two further topics: 'What is imperialism?' and 'What is socialism?'

Workers' fightback!

In October and November FRFI activists in London and the North East visited the postal workers' picket lines to show our solidarity, and were met with a positive response from strikers on the need for anti-racist unity against Labour's attacks. In Newcastle FRFI activists organised a picket of Reed and Manpower, two of the main recruitment agencies involved in hiring casual labour on behalf of Royal Mail to undermine the strikes. We call for solidarity with striking workers!

Troops out of Afghanistan! Hands off the Middle East!

On 24 October FRFI marched as part of the anti-imperialist contingent on the National London Stop the War demo. We chanted against the murderous occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq, called for the immediate withdrawal of troops and for the Labour cabinet to be put on trial for war crimes. In Manchester FRFI supporters attended the demonstration outside the Brimar factory in Chadderton on the 17 October. Brimar manufactures electronic viewing equipment which are found in fighter planes, attack helicopters, tanks, armoured vehicles and ground-based missile launchers. Israeli Apache helicopter pilots in Gaza, US marines in tanks in Fallujah, British Apache pilots in Afghanistan, and US fighter pilots over Iraq all aim and fire their deadly weaponry with display equipment made at Brimar's factory in Chadderton. The demonstration was the start of what is planned to be a concerted campaign, Target Brimar, against the factory, www.targetbrimar.org.uk

On 7 November, at the start of the days of action called by the 'Grassroots Campaign Against the Apartheid Wall' in the West Bank and Gaza, Manchester supporters of FRFI organised a successful rolling picket of banks and shops in the city centre that support Israel in one way or another. Nationwide activists have held pickets of Marks & Spencer in solidarity with the people of Palestine, building towards an 'Israel: Off Your Trolley' day of action on 5 December, targeting a string of key supporters of Israel on the British high street.

It is imperative that we continue to build on the anti-racist and anti-imperialist work that we are doing. Look at the Events list on page 15 to see what we are doing and join us in action!



FRFI marched to stop the war on 24 October 2009

REVIEW

Memoirs of a radical lawyer

Michael Mansfield
ISBN 978 0 7478 7864 9.
Bloomsbury, London 2009. 496pp, £20

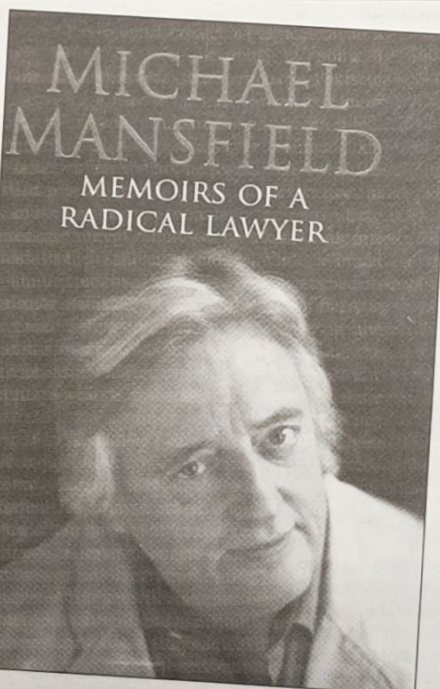
The English legal system, like all legal systems, is an instrument of class rule. Its system of precedents, cases, statutes, its rituals and its personnel reflect this. While the English constitution – unwritten – celebrates the 'rule of law', maintaining that all British subjects are governed by the same law equally and impartially, this is only a fiction that the ruling class maintains so that it can bask in the glow of its own righteousness while disciplining the inferior classes. A short visit to any magistrates' or crown court will show you the realities. Most judges and barristers are toffs. A high proportion of politicians are lawyers. The criminal law is designed to control the working class, the civil law to defend property rights and corporate interests. Working class burglars are imprisoned; banks that specialise in daylight robbery are rewarded. Ordinary folk who deliberately, or even accidentally, cheat the benefit system of a few

pounds are vilified; MPs who fiddle their expenses to the tune of thousands get a pension. It is remarkable, then, that among this morass of privilege and double-dealing there are a few decent lawyers. Michael Mansfield QC is one of them.

There is an interesting description in Mansfield's *Memoirs* of his education and admission to the Bar. Education for English barristers was for centuries conducted through Inns of Court requiring pupil barristers to eat a large number of meals and train on the job at a set of Chambers with no pay. Only the offspring of the ruling class could either understand the process or afford it. It was only when the Law Society (governing solicitors) instituted exams and proper training, that the Bar Council thought it should train barristers or get left behind. Much of the nonsense and lack of funding remains and consequently barristers are overwhelmingly from privileged backgrounds. Mansfield came from a petit bourgeois family but was educated at private school. Nonetheless, somehow, somewhere, he learned to care about justice, fair-

ness and human rights.

Mansfield's *Memoirs* of his career – he was called to the Bar in 1967 – reads like a catalogue of the most famous, most controversial and difficult cases of the last 40 years. From the Angry Brigade in the 1970s to the recent murder of Jean Charles de Menezes, and much else besides, Mansfield has applied his remarkable legal abilities for the benefit of ordinary people oppressed by the law. In 1973 he represented Irish Republicans Marian and Dolores Price who were charged with bombings in London (which included the Old Bailey and Mansfield's own car parked outside) at a time when it was almost impossible to find legal representation for anyone accused of IRA involvement. Mansfield led the defence team for the Orgreave riot trial during the miners' strike 1984-5, and defended prisoners who rose up against the system at Rislley (1989) and Strangeways (1990). Most of the major political issues of this era are dealt with.



That is not to say that Mansfield has rid himself of illusions in the system. He thinks that institutional racism may have decreased as a result of the

Macpherson Inquiry into the killing of Stephen Lawrence. He has illusions in the effectiveness of international law to right wrongs and protect human rights. It must be galling to have watched former colleagues like Vera Baird QC (Solicitor General) and Keir Starmer QC (Director of Public Prosecutions) accept the Labour government's shilling to batter working class and oppressed people. It must be infuriating to know that their government has launched a devastating attack on legal aid, at the same time creating hundreds of new criminal laws and devising new systems, like ASBOs, to deprive working class people of access to justice. To give him his due, Mike Mansfield has stuck to his principles and that makes him stand out and makes his book worth reading. There is also, incidentally, a very good Further Reading section!

Carol Brickley

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

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LETTERS

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Thousands march to free Basque prisoners

On 17 October, thousands of demonstrators crammed on to the streets of San Sebastian/Donostia to demand freedom for Rafael Diez Usabiaga, former General Secretary of the Basque trade union LAB and four other activists from the independence movement who were detained on 13 October.

The demonstration was called by the Basque unions ELA, LAB, ESK, STEE/EILAS, EHNE and HIRU, and received messages of solidarity from trade unions around the world.

The arrests and detentions, ordered by Judge Baltasar Garzon, were made under the Spanish Law on Political Parties, which effectively made participation in Basque independence activities illegal. This law is not only unfair

but was created and is being used to try to wipe out political and social choice. What the state has been doing by virtue of the anti-terrorist agenda signed by the Partido Popular and the PSOE in December 2001 is political genocide and we must stop it.

These detentions show the political attitude of the Spanish state, which wants to deny the right to political participation to those who hold certain ideas. We therefore must condemn, once again, the use to which the judicial system is being put to serve political purposes. Special legislation and exceptional measures are being taken every day by special courts like the Spanish National Court against political dissent in the Basque country.

The majority of Basque trade unionists want to show their deep concern about the anti-democratic, authoritarian and repressive drift of the Spanish state which has been the scene of the detentions. The Spanish state continues to deny the different realities in its territory, especially the Basque one. By acting in this way, the Spanish state once more confirms that it offers a single option for the Basque people: the perpetuation of conflict, rejecting a democratic option.

The organisations forming the majority of the Basque trade unions continue to reaffirm our commitment to a democratic solution to the Basque conflict. And we continue to call on the Basque working class to redouble their commitment to this objective.

IGOR URRUTIKOETXEA
(Secretary of International Relations, LAB – Basque trade union)

Hostage of the state

Many activities among people in prison frequently render me disgusted by the corruption that proliferates. Terry Allen's case is one such example. In a recent letter he told me: 'In 1969 I burgled the Horncastle Garage and stole some money, I worked for the place and got questioned about the burglary but was never charged. A while later I read in our local newspaper that a lad got sentenced to two years in prison for my crime. I wondered how on earth did he get convicted? Because obviously there couldn't have been any evidence against him.'

Subsequently Terry was arrested for another burglary and he confessed to the Horncastle Garage job, telling police an innocent man had been imprisoned for his crime. Their reply? – 'You ever tell anyone what you have just told me and you will find yourself so deep in shit you'll never find your way out of it.' Terry was just 17 years old at the time.

At the moment Terry is confined to HMP Coldingley, having been found guilty on 9 May 1986 of the murder of his friend, 26-year-old Anita Kirkwood, on 17 July 1985. He received a life sentence with a tariff of 16 years.

The day before Anita's body was found, Terry tried to commit suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning following a serious

disagreement with his common law wife. Ambulance men were forced to break his two front teeth to insert an airway. He was attached to a life support machine for two days and received a complete blood transfusion as his blood was 76% contaminated with carbon monoxide.

A week later police removed him from hospital. There were, then, no external injuries and Terry was questioned for two days. Then, when taken to HMP Winchester, Terry had a large burn hole in his right ankle and his left arm was bruised black and blue.

One consequence of carbon monoxide poisoning is memory impairment. Terry remembers neither his time in police custody nor his alleged confession. Neither does he remember ever being declared fit to be questioned.

Terry argues that the trial judge misdirected the jury, and plans to appeal are in hand. He has even named the person he knows to be responsible for Anita's death. In June 1986 he was visited in prison by police from Kidlington who confirmed his suspicions.

However, the police told him they could do nothing as the case was closed and their hands were tied. Terry wrote to the Home Office who contacted the relevant police force, only to be told that

Terry had lied and was, in their view, guilty of Anita's murder.

I would ask concerned comrades to write to Terry, expressing solidarity, at: Terrence William Allen A6119AD A102, HMP Coldingley, Bisley, Woking, Surrey, GU24 9EX

GEORGE COOMBS
Brighton

Prisoners write...

What democracy?

Sultan Muhammed and Aabid Khan would like to state they are innocent (innocent until proven Muslim). We will continue our fight for justice. If the UK is a democracy, democracy is hypocrisy. Woe to its lies against us. We would just like to also say that FRFI writes some interesting articles.

SULTAN MUHAMMED (TT5021) and
AABID KHAN (WW4708)
HMP Belmarsh

Keep sending FRFI

Thank you for sending me your newspaper. I'm very grateful and would hope to keep on receiving it frequently. Keep up the good work!

RANGZIEB AHMED (A6326AC)
HMP Full Sutton

Met police target black and Asian children

Figures released by police in November 2009 show that police have doubled the number of black and Asian primary school children they stop and search in London in the last year. Children as young as ten were stopped 755 times between April 2008 and March 2009, an increase of 80% on the previous year. The number of ten-year-old Asian children stopped rose 130% and the number of black children 100%, compared to a rise of 54% for white ten-year-olds.

In the last year in Southwark, southeast London, which has the highest stop-and-search rates in London, 13,824 under-18s were stopped; of these, 48 were aged under ten. According to the *Sunday Telegraph*, police forces around the country have searched children as young as two. The article also reported that more than 300 children a day are having their DNA taken by police and added to the national database.

While overall rates of stop-and-search under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act have fallen, these powers, where police do not have to

show reasonable suspicion, are increasingly used against children, with 2,331 under-15s in London stopped in the last year, including 58 children aged nine or under.

This assault on children was defended by ACPO spokesman Craig Mackay on the grounds that, with the majority of stop-and-searches being done on suspicion of possession of drugs, offensive weapons or stolen goods, or of terrorist intent, 'I have no evidence which suggests the pattern would be any different for under-tens'!

CAT WIENER
South London

NHS: don't give up the fight!

In FRFI 211 we reported that in July, Camden NHS awarded a £20 million contract for running its new GP-led health centre in north London to Care UK, a private company with a poor track record and many contracts across Britain.

However, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) has had to abandon the contract following a legal

challenge which is forcing them to consult the public. In the first of such cases, NHS Camden has been forced to concede that it acted unlawfully by not having conducted a proper public consultation, not only with regard to the private company Care UK but also with regard to having a 'GP-led' health centre at all.

Camden NHS has been one of the leading proponents of working with the private sector in primary care. In February 2008, the PCT awarded contracts for services from three local GP surgeries to UnitedHealth. In July 2008, it and another north London trust were found to have held secret talks with private companies about the future possibility of running polyclinics.

The government demand, following the Darzi report for London, was that every PCT should have a 'GP-led' health centre. The anti-privatisation campaigners' victory in Camden paves the way for the possibility of legal challenge in PCTs where the contracts have not yet been signed.

Congratulations to all those involved in this campaign. It is up to all of us to continue the struggle.

HANNAH CALLER
North London

EVENTS

LONDON

Tuesdays 5 January and 2 February
1-2pm

Fight Labour's racist immigration laws!

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

Every Thursday 6-8pm

and Saturday 19 December 12-3pm

Demonstration for Palestine – Victory to the Intifada

Picket Marks & Spencer,
Oxford Street, WC1
Nearest tube March Arch

Monthly readers and supporters group

Discussion of FRFI articles.
Contact us for details of reading material and venue.

For further details
Call 020 7837 1688
email londonfrfi@gmail.com

London School of Economics FRFI student society

Regular educational meetings

Contact us for details of reading material and room number.
email frfi_lse@yahoo.co.uk

NEWCASTLE

Every Saturday 3pm

Tyneside Community Action for Refugees organising meetings

Downstairs at Amnesty Bookshop,
bottom of Westgate Road
tynesidecam@yahoo.co.uk

Saturday 9 January 1pm

TCAR monthly general meeting

St Thomas' Church, Haymarket

Saturday 30 January 12-3pm

TCAR Speak Out Against Racism

Open mic for all anti-racists
Grey's Monument

Every Thursday 5-7pm

Demonstration for Palestine

Victory to the Intifada
Picket Marks & Spencer
Northumberland Street

We also have street actions in Newcastle every Saturday 11am-2pm and other stalls and meetings around the region.
For details call 07858 346 276 or email frfinortheast@googlemail.com

SUNDERLAND

Saturday 12 December 12-3pm

Speak Out Against Racism

Open mic for all anti-racists
Vine Place (between Park Lane Metro and Bridges shopping centre)

MANCHESTER

Tuesday 15 December 7.30pm

FRFI readers group

The Lass O' Gowrie,
Charles Street

GLASGOW

Thursday 10 December 7.30pm

Public forum: The fight against racism and fascism

Langside Hall,
1 Langside Avenue

Tuesday 19 January 7.30pm

Public forum: Understanding capitalism and crisis

Langside Hall

For further details of events and activities in Scotland
Call 07779 785 529
email friscotland@yahoo.com

ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE

LONDON

Wednesday 13 January 7.30pm

Discussion of Chapter 9

Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution

The Compass, Penton Street, N1

Wednesday 10 February 7-9.30pm

Discussion of Chapter 10

Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution

Venue as above

For further details

Call 020 7837 1688

email office@ratb.org.uk

MANCHESTER

Sunday 6 December 2pm

Cine Revolution – showing of John Pilger's

War on Democracy, Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel

Sunday 31 January 2pm

Cine Revolution – showing of Che

part 1 Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel

BNP gets bloody nose

The British National Party has hijacked the Zulu Security Firm that used to be run by black football supporters of Birmingham City Football Club. These people weren't angels, but supplied a genuine service to the community by stopping conflicts in night clubs between rival gang members in Harmondsworth.

The baton has now been taken over by a group of white males with allegiance to the BNP. They share the same ideology and are easily led. This group has been agitating the community ever since. On 8 August their attempt to stir up racial tension was fortunately

miscalculated and the 20 or so members present at the time got a decent bloodied nose by members of the Muslim community, but the BNP, who hang around like a bad smell, refused to adhere to the will of the people and returned in greater numbers on 5 September. That incident was only ended by a large police presence and police brutality.

The community reserves the right to denounce the BNP and the activities of their cowardly foot soldiers at every opportunity.

LEROY SMITH
HMP Woodhill

Revolutionary Cuba: the streets are ours

This Rock around the Blockade pamphlet covers everything you need to know about the Cuban Revolution, from Columbus to Batista, the Bay of Pigs invasion to the Battle of Ideas. Buy your copy today for only £3.95 inc p&p

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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Stop environmental disaster FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

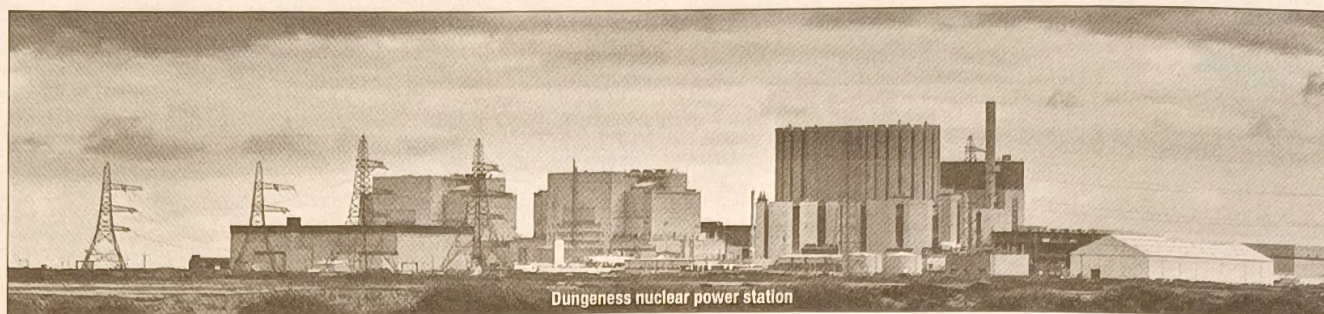
At present, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has risen to around 385ppm (parts per million) from 280ppm before the industrial revolution, resulting in an increase of 0.74C in the period 1906-2005.¹ Further warming cannot be predicted exactly due to positive feedback systems (ice caps and glaciers melting, therefore reducing the amount of heat reflected away from the earth; increases in temperature increasing water evaporation, which itself creates a greenhouse gas, therefore increasing temperatures further; as greenhouse gases increase, the earth and oceans cannot absorb as much of them which can lead to 'tipping points' etc), so the bourgeoisie concentrate on the conservative predictions.

When Gordon Brown was Chancellor, the Treasury commissioned a report by Nicholas Stern, a former chief economist at the World Bank, on the economics of climate change.² The Stern Review proposes a climate stabilisation regime in which greenhouse gas emissions would peak by 2015 and then drop 1 per cent per year after that, so as to stabilise CO₂ equivalents at 550ppm, leading to an estimated average global temperature increase of 3C. The report itself admits this may be enough to trigger a collapse of the Gulf Stream, leading to Siberian-like conditions in Western Europe. Most climatologists argue for the stabilisation of CO₂ equivalents at 450ppm or less, but for Stern, 'Paths requiring very rapid emissions cuts are unlikely to be economically viable.'

Hence, Labour's response to climate change is technology and cap and trade. The technology fix is mainly nuclear power and the unproven carbon capture for coal power stations. Massive burning of coal in the industrial revolution was a technological fix for the depletion of woods and peat, previously used for burning. Nuclear power, like coal, leaves a time bomb for future generations, but just like our toxic waste shipped to Africa it is a problem for others to deal with the consequences. To enable nuclear power to be profitable, a carbon tariff will be set, forcing up the price of electricity generated by coal and gas, pushing increasing numbers of the working class into fuel poverty. Biofuels used as fuel for vehicles was also dressed up as a green technology fix, which caused big rises in world food prices, making more of the world's poor hungry to feed the cars of the wealthy. Cap and trade is to set limits on carbon emissions, where the wealthy can pay extra to exceed limits. It is proposed that half of Britain's 'cuts' in emissions by 2050 will be through the purchase of permits, meaning Britain will only reduce its emissions by 50% of what it says. Only imperialist arrogance could come up with a solution that keeps the majority of the world under-developed.

So it is with this background we approach the UN summit on climate change in Copenhagen, which will be attended by top government officials from the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Japan, Australia, Brazil and Indonesia. US President Obama will pass through early on, en route to collect his Nobel Peace Prize, but has not indicated whether he will attend for the last two days alongside other world leaders. China is sending Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, who is head of the climate group in the state council.

The aim of the summit is to produce an agreement to replace the Kyoto agreement which runs out in 2012. The Kyoto agreement set legally binding targets for emission reductions for the world's richest countries acknowledging that it was their responsibility



Dungeness nuclear power station

'It is necessary to point out that the consumer societies are those fundamentally responsible for the atrocious destruction of the environment... A just international economic order must be applied. Pay the ecological debt instead of the foreign debt. Eradicate hunger and not humanity... Tomorrow will be too late for what we should have done a long time ago.'

Fidel Castro at the Rio Earth Summit 1992

Seventeen years after Fidel Castro spoke those words, the imperialists have largely forgone outright denial of the science of climate change, instead preferring economics to justify doing very little to halt the process.

DAVID HETFIELD reports.

for creating the vast majority of the greenhouse gases. Eventually, 182 countries ratified the Kyoto treaty; the US refused.

The Copenhagen summit has set a very limited framework for discussion:

1. How much are the industrialised countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases?
2. How much are major developing countries such as China and India willing to do to limit the growth of their emissions?
3. How is the help needed by developing countries to engage in reducing their emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change going to be financed?
4. How is that money going to be managed?

Preliminary discussions suggest that no agreement will be reached, African nations walked out of a UN meeting in Barcelona, supported by the G77 group of 130 nations, in disgust at targets proposed by the imperialist nations. Bruno Sekoli, chair of the Least Developed Countries group, said: 'Africa and Africans are dying now while those who are historically responsible are not taking actions.' The US is proposing they cut emissions by 4% on 1990 figures (dressed up as a 17% cut on 2005), and the aggregate for all industrialised countries' proposals amounts to only 10% by 2020, whilst the G77 demand 40% cuts. Climate scientists say overall emissions need to be reduced by 25-40% by 2020 and 80% by 2050.

Whilst doing very little to change their emissions, the imperialists are trying to put the blame on the major developing countries, especially China and India. China has become the biggest emitter of CO₂ by nation, but on a per capita basis emits less than a quarter of the US and half the UK amount. Out of all the G7 and EU countries, only Latvia and Romania emit less than China on a per capita basis. Historically, over the period 1906-2005 (which excludes the industrialisation of Britain, US, France and Germany, but includes years when China was occupied by Japan and India occupied by Britain), China's emissions were



Bangladeshi villagers made homeless by floods caused by rising sea-levels

16% of the G7. India's per capita emissions were around an eighth of the UK's.³ Even these figures have an imperialist bias; while China produces cheap consumer goods for the West, the energy emissions needed to produce these goods are blamed on China. Gas flaring by companies exporting oil from Nigeria, led by Shell, has produced more greenhouse gases than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa put together, excluding South Africa.⁴ They count as Nigeria's emissions. China has announced it will cut emissions by 40-45% on 2005 levels by 2020.⁵ President Obama has announced the rather more modest target of reducing US greenhouse gas emissions by 17% by 2020.

The imperialist nations have caused climate change, grown rich in the process, and made the poor of the world suffer. Therefore the rest of the world demands they pay to allow poorer nations to adapt to the impact of climate change and to reduce their own emissions while developing. Gordon Brown, who likes to champion the poor in rhetoric, suggested the fund for poor nations reach £100bn a year by 2020, administered by the World Bank. An insignificant amount compared to the debt of under-developed nations (over \$2.9 trillion for the poorest 144 countries),⁶ and also compared to the gains made by the imperialists in their plunder of the earth. The 'ecological debt' owed by the imperialists has been calculated at \$13trillion a year.⁷

The publication of the UN Population Fund's report *State of World Population 2009*⁸ was used by some news agencies and organisations like the Optimum Population Trust to blame climate change on rapid population increases, ie blaming poor countries, the rise in the middle classes in China and India, and immigration. The report does not reach that conclusion. In fact, in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 2005, the population growth was 18.5% and growth in CO₂ emissions was 2.4%, whereas US population grew by 4% with an increase in emissions of 14%.⁹ Population growth is just one of the red herrings about climate change, to avoid the fact that it is capitalist development that is unsustainable, causing poverty, destruction and climate change.

It seems no coincidence that as the Copenhagen summit approaches, thousands of emails and documents have been hacked from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia, selectively published around the world on websites, and used by climate change sceptics in an attempt to rubbish the science. These defenders of imperialist waste and destruction have used phrases in informal emails between scientists in an attempt to sow doubt about global warming science. It is part of what an unnamed EU diplomat called 'managing people's expectations' in the event of no deal being reached in Copenhagen. However, they are unable to challenge the real science, which is showing that

climate change and its effects are happening now at a faster rate than anticipated by the last IPCC report published in 2007.¹⁰

A world to win

'From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as *boni patres familias* [good heads of the household].' (Karl Marx)¹¹

Whilst the planet is divided into imperialist and exploited nations, the only deal on climate change will be an imperialist deal. These people who defend war criminals and torturers, promote racism with their immigration controls and wars of terror, allow children to die of curable diseases, feed cars while people starve and destroy forests to grow plants for the cosmetic industries, are not going to make the planet a clean and healthy place for all to live and develop in. If you want to halt climate change you have to follow Cuba, the only nation in the entire world that has achieved a high level of human development, with a human development index greater than 0.8, while also having a per capita ecological footprint below the world's average.¹² Join Cuba, fight imperialism, build socialism!

- 1 International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Methane, nitrous oxide and the three types of industrial gases - sulphur hexafluoride, HFCs and PFCs are also greenhouse gases. For the sake of ease, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is used as a standard, and the remaining gases are converted to their CO₂ equivalents. Present concentration of CO₂ equivalents is 430ppm.
- 2 Referred to as the Stern Review. Details of the Stern Review from *The Ecological Revolution* by John Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review Press.
- 3 www.guardian.co.uk/environment/datablog/2009/sep/02/co2-emissions-historical
- 4 www.guardian.co.uk/environment/datablog/2009/oct/22/carbon-emissions-data-country-world
- 5 www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/sep/28/population-growth-super-rich
- 6 www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/nov/26/china-targets-cut-carbon-footprint
- 7 www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/?lid=98
- 8 Quoted in *The Ecological Revolution* by John Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review Press.
- 9 www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/
- 10 www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/sep/28/population-growth-super-rich
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