

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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INSIDE

Solidarity
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Welcome... p2

PALESTINE

Intifada under siege p1-3

WAR ON IRAQ

Lies, damn lies and more lies p4

How the campaign to stop the

war was sabotaged p5

US zealots prepare for world

domination p6

Recolonising the Middle East p7

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina: new president, con-

tinuing misery p12

NEWS

Scottish and English elections

p10

Education: they've lost the

money and they've lost the plot

p11

CUBA VIVE

Defend Cuban socialism p8

Rock around the Blockade goes

to Cuba p9

FIGHT RACISM

Labour spawns racist press and

fascist councillors p16

+ news, prisoners fightback,
round-up and letters

PALESTINE: INTIFADA UNDER SIEGE

The end of the war in Iraq has left the Zionist state in complete military ascendancy within the Middle East. Iraq has been crushed, US imperialism directly threatens both Syria and Iran. Other Arab regimes, terrified of offending their imperialist paymasters, preoccupy themselves with suppressing internal opposition to their capitulation. Wringing their hands in useless complaint, they have given the Zionists a free hand to destroy the Intifada. Sharon is about to seize the opportunity; he has been given a green light by the Bush administration. The situation facing the Palestinian people is now very grave, ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

Sharon's strategy has become remarkably clear over the past weeks. He has now accepted Bush's 'roadmap to peace', having received guarantees that Israel's concerns will be addressed. But he will string out negotiations in order to complete the building of a wall that surrounds the main Palestinian population centres in the West Bank, effectively annexing 60% of its land mass to Israel, including the whole of the Jordan valley. Palestinians in the annexed areas will be forced into the four can-

tons or bantustans created by the wall. Without any proper economy, the entire Palestinian people will be reduced to a state of beggary completely dependent on external aid. Life will be made so intolerable for them that they will start to move out: a new Nakbah.

Sharon will not face any opposition from US imperialism. Over the past two and a half years of the Intifada, the Bush administration has had occasional concern that the Zionist terror campaign against the

Palestinian people might provoke instability in the Middle East. No longer: the Arab regimes have proved that they are effective gendarmes against their people even during the onslaught on Iraq. Whilst the new Palestinian Authority leadership desperately seeks negotiations, Sharon will demand more and more concessions in advance, knowing that time is on his side. Meanwhile he will continue to hit at the Gaza Strip in an attempt to destroy the will of the Palestinian people.

The separation wall

The lynchpin of Sharon's strategy is the 'separation' wall which he had initially opposed when the defence minister in Sharon's first national government, the former Israeli Labour leader Ben-Eliezzer, proposed its construction. The initial plan for the wall was to run down the border between Israel and the Occupied Territories - the Green Line. However, it was soon changed to make inroads into the Occupied Territories to ensure that Zionist settlements remained on the Israeli side

(see FRFI 170).

When finished this western leg will be 360km long; it will annex 10% of the West Bank to Israel, transferring 57 settlements with 303,000 settlers into Israel, together with 385,000 Palestinians who will be granted neither residential status nor citizenship. The first section, 114km long, is being constructed in the north and will be completed by July. Long sections are medieval in style, up to 30 feet high, with huge guard towers every 300 metres or so. It will fence in 17 villages and towns, hemming in 110,000 Palestinians. Land between the wall and the border will be a closed military zone.

Qalqilya will be completely surrounded by the 8-metre-high wall, its 48,000 population will only be able to get into and out of the town through a single checkpoint. Underneath Qalqilya is the Western Aquifer water system which provides 51% of the West Bank's water resources. Israel will confiscate this along with 14 wells which provide 30% of the town's water supply.

Now the Sharon government has

made two key decisions about the wall. The first is to re-route the western section so that it makes even greater detours into the West Bank to include the large settlements of Ariel, Kedumim and Immanuel on the Israeli side. The second is to add an eastern section which will allow huge swathes of the Jordan valley to be annexed to Israel (see map on page 3), leaving Jericho in complete isolation.

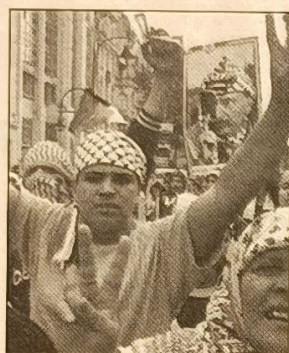
Sharon's view is that 'there will never be a situation in which the Jordan valley, a vital eastern security sector for Israel, will not be in the hands of Israel. That region will be in the hands of Israel forever' (quote by Jonathan Cook, *Electronic Intifada*, 28 March 2003).

Four Palestinian bantustans will be created; Jerusalem will be annexed in its entirety and Bethlehem will be surrounded. Whilst Sharon denies the wall will be a new border, in practice its cost (estimated at a total of \$2,000m for its 1,000 kilometre length) will make it an enduring fixture.

continued on page 3

Welcome...

'The politician is the cement in this crazy house... We rationalize the irrational. We convince the people that the greater fulfilment of life is to die for the rich. We convince the rich that they must part with some of their riches to keep the rest. We are magicians. We cast an illusion, and the illusion is foolproof. We say to the people - you are the power. Your vote is the source of Rome's strength and glory. You are the only free people in the world. There is nothing more precious than your freedom, nothing more admirable than your civilisation. And you control it; you are the power. And then they vote for our candidates. They weep at our defeats. They laugh with joy at our victories. And they feel proud and superior because they are not slaves. No matter how low they sink, if they sleep in the gutter, if they sit in the public seats at the races and the arena all day, if they strangle their infants at birth, if they live on the public dole and never lift a hand to do a day's work from birth to death, nevertheless they are not slaves. They are dirt, but every time they see a slave, their ego rises and they feel full of pride and power. Then they know that they are Roman citizens and all the world envies them.' (Howard Fast - Spartacus)



Victory to the Intifada

the Development Fund for Iraq, which includes Marconi, Balfour Beatty and the CBI (see page 7).

The massive mobilisations against the war gave hope that the British people had woken up to the mockery of parliamentary politics and militarism under capitalism. Shamefully, it was the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) itself which sung them the lullaby and sent them back into a blissful sleep. They achieved this historic con by making a respectable and 'parliamentary opposition' to the war their key strategy. The mobilisation of the public was simply a means to pressure Labour MPs to heed their constituents and speak out against the war - well, at least a war without UN approval - whilst promising 'total support' to British forces once invasion began. There was to be no effective opposition to the warmongering Labour government and no risk of breaking with the racist and imperialist Labour Party (see page 5).

In 1907 Ramsey MacDonald, the Labour Party's first Prime Minister in 1924, justified British imperialism as a 'duty imposed upon it to spread the blessings of its civilisation over the Earth.' Bush and Blair's terminology, the references to 'good' versus 'evil', 'civilisation', 'democracy' and 'moral duty', are present-day echoes of British Labour Party ideologues since the party's foundation. There is no 'new' and 'old' party, there is just the Labour Party.

While the 'war on terrorism' terrorises the oppressed nations, political parties and the media have reached a consensus that asylum-seekers and immigrants are to blame for crime, terrorism and disease in Britain. And with no hint of irony they are also blamed for the rising popularity of

fascist politics (see page 16). The mainstream parties react to the electoral success of the BNP by reassuring the white electorate that they can also respond to racist fears about immigrants whom they blame for their own poverty and neglect, really the product of corrupt councils. Many STWC members supported this effort by canvassing for candidates of the racist Labour Party, to keep the BNP out (see page 10). To stop the rise of the BNP we must also oppose the racism of the state which fertilises it.

In Argentina, the people who have lost everything to the 'democracy' of the IMF and the World Bank have rejected the parliamentary farce. In May, a new president was sworn into office with the lowest vote ever, while the people, forced by necessity, create their own grassroots forms of democracy and collective resistance (see page 12). In Palestine the US, with British support, imposes its shameless 'democracy' through the roadmap to (Zionist) peace via puppet Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, which means more brutality and more slavery for the Palestinian people (pages 1-3). Like Spartacus' army of liberated slaves, however, they continue to resist and rock the empire.

For the imperialists, socialist Cuba represents an island of slaves who broke free from the empire, creating its own form of democracy which places social responsibility and social reward in the hands of the people, at the grassroots level. The mass political participation, the collective ownership of wealth and universal provision of social welfare in such a poor country is a powerful ideological threat to the capitalist world. The US is preparing to attack Cuba. It faces an army of 11 million, an entire population ready to defend its revolution (see pages 8 and 9).

Wake up and join the resistance in Britain: 'Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite, we have nothing to lose but our chains!'

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! relies on your contributions, written and financial. Please send them to us at the address below.

VICTORY TO THE INTIFADA

Palestine round-up

New ministers: Mahmoud Abbas and Mohammed Dahlan

The imperialist media have portrayed the new PA government of Mahmoud Abbas as one which is cleaner and more democratic than its predecessors. Yet, as we wrote in FRFI 172, Abbas himself is well known for being on the take. When it came to the dispute between Abbas and Arafat about the appointment of Mohammed Dahlan as PA interior minister, an argument that threatened to scupper Abbas' chance of forming a government, the imperialists weighed in on the side of Abbas and Dahlan. Dahlan, however, has a past as murky as that of Abbas.

Back in 1996, David Hirst writing for *The Guardian*, cited a Palestinian official who said that the Israelis had penetrated so deeply into the Palestinian security forces that 'some of its leaders depend on them at least as much as they do on Arafat', and that they could be used to displace Arafat in the future. According to the official, 'The Israelis are grooming Abu Mazen [Abbas' nom de guerre], one of the secret negotiators

of the Oslo accord, to take Mr Arafat's place, and they will count on Mohammed Dahlan, head of Preventive Security in Gaza, to lead the putsch'.

Seven years later, not only were the imperialists able to install Abbas as prime minister, but the EU and Tony Blair told Arafat he would have to accept Dahlan as interior minister.

In his 1999 book *The End of the Peace Process* Edward Said describes Abbas 'as a catastrophically uninformed and ignorant man willing to give everything up just to stay in power'. Said also recounts his visit to the West Bank in mid-November 1998 which coincided with Sharon's infamous statement urging settlers to take as many hills as possible, as soon as possible, commenting that 'Abu Mazen, one of Arafat's numerous number twos, says that Ariel Sharon is no longer the same man who invaded Lebanon, laid siege to Beirut for two months, bombed the city indiscriminately, was

responsible for Sabra and Shatila, is the settler's main backer. I was surprised that Abu Mazen didn't also defend General Pinochet on the same grounds.'

Dahlan has been recently lauded in *The New York Times* as a 'tough Gazan' who has urged Arafat to crack down on the resistance, and who 'has often dealt with Israeli and American officials who hold him in high respect'. Like Abbas, he too built himself a villa in Gaza, one so lavish that it began to sink into the sand and had to be propped up with special supports. Dahlan's wealth came from his monopoly of the import of petrol into the Gaza and the inflated prices he charged. His Preventive Security Service spent much of their time protecting Israeli tankers. His forces were responsible for the arbitrary detention and torture of opponents of the Oslo agreements; in November 1994 the Gazan police force were responsible for murdering 13 Islamists on Black Friday.

Bedouin: more ethnic cleansing by the Zionists

It is not just the people of the Occupied Territories who are subject to racist attacks by the Zionists. A recent article by Jonathan Cook chronicles the attacks on the Bedouin who are now subject to a renewed campaign of ethnic cleansing, specifically those who live in the Negev in the south of Israel. In 1948, the Bedouin were the only Negev inhabitants. Now, as a result of systematic cleansing, the 130,000 Bedouin occupy just 2% of the land. Half of them have been herded into ghetto reservations.

In April, the Sharon govern-

ment approved a five-year \$200m plan to cleanse the remaining land of those who have illegally returned to their farms to eke out an adequate living. 'We see this plan as a declaration of war on the Bedouin community of the unrecognised villages' said a Bedouin leader.

A key component is a reinforcement of the Green Patrols which are supposed to prevent illegal Bedouin farming, and a tightening of the planning and construction ordinances which are crucial to dispossessing them. New laws of trespass

against the 70,000 Bedouin in 45 unrecognised villages will criminalise them with fines and six months in gaol on a first offence, two years on a subsequent one.

They will all be transferred into three new villages freeing up land for the settlement of 350,000 Zionists which is being financed by the World Zionist Organisation. As part of the ethnic cleansing effort, helicopters have twice used chemical sprays on crops at the village of Abda, the first time on 4 March, the second on 2 April.

website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk
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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Boycott M&S - don't listen to Palestine Solidarity Campaign leadership!

In September 2002, 50,000 marched through the centre of London in support of the Palestinian people. On 17 May, only a few thousand turned out for a rally in Trafalgar Square called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC). The leadership of the PSC is drawn from the same Labourist circles as that of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and, in an earlier period, the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

PSC Secretary Betty Hunter is on record as proposing to the PSC national aggregate that the campaign should support the Bush roadmap as 'the only show in town'.

At a recent meeting in Liverpool her colleague, Linda Clair, specifically opposed the Marks and Spencer boycott campaign, saying that it was alright to shop at M&S provided you did not buy Israeli goods. Her appeal to M&S shoppers was a succinct expression of her class allegiances. Such leaders are a complete disaster for the movement: they are concerned only with their narrow privileged interests.

FRFI urges those who want to do something effective to get out to picket M&S and reject the advice of the PSC misleaders!

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PALESTINE: Intifada under siege

continued from page 1

The roadmap

President Bush's so-called roadmap to peace seeks to force the Palestinian people back to the Oslo 'peace' framework which has proved so disastrous for them since 1993. After much procrastination, Bush finally published the roadmap following Mahmoud Abbas' confirmation as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA) on 29 April. Whilst Abbas immediately accepted it as a finished document, Sharon did not, and stated that the Zionists would not undertake any of their obligations in the plan such as stopping settlement building until the PA had disarmed the resistance and abandoned the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their dispossessed lands in Israel.

Colin Powell's visit to the Middle East in early May failed to secure Sharon's agreement to the plan, but the focus of Powell's attention was as ever the Palestinian resistance: 'We must see rapid, decisive action by the Palestinians to disarm and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure', he said, for 'without such action our best efforts will fail'.

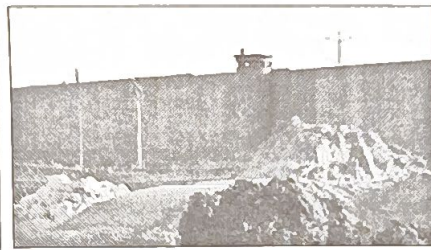
Further negotiations between the Zionists and the US administration resulted in a formula whereby the US could claim there had been no changes to the roadmap, but the Zionists could equally claim that in approving the document they were not endorsing it in its entirety. As one US administration official put it: 'The question is how to keep the concept of the roadmap while changing its substance'; the draft of the road map as released 'might be pretty dead. But the concept of the roadmap is not dead'. In a joint statement, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice

spoke of Israel's 'significant concerns' about the roadmap and went on 'The United States shares the view of the government of Israel that these are real concerns, and will address them fully and seriously in the implementation of the roadmap'.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of the US's partisan support for Israel, the PA leadership is desperate for the US to force the Zionists into substantive negotiations, since, according to one minister, the PA 'cannot reject (the roadmap) because it will face a catastrophe'. Such a capitulation represents the interests of a tiny Palestinian comprador bourgeoisie which is directly dependent on Zionism and imperialism.

The fact is that US imperialism has little interest in its roadmap, and key figures in the Bush administration, such as Richard Perle and Douglas Faith in the Defence Department, believe that the West Bank and Gaza belong to Israel by biblical right. Richard Cheney is on the board of the right-wing Zionist Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs; last year Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the 'so-called occupied territories' in a clear rejection of their internationally-recognised status.

A Zionist campaign led by the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee has resulted in 88 (out of 100) senators and 316 (out of 400) congressmen sending a letter to Bush expressing their reservations about the pressure the roadmap puts on Israel. The message is clear: Sharon will be allowed to string out negotiations over the terms of the roadmap to give the Zionists time to complete the separation wall, letting Israel annex 50-60% of the West Bank, and forcing the Palestinians there into what amount to concentration camps.



The wall at Qalqiliya

Map showing route of Separation Wall on the West Bank and how it will create bantustans for the Palestinian people

Zionist onslaught on Gaza continues

Whilst Mahmoud Abbas tries to persuade the Palestinian resistance to give up armed struggle, the Zionists continue to pound Gaza, targeting Rafah in the south in particular. There were 55 military incursions last December, 77 in January and 91 in February. The catalogue of deaths and destruction includes invasions of Al Tuffah on 18 February, which left 11 dead, and on 23 February of Beit Hanoun which resulted in six deaths. On 6 March it was Jabalya's turn - 11 killed, and then on 17 March both Nusseirat and Beit Lahia were hit, leaving 11 dead.

When, on 20 March, Palestinian police attempted to arrest Hamas missile instructors in a field by Jabalya, the population spontaneously took the side of Hamas; in the fighting that followed one Hamas member was killed and two police jeeps were burned out. On 8 April, the onslaught continued: ten were killed in an extra-judicial assassination undertaken by helicopter gunships in Asqoula; scores were wounded.

On 11 April in Rafah, Tom Hurndall, a British activist with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), was shot in the head as he attempted to help a young girl to safe-

ty away from Israeli fire. He is now brain-dead; the Israeli army claims he was caught in crossfire when an Israeli sniper targeted a Palestinian in camouflage firing a gun. All eye-witnesses and video evidence show this to be a lie: there was no such Palestinian, and Tom was wearing a fluorescent jacket. There has been no formal condemnation of the murder by the Foreign Office.

On 19 April, another incursion into Rafah killed five Palestinians including two children and wounded 30. On 29 April, hours before the Abbas government was confirmed, an Israeli helicopter missile attack on Gaza killed the local PFLP leader Nidal Salama and a bystander. 1 May saw more carnage as Abbas was formally sworn in: 12 were killed in Shijaiyah in Gaza in an attempt to assassinate Yusuf Abu Hein, a senior Hamas figure.

The following day, Israeli troops in an armoured personnel carrier (APC) deliberately shot dead British cameraman James Miller, again in Rafah. The Israeli army claimed that he was caught up in crossfire as they attempted to shoot someone preparing to fire a rocket. Video evidence showed that Miller was waving a white flag; his colleagues say they had been under observation for several hours, and that

the only shots that were fired were from the APC.

Of 2,500 Palestinians killed since the Intifada started, 250 have died in Rafah, a third of them children. It is a free-fire zone for the Israelis, subject to constant invasion, bulldozing and house demolition, the scene of continuous machine gun and sniper fire. The Zionist army is deliberately targeting both journalists and international observers to drive them away so that it can carry out its murderous campaign without any external witnesses. The Zionists now require foreign visitors in Gaza to declare that they have 'no association with the organisation known as ISM nor any other organisation whose aim is to disrupt IDF [army] operations' describing this activity as 'criminal'. The document also requires visitors to sign a declaration that 'I am aware of the risks involved and accept that the Government of the State of Israel and its organs cannot be held responsible for death, injury and/or damage/loss of property which may be incurred as a result of military activity'. This is in clear breach of the Geneva Convention which regards human rights in occupied territories as inalienable.

Not that such considerations would deter Israeli Chief of Staff General Ayalon, who stated that 'The activists create the negative image we have, because it certainly strengthens the Palestinian story, which, according to my understanding, is fabricated in this context...I have just given an order to remove the organisation's [ISM] activists from the area, firstly, for their own benefit - they are endangering their own lives in a superfluous way and are also creating provocations that hinder our freedom of action on the ground. And so it's advisable that they get out of the area'.

The reluctance of the Labour government to challenge seriously Israeli accounts of the death of either Hurndall or Miller is in stark contrast to the speed with which they moved against the family of a British suicide bomber in early May. It demonstrates how any campaign in support of the Palestinian people must challenge the Labour Party's record of unconditional support for Zionism. With the Palestinian people under an intensifying siege, we must step up our support for the Intifada.

Victory to the Palestinian people!



Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas





Lies, damn lies and more lies

The 2003 Iraq War was short, bloody and extremely nasty. It lasted from the 'shock and awe' of the first bombardment of Baghdad on 19 March to 2 May when US President George W. Bush announced that it was over. In effect, the war was more one-sided and less costly to the imperialist Coalition than anyone had predicted. With a combined defence budget of more than the total for all other countries in the world, there could be no doubt that the US and Britain would win. However, their victory does not answer questions about the legitimacy of the war or its aftermath.

The Coalition offered three main planks of justification for waging war on Iraq:

1. To stop the production and use of weapons of mass destruction.
2. To halt the threat to western democracies of rogue states and international terrorism.
3. To liberate the Iraqi people from a regime of intolerable repression (a very late argument).

1. Weapons of mass destruction

In the lead-up to the war, effectively from September 2002, both the US and Britain produced reports, said to be the products of high-grade state intelligence, on the production of biological, chemical and nuclear weaponry. In the early months of 2003, Prime Minister Tony Blair, argued that such weapons were available and ready for use 'within 45 minutes'.

All the reports presented to the United Nations Security Council were later found to be fabrications, including Jack Straw's now infamous PhD thesis, faked up as intelligence. US Secretary of State Colin Powell's report based on fuzzy satellite pictures, alleged that Scud missiles were ready to launch. In fact the UN inspectors had already reported that all but two of the 819 Scud weapons known to exist at the time of the first Gulf War had been verified as destroyed.

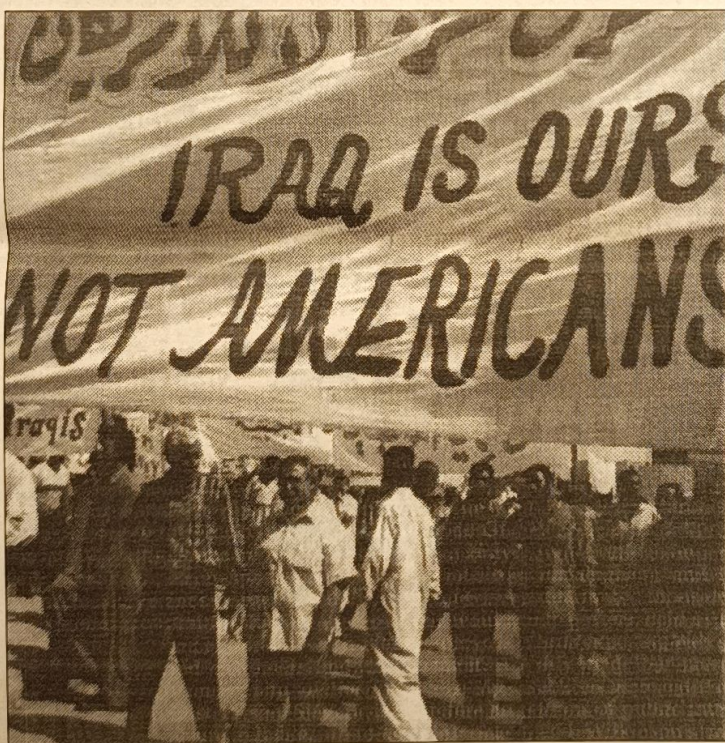
We should be clear that the Saddam Hussein regime did have chemical and biological weapons, sold to them by the imperialists, and had used them notoriously during the Iran-Iraq War and against the Kurds at Halabja. But the UN weapons inspectors, led by Hans Blix, had confirmed the destruction of large amounts of such material and had reported satisfactory progress towards full disarmament.

In his State of the Union speech at the end of January 2003, George W. Bush referred to reports that Iraq had imported weapons-grade uranium in large quantities from Niger. He credited the British government with supplying the information. When the evidence was passed to the International Atomic Energy Agency in March it took only hours to establish that the documents were fakes. One of the letters purported to be signed by a Niger minister who had been out of office since 1989.

Where did the fake documents come from? From 1997 onwards the British and US secret services were issuing fake documents and false accusations about Iraqi weapons in order to overcome the already major disagreement at the UN Security Council. It is probable that these documents

In the 1991 Gulf War, President George Bush Senior declared that: 'America stands where it always has, against aggression, against those who would use force to replace the rule of law'. He was lying of course. The propaganda of the time claimed that this period, in the wake of the destruction of the Soviet Union, would be the opening of a New World Order of peace and justice: '... a rare transforming moment of history', said US Secretary of State Baker. The Cold War was over, the Soviet Union in retreat and the UN was functioning 'as it should': as a 'bold peace-keeper', 'without the shrill anti-western rhetoric of the Third World'.

It took little more than ten years to incubate this New World Order. With the most recent War on Iraq, the New World Order has emerged fully-formed, not as the promoter of peace, justice and respect for the rule of law, but as the ghastly harbinger of barbarism, might is right and global domination. Over the last decade the imperialists have ravaged Serbia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and now Iraq with their bombs. They have helped the Israeli occupiers to persecute the Palestinians. They have consigned the entire African continent to the dustbin of history: starvation, genocidal wars and genocidal diseases. All the paraphernalia of international relations, established as a result of the post World War II settlement, has been compromised: international law and treaties, the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions.



Demonstration against American occupation

came from MI6 and were part of this propaganda programme. There never were any uranium imports.

There is a wider question, of course, even supposing that the Coalition's claims were true: does the possession of such weapons by a state justify 'regime change' brought about by aggressive war and military invasion? If it does then everyone should ask why Israel is not top of the list of rogue states in the region. It not only possesses chemical and biological weapons, and has used them against the Palestinians and the Lebanese, it also has a fully-developed nuclear weapons programme.

No weapons of mass destruction were used during the war and none have been found by the occupying powers. It is hard to believe that if Saddam Hussein had such weapons at his disposal he wouldn't have used them to defend the regime. Many reasons have been offered for this, one most notably by the Labour government: that the weapons had been hidden so thoroughly in order to fool the UN weapons inspectors, that there

was no time to get them out again or make them useable. This is a far cry from '45 minutes to Armageddon'. The whole point of telling such lies is that the public believes them at the time. At the outbreak of war 40% of the US population believed that Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons.

2. Rogue states and terrorism

Every effort was used to connect Saddam Hussein with international terrorism. According to the imperialist Coalition, not only was he a brutal dictator surrounded by a ferocious and brutal Republican Guard, but his regime also supported Al Qaida and was proliferating terrorism across the globe. This was ratcheted up by a cluster of warnings that major terrorist attacks were imminent: remember that in February Heathrow airport was surrounded by the British army. 44% of Americans believed that some or most of the World Trade Centre/Pentagon hijackers were Iraqi, and 45% thought that Saddam Hussein was personally responsible for the attacks. No

one was going to disabuse them.

Both Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida were nurtured by the US during the 1970s and 1980s as anti-communist allies. The US supported the anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan to the hilt and it was there that Al Qaida gained strength. In Iraq, the CIA provided the regime with the lists of people with communist and democratic connections for the regime to torture and murder. The massacres which followed the Shi'a rebellion in the early 1990s, the remains of which are now being unearthed, were not the first. Thousands of communists had already been murdered by Saddam Hussein with the full support of imperialism.

Brutal though Saddam Hussein's regime certainly was, it was quickly destroyed by the Coalition invasion. The ease with which the regime was defeated belied the fact that it was any threat at all on an international scale. Even the CIA announced that they did not believe there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and the Islamic fundamentalists.

3. A war of liberation?

It was only in the late stages of its argument that the Coalition began to offer the liberation of the Iraqi people from brutal repression as an excuse for war. Prime Minister Blair even argued that war would liberate the Iraqi people from the torment of UN-imposed sanctions – sanctions that the Labour Party had fully supported and which Blair acknowledged had led to the deaths of 130 children in every thousand in Iraq, and had left more than 60% of the population dependent on food aid.

Everyone knows how finely honed the sensibilities of the imperialist nations are to the suffering of oppressed people! They had resisted the urge to intervene in South Africa, Namibia, East Timor, Burma, Chile, Turkey or Israel/Palestine, to name but a few brutal regimes. When sanctions against South Africa were proposed, the US and Britain argued for 'constructive engagement' to change the policies of the intransigent apartheid state. But in Iraq it was different: the people must be liberated by imperialist war.

The Iraqi people did not rush out from their homes to welcome the invading troops as their saviours, not even the Shi'ites who hated the regime. The destruction of the statue

of Saddam Hussein was a staged event for the media, outside the hotel where the media were housed, and involving only a few hundred Iraqis and many more US troops. They were, funnily enough, armed with 'the Stars and Stripes flag that had been flying on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001' to put over the dictator's head. Laughably improbable though all this was the world media happily obliged by spreading the lie. This was the only pro-invasion activity going on. In reality generations of Iraqi people have lived in fear of their government, and they continue to live in fear of the occupying forces.

At every stage the public has been offered lies to cover up the real driving force for war. The three planks which justified the war have proved to be utter lies.

The occupation

It is estimated that 2,000 Iraqi civilians were killed during the war and that more than 5,000 were wounded. This gives the lie to the Coalition's claims of precision bombing of military targets only. More than a month after the end of the war, most cities still lack basic utilities like electricity and clean water because of the bombardment and because of the looting which was allowed to continue after the regime's army had fled. It was significant that while the troops claimed to have control of the oil fields in the south, the cities were allowed to descend into 'anarchy'.

In Baghdad the oil ministry was guarded while looters ransacked 30 other ministries, hospitals and the museums. Food warehouses, power stations and sewage plants essential for the restoration of civilian life have been left unprotected. As a result millions of tons of raw sewage have been discharged into the rivers every day. There have now been outbreaks of cholera and typhoid. Aid has been allowed into the country very slowly, some of it blocked by US troops. The hospitals are overcrowded, the staff unpaid and there are few medicines.

Demonstrations against Coalition rule began before the war had ended. At the end of April 20,000 marched in Nassariya against the meeting called by the US-appointed governor Jay Garner, an arms dealer and supporter of Zionist Ariel Sharon, to discuss a future Iraqi government. Garner had already announced that that there would be no Islamic state. 'Yes to Liberty! Yes to Islam! No to America. No to Saddam!' were the slogans of the march. Many more marches have followed with the same demands.

As occupying powers, the US and Britain have legal obligations to restore and maintain law and order, to provide food, medical care and relief assistance to the population and to protect property and natural resources. They have failed in these obligations.

What they haven't failed to do is begin 'reconstruction' funded by Iraqi oil sales and set about establishing a new governing regime which will favour imperialism. The United Nations has been sidelined. On 25 April Jack Straw said the UN should play a vital role in future weapons inspections. In fact the Coalition has set up its own weapons inspectors run

Carol Brickley

The imprisonment of children is against international treaty. We do not know how many children are imprisoned, their nationalities or the conditions of their detention. We know they are being interrogated. Jack Straw and the British Labour government clearly think that this is reasonable since they have barely managed a protest, even though some of the prisoners are British. You should only vote Labour if you support concentration camps.

[illegible]

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! JUNE/JULY 2003 • 5



IMPERIALISM AND WAR

US zealots prepare for world domination

'Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business.'

Michael Ledeen, holder of the 'Freedom Chair' at the American Enterprise Institute

'At some point we may be the only ones left. That's OK with me. We are America.'

George W Bush, President of the United States

The Iraq war is supposedly over, finished. In fact the opposite is true: the war has barely begun; Iraq was little more than a battle in a much bigger war, something far larger than Iraq, larger even than the Middle East. Iraq is the overture to a new world war. It is time for the left to get serious, because its opponents certainly are: deadly serious. James Woolsey, former head of the CIA describes the new war as 'World War IV':

'... World War III having been the Cold War. And I think that more accurately characterises the degree of commitment that we are going to have to be engaged in, and the scope of what we are going to be engaged in now for some years. This Fourth World War I think will last considerably longer than either World Wars I or II did for us, hopefully not the full four-plus decades of the Cold War.'

No ambiguity here: we are in a new world war, longer than any before it, lasting maybe decades. Woolsey is one of the gaggle of 'NeoCons' - the 'Neo-Conservatives' who infest the US Defence Department and who occupy major foreign policy positions in the Bush administration.

The NeoCons

The NeoCons are former liberals who in the 1970s became involved with the Reagan campaign. At the same time corporations were increasingly involved in politics, funding 'think-tanks' (such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA)), university programs, campus newspapers and generally helping tilt the culture of politics sharply to the right. The NeoCons were instrumental in organising and promoting this.

Once they had been recruited into the Reagan administration in the 1980s, they helped sharpen their 'conservative internationalist' analysis and programme. There these 'thinkers' teamed up with the shady 'fixers' from the murky world of the 'arms-for-hostages' clandestine operation, the Iran-Contra scandal - Oliver North, Richard Armitage, Elliott Abrams, Michael Ledeen and others. The Iran-Contra brigade put CIA and military experience at the NeoCons disposal.

The triangle was completed by a Republican Party revitalised by the mass support of millions of Christian Zionists. More Zionist than the Zionists, they are fervent supporters of Israel and some even practise Jewish culture. They believe that Armageddon is imminent, that it will happen in the Middle East, that it is God's Work to defend Israel and strike down its Islamic enemies. Because, at the end of the day, they expect the world to suffer The Tribulation while

they experience The Rapture for, as the bible says: 'Christ will rise, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord'. What happens to us, to the rest of the world is irrelevant to these zealots - we are 'the Lost'. These are the 'Rapture-ready' nuclear suicide bombers who expect to ascend to Heaven in a fiery chariot.

NeoCon Links

Given the affinity between Zionism and right wing ideology within the US ruling class, it is no surprise that so many of the NeoCons are pro-Israeli Jews.

NeoCon Elliott Abrams, the top policy advisor on the Middle East, is a racist: he opposes 'mixed marriages' with non-Jews because they are 'immensely threatening' to the Jewish community (imagine the uproar if a top government official opposed marriage between black and white). Abrams opposes the 'land-for-peace' which has been at the heart of the 'peace process'. Richard Perle, until recently Chair of the Defence Policy Board and still a member, is a director of the *Jerusalem Post*. Perle and Douglas Feith joined in policy deliberations for the ultra-right wing Israeli Likud party in 1996. JINSA, which includes Ledeen, Perle and Wolsey on

its advisory board, has close ties with the Israeli military, retired US military officers, US military training establishments and US armaments corporations who, via Israel, use Palestinians for live fire testing of weapons systems.

Although the links are less direct, the NeoCons also dabble in Cuban affairs. Before resigning to take up positions in the Bush administration, NeoCons Paula Dobriansky and Paul Wolfowitz were involved with the so-called National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is a conduit for US government funds to anti-communist organisations such as the Democratic Revolutionary Directorate. NeoCon Vin Weber is currently Chairman of NED and Michael Novak and Francis 'End of History' Fukuyama, both leading NeoCons, are directors.

NeoCon doctrine

The full scope of the NeoCons plans is set out in the important book *Present Dangers*, a programme or manifesto for US world domination, published in 2000 before Bush was appointed president.

Organised around the idea that the US should proactively exercise a 'benevolent hegemony': 'A strategy aimed at preserving American hegemony should...[be]...more rather than less inclined to weigh in when crises erupt and preferably before they erupt. This is the standard of a global superpower that intends to shape the international environment to its own advantage.'

This brings with it certain responsibilities: 'We must be prepared to make appropriate demands and claim appropriate prerogatives for the nation - this nation, at any rate - even when others oppose or condemn them. This is what it means to be alone on top. The challenge we face is to learn how to command.'

For someone to be able to command there must be others prepared to obey. While international law may be good enough for others, the US can be more flexible: 'foreign policy decisions cannot be subject to the kind of "rule of law" that we want for our domestic political process.'

The NeoCons can barely conceal a desire to encourage civil war in China: we 'can either make it easier or more difficult for [China]...our policy...ought to be the latter, so that we can hasten the day when the conflicting currents of Chinese society prove beyond the capacity of its dictatorial government to manage.'

On Israel, the US should 'avoid pressures on Israel'. Generally, 'The next decade will present enormous opportunities to advance American interests in the Middle East, but not for the most part through painstaking negotiations of documents. ... Here, as elsewhere, our military strength and willingness to use it will remain a key factor in our ability to promote peace.'

The Atlantic alliance must be re-asserted, but NATO should be used to constrain Europe and prevent it from going Gaullist. 'Efforts to create a separate European identity that is defined in opposition to the United States should be challenged and discouraged at every opportunity.'

'American foreign policy is infused with an unusually high degree of morality.' Indeed, 'the history of American involvement abroad has been



Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld. Inset: Paul Wolfowitz on a recent trip to Kabul

characterised by its generosity and humane acts.' The humanity shown by the US Government toward the people of Vietnam and the generosity showered onto the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are, of course, well known. 'The record shows that in the overwhelming number of instances America has been a liberating force from oppression. America is not interested in territorial conquest, subjugation of others or world domination.' This is because: 'the United States was built on a solid moral framework of respect for the self-interest of individuals in their lives, liberties, and property.' They forget the main prop: slavery.

NeoCon strategy

This NeoCon program was developed into the National Security Strategy of the US in 2002, with its doctrine of pre-emptive attacks. The NSS promises to ignite a 'New Era' of global economic growth 'through free markets and free trade'. The US will insist on 'pro-growth' legal and regulatory policies; capital-friendly tax policies; an end to corruption (in other countries); suitable financial systems; pro-business fiscal policies; investment in health and education (currently being cutback in the US); free trade. It babbles about capital being able to improve living standards internationally (something it has failed to do in 400 years). 'We are committed to policies that will help emerging markets achieve access to larger capital flows at lower cost'. In other words, to find it easier for US imperialism to make profitable investments outside the US.

NeoCon policy

Doctrine, of course, is not necessarily policy. So what is the distance between policy and doctrine? The answer is: not much. The attack on Iraq was clearly the doctrine's first serious trial. In order to close the gap, Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defence, has been re-organising the military.

One of the characteristics of the NeoCons is contempt for facts. Inconvenient facts are ignored. Rumsfeld, distrustful of the intelligence he has been receiving, has created a new intelligence organisation, the Office of Special Projects whose members style

themselves 'the Cabal'. Instead of evaluating and working from known facts, this group sifts out facts which fit their preconceived ideas, using unreliable sources if they fit, ignoring reliable ones which don't and interpolating any that are missing.

If there are not enough facts to twist, NeoCons manufacture them. For example, Richard Perle claims that UN weapons inspectors were 'expelled from Iraq'. This is an outright lie: the State Department's own Fact Sheet on Iraq says: 'The inspectors were not shown out of Iraq'. Richard Butler confirms this: 'On November 10, 1998...the US government...advised me, as executive head of UNSCOM, to consider evacuating UNSCOM staff from Iraq...I told [acting US representative to the UN] Burleigh that I would immediately order an evacuation.' After the inspectors had returned to Iraq, the obedient Butler received further instructions from Burleigh. 'Repeating a familiar script, I told him that I would act on this advice', again withdrawing the inspectors. Similarly, the attack on Iraq was justified by supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction and links with Al Qaida, for which no evidence has yet been produced.

Rumsfeld is also reshaping the military to unquestioningly do what he wants it to do. Although military discipline is necessary in any conflict, it usually accommodates disagreement and discussion about how best to achieve military objectives. Army Secretary Thomas White has resigned and Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki is on his way out. Both opposed invading Iraq. General Tommy Franks is ideal for Rumsfeld - a complete yes-man. During the planning of the attack on Afghanistan, Bush asked Franks what he thought about something Rumsfeld had said. Franks replied: 'Sir, I think exactly what my secretary thinks, what he's ever thought, what he will ever think, or whatever he thought he might think.'

The NeoCons have the philosophy, they have created the doctrine, and, with the 'victory' in Iraq and the reorganisation of the US military, the power to enforce their vision of US world domination. Onward, Christian soldiers. A new world war has begun.

Steve Palmer

Leading NeoCons in the Bush Administration

Elliott Abrams - Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director on the NSC for Near East and North African Affairs - the top policy adviser on the Middle East

Richard Armitage - Deputy US Secretary of State

John Bolton - US Under Secretary of State for Disarmament Affairs and International Security

Paula Dobriansky - Under Secretary for Global Affairs

Douglas Feith - Under Secretary of Defence for Policy

Zalmay Khalilzad - Special Envoy and Ambassador at Large for Free Iraqis, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Afghanistan, Free Iraqis, and outreach to the Muslim community.

Richard Perle - Defence Policy Board, Department of Defence

Peter Rodman - Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs

Donald Rumsfeld - Secretary of Defence

William Schneider - Chairman of the Defence Science Board, Department of Defence

Paul Wolfowitz - Deputy Secretary of Defence

Robert Zoellick - US Trade Representative



Recolonising the Middle East

The first Labour government responded to criticism of the bombing in 1924. Labour MP and pacifist George Lansbury described the bombing as a 'Hunnish and barbarous method of warfare.' In *The Royal Airforce in Iraq* Peter Sluglett states, 'In August 1924 the Labour Minister for Air presented to Parliament "A Note on the Employment of Air Arm in Iraq", apparently an attempt at a blanket answer to these criticisms. It described the circumstances under which RAF assistance could be requested and administrative procedures involved... The alternatives to air control were dismissed as impossibly unwieldy and expensive. The Note claimed that air defence was cheap, that it provided "a method of control more effective and less costly to life and suffering..." That is, less costly to the Labour government and to British troops who could kill with impunity from the skies.'

Old Labour, New Labour – it is essentially the same racist, imperialist, warmongering party: New Labour is not some distortion, as George Galloway and many on the left would have it. The Labour Party at its outset was racist and imperialist. In 1907 the Independent Labour Party MP (later the first Labour Prime Minister in 1924) Ramsay MacDonald wrote:

'The Tropics can yield much to keep the Temperate lands in comfort and to sweeten life for them, and the Temperate lands have a right to ask from the Tropics some of their desirable productions... The white nations which exploit the Tropics economically assume responsibility for the natives, and how to fulfil that responsibility is the kernel of the problem of dependency government. This responsibility, however, may be regarded from a worthier point of view than as a consequence of economic exploitation. A community may well claim that it has a duty imposed upon it to spread the blessings of its civilisation over the Earth. Morality has a universal sway, and by reason of its imperialism the more developed nations are brought into a position of something like guardian and teacher of the less developed nations.' (Labour and Empire, 1907).

MacDonald, like Tony Blair, was a devout Christian.

Thus did the RAF 'spread the blessings of civilisation' across Iraq in 1924. In 2003 Prime Minister Blair repeats MacDonald's message of moral superiority to justify colonialism, 'getting rid of the regime was justified in its own terms morally'. Blair's call to 're-order the world', as he put it, is a modern expression of socialist colonialism. At the 1907 Stuttgart conference of the Second International a dispute emerged over colonial policy. MacDonald, the British Labour Party and Fabians attended the conference and justified colonial policy on the grounds that it 'may have a civilising effect'. The German Social Democratic Party member, Eduard Bernstein, using similarly racist tones to MacDonald, expressed the position thus:

'The colonies are there. We must put up with this fact. A certain guardianship of cultured peoples over non-cultured peoples is a

In the previous issue of this paper we said 'In five of the past nine decades the Royal Air Force (RAF) has bombed Iraq.' This was wrong. The RAF was formed in 1918 and began bombing Iraq, then Mesopotamia, in 1919. It bombed in 1919, the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1990s and in each year this decade. That is six not five of the past nine decades. The RAF bombed Iraq at the orders of British Conservative, Labour and Coalition governments in the service of the Empire and imperialism. Trevor Rayne reports on the recolonisation of Iraq.

necessity, which should also be recognised by the socialists... A great part of our economic system is based on the exploitation of resources from the colonies which the natives would not know what to do with...'

The British Labour Party, MacDonald and Bernstein represented a privileged section of workers, a labour aristocracy, whose conditions of life were 'sweetened' by the 'desirable productions of the Tropics', by the profits of imperialism. That is why in 1907 and today the Labour Party has defended British imperialism, for plain material motives cloaked in moral justifications: today we are presented with a 'humanitarian imperialism'. The motion for socialist colonialism at the Stuttgart conference was narrowly defeated with the Russian delegation leading the opposition to it. Labour, the German Social Democrats and their supporters proceeded to lead the workers into the slaughter and pillage of the First World War when Britain first occupied Iraq. So successful was the RAF in Iraq that British governments swiftly deployed it in Palestine, Aden, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Ireland and against workers in Britain itself.

The recolonisation of the Middle East

Commenting on this most recent invasion of Iraq *Le Monde Diplomatique* described the arrival in Baghdad on 21 April of retired US General Garner to head the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (with his deputy British Major General Tim Cross at his side) to run Iraq. It likened their arrival to those of Clive in India and Kitchener in Sudan. This is the recolonisation of the Middle East as the RCG subtitled its 1994 publication *The New Warlords*.

A week before he arrived in Baghdad, Garner told the *New York Times* of his model for Iraq: 'Start with Vietnam and the strategic hamlet concept.' Garner worked on this programme in 1970-71; it was modelled on the British in Malaya after 1945. Heady with victory over the Iraqi army Garner went on reminiscing about Vietnam, 'We should have taken the war north instead of waiting in the south. Just like here. If Bush had been president we would have won'. This is deranged even for a US general.

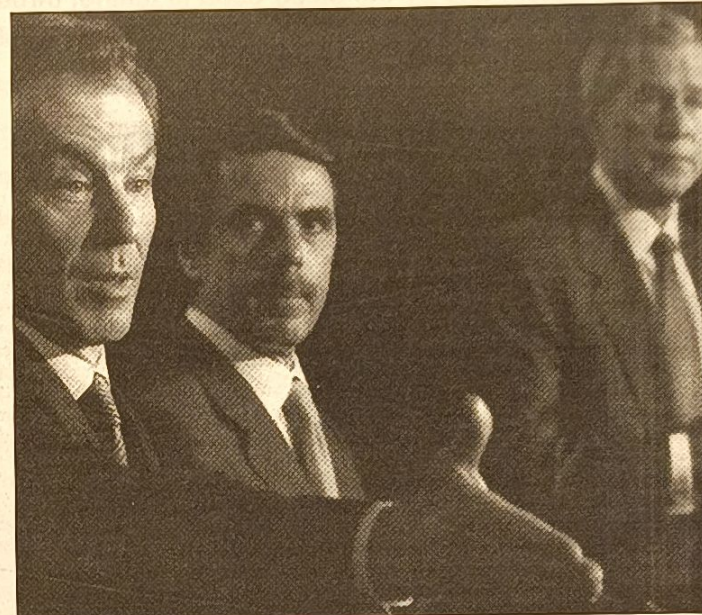
After less than a month Garner was subordinated to one L Paul 'Jerry' Bremer III. Formerly serving the US diplomatic service in Afghanistan, Malawi, Norway and the Netherlands, Bremer is described as 'one of the world's leading experts on crisis management, terrorism and homeland security'. He is a director of Air Products and Chemicals Inc., Akzo Nobel, the Harvard Business School of

New York etc. and was previously Managing Director of Kissinger Associates, 'a strategic consulting firm headed by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger'. So these are the credentials of the modern Clive and Kitchener.

On 27 March, as the US forces advanced towards Baghdad, the *New York Times* reported that the US 101st Airborne Division had named two new forward bases in Iraq *Forward Operating Base Shell* and *Forward Operating Base Exxon*. Questioned about this, the Pentagon saw no cause for embarrassment and Exxon's boss said it was 'pretty neat'. While the museums and hospitals were looted and US troops goaded people on to ransack universities, while ministries of agriculture, transport, foreign relations, water and irrigation burned, the ministries of oil and intelligence were ringed by US tanks. The oil, the pipelines, ports and airbases were all secured. The oil flowed before the water. As a commanding British officer put it, 'Iraq's national treasure is safe' – by treasure he meant oil.

There has been no shame at the speed with which international capital has moved to loot Iraq. The US and Britain intend to privatise Iraqi oil and state assets. Philip Carroll, former Shell executive, has been put in charge of an Advisory Team to manage Iraq's oil. Britain and the US, as the occupying powers, are to manage Iraq's oil revenues through the Development Fund for Iraq that they have set up. Contracts have been handed out to firms directly tied to the current US administration: Halliburton gets operation of oil facilities, distribution of products and extinguishing of fires, worth up to \$7 billion over two years; Bechtel, the US construction giant, gets \$680 million. Most of this money will be paid for with Iraqi government assets seized in 1990-91. The British Labour government has set up its own Working Group on Iraq including Marconi, Balfour Beatty, Taylor Woodrow, Alstom, the Health Network Association and the Confederation of British Industries (CBI). They anticipate a fifth of the contracts in recognition of Britain's military and new colonial role. Japanese companies Mitsubishi, Marubeni and Komatsu are also in the bidding to 'rebuild Iraq', seeking joint ventures with US partners as the best way to get in on the action.

The Iraqi people will remember that from 1927 when oil gushed out of the ground until 1972 when the oil industry was nationalised they saw almost no benefits from oil revenues, these flowed into accounts of the Iraq Petroleum Company (BP) in London. The US and British governments intend to establish free markets in the Middle East. This means privatisation,



Blair, Aznar and Bush at the Azores summit before the armed invasion of Iraq. There has been repeated success for US and British military ventures in the recent period, averaging almost one a year for this Labour government.

opening up economies to international capital. In Kosovo and Bosnia the US and British imposed the same free markets and privatisation. Today in Kosovo there is over 60% unemployment and in Bosnia it is over 40% with 75% of the people in poverty. Corruption and gangsters rule – this is the reality of the free market vision: humiliated, degraded, colonised people. The US is considering drafting in cheap Filipino labour for the new investment opportunities in Iraq.

A crisis of imperialism

Behind this brazen demonstration of crude power we must not lose sight of two factors. Firstly, the repeated success of US and British military ventures in the recent period, averaging almost one a year for this Labour government. The loss ratios for the US and British forces never exceed one of their own to 100 of their target's. Secondly, the deepening economic crisis of capitalism that propels these military aggressions. Together these spell great danger for the world. The crisis of accumulation has two consequences: the desperate pursuit of resources and markets to augment profits, and a tendency towards inter-imperialist rivalry. Both increase the trend to militarism and war.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the US ruling class has moved to dominate the world. The British ruling class seeks a share of the spoils through its alliance with the US. The Middle East and Central Asia are the arenas where the US ruling class believes it can stamp its domination over any potential rival – the European Union, Japan, Russia, China – by means of control over oil supplies and transportation routes combined with unmatched military power.

Also, the oil in the Middle East is cheap: \$2-3 a barrel compared to \$12-15 in the Gulf of Mexico and North Sea. Fantastic profits are to be made at prices of \$20 a barrel. Iraq's proven oil reserves are 115 billion barrels. Possible reserves rise to 250 billion barrels. War and sanctions prevented

Iraq developing 55 of its 70 known oil fields. Pre-war production capacity of 2.8 million barrels per day could be raised to 7-8 million barrels per day, rivalling Saudi Arabia. But to exploit these reserves meant that UN sanctions had to be removed. Without relinquishing their control over Iraq the US and British governments devised a United Nations resolution to allow the UN a role in monitoring oil revenues. This was interpreted by the French and Russian governments as offering a prospect of getting something from their contracts with the former regime. The resolution was passed on 22 May, giving UN legitimacy to the US and British occupation.

Meanwhile, evidence of the crisis gripping capitalism mounts up. US wholesale prices fell a record 1.9% in April. Federal Reserve chair Greenspan warned that the US had so little experience in dealing with deflation that the possibility required 'very close scrutiny'. The US economy is in danger of subsiding under an avalanche of debt. According to the International Monetary Fund, Germany is in 'considerable' risk of deflation.

So the world's three biggest capitalist economies, the US, Japan and Germany are going into reverse. In 2002 US personal bankruptcies reached a record 1.5 million and requests for both emergency food assistance and emergency housing were up by a fifth. In the two years to February 2003, US capital shed two million jobs: unemployment and poverty grow.

Imperialism's assault on the oppressed nations of the world is co-ordinated with attacks on the conditions and rights of the masses in its heartlands. The drive to war and repression will continue: escalating savagery accompanies capitalist crises until there is sufficient death and destruction for the system to be revived. If we do not accept this fate we must ally with the oppressed wherever they resist our ruling classes and we must break the deathly grip of the Labour Party on workers, ideas and action in Britain.

Rock around the Blockade goes to Cuba

In April, Rock around the Blockade's Battle of Ideas brigade visited socialist Cuba. Comrades returned inspired by the example of collective organisation, social inclusion and mass participation that characterises Cuban socialism and by the steps Cuba is taking, through its Battle of Ideas, to extend the Revolution at every level. Here, they give their impressions of how socialism is working in Cuba.

For a report of the brigade's activities, see page 14. For further reports see Viva Cuba newsletter 27.

Economic reform in Cuba

An important issue has been addressing the issue of inequality created by the legalisation of the dollar and the dual economy that has existed since the 1990s. Access to dollars has given some workers, for example those working in tourism, a better standard of living than others. This had the potential to divide Cuban society. The problem is being addressed by a decision taken in consultation with the trade unions to pay a bonus in dollars to workers who do not have access to dollars like those in state services such as health and education and those in industries such as oil and nickel.

Steps are also being taken to raise productivity without compromising the moral and social basis of the revolution. The recently introduced 'Perfection' system aims to increase pro-

ductivity and salaries. Planning and central control will remain in state hands. The agreed state quota will remain the priority for the enterprise. There will not be competition of the type seen between capitalist enterprises but there will be a degree of decentralisation, allowing enterprises to open up new products and markets. Any surplus will go back into society. One portion will be paid to the state, another will be for local projects enabling workers to contribute to developing socialism by their involvement, for instance, in rebuilding homes, schools, hospitals, or taking part in projects for the disabled.

Socialist Cuba knows the problems and is addressing them in a creative and principled manner.

Hannah Caller

Power to the people

The people's project

Before visiting Cuba, we wanted to discover the thoughts of 'ordinary' Cubans about the revolutionary process. However, if you define ordinary as those outside the political system, then you very soon realise that very few people in Cuba fit this definition.

It is through their mass organisations that Cubans join the revolutionary process and have an effective voice. For example, 80% of Cuban women are members of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC), working on social projects that include education of prisoners, working with troubled families and dealing with issues such as domestic violence. It was they who put proposals concerning paid maternity and paternity leave from work to the National Assembly, where they were debated before being made law. This is part of the Cuban system of popular power where the mass organisations have the right to make legislative initiatives.

At all ages Cubans can be a member of a dedicated organisation. From 7-14 there is the Pioneers. The UJC organises people under 30 and has a membership of one in three of the age range. It works closely with the Mid-Level Students' Federation (FEEM), for students aged 14-19, and the Federation of University Students (FEU). There are other mass organisations for every group in society, such as farmers, artists and writers and, of course, trade unions for all workers. If we add to these the Committees for Defence of the Revolution (CDR), of which 99% of the population (from 14 years on) are members, we can see that almost every person in Cuba has important roles to play in the organisation of society.

Such mass participation is in direct contrast to life in Britain, where less than 40% of inhabitants bothered to take part in the recent elections. Cuba offers an insight into the way forward

to a society that is run by and for its people. For those on the right, who refuse to accept that socialism can work, Cuba stands in defiance. For those on the left who are unable to picture socialism as a living process the message is clear, visit Cuba and see for yourself. We did.

Mark Suibhne

CDRs – at the heart of the revolution

We visited a Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) in the city of Guantanamo as well as a rural CDR within the Imias municipality.

The CDRs are central to the functioning of all Cuban society. The vast majority of Cubans over the age of 14 choose to participate in them, but membership is not compulsory. The few who don't join are still entitled to benefit from everything the CDRs do. They organise everything within communities from street parties to regular blood donations; the care of disabled people to the integration of prisoners back into society; looking after the local environment to being on call for night-time emergencies. It was evident when we met with the people from both these neighbourhoods that it was the incredible unity that binds these communities together that gives the Cuban revolution its strength.

The Cubans are famous for saying that they have no gold and they have little oil, their most valuable resource is their people. Perhaps the most important organisations within Cuban society, the CDRs ensure that no family is left alone and isolated. They are united within the revolution, assisting each other to achieve the best possible for their neighbourhood, their country and their revolution.

Lindsay Powell



Social inclusion in Cuba

Cuban society continuously promotes unity amongst its own people, but also solidarity with other peoples, as we saw at the May Day rally in Havana which encompassed people of all ages, colour and creed. In the same way the many grassroots organisations in Cuba try to get everyone united and involved in running their own society.

In particular, over the last 18 months, the Cubans have sent out social workers, working in collaboration with the mass organisations, to every family to ensure the benefits of the revolution are equally distributed and

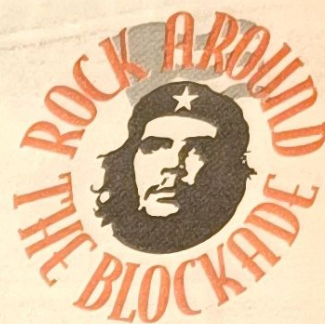
that the voice of its people is heard. The Cubans have identified that a small portion of its population is not accessing what is available to the majority. This small percentage (1-5%) may well be disabled, unidentified in their needs or even social delinquents. The aim of the revolution is to empower every individual so that they can be responsible citizens of Cuban society, including former convicts. Unlike the British 'justice' system, the Cuban authorities don't believe that stigmatising ex-convicts is a form of rehabilitation.

I wondered how much of a problem racism was within Cuba, both within organisations and generally in the streets. While walking around Havana and Guantanamo on my own I found that I received none of the peculiar looks that I often get in 'multi-cultural' Britain. But also, when visiting old people's homes and the chocolate factory or when meeting with the UJC, I saw that, compared to Britain, many more of the workers in responsible positions are black.

At the passport checkpoint I deliberately walked ahead of my comrades at Gatwick to see whether it was true that non-whites are more likely to be 'randomly' checked. Sure enough the officers at the airport questioned me about my travels. They also questioned another comrade with an Arabic-sounding name. This charade didn't happen in Cuba. This made me realise how set institutionalised racism is in the imperialist countries.

While this does not mean racism does not exist in Cuba, the Cubans are confident that through education and the widest possible inclusion, these problems will gradually have less bearing on society.

Mohammad Hussain



Growing up in Cuba

Over 50% of Cubans are under 30. These young Cubans have rights and responsibilities far greater than we could imagine in Britain.

Cubans begin life in the most supportive of environments. Mothers get a full year of paid leave, with the guarantee of their former job when they return and this is soon to be extended to fathers as well. For the next five years most Cuban children join their local nursery, learning co-operative ways of working and living through practices such as the collective celebration of birthdays.

From 7-14, they enter the Pioneers' movement, taking part in recreational, social and educational courses at Pioneers' Palaces in everything from alternative medicine to traditional music; from how to fly a plane to baking bread – with a wealth of hands-on experience. The Pioneers have their own structures, based upon principles of solidarity and co-operation. Their mass conferences are run by the children themselves, to determine the direction of their movement. This grassroots self-organisation results in bullying being entirely alien to Cuban schools. The power bestowed upon young Cubans to influence their world in a positive way makes unnecessary such destructive assertions of self. Similarly, the selfish academic competition between individuals which puts such pressure on students in Britain is not evident in Cuba. Those having more difficulties are helped by those achieving more easily. A recent development now sees secondary school students assisting younger students, and university students assisting secondary schools students. With maximum class sizes of 20 in primary schools, and 15 in secondary schools, teachers can provide much closer assistance than in Britain.

In the community the contribution of Cuban young people to society is highly valued and encouraged. By the time they reach 14 and become eligible to join the mass organisations, they are already well versed in the practices of participatory democracy and collective working, and have a strong sense of their important place in society, and of their responsibility to build and defend the Revolution.

Tom Vickers

Desde el corazon

La Brigada 'Batalla de Ideas' quiere agradecer sinceramente desde estas líneas el trabajo organizativo y el calor humano del Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales de la UJC y el buro político y ideológico de la UJC en Guantanamo. De su mano hemos aprendido el poder de las organizaciones populares y de masas en Cuba, la fuerza revolucionaria de la educación en libertad y la solidaridad verdadera con los oprimidos del mundo.

Porque vuestra inspiración es nuestra lucha y la Revolución no conoce fronteras, juntos compañeros cubanos hasta la victoria siempre!

Defend Cuban socialism!

'[Revolutionaries] start out from the principle that this is a life or death struggle. If revolutionaries do not defend themselves, their cause is defeated'. Fidel Castro, 25 April 2003

It is in this context that the arrest and gaoling in April of more than 60 Cuban 'dissidents' and the execution of three hijackers – which provoked widespread criticism in the bourgeois press – must be understood. During our stay in Cuba, we were privileged to be able to discuss these issues with two leading Cuban communists and long-time friends of FRFI and Rock around the Blockade. Rogelio Polanco is editor of the youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* and a frequent participant in the nightly televised round-table discussions on important current events; Noel Carrillo is a member of the Department of International Relations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Hijackers executed

On 11 April, after a summary trial, the three Cubans who had hijacked a passenger ferry crossing Havana Bay, held knives to passengers' throats and threatened to throw them overboard, were sentenced to death and executed. There was an international outcry, from Cuba's enemies, obviously, but also from liberal supporters of Cuba. However, the Cuban communists are clear that the actions of the United States had left them with no option but to act as they did.

Let us be clear. As communists, we are opposed to the death penalty. Indeed, it is not something the Cuban Communist Party promotes, and there had been an effective moratorium on executions in the past three years, with the possibility mooted, before recent events, of removing it from the statute books altogether. Polanco stated clearly that the death penalty is not part of the philosophy of the Revolution, but rather something they had been trying to leave behind. It was not a decision undertaken lightly. Carrillo told us that Cuba respects those who oppose the death penalty but felt in the current situation it was necessary to prevent death and destruction on a far greater scale. Those who condemn Cuba, including many left parties, have ended up 'somehow playing the same music as the north Americans'.

As Fidel Castro told the millions who gathered in Havana's Revolution Square on 1 May:

'The Cuban Revolution was placed in the dilemma of either protecting the lives of millions of Cubans by using the legally established death penalty to punish the three main hijackers of a passenger ferry or sitting back and doing nothing. The US government, which incites common criminals to assault boats or aeroplanes with passengers on board, encourages these people, gravely endangering the lives of innocents and creating the ideal conditions for an attack on Cuba. A wave of hijackings had been unleashed and was already in full development; it had to be stopped.

'We cannot ever hesitate when it is a question of protecting the lives of the sons and daughters of a people determined to fight until the end, arresting the mercenaries who serve the aggressors and applying the most severe sanctions against terrorists who hijack passenger boats or planes

The Rock around the Blockade brigade visited Cuba at a time of escalating tension in relations with the USA following the imperialist onslaught on Iraq and the Bush administration's stated aim of pre-emptive strikes at a moment's notice in any 'dark corner of the world'. For imperialism's 'dark corner', read, in this case, the shining example of socialism. In a world dominated by what Castro has characterised as the USA's 'Nazi-fascist' foreign policy, the Cuban Revolution stands in very real danger and is prepared to fight to the death for survival. US strategy is to probe Cuba. It is engaged in a new Cold War. A false move by the Cuban government could set off a process similar to that which began in September 2002 when the US started the countdown to the invasion of Iraq.

or commit similarly serious acts, who will be punished by the courts in accordance with the laws in force.'

The US government has, as an act of aggression, drastically reduced the number of visas it issues to Cubans wishing to travel to the United States, from the agreed 20,000 a year to only 700 in the last six months. At the same time, it is actively promoting illegal emigration. Yet it has warned that any mass emigration from Cuba to the United States – as when Cuba opened its borders in 1980 and in 1994 – will be treated as a 'national security issue'.

The scarcity of visas has prompted violent and criminal elements to resort to hijacking planes and ships in an attempt to reach the United States. This problem has escalated over the last seven months with seven vessels hijacked by Cubans armed with knives, firearms and grenades. In one case, a gang even grabbed an AK-M rifle from a soldier and attempted to storm a plane. The hijackers are encouraged by the fact that when they reach the USA, rather than being returned to Cuba to face criminal charges, they are bailed and released. Cuba is clear that the USA is waiting for an incident serious enough to serve as a pretext for invasion. Since the executions, the hijackings have stopped and the point has been made – not just to would-be hijackers, but to the USA and the world: Cuba takes the defence of its people and its revolution seriously.

US promotes counter-revolution

These are dangerous times for Cuba. Polanco told us the United States' doctrine of pre-emptive action and Cuba's inclusion on their list of so-called 'rogue states' meant that the situation in Cuba is the most dangerous for many years. Indeed, while we were in Cuba, US Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared on television to announce that the island's government should be eliminated. 'We are in one of the most risky and dangerous moments not only for Cuba but for the whole of humanity,' said Carrillo. For the Cuban Communist Party, the invasion of Iraq marks the end of the post-war world order and the beginning of a new and dangerous one. It believes the economic crisis of US imperialism is now so deep it cannot wait for measures such as the Free Trade Area



'Ideas will overcome weapons': millions join May Day parade in Havana

of the Americas to enlarge its markets and profits, but must launch wars to defend the interests of US capital. The system of international relations has broken down completely leaving the way open for such attacks. The European Union has proved too weak and divided to act as any kind of brake on US aggression. No country is now strong enough to stand in its way, leaving Cuba totally isolated apart from the international solidarity it receives.

The United States is searching for a pretext to invade the island. Propaganda used in the past – that Cuba has been involved in international drug trafficking, or possesses the technology to manufacture biological weapons – has been comprehensively discredited by the Cubans and 'put on ice', as Carrillo put it, for future use. Since the invasion of Iraq, the USA does not need proof. After all, where are those famous 'weapons of mass destruction', the pretext for war in the first place?

Instead, US strategy has been to foment dissent within the island itself. Since the arrival last September of arch-reactionary diplomat James Cason, the US Interests Section in Havana has been used as a headquarters for Cuba's fragmented and mercenary opposition. Here counter-revolutionary propaganda has been produced and printed, subversion planned and millions of dollars handed over to 'dissidents' of one

kind or another. Information provided by these sources was regularly fed through to the US administration to be used as fodder for the tightening of the Helms-Burton Act. As well as wining and dining dissidents at his home, in a brazen abuse of his diplomatic position, Cason has travelled around the island meeting with counter-revolutionaries and urging them to set aside their differences and unite around a 10-point programme. As Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque wryly pointed out, the imperialists condemn Cuba for having one political party uniting the people around socialism, but are themselves desperately attempting to create a single party of counter-revolution.

The hundreds of grouplets, ranging from the Independent Press Association of Cuba to the Independent Raters' Association, are a key part of tried and tested US strategy, used in the former socialist countries of the Eastern bloc, to undermine revolution from within. As former CIA official Philip Agee has commented, these 'so-called independent journalists, independent libraries and civil rights activists are not, nor were they ever, independent in any sense whatsoever'. Rather, they are completely in the pocket of the United States government and supplied with millions of dollars to say what they are told to say, write what they are told to write and lead comfortable and privileged lives with no need to work.

From 1997 to 2002, \$22 million was channelled into Cuba via the US Agency for International Development – and this was but a tiny fraction of money that finds its way into Cuba to foment counter-revolutionary activities.

All these activities were proved in court by 12 Cuban intelligence agents who had infiltrated these 'dissident' organisations. Two of them, 'Octavio' (Nestor Bague) and 'Tania' (Odilia Collazo), had risen to become, respectively, the chairman of the Independent Press Association of Cuba and the president of the Pro-Human Rights Party of Cuba. Their testimony exposed the corrupt, bogus and mercenary character of these groups, and the degree to which they are little other than puppets of the US Interests Section.

Upon arrival in Cuba, Cason had stated that his goal was 'to speed up the process towards a democratic Cuba' and urged 'support for all those who are contributing to this transition'. By March 2003 he was holding meetings with counter-revolutionaries every other day. Cason, in Castro's words, had 'attempted to transform his headquarters and his own residence into a venue for organising, instructing and directing mercenaries who betray their homeland in the service of a foreign power, or violate other laws through acts that cause serious harm to the country, expecting total impunity'.

At the same time, in a move further designed to provoke Cuba, Cuban political prisoners, the Miami 5, were being tortured in US gaols.

The Cubans decided it was time to act – but not by expelling Cason or closing the US Interests Section, which would have allowed the US to claim Cuba was taking hostile steps against it. As Polanco said 'We are a guerrilla nation and must attack the enemy's flanks'. Instead, 65 counter-revolutionaries (77 including the Cuban 'double agents') were rounded up and tried under Cuban law against receiving money or equipment from the US government for the purpose of implementing the Helms-Burton Law and sentenced to between six and 28 years in gaol. In the face of liberal furore, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque spelled it out: no-one is punished in Cuba for their ideas, but they will be punished for criminal and counter-revolutionary activity and the US must understand the consequences of its strategy: 'These trials must be understood as Cuba's behaviour when no other option remained...given the path of confrontation and provocation which the US government has chosen to pursue in its relations with Cuba.'

The Cubans do not believe an invasion is inevitable, but they are armed and ready to fight. Since the 1980s, when Reagan came to power on an anti-communist crusade, they have been preparing to resist occupation with a guerrilla war of all the people. An invader would face not just the Cuban army, but the entire people armed and ready to fight to the death in defence of their Revolution.

Ed Scrivens and Cat Wiener

Ireland

Direct rule from London continues

PAUL MALLON

The stalemate over the Good Friday 'peace process' continues. The Labour government has postponed elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly from May to the autumn. Direct rule from London continues. In the meantime the part publication of the Stephens' Report into collusion between Britain and Loyalists has exposed the reality of Britain's dirty war against the Nationalist working class. More recently the headlines have been filled with sensation over 'Stakeknife', the infamous British agent. All of this is designed to destabilise the Republican Movement.

On 13 April, the IRA issued a private communiqué regarding IRA disbandment to the British and Irish governments and to David Trimble, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). However, the absence of an explicit commitment failed to satisfy Trimble and the British government. On 23 April Prime Minister Tony Blair publicly responded by misquoting the IRA's statement and asking for three points of clarification on its position. On 6 May the IRA reissued its 13 April statement and provided further clarification of its position. In its statements, the IRA attempted to meet the demands set out by the British government by reassuring Unionists that it 'poses

no threat to Unionist people or to the peace process'. It also stated that it had sanctioned a further, third act of decommissioning of arms and offered apologies and condolences to non-combatants caught up in the conflict. None of this has cut any ice with either the British government or the Loyalists.

Meanwhile, on 17 April, just 15 pages of a 3,000-page report into collusion between British forces and Loyalist death squads were published. Metropolitan Police Commissioner John Stephens' report gives a glimpse of the realities of the nature of British rule. It confirms 'widespread' collaboration between Loyalists and Britain's occupation forces in the systematic campaign to terrorise the Nationalist community. It shows how British agents targeted Republicans for the Loyalist death squads and provided them with intelligence to undertake their murderous activities. Then in mid-May a British intelligence report was leaked which purported to reveal the identity of Britain's main agent within the IRA, 'Stakeknife'. The timing of this revelation was calculated to distract attention from Britain's role in running Loyalist death squads and to destabilise the Republican Movement.

In FRFI 171 we said that 'nothing short of a significant statement from the IRA on disbandment will restore the

devolved institutions. The Republican movement is once again being compelled to save the peace process'. This remains the case. Elections to the devolved assembly will only take place when it is suitable to the British government and when it is satisfied of a stable and acceptable outcome. Were the election to happen now, Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) would gain at the expense of Trimble and the favoured UUP. This would have resulted in severe problems for the assembly since the DUP would refuse to share power with Sinn Féin in the executive, forcing the collapse of the assembly, in effect unravelling the whole Good Friday Agreement.

As Britain's dirty war in Ireland demonstrated, British imperialism cannot play a progressive role in Ireland. This current crisis in the peace process follows a long established pattern: first, the Unionists complain about some part of the process; second, the Republicans call on the British government to honour the process; third, the British government compels the Republican Movement to make yet further concessions. That the Republican Movement will further compromise its position and the Nationalist working class is clear. The question then becomes, what are the forces that will emerge to defend the rights of the Nationalist working class? ■



Scottish elections

SSP refuses to challenge Labour

MICHAEL MACGREGOR

On 1 May, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) won six seats in the Scottish parliament, one less than the Greens. The election saw Labour's vote fall as it lost six seats, ending up with 50. The SNP too was a loser, down eight seats to 27. With only half the eligible voters taking part, the SSP received 128,026 votes in the regional lists which are derived from the 'second vote' system of proportional representation, or 7.68% of the total.

Although at first sight the SSP's result was impressive, the fact is that at no point in the election contest did the SSP campaign on the principled basis of demanding a 'no' vote for the Labour imperialists – the only basis on which any electoral intervention by socialists and anti-imperialists would have been acceptable. Far from it: the SSP deliberately avoided such a challenge by encouraging Labour voters to vote for the SSP with their second vote. Thus its leader Tommy Sheridan urged 'every Labour voter in Scotland to give us their second vote' (SSP website 30 April). He went even further, saying 'I would appeal to

Labour voters: even if you want to vote for your local MSP, give us your second vote, as a second vote for Labour would be wasted'.

In Dundee the SSP candidate withdrew from the election in favour of a sitting Labour MSP, John McAllion, getting a free run in a marginal constituency. He was described by the SSP as a 'socialist' who, because of his anti-war stance, merited this selfless leg-up from other socialists. As evidenced above, the SSP do not actually oppose Labour. They were in the business here of flogging Labour bundled together with the Scottish Socialist Party. The electorate could have it both ways: vote for the war party and the anti-war party at the same time!

On 15 February, as part of the massive wave of international protest against war, 500,000 people marched on the Scottish Labour Party conference in Glasgow. This was 10% of the entire Scottish population, and an even greater proportion of the potential electorate. However, what is clear from the election results is that Labour's support for the war did not alienate its voting base amongst well-off workers and the state-employed middle

class. The refusal of the SSP to take up the challenge to Labour was crucial in letting Labour off the hook. The SSP's endorsement of Labour has set back the struggle for socialism, central to which is complete opposition to imperialism and, in this particular and violent context, complete opposition to British imperialism and the Labour Party.

By contrast the Lothian Muslim Voting Committee was explicit and forthright in urging Muslims to vote tactically to oust Labour MSPs in protest at the war, whilst a pre-election FBU poll in Scotland showed that only 1% of members would vote Labour as compared to 63% in 1999 (quoted in *Socialist Voice* 24 April). This shows how sections of the working class were more advanced than the SSP in their understanding of the Labour Party. The SSP is now completely committed to a parliamentary strategy; it hopes to win 150-200 seats at the next council elections, 'helping us to sink deep roots in every community in Scotland'. New Labour in Scotland will have its own Old Labour opponent: an SSP for whom anti-imperialist principles are to be sloughed off whenever it is an electoral necessity. ■

English local elections

Labour, the BNP and the left

BOB SHEPHERD

Buoyed by the intense racist witch hunt of asylum seekers led by the Labour government and its media allies such as *The Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *The Express*, the BNP announced it would stand candidates in over 200 council wards in the 1 May council elections. It also sought to capitalise on local despair at Labour's record. The reality for many on white working class ghetto estates is deepening poverty, neglect, Labour council cuts, corruption and incompetence. They can see how under Labour the gap between rich and poor has widened, and how levels of child poverty have increased. With so little, they envy any help that goes to asylum seekers and refugees, or to the minority ethnic communities, even though this help is also a pittance. To such people who have no one to represent their interests, the demagoguery of the BNP has a terrible appeal.

Labour's response is to emphasise even more the racism of its own policies – how tough it is on refugees and asylum seek-

ers, how tough it is on working class youth and how intolerant it is of all political protest. Labour are the official racists, the BNP the unofficial racists who can be used as an auxiliary arm of the state should it be necessary.

Rather than confront the racism of the Labour Party, however, the left chose to duck the issue and call for an 'anti-Nazi' vote. The Anti-Nazi League (ANL) issued a national leaflet headlined 'Don't vote Nazi' – although its content had nothing to say to those who might contemplate supporting the BNP. Instead it was an appeal to Labour voters to turn out and vote for their local Labour candidate since there was only a handful of wards where the Socialist Alliance was prepared to battle it out direct with the BNP: 'No matter what problems we face', its opening paragraph argued, 'the Nazi British National Party is not the solution. No matter how fed up we are with our local council and the government, we can't let the Nazis pose as the respectable alternative. On 1 May, election day, we must turn out in massive numbers and vote against the Nazis'.

Nowhere did the ANL mention the Labour Party, even though it was clear that a BNP vote would be a protest against Labour. If we are to believe the ANL, then even if we are 'fed up' with our Labour council, 'fed up' with the Labour government, we must still dutifully turn out 'in massive numbers' to vote for the racist, anti-working class Labour Party so

If we are to believe the ANL, then even if we are 'fed up' with our Labour council, 'fed up' with the Labour government, we must still dutifully turn out 'in massive numbers' to vote for the racist, anti-working class Labour Party

that it can carry on making us 'fed up'. What a statement of absolute political futility!

The strategy of the ANL and the Socialist Alliance was a

washout. In Burnley, a higher than national average turnout elected seven BNP councillors, giving it a total of eight and making the BNP the second largest party in the council. In Oldham, BNP leader Nick Griffin was amongst ten BNP candidates. None of them won, but most came second in their wards. ANL posters plastered around Oldham portraying Griffin as Hitler didn't stop 993 people voting for him, second after the Labour candidate who got 1,684 votes. The Socialist Alliance itself stood four candidates; all got derisory votes. In the one ward where it challenged the BNP directly, Chadderton South, Socialist Alliance came last with 30 votes whilst the BNP was second with 773 votes. In Burnley the Socialist Alliance stood two candidates: both faced BNP candidates and both came last with 38 and 96 votes respectively. Nationally the Socialist Alliance stood 161 candidates. Most received less than 100 votes. In one Manchester ward, Meriden, it managed only 14

votes, in another, it got just 12! Out of 161 candidates, only one Socialist Alliance candidate won; only one other polled more than 20% of the vote.

FRFI has consistently argued we cannot fight racism and the rise of fascist ideas if we do not confront British imperialism, the racism of the British state and the Labour Party. Any other strategy is doomed to failure. It is the Labour Party in government and running local councils that is in reality creating the conditions for the rise of fascist support. The BNP portrays itself as being against the corruption of Labour at local and national level. The pro-Labour Party strategy of the Socialist Alliance reinforces the BNP's credibility as anti-establishment and capable of fighting in the interests of the white working class.

On 15 February, two million turned out to demonstrate against war on Iraq. Ten weeks later, the electoral achievement of the Socialist Alliance is just one council seat! What a spectacular achievement! Tied to

the Labour Party, the left has completely squandered this historic opportunity. This has not prevented *Socialist Worker* from speaking of 'breakthroughs for socialists' and 'socialist election successes' in its analysis of the elections. The fact is that the electoral strategy of the SWP and their left allies is a complete farce and reveals their political bankruptcy. They are more interested in relating to the interests of sections of the Labour Party than to the interests of the working class and oppressed, and in consequence will build nothing.

The alternative won't come through electoral politics but through the creation of an anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-Labour movement, a movement that can represent the interests of the poor, working class and oppressed and link their struggles here with the struggles of the oppressed worldwide against imperialism. The only choice for the left during the elections was to say no to Labour, no the BNP, and to organise the fightback. ■

Education Notes

They've lost the money and they've lost the plot

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Head teachers and education ministers are locked into a public slanging match about a missing £500 million of funding that is needed to run schools over the next year. The government claims that local education authorities have held on to the cash, but they say they have passed it on or spent it on educational provision. Many schools face huge budget deficits and heads warn that after cutting down on training, maintenance and repairs 'the only thing left to trim is staff'.

So, at a time of teacher shortage so severe that many inner city teachers have an automatic 'reward and retention' payment, schools are going to be sacking staff. A last-minute offer by Education Secretary Charles Clarke to allow schools to divert money from repairs to staff salaries or to borrow from richer neighbouring schools to pay this year's salary bills is a panic response that only highlights long-term underfunding.

The shameful spectacle of accusation and counter-accusation by politicians and administrators over the missing cash is the inevitable result of a budget



system that has been deliberately fragmented. This Labour government has set out to turn state provision of the education system into 'grace and favour' funding. Apart from the basic Education Formula Spending Share (EFSS) which is itself an arbitrary allocation of basic funds to education authorities, finance is targeted to support government policies. An initiative is announced, to 'fast-track' teachers, for example, and lo! a pot of money is ear-marked for it which must not be spent on anything else. Some major funds have been swallowed up in this

way. One such initiative, the national numeracy strategy, has been described as 'a £44 million failure' by the *Times Educational Supplement* in May, after research showed that it has made very little difference to pupil attainment.

The reason education ministers cannot point to the missing £500 million is that there is no missing £500 million. There is no creative accounting here. The money has simply been spent, or is due to be spent, on initiatives already announced. Changes in teacher's pay, pensions and national insurance

and changes in government-required job evaluation procedures simply cost more. Some charges previously borne by central government are now transferred to schools. For example, support for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), who are only allowed to teach a 90% curriculum is being withdrawn leaving schools to find the extra cash needed to put teachers in front of classes. Most education authorities will experience a cut of about 1.5% in real terms this year.

Badly miscalculating funding in this way is the by-product of turning state funding into a magic wand to wave at any time the reactionaries start to rumble. Bad pupils! – set up special units. Bad parents! – set up special fast-track courts to punish them. Bad head teachers! – 'take them out', as minister Stephen Byers suggested, and set up a leadership college. This government has lost the plot.

Universities – what are they good for?

You've got to laugh. Having set the target of 50% of the age-group to get a university level education by 2010 (currently 38%), and having agonised over whether it is elitist for posh uni-

versities to charge 'top-up' fees, Education Secretary Charles Clarke is suddenly overcome by doubt. What is it all for? he asks. And why should the state finance scholars at university anyway? We could keep a few 'medieval seekers-after-truth as an adornment to our society', but such a 'community of seekers-after-truth' should not be funded by the state. This was not an attack on historians, or even medieval historians, but on the whole idea of the study of the classics and the humanities. State funding, proposes Clarke, should go to those who 'help the economy to deal with challenges posed by rapid global change'. He must mean applied science, technology and business studies (including accountancy, which he definitely needs to improve on). We suppose he would include the modern languages of major trading nations but not mother-tongues or ancient languages. The view that the purpose of education is to service capitalism and turn out an efficient and disciplined working class is as old as state education itself. We would expect no other view from that ex-leftie, ex-public school lick-spittle of privatisation, Charles Clarke.

Live from the Globe Theatre

One of the main reasons why this government is so discredited is the tendency of its leaders to announce policy on the hoof, as it were. Whenever we see a photo opportunity of Blunkett with the police or Blair with

school pupils we brace ourselves for another 'initiative', like droppings from a rabbit. From the stage of the Globe Theatre, Blair announced the new London schools strategy, also known as 'a package of radical reforms designed to raise standards in the capital over the next five years'. What the Prime Minister means is that 20 new schools will be built to replace the crumbling, cash-starved buildings of the 1890s that house so many of the capital's pupils. His elector detector has picked up the rumblings of discontent from better-off parents who are angry that they cannot get their kids into the more desirable schools of their choice.

Fighting back

There's nothing like shortage of cash to really get people going. Fury at the funding fog fired the Spring conferences of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT). The NUT has come out against the government proposal to use Teaching Assistants, some paid as little as £6 an hour, for whole class teaching as a strategy to relieve work load. The NAHT has come out against government targets to raise SATS test results, claiming that the effect of teaching to the test for 7, 11 and 14-year-olds is damaging to schools and the welfare of children. Yes, it's time for the spinning to stop and the fight back for a democratic education system to begin.

Firefighters' leaders capitulate under Labour threats

JIM CRAVEN

At the end of May the executive of the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) agreed to end their industrial action. This was the second time that the executive had tried to end the nine-month-old dispute. In March FBU delegates angrily rejected their executive's decision and voted overwhelmingly to continue with strike action.

On both occasions Andy Gilchrist, FBU leader, claimed that he had won major concessions from the employers. In May he said, 'The proposed agreement differs significantly from previous offers'. In fact, the offer was the same 16% pay increase spread over two and a half years that had been on the table for several months. The only difference was some unspecified promise from the Labour government and employers that changes in working conditions could be negotiated rather than imposed, together with a telling suggestion that future pay formulas might be linked to professional salaries rather than manual earnings.

These promises have been accepted by Gilchrist and the executive despite the hostile manoeuvres and dirty tricks of Labour Deputy Prime Minister

John Prescott. Prescott has continued to force through a law aimed at preventing firefighters from taking further industrial action and threatened to impose a settlement, warning them that it could be less than what was already on offer and that the government wouldn't provide an extra penny. Prescott's determination to crush the firefighters' struggle by any means, whether through legislation or the forces of the state, demonstrates what the government has in store for workers who try to stand up for themselves in Labour's Britain.

The only exceptions will be those who must be relied upon to operate that state machinery. While Prescott threatens to remove the right to strike from firefighters, Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett has proposed that prison officers be given back the right to strike.

FBU delegates are due to meet on 9 June to consider their executive's recommendations. If they decide to reject Gilchrist's submission and continue their struggle they can expect little support from most of the other trade union leaders who are all anxious to clear the firefighters' dispute out of the way so they can complete a £40 million donation to Labour Party funds.

Foundation hospitals: a step towards privatising the NHS

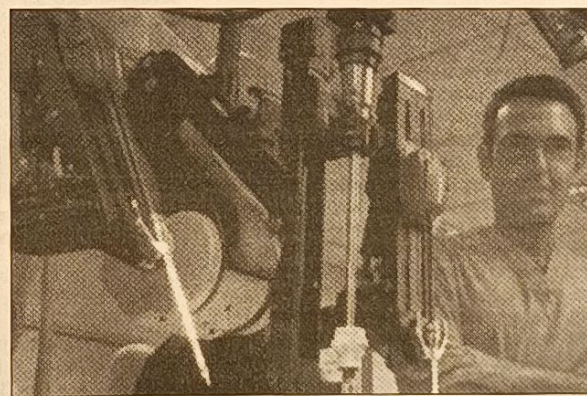
ROBERT CLOUGH

The outcome of the recent debate in the House of Commons on foundation hospitals was a foregone conclusion: a smaller than expected number of Labour MPs salved their consciences by voting against it, whilst the Labour government took a further step towards opening up the NHS to private healthcare providers.

Previous issues of FRFI (eg FRFI 161, 'Privatisation accelerates') have argued that Labour's commitment to continued privatisation is to enable the creation of British multinational service providers which are of sufficient size to compete on the world market. Its enthusiasm for privatisation has made it a keen supporter for the General Agreement on Trade in Services. This will open up any government-provided service, including health, to privatisation. British private healthcare providers such as BUPA are minnows compared to US counterparts: they have to grow substantially if they are to become a force in the world market. The creation of foundation hospitals will enable this to happen.

Foundation hospitals cannot be considered separately from other changes which form part of the government's 10-year NHS Plan.

One little-heralded development is the implementation of a new system of paying for hospital services. At the moment, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) pay NHS hospital and mental health trusts a block sum which is basically a



New NHS: on the way to elite hospitals and privatisation

fixed amount independent of cost or volume of patient throughput. Under the new system, a national tariff will be set for almost all non-emergency procedures which can be allocated to a Health Resource Group. The tariff will be weighted to promote 'efficiency' – the use of daycase surgery is an example. Hospitals will then charge according to this tariff. If they carry out more activity, they will get extra income which they can retain; if they under-achieve, they will lose income. They will be able to charge social services for any delays in discharging patients because of shortage of residential placements. This will enable 'money to follow the patient' – but within it are the seeds of privatisation. This will become more evident as the tariffs are refined to adjust for patient risk. Hospitals will be able to model services not on what the local population needs, but on what will maximise income. Their aim will be

to minimise risk by selecting low-risk patients, and by transferring as much risk to patients and their GPs as possible. Commissioners will agree on the need to transfer risk to patients, but will be driven by cost containment rather than income maximisation. It is the patient who will suffer in this system, particularly those with chronic and/or multiple conditions – mainly the elderly.

This sets the scene for foundation hospitals. To date privatisation has been achieved through the contracting out of ancillary services and, more recently, the Private Finance Initiative which added new hospital building to the private domain. This has allowed companies such as Jarvis, Siemens, Carillon and Rentokil to start fleecing the NHS: PFI schemes on average require a 30% bed loss to become affordable. Under the new legislation, NHS

hospital trusts can apply to become foundation hospitals. They will be able to raise money on the open market subject to limits set by a regulator. Crucially they will be able to subcontract clinical services to private providers. The legislation also allows any private sector body to become a foundation trust and run NHS services: the Department of Health is lining up companies such as BUPA and the US firm Kaiser Permanente to run 'failing' hospitals.

In promoting foundation hospitals, Health Secretary Alan Milburn stressed that the bill would address the question of universal access and equity. In fact the prime duty of foundation hospitals will be to function 'efficiently, effectively and economically'. The fact that the legislation gives foundation hospitals unlimited powers to enter into joint ventures with the private sector whether to raise money or provide clinical services means that services will fall outside any local control or public accountability. The scene is being set for a US model of healthcare funding and provision, and the principal characteristic of US healthcare is its utter lack of equity or universality.

Readers who want to know more about the privatisation of the NHS should read an excellent paper by Allyson Pollock, *Foundation hospitals and the NHS Plan*, from which this article is drawn. It can be found at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/download/health_policy/Foundation_hospitals_NHS_Plan.doc

Argentina: new president, continuing misery

The ruling class brought the presidential election forward by six months to forestall growing grassroots action. Now, under slogans of 'no more social spending' and 'security is a priority', the state has directed more intense attacks on the organisations of the poor. Last June the Federal Police received 6.45 million pesos from Buenos Aires City government to buy firearms, vehicles and computers. Picket organisations, which protest by blocking major routes, are now heavily targeted. On 19 February police blocked the *piqueteros* for 10 hours from marching to the Ministry of Welfare to demand reactivation of social programmes. In March police brutally attacked 89 families residing in Padelai, an abandoned building in San Telmo occupied for 19 years. During the eviction residents and supporters were teargassed, shot with rubber bullets and beaten, 86 were detained and 40 injured, among them minors and elderly.

With this reassertion of state power, the preliminary round of the presidential elections took place on 27 April. To the immense relief of the establishment, the three Peronist candidates collectively received 60% of the mandatory vote. This meant that a deal could be cut to force the corrupt and discredited Menem to withdraw. With Menem's withdrawal, the 18 May second round was quickly called off.

The Governor of Santa Cruz Province, Nestor Carlos Kirchner, was sworn in without further ado, but with the smallest-ever vote, instead of the anti-Menem landslide predicted. Kirchner is now a president under the shadow of his sponsor, outgoing President Duhalde, using Duhalde's economy team.

The establishment will continue its brutal assertion of control. Argentina's unemployment rate is officially at least 21.5% and 22 million of its 36 million people (around 60%) live in poverty. This compares to 40% in December 2001. Real wages fell 40% last year. Thus in the city of Rosario, middle class areas have collapsed into dependence on food parcels. Thousands of Argentinians are fleeing to Spain. For the first time in 200 years, malnutrition is a serious problem, causing daily deaths among children and the old, in the world's fourth biggest food exporter. Officially 15% of children are below 'normal' weight for their height. The situation is unfavourable compared even to the crisis in the 1930s, when Argentina's GDP dropped by 14% in three years.

Yet during the first round of the presidential elections, no large political opposition to the establishment developed. Why then have the workers not yet organised to throw out the 'political class'? Even the US State Department expressed surprise that the workers have not reacted more strongly. No new party has grown to escape the dominance of a fractured Peronist party. This is not simply because of the increased repression. Astonishingly, the 78% turnout saw the corrupt ex-President Menem (who threatened to put the army on

The Argentinean ruling class, led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been on the offensive. It has slashed the living conditions of the population to such an extent that Argentina, through a policy of starvation (see FRFI 169), is actually increasing its foreign currency reserves (now \$10.5 billion) and paying back state debts. Exports of wheat, soya, corn and meat increased during 2002, with a current balance of payments surplus of \$8.8 billion, whilst hunger ravaged the country. The gross domestic product fell 15% and half a million jobs were lost over the last year. Accordingly, in January, an IMF deal saw \$6.6 billion of debt 'rolled over' again, with loans covering obligations up to August. The IMF vultures are 'optimistically' planning an intense squeeze over two years, whilst 20% of children are already malnourished. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

the streets to fight 'crime' and automatically supported US foreign policy) and Nestor Kirchner (a provincial governor and creature of President Duhalde) gain most votes.

The middle class

After international 'creditors' (foreign banks), the middle class vote is a priority for the ruling class. It must be thrown the first available crumbs, redirected from the labour of the poor. For the moment they are given straws to clutch at. A successful cat and mouse game has been played with their frozen dollar bank deposits, which they demand back through the courts. The state in turn deposits bonds in the banks to sustain their operations – paper 'promises' to replace dollars owed to international lenders. In this way the middle class is tied to the establishment. Yet to pay back state debt Kirchner must now force even greater suffering on the workers than President Duhalde imposed. The recent tragic floods of 8 May in Santa Fe province, with up to 1,800 dead, 130,000 homeless, 2 million hectares of land spoiled and property losses of \$970 million, cannot be properly addressed. Without absolute austerity for the poor and increased returns for the rich, the estimated \$100 billion of private Argentinean capital stashed abroad will not return. Indeed new President Kirchner 'saved' the public finances of his own oil-rich province by transferring savings to accounts in Switzerland and Luxembourg and implementing severe spending cuts.

The struggle from below

Though many workers retain illusions in Peronism, the state still has to deal with the growing class consciousness of those with least to lose. Over the last six years *Los piqueteros* – picketers – have organised extensively amongst the unemployed, forced to live in misery in shacks on the outskirts of bigger towns and cities. They were central to the mass movement that deposed the government in 2001. By blocking the major roads they forced the state to provide them with a pittance – 150 pesos a month (\$45) for those men or women *piqueteros* who have children younger than 18, or other dependants. This comes from World Bank 15-year loans. 2.4 million poor people receive such handouts to prevent tuberculosis, dengue fever, yellow fever, HIV, chagas, bronchitis and so on spreading. The growing seriousness of the situation can be seen when only \$140 million was budgeted for state health and education last October and \$100 million the preceding March.



For the first time in 200 years, malnutrition is a serious problem, causing daily deaths among children and the old, in the world's fourth biggest food exporter.

The poor have built new forms of social organisation and protest. They have their own security arrangements to combat police infiltration. Everyone participates locally in each of the slum districts. Countrywide it acts broadly as three movements, but has also attracted political or social activists dispossessed of their previous posts and ambitions. So lower middle class activists have been drawn in, with a range of narrow, partisan and dogmatic ideas. The destructive petty bourgeois habits and sectarianism of such sections have hindered the movement, often driving away the unemployed workers and preventing them from developing their national political activity, driving them back to their communities and local action. We find a mix of political standpoints attracted to the original activities of the *piqueteros* movement.

There are three main trends. The first of these is the Pickets Block which has many militant communists and Trotskyists, who view their own actions as part of a popular revolution. The second is the Anibal Veron Coordination which sees the fight against hunger as the start of a similar campaign. It has attracted rebel Peronists, human rights' militants, and 'Guevaristas'. It is currently made up of 15 area movements of

the unemployed in places like Quilmes and Lugano. In all the groups the women push hardest and march at the front. The third is the CTA, with ex-priest and Provincial Deputy Luis D'Elia and trade unionist Juan Carlos Alderete as spokespersons. It is involved in the actual state and provincial elections. It does not want to break off such a public discussion or weaken its membership with 'aggressive' picketing. Alongside it marches the Class Combat Current (CCC).

Despite the *piqueteros* National Programme (see FRFI 165) there are tactical arguments arising from different political arguments, for example: whether to completely or partially block major routes during a protest; whether to attack the police directly when threatened; whether to wear hoods when in action. In these examples the CTA and CCC opt to allow public transport to pass to allow neighbours to go to work, but also not to upset the lower middle classes whom they see as potential allies in their struggle. The other two groups allow no one to pass. For them, with 75 children dying of hunger each day, the fight is for life itself. Entire families march, press cameras are unwelcome. Fighting the police is always a case of self-defence. The system in which they live is violent. The

police aim to destroy the effectiveness of their pickets and marches and so deny them justice. A constant economic demand is for larger payments for the unemployed and these are co-ordinated right across the country.

The large assemblies that make daily decisions, especially concerning the next picket site, are constantly aware of police threats, threatening phone calls, provocateurs in disguise, false arrests and gun threats to intimidate. Homage to the memory of the 30,000 'disappeared' under the dictatorship is common at the large assemblies. They prepare to face a time when the state pittance may be withdrawn. Conscious of the threat of manipulation, they reject plans from above, insisting that all spending be in the interest of everyone in each community. But any movement to create a new political party has now missed the curtailed election campaign. In February the government reopened a case brought last June charging the *piqueteros* with threatening national security in a further move to drive away potential support.

Factory occupations reversed

On 18 December 2001, the workers of Brukman's textile factory took it over after the owners abandoned it. From 1995 Brukman had difficulties even with nine-hour days, overtime usually of two more hours and work taken home on top. Piece wages were cut. On 18 December the workers demanded an end to this constantly increasing exploitation and the directors fled. 'We say that it wasn't us that took the factory, but the factory that took us,' said Celia, a worker there for nine years. On 20 December 2002, supported by the National Pickets Movement and the Anibal Veron Coordination, they attempted to meet at the Ministry of Labour to demand nationalisation under workers' control. They were tear gassed. Two months later the police attacked the women and their children in an attempt to dislodge them. As the presidential elections loomed, on 17 April 300 infantry took over the factory for the third time in 16 months, and three days later attacked a counter-demonstration of 3,000 workers, wounding 30 and arresting 100 workers. The workers continue to fight for the return of their factory.

Workers have occupied many other factories, such as Zanon Ceramics where the workers have been threatened for weeks with imminent eviction. In April 2002, at Carapachay (the bankrupt Medved Panifacion 5 Bakery) the police attacked workers within two hours of their occupying the closed factory. With neighbourhood assemblies and left groups outside, and workers barricaded inside, the police were repulsed for 45 days. The left parties and part of the local assemblies wanted the local authority to pay wages and provide raw material – a local 'nationalisation', a demand seen as naive by the occupying workers when the state could not even provide medicines for the hospitals. The workers formed a co-operative, El Aguante, formalised by a legal order from the provincial chamber of deputies, forcing the local authority to provide a start-up subsidy.

This sort of solution cannot be a general one. Subsidising the occasional small business after expelling the local capitalist, when the whole economy is strangled, will not solve the problems of the urban proletariat or the suburban slum dwellers. In these actions however, the lessons are being learned that must see the development of a national political party that can fully express and defend the demands of the workers.

Blunkett makes life mean life

On 7 May Home Secretary David Blunkett announced plans to set lengthy fixed minimum periods for prisoners convicted of murder. He has been seething with anger ever since the House of Lords ruled last November that the then procedure was incompatible with human rights legislation, and this is his revenge. Having lost the power to overrule individual judicial decisions, Blunkett has decided instead to exert wholesale demagogic control. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

Murder convictions result in the imposition of a mandatory life sentence, and in the past, once this had been passed, the trial judge made a recommendation for the 'tariff', the minimum period to be served before release could be considered. This was then scrutinised by the Lord Chief Justice, who might make a different recommendation. The final say lay with the Home Secretary, meaning the ultimate decision was a political one. Following a lengthy legal challenge by life sentence prisoner Anthony Anderson, the Lords ruled that this procedure was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Under Blunkett's proposed amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, the



David Blunkett, Home Secretary

lowest tariff for murder will now be 15 years. This means it will no longer be possible, in cases such as those where victims of domestic violence are convicted of the murder of their violent partners, for very low tariffs to be given in order to reflect the specific circumstances.

The minimum period then rises to 30 years for those convicted of murders:

- of police or prison officers,
- involving firearms or explosives,
- for gain (ie in the course of a burglary or robbery, or contract killing),
- 'intended to defeat ends of justice', such as killing a witness,
- on grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation,
- single counts of sadistic or sexual murder of an adult,
- multiple 'ordinary' murders of a type that would otherwise have a starting point of 15 years.

And to 50 years (in effect a 'whole life' tariff) for those convicted of:

- two or more murders that show a 'high degree of premeditation, involve abduction of the victim or are sexual or sadistic',
- murder of a child following abduction, or involving sexual or sadistic conduct,
- a second count of murder,
- terrorist murder, that is to say, killing with a political motive.

Although public outrage at premeditated, sexual or sadistic murder is totally comprehensible, the setting of the minimum sentence so high is draconian. Tariffs are minimum terms, not maximum ones. After they have expired, lifers can only be released if the Parole Board agrees they do not pose a risk of committing further violence, and very few are actually released at the point at which their tariff expires. Most are detained longer, some far longer, on this basis of perceived risk.

The final say on release was until recently also the prerogative of the Home Secretary, but in May 2002 the European Court ruled it was a breach of human rights for a politician to decide a prisoner's release date.

Blunkett is an unashamed populist. Before the Anderson case had even concluded, he announced that it was his view that 'life means life' and that if the judgement went against him, he would simply change the law. His public stance of taking

on the old-order judges and lords is playing to the crowd of the worst type, setting himself up as the 'common man' against the bewigged old fuddy-duddies who are out of touch with reality. And, of course, such a characterisation of the judiciary is completely reasonable – for years the working class has suffered in court at the hands of ancient, unaccountable, unknowledgeable buffoons with the power to sentence them to long periods in prison. But the Blunkett solution is not to implement democratic reform of the legal system or increase trial by jury. He has no problem with judges when they are handing out long sentences; he only worries about them when they tell him it is unlawful for the government to starve asylum seekers or retain personal control over the release of prisoners. His response is not that of the reformer – it is that of the thug, the demagogue, the politician who accrues all power to his person and office and leaves none to any other institution outside his absolute control.

Free Kong Kok Mun!



Since the end of April, there have been daily demonstrations outside Canterbury prison, calling for the release of Kong Kok Mun (known as Jacky), who would have been released by now, had he not fallen foul of a ruling that the time he spent in prison awaiting trial does not count against his sentence because he was being held as an immigration detainee, and was technically 'on bail' for the minor criminal charge he faced.

The demonstrations were organised by Jacky's partner, Colin Avis, after he had unsuccessfully explored

every conceivable angle from which to judicially challenge the decision.

The public and local press have been very sympathetic, with many people genuinely shocked that the three months Jacky spent in Brixton prison simply do not count in the way remand time normally does. But some members of Canterbury prison staff have been less impressed and on 30 April Colin was assaulted outside the prison.

For further information contact colin.avis@virgin.net

Campaigning against prison slavery

In pimping prisoners' labour to greedy companies, the Home Office relies on assuring, not only cheapness and reliability, but also anonymity. Few of the companies exploiting forced prison labour would be comfortable with their employees and customers knowing about it. A primary aim of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery is therefore to secure reliable, up-to-date information on these companies – which companies are contracting the work, what its nature is, and how much (or rather how little) prisoners are being paid – and to target and expose them. The very fact that the secrecy can be broken and prison slavery be put on the agenda will in itself have an effect on the Home Office's ability to sell prisoners' labour.

We are already finding that this is a highly controversial issue with the public, and we have had a great deal of support. These are capitalist companies who care about the illusion of self-image, they don't want to be linked to slavery, they don't want customers boycotting them, and they certainly don't want people picketing their stores.

At the first Campaign Against Prison Slavery conference on 1 February it was decided to hold a Day of Action to highlight the use of prison slavery by the large high-street chain Wilkinson's, who despite trying to portray themselves as a company with ethics, are in fact a ruthless anti-union one, who run their stores with minimal staff whose wages they have recently cut.

The Wilkinson's Day of Action was held on 5 April, with pickets of the Nottingham, Worthing, Leeds, Birmingham, and Luton stores. We distributed thousands of leaflets, put up posters, held up banners and placards exposing Wilkinson's and generally made our presence felt. All the actions were extremely successful in terms of public interest and support, and Wilkinson's management were clearly very upset by them.

Encouraged by the support, more Wilkinson's pickets were quickly organised – on May Day in Leeds, Birmingham, Stratford and Blackwood (Gwent) on 3 May in Worthing, and on 10 May at Headingley. More are planned: for example, on Saturday 24 June there will be a national picket of Wilkinson's in Leeds city centre, which we'd like as many people as possible to attend. The Birmingham group plans to picket Winson Green prison to highlight the issue, and the Leeds group hopes to picket Armley.

There are Wilkinson's stores all over the country, so it is easy enough for activists to organise their own actions. Just a few people with leaflets and placards helps to highlight what this company is doing. Let's keep up the pressure.

We are already getting information from prisoners on other companies exploiting prison slavery. For example, we know Virgin is using prisoners at Lewes to pack headphones for their airline, while Ford prisoners are doing laundry for Butlins. The company who were using prisoners to fold

paper party hats at Full Sutton was the Bishop Auckland firm, Thompsons Xmas Company, but prisoners there are currently working for Ard Electronics (tel: 01282 683000). Industrial Rubber plc (Fielder Drive, Fareham, Hants; tel: 01329 287955) is exploiting prisoners at several prisons, using them to do particularly mind-numbing work trimming rubber mouldings.

A relatively recent development in the prison slavery market is the use of prisoners to operate computers. In Rye Hill, for example, internet company Summit Media pays prisoners £9 per week, but charges its customers over £50,000 for two to three weeks' work. On its website Summit Media stresses its reliability, but this sits incongruously with its use of slave labour. Readers may recall the fuss a couple of years ago when data from the 1901 census was posted on the internet; people were keen to find out what their ancestors were up to and the site was proving hugely popular. However it was quickly closed down when it was discovered that the data it contained was worthless – hardly surprising considering prisoners had been forced to input it!

There's a lesson to be learned from this: prison labour is only exploitable because it is judged reliable by greedy companies. By joining together in the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, activists on both sides of the bars can hopefully change things and reject prison slavery and the Prison Industrial Complex.

If you have information on companies using prison labour and/or would like to get involved in the campaign, please get in touch.

Mark Barnsley

Campaign Against Prison Slavery, The Cardigan Centre, Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ

Double indemnity

Since the European Court of Human Rights ruled last summer in the case of Eze and Connors that it was unlawful for prison governors to add extra days onto prisoners' sentences as a disciplinary punishment, there has been a sharp increase in the use of cellular confinement as an alternative.

The number of days' cellular confinement that can be given has been increased from 14 to 21. In addition, a range of other new punishments has been made available to prison governors. There is a new punishment of being removed from your wing or unit for up to 28 days, and the maximum stoppage of earnings has increased from 42 to 84 days for a single offence.

The Prison Service could not be seen to be weakened by the European Court ruling and it came as no surprise that as soon as governors stopped being allowed to add extra time onto a prisoner's sentence for atrocities such as refusing a direct order or having an extra sachet of butter, additions were made to the existing bag of tricks at their disposal.

However, with the introduction of independent adjudicators to try disciplinary of-

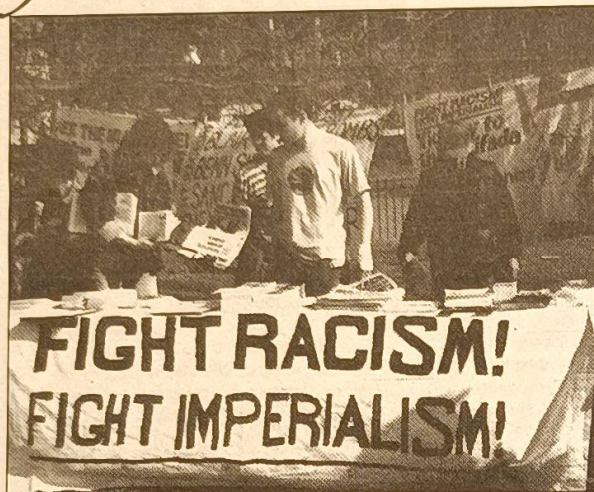
fences previously dealt with by governors, the Prison Service has far from lost its most effective weapon, as adjudicators can give all the same range of newly strengthened punishments that governors can, in addition to being able to give punishments of up to 42 extra days imprisonment.

Cellular confinement has, for many years, left a sour taste in the mouths of prisoners, who see it as a way of the system extracting a pound of flesh when the evidence to support the charge is very weak. Although the finding of guilt may be overturned on appeal and struck from the prisoner's record, the punishment will already have been served. Under the new system, governors decide whether an offence is likely to merit a punishment of added days and should therefore be referred to an independent adjudicator. With an increased number of days' cellular confinement, and a new non-retractable punishment of 'removal from the wing', many prisoners will be wondering whether, in cases where the evidence is weak, governors will avoid referring them to the adjudicators and will deal with them themselves instead.

John Shelley, HMP Whitemoor

Victory to the Intifada

The last two months have seen the consequences of the complete failure of the anti-war movement to break with Labour. *Socialist Worker* has made George Galloway's right to remain in the racist imperialist Labour Party its principal campaigning theme. There has been complete dishonesty in accounting for the collapse in support for the anti-war movement; defeats have been shamelessly branded as victories – for instance the Socialist Alliance election fiasco on 1 May. The 1 May demonstration and surrounding direct action events in London were a damp squib. 50,000 demonstrated in London last September in support of Palestine – the pro-Palestine rally in Trafalgar Square on 17 May this year mobilised less than a tenth of that number. The strategy of the social democratic left, its pandering to pro-imperialist politicians, its capitulation to the Labour Party, have proved a disaster. There is no alternative but to build an anti-imperialist movement which is anti-Labour. This is what FRFI is committed to doing through its work against the illegal occupation of Iraq and in support of the Palestinian Intifada.



The RCG in Hyde Park at the 12 April anti-war demonstration, calling for a break with the racist, imperialist Labour Party.

Over the last two months, FRFI has continued to picket Marks and Spencer stores up and down the country. Within London the target has been the Marble Arch flagship store, with pickets taking place every other Saturday. The London FRFI/Victory to the Intifada (VTI) group has also held fortnightly forums to educate people about the illegal occupation of West Bank and Gaza, and the murderous Zionist regime. Marks and Spencer is

an openly pro-Zionist company, and we say it must be the focus of any campaign to boycott Israeli goods. At the 17 May pro-Palestine rally, FRFI/VTI supporters handed out thousands of M&S leaflets and urged people to disregard the Palestine Solidarity Campaign leaders who openly oppose a boycott of Marks and Spencer. These leaders wish to talk about boycotts, but don't want to do anything effective. Presumably they find it too

much of a hardship to stop shopping in Marks and Spencer themselves!

In Manchester, the City Council has renewed its attack on the picket of M&S in Market Street. We have reported several times on the obsessive behaviour of Licensing Officers, particularly that of one Andrew Butcher. For some months it has been quiet, but in mid-May he issued a total of eight summonses against regular picketers; these relate to a picket last December. Seven of the summonses have been served on one person. Of these, no less than six relate to placards which picketers hang on railings in front of the store – one for each placard! The council claims that this amounts to fly-posting even though the placards are taken down at the end of each picket. The other summonses relate to the campaign stall. Even though there has been agreement for some time on where picketers can place the stall so that it does not cause an obstruction, Butcher still wants his pound of flesh. Pickets are launching a campaign to defend the right to protest in the city centre; the first court hearing is on 11 June. Please support us.

EVENTS

LONDON

FRFI/Victory to the Intifada Group Discussion meetings on Palestine, Imperialism and the Middle East: Next meetings: Wednesday 28 May, 7pm, Room S75, St Clements Building, London School of Economics (LSE), Houghton Street WC2. Wednesday 25 June, 7pm, Room G1, LSE, 20 Kingsway, WC2. Nearest tube: Holborn.

Next pickets of Marks and Spencer at Marble Arch, end of Oxford Street: Saturday 7 June, 21 June, 5 July and 19 July. 12-2pm

FRFI meeting with investigative journalist Greg Palast at LSE on Wednesday 18 June: ring 020 7837 1688 to confirm time and venue.

Join the FRFI stall at the Respect Festival on Saturday 19 July, The Dome, North Greenwich, London SE10. For information phone 07815 617746 or 020 7837 1688.

DURHAM

FRFI Readers Group: How do racism and Imperialism affect me? 7.30pm, Monday 16 June, Durham University, Elvet Riverside Building, Room 155, New Elvet, Durham. Contact 07813 073846.

Come along to the first Northeast Social Forum in Durham City, 20-23 June 2003. The event will revolve around six conferences based on the tenets of the DUSF: universal free education, sustainability and the environment, anti-oppression, anti-discrimination, people over profit, and international co-operation.

For further details, look at www.dur.ac.uk/durham.socialforum/NESF/

MIDLANDS

For further details, contact 07949 256 477

MANCHESTER

Victory to the Intifada! Picket of Marks and Spencer, Market Street, Manchester City Centre, 12-3pm every Saturday. For more info contact, Victory_Intifada@hotmail.com

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! anti-imperialist forum, Sunday 22 June 2-5pm, Percival Suite, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, Manchester City Centre: Cuba in the vanguard of the struggle against imperialism: reportback from the recent brigade to Cuba.

For more info contact manchesterrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com or phone 07816 547 066.

GLASGOW

FRFI readers group meetings: every other Thursday, 7.30pm. Next dates: 26 June, 10 July, 24 July, 7 August. All at Woodside Halls, Woodlands Road near St George Cross underground

For more details on Scotland FRFI activities and weekly stalls and events call 07779 785 529

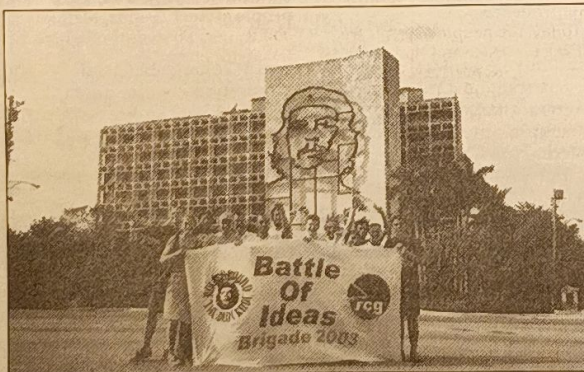
Rock around the Blockade round-up

Rock around the Blockade 'Battle of Ideas' brigade in Cuba

In April members and supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Group and Rock around the Blockade spent two weeks on a solidarity brigade in Cuba. After two days in Havana the brigade travelled across Cuba to the easternmost province of Guantanamo before returning to the capital.

We visited primary schools, the international schools of medicine and sports, the school for social workers, a Pioneers' Palace, clinics, an orphanage, a nursery, an old peoples' home, a chocolate factory that was first opened by Che Guevara and organisations for arts and music. On the streets and in local organisations we talked to students, young people, children, journalists, religious believers and workers; we held discussions with members of local Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), the women's federation (FMC), the Cuban Communist Party and Union of Young Communists (UJC), who hosted the brigade.

In Guantanamo it was rewarding to see the mobile sound system donated by a previous RATB brigade still being used by the UJC up to two or three times a day to take music and politics out to every corner of the province. We had spent many months



Battle of Ideas brigade in Revolution Square, Havana.

fund-raising in Britain to be ensure the Guantanamo UJC could pay for repairs and spare parts and keep the van on the road. We also visited the area overlooking the notorious US naval base where prisoners are still being held without trial in Camps X-Ray and Delta.

Back in Havana the brigade took part in the May Day celebrations in Revolution Square and joined over a million Cubans and other revolutionaries from around the world in singing the Internationale. We were delighted to be able to spend our final evening with Reinaldo Mancebo and his family, long-time friends of the RCG and Rock around the Blockade. Comrade Mancebo

had recently returned from Baghdad, where he and other members of the Cuban diplomatic mission had remained during the bombing.

The brigade has come back full of enthusiasm about Cuba's remarkable social programmes and with a deeper understanding of the imminent threat Cuba faces from the US and the recent steps it has taken to defend itself. Our task now is to ensure that we channel that enthusiasm into our own Battle for Ideas by using the example of Cuba to win people in Britain to the ideas of socialism – in contrast to the grim barbarity imposed on the planet by imperialism. Join us – take the battle for socialism out onto the streets of Britain!

Brigadistas' comments

At a nursery we saw all the children enjoying a birthday party for everyone who had had a birthday that month – a collective birthday party – a first step for children to learn solidarity.

Emre

In Cuba we saw a society that is not based on the capitalist concept of value, but one where people are valued for their abilities and the contributions they make to a better society for everyone.

Pam

'My arms are big enough to embrace all the children in this home but my heart embraces all the children of the world.' Martolo, father of the Guantanamo orphanage – ex-freedom fighter in Africa; ex-metal worker – a giant of a man in every respect.

Jim

It was overwhelming to visit a society that values people and cherishes children. The confidence and wellbeing of children and the consciousness of the people were astonishing.

Fiona

Seeing socialism in practice was an inspiration, something precious for the future of humanity; it must be defended more than ever in these times of threat.

Ed

Spending even a short time in a socialist country that has its interests firmly rooted in the people has had a profound impression on my dedication to building a revolutionary movement in Britain.

Linsay

The achievement of capitalism is to get the oppressed looking at each other through the eyes of the oppressor. But Cuba is a mirror of solidarity, internationalism and democracy – very hopeful to the many and too dangerous for the few.

JJ

www.ratb.org.uk

EVENTS

LONDON

Wednesday 11 June 7-10pm Cuba today: report back from the Battle of Ideas brigade Room G211, London School of Economics (LSE), Kingsway, London WC2 Nearest tube Holborn

Wednesday 9 July 7-10pm Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution Eye-witness video on the attempted coup and discussion on Venezuela Room S75, LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2 Nearest tube: Holborn

For details of other Cuba events around London phone 020 7837 1688 or 07815 617746 or e-mail office@ratb.org.uk

MIDLANDS

Sunday 25 May 2.30-4.30pm Cuba on the frontline: reportback from the Battle of Ideas brigade Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester For details of this and other Cuba events in the Midlands phone 07949 256 477 or e-mail rcgmidlands@hotmail.com

NORTHWEST

Sunday 22 June 2-5pm Anti-imperialist Forum on Cuba including reportback from the Battle of Ideas brigade Cross Street Chapel (Percival Suite), Cross Street, Manchester City Centre For details phone 07816 547 066

NORTHEAST

Saturday 21 June 1.30-3.30 Cuba brigade report back at the Northeast Social Forum University of Durham Also in June: Cuba brigade reportback in Newcastle For details of both events phone 07813 073 846

SCOTLAND

Cuba brigade reportback meetings in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee For details phone 07779 785 529 or e-mail frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

GLASGOW

Monday 9 June, 7.30pm, Caledonian University, Hamish Wood Building Glasgow (near Buchanan Street Bus Station)

EDINBURGH

Sunday 8 June, 7.30pm, Communications Workers Union Club, 15 Brunswick Street, Edinburgh

DUNDEE

Tuesday 10 June, 7.30pm, Dundee University, Tower Building, Dundee

For more information visit our website at www.ratb.org.uk.

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Brilliant

Carol Brickley's lead article in FRFI (April/May 2003) on the context of the present invasion of Iraq is brilliant – concise yet easily readable by a wide range of people. I have photocopied it and distributed it to a number of adolescents with whom I am privileged to work. A copy has also been placed in the Mathematics staffroom of our local comprehensive school.

Thank you FRFI and thank you, Carol Brickley.

PROFESSOR THEO MACDONALD
Littlehampton

Stop the arms trade! Shut DSEi!

Demonstrate against Europe's largest arms fair
9-12 September 2003, London Docklands
For more information contact Campaign Against Arms Trade Tel: 020 7281 0297
E-mail dsei@caat.demon.co.uk Web: www.caat.org.uk

Spanish political prisoner writes...

We have received the last four issues of your newspaper, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* with great pleasure, since it brings us important information concerning the deepening inter-imperialist rivalries and their consequences. You will be interested to know we now have a date for the judicial farce/court case for the PCE(r) activists and GRAPO fighters who have been detained since November 2000: from 12 June to 4 July. We have sent you some leaflets we have put out to mobilise, through our limited means, all anti-fascists and democrats to join us in demon-

strating outside this travesty of justice and turn the event into an international tribunal against imperialism, against capitalism and against fascism.

JAIME SIMON QUINTELA
Centro Penitenciario, Sevilla II, Spain

Free the Paris 7!
Demonstrate against the farcical trial of the PCE(r)
12 June-4 July, outside the Palais de Justice de Paris, 4, Boulevard du Palais, 75001 Paris, France.
For further information contact socorrojo@terra.es or secoursrouge@free.fr

LETTERS

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Can printing dollars stave off US economic crisis?

Thanks to David Yaffe for his excellent article in FRFI 171. As he points out, the USA needs a constant influx of foreign capital to maintain the overinflated and privileged lifestyles of the US American masses.

Such an influx *should* be impossible, considering that, since 1970, the US produces less and less basic substantial goods and the weakness of the US dollar with respect to the euro. 'Should' be that way, if free trade governed, but not if the neighbourhood's only armed bully has anything to do with it.

Absent from the article, I suggest, is the fact that the US dollar is today's 'preferred' currency of international exchange. So the US needs no foreign capital influx, but only to set the presses rolling.

A ream of top quality paper and the best printing may cost the US government \$20, at most. Whereas transformed into \$20 bills it's some \$14,000. More still if made into \$50, \$100, or \$1,000 bills. Since after Nixon the US dollar needs no gold or silver or any backing other than lead – military force.

An article in *The People* May-June 2003 (www.slp.org) and a similar article by Vic Ratima, *Northstar Compass* last issue (www.northstarcompass.org),

shows what happened to 'evil Saddam', not for gassing Kurds or gunning down potential rivals, but for daring to replace dollars with euros as the preferred exchange currency; and the implication that other OPEC nations (eg Venezuela or Mexico) might do the same – simply because the euro is backed by real wealth, unlike the dollar.

If even one third of nations made the conversion to euros, the US economy would collapse instantly.

Yes, you can expect Minuteman IIIs (each with a 300 kiloton nuclear warhead) to fly before that is allowed.

Another pipedream is President Chirac's pretension, endorsed by Tony Blair, that 'post-war Iraq' be turned over to the UN for administering. No way, José! It shall be 100% the sacred duty of gigantic US conglomerates like Bechtel, Halliburton (Brown & Root), Fluor, Schlumberger and the like, who will 'reconstruct Iraq', in exchange for oil, pay its labour force with false currency (dollars) and retain the last speck of profit therefrom.

And who will oppose them?!

ANA LUCIA GELABERT
384484, 1401 State School Rd,
Gatesville, Texas 76599, USA

David Yaffe replies:

Thanks for your most interesting letter. With much of it I am in agreement. On the question of money, however, I have to take issue with your analysis. Money is not a mere token or symbol. It cannot be expanded at will because it has to act as a store of value. Its strength depends on the relative strength of the economy whose currency it is. This applies to the dollar as any other currencies, as was demonstrated in the 1970s with the devaluation of the dollar against gold.

Paper money – cash – is mainly used by consumers in everyday transactions but not on a significant scale by businesses. Cheques, or credit/debit cards – orders to the bank to adjust their clients' accounts – have replaced money even for the mass of retail transactions.

Most business and many retail transactions take place as a result of credit – mutual promises to pay a given amount at a given time. The vast majority of credits are cleared against each other over a set period, through the bank, without the use of paper money. So rolling the printing presses does not provide the main means of expanding exchange. The only real money manufacturers are the banks, which take the risk of expanding credit over the amount of their deposits. The government through the Federal Reserve or central bank may or may not encourage this process. The current low interest rate policy of the Federal

Reserve is a desperate attempt to encourage more economic activity through borrowing in the US because of the impact falling profitability is having on the US economy.

As a result corporate, household and more recently public debt have dramatically grown and overall debt in the US economy has reached unprecedented levels. Foreign investors hold a substantial part of US corporate and public debt in dollars because of its previous strength and security. However as credit growth outruns profitable opportunities in the US economy and the dollar falls in value, the holders of dollar debts will want to sell them. The dollar will depreciate further. So there are limits to the growth of credit and hence 'printing money'.

As you correctly say, if significant foreign holders of dollars exchange them for euros, the US economy would dramatically deteriorate and the standard of living of US people would rapidly fall.

I think you underestimate the economic strength of imperialist Europe and, therefore the importance of the euro's rise against the dollar – since the start of 2002 the dollar has fallen close to 24% against the euro. This is why the US has been forced to assert itself militarily against 'old Europe' through the brutal assault on Iraq. However, military power in the final analysis has to be backed by a strong economy. The US economy faces a severe economic crisis. The other European powers are not simply going to prostrate themselves before the now not-so-almighty dollar or before the military ambitions of the Bush administration.

We face turbulent times.

PSC scabs on Marks & Spencer boycott

On 16 April, we went to a public meeting on Iraq, which featured two speakers, one 'human shield' returned from Iraq and a woman called Linda from the PSC.

During her speech, Linda from the PSC advocated the boycott Israeli goods campaign. Maybe she was seeking to stress a point about produce and goods as opposed to the targeting of businesses, but she referred specifically to Marks & Spencer. She said: 'You can go into Marks & Spencer, if you like. The point is to avoid buying the Israeli goods.' She then said that although Marks & Spencer give a lot of money to Israel, so did many other companies and some much more than M&S.

I thought her comments a little odd, because M&S was the only business she mentioned by name. I wondered why she needed to mention M&S, or indeed any company at all, given that this was irrelevant to the point she was making. Of course, she's free to disagree with the M&S boycott as a strategy, or to favour an alternative, but given that there is a nationwide M&S boycott and a highly successful weekly picket in Manchester, specifically, I think she's pushing it by 'encouraging' people to shop in Marks & Spencer.

BARBARA and KIM
Liverpool

No to war in Aceh

The Indonesian government has rejected a peaceful resolution to the 27-year conflict and instead declared martial law, launching a full-scale military operation against the people of Aceh.

The last time the Indonesian government declared martial law was in 1999, when its military and military-backed militia waged a campaign of terror in East Timor after the local population voted overwhelmingly for independence.

Today, the people of Aceh are calling for peace and their own democratic right to a peaceful process of self-determination, through a UN-facilitated referendum.

Contrary to reports in the mainstream media, calls for self-determination are not being led by armed separatists calling for an Islamic state but rather by a broad-based, non-violent civil society

movement that includes farmers, fishermen, women's organisations, student groups, religious leaders and businessmen.

The people of Aceh are not harking back to a traditional past, but to a future of peace and prosperity through democracy and social justice. This future will not come as long as the Indonesian military continues to act with impunity against the people of Aceh, Papua, Maluku and its own citizens throughout the archipelago.

It will not come as long as governments around the world (including the US, Britain and Australia) continue to give military aid to Indonesia.

PIP HINMAN
Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific, Sydney, Australia

US hands off Cuba

According to the 17 April *New York Times* the Bush regime is considering new measures to tighten the US blockade of socialist Cuba. 'The harshest sanctions involve restricting or eliminating the transfer of cash payments, called remittances, to friends and relatives on the island...' Bush is also enforcing limits on US citizens who travel to Cuba by ending direct charter flights between the countries.

The pretext for the latest US aggression is the gaoing of 65 opponents of the Cuban Revolution in early April and the execution of three men who hijacked a ferry. The US House of Representatives adopted a bipartisan resolution, unanimously condemning the measures the Cuban Revolution has taken to defend itself.

What the media downplays or avoids mentioning altogether is the US government assistance to

these 'dissidents'; 32 of them met with US diplomatic personnel at the US Interests Section in Havana. A number of the defendants distributed a magazine called *Revista de Cuba*, printed at facilities of the US Interests Section. Some of them were funded by the 'American Centre for International Labour Solidarity', a grotesquely misnamed outfit funded by the US government whose aim is to persuade foreign investors not to invest in Cuba, and much, much more.

Cuba's real crime, as ever, is to stand as an example of social progress: health, education and land reform programmes that the rest of the Latin America can scarcely dream of under the boot of the IMF and the World Bank. These are only possible in the Third World by breaking with imperialist domination and taking the road to socialism.

Meanwhile the US holds large numbers of Afghan prisoners of war at the illegally occupied Guantanamo naval base in Cuba, with many more Arab and Muslim prisoners without any contact with lawyers in the US. And of course, the Miami Five, imprisoned for seeking to uncover Cuban exile terrorist plots backed by Washington.

Now more than ever it is necessary to step up solidarity with the embattled people of Cuba, to whom the imperialists would love to do what they have just done to Iraq. But the Yankees should take note: an armed, organised, mobilised people can stand up to anything the Empire can throw at them.

Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution! US Hands off Cuba!

MIKE WEBBER
Aylesbury

Imperialists out of Ireland and Iraq!

In April, a series of anti-war demonstrations took place in Ireland. On 7 April, around 3,000 protesters from throughout Ireland and beyond, including political parties and groups from across the political spectrum, converged on Hillsborough to protest against the war summit.

Along the route, the northern leadership of the Irish Trade Union Congress led by Peter Bunting deliberately attempted to install a platform to prevent the march from continuing to Hillsborough. Several hundred marched on, only to be met with a solid line of police in riot gear and jeeps who were determined to defend the imperialists.

Chants were shouted such as 'Police defend the terrorists!' and others about the suffering of the Iraqi people. Then the activists pulled back and instead blocked the M2 motorway for about two hours. Meanwhile, Bernadette McAliskey and Eamonn McCann made passionate speeches to the crowd. Speakers from Sinn Féin and the SDLP and Peter Bunting were understandably booed off the platform. Most people felt absolute anger towards the political parties, particularly towards Sinn Féin who were supposedly anti-imperialist but yet were wining and dining with their imperialist masters.

The following day, Irish people again demonstrated their utter contempt for this war of aggression by engaging in a sit-down protest, bringing the whole city centre to a virtual standstill. The trade union leaders typically highlighted their compliant nature by calling for participants to desist as it would further strain their cosy relationship with the repressive RUC/PSNI. They even went as far as to publicly disown those dedicated activists who were determined to make their voices heard.

The colonial police force immediately moved in to forcibly remove us, lashing into protesters as young as 14 – and even a blind man. Despite their efforts to block cameras from filming their fascist actions, later that night TV pictures clearly exposed police brutality. The injured included a 16-year-old boy with a suspected broken arm. After facing an hour of determined resistance to oppression the police eventually withdrew, to the cheers of the crowd. Bernadette McAliskey said: 'Victory to the people!' The 14 protesters arrested were kept in a police van for several hours and denied access to a phone; nor were they told why they had been arrested. After about five hours some were charged and others released. It is clear from this episode that whatever the name or badge any Six County police force goes under, it is naturally going to be used as an oppressive tool of the British state against those who have a conflicting political view.

We have shown that we in Ireland were prepared to make our voices heard and stand in solidarity with the Iraqi people against illegal Anglo-American occupation of their land.

Imperialists out of Ireland and Iraq!

SEAN MATTHEWS
Belfast, Ireland

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Racist government spawns racist press and fascist councillors

On 19 May 2003 the front-page of rabid right-wing tabloid *The Sun* screamed 'Asylum exposed - Sun man posing as refugee is smuggled into Britain... and gets free home, food and travel'. Disturbing as the widespread take-up of *The Sun*'s view is, the front-page headline of 'liberal' broadsheet *The Observer* a day earlier was far more frightening: 'Immigrants "behind crime wave" - police'.

Chris Fox, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, (ACPO) told *The Observer*'s grovelingly uncritical political editor Kamal Ahmed how 'mass migration has brought with it a whole new range and a whole new type of crime... Every time you get a new group you get more tension. The Eastern European, Afghanistan, Middle Eastern movement has had the most effect - it is such large numbers of people... this is a very small island... we have to be very careful how we let the mix develop.' Xenophobia is now completely mainstream, and comparisons with the anti-Semitic propaganda of Nazi Germany have ceased to be exaggerated or ultra-left.

The latest wave of hysteria followed local election victories for the British National Party (BNP) and the publication of a Home Affairs Select Committee report into 'Asylum Removals'. The announcement by David Blunkett on 22 May that the number of new asylum claims in the first quarter of this year was 32% down on the last quarter of 2002 has done nothing to change this. Instead it has whipped up a storm of its own, with the Tories loudly claiming Labour has fiddled the figures, artificially inflating the earlier numbers and not counting immigrants issued with work permits in the asylum statistics. All this is of course true, and some of it ridiculously obvious; however, it is also the case that the number of applicants has fallen because, as the government boasts, application is harder, access to welfare benefits has been further reduced and a so-called 'white list' is in operation, whereby applications from some countries are automatically rejected.

The Select Committee report on 'Removals' (forcible deportations) focussed on Home Office and Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) inefficiency. There is absolutely no doubt that the IND is indeed completely incompetent, with the victims, rather than the victors, of this incompetence, being people claiming asylum. But in the absence of the Home Office providing any remotely

There is now a sinister consensus between all political parties and virtually every section of the media, that asylum-seekers and immigrants are to blame - for everything. Immigrants have always been used as a convenient scapegoat by the British ruling class, in order to deflect criticisms by the poor and working class about lack of homes, jobs and facilities. But now they are also being held responsible for crime, terrorism, disease, and, with no hint of irony, for the rise in popularity of fascist and racist parties and ideas. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

reliable statistical information about deportations, the Committee chose to rely instead on testimony from the highly dubious 'independent think-tank' Migration Watch UK.

Migration Watch UK contends that, in addition to the numbers of those claiming asylum, 25,000 people enter Britain illegally per year without ever being detected, and that 35,000 visitors on student or other temporary visas overstay but do not claim asylum. They also claim that 90% of those who seek asylum in Britain succeed in remaining here, mostly illegally. They arrive at this figure by deducting the numbers of known removals from the numbers refused asylum, then adding back on to this sub-total all those granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain. They then add on an arbitrary number of dependants in order to arrive at this 'statistic'.

It may be true that a significant number of people who are refused asylum manage to stay in Britain after their claims are rejected. But they should not in any way be confused, as is deliberately done by *The Sun*, Migration Watch UK and the government, with those who receive state support while their claims are being processed. These failed refugees will not be receiving housing benefit or the pittance of food support given to dispersed would-be asylum seekers, they will be living entirely illegally, forced to work in the worst conditions for the least pay, constantly looking over their shoulders, for fear of identification, detention and deportation.



MigrationWatch UK is headed by Sir Andrew Green, a former Foreign Officer adviser on the Middle East. Its board includes a Christian fundamentalist, a supporter of the 'Optimum Population Trust UK', which campaigns for recognition that the UK's sustainable population level is 30 million, and a professor of hepatology whose 'chief concern is the increasing frequency of Hepatitis B, HIV and other infections due to failure to test immigrants from countries with high infection rates'.

The Select Committee warns that 'unsustainable' and 'unchecked' immigration to 'developed countries' could 'overwhelm the capacity of the receiving country, leading inevitably to social unrest. It also could, and there are signs that this may already be happening, lead to a growing political backlash which will in turn lead to the election of extremist parties with extreme solutions.'

In FRFI 167 (June/July 2002) we wrote of the parliamentary debate on the Asylum and Immigration Bill:

'All the parties agreed that the two biggest threats to British social cohesion were: 1) unwanted immigrants and 2) fascists. And they agreed that the best way to deal with the fascists was to restrict, ghettoise and expel the immigrants; thereby... reaffirming that racists don't need to vote for the unpalatable face of the far right in order to express their views, as they can vote for any of the mainstream parties with precisely the same result. This tactic did not prevent the BNP from winning three [local council] seats in Burnley. On the contrary, it legitimised its racism in the eyes of disaffected white voters. A vote for the BNP wasn't so extreme after all.'

A year later, with a total of 16 BNP councillors elected, and the extreme right parties no longer even make it to 'twin-evil' status in this debate - immigrants are now depicted as the main enemy, with unpalatable fascists reduced to an unwelcome and dangerous side effect.

Immigrants do not make racism. Nor, in reality, does the BNP, which merely feeds off it. The thugs and fascists of the BNP and other far-right parties are the unofficial expression of official policy. The existence of a climate in which vilifying and attacking immigrants is completely acceptable and respectable is entirely down to the parliamentary Labour Party, its wars, its laws, its supporters and its spokespersons in the media. The British government has just waged a one-sided war against the people of Iraq, and there are to be more wars, imperialist wars for global domination by the US and Britain.

And wars create refugees. It is no coincidence that the three areas cited by ACPO as creating mass immigration into Britain are the sites of the last three major imperialist onslaughts - the Middle East, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe.

Imperialism exports capitalism by force and dominates oppressed peoples; racism is the domestic expression of imperialism. Those targeted by imperialism are the poor, the oppressed, the dispossessed of the world. They are under attack in their countries of origin and under attack when they flee and seek sanctuary within the belly of the imperialist beast.

Killer cops

JIM WILLS

The High Court has overturned the open verdict result on the inquest into the death of Harry Stanley. Harry, who was unarmed, was shot dead in September 1999 by two armed policemen.

Ordering a new inquest, Mr Justice Silber slammed the coroner Dr Stephen Chan, ruling that he prevented a fair inquest and breached human rights. He highlighted Chan's refusal to allow the

jury to consider a verdict of unlawful killing and the failure to investigate effectively whether a crime of murder or manslaughter had been committed. He also criticised Chan for disallowing evidence from witnesses and allowing the police lawyer to introduce evidence of criminal offences Harry committed in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the meantime, the police, aided and abetted by their little drummer boys in the media, have been using Harry and other tragic cop killings as an excuse to introduce new weapons of terror and repression into their arsenal.

The police are issuing units with the

tazer stun-gun. From a range of up to 21 feet, this weapon fires two barbed darts at the victim. Wires attached to the darts carry an electric current of 50,000 volts (yes, fifty thousand), electrocuting the victim for five seconds. Despite police claims these weapons are 'less than lethal force', they have caused deaths in the US and are suspected of causing miscarriages.

The police and army have also been issued with a new baton round (plastic bullet), the L21A1, and the launcher, the L104 anti-riot gun, has been modified to accommodate the XL18E3 optical sight, in addition to the conventional

battle sight. The effect will be more 'strikes' and more injuries.

The plastic bullet being introduced has already been condemned by the European Parliament, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and Amnesty International. Labour MP Kevin McNamara has tabled over 20 parliamentary questions on the 'lethality and injury potential' of these missiles. As on many things, the talking shop of Parliament just won't talk, and he hasn't got anywhere. However, the Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC) has issued a statement, and we endorse McNamara's remark that 'it makes chilling reading'.

The DSAC confirms that: 'The use of the L21A1 is likely to increase the incidence of some intra-abdominal injuries'. It also admits that if this projectile hits a human head 'head on' it can embed itself in the skull.

The nationalist community in Ireland can testify just how deadly these 'less than lethal' weapons are. Scores have been killed and hundreds crippled and maimed. It is a Labour government which has introduced these horrific weapons, and 'old' Labour's record in Ireland proves it won't hesitate to use them, as capitalism goes deeper into crisis.