

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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British troops guard Basra: behind them the city burns

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# WAR FOR GLOBAL DOMINATION

The US/British Coalition war on Iraq has immense consequences not only for the countries involved, the invaders and the invaded, and the neighbouring countries in the Middle East, but also for the rest of the world. This war is a watershed, marking the complete disintegration of the old world order which subsisted from the Second World War onwards. This war initiates the new century that the US has marked down as its own: this is its opening bid for global domination. The British ruling class, under the leadership of its most committed imperialists, the Labour government, is no poodle, but a greedy partner in this enterprise. The Coalition strategy is both a war for oil and for stamping its authority on future world relations. We should be clear, however, that while the US may want to claim 'a new American century', and Britain may demand its share, the seeds of their own destruction have already been sown. Alongside wars come revolutions.

The Coalition war began on 19 March after months of diplomatic manoeuvring, strong-arm tactics, and behind the scenes, the remorseless movement of troops and war materiel to the region around Iraq. US Joint Chief of Staff, General Tommy Franks, promised 'this will be a campaign unlike any other in history', comprised of 'shock, surprise, flexibility and overwhelming

force'. 'S, G and A', he said, adopting the style of an advertising executive, 'special forces, ground attack and air bombardment, in that order.' Hundreds of journalists were 'embedded' with Coalition forces, ready to be drip-fed information favourable to the invaders. As if as a warning, a crew of ITN journalists travelling independently, were wiped out by Coalition 'friendly fire'

in the first days of the war.

Coalition partners promoted the idea that this was a humanitarian enterprise, a liberation war. Prime Minister Blair, in a 21st-century version of the Crusades and Onward Christian Soldiers, maintained that he had a moral duty to rescue the Iraqi people from intolerable repression. The war was dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Reality, however, quickly gave the lie to any expectation that the war would quickly turn to victory or that the Iraqi people would pour out of their houses to welcome Coalition troops. With the northern invasion route blocked by the Turkish refusal to host Coalition forces, the smooth running of the invasion through Kuwait became imperative. In the first few days, according to the news reports, invading Iraq was like slicing through butter: Basra for breakfast, Baghdad by tea-time. Then the capture and total submission of Umm Qasr, a small town near the border, had to be announced on three consecutive days, when in fact resistance continued throughout. Basra

was pronounced to be friendly, 'not a military target': Coalition forces would surround it, 'fix it', but leave it alone. 'We have no quarrel with the Iraqi people' became the mantra, while Baghdad was bombarded with missiles, wounding and killing hundreds of civilians, and Basra was redesignated a military target because Coalition troops were meeting armed resistance. Doubts were now creeping in that Donald Rumsfeld's insistence on restricting the number of troops to a light invasion force was a mistake. The theory of shock and awe is that a number of wars can be fought quickly. But Iraqi cities could not just be 'fixed' and then left to a smaller number of British troops to 'housekeep'. The Iraqis were fighting back. On Saturday 22 March, Day 4, General Franks boasted of the surrender of Iraqi troops: at one stage claiming the entire 51st Division of the Iraqi army which would have consisted of thousands of soldiers. The reality was that only a few hundred came forward.

The US spent months before the

war on psychological operations calculated to demoralise the Iraqi people, encourage them to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and intimidate anyone thinking of fighting back. It even set up a radio station, Radio Tikrit (named after Saddam Hussein's birthplace) to spread disinformation.

The lying infected not only the propaganda aimed at the Iraqi people; both US and British reports aimed at swaying opinion in the United Nations (UN) Security Council were littered with fabrications. Britain's 55-page report published in September 2002, the work of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, alleging the smuggling of uranium to make nuclear weapons, was exposed as obvious lies. And the January report, promoted by Downing Street, turned out to be a 10-year-old PhD thesis together with already-published and speculative material from *Jane's Weekly*. Colin Powell tried to seduce the UN to support war with bogus information. Iraq had kept 'up to a few dozen' Scud missiles he alleged

continued on page 3



# Welcome...

Smile for the cameras – you're being bombed live on TV! Not for nothing does the United States spend \$380 billion every year on weapons of mass destruction – more than the next 25 biggest military spenders combined. As one US general put it: 'You don't think we're going to spend all that money on the military and keep it parked in the garage, do you?' The US wants the world to know its capacity for mass destruction – and what better way than to have it televised 24 hours of the day? Likewise we see the 'special relationship' between the US and Britain played out in the sandstorms, explosions and rubble of Iraq (see pages 1 and 3). Tony Blair has taken the Labour Party into an alliance with a US administration of chicken-hawks which chooses to use force to reimpose its economic domination of the world, despite the weakness of the US economy and fighting off competition from the EU and Japan. Via the military onslaught on Iraq, Britain is attempting to raise its global status relative to France and Germany. The new era of inter-imperialist rivalries has arrived, as the advanced capitalist countries jostle to recolonise the world (see pages 6 and 7).

When darling of the Labour 'left' George Galloway declares, from yet another Stop the War platform, that this Labour government's foreign policy is 'far from Labour', he is lying! British soldiers have been sent to Basra precisely because of their expertise in urban guerrilla warfare, picked up in the North of Ireland. Like the military onslaught in Iraq, those troops were sent to Ireland on an imperialist operation by the very same Labour Party 34 years ago. Labour is an imperialist Party. It is a racist Party. Aligning yourself with Labour, whether it is as an MP, a party activist, or a card-carrying member, is aligning yourself with the system of racism and imperialism it represents. Resign now and let's build an independent anti-capitalist alternative.

Sections of the Labour 'left' and leading representatives of the Stop the War Coalition – including Lindsey German, convenor of the Coalition and a leader of the Socialist Workers' Party – signed a letter to Tony Blair last December opposing military action against Iraq with-



London, 15 March

out explicit authority of the United Nations and the House of Commons! These people are more concerned with maintaining an alliance with 'soft' imperialists, like Charles Kennedy, who spoke at the national demonstration, than they are with building an effective opposition to the war – or fighting imperialism. Get these hypocrites off our platform! Hand leadership of the movement over to the activists using direct action against military bases and roads, to the anti-imperialists opposing Zionism and interventions across Africa, Asia and Latin America, to the angry Asian youth turning out to demonstrate, to the school students walking out of schools and to workers prepared to lose pay to protest. Then we will have a real democratic and grassroots movement, with growing consciousness, capable of stopping this horrific onslaught on Iraq and bringing down the Labour government and the party it represents (see page 4).

The bombing of Iraq is the latest war in a series of imperialist wars. While the US list of possible targets for 'pre-emptive' military attack grows and North Korea braces itself (see page 4), imperialism is already at war against the poor in nations across the world, in alliance with their national bourgeoisies, the clients of imperialism. The implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is another battle of US imperialism, to recolonise Latin America, securing the continent for capitalist exploitation and for access to its oil. *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* spoke to anti-imperialist revolutionary James Petras, who explained the global strategic importance of Latin America to the US in offsetting the weakness of the dollar

and the US economy. Petras also described the enormous and widespread opposition to the FTAA from the people who will suffer from its implementation. He describes the struggles in Bolivia and Colombia as the most advanced in the continent, and Venezuela and Argentina being on a secondary, but potentially revolutionary, level (see pages 8 and 9).

In Palestine the Intifada continues to resist another imperialist war, Zionist expansionism and the brutality of the Israeli state, which now kills nearly 30 Palestinians every week (see page 5).

One battle the imperialists cannot win is the one to eradicate socialist Cuba, an example to the poor and oppressed of the world that an alternative exists to the ravages of capitalism and that imperialism can be defeated. The US administration is intensifying its war against Cuba (see page 12).

Capitalism's battle against the poor is also carried out within the imperialist heartlands. In Britain, Labour Home Secretary, the social fascist David Blunkett, is attempting to halve the number of asylum seekers, deprive them of social security, and to forcibly deport thousands of Afghan refugees. The cause of the rise in asylum seekers is clear. The greatest number of them arrive from Iraq, a country under US and British attack (see page 16).

Tony Blair has the audacity to talk about liberating Iraq, to talk about morality and democracy, while in Britain the Labour government threatens to ban strike action in order to undermine the firefighters (see page 10), while poverty is on the rise (see page 10), the education system is being privatised (see page 10), and a swelling prison population is exploited as a useful source of cheap labour (see page 13).

To take up the cause of the oppressed around the world is to take on the same ruling class which oppresses us. An anti-imperialist movement will tackle racism, exploitation, repression and criminalisation here in Britain. Our slogan must be: workers and oppressed people of the world unite to fight imperialism!

*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* relies on your contributions – written and financial. Please send them to the address below.



NICKI JAMESON

Since 11 September 2001 there have been 304 arrests under British anti-terrorist legislation. Most of these have been under the Terrorism Act 2000 (TA) and the overwhelming majority of those detained have either been released with no charge, freed on bail for minor criminal charges, or – most ominously – detained under immigration powers.

Details of the arrests and their outcomes collated by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) clearly show the way in which this legislation is being employed. We reproduce here just a brief excerpt from the IRR information. The full list is available on IRR's website, [www.irr.org.uk](http://www.irr.org.uk).

There is little doubt that those released without charge will then be under state surveillance. In contrast to the 1991 Gulf War when Iraqis and Palestinians were interned in

# Terrorising communities

British prisons for the duration, the British government has in the current situation decided against mass internment and in favour of a high level of surveillance.

That is not to say that there is no internment. In order to pass the post-11 September Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA), the government opted out of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which outlaws detention without trial. Thirteen 'suspected terrorists' are currently detained under the powers of the ATCSA in Belmarsh and Highdown prisons. They are permitted just one 'closed' visit a fortnight.

A delegation from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited the detainees in February 2002. Its report was not published until a year later.

The CPT delegation was extremely concerned about 'the provision of psychological support and/or psychiatric treat-

ment to persons detained'. The report points out that the UK authorities accept that if these detainees were deported to their countries of origin they would risk serious human rights violations, including death or torture. In fact this is the rationale used for internment them. Several of them have already been tortured prior to coming to Britain, and suffer post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychiatric problems as a result. Being indefinitely detained with no way of contesting the vague and sweeping allegations against them massively increases this distress. This in turn is exacerbated by their being kept in their cells for hours on end, with little access to the ordinary facilities, such as a library and education which are afforded to prisoners convicted of criminal offences.

And the approach of the prison medical service to the severe trauma suffered by these men is nothing short of scandalous. The CPT report states: '...the records examined by the delegation's doctor on occasion showed no indication of the reasons for prescribing psychotropic drugs, their dosage, or the person who had prescribed them'.

The state's aim is not simply to locate and imprison would-be terrorists; these arrests and detentions are also designed to terrorise entire sections of the community into keeping the lowest of possible profiles. This includes anyone who is Middle Eastern or north African, or who looks like they might be, and anyone who is, or who looks as though they might be a Muslim, whatever their colour or country of origin. The message to these sections of British society is similar to the one sent out by the use of sweeping anti-terrorist powers against Irish people in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s – do not organise, do not protest against the war or against racism, do not practise your religion overtly, do not criticise Britain or the US – if you do any of these things, we will hound you and your families, using whichever part of the immense legal power at our disposal that we choose.

| Name                             | Age   | Nationality | Date and place of arrest                | Details                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abdul Hamid Maskine-Djabar       | 30    | —           | 29.1.03 Manchester                      | Arrested in three locations in Manchester and taken to London for questioning. On 12.03 they were all charged with possessing false documents. |
| Kamel Mouzoug                    | 32    | —           | —                                       | —                                                                                                                                              |
| Krimou Azzouz                    | 35    | —           | —                                       | —                                                                                                                                              |
| Mourad Khilif                    | 31    | —           | —                                       | —                                                                                                                                              |
| Unnamed person (male)            | —     | —           | North east London                       | Arrested under TA.                                                                                                                             |
| 7 unnamed people (6 men 1 woman) | —     | British     | 6.2.03 Edinburgh Glasgow and Manchester | Arrested in different locations under TA. Questioned in Scotland. The woman was released two days later.                                       |
| Unnamed person (male)            | —     | —           | 6.2.03 London                           | Arrested under TA on arrival from France on Eurostar.                                                                                          |
| 2 unnamed people (male)          | 25 26 | Iraqi Kurd  | 13.2.03 near Leeds Bradford airport     | Arrested under TA when seen 'acting suspiciously' Released without charge two days later.                                                      |
| 2 unnamed people (male)          | —     | —           | 13.2.03 near Heathrow airport           | Arrested under TA. Taken to Paddington Green police station for questioning. Released without charge. One redetained by Immigration Service.   |
| 4 unnamed people                 | 20s   | —           | 13.2.03 Langley, Berkshire              | Arrested under TA in village under a Heathrow flight path. Released without charge and detained by Immigration Service.                        |

website: [www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk](http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk)  
[www.revolutionarycommunist.com](http://www.revolutionarycommunist.com)

## Labour: a party fit for imperialism

Robert Clough, pp192

New Labour, Old Labour, both the same – this history shows how Labour has always been a racist and warmongering party.

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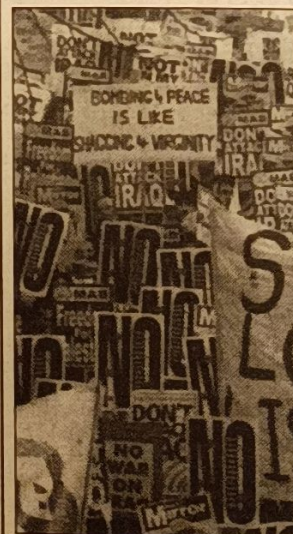
## FRFI Fighting Fund

We continue to need money, particularly to expand our propaganda as war on Iraq intensifies. The need to publicise an anti-imperialist standpoint is ever-more urgent. So please send donations to: FRFI Fighting Fund, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques etc payable to Larkin Publications.

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## Terrorism Act used against protesters

Although the police already have extremely wide powers to detain, stop and search people individually or in groups, particularly under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, they have recently begun using a similar power created under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 as well. This has happened both in London and at and around the Fairford airbase. The rationale is presumably that using anti-terrorist powers will intimidate

protesters and may help to drive a wedge between the 'respectable' and direct action sections of the movement.

More information about the Terrorism Act and your rights under it and other legislation used against protesters is available from the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group, BM Box Haven, London, WC1N 3XX. Tel: 020 8245 2930 (24hr answerphone) Email: [ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk) Website: <http://www2.phreak.co.uk/ldmg>





# WAR FOR GLOBAL DOMINATION

continued from page 1

but the UN inspectors reported that they had accounted for the disposal of 817 of 819 after the Gulf War. Powell also detailed 'vast amounts of chemical weaponry' while the UN inspectors reported that they had verified the destruction of virtually all of Iraq's stocks. Even the CIA was sceptical about the claim that Iraq is part of a global terrorist network.

The lying was not successful. The Iraqi people, oppressed though they are by the current regime, have not been deluded by Coalition blandishments to believe that US-style 'liberation' to imperialist-puppet status has more to offer. Likewise, despite months of diplomacy, arm-twisting and bribery, a majority of the Security Council could not be forced to support a second resolution for war on Iraq, which would have dignified it with a doubtful legality under international law. In fact the first resolution, passed in the Autumn of 2002, Resolution 1441, was worded in such a way as to cover up the differences in international opinion. Subsequent attempts by the British Labour government to bend the wording to show either international unity or approval for war were ridiculous. The split in the Security Council was inevitable and reflected the real dynamic of international relations: the US and Britain were supported by Spain and Bulgaria; France, Russia, China, Syria and Germany were in opposition. Six other member states sat on the sidelines.

In fact it was only the British Labour government that was desper-

ate for United Nations approval for the war. If its manoeuvres had succeeded at the UN, Britain would have reaped the kudos for coralling Europe into the US camp. When this plan was crushed by the threat of a French veto, which the British and the US loudly condemned as an 'unreasonable veto' (see box), there was no question of turning back. Without the second resolution, Blair is now banking on being able to outflank Britain's main competitors in Europe - France and Germany - by partnering the USA in the war. The UN, after all, was just a cover for Labour's imperialist ambitions. In the end, the fig-leaf of the Attorney General's unpublished opinion that the war is legal under international law was enough for the Labour government.

The much-vaunted Labour opposition in Parliament, and the promised vote before going to war, fizzled out. Once troops were on the move most were happy to back 'our boys'. Still the myth is being promoted that Blair has hijacked the Labour Party, when in fact Labour's history is entirely on the side of imperialism. The left in the Labour Party stands convicted of a failure of principle. Some like Clare Short, international development secretary, are all mouth, selling out their principles for a morsel of cabinet power. Others are happy without the morsel of power: they take their salaries and pensions. The Labour Party was formed as a bourgeois imperialist party designed to oppose socialism and betray the working class. It continues in this tradition.

The US, on the other hand, proclaimed in advance that it was willing to go it alone, without the blessing of the United Nations or international law. When Hans Blix reported to the UN that the weapons inspectors were making 'some progress' and needed 'months, not days or years' to disarm Iraq, this was the signal for the US to break ranks. It was no surprise. While the UN had been useful to impose the will of imperialism on small nations in the post Second World War period, preventing the differences between the nuclear superstates escalating into war, it is now a fetter on US imperialist ambitions. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US, free to cajole, bribe and bully, began to show contempt for international treaties and the United Nations. After the election of President GW Bush, the US ruling class openly began to forge international relations in its own interests. International treaties on the environment, world trade, nuclear weapons proliferation, cheap generic medicine for poor nations, and agricultural subsidies have been reneged upon. The US opposes the foundation of an international criminal court and now openly describes the UN as 'a theatre of the absurd'.

In line with a blueprint promoted by a right-wing Republican pressure group, The Project for a New American Century (see box), President Bush has flagged up the intention to go for world domination, especially in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre. The first step was the war on Afghanistan which led to the deaths of an estimated 20,000 people. With no opposition to its control of the region, the US



Bombing Baghdad means killing children

appointed ex-Unocol (US oil company with a reputation for doing business with repressive regimes, eg Burma) advisor, Zalmay Khalilzad, as Special Envoy to Afghanistan. The plan is for a US oil pipeline across the country: a proposal that the Taliban had turned down. As a result of its Afghan war, the US now has military bases in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Georgia. It has established a presence in Djibouti (eastern tip of Africa on the Red Sea). It has control of Bab Al Madab: a main oil trading route and also controls interests that give it access to West African oil fields.

There was no opposition from the international community when the US deprived prisoners from the Afghan war of any rights. They were refused prisoner of war status under the Geneva Conventions, and deprived of any rights to a trial as citizens of any state. Many were transferred to the US Guantanamo Bay Camp X-ray in Cuba where they are still detained without trial and without access to legal representation. Many others, unnamed, have been transported to unknown prisons in unnamed countries where they are undoubtedly being tortured in total contravention of international law. Blair has not raised one finger to help the British citizens who are detained in these circumstances. Hence the hollow laughter from the Arab and Islamic world that greeted the US/British cry of foul play at the treatment of Coalition soldiers captured by the Iraqi regime by showing them on television.

Last year in the US National Security Strategy, Bush announced a chilling programme 'to dissuade potential adversaries from...surpassing, or equalling, the power of the United States'. In his speech at the military graduation ceremony at West Point in June 2002, Bush warned that American security 'will require all Americans...to be ready for pre-emptive action.' Pre-emptive action is, by definition, in breach of international law. Donald Rumsfeld wants to rid the world of the old treaties which prevent chemical war-

fare: he is promoting a new form of chemical warfare that will put combatants (and civilians) to 'sleep' - Coalition-speak for death in the case of the sick, elderly and children. Already, before the war is even won, the imperialists are squabbling over the spoils. The UN may be assigned the role of clearing up the rubble and disposing of the refugees. The real profits will go to US corporations, and the British if they are lucky. International regulators will take control, with the Iraqi people coming last in the list of beneficiaries.

We are witnessing the establishment of the new world order by bloody force and it is our job to join the opposition.

The US wants to restore its former

glory. It wants a return to the post Second World War years, this time without the Soviet Union. It wants to rule Europe through its special relationship with Britain, dominate the Americas, and outgun Asia. Such ambitions, however, cost money and resources. And this time round the world is heading for recession, with the US in a position to fall further and faster than its competitors.

It is clear that in the Middle East the opposition to imperialism is being built. It is not led by Saddam Hussein or Al Qaida; they are the creatures of imperialism, hired to control the oppressed and bludgeon any opposition. They are just the excuse imperialism uses for war. It is led by the example of the Palestinian people and by the poor and oppressed of the Middle East who are demonstrating their implacable opposition to the new world order. This time round the US and Britain may not be able to afford to rule.

Carol Brickley

## Stop Press

The suicide attack which left four US soldiers dead on Saturday 29 March in Najaf was a nightmare for US and British imperialism. The spectre of such attacks multiplying during the battle for Baghdad will haunt the military. In a bid to spread the war regionally, US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld has threatened Syria and Iran for allegedly supplying equipment and volunteers to the Iraqi war effort. Meanwhile British construction giant Costain has urged the government to 'bypass the UN' in awarding post-war construction contracts and the proposed new 'Governor of Iraq' will be retired US General Jay Warner who is president of an arms company which supplies technical services for Patriot missile systems. He is also a strong pro-Zionist.

After March 1988 when the Iraqi regime gassed Kurds at Halabja killing 5,000 people, the *Financial Times* ran articles exposing what the regime was doing. Mrs Thatcher complained to the paper that Edward Mortimer's articles were damaging British business prospects.

## The Veto and the United Nations Security Council

Neither the US nor Britain has ever had any hesitation in using the veto in their own interests (often coinciding). There is no such thing as an 'unreasonable veto'. The five permanent members of the Security Council have the right to use the veto against resolutions, effectively blocking them.

**USA:** Since 1990 the USA has used its veto more times than any other country. Seven of the last nine vetoes have been used by the US; six of these were in favour of Israel. Its overall total is 76, with 35 of them being used to block criticism of Israel. Its last lone veto was three months ago to block a resolution condemning the killing of UN employees by Israeli soldiers and the destruction of a UN warehouse filled with food for poor Palestinians. **Britain:** The UK has used its veto 32 times, 23 times with the USA. Many of these vetoes blocked criticism of apartheid South Africa or prevented action against it. The most recent UK veto was in 1989 when the USA, France and Britain vetoed a resolution deploring the US military invasion of Panama.

**France:** France has used the veto 18 times, 13 times alongside the US and UK. It last used a lone veto in 1976.

China has used its veto five times. Overall the USSR used its veto more times than any other country, but since 1991, Russia has used its veto only twice.

## Project for a New American Century

The Project for a New American Century was formed in the 1990s by a group of right-wing 'thinkers' with the aim of reviving Reaganite policies. Its Statement of Principles, dated 3 June 1997 opens:

'As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world's pre-eminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests? ...

'We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan Administration's success; a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities.'

In January 1998 this pressure group wrote to President Clinton proposing the removal of Saddam Hussein from power as a priority of foreign policy. The letter points out that if Iraq is allowed to develop weapons of mass destruction 'American troops in the region, our friends and allies like Israel...and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil will all be put at hazard'. It goes on to urge diplomatic, political and military effort in this direction, cautioning 'in any case American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN Security Council'.

Supporters of this letter, now holding office in the Bush administration include: Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defence; Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defence; Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs; Richard Lee Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State; John Bolton, Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control, Non Proliferation and International Security; Zalmay Khalilzad, Special Envoy to Afghanistan; Paul J. Dobriansky, Under-Secretary of Global Affairs; William Schneider Jr, Chairman of Defence Science Board. Other supporters of the Project and signatories to its Statement of Principles are: Dick Cheney, Vice President; I. Lewis Libby, Cheney's Chief of Staff; and Jeb Bush, GW Bush's brother; and Richard Perle, formerly Secretary of Defence under President Reagan, until recently Chairman of the Defence Policy Board and instrumental in the drive to war. Perle was forced to resign because of the clash of his 'business interests' with affairs of state.





# Campaign to stop the war

**The massive demonstration on 15 February, organised by the Stop The War Coalition (STWC), Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), was a historic occasion. Up to two million people took to the streets of London in opposition to the coming war on Iraq. Later, on 22 March, following the start of the US/British onslaught, nearly half a million marched. With the prospect of a protracted conflict, how is this movement to develop? How is its ideological level to be raised? BOB SHEPHERD examines the issues.**

Before the 15 February demonstration, political debate focused on the British-led drive to get a second UN resolution. The Lib Dems, led by Charles Kennedy, and many in the Labour Party, had latched on to this possibility to cover up their refusal to openly oppose imperialist war preparations. They hoped that with a second resolution, they would be able to save their conscience and support the war at the same time. How did the STWC deal with these temporary fair-weather friends? In the first instance, by ideologically capitulating to them. In a letter to Tony Blair in December last year to mark UN Human Rights Day, its leaders wrote 'We call upon you as Prime Minister to give a clear undertaking not to engage in military

action against Iraq without the explicit authority of the United Nations and without an explicit decision of the House of Commons to do so'. Signatories included left Labour MPs Alice Mahon and Jeremy Corbyn, together with CND chair Carol Naughton, and STWC Convenor Lindsey German, also a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The clear implication was that with the agreement of the UN and parliament, the signatories would not oppose the war.

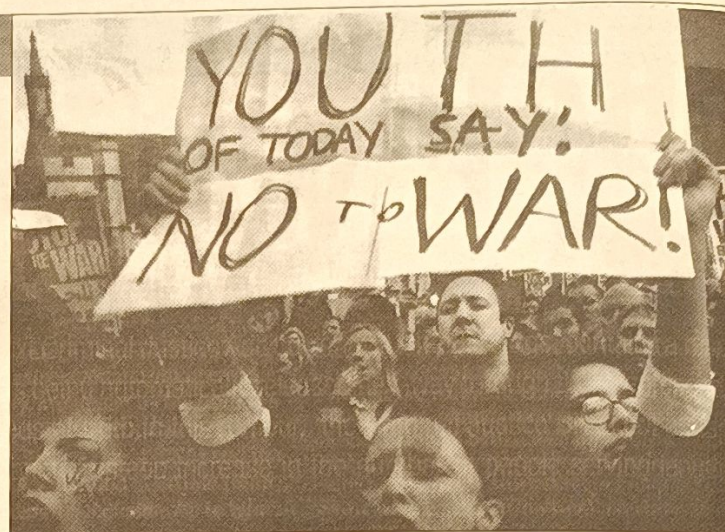
No serious socialist could have signed such a letter. The UN has always been a forum for imperialist negotiations over spheres of influence, all the more so since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The British Parliament has always sanctioned every war that British imperialism has chosen to wage against the oppressed of the world. The responsibility of socialists was clear: to educate the movement about the history of the UN, and the real nature of British imperialist democracy. The STWC and SWP ducked this.

The STWC then went further, and invited Charles Kennedy, leader of the imperialist Lib Dems, onto the platform on 15 February, together with a long list of Labour lefts and trade union leaders. There was little room for anyone new, anybody directly representing the anti-imperialist sentiments of young people. It is a deception to describe Charles Kennedy after the event as a 'turncoat' as *Socialist Worker* did. He had

never changed his imperialist clothes – nor did the STWC demand that he should.

The desire of the STWC leadership to be respectable is overwhelming. This means that the agenda of the Labour left cannot be challenged in any way. An example is the so-called parliamentary rebellion against Blair on 18 March. The media made much of the 140 Labour MPs who 'rebelled' by voting for an amendment to a resolution supporting the government's policy on Iraq. But what did the amendment say? That parliament 'believes that the case for war against Iraq has not yet been established, especially given the absence of specific UN authorisation, but in the event hostilities do commence, pledges its total support for the British forces engaged in the Middle East, expresses its admiration for their courage, skill and devotion to duty, and hopes that their tasks will be swiftly concluded with minimal casualties on all sides'. Who voted for this? STWC Labour MP leaders Alice Mahon, Jeremy Corbyn and of course George Galloway. So we have a movement which proclaims itself as anti-war but with leaders who have pledged their support to the British forces in Iraq. Do we hear anything about this contradiction from, say, the SWP? Not a word. The shame-faced left outside the Labour Party is protecting the shameful left within.

Drawing a distinction between a



party leadership which supports imperialism and war, and ordinary members who have been 'committed to peace' (*Socialist Worker*, 25 March) is entirely bogus. It allows the Labour left to get away with the pretence that there is a progressive aspect to the Labour Party. It also allows the SWP to get away from really putting pressure on left Labour MPs to resign from the Labour Party, and declare themselves unequivocally opposed to British imperialism.

If this movement is to be successful we must take the side of the oppressed. This means taking the side of the Palestinian people and putting it at the heart of anti-war work. The aims and objectives of the STWC fail to mention Israel or Palestine at all. More conspicuously, nor did the declaration or the resolutions passed by the recent STWC People's Assembly. The left pays lip-service to the cause of the Palestinian people, but fails to ensure that the movement takes on board the connection between Zionism and British or US imperialist interests in the Middle East.

An effective movement will come into direct conflict with the British state. Already police have prevented demonstrators from getting close to Fairford airbase on the 22 March demonstration. They have attacked schoolchildren in London. Lines are now being drawn between those who really want to oppose the war and its supporters, and a leadership dedicated to respectability. This division will become more apparent when it comes to organising defence campaigns and fighting for basic democratic rights. Anti-imperialists must play a leading role in preparing the movement politically for this.

The actions of the school students in their national strike against the war on 19 March offers hope for the future of the movement. Their actions were, by and large, organised spontaneously; they engaged in militant action in blockading city centre streets, were forced into confrontation with school authorities and faced police brutality. This is the sort of determination that will ensure the movement goes beyond the limits the STWC leadership is trying to set.



## San Francisco: 'The anti-war movement is gathering strength'

The Californian economy is the fifth largest in the world and many military contractors operate in the state. Some 900 companies in the San Francisco Bay area supply \$4bn worth of supplies and equipment to the US Defence Department. In addition, the Department of Energy's contracts with local organisations total \$2.3bn for nuclear weapons labs. Additionally, huge sums are being disbursed by the new Department of Homeland Security. Much of the new high-technology equipment being used in Iraq has been developed here.

Protest against oppression and defence of democracy are also rooted in the area. There is a long history of labour militancy, revolutionary protest and gay rights activism. The San Francisco labour movement was, until the 1970s, fiercely militant, led by the longshoremen – the dockers.

Berkeley was the birthplace of the student free speech movement in the 1960s and is still known as the People's Republic of Berkeley, while the revolutionary Black Panther movement was born in neighbouring Oakland. The whole area strongly opposed the Vietnam war. For over 50 years, the area has given support to the gay rights movement, particularly in the 1970s with the assassination of Supervisor Harvey Milk by an off-duty cop. A natural development has been AIDS activism. In short, the Bay area is probably the most progressive and politically active area in the US.

It is therefore no surprise that downtown San Francisco, the heart of the city's financial district which bankrolls Silicon Valley, was a virtual no-go area for motorists for three days between 20-22 March. During that time there were 2,150 arrests of

protesters. The 2,200-strong city police force deployed 1,700 officers almost continuously in a desperate attempt to stop the protests. Local prisons overflowed and prisoners had to be shipped out to prisons and detention centres 50 miles away. Police reinforcements came from the California Highway Patrol, who tried to prevent protesters from blocking the strategic Bay Bridge, which connects San Francisco to Oakland.

On Thursday 20 March, the headquarters of the Chevron oil corporation and the Federal Building were a focus for protests. On Friday it was the turn of the headquarters of the Bechtel corporation, a company bidding for the contracts for rebuilding Iraq, as well as providing 'anti-terrorist' technology. A series of operations were conducted by protesters wearing road crew outfits who spread orange traffic cones, accident flares and diversion signals across key on-ramps before sprinting away. These snarled commute-hour traffic. Anti-war activities culminated on Saturday 22 March with a huge march and demonstration of about 100,000 people to a massive meeting in Civic Centre Plaza.

In addition to the San Francisco protests, spontaneous demonstrations of school students have taken place across the Bay Area, with students walking out of schools and marching through their cities. More formal protests such as demonstrations, vigils, pickets and church services have taken place in Berkeley, in Oakland, San Jose in the south of the bay, in Napa – the wine region – and Marin in the north of the Bay. These have included the families of servicemen and women who oppose their sons and daughters being sent into an unjust war. The anti-war movement is gathering strength.

From our San Francisco correspondent

## North Korea: the next target for imperialism

Following the 2001 World Trade Centre attack, President Bush declared Iran, Iraq and North Korea to be an 'axis of evil'. North Korea believes that it is the next country to be invaded after Iraq and has called on the US to sign a non-aggression pact. It has warned that since the US has now declared a policy of 'pre-emptive' strikes, it may strike first if it feels that imperialism is preparing an invasion. Recently, in a direct threat, the US sent 20 B52 bombers to its base in Guam. 250,000 US and South Korean troops have staged military exercises on the North's borders.

Since the Democratic People's Republic was established in the north of Korea after the Second World War it has been the focus of intense imperialist hostility. In the late 1940s a national liberation war broke out in the South against the US-backed dictatorship. In 1950 this developed into a war with the North. Threatened with collapse, South Korea was only saved by the massive firepower of a United Nations force led by the US and Britain that devastated the peninsula. Three million Koreans died and the northern capital Pyongyang was razed to the ground.

In 1994 the Clinton administration reached an agreement with North Korea under which the North would shut down its Yongbon nuclear reactor in return for food supplies, the construction of two light-water nuclear power stations and heavy fuel oil for producing electricity while the power stations were built. However the US had calculated that North Korea would collapse before the agree-



ment was fully implemented and never fulfilled its side of the deal. Nine years later, with no collapse, the US suspended food supplies. With few energy supplies, North Korea, restarted the Yongbon nuclear reactor to produce electricity. This, the US claims, will produce plutonium that could be used for nuclear weapons.

If the US were able to attack and overrun North Korea it would bring them right up to China's northeast borders and add another base to the chain of US military presence surrounding China from former Soviet Central Asia to the Philippines. It would also bring it close to Vladivostok, Russia's main Pacific port. There is no doubt that the US is seeking an excuse to attack North Korea. There is equally no doubt that North Korea will resist, and that China and Russia may be drawn into the conflict with unimaginable consequences.

Ed Scrivens



## Zionist onslaught on Palestinians intensifies

Since the last issue of FRFI, the Zionists have stepped up their onslaught on the Palestinian people. The wholesale destruction last year of the Palestinian economy and the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has allowed the Zionists to move on to the next stage of their strategy. This is to use a comprehensive system of collective punishment to force the Palestinian people to move into a small number of cantons on the West Bank and Gaza which can then be sealed off and policed by a puppet PA, itself rebuilt under a more pliant leader than Yasser Arafat. First, however, the Zionist state has to isolate and destroy the leadership of the Intifada, in particular Hamas. In the meantime, it is reducing the mass of the Palestine population to near-starvation in an effort to force the people to capitulate.

ROBERT CLOUGH reports.



Palestinian youth are shot for throwing stones at armoured tanks

The Zionist strategy has the support of US and British imperialism, both of which are anxious to see the end of Palestinian resistance. Over the last two months, the number of Palestinians killed by Zionist forces has risen from 15 to nearly 30 a week. Large-scale invasions of Gaza involving dozens of tanks have taken place several times each week. Death squads have stepped up their murderous activities in both the West Bank and Gaza. Day after day children are being shot for throwing stones. Houses of families of known militants are being bulldozed or blown up at an increasing rate: in Gaza, since the start of the Intifada, 995 had been destroyed by mid-March, 230 this year alone. Every invasion of Gaza is aimed at workshops which provide crucial Palestinian employment, and at the farmland and greenhouses which provide food for a half-starving population.

Zionist policy is to eliminate Hamas in its Gaza stronghold. The immediate excuse for a series of murderous operations was a Hamas attack on 15 February which blew up a Merkava tank killing its crew of four. Zionist Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz promised retribution for this 'terrorist act'. An invasion of Gaza on 17 March resulted in the death of four Hamas members including guerrilla leader Riyadh Abu Zeid; the previous day six Hamas fighters died in an explosion. Between 15 February and 8 March, 16 invasions of Gaza left 68 dead. There has been furious resistance, such as that during the invasion of Al Buriej on 3 March to arrest Hamas political leader Mohamed Taha. According to one community leader, Ahmed Abdallah, 'It's not about defeating Hamas: it's about forcing us to surrender' (quoted by Graham Usher in *Al Ahram Weekly*). Although Hamas has been singled out, all sections of the resistance are now under attack. On 19 February, separate operations led to the arrests of Taysir Khaled, deputy leader of the DFLP, and Abd Al Rahim Malouh, a member of the PFLP politburo. Both are also members of the PLO Executive Committee. On 13 March, an undercover squad murdered five Islamic Jihad members who had returned to Jenin refugee camp.

The Zionist war is economic as well. The last 27 months of the Intifada have cost \$5.4bn in Palestinian national income on top of \$730m in damage inflicted by Zionist military operations. Unemployment is now 50% in the West Bank and 70% in Gaza. Up to 18 Palestinians depend on the earnings of each breadwinner. Some 60% of the population live below the poverty line; now 1.3m Palestinians depend on UNRWA (United Nations Refugee Welfare Agency) handouts, compared to a few tens of thousands before the Intifada. A quarter of all children suffer from chronic or acute malnutrition; four out of five children are anaemic. UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen warned early in March that its warehouses would be empty of food within weeks unless the international community stumped up \$32m; to date only \$1.5m has been pledged.

By their constant acts of destruction and dispossession, the Zionists intend to wear down the Palestinian people until they have no will to oppose either the military occupation or continued settlement growth, and force them out of the countryside into the eight major urban centres of the West Bank and Gaza. These will then be enclosed by a series of walls, fences and ditches. This, the Zionists hope, will end any pretensions to a Palestinian state.

The support the Zionists receive from the US and Britain is crucial. In the lead up to the war on Iraq, both

put intense pressure on Yasser Arafat to appoint a Prime Minister, making it clear that should he not agree, he would go the same way as Saddam Hussein. The appointment was part of a package of reform that the US and Zionists had demanded of the Palestinian Authority in December 2002, and was a precondition for the publication of President Bush's so-called roadmap to peace. Neither the US nor the Zionists want to deal with Arafat. Traitor though he has been to the Palestinian people, the pressure from the people has prevented him at times from total capitulation. The imperialists want a leader who will do their bidding without the slightest complaint or delay.

The roadmap itself was agreed by the UN, EU, Russia and the PA in December. Its proclaimed goal is the establishment of a Palestinian state by 2005. But like the Powell plan before it, the precondition is the complete surrender of the Palestinian people. The first phase of the roadmap requires the PA to end the Intifada and institute all the reforms that have been demanded by the Zionists and the imperialist powers. Whilst the PA, Russia and the EU regard the roadmap as a finished document, the US and Israel see it as negotiable. A memo leaked from Sharon's office dated 24 February states that the Israeli government 'has many reservations and revisions to the draft that was presented to us by the American administration'. Such 'reservations' include any reference to an 'independent' Palestinian state;

the Zionists would only consider descriptions such as 'credible', 'law-abiding' and possessing 'certain attributes of sovereignty'. The Sharon government will not countenance a move to the second phase of the roadmap until there is 'a complete cessation of violence and terrorism, full disarmament of terrorist organisations, complete collection of illegal weapons and the emergence of a new and different leadership'. Nor could there be any dismantling of the 107 settlement outposts - at most there could only be a vague commitment to 'enforce the law in relation to the outposts.' As for a settlement freeze, this would have to exclude the 'natural growth' of settlements and would only be considered 'following a continuous and comprehensive security calm'.

In an announcement on 14 March, Bush made clear that he too regarded the roadmap as negotiable, stating that 'immediately upon confirmation' of a Palestinian prime minister with 'real authority - the roadmap for peace will be given to Israel and the Palestinians.' He added: 'Once this roadmap is delivered, we will expect and welcome contributions from Israel and the Palestinians to this document that will advance true peace.' On 18 March, following Arafat's agreement to appoint Mahmoud Abbas (whose *nom de guerre* is Abu Mazen) as prime minister, and in a cynical ploy to placate Arab regimes in advance of the war on Iraq, Tony Blair announced that the roadmap could be published immediately. The

US disagreed, and on 22 March confirmed that it would be made public only once the war on Iraq was finished. Three days later, Jack Straw conceded that its content would be open to negotiation, telling MPs that 'it is a framework, yes, some of its detail may be changed over time, but what we cannot see is any change to its fundamental principles'.

The expectations of the US, Britain and the Zionists are clear: the PA will have to make even further concessions in a process that will leave them as distant from a Palestinian state as they were after the Oslo agreement in 1993. This is why they need an even more pliable leader than Arafat. Mahmoud Abbas is exactly the person they need. For decades he has been seen as Arafat's number two, so he has always been part of the 'failed leadership' that the US and Zionists claimed they wanted to remove. However, he has always been an outspoken opponent of the Intifada. It was he who led the PA delegation in talks with the resistance movement in Cairo demanding that it lay down its arms (see FRFI 171). He has been an enthusiastic supporter for all the various peace proposals that would keep the occupation in place under a different name. It was he who proposed that the village of Abu Dis be renamed Al Quds (Jerusalem) so that the city proper could be handed over to the Zionists, and he has publicly repudiated the right of Palestinian return. He is among those who benefited from the post-Oslo plunder. Soon after the PA was established in Gaza, construction started on a \$1.5 million villa for Abbas with unknown funding. The then Minister of Commerce and Economy, Nasser Sarraj, argued: 'Who says he doesn't have the right to live in a villa worth \$1.5m or even \$10m? Those who say he doesn't are spies and collaborators for Israel' (*New York Times* 2 February 1997).

By an overwhelming vote the Palestinian Legislative Council supported Abbas' appointment, confirming the spinelessness of the Palestinian comprador bourgeoisie. On behalf of Bush, Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage told reporters that Abbas was the US's choice because he would speak 'authoritatively for the Palestinian people'. Meanwhile, the resistance denounced the 'imposition' of a prime minister by 'external forces'. Abbas will take over the running of the PA and will present a cabinet shortly. A rumoured candidate for Interior Minister is Mohammed Dahlan, a former chief of security in Gaza where he was a determined opponent of Hamas and the Intifada and actively co-operated with the CIA and the Zionists. The expectations the imperialists and the Zionists have of the new PA government are quite clear: crush the Intifada, and negotiate the end of any hopes for a Palestinian state. There is no sign that the mass of the Palestinian people will accept such a capitulation.

**Victory to the Intifada!**

## INTIFADA: THE FACTS

### 27 February to 5 March:

28 Palestinians killed, including six children, two old men and two women, one of whom was pregnant. Incidents included:

- 2 March: Abd Al-Rahman Jadallah, aged 9, shot dead during a funeral procession in Khan Younis in Gaza.
- 3 March: An invasion of Al Boreij camp left eight civilians dead including a pregnant woman who died when her house was demolished. On the same day, Mohammed Isa was arrested in Nablus, handcuffed and then executed as he lay on the ground.

### 6-12 March:

23 Palestinians killed including four children, a woman and an old man. Incidents included:

- 6 March: Invasion of Jabalya Camp in Gaza. 12 Palestinians killed including eight civilians; 75 injured. Five of the dead were hit by shrapnel from a flechette shell fired by a tank, one of

them a fireman. In addition, a 14-year-old boy killed by a bullet in the head.

- 8 March: The continuing assassination policy claimed the lives of four Hamas members when their car was hit by four missiles from a helicopter.

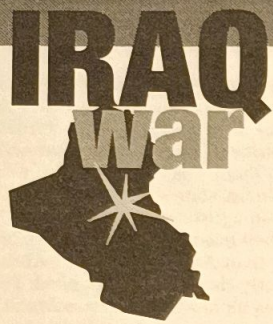
### 13-19 March:

27 killed, including seven children and peace activist Rachel Corrie. Incidents included:

- 13/14 March: Undercover death squads killed five in Tammoun and four more including two children in Jenin. The commander of these death squads claims the unit killed 79 Palestinians in 2002 alone.
- 14 March: 17-year-old shot dead for throwing stones at troops in Qalqilya.
- 17 March: 11 Palestinians including three children killed in Nusseirat camp and Beit Lahia in Gaza; one of these was four-year-old Iham Al Assar.

(Information drawn from Palestine Campaign for Human Rights)





## IMPERIALIST WAR

# Inter-imperialist rivalry A fight of hostile brothers

British armed forces have launched their twenty-ninth separate military intervention in the Middle East since the end of the Second World War. In five of the past nine decades the Royal Air Force has bombed Iraq. This repeated violence has been used to build and sustain British imperial power in the interests of British capitalism, often at the expense of other imperialist powers. The latest war on Iraq reveals and accelerates the tendency of imperialism towards inter-imperialist rivalry: the rivalry that brought two world wars. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

The obscenity of this war is demonstrated in the statistics: Iraq's gross domestic product (GDP) is \$15 billion. The US's GDP is \$10.2 trillion or about 700 times bigger than Iraq's. The US's military expenditure is almost \$400 billion. Iraq's military expenditure is \$1.4 billion or 0.35% of the US's.

US military spending exceeds that of the next 25 biggest military spenders combined. The National Security Strategy of the United States declares that the US military will be 'strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equalling, the power of the US'. Addressing West Point military graduates in June 2002 President Bush stated, 'America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge'. This war is waged amid deepening economic crisis for international capitalism, with growing resistance to US hegemony in Latin America. Venezuela refuses to privatise its oil industry for the multinationals. The US ruling class is demonstrating that it will not tolerate any opposition that could turn the economic crisis into a political crisis for imperialism. It wants to enforce its domination for the foreseeable future over potential rivals on both global and regional scales: the European Union (EU), Russia and China. The Middle East, with around 60% of the world's oil reserves, is central to this strategy. The US, with Britain, has to reinforce the domination of the Middle East which they have maintained since the Second World War and which they judge to be in peril.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the US role as bulwark has disappeared and each imperialist power now seeks its own advantage. Through their opposition to this US and British-led war the French and German ruling classes have signalled they do not intend to be subordinate to US interests. Having brushed aside the UN, ignored NATO, insulted France and Germany and launched its first 'pre-emptive war', the US ruling class has taken its gloves off in what now threatens to become 'a fight of hostile brothers' of capitalism.

In the personality of Tony Blair the British ruling class has an instrument well adapted to its calculations. Behind the self-righteous pose stand nothing more morally persuasive than British overseas investments (second only to those of the US), British oil

monopolies (the second and third biggest in the world) and the global role of the City of London (Europe's financial centre). The Labour government reckons that, in the event of full blown inter-imperialist rivalry, the interests of the British ruling class are best served in alliance with unchallenged US military power. This alliance allows it to 'punch above its weight' in world affairs relative to France, Germany and Japan. This is a gamble: the economic crisis and political responses from France and Germany could rapidly change the situation. The British ruling class, with major ties to US and European capital, may be forced to reassess. For now Blair will attempt to restore the British role of bridge between the US and the EU. Thus far, and to the satisfaction of the US ruling class, he has succeeded in pulling part of the EU away from France and Germany towards the US.

### Rivals for oil

**'He who owns oil will own the world... who has oil has empire.'** Henry Berenger, Commissioner General for Oil Products in France during the First World War.

Inter-imperialist conflict in the Middle East has often been intricate, but it is a tale of treachery and shifting alliances in the service of power and profits. German interests were evicted after the First World War never to resume a significant foothold. Britain and France then predominated, but the US encroached until after the Second World War and the 1956 Suez crisis when it supplanted Britain and France as the dominant regional power. France and West Germany responded and led the European Union project. The French ruling class never abandoned its 'sphere of interest' but it was chief loser as the US asserted itself in the region. The British ruling class accepted a supporting role to its US counterpart.

During the First World War infantry became partly motorised, navies converted to oil and the airforce was introduced. Henceforth, oil was to be a vital commodity and securing its transport routes and production fields a strategic priority for major powers. Availability of oil could make the difference between victory and defeat.

The Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) was formed by the National Bank of Turkey (owned by three

London bankers), Shell and Deutsche Bank to explore Mesopotamia (Iraq). In 1914 the National Bank of Turkey's 50% share was transferred to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later renamed BP), 51% owned by the British government. After 1918 Deutsche Bank's 25% share was confiscated by the British government as enemy property and transferred to the newly created *Compagnie Française des Pétroles* (CFP - now Total).

Ominously, US interests began to compete with European interests. In 1908 US Admiral Chester negotiated rail and oil concessions with the Ottoman Empire. After the First World War the Turkish government, seeking to enlist US support in its struggle with Britain and France, granted the Chester concessions in 1923, favouring US companies. Among these was the oil-rich Mosul district of Iraq. In the original secret 1916 Sykes-Picot (Franco-British) agreement for the partition of the Ottoman Empire, Mosul was assigned to France on condition that France respect the TPC concession there. However, with the British army having occupied Baghdad in March 1917, the British government persuaded France to include Mosul in the new British mandate of Mesopotamia. Turkey insisted the inhabitants of Mosul were Kurds who should be given the right of self-determination (sic) to belong to Turkey. With similar selfishness the British championed the right of Mesopotamian Arabs to keep Mosul.

When France and Britain signed the 1920 San Remo agreement, dividing up Mosul and the entire Middle East between them, the US government complained bitterly. Henry Cabot Lodge told the US Congress, 'England has taken possession of the oil supply of the world'. Following sustained US diplomatic pressure a bargain was struck in 1928 that allowed five US companies to buy 25% of TPC stock. British, French and US capital agreed to share in the plunder of Middle East wealth, in proportions reflecting their relative weights in the world.

During this period, 1922-28, US oil company (chiefly Standard Oil of New Jersey/Exxon and Gulf) control of Venezuelan oil grew from 32% to over half. Venezuela went from being a minor oil producer to the world's second largest producer and exporter. US encroachment into the Middle East was accompanied by moves to monopolise Latin American resources.



Raising the US flag over Umm Qasr.

## Britain in Iraq

- 1914-16 British press stories of Turkish atrocities in Mesopotamia: 'The Turk must go.'
- March 1917 Sir Stanley Maude leads British invasion force from the Persian Gulf and proclaims the 'liberation' of Baghdad.
- May 1920 Britain assumes the League of Nations mandate to govern a united Iraq. Revolt is crushed. 'We have killed 10,000 Arabs in this rising this summer. We cannot hope to maintain such an average: it is a poor country and sparsely populated.' TE Lawrence (of Arabia) in the *Sunday Times*.
- 1920s Winston Churchill launches the policy of bombing Iraq. Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, squadron leader in the 1919 Third Afghan war, was posted to Iraq. He pioneered 'control without occupation': 'In 45 minutes a full sized village... can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target.'
- 1922 The RAF is the first to use poison gas bombs against civilians, gassing Kurdish villagers. Bombing continues into the 1930s.
- 1921 Britain appoints Faisal ibn Hussain king of Iraq. Britain establishes the Iraqi Army to assist in repressing revolt.
- 1941 Anti-British officers seize power. The RAF bomb them into defeat. Four rebellious generals are hanged by the British.
- 1956 Britain closes its last RAF base in Iraq.
- 1958 General Qasim leads overthrow of the monarchy. British and US soldiers land in Lebanon and Jordan to prevent the nationalisation of the Iraq Petroleum Company/BP. Qasim proclaims Kuwait part of Iraq; British troops are deployed to Kuwait.
- 1979 Saddam Hussein becomes President. Britain supplies arms.
- 1991 the RAF resumes bombing Iraq and continues to do so...

The 1928 TPC agreement, known as the Red Line Agreement after a red line drawn on a map of the Middle East presented by France, designated Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula, excluding Kuwait, subject to its terms. Signatories agreed not to compete with each other for concessions within the Red Line; they set up a monopoly cartel. CFP/Total stated that 'the execution of the Red Line Agreement marked the beginning of the long-term plan for the world control and distribution of oil in the Near East'. TPC's name was changed to the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC, later BP). In 1929 Standard Oil of California (today Chevron) gained a concession to

Bahrain through a Canadian subsidiary. Based in Canada the subsidiary was deemed British and so got through the Red Line Agreement. The same company gained a concession in Saudi Arabia in 1933. By the end of the 1930s the US had footholds in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but controlled just 13% of Middle East oil production. Britain had 60% of the oil and France was second to Britain. By 1960 Britain had 30% while the US had 65%.

At the onset of the Second World War 60% of Germany's oil requirement was imported, mostly from Exxon. At the end of 1940 when German troops occupied Romania



# INTER-IMPERIALIST RIVALRY

they possessed the only substantial oil reserves in Europe. Germany then attacked the Ukraine and headed for the oil-rich area of the Soviet Union's Caucasus. By 1944 synthetically produced fuel supplied 90% of the Luftwaffe's consumption, but it was inadequate. 'Shortage of petrol! It's enough to make one weep' said General Rommel. Up until June 1941 Japan's oil needs were largely met by the US. Japanese forces occupied the Dutch East Indies and restored a few oil fields not blown up by the retreating Allies. By the end of the war, with China lost to Japan, synthetic fuel was extracted from all kinds of biological material. Oil was crucial to the Allies victory. The Vice Chairman of the US War Production Board said, 'the responsibility which rests upon the petroleum industry...is nothing less than the responsibility for victory'. During the war Britain tried to replace the US in Saudi Arabia through loans and currency conversion to the sterling area. The US was having none of it; on 16 February 1943 President Roosevelt announced the extension of lend-lease to Saudi Arabia because, 'the defence of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defence of the United States'. Henceforth Saudi oil became a matter of US national security.

## The Marshall Plan

The 1947 US Marshall Plan 'to revive free enterprise capitalist economies in Western Europe...' is presented as a gesture of US generosity. Amounting to 3% of US GDP it was an investment in US hegemony, focusing on oil supplies. The 1944 Bretton Woods conference, led by the US and Britain, established the dollar as the international currency reserve. Possession of dollars was necessary to buy crude oil from US controlled sources. About one third of Marshall Aid was designated for oil and oil related matters, for example refining. The greater the Western European oil imports the greater US companies' control over Western European economies. Between 1950 and 1965 oil's share in the (original six) EU countries' energy grew from 10% to 45% of the total. Refineries were built close to the consumer countries, depriving producer countries of possibilities to develop their infrastructures and petrochemical industries.

After the Second World War Exxon had over 50% of the European market. The Red Line Agreement obstructed US ambitions to get more Middle East oil reserves. US lawyers claimed the



Guarding the oil fields for imperialism: a priority job for Coalition forces

Agreement was terminated because two of the IPC partners CFP (Total) and Gulbenkian had become 'enemies' during the war. Perfidious Albion, the British Labour government, accepted the argument and the Agreement was cancelled in November 1948. Exxon and Mobil entered Saudi Arabia. France reacted angrily, 'The French government never forgave the Americans for keeping them out of Saudi Arabia'. (US Senate Report 1975). The dismantling of the Red Line Agreement reflected the changing balance of inter-imperialist power after the Second World War, with the US now dominant.

## Suez crisis

France and Britain jointly owned the Suez Canal, the main route from Western Europe to the Gulf oil fields and the Indian Ocean. Egyptian President Nasser nationalised the Canal in July 1956. The French government accused Egypt of supporting the Algerian FLN national liberation guerrillas. France viewed Algeria as central to its colonial empire. The French government said attempts to get the US on the side of military intervention against Egypt were 'a waste of time'. The US government opposed British and French efforts to impose their own regional domination and it feared being seen as a supporter of colonial rule when the Soviet Union championed independ-

ence and increased its regional influence.

In October 1956 Britain, France and Israel agreed to attack Egypt. Israel led the way and France and Britain intervened supposedly to establish a ceasefire, but actually to seize back the Canal Zone. The US Treasury sold off sterling reserves and threatened to sell off the rest if British forces did not stop fighting. Britain stopped the assault and the French resentfully complied with the decision of their British allies. To the French it was the British who had halted the Suez operation. Within five months France signed the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community, forerunner of the EU. Through European unity French capitalism would seek to regain a position of power and independence in the world. German Chancellor Adenauer remarked that building Europe would be 'France's revenge on Britain for buckling under US pressure to withdraw from Suez'.

With oil supplies through the Suez Canal disrupted Western Europe faced economic catastrophe. As British and French troops withdrew from Egypt in December 1956, US oil deliveries were activated. Venezuela increased its oil production in 1956 and 1957 by 14% and 13% respectively. The US-organised oil lift to Europe met 90% of daily requirements until Middle Eastern oil flowed again in mid-1957. US power in Latin America was used both to sustain Western European capitalism and ensure European dependence on the US ruling class.

## The EU and the US

'We used to question each other's judgments. What is corrosive is that now we question each other's motives.'

US Senator Joe Biden

Today's insults flying between the US and Britain on one side and France and Germany on the other have a certain comic character, but this is not funny: deadly consequences can follow. French President Chirac accused the US and Britain of having 'breached international legality' in their war on Iraq. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said the pre-emptive attack was never discussed with NATO and could destroy the alliance. France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg blocked a US NATO request for Patriot missiles to be stationed in Turkey.

US Secretary of State Rumsfeld, having called France and Germany 'old Europe', tied Germany with Libya and Cuba for opposing the US. Rumsfeld accused Austria of blocking US troop movements from Germany to Italy and said the US was considering bringing home 100,000 troops stationed in Europe (70,000 in Germany)

or relocating them to Eastern Europe. He is reported to have ordered sanctions to punish Germany: 'We are doing this for one reason only: to harm the German economy.' Bush warned Chirac, he 'will neither forgive nor forget if France continues to oppose the resolution'. British Foreign Secretary Straw took his cue, 'I say to France and Germany: take care...we will reap a whirlwind if we push the US into a unilateralist position'.

Just as US capital could not accept the post-First World War status quo in the world, neither can French nor German capital accept whatever share of the world the US ruling class decides is their lot. Capital must expand or perish and in a context of falling profitability this means a fight for resources and markets for commodities and investments. The US ruling class has demonstrated that it will subordinate or destroy the institutions that preserved the Cold War status quo. The gauntlet has been thrown down to France, Germany, Russia and China.

The US has 31.5% of world output, the EU has 26%. However in 2004 ten additional countries are scheduled to join the current 15 EU member states. Their 25 combined economies will match the size of the US's and their population will exceed the US population. As we showed in FRFI 171 February/March 2003 'The world economy - facing war and recession', EU total foreign direct investment amounts to 52.5% of the world's total, nearly 2.5 times that of the US. 'Over the period 1980-2001, the US share of the global total has halved.' The EU's share has grown by 25%. For the year 2001 French and German investment in the rest of the world each exceeded that of Britain.

German and Japanese capital have been excluded from Middle Eastern oil reserves. In 1995 the *Financial Times* reported the heads of Total, Agip of Italy, Repsol of Spain, Deminex of Germany and Mitsubishi Oil of Japan meeting the Iraqi government in Baghdad. US and British loss would be their gain. *The Wall Street Journal* warned that one day we could wake up to find Total the biggest oil business in the world. Total and Russian oil companies went on to negotiate large contracts with the Iraqi government.

From the start of 2002 to 4 March 2003 the dollar fell 20% against the euro. Iraq prices its oil in euros. Other producers are said to be considering switching from dollars to euros. Some argue that this is a war about petrodollars, to maintain the dollar as the main oil payment currency and the international currency reserve. The dollar achieved both functions as a result of being the currency of the major economy in the world and through US corporate control over the major oil resources after the Second World War. Ultimately, the strength of a currency reflects the productivity and size of the economy behind it. With French productivity per working hour matching that of the US, and Germany not far behind, with the scale of US indebtedness (see FRFI 171) and its current account deficit heading for \$506 billion this year, there is real potential for a challenge to the dollar's role. Trade disputes between the EU and US show the structural imbalance of their relations and a mendacity that could lead to trade war and currency chaos. The EU and US are defying World Trade Organisation rulings on hormone treated beef, company taxes, copyright and trade marks, beef imports, bananas and steel. The antagonists have taken retaliatory measures.

EU external investment in and exports to the world exceeds those of the US. The number of euro denominated transactions may come to exceed US dollar transactions. The euro would then have the potential to displace the dollar as the world's lead-

ing currency. Historically, international crises and wars accompanied the transfer of capitalism's financial centre from Amsterdam to London and from London to New York. Political power based on economic power determined the rise of the role of the dollar. This war on Iraq, like the wars on Afghanistan and Yugoslavia before it, is for geo-strategic power and the fates of the euro and the dollar are consequent to the outcome. US, European and Japanese capital dominate the world; together they have bled the under-developed majority of the world close to death. Still the profits obtained are inadequate to sustain capitalist accumulation. Now the imperialists look set to fight each other for the right to rob whatever is left of the world to steal.

## EU enlargement

Of the ten countries scheduled to join the EU in 2004 eight are from the former socialist bloc: Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The other two are Malta and Cyprus. Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are also queuing up to join. In two separate statements, 18 European states opposed the French and German governments and supported the US stance on war against Iraq. The British Labour government carries much of the diplomatic responsibility for this. This 'New Europe' can weaken European imperialism's potential challenge to the US. In February France and Germany combined to stop 13 EU candidate countries, many with a pro-US stance, from attending an EU summit on Iraq. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and the three Baltic states are among the signatories to the statements. French President Chirac accused the East European candidates of behaving 'recklessly', and of 'infantile' and 'dangerous' behaviour, adding that Romania and Bulgaria were 'particularly irresponsible': 'If they wanted to diminish their chances of joining Europe they could not have found a better way.'

The former socialist countries offer prospects for EU, US and Japanese capital. While global foreign direct investment fell by 55% in 2001, that to Central and Eastern Europe grew by 2%. Its share of world investment inflows grew from 2% in 2000 to 3.7% in 2001. This is seen as 'a stable and promising region for FDI'. (UNCTAD *World Investment Report* 2002). Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Russia accounted for 75% of the region's inflows. As a proportion of total investment in the region, foreign direct investment varied according to country from 20% to 42%. This suggests great potential outlets for imperialism's surplus capital.

The EU has been the predominant foreign economic factor in these countries for a decade. The EU accounts for 75% of their trade and 79% of the foreign investment in them. US imperialism is fighting to make up lost ground. As NATO has expanded eastwards so the US has used its military superiority to enforce the rules. New NATO members Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have to set aside 20% of their defence budget to buy US weapons - this is a condition of entry.

As we said in FRFI 171 'It is no surprise that many countries in the EU, led by Germany and France, want to establish their own regional defence force independent of NATO...' Germany now has more 'peace-keeping' troops on international missions than any other country. France has 8,000 soldiers on operations overseas, including 3,000 in the Ivory Coast. It is possible that the US and EU will find an accommodation over the reconstruction - sharing the spoils - of Iraq, but any lull in the hostilities between the US and France and Germany is likely to be short-lived.

The 2-million strong march to stop the war, London, 15 February





# Interview with James Petras Neoliberalism and resistance in Latin America

James Petras is a revolutionary, anti-imperialist activist and writer, who has worked with the Brazilian landless workers' movement and the unemployed workers' movement in Argentina. He gave this interview to Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! on 21 March 2003.

**FRFI: What is the strategic importance of Latin America for the US, particularly in the present circumstances?**

**JP:** Well let's deal with the phoney arguments that say Latin America's percentage of world trade has been declining; its importance for the US economy as a whole, as a percentage of its world trade, has been declining, so it is not very important. These are generalised arguments with inappropriate comparisons. It is important to note that Latin America is the area where the US banks get the highest rates of return and where historically they have received the greatest part of their overseas earnings. Banks like Citibank and Bank of America have been enormously successful in transferring illegal funds from Latin America, amounting to tens of billions of dollars every year. In addition Latin America is the only region in the world where the US has favourable external accounts balance of payments, so it helps to compensate for the enormous deficits it has in Asia and even in Europe. From that vantage point, if the US did not have Latin America the dollar would be weaker and its external accounts would be in even worse shape than they are right now.

There are other factors apart from its significant global strategic importance. Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina are all oil-producing regions and provide an important source of petroleum to the United States, particularly in times of crisis in the Middle East. The US has in Latin America, usually, a solid bloc of votes which it is able to mobilise to counteract opposition in other regions. There is also the fact that the US corporations in Latin America, particularly the 500 biggest corporations in the United States, control significant parts of the Latin American economy, and I don't just mean industry and raw materials. I mean fast food, real estate, tourism, air traffic etc. You have a whole array of important strategic sectors of the US multinationals and banking which are able to appropriate profits, interest

payments and royalty transfers, that help bolster sagging positions within the United States. For all these reasons, I think Latin America is extremely important. The concern particularly with Colombia, but Venezuela also, has to do precisely with the fear that a successful social transformation would have a demonstration effect on the rest of Latin America. It would undermine this notion that it is not possible to carry out change under the so-called conditions of globalisation, which has become one of the main arguments for all sorts of fake left and reformist people who say: 'Well yes of course we should forget about the debt, of course we should fight neo-liberalism, but let's be realistic, how far can we go given the power and dominance of the US?' Or again they use this very amorphous term 'globalisation won't allow it'. I think the struggle in Colombia is precisely over the attempt by the United States to prevent that invincibility myth from being eroded.

**Could you say something about the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which is being planned in this context?**

First let's look at what has happened in the last decade. The 1990s was a decade that was horrible for Latin America in every sense of the word. Income declined, poverty increased, the biggest economies went belly up and Brazil had the worst growth record in its modern history. On the other hand, for US investors, bankers, industrialists and telecommunications, it was the golden age. Never did they take out so many profits, never were so many public firms handed over to monopolies, never were they able to enforce so much interest transfers, never were they able to ship out so much illicit earnings through their financial circuits because of the deregulation of financial markets. Now, this golden age isn't enough. Washington wants it all and I think a lot of thinkers are mistaken in underestimating the voracious appetite of US imperialism.

Two things have to be kept in mind. One is that extremely lucrative sectors of the Latin American economies still are in the public sector, largely because of mass trade union struggles. I'm talking about the petroleum industry, electrical power and light industries in Ecuador and in Mexico. I'm talking about some of the minerals, gas and oil in Bolivia and several other strategic sectors which they haven't been able to privatise because of enormous worker resistance. The same is true in Colombia, some of the public utilities held back. So FTAA will fashion a framework in which the rules it sets will supersede national legislation on public-private divisions. Secondly, and more importantly, the principal backers of the current neo-liberal policies have lost support. They are no longer able to mystify the population; they are totally discredited. That group of political clients of the US in the 1990s are totally discredited everywhere. Toledo (in Peru) gets elected and within six months he is down to single digit support. Sanchez de Lozada (in Bolivia) is barely holding on to power and the betting is that he doesn't last out his regime.

There is fear that this golden egg that they have been hatching every year is going to be lost, so they want to go beyond the nation state where the pressures are enormous, to set up a commission of free trade, in Miami probably, run by a US official or a notable client, where they don't have to worry directly about legislators and local officials or mass movements. They will be immune to those direct pressures. So the free trade area will be multi-purpose. It is a further stage that goes from neo-colonialism to outright colonialism. Sovereignty is totally dissolved in this supra-national entity which is simply another arm of US imperialism. The US government will have the dominant influence. Along with this free trade area you need some mechanism to sustain the decisions and implement them against powerful majorities and that is why US military bases are being set up, joint training exercises and further deepening involvement through the Plan Colombia initiative or the Andean initiative etc.

There is one further embellishment to this and I think this is probably a bit more controversial. With the disintegration of the older generation of neoliberals, I am talking about Cardoso (in Brazil), Noboa (in Ecuador) etc, a new wave of neo-liberals disguised as social-democrats, like Lula da Silva (in Brazil), a populist, like Gutierrez (in Ecuador), are now backing the FTAA, although they want to discuss the timing and the concessions they can secure from the United States. So they are not just operating on the level of direct control, they are also working through this new wave of former leftists or populists as the new supporters. However, Gutierrez, is already facing opposition from his former allies in the Indian organisations, and Lula is already facing major challenges from metal workers and public employees for his drastic IMF austerity programme. So again this idea of having a

supra-national entity is high on the agenda in Washington.

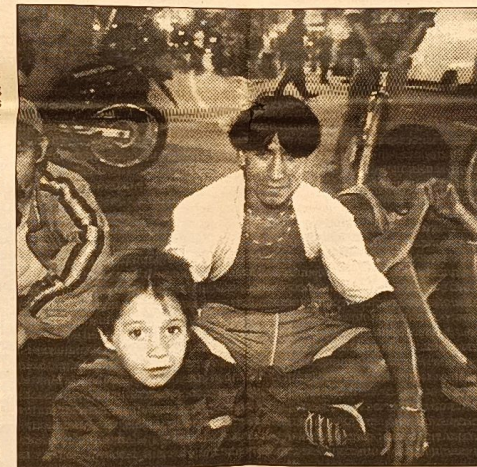
**FRFI: How do you see the resistance in Latin America developing?**

The resistance is extremely widespread; the opposition to FTAA is enormous. I would say it involves three quarters of the population without exaggerating. I think if we look at Bolivia we see some of the most significant mass struggles today. They almost toppled Sanchez de Lozada on the day of the urban insurrection. When the police became involved he had to actually sink out of the Presidential Palace in an ambulance. Someone said he was dressed as a nurse – I don't know if that is simply apocryphal – but the fact is that streets in cities like Santa Cruz and Cochabamba were practically taken over by the army but surrounded by huge opposition movements. They have an extraordinary leader there, Evo Morales, who has combined extra-parliamentary and parliamentary struggles in a very creative way, subordinating the parliamentary struggle to the mass struggle and creating a *comando popular* [popular coordinator] trying to merge the urban movements, the self-employed and progressive or class-oriented trade unions. The struggle there is extraordinarily advanced. Evo is a clear anti-imperialist, no ambiguities there, and while he embraces an autonomy for Indians and of course the legalisation of coca, he has a broader vision of a kind of Andean socialism, that is socialism adapted to the social formation of the Andean countries. Now that is one of the most advanced struggles.

Colombia is a second advanced struggle and I think we have to look at it as a multi-dimensional struggle. The big confrontation by the guerrilla movement encompasses up to 25,000, but could easily escalate to 50,000 combatants. They are extremely well armed with light weaponry and prepared by an extraordinary leadership. Manuel Marulanda is one of the great guerrilla commanders of Latin American history, comparable to Ho Chi Minh in many ways or General Giap, the famous Vietnamese. The influence of the FARC probably extends anywhere between 40% upward of the countryside. Overwhelmingly a peasant formation, over 70-80%, whose leaders are closely tied to the mass struggle. They differ from some of the commanders of Central America, petty bourgeois professionals who found it pretty easy to return to cushy seats in Parliament abandoning many of their principles. I don't think you'll see that kind of phenomenon in Colombia. They are a very advanced movement with very strong class roots.

The second thing about Colombia is the mass struggle and here I think we have to look at the neo-liberal policies that have radicalised the trade union movement, that have radicalised the countryside. There is an agricultural block that goes from landless workers, small peasants, middle-sized coffee growers, who are adversely affected by the ending of government subsidies and free trade policies that have resulted in the import of cheap grains and

the failure to provide support for coffee. So you have a block here that has had extraordinary success in mobilising tens of thousands in opposition to this government. You have the trade union movement, the public employees, school teachers, sections of manufacturing workers and banana workers, petrol workers, who have been in head-to-head confrontations with the regime and suffered the consequences through scores of killings etc. It's a life and death struggle. The question of state power is on the table. At least the advanced detachments of the class struggle have put the question of socialism versus capitalism on the table. I think it's the principal concern of the United States outside of the Middle East.



Argentina: 'There has been an incredible collapse in living standards and growth of poverty reaching 60% of the population. This is in a country which in 1990 had a per capita income of \$9,000 a year, now falling to \$2,500-\$2,700 per capita, which doesn't take into account the great disparities.'

Just highlighted what I think are the most advanced movements. On a secondary level, but not far behind, is the movement in Venezuela, which is very complex, very contradictory, but moving toward a clearer class polarisation. Chavez began as a kind of foreign policy nationalist, which was enough to provoke the United States. He had carried out some welfare spending programmes, on housing, on schools etc. Very minimal introduction of some progressive taxation, the beginning of taxing some part of wealth. The whole tax system in Venezuela is extraordinarily regressive, based on taxing petroleum income. Chavez's politics is a kind of progressive Bonapartism, balancing between different internal groups, maintaining US corporate interests while also determining independent foreign policy, on OPEC, on Cuba and in relationship to Plan Colombia etc. However, after two coup attempts led by the local bourgeoisie in

alliance with the US, Chavez has begun to move in some very significant ways.

First, he's cleaned out some sectors of the pro-imperialist military, which is important for any progress in the country. Secondly, he's moved towards a more conscious and deliberate organisation of the neighbourhoods, the Bolivarian circles. Thirdly, he's beginning to develop a policy of creating alternative class-orientated trade union nuclei to displace the pro-imperialist trade union cabals. Most significantly he has nationalised the public enterprises. Now that sounds a bit anomalous, but these are public enterprises in which 60% of the revenue was spent on salaries. The salaries of the senior executives were between \$400-500,000 a year. Most of the profits from the oil

priority to revitalising oil as a source of domestic development and eliminating all those extraordinary salaries and other investments. This is key. If you control the oil revenue, you can finance public enterprises, you can finance public development of research, social development etc. So it is an extremely important move, the first step to creating what we might call a welfare state, a social economy, a nationalist social-democratic state. And I think the dynamics there are coming from below. Chavez has been trying to conciliate classes, but under the pressures of the struggle, the blows from imperialism and the pressure from below, he's moving in a radical direction and that's a very important development.

In Argentina, since the 2001 uprising you had an enormous radicalisation in the middle class. And I think we should use that term in quotation marks. What we know as the 'middle-class', making ten to twelve thousand dollars a year in Argentina, which in Buenos Aires was something like 35% or even more of the population, has been proletarianised. Many have lost their jobs, their incomes have been cut by two-thirds and they are no longer objectively middle-class. You have a downwardly mobile middle-class approaching the living standards of the proletariat and incorporating some of the mentality of class politics, engaging in marches, uprisings, supporting the unemployed workers' movements etc. That's a huge change. There has been an incredible collapse in living standards and growth of poverty reaching 60% of the population. This is in a country which in 1990 had a per capita income of \$9,000 a year, now falling to \$2,500-\$2,700 per capita, which doesn't take into account the great disparities. You have the organised unemployed, you have the growth of these neighbourhood popular assemblies, incorporation of the lower middle-class, the collapse of capitalism, the banking swindles and loss of savings.

Objectively, it should be a pre-revolutionary situation. However, what has happened? The fundamental subjective factor is lacking, and I'm not talking about the subjectivity of individuals or groups, I'm talking about the subjectivity problem of the existing left groupings. And one might add of the piqueteros, who have developed what I would call a very sectarian conception of the revolution. Each one with their small groups, fighting the other groups to see who can win over one or another neighbourhood, to put up their flag. So there's been an appalling lack of unity in the face of this tremendous historical opportunity and I'm not picking and choosing. I think that there is a good deal of blame to pass around to all these groups. There's been one ideological influence that's affected some small groups of intellectuals who have disseminated it in popular neighbourhoods and actually influenced a few leaders. It is the concept that the new revolution will happen without taking state power. John Holloway [a British academic based in Mexico], for exam-

ple, says that you don't have to struggle for state power, you just create parallel organisations at the local level and they somehow multiply themselves and eventually they'll transform the system through some form of permeation. This is a kind of warmed over Fabianism with a certain kind of populist veneer. It is an ideology which simply codifies the limitations of some of the locally-based movements instead of helping them to develop a real class consciousness and conception. None of the local problems can ever be solved – even the most elementary problems of food and jobs – simply by devising barter relations at the local level. In other words Holloway is raising to a political principle the survival strategies that people themselves have been forced to pursue.

So all of this together has led to a situation which is extremely difficult to deal with right now. The problem is that there are elections coming up. My position has been very negative toward electoral politics in general and in particular because of all the experiences we've had, past and present, with the evolution, adaptation of left electoral parties to the bourgeois state, bourgeois politics. However, the question I raise – I don't have an answer – is how much of an abstentionist vote can you get? Can you get 50% abstention? What if you only get 25%? Then what do you do if 75% of the people are going to vote, particularly in the context where the insurrection is not on the table? So you have the possibility – I'm not saying I know the story yet – that the majority of the people in the streets is going to vote. The alternative perspective of an insurrectionary politics is not on the agenda. The bourgeois parties are divided at least six ways, which means a 25% majority, which a united left could secure, is being overlooked. What do you do in that context? Do you say elections? But if you say elections and all the little groups present their candidates to get two or three per cent of the vote, that's going to be an illustration of weakness. If you call for an abstention and only get 25-30% of the vote what do you get out of that? If a fascist like Menem comes to power, a Menem who is as sinister as any death squad leader in Latin America.

So it's a difficult situation. I would dare to say, that if the left could present a unified candidate with some credibility, it could secure a vote and put into question the whole political order as a transition to a further radicalisation. If they can secure the 40-50% abstentions then by all means, delegitimise the system. So it's hard to make a judgement from outside. It is clear that bourgeois parties are in deep crisis. It's clear in the most vulgar Marxist sense that the whole capitalist system in Argentina is collapsing. Nothing is working. When you get 30% of the population that has absolutely nothing to lose but their chains, and 60% living below the poverty line, a middle-class that's downwardly mobile, a ruling class that's divided, obviously this is what Marx talked about when he talked about the possibilities of a socialist revolution.

Now Chavez has cleaned out most of these directors and some of the so-called technical people who would sabotage the whole operation. There was a kind of ruin or rule policy. They've been cut off and oil is now in the hands of – at least I can say – the nationalist Ali Rodriguez, who was a guerrilla in the 1960s and a moderate nationalist today. He's a reasonably honest fellow, who, I think has given

## Repression and resistance in Colombia

Gloria Ramirez, member of the National Executive of the Central Workers Union in Colombia and Carlos Lozano, editor of the *Voz* newspaper and member of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Colombia spoke to FRFI. They explained that the level of state and fascist paramilitary repression is escalating with the direct military intervention of the United States through Plan Colombia.

Carlos Lozano said the US government had openly interfered in the Colombian civil war for 40 years: 'Plan Colombia is an instrument of intervention that, despite the name, has been adopted in the US Congress. It is a plan that never was approved by any Colombian institution.'

Under the pretext of combating narco-trafficking, the US military forces in Colombia are actively attempting to defeat the popular movement and the insurgency. In March 2003 the FARC guerrillas shot down a spy plane and captured three members of US intelligence who were on board attempting to locate the leading members of the FARC: irrefutable evidence of direct US involvement. 'They are not there as military "advisors": there are many US soldiers in different zones throughout the country', explained Carlos. 'There is a US military presence in Arauca, close to the border near Venezuela, which is rich in oil. They are setting up military bases in the Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline zone, which has been attacked previously by the guerrillas.' The Colombian government is supporting the war on Iraq, calling for a quick war in the hope that US troops can then be transferred to Colombia.

Alongside operations against the guerrilla movement there is repression against those engaged with popular struggle, particularly targeted at trade unionists. Gloria Ramirez stated that the government has a policy of exterminating trade unionists. President Uribe has introduced a state of emergency under his so-called 'democratic security' doctrine, which criminalises social protest. Even NGOs and human rights organisations have been attacked and all their computer information has been seized by the state. 'This government still calls itself a democracy, because they have the official institutions of "democracy". In reality, Colombia is closer to a military dictatorship, comparable with Chile under Pinochet' said Gloria. Since 1986

4,000 trade unionists have been assassinated.

Despite the 'dirty war', the Communist Party operates openly and publicly. The Party participated in the foundation of the Patriotic Union, set up after peace talks between the FARC and government in 1984 by a coalition of progressive organisations in an attempt at a democratic solution to the conflict. Communist Party members were among thousands from the Patriotic Union, including those elected to Congress, who were persecuted and assassinated with impunity.

The communists still utilise the limited legal spaces in Colombia, which were won through popular struggles. 'But at the same time,' Carlos told us, 'we believe that the revolutionary armed struggle is a form of struggle that is valid in Colombia, because it develops from political, social and economic causes. The Party states that part of the tactic and strategy of Colombian revolutionaries is the combination of all forms of struggle of the masses and unity between the democrats and the revolutionaries. Our Party is working towards the consolidation of the so-called Social and Political Fronts, a coalition of the left, trade unions, popular organisations, to create an alternative to the Liberal-Conservative system.'

Gloria told us that the communists believed that armed conflict in Colombia stems from structural causes, the political, economic and social exclusion of the great majority of the people. 'It is necessary to work towards a negotiated political exit, which we will arrive at through a structural transformation in our country', she said. 'That is why we have always pointed out the contradiction between the economic and social policies pursued by the various governments and the peace process.' While the government talks peace they attack people's rights, increase taxes, and throw resources at the war. 'In our country 40% of the budget is going to pay the external debt, 25% goes to the military, so what is left for social investment is minimal.'

Plan Colombia reflects the US and Colombian government's misconception that destroying the guerrilla movement will solve the problems of the country. 'The violence in Colombia doesn't have just one cause, but the main reason is the social inequity, the level of poverty and the model of wealth concentration.'



## Education Notes

# Labour's long march to privatisation continues

SUSAN DAVIDSON

We want to take 'private-sector involvement in education to another level' says the Head of Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) which took over education services in the London Borough of Islington in 2000. Education firms want to extend control of teaching and learning in schools for up to 30 years in deals that would enable them to employ staff including teachers. So far this has only been possible in a handful of so-called city academies. To get a taste of what this might mean we can look at Waltham Forest Council in Outer London where EduAction, a new and highly competitive business, has just taken over the council's education service. Nearly 50 employees, some with over 20 years experience, have had to re-apply for their own jobs and been forced to accept pay cuts of up to £4,000.

While the education companies are not private enterprises in the sense that capital is transferred to them from the state sector, they do operate like normal businesses. And like other share prices on the stock market they have taken a battering recently. Education services firms such as Capita, Serco and NordAnglia lost around half their market value in a couple of months. More badly hit still are the share prices of the government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) partners who get the building contracts, like Jarvis who were damaged by bad publicity about rail maintenance and their Railtrack contracts.

Clearly with the squeeze on share prices the education companies will lobby all the harder to get business diverted their way and in this schools standards minister, David Milliband, is a great help. His plans promise further privatisation and PFI projects despite January's review by the audit com-

mission that concludes that PFI schools are significantly less satisfactory than those built with traditional state funding. The grovelling admiration for private business that is shown by this Labour government will lead to continuing casualisation and outsourcing of the state education sector in the future. We can predict that the drive for profitability will lead to staff and wage cuts by the top nine education firms as they bid for contracts against each other.

## Standards? That must mean tests

While the government is selling off the public sector it holds on tight to what it calls performance indicators, or targets to sustain the illusion of political responsibility. In schools the Sats (standard attainment tests) dominate the lives of children at the ages of 7, 10 and 14 years and determine what their teachers do. Last year the government failed to reach its Key Stage 2 targets:

73% achieved a level 4 in maths and 75% in English compared with the targets set of 75% and 80%. This despite the fact that teachers now suspend education for five months of the year and put children through an extensive revision course teaching to the test so that a school will move up the league table of results. Jump! says the government and they all do. While the government has ignored children's authors like Anne Fine, Philip Pullman and Michael Rosen who have criticised Sats, they now have to see off David Bell, chief inspector of Ofsted who recently suggested that the over-concentration on targets could be a major block on improving school pupils' achievements. *Beyond measure: Why educational assessment is failing the test* has just been published by Demos. The author, Paul Skidmore says, 'If you want to look at why so many 14-to-19-year old kids are leaving the education system - by the age of 14 many children



Teachers now suspend education for five months of the year and put children through an extensive revision course so that their school will move up the league tables

have become terrified of assessments and have been put off the whole idea of learning'.

## Fast-track to Essex

Thurrock Council in Essex became the first council to use a new 'fast-track scheme to clamp down on truancy' when it summonsed ten families to court within 12 weeks of their child's first unauthorised absence. Councils have had powers since 1966 to take parents to court if their children miss school repeatedly without permission but this was to be a new trail-blazing example of just how quickly and how much punishment can be handed out to offending parents. Fines of up to £2,500 or prison sentences of

up to three months are now possible for parents, including those who take their children on holiday during term-time. Further legislation being prepared this year will allow £50 on-the-spot fines for parents of truants.

Unfortunately for the council there were no simple conclusions at February's court appearances - no shutting of prison gates behind feckless parents. Six families did not turn up (that's what truants do), one mother made a moving speech from the dock about her refusal to send her child to an unsafe, bullying environment and the rest claimed a medley of social and welfare situations for which they were supposed to be receiving council support.

# Poverty, inequality and unemployment

ED SCRIVENS

Last year the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone commissioned a special report on poverty in the city. The results, which came out in November show that while inner London has the highest per capita income in the European Union together with the most millionaires and the most expensive properties, the flipside of this typical capitalist coin is that inequalities are so great that London is also the child poverty capital of Britain.

Child poverty is defined as children in households living on less than 50% of the national mean average income before housing costs. In 2001/2002 the threshold weekly income was £280.50 for a couple with two children and £205.50 for a lone parent with two children; for a single person the poverty line was £117 and for a couple with no children it was £192.

The number of children living in poverty in inner London was the highest of any of Britain's sub-regions at 49% or 600,000. It was also the worst area for the number of adults in poverty at 30% and for pensioners living in poverty at 36%. Poverty also has a significant racial component as nationally 29% of white children, 43% of black Caribbean and 71% of Bangladeshi/Pakistani children lived in poverty. After London the North West and Merseyside was the region with the second highest number of children in poverty at 35%, the national average was 32%, while the relatively prosperous south east outside Lon-

## Unemployment top 10

| Area                             | Unemployed (%) | Unemployed (total) |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Hackney (London)                 | 16.4           | 14,000             |
| Newham (London)                  | 13.5           | 12,000             |
| Dundee City (Scotland)           | 12.8           | 9,000              |
| Haringey (London)                | 12.7           | 13,000             |
| Middlesbrough (North East)       | 12.4           | 8,000              |
| Southwark (London)               | 12.1           | 13,000             |
| South Tyneside (North East)      | 12.1           | 8,000              |
| Tower Hamlets (London)           | 11.8           | 9,000              |
| Liverpool (North West)           | 11.1           | 21,000             |
| Newcastle upon Tyne (North East) | 11.0           | 14,000             |

don recorded 26%. Alongside poverty the diseases of poverty that had virtually disappeared in the post-war boom are returning. Tuberculosis, which is associated with poverty, has increased rapidly and the number of notified cases has reached three to eight times that of other areas.

Clearly part of the reason for the extremely high level of poverty in inner London is the high cost of housing which has been driven up by market speculation as homes become another commodity for those with money to buy and sell with the aim of extracting a share of the profit without creating any value themselves. Extortionate housing costs take up a large part of income and so increase the number of people living on less than 50% of the national average disposable income.

Another important factor is unemployment. Inner London now has the highest unemployment rate of any sub-region of Britain. While employment by no means guarantees a lack of poverty as 40% of poor children live in households where at least one person is working, the difference between the child pov-

erty rates in London and the national average reflects the high percentage of children in the capital in workless households. In 2002 there were 3.75 million people who wanted to be in paid work but were not. However, government unemployment

employed to accept low paid jobs or have their miserable benefits cut off and so fulfills the task of on the one hand reducing social security benefits and on the other supplying a well regulated reserve army of labour to feed the economy's demand for low paid and casualised workers.

FRFI has argued that Labour's election success depends on its ability to hold together a coalition of the middle class whose votes decide the outcome of elections, the upper, better-off layer of the working class together with finance and banking capital. The government is only interested in the poor as providers of cheap and flexible labour to stoke up profits when employed, as a nuisance and drain on the profits and taxes of its supporters when unemployed and as an enemy when they inevitably resist.

Unemployment and poverty are bound to increase as the economy deteriorates, as it is always the lowest paid who are first to lose their jobs as the



statistics are based on the number of people claiming benefits and the figure for the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance was only 928,300 in December 2002. The Jobseeker's Allowance is a particularly vicious scheme as it forces the un-

economy stagnates. It is clear from what happened in Bradford and other towns in northern England in 2001, as well as from other past examples of uprisings against poverty and racism in the inner cities, that there will be resistance.

# Labour threatens to ban strikes

JIM CRAVEN

In March, the Labour government threatened emergency laws to ban further action by firefighters. As British imperialist troops launched their war on Iraq, Labour claimed that 19,000 members of the armed forces would be distracted from their bloody tasks in order to cover for striking firefighters. Such threats were part of the disgusting campaign of lies, spin and mudslinging by politicians, local government and the media aimed at trying to shame the firefighters into submission. Tory Shadow Defence Secretary Bernard Jenkins even tried to label the firefighters as 'Saddam's friends'.

## Taking the Queen's shilling

Fortunately for this coalition of the ruling class they have found a friend in FBU leader Andy Gilchrist. On 12 March the FBU executive rejected a revised offer of a 16% pay increase over three years because of attached conditions that gave employers sweeping powers to make job cuts and change working practices. Another one-day strike was called for 20 March. Clearly anxious not to upset the war effort, Gilchrist described the strike as, 'extremely disappointing to the nation'. Within a week, and on the eve of war breaking out, Gilchrist and the executive had turned tail, cancelled the strike and accepted the same offer, the only difference being government 'reassurances' on working conditions.

The following day a confer-

ence of FBU delegates angrily and overwhelmingly rejected the deal. However, the damage had been done. The Labour government had played its well-worn card of patriotism and the national (read imperialist) interest and Gilchrist had accepted it.



Andy Gilchrist

## Andy Gilchrist - labour aristocrat

Of course, no one should be surprised at Gilchrist's treachery. He is part of that section of the working class that does very nicely, thank you, out of the system. Gilchrist earns £81,000 a year including benefits. Earlier in March he was reported as having a dinner bill of over £800 at the exclusive Cinnamon Club. It included four bottles of wine at £85 per bottle!

The latest offer was due to be voted on by firefighters at the beginning of April but their unity and determination had already been undermined by Gilchrist's actions. So much for the so-called 'new breed' of militant trade union leaders.



## Venezuela

## Chavez stays in charge

ALVARO MICHAELS

By February 2003 the Venezuelan government had defeated a ten week campaign of economic obstruction centred on the state oil company - PDVSA. The rich, the middle classes and the oil industry's labour aristocracy aimed to maintain the rule of a few rich over the mass of impoverished Venezuelans by pulling down the government and pushing forward the privatisation of the industry that had been stopped by President Chavez. Now, after enormous effort by the rank and file workers, Venezuelan oil production will reach 2.7 million barrels per day by the end of March, compared to 3 million before the attempted 'economic coup'. The leaders of the sabotage are being brought to the courts, while the government works to repair the damage done to its policies for social justice. On 20 February corrupt CTV union leader Carlos Ortega went into hiding after a warrant was issued for his arrest for rebellion and incitement charges. In March he asked for political asylum at the Costa Rican embassy and the government agreed to safe passage out of the country. Ortega's flight follows those



of the April 2002 defeated coup leader Pedro Carmona to Colombia and naval officer Carlos Molina to El Salvador (see FRFI 167). Also on 20 February Carlos Fernandez, President of the Fedecamaras (chambers of commerce federation) was placed under house arrest and charged with criminal conspiracy and civil rebellion. In March the CTV union's next main spokes-

man Manuel Cova was summoned to appear before the attorney general. Charges have been filed against seven fugitive executives of the state oil company. Some 15,000 employees, 80% of them managers and white-collar workers involved in the political strike, have been fired. 25,000 employees remain.

The privately owned TV and radio stations that promoted the

attempted military coup of April 2002 and the recent economic sabotage, have had legal documents served on them, threatening closure if they continued to undermine the constitutional legitimacy of the government and participate in attempts to overthrow it. They ran an average of 700 pro-'strike' adverts every day and changed normal programming to pro-

mote anti-government acts. Given their owners' leading agitating and propaganda role against the legitimate government, they were the last to return to 'normal' operations in the second week of February. New regulations are now approved by the National Assembly to control this hysterical anti-government propaganda.

Lost production cost PDVSA over \$5 billion, forcing the government to cut the national budget. The losses are the sharpest on record, greatly reducing foreign currency holdings. New foreign exchange controls went into effect on 5 February after the government suspended foreign exchange trading by the Central Bank on 22 January.

Big business is passing on the costs of its anti-Chavez campaign to the workers. Car-makers laid off workers while they sell off accumulated stocks. General Motors, which sold 25,945 of the 74,560 vehicles assembled in the country in 2002, has made its 1,800 employees stay away and take a 25% pay cut until some 6,000 vehicles are sold on the local market or exported to Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. Ford and Chrysler have taken similar steps. With around half of car components imported, the exchange rate fall has forced up costs and prices.

The government has responded to demands of the poor to create a more equal society. The poorest have found a voice in some 70,000 civil action groups formed across the country. Like the rich, they are armed. They can lobby the government di-

rectly for funds. Such direct participation horrifies those who live well off the dispossessed poor.

On 11 March bomb attacks on the Spanish and Colombian embassies followed the President's public demand that the US, Colombia and Spain stop meddling in Venezuela's internal affairs. Each of these states supported the 'opposition' leaders in Venezuela during President Chavez's mandate. The Secretary General of the Organisation of American States (OAS), Cesar Gaviria, spoke publicly in favour of Carlos Fernandez. The bombings were attempts to discredit the President - either he supposedly 'provokes' them, or 'organises' them - even as the Vice President insisted that the government would do everything it could to prevent such 'macro-terrorism'. On 18 March the 'opposition' propped up by the US, agreed to sign the non-violence pact it had rejected in December before attempting the 'economic coup'. To justify continued public exchanges with the government (it has almost no representation in the National Assembly) and, in an astonishingly hypocritical attempt to cover its tracks, it has now agreed to 'create a climate of peace and calm in the country'. This agreement is prompted by the same OAS whose Secretary General lauds the 'opposition' leadership. President Chavez has called this year the year of 'strategic offensive'; he is now better placed to pursue his political programme.

## Ireland: Assembly elections postponed

PAUL MALLON

Despite the attention to the North of Ireland peace process given by the British and Irish governments in recent weeks they have been unable to restore devolved power to Stormont in time for the scheduled 1 May elections. The election timetable has been changed to June in order to resurrect some semblance of normality in the Six Counties.

The importance for imperialism of maintaining peace and stability in the North of Ireland was reiterated in March. Amidst the build up to war in Iraq Blair put off meetings with the Queen and Russian foreign minister in London to travel to Belfast on 5 March attempting to restore devolved power. The talks had five key areas of discussion: demilitarisation, devolution of policing and justice, human rights and equality, the return of those on Britain's 'wanted list', and a monitoring body for the 'acts of completion' which will oversee eventual IRA disarmament. Meanwhile, further time has been allowed for the parties to sell this to their membership before the June elections.

Days before war on Iraq, the White House was surrounded in shamrock as Bush took time out from planning war and plunder in Iraq to promote 'peace' in Ireland as part of the annual St Patrick's Day celebrations. Conscious of the Irish economy's dependence on US investment, Prime Minister Bertie Ahern stood alongside Bush. He was silent on the war on Iraq and Ireland's historic betrayal of its

neutrality, where Shannon airport has now been handed over to US military personnel to facilitate the current war on Iraq and imperialist wars to come. Since 1 January over 30,000 US armed forces have passed through Shannon, making Ireland a crucial client state for US imperialism. This is an example of the 'peace dividend' for the Irish people.

The White House travel expenses for the St Patrick's Day celebrations extended to all the main parties from the North of Ireland including Sinn Fein and Ian Paisley's DUP. The new Chief Constable of the colonial police force Hugh Orde, head of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI, previously the RUC) attended. Speculation surrounded a possible 'historic handshake' between Hugh Orde and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams. While this was not forthcoming, it is only a matter of time before Sinn Fein signs up to the police boards, implementing British security policy. Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness outlined his party's vision on policing when he said 'We are very determined to bring about the kind of change which would encourage young nationalists to step out of their front doors with their uniforms on, with their heads held high.'

Figures recently released by the PSNI reveal the reality of the so called 'peace process' for the nationalist community. Since the year 2000 loyalists have been responsible for over 500 pipe-bomb attacks, an average of one every two days. These figures exclude the hundreds of blast and petrol bombs in daily use and on the increase.

## HIV/AIDS - the fight for life

HANNAH CALLER

Across sub-Saharan Africa, 29.4 million people are infected with HIV. In 2002, 2.4 million people died. Four million people are in need of urgent drugs yet fewer than 50,000 are getting them. Tuberculosis infects 70% of those with HIV/AIDS. In South Africa, 4.7 million people are infected, with an estimate that 200,000 people will die this year. Of Malawi's 11 million people approximately one million are infected; AIDS has reduced life expectancy from 53 to 39 years and made 475,000 children orphans.

AIDS kills mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles and all those who raise the family, who should be working the land, who teach the next generation, who provide health care. AIDS is being passed from mother to child. Orphanages struggle to cope. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in India is thought to be following the African path, only 15 years behind.

In 1985, GlaxoWellcome (now GlaxoSmithKline) developed the first anti-retroviral drug - AZT, capable of suppressing the virus; in 1987 Bristol Myers Squibb made the second - ddI. There have been about ten further drugs developed. Yet in the wards of sub-Saharan African hospitals 70% of people have HIV/AIDS and there are no drugs to treat them with. In Malawi, drugs for HIV/AIDS are available for £18 a month imported from the Indian generics firm Cipla. A year's supply costs twice the per capita income.



South Africa: 4.7 million people are infected; an estimated 200,000 people will die this year.

In September 2000, multi-millionaire Yusuf Hamied, head of Bombay-based Cipla, manufacturer of cheaper generic copies of medicines, offered to sell AIDS drugs at less than a tenth of their market price. This forced the big companies to reduce prices but Cipla remained cheaper. Despite this just 50,000 of the almost 30 million people infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are being treated. Cost would always be an issue, but the bullying tactics of the pharmaceutical industry are the main barrier to treatment.

US and European pharmaceutical companies brought in a World Trade Organisation agreement called Trips, (trade related intellectual property rights), signing up every nation to protect patents on new drugs for 20 years. In 2001, the industry was forced to drop its court case against the South African government for importing cheap

drugs. In the same year, campaigners won an exemption clause to Trips: the Doha Declaration, allowing developing countries to ignore patents and buy generic drugs in health crises. The wrangling over precisely which countries and which diseases this applies to has gone on for 14 months, predominantly because of US stonewalling. The pharmaceutical lobby recently provided \$39 million to the Republicans. It demands payback. It wants the US to limit the scope of the Doha Declaration.

In June 2001, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria was set up by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to raise \$10 billion a year from rich countries to subsidise treatment for the poor. So far only \$3.2 billion has been pledged. Richard Feacham, head of the Global Fund says that when the HIV/AIDS pan-

demie peaks in 2050/2060 it will do more to destabilise the world than any terrorist threats. While the US spends \$200 billion or more on war against Iraq, it has so far donated a paltry \$500 million to the Global Fund. Britain has pledged \$138 million to the fund, spread over five years.

In South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is at the forefront of campaigning around HIV/AIDS. Along with trade unions and religious groups, it organised a march to condemn President Thabo Mbeki's state of the nation address in February that virtually ignored the HIV/AIDS issue. Last year a South African court ruled that the government should universally implement its anti-retroviral treatment programme in all state hospitals. However this has not happened and TAC has started a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience to force the government to act on the court ruling.

AIDS is destroying African economies and eliminating its populations. While Jean-Pierre Garnier, chief executive of GlaxoSmithKline, earned over £3.5 million in 2001, while the WTO is deadlocked over exemptions to the Trips agreement, hundreds of men, women and children are dying of AIDS every day. There can be no nice solutions in corporate boardrooms and politicians' offices in the imperialist countries. The struggle to combat the death and destruction being wreaked on the oppressed world by HIV/AIDS is a political struggle that will have to take on the imperialist drive for profit at any human cost.



# Cuba's revolution in education

While the forces of imperialism lead the world into ever-greater barbarism, socialist Cuba is working to create the most cultured, educated and humane society that has ever existed: a pathway of hope for a better world. **JIM CRAVEN** examines the steps Cuba is taking to deepen the revolution through socialist education.

**U**nder capitalism people are excluded from society by many mechanisms: birth, income, education, gender, race, lack of access to power and the media etc. These are inherent in a class-based society, where competition and individualism are regarded as virtues. But under socialism these constraints do not automatically disappear. Socialism is a transitional stage. The class struggle continues. It is the task of revolutionaries to replace capitalist values and structures with communist ones.

## A better socialism is possible

In recent years Cuban revolutionaries have admitted they could have done much more to advance their socialist society, even with the limited resources available during the Special Period. In particular, they have come to understand the central importance of raising the educational and cultural level of all the Cuban people, even beyond the outstanding levels already achieved. Only when the people have knowledge and ideas can they fully participate in solving their problems and building a better socialist society. Education is crucial: for better child care and family life; for handling the difficult transition from childhood to teenager; for improving health, diet and hygiene; to satisfy cultural needs and make people whole, rounded, fully human beings; for political understanding to withstand imperialist cultural domination and brainwashing; for reducing privilege and relative poverty and hence the social exclusion, crime and anti-social behaviour that stems from them.

Of course, bourgeois liberals and academics also often talk about transforming the world and ending poverty through education. There have been countless such national and international programmes. The fact they get nowhere is not simply due to the necessary resources not being made available, but that the social relationships and economic class interests in capitalist societies run counter to any egalitarian, universal advanced education system. In a socialist society such as Cuba, work-

ing to eradicate class distinctions, the possibility of success exists.

## Education to transform society

The Cuban vision is spectacular. In a recent speech to an international conference on pedagogy, Fidel Castro put it this way: 'In the last three years, life has led us to a great Battle of Ideas and the need to instil a critical rather than a self-complacent view of our work and our historical objectives.'

'There are new and higher challenges and an important lesson. We are currently undertaking programmes that we could never have dreamed of in our early years as revolutionary young radicals.'

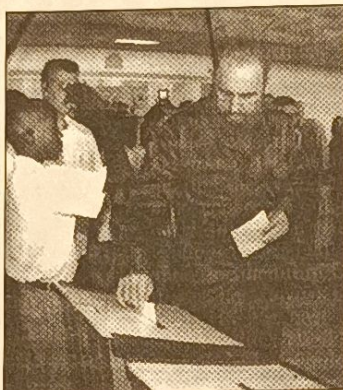
It is a fact that eradicating total illiteracy within one year constituted a feat; doing so with functional illiteracy took far longer. Now, with a large human and ethical capital, a great internationalist spirit and an elevated political culture, any objective in education and culture, both artistic and political, is within our reach. These compact words merely synthesise the essence of the educational revolution.

'With fabulous means of transmitting knowledge and culture, linked to the introduction of new concepts in the organisation and improvement of the educational system, there is nothing unusual in increasing three, four or even five-fold, the knowledge that our children, our adolescents and our students are receiving.'

'Future developments in our education will have notable political, social and human connotations.'

'Today, ideas are the essential instrument in the battle of our species for its own survival. And ideas are born from education. The fundamental values, including ethical ones, are sown in this way.'

'As education is the instrument par excellence in the search for equality, well-being and social justice, you can better understand why I qualify what is currently taking place in Cuban education in search of higher objectives as a profound revolution. It is the total transformation of society itself, one of whose fruits will



be a general integrated culture accessible to all citizens.

The very material future of our people is to be based on knowledge and culture.'

## 100+ programmes

Over 100 programmes are underway as part of this educational revolution. They include extending higher education to the whole population through the televised University for All and intensive courses for those who would not previously have had the opportunity. Over 85,000 high school graduates training as social workers, 80,000 unemployed young people and thousands of redundant sugar workers are already benefiting from this programme. New municipal universities are planned and the number of university students is set to rise by 50% in the next five years. The amazing aim within ten years is to raise the average educational standard to graduate level.

Improvements in the school system include reducing primary class sizes to 20 and junior high school classes to 15. Within two years an extra 4,500 extra primary teachers will be trained. A major programme of classroom construction and school refurbishment was completed in record time last September, thanks to the voluntary help and participation of parents and the community. Every school now has access to IT facilities and 70,000 teachers have been trained in their use. In a radical change to educating those in the difficult 12 to 15 years age group, a less specialised, more student-based approach has been adopted and 30,000 high school students have been recruited as classroom assistants for their younger comrades.

To ensure an all-round, cultural education every university must now offer arts and humanities courses. Seven new arts schools are to be opened in the municipalities and 4,000 new art teachers are to be trained so as to ensure everyone has the opportunity to pursue their talents and interests. Every village and neighbourhood now has a cultural centre where video films are screened and discussed.

## In socialist Cuba no-one is to be excluded

But if these educational programmes are to achieve a qualitative change in Cuban socialism, we must remember they are only a means to a more important end. The very concept of what it means to be a member of society is to be transformed. In capitalist society those who own the means of production and their associates – the ruling class – are society, and the rest of us merely bystanders, servants, scapegoats. In Cuba, as Fidel said, knowledge and culture are to be the material basis of society and no-one (so far as is possible before a communist society can be established) is to be excluded from that process. ■

## Miami 5: US tortures Cuban political prisoners

**O**n 28 February, as part of a 'national security alert', the Miami 5 – the five Cubans incarcerated by the USA on trumped-up spying charges – were all condemned to solitary confinement on the orders of the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington, the Department of Justice and the US Attorney General. Not only were all five sent to the punishment blocks, known as the 'holes', of their respective prisons, they were put in the 'box' – reserved for those who breach the 'hole's' discipline code. However none of the five has been accused of any breach of prison discipline. Their treatment is part of an arbitrary, vindictive and politically motivated campaign by the US administration. The Attorney General has ordered that these 'special administrative measures' will not be reviewed until 24 February 2004, which means the five will remain in isolation for a year or more. This is not the first time political prisoners have been arbitrarily punished in the US because of events in the outside world. After the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre many political prisoners were put in punishment blocks and solitary confinement.

The prison authorities are not allowing the Cubans any visitors and have cancelled the consular visit to Fernando González that had been

scheduled for 10 March. Two of the men's wives have been refused permission to enter the US and visitors to Lompoc prison to see Gerardo Hernandez and to Beaumont federal prison to see Ramon Labaniño (including Father Geoffrey Bottoms from Blackpool) were turned away despite having visits scheduled.

Not satisfied with solitary confinement for the Miami 5, the prison authorities have resorted to sleep deprivation torture by keeping the lights on in their cells 24 hours a day. The five Cubans are being denied any contact with the outside world, they are not allowed their post, any access to their legal documents or to contact their attorney. This cruel treatment is a gross violation of human rights, the US's own constitution and the right to legal defence.

There will be a mobilisation of support for the Miami 5 all around the world on the weekend of 5 and 6 April and demonstrations outside US embassies in many cities on Monday 7 April. The fight to free the Miami 5 and raise the profile of their case has become even more urgent.

**Join Rock around the Blockade on a picket of the US embassy in Grosvenor Square in London W1, 6-7.30pm on Monday 7 April. Show your opposition to the abuse and torture of the Cuban heroes held in the empire's gaols!**

## General election in Cuba

General elections to the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies were held in Cuba on 19 January. Despite calls by the counter-revolutionary Varela Project – much trumpeted in the West – for a boycott, the turn out for the elections was 8,115,000 or 97.61% of the country's eligible voters, the highest in Cuban history.

50% of the candidates were nominated by the various mass organisations such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, trade unions, farmers', students' and women's organisations. The other 50% were nominated directly by the electorate. Both Party and non-Party members were nominated. The Cuban Communist Party does not itself stand in elections.

Candidates did not have to be millionaires to stand for elections. On the contrary all candidates received the same publicity for their campaigns – a simple CV – in another measure to ensure that democracy is what it should be: rule for the people and by the people.

## Cuba moves to block US interference

The Cuban government took strong measures in March to block attempts by the US to foment counter-revolution. Diplomats at the US Interests Section in Havana will only be allowed to travel outside the city area with prior approval from the Cubans. This follows months of extensive trips around the island by diplomatic chief James Cason during which he flagrantly violated normal diplomatic protocol by interfering in Cuba's internal affairs. Cason made high profile visits to Cubans opposed to the socialist government, providing them with meeting facilities and international media support. Many of these people are financed from US government funds provided to front organisations of the Miami mafia. Around

20 of them were later arrested and charged by the Cuban authorities and are now awaiting trial. Cason was appointed last autumn by the notorious Otto Reich (see FRFI 171).

## Anti-Cuban terrorists rewarded in US

While the Miami 5 languish in solitary confinement for working to prevent US-backed terrorism against Cuba, US authorities continue to reward anti-Cuban terrorists.

A Miami Dade County judge mysteriously reduced from \$200,000 to \$50,000 the bail of Antonio Calatayud, a well-known and wealthy leader of the Miami mafia charged with defrauding Medicaid and low-income patients out of \$290,944.

Calatayud's many terrorist crimes include participation in the RECE organisation which bombed the Cuban Trade Mission in Montreal in 1972, killing a diplomat, and the planning and financing of the bombing of the Cuban Embassy in Paris in 1974. Calatayud was also a member of the group which claimed responsibility for bombing a Cuban passenger plane in 1976, killing all 73 civilians on board.

In another incident, a Cuban airliner with 37 people on board was forced to land in the United States in March 2003 by six hijackers armed with knives and hatchets. Instead of totally condemning this criminal action the US authorities are to impound the plane, having released the hijackers from gaol. A US housewife, Ana Margrita Martinez, is claiming the plane as compensation for being deserted by her Cuban husband, Juan Pablo Roque, a Cuban agent who infiltrated the notorious Brothers to the Rescue, and had to flee the US after warning Cuba that the organisation was planning sabotage flights over the island. This is the second time the US has ignored international conventions on hijacking to give Martinez and the Miami mafia cheap anti-Cuban propaganda.

Ed Scrivens and Jim Craven



Young Pioneers traditionally guard ballot boxes during elections in Cuba



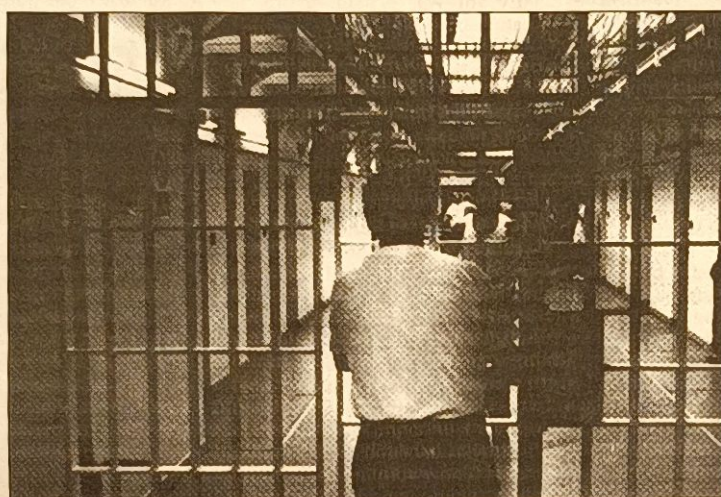
# Labour government's latest sentencing plans

The prison system has been awash with rumours that the next Criminal Justice Act, currently at the Bill stage, contains a response by the government to overcrowding which will result in prisoners being automatically released half-way through their sentences, instead of having to apply for parole. In fact, although there are seeds of truth in this rumour, the Criminal Justice Bill is not a response to overcrowding and its provisions are likely to result in yet another steep increase in the number of people serving lengthy prison sentences. NICKI JAMESON reports.

'Custody plus' will replace all short prison sentences of under 12 months. It consists of a short period in custody of up to three months, followed by a longer period of probation supervision (minimum of six months). The court can attach any of a long list of specific requirements to the supervision part of the sentence. If both the court and the person being sentenced agree, the prison part of the sentence can be served as 'intermittent custody'.

## Determinate sentences

As the rumours have suggested, people convicted of non-violent offences and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment or more will be released automatically on licence half way through their sentence. However, what has been far less well publicised within prison is that the whole of the second half of the sentence will be spent on licence, with the sentencing court able to recommend a vast range of licence conditions. At the moment, prisoners are released either after completing half their sentence (on parole), or two-thirds (at their 'non-parole date'). They are then on licence until the three-quarters point, and, except in a minority of cases, they then cease to be subject to supervision. In future all determinate sentence prisoners will now be subject to licence conditions up to the expiry of their sentence.



## Extended sentences

The Bill introduces a new scheme of sentences for people who are 'assessed as dangerous' and are convicted of 'specified sexual or violent offences'. If the maximum sentence for the offence is less than ten years they will be given an 'extended sentence'. This is a finite sentence, but has a licence period that is longer than the sentence itself (an extra five years for violent offences and nine years for sexual ones).

Half way through an extended sentence, a prisoner will be able to

apply for parole, and they will have further opportunities to do this during the remainder of their sentence, however, if the Parole Board does not agree to their release they will serve the entire custodial sentence.

## Imprisonment for public protection/discretionary life sentences

If someone assessed as 'dangerous' is convicted of a sexual or violent offence for which the maximum sentence length is ten years or more, s/he will receive either a 'sentence of

imprisonment for public protection' or a discretionary life sentence. In either case the court will specify a minimum term (similar to the current 'tariff' or 'relevant part') to be served in custody. After this point the prisoner can only be released if the Parole Board agrees. Ten years after release, those sentenced to imprisonment for public protection will be able to apply to the Parole Board to have their licences rescinded. Those serving discretionary life sentences will be on licence for the rest of their lives.

The net effect of all these measures will be a massive increase in the number of people subject to some form of custody or supervision. In recent years the role of the probation service has been rendered increasingly draconian, and probation officers have virtually ceased to assist with welfare and resettlement, concentrating instead on policing people on licence or community orders. The implementation of the Criminal Justice Bill will be bound to push this trend still further, and the sole function of probation officers will become arranging for anyone considered to be in breach of their licence to be recalled to prison. It is notoriously difficult to appeal against recall decisions, which are shamelessly operated on the basis of 'guilty until proved innocent', and the prison population will continue to increase.

## Wilkinson's: Cheap – because we use slave labour

The Campaign against Prison Slavery was launched at a conference in Leeds on 1 February. On 5 April it will be targeting Wilkinson's, a company making stationery and household goods. Wilkinson's claims to have a 'caring' outlook and an 'ethical' view, and to work 'in partnership with local communities'. But the reality is that rather than offer jobs to the community, Wilkinson's prefers to use the slave labour of a captive non-unionised workforce in order to keep its costs low and its profits high.

Slavery has not been abolished in Britain; behind high walls and locked doors it still flourishes. Working class people are forced to toil in poor conditions, beyond the reach of health and safety inspectors, denied even the most basic employment and trade union rights, and severely punished if they refuse to work. In British prisons there have been savage cuts in education budgets over the past half-decade; any pretence at rehabilitating prisoners and empowering them with trade skills has been abandoned. They are now seen as a readily exploitable labour force, a Third World colony in Britain's own backyard, cheap, non-unionised, available, and literally compelled to work.

If prisoners refuse to work, or are not considered to be working hard enough, they are punished – placed in solitary confinement, brutalised, denied visits, and can even end up having days added to their sentences. Private companies are making enormous profits from prison labour: £52.9 million in 1999, and that figure is growing rapidly. They use it because it is cheap – prisoners may be paid less than £5 for a week's work – and for prisoners there are no 'sickies', no holidays, no union meetings, no transport problems, and if there's no work they can simply be locked back in their cells. Prisoners are treated in the way the bosses would like to treat all of us.

Wilkinson's is one of many companies profiting from the slave labour of prisoners. In Swansea prison for example, prisoners forced to do packing work for Wilkinson's are paid little more than £1 per day. This greedy company would rather use slave labour than give more work to its own workers or employ new ones.

The issue of prison slavery is an issue for all working-class people, not least because it undermines workers' pay and conditions generally. Not because prisoners are somehow 'stealing' jobs – they have absolutely no choice in the matter – but because companies can drive down the wages of their own employees by using prison labour, and it brings with it the threat of short-time and redundancies. The employees of Dysons, the vacuum-cleaner manufacturer, for example, were thrown out of work when Dysons decided to use cheap non-unionised labour in Malaysia, but how many Dysons' workers knew that for some time the company had been using cheap, non-unionised labour at Full Sutton prison? Not surprisingly the latter-day slave-masters are desperate to keep their involvement secret, from their own employees, and from the wider public.

Mark Barnsley

Contact the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, The Cardigan Centre, Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ; e-mail: [againstprisonslavery@ncl.com](mailto:againstprisonslavery@ncl.com), for details of actions on 5 April, or support, advice and information on organising your own.

# Organise against brutality

The segregation unit at Full Sutton maximum security prison in York is once again the focus of complaints concerning staff brutality. This raises serious questions about the treatment of long-term prisoners in segregation units throughout the dispersal system. JOHN BOWDEN, currently at HMP Durham, reports.

Since 1994-5, when the Prison Service instigated a deliberate policy of increased repression against long-term prisoners, the nature of segregation unit regimes throughout the maximum security dispersal system has become brutal and dehumanising. In gaols like Long Lartin, Frankland and Full Sutton control over prisoners in segregation is maintained by physical violence and fear. Staff use a strategy designed to create maximum stress, which in turn is used as a justification for physically attacking prisoners pushed to the very edge of psychological endurance and self-control. Dr Bob Johnson, a doctor for 42 years, and one-time employee of the Prison Service, said in a report concerning the recent beating up of prisoner Charles Bronson in the segregation unit at Full Sutton: 'Perhaps most troubling, there is the suggestion of an under-culture of physical brutality which may run something as follows – if a prisoner smashes property, then the staff are expected to smash the prisoner.' This strategy of mentally winding prisoners up and then physically beating them when they react is a strong characterising feature of all dispersal system segregation units at the moment.

In 1994 FRFI highlighted the complaints of prisoners in the Full Sutton segregation unit who were experiencing what amounted to a regime of terror. A gang of eight to ten prison officers were routinely dragging prisoners from their cells and systematically beating them, largely as a form of group enjoyment. The police are currently investigating fresh complaints about staff brutality in the Full Sutton segregation unit, which prior to any investigation of their own, the prison authorities have predictably refuted.

During the early days of the dispersal system some of the most high-profile rebellions (Parkhurst 1969, Hull 1976, etc) were provoked by ill-treatment of prisoners in segregation. The cumulative effect of those uprisings was a principle factor in achieving fundamental changes to the running of segregation units in long-term prisons. Since 1994-5, however, and as a result of then Home Secretary Michael Howard's massive onslaught on the rights of prisoners, prison staff have seized back the power to run segregation units as places of fear and gratuitous brutality.

Prison officer culture has always been imbued with the view that control should be maintained by the

threat and use of physical violence. In the hidden world of the segregation unit that view is given open and free expression. In some segregation units so all-pervasive is the violence that prisoners literally live in fear for their lives.

Following the arrest and conviction in 2000 of prison officers for brutalising prisoners in segregation at Wormwood Scrubs, Director General of Prisons, Martin Narey publicly declared that in future such behaviour would be rooted out and punished. In 2002 I spoke with Narey and described to him the behaviour of staff in the segregation unit at Long Lartin. He did absolutely nothing about my complaint. In her most recent report on Long Lartin, the Chief Inspector of Prisons Ann Owens absurdly praised the 'professionalism' of staff running the segregation unit. This despite a recent successful legal action by prisoner Billy Whitfield who was awarded thousands of pounds in compensation following repeated beatings in the Long Lartin segregation unit. The establishment obviously measures prison officer 'professionalism' by the degree to which they're able to subdue 'difficult' prisoners.

During the 1970s and 1980s a high degree of solidarity and organisation

amongst long-term prisoners ensured that segregation unit staff were ever mindful of the potential for collective unrest and were therefore, to a degree, circumspect in their treatment of prisoners. Today that wariness has gone and abuse is widespread and routine.

It took long-term prisoners in Britain decades of struggle and sacrifice to shift the balance of power slightly in their favour and stop the brutalisation and murder of prisoners in segregation. That struggle must be pursued again by the current generation of long-term prisoners if the thugs and sadists who now run places like the Full Sutton segregation unit are to be stopped.

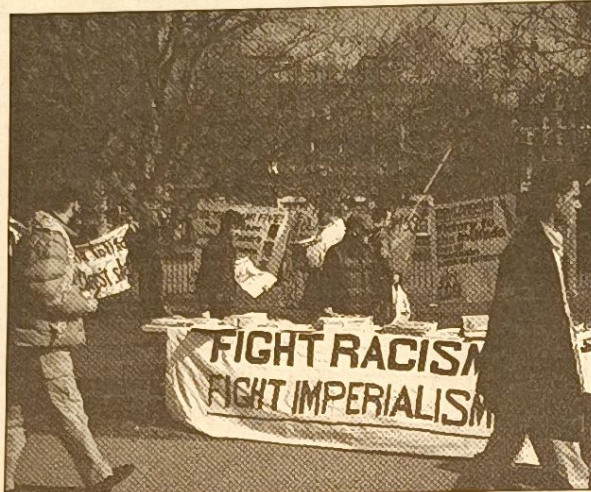
## Your right to receive FRFI

In FRFI 170 we reported on the judgment of the Prisons Ombudsman following an attempt by Erlestoke prison to ban FRFI. When FRFI 171 arrived at Kingston prison, the authorities there attempted to ban it on almost identically spurious grounds. Larkin Publications threatened legal action against the prison if it did not issue our subscribers with their copies of FRFI. This resulted in an immediate climb-down. We will respond in the same way to all attempts to ban FRFI.



# Break with Labour

**W**riting in *The Guardian*, Labour MP Tam Dalyell described Tony Blair as a 'war criminal', but then went on to say that 'The Labour Party will not tolerate a leader who takes the country into an avoidable war.' Interviewed in *Al Ahram Weekly*, the even more left Labour MP George Galloway tells us that the Labour government's foreign policy is 'far from Labour' but, having said how opposed he is to the war, goes on to say that 'I don't want to leave the Labour Party... I hope it will not come to that'. But the Labour Party has always been a war party: it has always been prepared to kill innocent people to protect the interests of British imperialism. Whilst the Stop the War Coalition continues to give the Labour Party a platform, we must campaign against those who refuse to resign from the rotten, racist and imperialist party. On the 22 March national demonstration, FRFI comrades held a public rally in Hyde Park in front of a banner which read: 'Tony Blair drops bombs, Tony Benn supported sanctions. New Labour, Old Labour are both deadly'. There were heated exchanges



At the outbreak of war, London FRFI held a street meeting in Hyde Park

with Labour Party members; but many, especially young people, agreed with FRFI. On the same day, other London comrades travelled to the US airbase at Fairford. Police followed the three buses carrying protestors into Gloucestershire. There, the local police pulled the buses over, stopped and searched them, videoing their occupants. FRFI comrades and some others predicted that the police were going to turn the buses back, so

they set off to get to the airbase on foot. As it turned out, they were right: the police were using tactics employed extensively in the 1984/85 miners' strike. The buses were turned round and only a small proportion of London protestors actually got to Fairford.

A priority in anti-war work must be building solidarity with the Palestinian people. FRFI continues to organise regular M&S pickets and educational meetings in London,

highlighting Israel's role in defending imperialist interests in the Middle East. M&S pickets have also continued in central Manchester where they have faced down harassment from M&S management and Zionists, one of whom was arrested for possession of a flick-knife. An FRFI M&S picketer who spoke at the 15,000 strong Manchester anti-war demonstration on 8 March was the only speaker to demand that Labour members resign their membership. The same message went out at the 22 March demo where the Labour City Council – supposedly anti-war – banned protestors from rallying in Albert Square. Later police stood by when drunken football fans attacked a Muslim family, and instead arrested a young Muslim woman, holding her for four hours in Bootle Street police station. FRFI supporters picketed the police station until her release. On the same day in Leeds, supporters attended a march of about 1,500, and later held an M&S picket in the city centre. They were joined by about 40 of the demonstrators in a lively and noisy event. More pickets are planned. Leeds police were also active: several plain clothes officers joined the march and later on hung around the picket until they were photographed, at which point they slunk off. 'Star' speaker at the march was a Labour councillor, who was challenged by many dem-

onstrators shouting at him to resign.

In Scotland, comrades participated in spontaneous demonstrations with local youth outside the Scottish Labour Party conference in Dundee on the weekend after war started. The left tried to prevent this challenge, but failed. Elsewhere, in both Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scottish Socialist Party stewards held protestors back from effective action. In Edinburgh they stopped young marchers from picketing a police station to which some of them had been taken after they had been arrested.

As the war continues, anti-

imperialists must join with FRFI supporters in challenging the Labour left and their admirers in the Stop the War Coalition. We must create a new movement which is anti-imperialist and which therefore has broken with Labour. When police start to prevent effective protest from taking place, we must build support for those arrested, and organise to defend our rights, for it is certain that the respectable left will not. We urge readers to contact us to get involved in building a real anti-imperialist, anti-war movement.

*Stop the War! No to Labour imperialism!*

## EVENTS

### SCOTLAND

Glasgow public meeting Monday 7 April 7pm: Stop the War! Fight Labour Imperialism! Room 7 Partick Burgh Halls, Burgh Hall Street (off Dumbarton Road) Nearest underground station: Partick.  
Dundee public meeting Thursday 15 May 7.30pm: No to imperialist war! No to Labour imperialism! Room G1, University Tower, Dundee University, Perth Road. Contact FRFI in Scotland: write to Unit 111, 36 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1DL, or email frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk or phone 07779 785 529.

### LONDON

Public meeting Wednesday 23 April 7-9pm: Stop the War! Fight Labour Imperialism! Room G1, 20 Kingsway, London WC2. Nearest Tube Holborn.

Marks & Spencer pickets: Oxford Street (Marble Arch end) every second Saturday

12-2pm; next dates are 12 April, 26 April, 10 May and 24 May. Phone to confirm.

FRFI Victory to the Intifada group meetings: Wednesday 9 April and 7 May at 7pm in Room S75, St Clement's Building, Houghton Street. Nearest tube: Holborn.

For more information, phone 020 7837 1688 or e-mail victoryintifada@hotmail.com

### MANCHESTER

FRFI anti-imperialist forum Sunday 27 April 2pm: Stop the War! Victory to the Intifada! Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester city centre.

Boycott Marks & Spencer: Pickets every Saturday 12-3pm, Market Street, Manchester. For details of these and others in Bolton and Leeds contact 07816 547066 or email victory\_intifada@yahoo.com

### MIDLANDS

For details of regular anti-war stalls and Marks & Spencer pickets contact 07803 939 713 or 020 7837 1688 or email midlandsreg@hotmail.com

## Rock around the Blockade round-up

www.ratb.org.uk

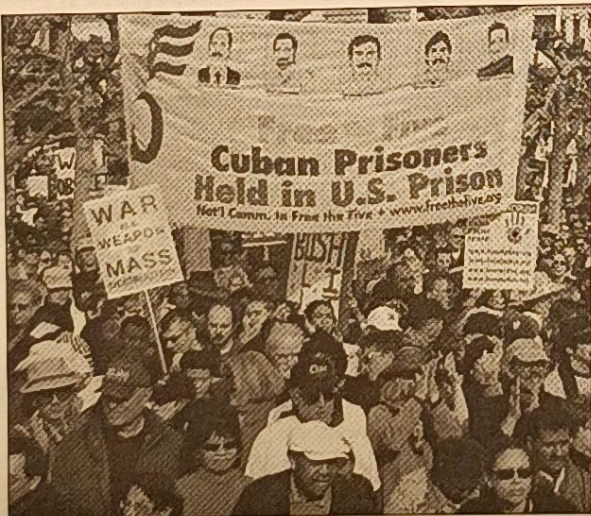
# Rock around the Blockade goes to Cuba



**O**n 19 April, Rock around the Blockade will be sending its fifth brigade to Cuba. The brigadistas are an eclectic group, including Kurdish and Turkish refugees, Scottish students, Asian youth, doctors, teachers, squatters and trade union activists. The group is united by its commitment to building a socialist movement in Britain and eagerness to learn from the Cuban example.

The visit, organised by Cuba's Union of Young Communists, will include many discussions with representatives of mass organisations and the Cuban Communist Party, as well as opportunities to visit projects such as schools, Pioneer Palaces (children's palaces), an old people's home and family doctor's clinic to see the building of socialism in practice. We will visit the offices of Cuba's communist youth newspaper, *Juventud Rebelde*, visit the Latin American School of Medicine, Cuba's International School of Sports and Physical Education, spend time with social work students involved in the latest phase of Cuba's efforts to ensure social inclusion for all, and meet with Cuban artists. A highlight of the brigade will be the chance to participate in the mass demonstrations in Havana marking international workers' day on 1 May.

Our first week will be spent in Guantanamo province, part of which remains illegally oc-



All over the world people are demonstrating for the release of the Miami 5

cupied by a US naval base. In 2000, a Rock around the Blockade brigade brought a sound system as material aid for the Union of Young Communists (UJC). This year's brigade will be visiting the community who are still served by the sound system in the form of a mobile disco that travels around the rural parts of the province. Rock around the Blockade is currently raising money to take out to the UJC so that the sound system can be maintained in top condition. The second week will be spent in Havana.

Throughout our visits, meet-

ings and discussions, we look forward to hearing more about the ideological and practical initiatives Cuba is involved in at the moment as part of the Battle of Ideas. We will also be discussing with Cuban communists the campaign to free the Miami 5, locked up in illegal and inhumane solitary confinement in prisons in the US, as well as hearing Cuba's perspective on imperialism's onslaught on Iraq.

In preparation for the brigade, the brigadistas are working now on collating facts and figures about life in imperialist Britain, in order to take to

the Cubans some information exposing the truth about capitalism.

We look forward to returning to Britain inspired to redouble our efforts to build an anti-imperialist socialist movement here.

As well as raising awareness about Cuba with a showing of the excellent documentary *El Che*, about Che Guevara's contribution to the Cuban Revolution, we have been raising money to support the UJC with another hugely successful Rebel Music club night which made over £1,000 on 28 March. We urge all readers to contribute to the fundraising to help the UJC in their practical and ideological work with the Cuban youth and help maintain the Guantanamo sound system.

Please send cheques, payable to Rock around the Blockade, to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

We hope that you will all be able to attend the report back meetings that will be happening up and down the country on our return. You will be able to hear the latest news from Cuba and reports of the political debates going on there at the moment. Please ring for details or send us your email address so that we can let you know of report back meetings in your area. See box for details of those arranged so far.

## EVENTS

**Monday 7 April 6-7.30pm The Miami 5 are Innocent! No to solitary confinement!**

Demonstration to mark the appeal of the Miami 5. Rock around the Blockade will be picketing the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, London W1 to demand freedom for the five men and protest against the illegal and inhumane conditions of their detention. Bring whistles, banners, loud voices and be prepared for street theatre...

**Sunday 18 May 11am-5pm. London brigade report back**

Venue to be confirmed - ring or e-mail for details. Come and hear eye-witness reports from the brigadistas about Cuban socialism and the work the UJC is doing with the youth, and discuss the current political issues facing Cuba and the Cuban perspective on the imperialist onslaught against Iraq.

**Leicester brigade reportback meeting**

**Sunday 25 May, 2pm**

**Life in revolutionary Cuba now**

Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Everyone welcome. Tel: 07803 939 713 for further details.

**Rock around the Blockade will be supporting FRFI Stop the War stalls on Saturdays 12-2pm.**

Phone 020 7837 1688 or e-mail the campaign on: office@ratb.org.uk for more details about how you can get involved.

Rock around the Blockade website: www.ratb.org.uk

**I would like to help the work of Rock around the Blockade by**

- ☐ joining Rock around the Blockade (£10 high waged/£4 low waged/£2 unwaged, payable to Rock around the Blockade)
- ☐ being sent details of events in my areas
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Return to Rock around the Blockade, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX  
e-mail: office@ratb.org.uk or tel: 020 7837 1688



## CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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### IN MEMORIAM Rene Waller

3 April 1913-22 March 1999

Rene Waller died aged 85 on 22 March 1999. She had been a fighter for socialism all her life. She joined the Labour Party in 1931 and formed a branch of the Labour League of Youth to support Republican Spain. In 1937, Rene joined the Communist Party. In her 70s, she was a founder member of City of London Anti-Apartheid Group and was regularly on the picket outside the South African Embassy.

In 1991, aged 78, Rene joined the RCG and was active within the pensioners' movement. We remember her enthusiasm in reminding us all never to give up the fight for socialism.

### IN MEMORIAM June Taylor

12 June 1943-10 March 1997

June Taylor made an invaluable and unstinting contribution to the production of FRFI from its launch in 1979 until her sudden death in 1997. We miss her greatly as a friend and comrade.

**LETTERS** write to  
FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: [rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk](mailto:rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk)  
website: [www.revolutionarycommunist.com](http://www.revolutionarycommunist.com) and [www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk](http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk)

## Fighting against the war in Bolton

As yet another war loomed on the horizon, and hopes for peace were fast fading away, my friend and I asked ourselves, as many others may also have, 'What can we do?' In times like this, you can't escape that feeling of helplessness, that you're only a small potato anyway.

So my friend and I decided that action, no matter how small, is better than inaction. Your existence can shape the world through your choice to act and through your choice not to act. Sometimes you can't help but feel complicit in the state terrorism that is rampant today if you sit back and let oppressed people everywhere get steamrollered. My friend and I couldn't handle that.

How do you respond to such crises? Well, you can picket. Inspired by the dedication of those that make up the Boycott Marks & Spencer's picket in Manchester, Komal and I set about organising a picket of our own. We hadn't done anything like this before, but we thought it was about time that such activities took place in Bolton too. Yes, Bolton seemed quite a quiet town, but we had plans to make a whole lotta noise!

It was a sunny Saturday, and people were busy shopping and carrying on with their daily routine. Strange, isn't it, that there

is a whole nation being annihilated by our government, a government that we collectively elected, and yet this fact sits comfortably with many people? Yes, some of us can hear about the horrors going on over there, and not feel compelled to speak out, cry out, scream. Is there an ounce of sanity, a shred of humanity left in us yet? What have we learned from slavery, the holocaust, Vietnam? Does the word imperialism ring a bell, anyone?

Komal, me, and some socialists boldly marched through the city centre and climbed up the steps of Bolton Town Hall for all to see, for all to hear. Megaphone in one hand, and placard in the other, Komal cleared her throat and called the people of Bolton to attention. Hello? Does anyone care what is happening to our fellow human beings? So, there we were, talking about facts. Good solid facts. Things that are only words to some people, but are an everyday reality for the tired, hungry, desperate people of Iraq. We talked about how Saddam Hussein was a buddy one day, and when he didn't dance to our tune, he became an enemy. We talked about the devastation of a nation through sanctions, the horrific effects of depleted uranium. And Blair speaks lies, blatant lies. Apparently, he reckons we're

doing this to bring stability to the Middle East by taking away Saddam Hussein's elusive weapons of mass destruction. Pardon me for being pedantic, but aren't we forgetting something? What about Israel? It might have escaped your notice, but Israel has weapons of mass destruction, and will recklessly use them.

Komal and I just wanted to tell people the truth, because we weren't going to let the politicians shroud reality with their flowery rhetoric, when what their words were actually shrouding was the corpse of Iraq. So there we were, urging people to stand up for justice, not to back this terrible war. Yes, we were speaking out, and by-passers stopped, shopping bags in hands, and looked over at us in amazement. Would you just look at those two headscarved Asian girls stood there, shouting out about Iraq? Lots of people came up to sign the petition against the war.

Then, there was the aggressive racism. Oh yes, there is always one. Well, actually, there were several. The thing with the pro-war people that we encountered was that they didn't actually have a single rational justification whatsoever. That is what struck me. 'Kill the black b\*\*\*\*\*s! They'll only bomb us anyway!' Really? Who told you that, I

wonder? What encourages you in these kind of situations is the thought of the Palestinians. In the face of tanks, missiles, helicopter gunships, they fight on. What is stopping us?

I decided to go down and talk to some of the young people who were flippantly shouting pro-war comments. So, why do you think that 11 September was a tragedy, which it was, and think that the killing of many more Iraqis is okay? It was sad to see that it was simply racism. However, what was encouraging was that they were open to dialogue, and some of the young people actually went away rethinking their ideas. So, the weapons inspectors haven't found any weapons? You're not actually supporting Saddam Hussein, but the Iraqi people?

Things seem to be changing. We've seen the biggest demonstration in history take place in London. More and more young people are scrutinising what their government is doing to defenceless people everywhere.

The Labour government may have thought that we, the British people, would let it get away with murder. The Labour government can think again.

NAFISA  
Bolton

## Clampdown on school students

School students who protested up and down the country over the last week have had a sharp lesson in British democracy. Not only is the government bombing for peace, but it is coming down hard on the right to protest. In London hundreds of pupils left school to sit down in Parliament Square on the day war started. They were assaulted by the police who first removed numbers from their uniforms so that they could not be identified. Pupils aged from 11 years old were punched in the face, had their arms twisted and were dumped heavily on the pavement. Now school headteachers in the London Borough of Camden have met to agree unanimously to punish

pupils if they stage any more 'unauthorised' walkouts in protest over the war in Iraq. London Mayor Ken Livingstone has sent a patronising letter to all London teachers asking them to be on the lookout for intolerance directed at minority groups and be sensitive about the war. The real message being sent to teachers and pupils is: be neutral - which means shut up and don't do anything, don't ask questions, agree with us, we know best, no badges, banners or statements are allowed. This is threats and censorship. For this reason, in writing to your newspaper, I sign myself:

A CAMDEN TEACHER

## Scottish school students oppose war

Despite having received little or no coverage in the mainstream media, thousands of school students have mobilised all over Scotland. On strike from school and taking to the streets of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, the pupils, alongside college and university students, registered their protest by gaining control of the streets and closing down the major city centres. These protests and demonstrations have been organised by Scottish Socialist Youth and have included speakers such as Mark Thomas, Tommy Sheridan and Keef Tomkinson. Vast numbers of people are becoming politicised and willing to engage in active politics, and it would appear as though this most valuable asset is not being utilised to its full potential.

Where past demonstrations have, in most cases, seen only the faithful of the 'old left' turn out - the 'usual suspects' - the advent of another imperialist war on such a grand scale has left the

movement open to people from all walks of life. This has allowed for different trends to develop within the movement. The pacifist opposition to war in its entirety, the opposition to war without a second UN resolution (with the option of pledging support to British troops once war began), and the opposition to war on an anti-imperialist basis.

It is vital that these huge numbers of people who walk the streets in protest and defiance of the imperialist British government are not left disillusioned with the left option within politics. Threats must be carried out, the cities must stop. If the anti-war movement wishes to gain credibility it must prove that it does stand for something concrete, and not change its outlook and opinion in line with the racist Labour Party's actions.

No to imperialist war! Fight racism! Fight imperialism!

LINSAY POWELL  
Glasgow, Scotland

## Massive attack on civil rights in the USA

Following 11 September 2001, the US administration has launched a domestic crusade against Arab-Americans, an attack on basic freedoms unprecedented since the infamous 'Palmer Raids' in 1919. Then, repression against the American left led to the detention of more than 6,000 people, most of them immigrants. Like the Palmer Raids, the 'anti-terrorist' campaign is directed principally against immigrants, many of them undocumented.

Racial profiling has been a major part of this assault. Thousands of Muslims, South Asians and Arabs have been questioned and hundreds arrested, including US citizens. Jailed for many months on minor immigration or tax charges these men and their families are then forced to leave the country, while even residents and citizens are fleeing. A Muslim woman who refused to remove her headscarf at Chicago's O'Hare airport was

subjected to a body search. Passengers of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin have been removed from flights because passengers claimed that they made them 'feel uncomfortable'.

Canadian refugee camps have been crowded out with thousands of South Asians trying to leave the US out of fear of arrest, interrogation and detention. Immigrants from 22 countries who remain have to register with the INS, be photographed and fingerprinted.

Last summer, Peter Kirsanow, a Bush appointee to the US Commission on Civil Rights, said that 'not too many people will be crying in their beer if there are more detentions, more stops and more profiling'. He added that, if there is a future attack in America 'and they come from the same ethnic group that attacked the World Trade Centre, you can forget about civil rights'. Kirsanow is the former head of the

right-wing Centre for New Black Leadership.

The 'Federal Bureau of Intimidation' (FBI) has held press conferences about its prosecution of people guilty of hate crimes against Arab-Americans. But, behind the scenes, the FBI is working part of the same crusade. It recently emerged that the bureau's 56 field offices have been ordered to develop 'demographic' (ie racist) profiles of their localities - including tallying the number of mosques. Those profiles are then used to set goals for counter-terrorism investigations and secret national-security wiretaps in each region.

Even some conservatives have condemned this shredding of the US Constitution. Yet the wretched Democrat leadership has supported most of these attacks. But many thousands of Americans have been drawn

into the fightback against them, most notably other Americans of colour. Black organisations and political leaders have denounced the attacks; Japanese-Americans have condemned the detentions; Latinos have joined the protest against attacks on immigrant rights. Americans of all colours, including veterans of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war struggles have joined the resistance against war and linked it to the struggle for immigrants' rights and civil liberties. Protests have included supporting immigrants visiting INS offices, candle-light vigils, local marches, meetings in church and community halls as well as jamming the White House switchboard with phone calls.

ANTI-WAR ACTIVIST  
San Francisco

## Palestine and the public

Raising the public awareness of Palestine and the problems of the people there is never going to be easy - constant news reports of Palestinian 'violence', which handily omit the Israeli terror that causes the violent retaliation, will only keep people in the dark - but there is hope.

In the forum that is the public outcry against war on Iraq, there is an opportunity to bring the issue of Palestine to the fore - something some comrades and I achieved successfully in Leeds on Saturday 22 March, in the aftermath of war breaking out.

We organised a picket of Marks & Spencer for 1.30pm - around the time the local anti-war demonstration was finishing - outside the store in the city centre, aiming to highlight its sponsorship of the Israeli terror campaign. We amassed around 50 people and, with placards, leaflets and petitions, it was impossible not to notice us outside the store.

We also attracted two police vans, a multitude of police officers, plainclothes police officers and around four M&S security guards all quietly observing the picket. In contrast, we were far from quiet! A team of young Asian women led the chanting. The noise of the picket, aided by chants such as 'Sharon, Sharon, you will see - Palestine will be free!' served to smash down any public misconceptions about this unjust world. That Saturday proved that support for the Palestinian movement is getting stronger, that people can only become more knowledgeable and that we need to provide this focus constantly. We need to provide a voice for people and we can do it. It's only a matter of time before the world wakes up - we need to shout louder!

DANIEL WARDLE  
Leeds

## British and US hypocrisy

I was disgusted with the brazen hypocrisy of the British and US governments in denouncing Iraq for breaking the Geneva Convention by showing their prisoners on TV and for fighting the invaders in civilian clothes.

In Afghanistan the US tore up the Geneva Convention and shipped the prisoners off to cages at Guantanamo Bay to be held indefinitely without POW status, charge or trial. Secretary of 'Defence' Rumsfeld complains that international treaties forbidding the use of 'calumnious' agents in warfare are a

'straitjacket'. These were used in the Moscow theatre siege last year, killing 150. The British media has published images of dead Iraqi soldiers and POWs with guns held to their heads.

This is a blitzkrieg war with the Coalition possessing weapons whose number, sophistication and destructive power the Luftwaffe's Herman Goering could not even have dreamed of. Thousands of cruise missiles are fired at the press of a button hundreds of kilometres from their target. The media are largely uncritical propagandists for the war, the death of one professional British soldier invading Iraq is a 'tragedy' while the killing and injuring of so many hundred or thousand Iraqi civilians and soldiers is mentioned in passing

PAUL ELLIS  
North London



**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

In the run-up to the imperialist attack on Iraq, the previous racist caricature of the lazy, 'bogus' asylum seeker has been embellished by the new caricatures of the 'terrorist asylum seeker', who seeks shelter in our benevolent democracy, only to spend his time plotting to poison or bomb us, and the infectious asylum seeker, who is carrying TB, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS and other diseases. None of this propaganda is accidental; all of it suits the Labour government, as it wages its racist war in the Middle East, and plans new measures to restrict immigration and subjugate immigrants.

**NICKI JAMESON** reports.

## STATE TERROR

# Labour plans more attacks on asylum seekers

**O**n 7 February 2003 Tony Blair announced on Newsnight that the government would be aiming to reduce asylum applications to Britain by 30-40% in the next few months and by 50% by September. This announcement was a very transparent PR stunt in advance of the release of the figures for asylum applications last year. It served both to hype up the 'problem' of unwanted foreign entrants, and to make the proposed draconian solutions appear to be a proportionate response to the 'crisis'.

During most of 2002 the number of applications for asylum rose continuously, with 19,520 applicants in the first quarter, 20,400 in the second, 22,560 in the third and 23,385 in the fourth. This peaked at 8,900 applications in October 2002, the month which Blair has decreed the 'benchmark' from which the government

will proceed to make reductions it can then publicly boast about.

The largest numbers of asylum applicants in 2002 were from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Zimbabwe. The first three countries are the scenes of recent or current imperialist attack and invasion; the fourth is a former British colony where the fallout from constitutionally enshrined white privilege is still being played out. It is no surprise that any of them have produced large numbers of refugees, and it will be even less surprising when the current murderous onslaught on Iraq results in yet more Kurds and Iraqis fleeing to seek sanctuary in neighbouring countries in the Middle East and, if they can make it, in Europe.

In advance of this eventuality, the government has come up with a bizarre proposal that it is attempting to sell to the rest of the European

Union. Depending on which spin is put on it, the plan is for 'detention centres', 'camps', 'protection areas' or 'safe havens' to be constructed. These are not simply the Red Cross-administered refugee camps which spring up on the borders of any war-torn country, and which are currently being constructed in Jordan to house those fleeing Iraq. The idea is that Britain and any other west European country that signs up to the scheme pays a poorer nation, such as Albania or the Ukraine, to run a detention centre for it. Asylum seekers who reach Britain will register their asylum claim and, instead of then being dispersed to some hostile part of the country, or sent to Oakington, Campsfield House or a British prison, they will be flown to Albania where they will be detained while their claim is processed.

In the shorter term, Home Sec-

retary David Blunkett has announced plans to forcibly deport thousands of Afghan refugees, and has declared a selection of countries to be 'safe' - meaning that asylum applications will automatically be rejected. He has also implemented a requirement that all visitors from Jamaica obtain visas prior to travelling to Britain.

As Labour becomes more openly bellicose, Home Secretary Blunkett is himself becoming more and more overtly racist, and less concerned about any trappings of political correctness. This was abundantly clear in his recent sickening adulation of the editor of the viciously xenophobic *Daily Mail*. Blunkett said that the *Mail*, which is infamous for its sustained vitriolic attacks on minorities 'reflects the best of journalism'.

Blunkett has all the characteristics of a petty tyrant and relies on the support of the most fascist sections of the press to support him when anything goes wrong in his crusade against immigrants. The Labour Party's plans to starve refugees were recently dealt a blow in the courts when lawyers acting on behalf of refugees successfully challenged section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. This section deprives asylum seekers of all access to state support if they fail to register their asylum claim the moment they arrive in Britain. Both the High Court and the Court of Appeal found for the refugees and against the government. Blunkett's response was predictably to rail against the courts for being a 'threat to democracy' - a line loudly echoed of course by the racist *Daily Mail*.



## US: closer to fascism

The USA Patriot Act of 2001 constituted the most dramatic expansion of state power at the expense of civil liberties in the history of the United States. New legislation, drafted in secret by the US Department of Justice and leaked by an insider, would intensify even further the drive of the US government toward totalitarian state powers.

**DALTON HILLIARD** reports.

**I**n January 2003 the Domestic Security Enhancement Act, drafted under heavy secrecy by the Department of Justice as a redux to the Patriot Act of 2001, was leaked by an alarmed insider to a civil rights watch-group. The document, labelled 'Confidential - not for distribution', constitutes the latest step in the systematic attempt by the US government to usurp authoritarian powers to spy on, detain and punish its people, free from public scrutiny and judicial review. If approved, the new legislation would extend to US citizens many of the abuses of civil liberties already in place for foreign nationals and non-citizen US residents. It would grant the Department of Justice the power to revoke, by fiat, the right of habeas corpus of US citizens suspected of terrorism, would expand dramatically the state's capacity to spy on its citizens without judicial approval or scrutiny and would create a vast database of consumer, personal and political intelligence on all United

States citizens and residents, called Total Information Awareness.

The proposed legislation is the latest and most radical step in a shift over recent years towards increasingly extensive and unaccountable police powers. This shift began with the Omnibus Counter-Terrorism Act of 1996, under which it became legal to hold non-US nationals without charge or trial based on secret evidence. After the attacks of 11 September, the USA Patriot Act of 2001 swept in a massive expansion of state powers. Non-nationals could not only be detained based on secret evidence, but could be held indefinitely, without access to a lawyer, without a trial or formal charges and without any right of habeas corpus. Under the Patriot Act, 3,000 men of Middle Eastern origin were rounded up on the sole basis of their race and held in solitary confinement, incomunicado from their families or attorneys, and with no understanding of why they were being held. From the 3,000 arrests, not a single

person was charged with a terrorist-related crime.

In late 2001 President George W Bush issued an Executive Order, which authorised trials for foreigners by kangaroo-court military tribunals, further undermining constitutionally guaranteed rights and the Geneva Convention. Hundreds of individuals were brought bound and gagged to a concentration camp in the imperialist holding of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they remain today, largely forgotten by the world. The Department of Justice is currently attempting to have two suspects, British citizen Richard Reid and Moroccan-born Zacarias Moussaoui, tried in military tribunals, because their trials in the regular courts are not going well for the government.

Fearing such persecution and an overtly racist 'registration programme' for Arabs, thousands of Arabs and near-east Asians have fled the US to Canada seeking political asylum. For several weeks these pleas for asylum were recognised by

the Canadian government, until the US forced Canada to begin turning back asylum seekers at the border, an order Canada has dutifully obeyed.

With the Domestic Security Enhancement Act, the US government is attempting to legitimate unconstitutional powers it has attempted to usurp for itself already, with only partial success. In one case, the government refused to permit Yaser Esam Hamdi access to a lawyer or to the evidence against him, despite the fact that he is a US citizen. One court, headed by Judge Robert Doumar, found in Hamdi's favour, commenting: 'I tried valiantly to find a case of any kind, in any court, where a lawyer couldn't meet with a client. This case sets the most interesting precedent in relation to that which has ever existed in Anglo-American jurisprudence since the days of the Star Chamber.' An appeals court, however, subsequently overturned Doumar's decision, arguing that the courts have no say in matters of national security.

If approved, the Domestic Security Enhancement Act would allow the government to avoid the courts altogether and would constitute the most dramatic step yet along the path toward totalitarian state powers in the United States. Most significant, it would extend to US citizens what has until now been a gross abuse primarily of the civil rights of non-naturalised immigrants. Under Section 201 of the legislation, the Department of Justice, on its sole discretion and entirely independent of the courts, would have the authority to detain US citizens accused of terrorism, without

disclosing any information on their whereabouts, the reason for their arrest or the charges against them. The provision grants the government the authority to revoke habeas corpus at its whim, dismantling in the process the most basic defence against the state's ability to 'disappear' its citizens without legal recourse.

In addition, the legislation would authorise a vast expansion of government capacity to spy and invade privacy, by permitting blanket electronic surveillance of citizens in times deemed by the government to be 'an emergency', by making it impossible to sue a corporation that provides confidential consumer information to the government without consent and by authorising the creation of a universal database of information on citizens, shared by the FBI, the CIA and all other governmental agencies.

Despite the fact that the proposed legislation constitutes the most comprehensive assault on constitutional rights and civil liberties in the nation's history, the leak of the Domestic Security Enhancement Act received essentially no coverage in the corporate-owned media in the United States. The proposed legislation faced some mild criticism in the US Congress, generally surrounding 'the complete veil of secrecy with which the document has been drafted'. It is generally assumed, however, that the Department of Justice will wait to introduce the legislation until another terrorist attack has taken place, all but assuring the approval of a cowed and corrupt Congress and taking the United States a significant step closer to fascism.