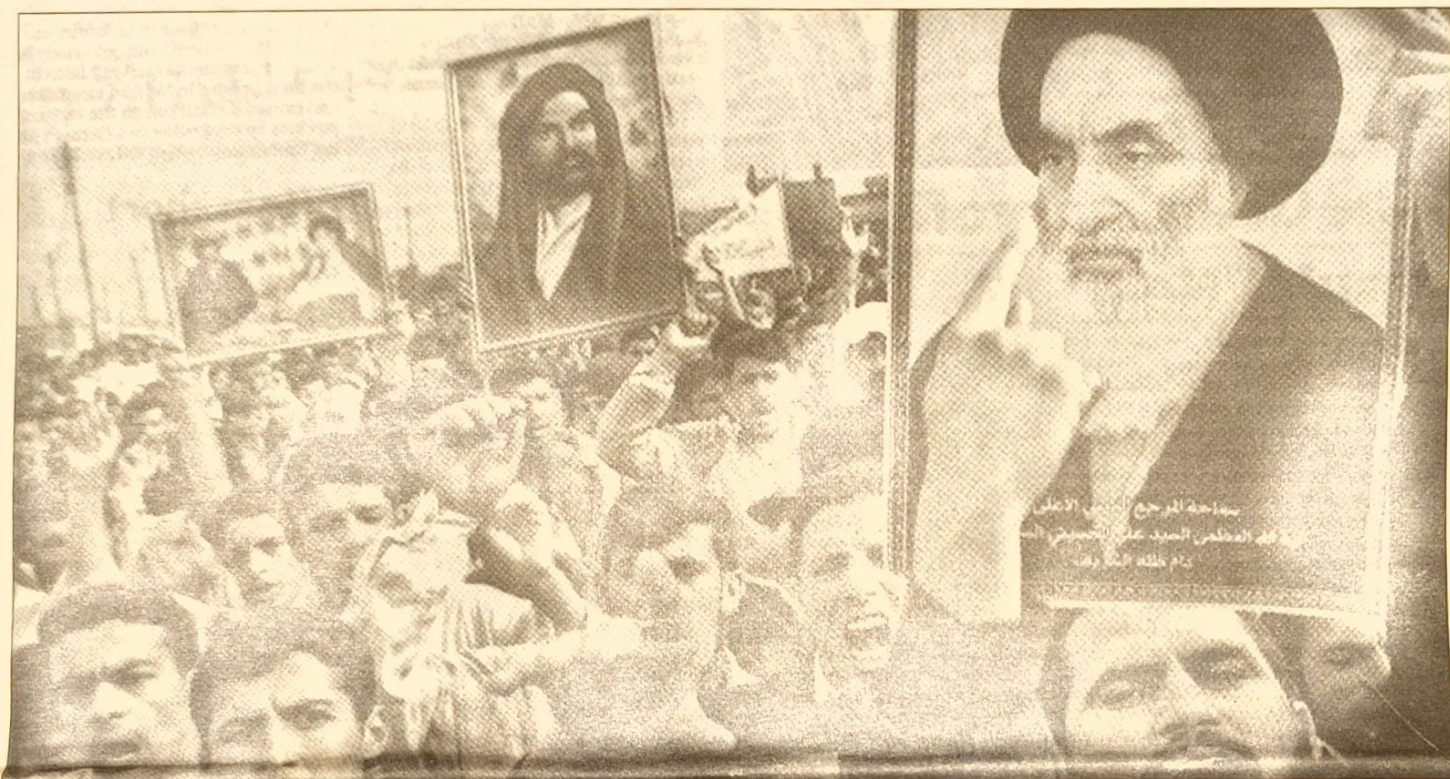


FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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IRAQI RESISTANCE FORCES COALITION RETREAT

With the US and British occupation forces in danger of losing their most valuable political assets in Iraq, Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), was flown back to Washington on 15 January. The previously quiescent Shia population of the south had taken to the streets demanding elections that the CPA did not intend to give them. The dominant Kurdish political parties of the north, military allies of the US and Britain, demanded a degree of autonomy from the rest of Iraq also unacceptable to the occupiers. As the resistance war continues to claim its daily toll of coalition soldiers' lives, the US and British governments are groping for a political solution before they are engulfed in a greater conflagration they cannot win. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

'Ladies and gentlemen - we got him.' So announced Paul Bremer after the capture of Saddam Hussein on 13 December. The US Pentagon claimed that the capture led directly to the arrest of over 200 people. Thirty Iraqi civilians were killed in suicide attacks within a day of Bremer's triumphal announcement. US troops killed over 40 Iraqi civilians in the

four days following the capture. In captivity and at large Saddam Hussein was of use to the US and British states. His capture was used to justify the invasion and as a means for increased repression.

Christmas and New Year

Whatever rewards the coalition authorities thought Saddam Hus-

sein's captivity might bring them, they did not arrive. Four US soldiers were killed in the 24 hours up to mid-day Christmas Day. Twenty coalition troops were killed over five days starting from 24 December, including two Thai engineers and four Bulgarian soldiers. On 25 December rockets were fired at the CPA chief's palace and there was a mortar attack on the Sheraton hotel, used by occupation authority staff and US businessmen. The medical director of Baghdad's mortuary told Robert Fisk that up to 20 Iraqis, mostly the victims of violence, were delivered on the morning of 25 December.

By January approximately 10,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed since the war was launched on 20 March 2003. In December the CPA is reported to have told the Iraqi health ministry to stop collecting statistics on civilian deaths. Almost nine months after the US and British forces claimed victory, many areas of Baghdad still have just six hours of electricity a day and petrol queues stretch for three miles.

On New Year's Day US troops broke into a Sunni mosque in Baghdad. They smashed down the front gate, broke air conditioners, ripped up carpets, threw Korans to the floor, smashed open the metal collection box and took the money inside along with the mosque's computers. US soldiers allegedly punched the man leading the call to prayer in the face. They said they were looking for weapons. Also on New Year's Day two British SAS soldiers were killed in Baghdad, bringing the total of British troops killed since the start of the conflict to 55.

Putting on a brave face

Prime Minister Blair's seven-hour New Year visit to Iraq was almost three times as long as President Bush's visit for Thanksgiving. Blair told the assembled troops that they were 'new pioneers of 21st century soldiering' and that 'the conflict here was of enormous importance because Iraq was a test case.' The assembly received this promise of wars to come politely. It is essential

to US and British imperialist ambitions that they are seen to be succeeding in Iraq - failure would seriously harm if not destroy their aim for global domination.

The capture of Saddam Hussein provided a context in which the US and British ruling class could hide reality behind celebration. *The Wall Street Journal* used its end of year review to promote the cause of wars:

'For the vast majority of Iraqis, their lives and prospects are infinitely better...The Ba'athist and jihadi die-hards will have to be killed...The invasion and its aftermath have gone far in purging the ghosts of Beirut and Mogadishu...As destructive as they are, the truck bombs in Iraq are only strategically notable because this time they are not driving the US home...Even amid the worst of the casualty reports in November, some 60% of Americans said the war was worth fighting.'

94 US troops were killed in November. With some relief US forces announced that attacks on

continued on page 3

Welcome...

British politics is a puppet show. Like Punch and Judy, parliamentary politics is satire born in the 17th century. The politics played out in Parliament in the last week of January was like the boastful squeaky-voiced Punch and his disobedient wife Judy, using a 'slapstick' to knock each other down in a series of farcical quarrels. Moments later they get back up so the show can go on. And no one in the audience ever really thought the show would change.

In the vote on university top-up fees, the rebellious little Labour puppets had their moment on the stage, but just enough strings were pulled to make sure that the play continued (see page 4). The Hutton Inquiry came and went with government, media and parliamentary puppets all slapping each other around with a flat wooden stick while the audience jeered, remembering the weapons of mass destruction that haven't been found (see this page).

In reality, it is not the puppets that matter, but the hands that control them. In our system of parliamentary *poli-tricks* the characters are controlled by what Karl Marx called Mister Moneybags: the capitalist and his system. For genuine socialists and other anti-capitalists, the only alternative is to get rid of the puppeteer and destroy his stage.

Sadly, a lot of so-called socialists do not seem to realise this. So in late January yet another electoral coalition of social democrats and liberals aspiring to be a 'viable alternative to New Labour' was launched for June's local elections. The project has been formed to promote George Galloway, the MP expelled from the Labour Party for jeering too loudly at the show. With him are the trade unions, the Socialist Workers Party and various other left groups with aspirations to take the parliamentary stage. This RESPECT coalition, like the Socialist Alliance, is riddled with dilemmas and contradictions, but these will be played out on Mister Moneybags' stage, not in the real world (see page 16).

Back in the real world in Britain, the number of people made homeless last year was the highest since New Labour took the stage, while the privati-



In Nepal Britain is backing the repressive regime against the people, see page 6

sation of council housing is forced through the back door (see page 5). The same story is unfolding in education and health care. Government creates or allows a crisis to occur, through underfunding and neglect, and then declares that big business money is the only salvation for our public services (see pages 4 and 15). In the prison system, racism and drug addiction are features of everyday life. A new report by the Commission for Racial Equality proves that the British prison system is racist to the core, and yet the recommendations are a farce, nothing is done, and the show can go on (see page 13).

While the British public is numbed by the cycle of daily struggle and political satire, new legislation is being slipped into place to give the government unprecedented powers to control its citizens. The Civil Contingencies Bill gives government ministers the power to ban people's movements, ban gatherings, take over property and ignore all existing laws when dealing with some kind of 'event', 'situation' or 'catastrophe' (see page 4).

Outside Britain, the real world is full of anti-imperialist struggle and class war. The Iraqi resistance is blowing Mister Moneybags' stage to bits, with rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. The US may have caught their old puppet Saddam, but any impression that the occupation forces are in control has long passed (see front page and page 3).

In Nepal and Bolivia too, revolutionary movements are threatening to tear down Mister Moneybags' stage, to reclaim the countries' natural resources and use the wealth to educate and feed their people (see page 7). In Venezuela, the class strug-

gle continues to rage between President Chavez with the poor majority on the one hand, and the middle class allies of US imperialism on the other. After the failed CIA-backed military coup and the failed strike in the oil industry, Mister Moneybags is getting nervous (see page 10).

Inspiring those struggles in Nepal, Bolivia and Venezuela is the Cuban Revolution, still strong and resilient after 45 years of blockade, sabotage, propaganda and isolation. Cuba's assistance to Latin America is much more than ideological, with thousands of doctors and educators throughout the continent helping raise living standards for millions forced to live in absolute poverty (see page 11).

In Palestine, after over three years of Intifada (uprising) the Israeli state is pushing ahead with the construction of its apartheid wall in an effort to create a stage it can control. This will allow Israel to continue its systematic policy of ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, which is at the heart of the Zionist project (see pages 8 and 9). Comrades in Manchester campaigning in this country against this racist oppression have found themselves under attack with an attempt to silence the Victory to the Intifada pickets (see page 4).

Like the traveller community in Bulkington (see Letters, page 15) who refused to be puppets and threatened to burn the stage down in order to fight their unjust eviction from the land they own - we will resist!

Readers of FRFI, hold on to your disbelief, do not be fooled by the parliamentary farce. Let's rip down this stage, destroy Mister Moneybags and create a world we would choose to live in. Please send us your contributions, written and financial.

HUTTON INQUIRY

The empire strikes back

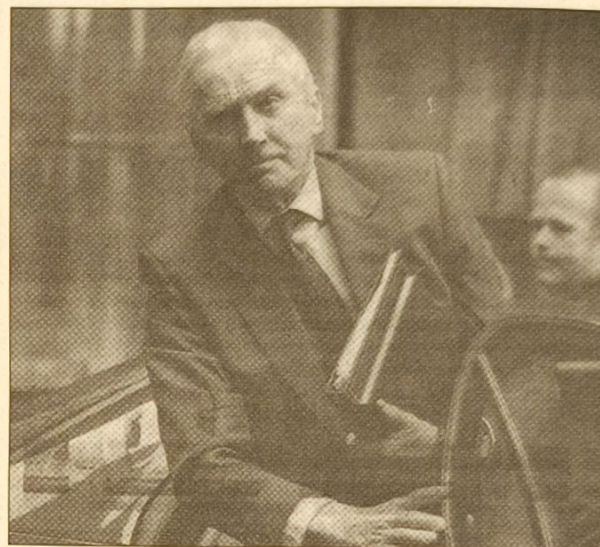
Months later, the Hutton Inquiry has reported and surprised most commentators by the completeness of the whitewash in the government's favour. Most thought that a few minor heads in government would roll. But, true to form, the British government is arrogant in its cover-up and aggressive in demanding its pound of flesh. The BBC is being prepared for a carve-up. The press have minutely analysed the report and its background exhaustively, so here CAROL BRICKLEY offers a 'constitutional review'.

In times of crisis it pays to know something about a country's constitution. Contrary to popular belief the British state does have a constitution, even though it is not written down. The British state is the result of a settlement between the Executive (the government acting as the 'Crown'), the Legislature (Parliament), and the Rule of Law (the courts and the judges). Of course, like everything to do with government in Britain, even this is a bit of a fiction: the sovereignty of Parliament and the rule of law are very much subject to the dictates of the political party in power - the government.

Anyone following current events will have no difficulty understanding this. Parliament is now the forum where the government engages in routine bullying, backstabbing and blackmail of MPs to push through its policies - witness the imposition of top-up fees. Government makes the law by these means, and is happy to ignore any law that gets in its way - witness the incarceration of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay in breach of international law and internment without trial in Belmarsh in breach of human rights law.

The events surrounding Dr David Kelly's death are evidence of the crisis facing the British government over its invasion of Iraq in 2003. Public opinion was split on the question of war, and necessarily the ruling class (the Establishment) was deeply divided as well. The BBC likes to think of itself as a purveyor of objective truth, when in fact it is just another arm of the Establishment, in business, when the chips are down, to promote the views of the ruling class. Independent media analysis shows that the BBC's coverage of the Iraq war overall was more supportive of the government than other media. But when the ruling class is divided, events can turn ugly. In troubled times the government will turn on junior partners, in this case its hired hacks, in order to save its own skins. The Hutton Inquiry is a perfect illustration of what happens.

Andrew Gilligan and David Kelly provided the government with perfect red herrings. Millions were spent on an inquiry into why Kelly killed



himself. Andrew Gilligan has been publicly humiliated over one sentence in an early morning radio broadcast suggesting that the government knew that their claim that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) could be launched in 45 minutes was dubious. In contrast this same government has published two dodgy dossiers on Iraq and launched a brutal, expensive war in breach of international law. Rather than explaining why no WMD have been found and why its dossiers were full of dubious claims, not least that Saddam Hussein's regime represented a 'clear and present threat', the government has been cleared of all the charges. Despite the evidence to the contrary, Hutton has declared that neither the Prime Minister, nor Geoff Hoon at the MoD, nor Alastair Campbell, played any part in naming Kelly to the press, despite the fact that Campbell and Hoon were 'gagging' to expose Kelly's name, and the Prime Minister chaired the meeting which decided on a plan to do exactly that. Hutton decided that 10 Downing Street did not 'unduly' influence the publication of the September 'intelligence' dossier, despite the fact that the words were changed at Campbell's request to make the tentative allegations about WMD into certainties.

Hutton was Blair's perfect choice for the job of running the Inquiry. Rt Hon the Lord Hutton (life Baron), Law Lord until he retired on 14 January, educated at Shrewsbury School, Balliol College, Oxford and Queen's University Belfast, formerly Queen's Council, Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, had a life-time of serving the ruling class behind him. One of the many Latin shibboleths with which the legal profession dresses up its activities as an arm of the Establishment is 'Let justice be done though the heavens fall' - another fiction, useful only for maintaining myths. In the real world, Law Lords and the like are experts at maintaining the status quo and preventing earth-shattering conclu-

sions. In this, Hutton stands in a long line of High Court Judges who have embarked on government whitewash inquiries (Widgery, Parker, Compton etc), or who like Lord Denning, ruled against the Birmingham Six appeal because he could not allow the 'appalling vista' of police and prison corruption that might undermine the ruling class.

Hutton worked in the Diplock courts in the north of Ireland during the period when his loyalty to the British state would have been the chief factor in his promotion. He was promoted to the top. In his last job, the Hutton Inquiry, he earned his bread, butter and wild strawberry conserve whilst believing, perhaps, that he was dispensing justice and overseeing the truth. Maybe Hutton was thinking of himself when he forgave the menacing John Scarlett from the Joint Intelligence Committee for being 'subconsciously' influenced by the pressure of No 10 when rewording the September dossier in favour of waging war. He can retire on a state pension well above the 'Ordinary'.

So now it is hacks to the wall. Gilligan is shamed and the Director General and Chairman of the BBC have fallen on their swords. The Emperor has given the thumbs down and the crowds will cheer...or will they? The early signs are that Hutton may be a whitewash too far. Opinion polls now show that more people think Blair should be sacked than Greg Dyke. The public is suspicious that the government would like to 'influence' BBC news output: Campbell was already accusing the BBC of giving too much airtime to the opponents of the war.

Those weapons of mass destruction are still missing, and the latest chief weapons inspector, David Kay, the Coalition's answer to Hans Blix, has just resigned having failed to find anything even with a staff of 1,400. The costs of the war and the occupation are rising, and Blair may be the last man to believe the lies.

website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk
www.revolutionarycommunist.com

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FRFI reports on and supports the struggles of the oppressed resisting imperialism throughout the world. It is the only newspaper in Britain to expose the true nature of Labour imperialism. We salute Cuba's struggle to build socialism. We work alongside all those who are building a new movement which genuinely represents the interests of the working class and oppressed.

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IRAQI RESISTANCE

continued from page 1

them had fallen by half in December. Separately they said that the number of US army patrols had been cut from 1,500 a day in November to 500 a day in December. So who might claim to be winning? 24 US soldiers were killed in combat in December and 33 in the month to 29 January. The final January toll exceeds the number of US killed in combat for every month except November since 1 May 2003 when Bush declared the war over and won. By 17 January the US had lost 500 soldiers since 20 March 2003 and 2,895 were seriously wounded. Of these totals, 138 were killed and 550 injured up to 1 May 2003. About ten US soldiers are wounded every day.

Nearly 7,000 US soldiers have had to be evacuated from Iraq, many with psychological problems. At least 21 have committed suicide in Iraq, one in seven of non-hostile deaths. More than 300 Iraqi policemen working for the CPA have been killed since 1 May. The Iraqi resistance is fighting a guerrilla war of attrition. The US government and its Wall Street backers must fear that like Vietnam it will first erode support for the war in the US, and then trigger an avalanche of opposition.

Israeli guidance

Responding to the intensity of attacks in November the US forces launched Operation Iron Hammer using 2,000-pound bombs and missiles on built up areas for the first time since April 2003. A US commander repeated a phrase of British Field Marshal Viscount Slim who led the British forces against Japan in Burma, saying the US military would 'use a sledgehammer to crush a walnut'. US tactics have included those typical of the Saddam Hussein regime: destruction of plantations, arrest of the wives of wanted men – to be used as bargaining tools. Elements of the Ba'athist intelligence services are being incorporated into the occupation administration.

Israeli Defence Force staff are training US special forces in assassination squads and Israeli military 'consultants' have visited Iraq. Methods used against the Palestinians are employed in Iraq. Areas deemed centres of resistance are sealed off with razor wire, buildings are flattened, as are roadsides. One US officer likened the tactics to putting the population in a goldfish bowl and peering in – presumably then to unleash the assassination squad. The occupation forces use collective punishments as the Israeli forces do in Palestine.

On 13 January a third US helicopter was shot down in two weeks. The US responded by shooting three men in a car and an elderly woman. Iraqi people complain that the US is using its firepower randomly to retaliate against attacks thereby killing Iraqis arbitrarily. Random slaughter is what US soldiers did in Vietnam. The US and British governments are refusing to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency monitors into Iraq to test for uranium contamination. Radiation related illnesses and deaths from the US and British depleted uranium shells are rising. Journalist John Pilger estimates deaths and injuries to young children from unexploded cluster bombs at 1,000 a month.

Afraid of democracy

For all their talk of liberating Iraq the prospect of a free self-governing Iraqi people is what the US and British states cannot abide. They intend to repress the organised expressions of the mass of Iraqi people and encourage those elements willing to connive

in imperialism's continuing domination of Iraq.

According to Iraq's Union of the Unemployed 70% of the workforce are unemployed and hungry and many are now homeless. On 19 September the CPA published Order Number 39 permitting 100% foreign ownership of business apart from oil and allowing the transfer abroad of profits made in Iraq. This is the context in which the resistance fights and mass demonstrations take place. The demand for democracy and self-determination is a demand for jobs and food and an end to imperialist plunder of Iraq.

In December Southern Oil Company trade unionists declared their workplace 'no-go zones' for Halliburton. They banned all Kellogg, Brown and Root (a Halliburton subsidiary) representatives and foreign workers from entering their sites. Iraqi workers threw out Indian and Pakistani workers hired by Kuwaiti subcontractors. They have succeeded in repairing oil refinery and pumping stations.

The CPA accepts as law the 1987 Ba'athist statute forbidding workers in state-owned institutions from forming independent trade unions. Ba'athist unions were intended as

Muhsen Mull Ali, who spent two long prison stretches under Saddam Hussein for organising unions, said 'our responsibility is to oppose privatisation as much as possible, and fight for the welfare of our workers'. That is a crime in occupied Iraq.

US and British strategy in Iraq seeks to engage as many sections of society as it can in their political process, isolate opposition and use allies to target and eliminate it. To this end, in January, the US released over 500 of the 9,500 prisoners it holds in Iraq. The intention is to draw local and clan leaders towards the stooge Governing Council and boost support for the coalition's constitutional plans.

The coalition plan, unveiled in November after Bremer's previous hasty return to Washington, is to use the Governing Council, selected by the US and Britain, to hold 18 regional caucuses which would pick national assembly members, who would again in turn select a government. That body would be the formal government after 30 June 2004. The CPA would dissolve and the occupation end. However, the new government would invite the outside armies to stay on in Iraq. If all goes according to plan, elections for a new Iraqi govern-



instruments of surveillance and repression. In early December US troops raided the offices of the Transport and Communications Union in Baghdad, home of the Workers' Federation of Trade Unions. Eight members of the Federation's executive were taken into detention. The CPA gave no explanation for the arrests. The eight were released the following day. Two other trade unionists, members of the Union of the Unemployed, had been arrested in November. They had helped organise protests demanding jobs and unemployment benefits. Federation leader

Kurdish women defend their rights

5,000 Kurdish women demonstrated in Suleimaniyah, northern Iraq, on 21 January against a Governing Council decision to repeal long-standing secular family laws and replace them with religious jurisdiction. This attack on women's rights was instigated by the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq that participates in the stooge Governing Council. The code defended by the women makes polygamy difficult and guarantees women's custody rights in the case of divorce.

ment would take place on 31 December 2005. As the second most senior Shia cleric wrote to Bush and Blair in mid-January: 'Your plan for the transfer of powers is vague and too complicated. It is nothing other than replacing one dictatorship with another to serve your own re-election goals.'

60% of Iraqi people are described as Shia Muslims, 20% Sunni Muslims and 17% are Kurds. Using regional caucuses the occupying powers intend to control the outcomes of the political process. On 15 January tens of thousands of supporters of the leading Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani marched in Basra supporting his call for direct elections to the national assembly to then serve as the interim government after 30 June. Earlier in the week in the predominantly Shia town of Kut demonstrators demanding jobs had been fired on, killing one and wounding three. On 10 January in the Shia town of Amarah British troops and Iraqi police killed six people who were part of a demonstration for jobs. The British army acknowledged one or two deaths attributable to its soldiers. A British military offer to pay the family of Baha Mousa compensation of \$8,000 for British soldiers beating him to death was rejected by the family. The letter containing the offer said

acceptance would be a 'final settlement...without admission of liability' on behalf of British forces (*The Independent on Sunday*). Attacks on the occupation forces in the Shia south east of Iraq doubled between August and December. Bremer and his British allies can see the writing on the wall for the occupation.

Any concessions made to the Shia clerics are likely to be at the expense of the ambitions of the Kurdish leadership. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) want to retain autonomy within Iraq, control over natural resources and a veto over troop movements in the Kurdish region. The KDP and PUK want control over the oil-rich Kirkuk area. The CPA and the Turkic peoples who live among the Kurds reject these proposals. For the Arab and Turkic peoples, demands for democracy can be used as a means of restoring majority rule over the Kurds and Kirkuk. Among the Kurds there is a movement for a referendum

on the future status of their region.

Confronted by rival claims from Kurds, Sunni and Shia populations the occupation forces may calculate that the bourgeois Kurdish leadership will be compliant and seek a price acceptable to the Shia religious leadership. At the behest of the US and British governments, the United Nations (UN) has sent a small team to Iraq to investigate whether it is safe enough to send a team of experts to assess the possibility of holding elections. The occupiers believe that a judgement from the UN against the possibility of elections will be more acceptable to the Shia religious leadership than their own edict.

Whatever deals the occupation powers manage they will not meet the people's demands for work and control of their own industries and resources. They may have captured the original, but they will be seeking another Saddam Hussein in all but name.

US anti-war movement faces important test

The anti-war movement in the United States is facing an important test in a struggle between its reformist and anti-imperialist wings. The reformist wing is led by United For Peace and Justice (UFPJ), an alliance of environmentalists, professional activists, NGOs, various 'progressive' organisations and various trade unions at the national level. The anti-imperialist wing is represented by the International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) coalition.

The division in the anti-war movement began immediately following 11 September. Anti-globalisation demonstrations had been planned in Washington DC at the end of September. Following the attacks on 11 September, the globalisation coalition cancelled them, but a number of anti-imperialist organizations decided to go ahead and founded the ANSWER coalition to express widespread opposition to war and to racist attacks. The demonstrations were re-oriented to oppose jingoism and the anti-Muslim attacks. Some 25,000 demonstrated on 29 September 2001 in Washington, another 15,000 in San Francisco. Since then ANSWER has played the leading role in all the large demonstrations. It has won increased support from youth, local labour organisations and immigrant groups. It played a leading role in the 25 October demonstration last year, and organised or co-organised local protests against the war in Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

ANSWER's anti-imperialist leadership has attracted criticism. It began with attacks from the far right. David Horowitz, renegade from the left and now a rabid guard-dog of imperialism, howled hysterically in *Front Page*, January 2003, accusing the organizers of being communists:

'This anti-American pro-terrorist movement is now larger than the anti-Vietnam pro-communist 'peace' movement was until the very end of the Sixties. ... It is anti-American movement to divide this country in the face of its enemies and give aid and comfort to those who would destroy us.'

The attacks on ANSWER and the anti-imperialist current, which started with the right, were taken up by the ruling class media and then by sections of the antiwar movement itself. Within the UFPJ an attempt is being made to prevent the issue of Palestine being part of the platform for big marches planned for 20 March, alleging that support for the Palestinian struggle is divisive and will reduce support for the march. This section wants to see Iraq under the control of the UN, whereas ANSWER supports the right of the Iraqi people to decide their own future.

The issue is now coming to a head. ANSWER's call to action on 20 March includes the demands 'Bring the troops home now!', 'End colonial occupation from Iraq to Palestine and everywhere!', 'Stop the attacks on civil liberties!' and 'Money for jobs, education, healthcare and housing – Not war!' The coalition is also taking an explicit position opposing internationalising

the occupation of Iraq, instead insisting on the Iraqi people's unconditional right to exercise self-determination.

According to Brian Becker, an ANSWER spokesperson:

'The issue of a political program for March 20, as expressed in the statement, is of paramount importance. It is essential to demand that the US troops leave immediately with no conditions and to support the right of the Iraqi and Palestinian people to resist as they embrace the fundamental right to self-determination. This would include opposing any internationalization of the occupation through the United Nations or any other bodies...the anti-war movement is at a crossroads. ...there is a tendency that seeks to direct the movement's energy to supporting Howard Dean or some other Democratic Party candidate in the upcoming national elections.'

'While Bush's policies are criminal, it would be an error for the progressive anti-war movement to become a tail to the Democratic Party, which shares Bush's imperialist objectives regarding the occupation of Iraq, Palestine and everywhere else. The ANSWER statement makes it clear that its goal is to make the international March 20 action one of solidarity with all those who resist US hegemony, domination and invasion.'

ANSWER's position has received support from the Arab-American community which has issued an 'Open Letter from the Arab-American and Muslim community to the US anti-war movement' insisting on full support for the principled call to action, adding:

'In its attempt to silence the Arab and Muslim voices for decades, particularly that of the Palestinian people, the movement in the US has stood alone in the global movement for justice. We see ourselves as full partners in leading the movement as signified in the heavy price we continue to pay along the way, and reject any attempt to objectify our presence.'

In the past, radical movements have consistently acceded to Zionist objections to raising the Palestinian issue at anti-war events. It is as if, on anti-apartheid protests, the organisers had attempted to exclude the ANC and its struggle. This Open Letter is particularly authoritative, since it has the support of the National Council of Arab Americans (NCAA).

The US anti-war movement now has to choose: is it with the Iraqi people, the Palestinian people and the Arab-American community or is it with imperialism?

All out 20 March under the slogans:

- End all colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere!
- Bring the troops home NOW!
- No to internationalizing colonial occupations!
- Stop the attacks on civil liberties!
- Money for jobs, education, and healthcare not for war!

Steve Palmer, San Francisco correspondent

University fees: higher education to become a commodity

JIM CRAVEN AND SUSAN DAVIDSON

The argument over university top-up fees that fizzled out in another gutless climb-down by so-called Labour rebels was irrelevant to most of the British working class. Education in Britain has always been elitist. It is one of the means by which the upper middle class maintains its ascendancy and through which the lower middle class and the more affluent aspiring minority of the working class hope to improve their lot.

University degrees were once reserved for children of the ruling class. By 1965 only around 8% of the relevant age group received higher education. The first massive expansion of university education came after the 1963 Robbins Report called for modernisation of the higher education sector.

Little gain for the working class

As the British economy was restructured over the past two decades, higher education expanded rapidly to meet the new labour force requirements and save industry the considerable costs of retraining. Today 43% of 19-year-olds in England and Wales are in full-time education.

The government wants the percentage of people attending university to rise to around 50%. So the argument is now about how the estimated annual £2.6bn bill for university teaching necessary for such an expansion will be funded. The government has proposed that annual tuition fees should rise to a maximum of £3,000 from the current £1,100, with universities choosing the level of their fees for different courses. Already the elite universities have made it clear that they want to be able to charge much higher 'variable fees' for 'expensive' courses.

The chief beneficiaries of this expansion have been and will continue to be the middle class. Over 60% of students at the top universities – the ones that count most for privilege and influence – come from private and selective schools. The advantages of an elite university place are enormous. Not only is the learning environment superior but each college provides its own network of contacts and influences that still dominate the elite in the armed forces, the judiciary, political parties and the media. Any increase in the number of working class university entrants has overwhelmingly been to the less prestigious universities. For instance, at the University of East London over 40% of students have their fees waived due to low family incomes, compared with 10% at Oxford and Cambridge.

In reality only a small minority of the poor working class is involved. For most the chance of ever receiving higher education is a world away. The bulk of working class young people have no more opportunities today than they did 30 years



ago. They are still destined for the most menial and low-paid work.

Gutless rebels, gutless arguments

So for the Labour left to complain that university top-up fees are elitist and put working class students at a disadvantage is totally dishonest and hypocritical. The working class has been disadvantaged by an elitist education system for over a hundred years. The Labour Party continues to support selective schools, private education and the right of mobile middle class families to seek out and monopolise the 'best' state schools. Indeed, many Labour MPs, from Tony Blair to Dianne Abbott take advantage of these for their own children. Educational inequality is rooted in a host of class differences such as poverty, poor housing, racism, cultural deprivation. It will take a lot more than concessions on variable fees and student bursaries to eliminate it.

Higher education – extending the market

The main purpose of university top-up fees is to extend market forces in that sector. Higher education is to become a commodity with the student as consumer checking out the market. Now that payment has been established as a principle, the market between universities, colleges and courses can accelerate with the wealthiest institutions charging top prices for their superior products. The government's justification for higher fees is that payment is an individual investment in future earning power; that since graduates benefit from education they should pay.

In the same way individual families will increasingly be expected to pay not only for superior education but also for quality health care and improved public services. Blunkett, Straw, Blair and cronies have set out to dismantle the welfare state with its notions of redistributive tax and universal provision, and replace it with the mantra that there are no rights without personal responsibility. As Blair said, 'I passionately believe [that] you can expand public services and protect quality but that you can only do this in the modern world if people see a fair way of paying for these services.'

With the increase in university graduates, a degree has become a minimum precondition for middle class youngsters

to pursue a well-paid future. Large numbers of them are now aghast that one of the main props of their privilege might become beyond their means.

Most Labour MPs benefited from free university education and an important section of their electorate are among the middle class being threatened. That is why the university top-up fees created such parliamentary opposition. It has little to do with concern for poor working class students and everything to do with naked self-interest.

A socialist alternative

Late degenerate capitalism wants to see all life packaged for profit; everything is to have a price. The only conceivable relationship is that between producer and consumer; the only incentive individual material gain. As socialists we know there is another way. We believe education should be provided for the benefit of all, free of charge, funded from taxation. Education is a fundamental requirement of human dignity; for cultural enlightenment, understanding and participation in the tasks of society – not for the mean purpose of treading over a fellow human to gain the next rung of the career ladder.

In Cuba, which is trying to build a socialist society without class distinctions, university education is entirely free. The Battle of Ideas, as the Cubans call it, aims to raise the educational level of everyone, throughout their lives, as a right and as a necessity for creating a cultured population capable of understanding and tackling the problems of the world.

Manchester M&S picket under attack

HEATHER KEATING

As the rain poured down on 8 January, supporters of the Marks & Spencer picket gathered outside Manchester City Magistrates' Court to support two regular picketers who were facing charges that attacked our right to protest outside the shop. Slogans calling for the defence of democratic rights and cries of 'Defend the right to protest!' rang around the court complex as we handed out leaflets and explained what was going on in court.

The case was brought against the picket after constant harassment from the Labour council and its licensing officers. One of the picketers was charged with affixing placards to council property and both were charged with depositing a paste-table on the highway 'without lawful authority or excuse to the interruption of pedestrians'. Our solicitor, David Lees, was told on entering court that one of the magistrates was a shareholder in M&S. On our objection he was removed from the bench. The case opened with both solicitors giving definitions of 'affixed', which isn't defined in the Highways Act. Prosecution witness Andrew Butcher, Senior Licensing Officer, testified that the placards were 'draped' on the railings, with the clear implication that they were not 'fixed'.

On the obstruction charge, Lees argued that for the defendants to be found guilty, the magistrates would have to find that the table was an unreasonable interruption. Butcher was asked if any member of the public had ever complained. He testified that they hadn't. Lees then asked Butcher if M&S had ever complained to the council about



the table: Butcher confirmed they had. But when Lees asked if M&S's complaint had been passed on to him, the prosecution objected, and the chief magistrate ruled that the question was not relevant so that Butcher did not have to answer. Lees then explained that he was trying to find out exactly to whom the table was an interruption. The question was still ruled irrelevant. The prosecution argued that a table was not needed for the picket because we could carry all our leaflets. They also suggested that we could all wear placards instead of 'affixing them to council property'.

One of the two defendants described the reasons for the M&S picket saying it was in solidarity with Palestine and that the placards were 'draped' on the railings, with the clear implication that they were not 'fixed'.

We were found guilty on all counts. There was some obscure nonsense about 'saddles' in deciding that placards draped on council railings were indeed 'affixed' in the eyes of the law;

the chief magistrate also ridiculously asserted that the placards prevented people from leaning on the railings.

The verdict is an attack not only on our democratic right to protest against M&S's support for the Israeli state but the rights of any campaigning group in Manchester to protest on the streets. We have lodged an appeal to the Crown Court and are forming a 'Defend the M&S Picket Campaign' to fight for our democratic rights.

Support the campaign if you are in the Manchester area by coming to the weekly picket of M&S. Every Saturday at 12 noon, Market Street, City Centre.

We need financial help to fight the charges. Cheques payable to, 'Defend the M&S Picket Campaign'. Send to PO Box 20, Bridge 5 Mill, 22A Beswick Street, Manchester, M4 7HR

Protest to the local Labour MP, Tony Lloyd, Lloyd@parliament.uk demanding action in defence of democratic rights.

For more information, contact Victory_Intifada@hotmail.com or phone 07816 547 066.

More special powers for government repression

NICKI JAMESON

Following the introduction of the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, the Labour government is set to bring in yet another act of Parliament giving it further sweeping powers to suppress dissent. The Civil Contingencies Bill gives government unprecedented power in 'an emergency' to ban people from leaving or entering any area, to deploy troops, ban gathering, requisition property and disregard existing legislation.

Local and regional authorities will be required to draw up detailed plans for dealing with 'events', 'situations' and 'catastrophes'. This will involve the creation of a new tier of regional civil defence organisations, described as 'resilience bodies' to co-ordinate the response on a local and national level.

Under the new provisions each Regional Coordinator will be assisted by the Regional Military Commander, a police Chief

Constable and a Regional Controller from a local council. This group will have colossal power to impose its will on the region it oversees. This is a blueprint for future rule by martial law.

The Bill was published in draft form in June 2003 and was met with alarm and outrage from civil liberties groups, who quite rightly saw the proposed definition of an 'emergency' as a blank cheque to any government faced with strikes, demonstrations and a lack of confidence in its abilities to rule by decree.

The parliamentary Joint Committee on the bill took up these criticisms, with the result that when, on 7 January, the government published its response to the consultation, it did so to praise from previously critical MPs and the pressure groups Liberty and Justice. Editorials in *The Guardian* and *Independent*, expressed delight that parliamentary democracy was working so well for a change and 'ministers have listened'. Ironically, as Michael Howard asserts

a new Tory agenda, the only daily newspapers to dissent from the back-slapping were the *Daily Mail* and *Evening Standard*, which described Labour's plans as 'draconian' and 'the foundations of a new tyranny'.

In fact the ministers haven't listened at all, and as the magazine *Statewatch* points out, the amended Bill 'has preserved nearly all the powers it originally proposed – albeit in a different form – and added new contentious provisions which were not in the first draft'.

The original Bill defined an emergency as any event that 'presents a serious threat to human welfare, the environment, political, administrative or economic stability, and the security of the UK or part of it'. The amended version removes 'political, administrative or economic stability' from that definition, but redefines 'human welfare' as 'disruption of a supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel'. New clauses are then inserted giving the government power to use emergency regula-

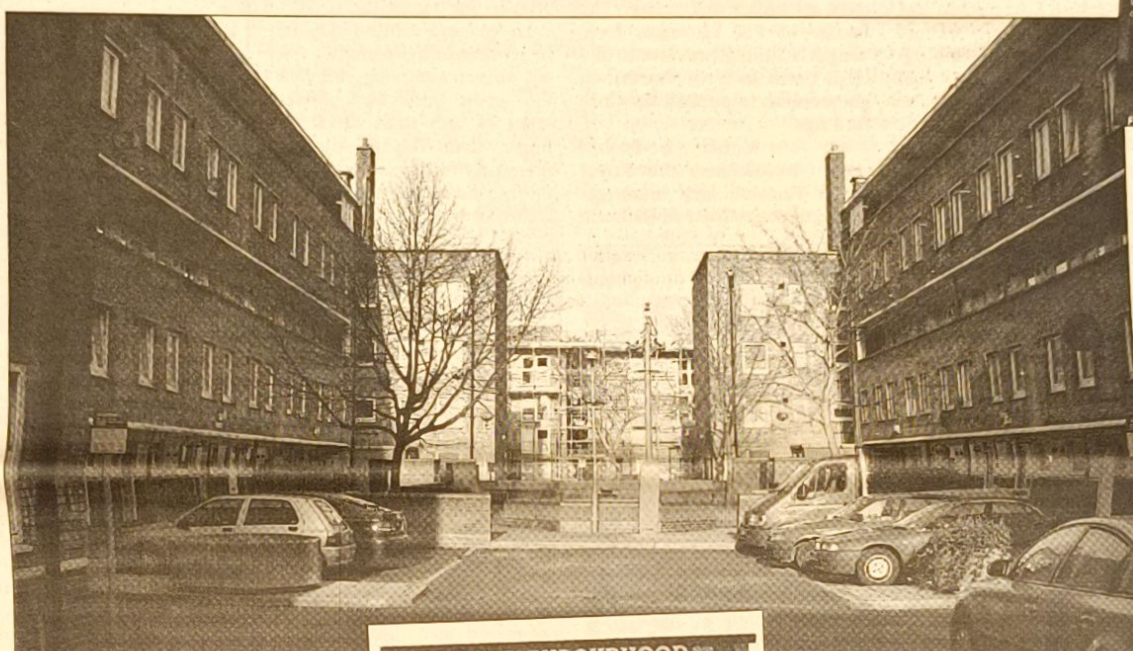
tions for 'protecting or restoring the activities of banks and other financial institutions... activities of Her Majesty's government (and)... the performance of public functions'. In other words, preserving the political, administrative and economic status quo.

The previous requirement for states of emergency to be declared by royal proclamation is removed and the power to invoke emergency powers given to ministers. As *Statewatch* argues:

'The issuing of an "order" that a "situation" or "event" exists or is about to occur is not the same as a "declaration of a state of emergency". It would allow governments enormous discretion and allow them to mix ongoing business in normal times with powers that are intended to deal with peacetime emergencies. This new "normality" could see parts of cities or whole towns subject to exceptional laws and controls in the same way that emergency laws have been in place in Northern Ireland for more than thirty years.'

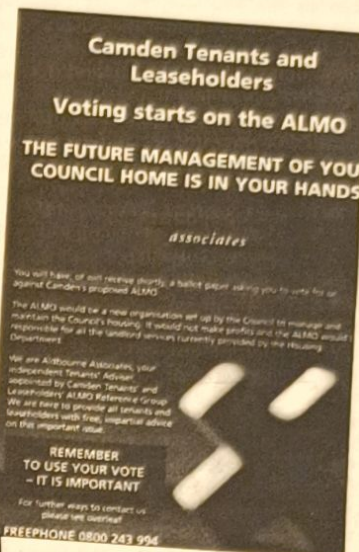
The death of council housing

In January, council tenants in Camden, north London, dealt a blow to the Labour government's housing policy by voting unanimously against the proposed transfer of their homes to a new-style housing corporation called an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). The 'no' vote is the first time tenants have rejected an ALMO. What is most significant is that tenants in Camden have realised that the ALMO is nothing more than privatisation by the back door, as **BARNABY MITCHEL** reports.



in their housing stock. Tenants in local authorities who lose the battle for funds will continue to live in poor quality housing. If they cannot improve they will be forced to adopt one of the other two options available both of which involve privatisation. The government is using the carrot-and-stick approach.

The government claims ALMOs will improve the condition of housing in line with its 'Decent Homes'



targets to be met by 2010, and make for more efficient housing management services. Efficiency gains will no doubt be at the expense of council workers' jobs as the companies rationalise on the workforce. Leeds ALMO immediately recruited 18 new senior managers with an extra wage bill of £1 million per year.

Throughout the country council tenants have been bombarded with propaganda to convince them to vote in favour of the ALMO. Glossy brochures showing smiling council tenants, with shining new fitted kitchens and bathrooms, telling their fellow tenants to vote yes, have flooded through letterboxes. Camden Council built seven show homes to convince the community that the ALMO will make them happy. Groups opposed to the ALMO launched a legal challenge to the ALMO 'consultation' process claiming that the council propaganda was one-sided and misled tenants. The judge ruled in favour of Camden Council. Tenants and local campaigners are now demanding that the £283 million offered to the proposed ALMO be made available to Camden Council direct for investment in council homes. This presents the Labour government with a serious dilemma. It cannot be seen to be endorsing the council housing model by providing the funding the tenants are demanding. Such a concession would undermine its commitment to privatisation. If the government backtracks and gives Camden a fourth option of direct investment there would be a potential uproar from those local authorities who have previously been forced into privatisation in the belief that there was no other option.

and get nothing. Council tenants are being blackmailed. In Glasgow tenants voted 58% to 42% in favour of transfer after the treasury promised to wipe out the city's £900 million housing debt.

In Islington, north London, the proposed transfer of the Tollington estates to North British Housing Association was rejected by 60% of the 69% of tenants who voted. Local campaigners revealed to tenants that the housing association planned to build 340 private flats for sale, which would have doubled the density of housing on the estate. Between 1997 and 2002 the number of registered homeless families in Islington rose from 949 to 1,314, and the number of families living in temporary accommodation rose from 737 to 1,481. In the same period the number of lettings made available by the council and housing associations fell from 2,000 to 1,084. This shortfall in the building of social housing is in contrast to the building boom of luxury flats throughout Islington.

ALMOs are widely regarded as a stepping stone to privatisation and full stock transfer in the long term. An ALMO is a private not-for-profit company set-up to manage council housing. Council tenants remain as such and the local authority is still the landlord. The day-to-day business of housing management is handed over to the ALMO management board. Councils don't have to ballot their tenants before setting up an ALMO, but in practice most do because they have to demonstrate that the idea is



ready owns much of the social housing in Islington. Tenants in Islington voted yes to the setting up of an ALMO. Of the 24.17% of tenants who bothered to vote, 83% voted yes. The 1,600 tenants from the Tollington estates who rejected stock transfer earlier in the year were not included in the ballot. Ballot papers had the council's 'vote yes' leaflet wrapped around them and local caretakers had been instructed to tear down 'vote no' posters.

However, there is no guarantee that local authorities will receive all of the investment that the government has promised them as an incentive to set up an ALMO. Poor performing councils are not given the option of setting up an ALMO and are unable to invest

popular. Only the best performing councils are allowed to compete for ALMO status and the promised millions. So far the government has earmarked nearly £2.5 billion for high-performing councils that set up ALMOs to spend on repairs. The ALMO has a board of directors made up of local councillors, elected tenants and so-called 'independents'. These 'independents' are specialists in the social housing and community development sector. In Islington, a London borough committed to the ALMO road, it has been revealed that one of the proposed 'independents' is a director of Circle 33 Housing Association which, thanks to the council's Private Finance Initiative, al-

The number of people made homeless this year is 212,760, the highest since Labour came to power. Homelessness is at its highest level since 1997. However, huge controversy surrounds the accuracy of the official government figures on the number of homeless people and especially those who are living on the streets. Street counts often only look in those obvious places such as doorways and check the number residing in temporary hostel accommodation, therefore those who live in squats or on the streets but away from the established places are not included. It is estimated that 300,000 people make up what can be termed the 'hidden homeless' - individuals and families who have a roof over their heads,

perhaps staying on friends' sofas or with family in overcrowded conditions, but not having a secure home of their own.

Hackney council in east London has a new campaign called Park Life. All over the borough, at bus stops and outside schools are huge glossy posters showing an unhappy couple sitting on a bench in a park, their belongings on the floor next to them with the slogan 'Hackney council will evict tenants who will not pay their rent'. Hackney council is terrorising council tenants. It should be reminded that the average life expectancy of a person living on the streets is 42. People sleeping on the streets are 35 times more likely to commit suicide, and 15 times more likely to be assaulted than the general public.

Ireland: Loyalist racism and terror attacks

PAUL MALLON

Since the 26 November elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly (reported in FRFI 176), stalemate has ensued pending the review of the Good Friday Agreement set to begin in February. Loyalist attacks have continued against the nationalist community and have been extended to a widespread racist terror campaign against ethnic groups, exposing the racist character of the loyalist tradition itself. Further evidence of the widespread collusion between the British government, its agents and the loyalist death squads in the terror campaign directed at the nationalist community has also been published. The DUP is now setting the pace of the political agenda in the north and is set to destroy the illusions of Sinn Féin in regard to the restoration of devolved power to the Stormont Assembly.

The Six County statelet is now the race hate capital of Europe. Every day in Belfast a racist attack is carried out. The white supremacist loyalist tradition, which is materially dependent on British imperialism, has maintained its hate campaign primarily against Catholics and Irish nationalists for centuries. Loyalism is racism by definition. Loyalist death squads and hate mobs have extended their hate campaign in recent weeks in Belfast against the tiny minority ethnic community in the north of Ireland where 99% of citizens are white. In December Ugandan and Romanian families were burned out of their homes in South Belfast. The Belfast Chinese community has come under recent sustained attack from loyalist hate mobs, as have Muslims throughout the north.

Following weeks of speculation and in the aftermath of the election of Ian Paisley's hard-line Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) as the main unionist party, Jeffery Donaldson, the anti-Agreement Unionist, joined the DUP from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). Two other

key supporters followed him, taking the DUP assembly membership total to 33 seats compared to the UUP's 24. This adds to the crisis facing the Good Friday Agreement as Unionism turns increasingly hard line.

Barron report

In early December, the Dublin government published part of the Barron report. The interim report of the Barron Inquiry into the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings points to collusion between agents of the British armed forces and loyalists in the atrocity, which claimed 34 lives. The initial report stated that Barron could not say if there was collusion at the highest level, but that the British government had certainly thwarted any proper investigation into the bombings at the time and since, and had failed to co-operate fully with the present inquiry.

Several reports published since the end of last year have detailed widespread collusion between the British government

by Canadian Judge Peter Cory. Cory had been asked to investigate the allegations of British state collusion with a number of killings including those of human rights lawyers Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson and the killing of Catholic Robert Hamill. Blair had previously promised to publish the reports but with elections looming in November their publication was postponed; they still have not appeared. In mid-January Judge Cory went over Blair's head to contact the families directly concerned advising them that he recommended full public inquiries. Cory described the British government's attempts to keep them in the dark as 'unfair and cruel'. The family of Pat Finucane have sought a judicial review in the High Court to force the British government to publish the Cory findings.

On 19 January a further report condemned the Royal Ulster Constabulary investigation into the murder of Catholic



Street graffiti on the Shankill Road, Belfast

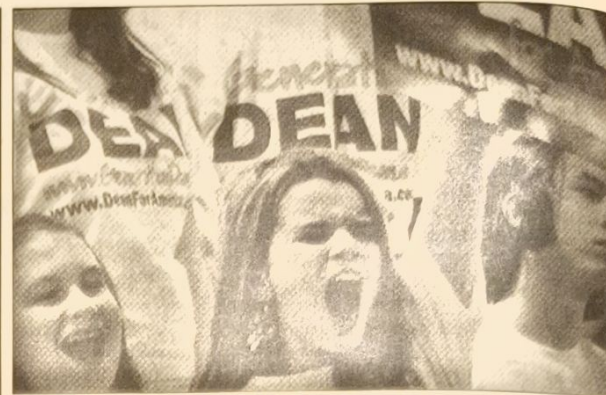
and loyalist death squads' campaign to terrorise Irish republicans and the wider Catholic community in the Six Counties. In October the British government refused to publish the findings and recommendations of a report into British collusion

Sean Brown in May 1997 as 'appalling and unprofessional' with 'serious and unexplained failures'. The report, by police ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, stated that the RUC 'had made no real effort to track down the killers'.

The review of the Good Friday Agreement is due to start on 3 February. The only movement of significance since the November election has been yet another sop to Unionism when the British government established a so-called Independent Monitoring Commission in January which is the only part of the two governments' April 2003 Joint Declaration to be implemented. The Commission will focus almost entirely on Republican armed groups and will ignore the ongoing loyalist campaign of violence. As we argued in FRFI 176: 'A review of the Good Friday Agreement in the next period will attempt to wrest further concessions from Sinn Féin to appease Unionists and the British government.' This remains the case.

Sinn Féin remains completely tied to the Good Friday Agreement. There is quite simply nowhere else for them to go. The immediate political future will be one of ongoing loyalist attacks on nationalists. Faced with this and continued assembly suspension Sinn Féin's strategy amounts to being reliant on the 'good faith and commitment' of Tony Blair and British imperialism. The Unionist veto remains firmly at the heart of the northern statelet. The DUP is now setting the political agenda of the north. The pace of any future 'progress' will be dependent on the racist bigot Ian Paisley.

Faced with this harsh reality and the obvious implications for the Republican strategy, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has opted for some wishful thinking. Speaking in Belfast on 27 January he said: 'The review will not be a renegotiation of the Good Friday Agreement but it is an opportunity to accelerate the process of change promised in the Agreement'. The 'acceleration of change' will be assessed on the streets by the most oppressed and the victims of state discrimination and loyalist terror. The real acceleration of change will not occur within the failed structure of British rule in Ireland but within the republican movement itself. Having endured generations of the Orange/Unionist veto the question for nationalists then becomes how long will the present consensus endure and where are the forces emerging from to defend the nationalist working class from loyalist attack? ■



Presidential election time in the US: it's time to win votes

Bush plans racist immigration reform in the US

DALTON HILLIARD

It is a presidential election year in the United States, which means the spectre of false immigration reform is once again on the horizon.

On 7 January President George W Bush, acting 'out of common sense and fairness' and flanked by anointed leaders of the Latino community, introduced his version of a guest-worker programme.

The proposal is similar in many respects to an earlier US guest-worker proposal profiled in FRFI 174. Undocumented workers, for a fee, would win the opportunity to spend short stints of low-wage servitude in the United States, before being forced back to their countries of origin. The plan satisfies with comparable grace those two important forces of reaction, capital and racism. The plan caters to capital, on the one side, by ensuring the workers will be uprooted every three years, thereby guaranteeing the continued existence of a permanently disorganised source of inexpensive labour. As Bush intoned, 'Our nation needs an immigration system that serves the American economy' - 'the economy' referring, as usual, to profit margins inflated by forcing down the price of labour.

The plan equally satisfies the unnamed but pervasive coal-

ition to Keep America White, by explicitly rejecting any path to citizenship or permanent legal residency for 'guest workers'.

The 'immigration reform plan' is a central part of Bush's re-election bid - to put on a 'compassionate conservative' face and bamboozle the fast-growing Latino voting population into thinking there's something positive about this sort of immigration reform.

This strategy is no easy task, considering the exploitation encouraged by the plan. Its success is contingent on a sophisticated public relations campaign. With every new guest-worker plan, several dozen reactionary Latino community leaders and politicians, an inordinate number of whom are Cuban-Americans, flood Spanish TV stations to praise this day of justice for immigrants. In fact, these politicians are on the right wing of the Republican Party, but they have names like Sanchez and Gonzalez.

The Bush proposal adds a new element to previous guest-worker proposals: indenture. Guest-worker status would be tied to a specific offer of employment. For undocumented immigrants, this means that the only path to obtaining some sort of recognised status - without which drivers' licences, health insurance and other basic necessities are unattainable - is to remain in the good graces of a sponsoring employer. If, by some chance, wages or working conditions under that sponsoring employer are unacceptable, the worker faces deportation as an alternative. This monopoly of access to an immigrant's labour means the employer benefits from the full machinery of the state's immigration police as a tool for dominance and intimidation.

The whole arrangement bears a strong resemblance to the approach to immigration of several oil-producing Arabic deserts, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is completely dependent on imported labour for manual production. For decades linking immigrant employment to specific employer-sponsors has allowed the UAE to wield the club of deportation to disrupt attempts at organizing, keeping the price of labour abominably low across the whole market.

The intentions for the US plan are similar. ■

The Socialist Environmental Alliance: The SWP and Partition of Ireland

PAUL MALLON

On 14 February a left convention will meet in Derry to discuss a joint electoral pact for the pending June European elections. The invitation to the convention circulated by the Socialist Environmental Alliance (SEA) 'envisages an electoral alliance of different parties, campaigning groups and individuals offering voters a radical, anti-sectarian alternative to parties based on one or the other of the two communities'.

Such a 'radical alliance' in fact is nothing new. What unites

them is their refusal to fight against the partition of Ireland and directly confront imperialism in Ireland. Long-standing Socialist Workers Party (SWP) member Eamonn McCann will stand on the SEA platform. The 'broad alliance' will not be extended to those anti-imperialists, socialists and republicans who oppose partition and regard British imperialism, as the primary cause of the conflict. The SEA describes those who oppose partition as 'sectarians'.

The core of the SEA is the SWP in Ireland. The SEA stood McCann in last November's elections to the Stormont Assembly;

he polled 2,257 votes (5.5% of the vote). McCann later said in *Socialist Worker* (6 December 2003): 'We regard class divisions, not community differences between Protestant and Catholics, as the defining characteristic of our society'. For the SWP ambivalence towards the partition of Ireland and the role of British imperialism is part of its history. In 1969 the SWP supported the Labour Party sending troops in to the Six Counties believing then as they do now that imperialism can play a progressive role.

British imperialism created and maintains the division and split between the Catholic and

Protestant working class. The social deprivation/poverty map reflects the sectarian character of the northern statelet with almost 80% of the top 50 most deprived wards in the north being Catholic. According to the 2001 population census, unemployment rates for Catholics remain 1.8 times higher than Protestants. The October 2003 *Bare Necessities: Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland* report revealed 37% of Irish nationalist households live in poverty compared to 25% of households who view themselves as British. To campaign for better conditions for the

working class it is absolutely essential to fight British imperialism. In contrast, McCann and the SEA wish to see a middle road of reform that maintains their privileged position, and so they imply that British imperialism can play a progressive role in Ireland and reform the reactionary loyalist state. This can never be the case: British imperialism in Ireland has always been reactionary and always will be. There can be no progress in unifying the working class without destroying that which divides it: partition and British occupation of the North. ■

Imperialists target Nepal

ANDREW ALEXANDER

Pressure against the people's war in Nepal has escalated with a recent incursion into the country by Indian forces who burned and looted homes of suspected Maoists. This confrontation is a direct result of the frequent attacks against the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), including:

- 1 December in Kailali, 15 RNA soldiers killed in a lengthy battle
- 4 December in Morang, four mercenaries killed
- 13 December in the western region, 10 RNA soldiers killed by mines
- 14 December, 14 members of the Armed Police Force ambushed and killed in the Mahottari district and ten security personnel killed in the Kapilvastu district.

The list goes on. Up to the middle of December a total of 287 security personnel, including the army and armed police, have died since the breakdown of the ceasefire on 27 August 2003.

In addition to the continuing clashes with the army, there has also been a rise in strike action. On 3 January a strike called by ANNISU, the student wing of the Maoist rebels, brought life in the Mechi and Koshi zones to a standstill, causing major disruption to travel and closure of shops in the major cities, affecting nearly 1.6 million students. ANNISU announced the strike to demand that the government make public the whereabouts of some of their comrades who have gone missing. To coincide with this, the banned All Nepal Women's Organisation (ANWO) has called a countrywide general strike on 8 March, International Women's Day. ANWO's chair emphasised the building of 'model villages free of the oppression of women in the liberated areas', where women have equal rights in property, politics and every sphere of society, and called for greater participation by women in the local revolutionary people's governments.

The feudal government continues to act with indecision in dealing with the deepening crisis. On the one hand they have extended their assaults by continuing their brutal policy of collective punishment: RNA soldiers are told to kill 10 Maoists to every soldier/policeman killed. The reality is that the majority of those killed are not Maoist guerrillas but non-combatant peasants who refuse to give information about the Maoists.

However, because of increasing desperation the government has introduced a 'surrender and amnesty' policy, assuring security, jobs, and other offers to those who surrender. Communications Minister Kamal Thapa stated that 'the government will provide certain "financial aid" to those who will help seize weapons, explosives and other sensitive materials', adding that 'their identities will be kept secret'. Free medical treatment, education, employment and loans to start businesses were also offered. The government also claimed it

will later on grant full freedom to them, allowing them to follow any political ideology they believe in!

In the absence of a bourgeois parliament the monarchy has had to openly resort to such direct tactics to split the movement. They will be unlikely to fool the majority of the Nepalese people who have experienced the naked brutality of the King's army and police. The reality has been the opposite - increased desertion from the police and army to the People's Liberation Army.

In response to these events



Christina Rocca, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, went to Nepal on 16 December 2003 for a four-day visit where she met with both the King and Prime Minister to discuss 'security issues'. Rocca, who reports directly to Colin Powell the US Secretary of State, arrived with pledges of continued US assistance to fight the Maoist insurgency. She arrived amid a huge cross-party counter-demonstration outside the Royal Palace. It was her first visit to Nepal since Washington decided to freeze Maoist assets in the US after declaring the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) a terrorist organisation.

The British Labour government has also intensified its pressure by approving 'big increases in the sales of arms to Nepal where security forces are fighting Maoists,' *The Guardian* said. 'Last year, Britain provided Nepal with two military helicopters with funds from its "conflict prevention" fund,' the paper added. The British government has also agreed to provide two STOL (Short Take-off and Landing) aircraft to the RNA as a grant assistance under its Global Conflict Prevention Pool. Israel has also managed to get itself a slice of the pie. They have sold the RNA high-tech infra-red surveillance devices which have been fitted to their helicopters and will considerably help



monitor Maoist activity on the ground.

Despite the recent incursion India claims that it has a 'non-interference policy'. The Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha recently said 'we never impose our views on Nepal. India and Nepal are two of the closest neighbours and we give friendly advice to Nepal only when we are asked or if it is very essential.' Well, we can determine then that Delhi considers the situation as critical, for he went on to state 'we feel concerned about Nepal's Maoist problem, if we encourage Nepali Maoists, then we would be encouraging Maoist Communist Centre and People's War Group (the two main Maoist organisations in India). It's not in India's interests... we need energy and Nepal can produce energy.'

The Indian government continues to incarcerate Chandra Prakash Gajurel, a political bur-

eau member of the CPN, on trumped up charges of having insufficient travel documents. Furthermore, India has been continuing its military support to the Nepalese government with a supply of over 1 million 5.56 calibre bullets for modern rifles to Nepal. Indian Special Forces have also arrived in Nepal with military supplies to provide counter-insurgency training to the RNA.

This intensification of the war against the Nepalese people is being continued by the imperialist countries. Yet despite this joint aggression, the rebels are still making steady gains.

Victory to the Nepalese revolution!

Sources and quotes used in this article were taken from the *Maoist Information Bulletin*, *Nepal News*, *A World to Win* News Service, the BBC World Service and *The Himalayan Times*.

FRFI and The World People's Resistance Movement will be holding a joint meeting to discuss the history and developments in Nepal on Wednesday 18 February at 7pm. Room S78, St Clement's Building, Houghton St, London School of Economics, Kingsway, WC2. Near tube Holborn.

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or tel 020 7837 1688.

Bolivia: battleground against imperialism

FIONA DONOVAN

Millionaire Carlos Mesa has been President of Bolivia for three months, during which time he has broken every promise that he made in his first few days of office following the huge popular uprising in September/October that overthrew the Sanchez de Lozada administration. Mesa swiftly abandoned his declaration that he would call elections rapidly and he has since vowed to stay in post until 2007. The mass movements of Bolivia's poor and disenfranchised, the majority of the population, did not take long to recognise Mesa's administration as a continuation of the preceding neoliberal governments they fought so long and hard. A split has occurred, however, in the movement concerning how to eradicate and reverse the neoliberal policies that have afflicted and impoverished most Bolivians since 1985.

The 'gas war', the label given to the people's October insurrection opposing the export of Bolivia's vast natural gas reserves to the US via Chile, has

economy. They will amount to 'blood, sweat and tears' for the people according to the Minister of Economic Development Xavier Nogales. Government ministers failed to secure financial help from the IMF, World Bank, US or other countries to alleviate the fiscal deficit, though assistance was offered in the form of advice to take even harsher measures than those already drawn up. The powerful institutions in Washington have decided that the Bolivian people must pay for the economic crisis, ultimately to service the external debt.

All the organisations involved in the last uprising have been vocal about their opposition to Mesa's administration and the way it is following the dictates of the US Embassy, but their strategies conflict. The leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Evo Morales, has given his full backing to the challenge to Chile. Morales is looking to the municipal elections in December to gain more of a stake in the government to influence reforms. He speaks strongly against imperialism and for national sovereignty and dignity, but aims to preserve 'dem-

coca growers, who form the bulk of the MAS rank and file, a peaceful road to participatory democracy on a national level must seem appealing but unlikely. Over the next few weeks, they may well join their Aymara brothers and sisters living on the Altiplano in another uprising, despite the warnings of Morales that this will bring about a military coup.

The majority of the workers and peasant movements are united to take democracy into their own hands. The leader of the national workers' union the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), miner Jaime Solares, has declared war, backed up by Roberto de la Cruz of the regional workers' union of El Alto. They are clear that the people must now take the power for themselves by force through revolution. Felipe Quispe, leader of the peasant federation (CSUTCB) and the Indigenous Pachacuti Movement (MIP), has expressed support. Mesa has given 90 days to attend to the people's demands; his failure has resulted in a determination to close the parliament and set up a Popular Assembly in its place, using the same principles as the one set up by the COB in 1970. On 22 January it was resolved in a mass meeting that if the government fails to implement at least 70% of the demands of a broad-based petition, a general strike will begin within 20 days, accompanied by widespread road blockades. El Alto looks set to lead the way. On 21 January 15,000 parents of El Alto marched on La Paz to demand more teachers and funding for education for their children. They promised greater pressure the next week. The poor neighbourhoods are united once to blockade roads, close the city and cut off vital routes to and from La Paz.

As the social movements prepare to paralyse the country in order to seize power they can be sure that the US is also getting ready to prevent this by any means. Bolivia is rich in natural resources and the US will not surrender those riches to the Bolivian people without a fight. Four US officials practically directed the Bolivian army during the last peoples' revolt. However, due to the threatened price and tax increases, more groups are pledging to join the uprising. This may also ignite sections of the police and military to rebel, as happened last year. Bolivia could soon become a battleground against imperialism.



taken on a new meaning. Mesa is demanding the return of land seized by Chile in 1879, and with it, the restoration of Bolivia's coastline so that it can export the gas to the US directly. This is in flagrant disregard of the wishes of the majority of the population who want to see Bolivians benefit from their own natural resources. It appears to be an attempt to focus the discontent away from the Bolivian government on to Chile. Patriotic (rightwing) youth organisations have been inspired to call for the dismissal of Mesa's Chancellor, Juan Ignacio Siles, because he was born in Chile.

Huge tax and price increases are being prepared for the end of January in order to tackle the severe crisis of Bolivia's

ocracy' to win the presidency in 2007 and form an alliance with other Latin American leaders, such as Hugo Chavez, to resist US domination and military intervention. For the embattled

Terror against Colombian trade unionists

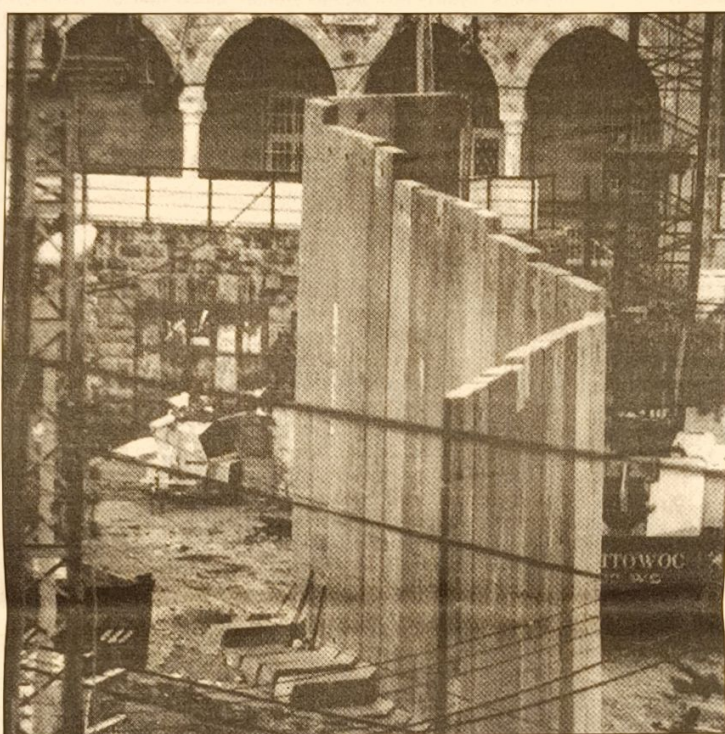
At least 72 organisers and activists from trade unions belonging to the Colombian trade union federation CUT were murdered during 2003. Colombia remains the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists: over 3,500 have been murdered over a 25-year period, 184 in 2002 alone. Across the world many trade unionists face attack and even death at the hands of squads funded by the bosses, but two-thirds of all such murders take place in Colombia. Amongst those gunned down by the fascists paramilitaries have been union activists at the Roman Bottling Company in Monteiro which bottle Coca-Cola.

Palestinians resist annihilation

The Palestinian resistance faces a severe challenge as the Zionist state accelerates the construction of the Apartheid Wall on the West Bank.

ROBERT CLOUGH reports.

OPPOSITE: JOE REAC uncovers how ethnic cleansing has been and remains an integral policy of the Zionist state.



dead including one man executed in cold blood; a week later the Israeli army re-entered the city, occupying its centre and the historic Kasbah. In a two-week frenzy of destruction, 20 Palestinians died, several of them school children shot in cold blood by Israeli snipers. Overall, in 2003:

- 882 Palestinians were killed (91 Israelis)
- 117 Palestinian children were murdered (20 Israeli children)
- 37 resistance fighters were assassinated by Zionist missile attacks or death squads

The bourgeois press deliberately obscures this disproportional casualty rate. Hence when Liberal Democrat MP Jenny Tonge made some quite anodyne and reasonable comments about why Palestinians are driven to become suicide bombers, the British press demanded her head on a plate – and Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy duly obliged. There was not the slightest attempt to explore the condition of the Palestinian people, or to set out the facts about the murderous Zionist occupation of the West Bank. Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin said that Palestinians were being forced 'to choose between annihilation and ourselves' and that 'we see the world is just watching passively while Israel is slaughtering us and demolishing our homes'. The Zionist response was to declare him a legitimate target for assassination.

In fact Sharon faces many difficulties in achieving his goal, not least of all the fact that he may be indicted on corruption charges from when he was foreign minister, involving kickbacks-

from a business friend who solicited his support for a construction project in Greece.

There is also resistance from within his Likud Party and from the settlers who will be removed from the Palestinian enclaves. This is expressed through a debate on the Zionist state's 'demographic problem': the fact that Jews may become a minority within a Greater Israel which stretches to the River Jordan. Within this debate, Benny Morris, a Zionist historian who has written candidly about the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948, has suggested that such steps may be necessary again in the future.

Meanwhile a leading Likud Knesset member Uzi Cohen has called for the 'transferring' of Palestinians to Jordan, and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu complained that 'if there is a demographic problem, and there is, it is with the Israeli Arabs who will remain Israeli citizens'. Backing him up, Dr Yitzhak Ravid, a senior researcher at Rafael, the Armament Development Authority, argued that the state should implement a stringent policy of family planning in relation to its Muslim population, saying the 'delivery rooms in Soroka hospital in Be'er Sheva have turned into a factory for the production of a backward population'.

With the Israeli economy still in deep crisis, Sharon faces serious problems in achieving his objectives. However, the seriousness of the situation facing the Palestinian people is such that we must redouble our efforts in their support.

**Victory to the Palestinian People!
No to the separation wall!**

Labour government defends Separation Wall

The British government has challenged the right of the international court of justice in the Hague to hold hearings into the legality of the Separation Wall. The UN General Assembly referred the construction of the wall to the court by 90 votes to eight with 74 abstentions (including Britain) for an advisory opinion on its legality. The hearing is due to start on 23 February. Now Britain has joined Australia in opposing the referral. Foreign Minister Lady Symons says it would 'serve to politicise the court in a way for which it was not intended'. This is obvious nonsense – any international court of justice is bound to arbitrate on political questions; there would be little other purpose for its existence.

Facility 1391



Facility 1391 – a unit so secret that the complex has been purged from every modern Israeli map and the road leading to it airbrushed from aerial photographs. Facility 1391, originally a fort built for the British army in the 1930s, was so secret that censors excised all mention of it from the Israeli media 'to prevent harm to the country's security'. Although it has been dubbed Israel's Guantanamo, far more is known about the US detention centre than about Facility 1391. Until recently, there were no photographs of Facility 1391. No one knows how many people are held there, or who has been held there, or for how long, or under what conditions. People just disappear into it. Even now, the Israeli government refuses to reveal anything substantial about it.

Such information as does exist has come from released prisoners who passed through it on their journey through the Zionists' vast detention network. The original detainees appear to have been foreign nationals – Egyptians, Syrians, Iranians, and particularly Lebanese. How many are held there is unknown. But 15 Arab foreign nationals have gone missing in Israel's prison system, including four Iranians kidnapped in Beirut in 1982. What finally led to the exposure of the unit was its use to house Palestinians detained during the huge invasions of the West Bank in

April 2002. Israeli human rights lawyers forced the government to admit to its existence when they pursued habeas corpus writs for the Palestinian detainees.

Detainees who have been held in Facility 1391 all speak of a regime of torture, the most common form of this being sensory deprivation. Held in cells with black walls and the dimmest of illumination, deprived of any contact with other detainees, refused any access to lawyers, denied access to any information, prisoners become completely disoriented. Other forms include sleep deprivation, exposure to extremes of temperature, and prolonged exposure to artificial light. Add to this actual physical torture, and prisoners develop a sense of dread, a feeling that no one knows where they are or cares. And physical torture is widespread: 58% of Palestinian prisoners have reported overt violence including beatings, kickings, partial strangulation and position abuse – being tied in painful contorted positions. Ex-Facility 1391 detainees have reported being sexually assaulted with sticks or wooden batons.

Facility 1391 may not be the only secret detention centre. Prisoners speak of another such unit near Haifa; with 70 heavily fortified police stations built during the British mandate, there is no shortage of locations.

Jimmy German

Right to return for the Palestinians

As Zionists debate their supposed 'demographic problem' and Sharon plans to complete the cantonisation of the West Bank, the right of return for Palestinian refugees remains the most important issue in the Palestinian struggle for justice. Israel's whole existence depends on the continued dispossession of the Palestinian people, and a continued rejection of their right to return.

The first Zionists

There are currently 3.9 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN and a further 4.5 million scattered around the borders of their homeland. They are refugees because they were expelled from their ancestral homeland by the Zionists in order to set up and expand the state of Israel. Zionists aim to have a racially pure state of Jews in Israel. From the outset they intended to purge Palestine of its indigenous population. As early as 1895 Theodor Herzl wrote 'we shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border'. In 1919 Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the World Zionist Organisation (WZO), along with other leading Zionists, attended the Paris Peace Conference, to discuss the transfer of the Palestinians to Iraq. Iraq was persistently favoured as the final destination for the Palestinians for two reasons. First, the Zionists wanted to get rid of the Palestinians as far as possible from Israel's borders, but second, many Zionists claimed, and still do, that Eretz Israel includes parts of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt and they did not wish to do the job of ethnic cleansing twice.

Ethnic cleansing

The project to transfer, cleanse, evacuate, expel the Palestinians out of Palestine was continuously planned and promoted yet obscured. In 1931 Weizmann warned against 'the world knowing about an attempt to expel the Arabs from Palestine', but he joined David Ben Gurion (who became Israel's first Prime Minister) at a round table conference in London to suggest a figure of £10 million to transfer 100,000 Palestinian families (around 600,000 people) to Iraq.

In 1937, 1944 and 1948 transfer committees were set up for the sole purpose of ethnically cleansing the Palestinians. All the leading Zionists participated - Ben Gurion, Weizmann, Yosef Weitz (a dedicated and energetic proponent of ethnic cleansing in the Jewish National Fund). Also represented on these committees were all the leading Zionist organisations - WZO, New Zionist Organisation (NZO), Jabotinsky's Revisionists, later transformed into Likud, Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund and so on.

Two important proposals were put forward by individual Zionists: Edward Norman (an American) and Ben Horin. The Norman Plan, formulated

between 1935 and 1948, was very detailed about the transfer of 1.2 million Palestinians to Iraq, literally emptying all mandatory Palestine of Palestinians. Norman had the support of all the leading Zionists and Zionist organisations, and the financial backing of Baron de Rothschild, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, Felix Warburg and many more. Norman acknowledged that 'Jewish colonisation entailed taking over Palestine without the consent of the indigenous population' reckoning that 'if the Arabs are forced out as a result of Jewish pressure, they will go with ill will and will cherish enmity towards the Jews that will persist for generations and would render the Jewish homeland precarious'.

Ben Horin was a close associate of Vladimir Jabotinsky, and together they broke away from the WZO and formed the NZO. Horin suggested that 'the Arabs of Palestine and Transjordan be transferred to Iraq or a united Iraq-Syria state'. He wrote a book called *Middle East: Crossroads of History* that became the basis for the plan of US President Herbert Hoover, launched in 1945 in the *New York Telegram*. Its aim: 'to clear Palestine completely for a large Jewish immigration and colonisation'. US Supreme Court Justice and Presidential Advisor Felix Frankfurter (an avid Zionist and legal advisor at the Paris Peace Conference) ensured that White House backing was forthcoming.

Zionist expansion

Zionists considered numerous partition plans, such as the Peel partition plan of 1937 and the UN partition plan of 1947, to be temporary. Weizmann told the British High Commissioner: 'We shall expand this whole country in time and this is only an arrangement for the next 20-25 years.' Relentless pursuit of Zionist goals led Weizmann, in 1937, to tell the pro-Zionist British Colonial Secretary, Ormsby Gore, 'success in Palestine depends on the British government transferring the Arab population. The transfer could only be done by the British and not the Jews'. Rejection by the British prompted Ben Gurion to write: 'We must prepare ourselves to carry out this transfer.'

All Zionists agreed on the policy of transfer, but debate ensued over whether it should be voluntary or compulsory. 'Voluntary' meant only the agreement of the proposed host country to accept the transferees. In 1938 the Jewish Agency held a vote on the issue: most favoured collective forced removal, which was eventually carried out.

The responsibility of the British

Responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy clearly lies with successive British governments. Without British support the Zionist project would not have succeeded. They ensured that the Zionists got a foothold and established themselves in Palestine, and



offered protection. The Palestinians rapidly felt threatened by the influx of Europeans and rebelled, but British forces guaranteed Zionist success, ruthlessly suppressing resistance. This prolonged state of affairs culminated in the General Strike of 1936-1939 in which 5,000 Palestinians were killed and 20,000 seriously injured. The Palestinian people were mercilessly crushed, disarmed and exhausted by the British, enabling the Zionists to expand their aims.

By 1948 the Zionists were ready for war. The British estimated that the Haganah (Israeli army) had 35,000 armed men (14,500 trained by the British), and 40,000 paramilitary settlers. There were also 25,000 Jewish Brigade soldiers, professionals who fought with the allies in the Second World War, and some 10,000 irregulars. They were heavily armed. The Zionists had a fledgling arms industry that sold £33 million worth of arms to the British during the War - guns, anti-tank weapons, mortars, grenades etc.

From 1945 the Jewish Agency embarked on a programme of buying entire weapons manufacturing plants as war scrap from the US, which they smuggled into Palestine and installed into heavily-populated Jewish areas, constructing armoured personnel carriers and light artillery. They bought fighter planes from the British and the Czechs, as well as munitions by the boatload. The number of armed Arabs was just 25,000, 10,000 of whom were Palestinians and only a quarter of these were trained. Money, overwhelming power and Western sophistication pitted against a largely peasant people with virtually nothing but their spirit and a token semblance of arms.

By early May 1948 (Israel declared independence on May 15 1948) the Zionists had already expelled 200,000 Palestinians under the eyes of the British mandate forces. When the British left they handed vital strategic towns and positions to the Zionists, leaving the Palestinians to the mercy of the Zionists. By June 1948 a further

190,000 Palestinians had been driven out, 85% of which was a direct result of Haganah military action.

Massacre

By 1949 over 700,000 Palestinians had been made refugees. Meir Pail, the Israeli historian of the Haganah estimates that a third were forced out by direct military action, a third fled out of fear, and the remainder were 'encouraged' to flee by Zionist psychological warfare. The Deir Yassin massacre on April 9 1949 served as a warning to those Palestinians who wanted to remain; it was well documented by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the British Police in Palestine.

The massacre was committed by the Irgun terrorists of Menachim Begin (Prime Minister of Israel 1977-1984) and the terrorist Stern Gang of Yitzhak Shamir (Prime Minister of Israel 1986-1992). The Haganah supplied weaponry and the Palmach (commandos) gave artillery support. Jacques de Rainier of ICRC walked in soon after the Irgun/Stern Gang 'clean up' that 'had been done with machine guns, then grenades and finished off with knives...'. He found a little girl of ten, mutilated by a hand grenade, but still alive. The 'horrible sight' was meticulously recorded by the British authorities and the details observed by Assistant Inspector General Richard Cutling: 'women had bracelets torn from their arms and rings from their fingers, and part of the women's ears were severed to remove earrings.'

The few survivors relayed their ordeal to the British authorities: 'families had been lined up and shot down in a barrage of machine gun fire; young girls raped; a pregnant mother was first slaughtered and then had her stomach cut open with a butcher's knife; a girl who tried to remove the unborn child from the woman's womb was shot down.' Others were literally cut to pieces with cutlasses. Today Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial, backs onto Deir Yassin. Although the perpetrators of this hideous crime are known to the Israeli authorities, no one has ever been charged. The Stern Gang held a press conference to broadcast their massacre of 254 Palestinians.

Many other massacres took place; among the worst were Ayn Zaytun, Hula, Ilabun, Tantura, Saliha, Sasa, Safsaf, Al Dawayma etc. In Al Dawayma Moshe Dayan's (later Israeli Defence Minister and Foreign Secretary) battalion overran the village as Israeli soldiers testified: 'The children they killed by breaking their heads with sticks. There was not a house without its dead... One soldier boasted that he had raped a woman and then shot her.' Over 80 villagers were massacred.

Israeli historians reveal over 120 lesser massacres took place and that at the end of every battle a massacre was perpetrated against the Palestinians. A common tactic used by the Israelis was to surround a village on three sides, enter the village, round up the villagers and in cold blood shoot one or two of them, whereupon those remaining would run for their lives from the open exit. Other methods employed were harassment, the burning and destruction of crops and finally the total destruction of villages to make sure the villagers had nothing to come back to. Over 418 villages were razed.

Plan Dalet

All these horrors played a decisive accelerating factor in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Many people left, fearing they would become the new Deir Yassin. As Begin put it: 'Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of "Irgun butchery" were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives...[of] Arabs who lived on the

present territory of the state of Israel, only some 165,000 are still there... The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated.'

This then was Plan Dalet, prepared in 1944 and finalised in 1948. At all levels of Zionist decision making it was understood that the objective was a Jewish state with the least possible number of Arabs remaining: 'expulsion over the borders of the local Arab population in the event of opposition to our attacks... the defence of contiguous Jewish settlements in Arab bases, including the "temporary" capture of Arab bases on the other side of the border.' In other words annexation of Arab designated territory.

Plan to reorganise Middle East

After 1949 the Israelis continued their obsessive cleansing of Palestine. In 1950 Ben Gurion authorised the expulsion of the remaining 2,700 Arab inhabitants from the town of Al Majdal, now Ashkelon. Pre-1948 Al Majdal was a thriving community of 10,000. Moshe Dayan directed the operation. Between 1949 and 1953 the Bedouin tribespeople of the Negev suffered the same fate, 17,000 of them were expelled. In fact out of an estimated pre-war population of 75,000 Bedouins only 13,000 remained by 1951. In 1953 it was reported in the UN that 7,000 Bedouins had been forcefully removed from Israel.

In 1956, as Britain, France and Israel secretly colluded to smash Egypt and its President Nasser for nationalising the Suez Canal, Ben Gurion proposed to his co-conspirators a 'fantastic' comprehensive plan for the reorganisation of the Middle East. It entailed Israel annexing Lebanon up to the Litani river, the Sinai Peninsula, and dividing Jordan with Iraq, providing Iraq agreed to take all the Palestinian refugees and make peace with Israel. The US thwarted the plan. However, Yitzhak Rabin (Israeli Prime Minister 1992-1995) commander of forces in northern Israel was able to boast later: 'I solved one problem in the north by exploiting the fighting against the Egyptians... and we transferred 2,000 Arabs... across the Jordan River into Syria.' In July 1948, under direct orders from Ben Gurion to expel the Palestinians en masse from Lydda and Ramla, the Oslo Agreement co-signatory directed the expulsion of over 50,000 Palestinians. During this operation a massacre occurred in Lydda in which 250 Palestinians were murdered and a further 350 died on the march into exile.

'We have taken their country'

The ethnic cleansing continues to this day. The Palestinian people have had to endure a slow burn massacre for over 55 years, harassed, murdered and uprooted - in some cases up to four times. Israel's insatiable appetite for cruelty and expansion knows no frontiers.

Nahum Goldman (head of the Jewish World Congress) in his book *The Jewish Paradox* cites a letter from Ben Gurion: 'If I were an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: We have taken their country. Sure God promised it to us. We came from Israel 2,000 years ago and what is that to them? Our God is not their God. There has been anti-Semitism, Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz - but that was not their fault. They see one thing - we came here and stole their country.'

The Zionist state, then, was founded on the forcible expulsion of the Palestinian people; many Zionists openly talk today of the need for further ethnic cleansing to safeguard the Jewish character of the Zionist state. There can be no settlement of the Palestinian question unless the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to the homes from which they were so brutally driven is recognised and put into effect.

Joe Reac

The class struggle in Venezuela

The failure of both the US-backed military coup against President Chavez's democratic government in April 2002 and the economic lockout by the employers and oil corporation managers at the turn of 2003 has demoralised the rich and their friends in Venezuela. For the moment they are pressing their third option to shorten President Chavez's period in office by a referendum made possible by the new democratic constitution that they want to destroy! Legal methods are a secondary resort of a cynical and corrupt Venezuelan business elite in retreat. They hope that the damage they have done to the economy, along with their massive media campaign, will remove President Chavez from office, allowing them to recoup their losses at the expense of the poor. Pressure by the US at all levels to carry through this campaign has been intense. **ALVARO MICHAELS** reports on the reactionary manoeuvres of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie.

The deadline for the collection of enough signatures for the National Electoral Council to call a referendum passed on 19 January. A battle is now taking place over the validity of many signatures, including those of the middle classes living abroad. On 25 January Jimmy Carter's 'peace' circus arrived to meet the government and opposition groups to discuss an accord to 'resolve the crisis'. This insolent visit suggested that a democratically elected government should give way to the demands of its defeated opponents, *Alianza Cívica*. If fraudulent signatures are found and removed and the referendum is not implemented, the government's opponents will undoubtedly return to violence. Already the US government is threatening the Venezuelan government, using website warnings to US citizens of a likely bombing campaign by dissenters in Caracas.

On 9 January frustrated US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice pressed for a referendum, whilst accusing Chavez of fomenting unrest in neighbouring countries. Certainly the refusal to privatise Venezuela's oil has been an example to Bolivia, where US attempts to seize natural gas have been thwarted. At the Monterrey Conference of Latin American States on 12/13 January, President Chavez applauded the nationalisation of Mexican oil 66 years ago. He praised the Catholic bishops for their declaration of support for the poor 25 years ago, praised US President Roosevelt's New Deal and JK Galbraith's work on the contrast between public poverty and private wealth. He showed how, in the ten years since the Free Trade Area of the Americas was proposed, there has been a 2.6% annual growth rate in the number of Latin Americans living in poverty, from 201 million to 227 million. In short, he stood as a progressive, demanding a new moral architecture in Latin America, where 10-15% of foreign debt should be moved to a 'human fund', whilst his domestic opponents and the US demand freedom to plunder Venezuela.

The economy

The economy contracted 9% last year because of the employers' lockout, causing some 5,000 companies to fail. An IMF scare story suggests a further 17% fall this year. Presently unemployment is at the same level it was when Chavez was first elected President, 18%. But President Chavez has wasted no time taking the offen-

sive against his opponents. The president has criss-crossed Venezuela urging supporters to organise local referendums to remove opposition legislators. To counter this, *Alianza Cívica* demands simultaneous elections for all posts. Measures to tighten control over the barrage of shameless anti-government slander by the millionaire communications industry are proposed.

With strict controls on foreign exchange to stem capital flight, the opposition bleats that this is intended to punish them for their role in the strike. The government has told the Central Bank to allow the use of all exchange rate adjustment gains to be used for social goals, and further demanded that \$1 billion of reserves be used to support agricultural investment on newly allocated lands.

What Chavez has achieved

When President Chavez took office, 45% of households had no daily access to safe water and 27% had no sewage facilities. At least one person in 44% of all households had a chronic illness. There was one hospital bed per 585 residents, mostly accessible only to the wealthy. 13% of the country's youth, nearly all from the poor sector, were not attending school. The dropout rate was 69%. In 1998, a total of 44% of children were excluded from the education system.

Since Chavez became president, three million people have received drinking water for the first time and one million have received sewage services. 20,000 new homes have been built and another 10,000 rebuilt by the *Avispa* and *Reviba* military programmes. Federal spending on education more than doubled in Chavez's first two years: more than one million children were integrated into the education system; kindergarten enrolment tripled; nearly 700 new schools were built, over 2,000 were reconstructed, and 36,000 new teachers were employed.

The Bolivarian school model was established in 3,000 schools, bringing two meals a day, art, sports and recreation to many children's daily lives. One million people are being taught to read and write under the Mission Robinson project in which dropouts will get a second chance at finishing high school. Two new Bolivarian public universities will open by this spring and others will follow, offering tens of thousands of scholarships to the underprivileged.

Hundreds of thousands of poor people are being attended to by vol-



unteer Cuban doctors through the *Barrio Adentro* programme, providing one doctor per 200 families in slums where no medical facilities ever existed before. The number of doctors throughout the nation has increased by 48 per 1,000 residents and life expectancy has risen by nine months. The new *Proyecto Simoncito* gives support to women and infants from pregnancy to pre-school; infant mortality and undernourishment dropped significantly. Three new metro lines, three freeways, a railway line, a second bridge over the Orinoco river, the Caruachi dam, a giant aqueduct, and a second heavy oil refinery are under construction, creating tens of thousands of jobs. Thirteen cultural centres were built around the nation and the Caracas Theatre was reopened. 243 Info-centers – computer salons with high-speed internet services – were installed in libraries, museums, city halls and NGO offices.

The struggle with the large landowners

With the complicity of previous governments, the big landowners appropriated millions of hectares, with the result that Venezuela now imports 70% of its food. The owners of Polar beer (the largest company after petrol) import all their hops from the US. Tinned sweetcorn is imported. This situation benefits big importers and disadvantages the poorer sections of the economy, especially smallholders.

On 13 November 2001 a Land Law was passed aiming to guarantee food

supplies by boosting domestic production. It affects only unused land, which it either taxes or expropriates. It forbids any individual from owning more than 5,000 hectares and plans to repossess many acres of illegally occupied state land, redistributing all of it to landless workers, principally through the formation of co-operatives.

A mere 1.7% of the population owned 74% of arable land. The National Land Institute (INTI) was created on 8 January 2002 to enact the land reforms. Pressure by big landowners meant little progress. On 4 May the Urachiche and Camunare Rojo land committees requested and received 665 hectares of fallow land stolen from the former National Agrarian Institute by the Bolmer and Azleca families (tied to the family of the state's opposition governor, Eduardo Lapi). The governor ordered the *pantaneros*, regional police hard-

forms have begun to return parts of enormous, barely used land-holdings to poor landless peasants, encouraging them to grow their own food and build working communities.

In the Santa Lucía section of the Santa Catalina estate (which belonged to the Central Matilde sugar consortium), 600 people received 540 hectares on 3 May 2003, plus 170m bolivars (\$106,300) and a tractor, and sowed 170 hectares. 'Armed men attacked us on 20 July; they burnt a truck and a car, beat two people up, and poured petrol over them,' says Zapata, one of the co-operative's leaders.

INTI handed 31,700 hectares to 500 families in Curito Mapurital (Barinas State). The Táchira State Cattle Raisers Association and Chamber of Commerce reacted furiously: 'The law... imposes state control and ignores the right to property, which is a fundamental human right'. They claimed taxation of uncultivated lands was unconstitutional and based on Castro's communist ideas.

Elsewhere there are extermination groups in the landowners' pay, especially in the states of Zulia, Barinas, Táchira and Apure. More than 120 campesinos have been murdered since 1999. Twelve people were murdered in Portuguesa State, including local land committee organiser Jacinto Mendoza, in front of the INTI offices. When arrested, the intermediary who recruited the contract killers said he received eight million bolivars (\$5,000) from Omar Contreras Barboza, ex-minister of agriculture under exiled ex-president Pérez.

In March, the daily *El Universal* accused community leader Jorge Nieves of being an Apure region commandante of the supposed Bolivarian Liberation Front (FBL), said to be the armed wing of the Bolivarian Revolution. A month later he was shot down in the centre of Guasdalito.

The 1999 Constitution

The new constitution is the most democratic ever conceived in Venezuela. It was approved by referendum. Parliament now has priority over the executive, accused are now assumed innocent until proven guilty and the armed forces have the vote. The underlying principles are: 1) Nullification of treaties, pacts or concessions that diminish the country's integrity. 2) Property rights will be respected, but with economic planning to assure balanced development. 3) Dogmatic extremes are rejected, with a balance between the state and market, public and private interest, and national and international factors, but must strengthen the autonomy of the country. 4) A new Supreme Court of Justice is to be created. 5) Ethnic and cultural diversity is recognised. 6) The right to 'true' information, the rights of all religions, the possibility of abortion are included.

The bourgeoisie hates this constitution. All elected officials must give an annual account of their work. 5% of citizens can require a referendum on sacking individual officers, or an investigation into complaints. Legislators cannot own or manage any business and no longer have judicial immunity. Far-reaching social security and labour benefits and a 44-hour working week have been included. Many police are violently opposed to restrictions on their abuse of workers.

The Chavez presidency and the movement that supports him are waging class war. Their defiance of imperialism and its Venezuelan allies greatly encourages the Latin American masses. In Venezuela we can see a road to victory being opened up. We must support the achievements of the Chavez government and oppose every effort by the US, British and other imperialist ruling classes to defeat the government, destroy the gains made and turn the people back. ■

Cuban doctors bring hope to Venezuela's barrios

In recent months, Cuba has strengthened agreements made with the Venezuelan government, aimed at improving the living conditions of the Venezuelan working class through social projects ranging from free sports training to a massive literacy campaign. One of the most impressive contributions has been in health care, which the Chavez government aims to revolutionise by providing virtually free medical care via local clinics, with the help of thousands of Cuban specialists. Cubans are involved in similar campaigns from Honduras to Argentina; perhaps it is this solidarity that US Secretary of State Colin Powell was referring to in January when he hypocritically attacked Cuba for so-called attempts to 'destabilise parts of the region' and 'create discontent'. **JUANJO RIVAS** reports on the Cuban internationalist mission in Venezuela.

In 1999 the Chavez government approved one of the world's most progressive constitutions that challenges the problems of a country exhausted by poverty, foreign intervention, illiteracy, infant mortality and corruption. Fine words on paper have been backed by concrete programmes, including:

- the nationalisation of basic resources;
- \$1.5 million targeted on tackling illiteracy;
- the creation of cooperatives of small producers;
- widespread construction of affordable housing;
- a new subway and railway systems in seven cities;
- a modern medical centre for treatment of congenital heart diseases.

The new plan, called *Barrio Adentro* (Inside the Neighbourhood), is intended to reach deprived areas where the reactionary Venezuelan Medical Federation (VMF) refuses to serve. Many VMF members used to bribe the authorities to avoid serving in rural areas – as they are obliged to do after graduating from the medical school – gravitating instead towards lucrative specialities like plastic surgery. *Barrio Adentro* was launched in spring 2003 in the Libertador municipality of Caracas, with the involvement of dozens of Cuban internationalists. By June there were 1,000 working in and around Caracas and by the end of 2003 the number operating in poor working class areas had doubled. This successful initiative will mean thousands of Cuban doctors offering a free health service from Carabobo to the mountainous northwest of Venezuela.

The vast majority of the Cuban doctors volunteering in Venezuela have served on at least one previous internationalist mission in the Caribbean, Africa or Latin America. They work in small clinics in the morning and, as part of a development of the programme called *Bloque Adentro* (Inside the Block), make house-

to-house visits in the afternoon to get first-hand experience of living conditions and health problems in a specific area, practising preventive medicine. They are offered accommodation and the community knows how to contact them at any time, including nights and weekends, free of charge.

The Venezuelan bourgeoisie is using big business dailies like *El Universal*, together with right-wing private TV stations, to wage a virulent campaign against the programme. The VMF has denounced *Barrio Adentro*, asking the courts to ban the foreign doctors from practising and arguing that rather than medical experts these are 'Castro's agents' who aim to indoctrinate the poor, 'proselytising' to them with communist propaganda. They also claim that the Cubans are taking the jobs of about 8,000 national doctors who are jobless or underemployed. However, Health Minister Maria Urbaneja insists the Cubans were invited because the government couldn't find enough Venezuelans willing to work in working-class neighbourhoods. The fact is that a visit to a private clinic costs up to \$31, beyond the reach of the mass of the people whose earnings are close to the minimum wage of \$125 per month.

The vast majority of the people are satisfied with the humanity, sensitivity and professionalism of the Cubans. Indeed, some middle-class people have switched to take advantage of the free clinics, while still attacking their government for providing them! This represents a split with the most entrenched and reactionary oligarchy that fears a boost of support for Chavez and has pressurised hospitals to turn away patients referred by the Cuban doctors. Last September, this led to the death of a child.

The Cuban doctors, who are mostly women, have faced anonymous death threats in response to their courageous and comradely commitment to save and improve the lives of their



Presidents Chavez and Castro

fellow Latin Americans. The success of the programme could bring paramilitary repression from privileged and deeply reactionary sectors, as happened to Cuban teachers and doctors volunteering in Nicaragua and Angola in the 1980s. But their revolutionary consciousness makes this a risk they are willing to face in this battle for life where the medicines are their only munitions.

Washington fears this international solidarity which continues to boost support for Cuba throughout Latin America and increase working-class support for the Bolivarian Revolution. To undermine this process they have tried without success to fund and train dissident mercenaries in Cuba, call for support for the criminal blockade (see previous issues) and expelled under false allegations 19 diplomats in the last 13 months from the Cuban Interest Section in Washington and the Mission to the United Nations.

The internal opposition in Venezuela is backed by the exiled oligarchy

that has already attempted two coups against the government and is allied with the terrorist Cuban-American mafia of Miami. They are joined by the billionaire former president of Bolivia, overthrown by a popular uprising last October. These elements are developing a common agenda that fits with US imperialist plans for the subcontinent.

However, there are important lessons to be learned from the Cuba-Venezuela agreements:

- It is possible and necessary for underdeveloped countries to establish non-profit-based trade, for the exchange of goods, human capital and cooperative experiences that have a direct positive impact on the living standards of the dispossessed.

Such exchanges will sharpen the contradictions between those who clamour for more profound and revolutionary changes and the alliance of the privileged and imperialists, leading to an open struggle between revolution and reaction.

Cuba and Venezuela lead this process in Latin America through the creation of networks of resistance and solidarity, like the Bolivarian Congress of the Peoples (Caracas, November 2003) attended by 400 delegates from Latin American social movements, or the summit against the Free Trade Area of Americas (Havana, 26-29 January 2004). This strategy challenges debt and foreign aggression and encourages indigenous rights, sovereignty against imperialism, education, health care, instruments for participative democracy and so on. If this is the 'discontent' and 'destabilisation in parts of the region' that Colin Powell talked about, we welcome it.

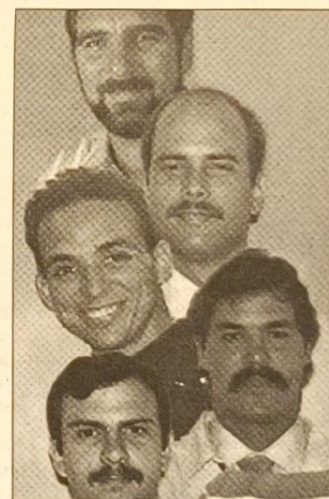
Miami 5 appeal to be held in mafia territory

The Miami 5, five Cubans given sentences ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment on trumped-up spying charges in the United States, will have their appeal heard from 10 March onwards. But the appeal will be held in Miami where the original trial took place in an atmosphere of anti-Cuban hysteria and political pressure. The fact that a fair hearing for the Cubans was impossible in such a hostile environment forms one of the 24 grounds for their appeal.

Among other grounds for appeal is the argument that the activities of the Miami 5 were aimed at preventing acts of violence, planned by the Miami mafia against Cuba, and that such acts could have had negative consequences for the US. In the original trial, the judge had refused to allow evidence showing the Cubans had acted out of 'necessity'. The defence will also argue that the prosecution evidence was inadequate, that they were not allowed to present a proper defence, and that the defendants were mistreated by being held in solitary confinement for 17 months before their trial and having their documents confiscated.

Meanwhile, the torture and mistreatment continue. Since their original trial, the Cuban political prisoners have been held in separate prisons spread across the US and are unable to contact each other. During the war on Iraq, they were kept in solitary confinement. The US administration has denied their families visas to travel to the US or moved the prisoners at short notice to prevent relatives from visiting them.

If this appeal fails, the Miami 5 could ask for an 'en banc' hearing in front of all the 14 to 16 11th Circuit judges. After that, their only further course of action is an appeal to the Supreme Court, a body loaded with right-wing supporters of George Bush.



Cuba has lowest infant mortality rate in Latin America

In 2003, Cuba attained a rate of 6.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births as an international measure of health and, in particular, of maternal-infant care. This makes Cuba the Latin American country with the lowest infant mortality rate.

According to the State of the World's Children published by Unicef, the United States registers 7.0 (a figure which masks the increasing disparity between the death rates for white infants on the one hand and black and hispanic infants on the other). Cuba's figures are broadly uniform across the country, with the poorest region, rural Guantanamo, having a figure of 8.6, with other provinces ranging from 4.2 to 6.0.

Many developing countries have figures as high as 60 deaths per 1,000 live births; the least developed have rates of 100.

Cuba's impressive figure reflects the priority given to health care within the country, its universal accessibility and the training and commitment of its health professionals.

Uruguayan children, even when their government did not want to purchase it precisely because it was Cuban.'

- 'Cuban human and material resources were a decisive factor in eradicating the disease when El Salvador was in the grips of a serious dengue epidemic, even though its government was a bitter enemy of Cuba, a haven for terrorists and a centre of operations from which gross crimes against our people were launched.'
- Giving thousands of scholarships to young Venezuelans to study medicine, sports, social work and technical training.

The evidence speaks for itself.

Hannah Callier

Cuba's internationalism speaks for itself

Cuba has responded eloquently and powerfully to recent speeches by Otto Reich, US ambassador to Latin America and Roger Noriega, US Under-Secretary of State for Hemispheric Affairs. Noriega accuses Cuba of 'supporting elements in several countries that want to destabilise democratic governments' and the people that Otto Reich accuses of being agents in Venezuela have turned out to be the Cuban doctors. In an editorial in *Granma Internacional* in early January, Cuba rhetorically asks: 'Since when is to promote education and culture to destabilise a nation?' The article goes on to point

out some of the outstanding internationalist missions that Cuba has led:

- Sending thousands of doctors to collaborate with governments in giving care to the poorest and most needy in Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Belize, Paraguay, and countries in the Caribbean, Central and South America: '15,000 Cuban doctors to 64 countries where millions of people are given medical care and tens of thousands of lives are saved.'
- Promoting highly effective literacy campaigns.
- Giving scholarships to study in

Cuban universities to 12,000 young people from developing countries.

- 'Thousands of sports instructors who are promoting the most wholesome activities which help to reduce crime, drug use and make millions of young people healthier.'
- 'In 1970, after a terrible earthquake in Peru left more than 50,000 dead, the people of Cuba sent 100,000 blood donations, built hospitals and supplied medicines.'
- 'When the Uruguayan people fell victim to a serious meningitis epidemic, Cuba, the only country making a suitable vaccine, sent millions of doses to protect the lives of

Denying the imperialist reality

■ *Socialist Register 2004* – the new imperial challenge, available from Merlin Press
www.merlinpress.co.uk, £14.95, 280pp.

Most of the British left have been denying the existence of imperialism for years, so we welcome any opportunity to further a Marxist understanding of imperialism, not just for ideological clarity, but to focus the actions of the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. *Socialist Register 2004* is made up of 13 essays, written by academics. The first essay by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin claims: 'The left needs a new theorisation of imperialism, one that will transcend the limitations of the old Marxist "stagist" theory of inter-imperial rivalry, and allow for a full appreciation of the historical factors that have led to the formation of a unique American informal empire.' This 'new theorisation' consistently either ignores or denigrates Lenin's contribution to Marxism and understanding of imperialism. Consequently these essays overlook and deny the reality of inter-imperialist rivalry centred on the US, Europe and Japan. There is no mention of a labour aristocracy, generated by and tied to imperialism, that must be fought and overcome if imperialism is to be challenged. Nor is there any call for solidarity between socialists in the oppressor nations and all those fighting imperialism in the oppressed nations. Gone are the prospect and reality of revolution.

For Panitch and Gindin, Lenin's assertion that imperialist wars are inevitable is 'clearly lacking in the contemporary context of American

military dominance', which one could have said about British military dominance in the past. British military dominance was based on economic strength, but its imperialist rivals caught up, just as today the imperialist rivals of the US are catching up (see FRFI 175 for figures on US and EU economies). It seems the US ruling class agrees more with Lenin than these authors: the 2002 US National Security Strategy states that the US should 'maintain mechanisms for deterring potential competitors, from ever aspiring to a larger regional or global role'.

Instead the authors just talk of rivalry between the three imperialist blocs due to the inter-dependency of international capital. They explain the dispute over the Iraq war as being due to Germany, France and Russia preferring to use 'international financial institutions, the World Trade Organisation and the UN to try to fashion the "effective states" around the world to global capitalist needs.' The US and British war on Iraq was to get control of the oil, and to demonstrate that US imperialism will use force on countries that do not follow its dictates. As Michael Klare's essay 'Blood for oil' shows, the US has military bases and forces in the Middle East, the Caspian Sea region, Central Asia, Latin America and hopes to get a base in West Africa. These are all areas where there are large quantities of oil. US forces are there not just to secure it for US consumption, but to control the oil and ensure the dependence of rivals. Which sounds like old-fashioned imperialism. As the contribution by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, 'Ecological Imperialism',

states, the US is 'securing for itself an increasingly dominant position in the control of this crucial resource as part of its larger economic and geopolitical strategy.'

Lenin sought theoretical clarity with a view to action. In 'The New Imperial Challenge' only two essays give any vague pointer to socialist action. 'Only a revolutionary social solution... offers any genuine hope that these con-



traditions can be transcended' ('Ecological Imperialism'). 'Fighting for... the end to the criminalization of poor people crossing borders', (Bob Sutcliffe, 'Crossing Borders in the New Imperialism'). Others suggest that 'the main focus in promoting an alternative security paradigm must be on NGOs, citizen groups, and independent analysts'. However, in Tina Wallace's 'NGO Dilemmas', these 'champions of the poor, as organisations working in solidarity with those marginalized by the world economy' are being 'tied to global agendas' by the governments and corporations they seek donations from!

This book fails to convince that its contributors are developing a new theory of imperialism that will stand the test of time, and, with very few exceptions, the choice of essays to demonstrate the state of imperialism today are very poor.

David Hetfield

A history of Zionist brutality

■ *The Gun and the Olive Branch* (third edition), David Hirst, Faber & Faber 2003, £16.99, 613pp

When it was first published in 1977, *The Gun and the Olive Branch* was one of the most comprehensive books on the history of the Palestinian struggle and of Zionism. 26 years later this is still the case. Written by David Hirst, former Middle East correspondent of *The Guardian*, the reporting is well referenced and expresses sympathy – though not outright support – for the heroic Palestinian cause.

Hirst begins, rightly, at the roots of Zionism and makes more than brief mention of the fact that Herzl, 'the father of Zionism', knew that physical force would be necessary to uproot the Palestinians from their homes:

'The prophet of Zionism foresaw that coercion and physical force were inevitable; they were not unfortunate necessities thrust, unforeseen, on his followers. To his diaries, not published until 26 years after his death in 1904, Herzl confided the beliefs which, in his public utterances, he had been careful to omit: that military power was an essential component of his strategy and that, ideally, the Zionists should acquire the land of their choice by armed conquest.'

Hirst also points out that Palestinian resistance is not merely a recent, post-1948, phenomena as some historians would have us believe, but that as early as the first Aliyah (wave of Zionist immigration) in 1882 'the peasants resorted to physical violence against the settlers'.

Due attention is given to the fact that British-Zionist military collaboration existed as early as the first imperialist war prior to the Balfour Declaration:

'War in Europe, as Herzl had foreseen, could be turned to their advantage. It opened up dazzling opportunities, both in Palestine itself and outside it. Early in the war two young men, Joseph Trumpeldor and Vladimir Jabotinsky, created a Jewish fighting unit, the Zion Mule Corps, which served with British forces in Gallipoli. During the war, too, a third, Aaron Aaronsohn, organised an espionage network, the Nili (*Netzakh Israel Lo Yeshaker* – "the eternal Jewish shall not fail"), which collaborated with British intelligence. And as the war drew to a close, Jabotinsky succeeded in forming "The Jewish Legion", four battalions of Royal Fusiliers, 5,000 men in all, who fought with the British under their own flag. The three men were celebrated militants.'

The Balfour Declaration itself is covered in detail, however Hirst plays down British imperialism's intentions, seeing the Declaration as intended to protect Arab interests.

Hirst deals concisely with the often forgotten epoch of the 'Arab Rebellion' of 1935-1939 which was crushed by Britain's 're-conquering' of Palestine, subsequently leading to Zionist control. He is absolutely right to highlight the role played by the opportunistic British Labour and trade union movement in the chapter 'Gun Zionism' and this is summed up by a quote from Chaim Weizmann's memoirs saying that 'we have never contemplated the removal of the Arabs, and the British Labourites, in their pro-Zionist enthusiasm, went far beyond our intentions'. Hirst, however, does not at this point lay due stress on the fact that the creation of the Israeli state was in the interests of British imperialism and his argument that the Zionists had control

over imperial policy is an empty one.

The period around 1948 is dealt with in great detail. Hirst gives many accounts of the murderous force that the Zionists used to crush the Palestinians and drive them from their homes. Without these actions, the racist colonial settler-state of Israel could never have come into existence. Deir Yassin, Hirst states, was not an isolated incident; rather it was but a particularly ruthless massacre among other smaller ones.

The expansionist nature of the Zionist state is undeniable and the provocations used by Israel against neighbouring countries in the period after the state came into existence were clear in motive. It was not until 1967, when Israel 'was suffering the severest economic crisis of its existence' and 'emigration was beginning to exceed immigration', that 'favourable circumstances presented themselves'. Israel went to war with its Arab neighbours, utterly defeated them in six days with its imperialist-sponsored military and 'acquired an empire'. Hirst powerfully describes the events which followed and how 'the immediate aftermath of the war... was an ideal opportunity which the Israelis had no scruples about taking'.



When writing about the history of the subject, the reporting is excellent, detailed, and in some parts, moving. However, where Hirst is at his weakest, when his liberal class standpoint seeps through the most, is in writing about more recent events, particularly the rise of armed Palestinian militancy. He describes acts of resistance as 'terrorist attacks'. While he accepts that the current Intifada was born out of Israeli aggression and provocation, he does not support it and is in favour of a two-state solution. Similarly, he praises Arafat's 'historic peace offer' to renounce 78% of Palestine. Hirst's foreword to the current edition includes a section entitled 'Who is master – George Bush or Ariel Sharon?' which adds weight to the myth that 'The Lobby' controls US imperial policy towards Israel. All liberal writers find it easy to be critical of past imperialist actions but have the crippling inability to attack the status quo and this is Hirst's downfall.

Louis Brehony

Brothers under the skin

■ *Comrades and Cousins*, Neville Kirk, Merlin Press, London 2003, £14.95, 230pp.

This book is a comparative study of the labour movements in Britain, Australia and the US from the last decades of the 19th century to the outbreak of the First World War. This was a period of rapid expansion of imperialism that, in some aspects, mirrored the present period of globalisation. However, instead of trying to draw lessons for the current struggle from this earlier epoch, Kirk restricts himself to a rather dry historical study in which he refuses to take any strong political standpoint at all. The only conclusion of this nature he makes is a rather timid suggestion that the modern labour movement might benefit from being more internationalist in its outlook.

The bulk of the book is concerned with drawing out the different paths taken by the labour movements in the three countries. Kirk concludes, 'In the American case, this revolved around the primacy of craft trade unionism, anti-statism and increasingly anti-socialism and the "defence

of democracy"; while the Australian movement adopted a combination of statist Labour politics, mass unionism and workerist nationalism'. He characterises the British movement as having, 'an ideological mixture of voluntarism and collectivism, craft and general unionism, liberalism, labourism and socialism' and tries to explain the differences as partly due to the US and Australian movements wanting to take independent paths from the 'pioneering' but 'traditional' British movement.

Of interest are not the differences but what came to be the similarities between the movements. The better off workers dominated the movements and they attacked revolutionary socialism. They collaborated with their imperialist masters and they would eventually, at the end of the period, support the imperialist war. Kirk does point out that all the movements were, 'limited, disfigured and diminished by racism', but his analysis fails to demonstrate that racism was not simply some sort of unfortunate aberration but an essen-

tial ingredient of the pro-imperialist, class collaborationist policies of the trade unions. Naively, he spends a third of the book quoting from British left-wing journals of the time trying to demonstrate that the British movement perhaps wasn't so racist and pro-imperialist after all. No doubt that is true of some of the writers, but it is to the actions of their organisations, not just their words that Kirk should be looking.

What is missing from Kirk's analysis is a concept of the split in the working class that occurred as the imperialist ruling classes sought to divide and rule the labour movement. They encouraged a labour aristocracy that would steer the working class away from class conflict and revolutionary politics towards compromise with the capitalist status quo. An historical study in that light would help us to understand the same processes that hamper the working class in the imperialist countries today and make a contribution to socialism and the overthrow of capitalism.

Jim Craven

Racist prisons exposed – but no action taken

On 16 December 2003 the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) finally published the second part of its Formal Investigation into HM Prison Service of England and Wales. The report is damning and details how racism pervades every part of prison life; however instead of proceeding to issue a Non-Discrimination Notice against the Prison Service, demanding improvements be implemented, as it is empowered to under the Race Relations Act, the Commission decided instead to get into bed with the perpetrators of the racism and announce a cosy partnership to implement an Action Plan to bring about reform. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

The CRE's investigation into the Prison Service dealt with allegations of racism in three prisons: Brixton in south London, Parc in Wales and Feltham Young Offenders Institution in Middlesex. The report on the first part of the investigation, which dealt with the murder of Zahid Mubarek in Feltham, was published earlier last year.

The Formal Investigation began in 2000; its remit arising from three specific incidents. It is striking that none of these involved direct allegations of racist behaviour by prison staff towards prisoners. But it is not altogether surprising given both the climate of cover-up that makes prisoners' complaints about staff racism so difficult to pursue, and the CRE's history of apathy in the face of this difficulty. Instead two counts relate to the Prison Service's failure to prevent racist violence by prisoners towards other prisoners and the third to an employment complaint of racial discrimination brought by a black prison officer.

However, despite this starting point, the report is extremely detailed, deals extensively with all aspects of racism in the three prisons, and does not shy away from pointing the finger at prison staff. For example, the section on racist graffiti details not only how Welsh nationalist skinheads in Parc defaced the walls of young black prisoners' cells with fascist insignia and acronyms, but how 'HMP Brixton has experienced an ongoing problem with racist graffiti by staff'.

The report recognises that indirect discrimination and negative stereotyping are an ever-present feature of prison life and highlights the 'consistent over-representation of black male prisoners in the prison disciplinary system' and the 'disproportionate numbers of black prisoners on the basic IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges) level'.



On paper, there are all sorts of ways in which prisoners who have been discriminated against can complain, and both the Race Relations Act and the Prison Service Order on Race Relations state that they should not be victimised for doing so. But of course on the ground the reality is different, as the report acknowledges, quoting the Race Relations Liaison Officer from Brixton: 'If a prisoner complains about a member of staff, then you'll usually find that 90% of the staff around are going to try to do things to get back at the prisoner for complaining about the member of staff in the first place.'

The investigation concluded that the Prison Service was guilty of 18 specific counts of unlawful racial discrimination, including:

1. Failure to protect prisoners at Parc from racial abuse, racist graffiti, assault and having things thrown at them, and failure to investigate their complaints or take disciplinary action against the assailants;

4. Failure to protect a prisoner at Feltham from racial abuse and attack resulting in his jaw being broken, or to investigate his complaint or take disciplinary action against the assailants;

5. Failure to provide facilities and services to meet the needs of Muslim prisoners at Brixton and Feltham;

6. Stereotyping black prisoners in such a way as to result in their being over-represented on the basic level of privileges and under-represented on the enhanced level;

7. Refusing or deliberately omitting to provide via the prison shop 'hair and skin products necessary for the health and well-being of black prisoners and a diet that is culturally and religiously appropriate to ethnic minority prisoners';

8. Victimisation of a prisoner at Brixton who complained of racism and was then subjected to 'unauthorised and flawed drug testing' and 'unlawfully confined to his cell...' to 'reflect' on his complaints of racism;

9. Victimisation of prisoners at Parc who complained that officers were racist and were then put on disciplinary charges for complaining;

10. Failure to take adequate steps to prevent the victimisation of prisoners making race related complaints.

Overall the Commission found that the Prison Service 'discriminated against prisoners in its care in that it failed to put in place an effective policy of equivalent protection which comprehensively addressed the needs of prisoners to be safe from detrimental treatment by act or omission of officers or inmates on the grounds of their race...', 'failed comprehensively and effectively to address the needs of ethnic minority staff and prisoners for protection from detrimental treatment...' and 'failed to implement a comprehensive race equality policy'.

The report conclusively demonstrates not only that the prison sys-

tem is racist to the core, as everyone already knew, but that the Prison Service is breaking the law. So, where are the prosecutions? Where are the payouts to the prisoners who have been discriminated against and victimised? Where are the wholesale sackings of racist prison officers and governors? Where are the calls to close Parc, Brixton and Feltham, and to subject other prisons known for their systematic racism, such as Parkhurst, to the same level of scrutiny?

Instead, those who have been running the racist regimes are now deemed suitable to oversee their reform. So, while targets are drawn up and civil servants discuss 'High Level Key Deliverables', 'Performance Improvement (Benchmarking)' and 'Intensive Development Schemes', on the landings and segregation units of Britain's overcrowded prison system it will be racist business as usual. ■

Prisoner wins compensation for racist remarks

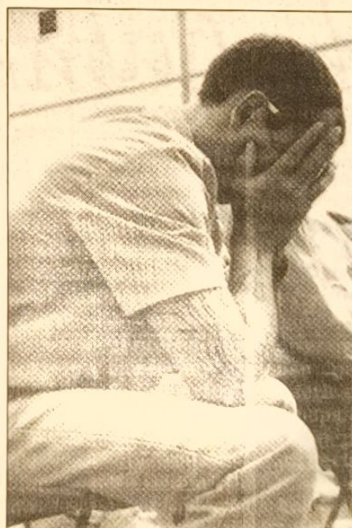
A recently released prisoner has just been awarded an out-of-court settlement of £7,500 and a written apology from the Prison Service for racist remarks made to him by a prison officer at Whitmore prison in 2001. The officer told the prisoner 'just because you look like a monkey, doesn't mean you have to behave like one'. Despite this being said openly in front of many witnesses, the officer denied any racist intent, and an internal Prison Service investigation only found that she should perhaps be given some 'diversity training' at some unspecified point in the future. The prisoner was meanwhile put in segregation, subjected to spurious disciplinary charges, cell searches and drug tests, as well as the ridicule of having monkey noises made at him and a banana skin put on the door of his cell. The CRE did not consider that there was sufficient evidence of victimisation for it to take this case, resulting in the prisoner submitting the papers himself, and then, with great difficulty, finding a solicitor to help him take the case to court.

Putting the house in order

Like many others, I am sick of hearing the Prison Service bang on about its troubles and the mountainous task it faces in trying to stem the flow of suicides, especially among women prisoners. Not a month goes by without the nation hearing how our prisons are full to capacity, at breaking point even.

Drugs are by far the main reason the prison population has risen so sharply during recent years. And while the Prison Service cannot be blamed for vices obtained outside its walls, it does have a duty to provide effective treatment to those entrusted to its care in order for them to have the best chance of living law-abiding lives after release.

Enter any local prison and you start to get some idea of the scale of the problem. Bodies move along the landings like zombies, barely recognisable as the people they are. Yet even at this stage, when help is most needed, treatment is being restricted and in some cases completely denied. Because prison doctors are reluctant to prescribe medication containing opiates, most detoxification programmes are a three-day affair. And whilst an addict will not refuse what is offered to try and numb the pain of withdrawal, the minute treatment stops they will be hunting the landings for the one thing that can release them from the agony. For most, relief is found in a cell just a few doors from their own in the shape of a small bag of brown powder. For those to whom prison is



an alien environment there are no choices. Refused proper treatment and unable to find the prison dealer, withdrawal can be horrific. Sadly some find the prospect just too much to contemplate. You do not need an inquiry to tell you why so many prisoners are taking their own lives. It is common sense that someone with a drug problem going back ten years cannot simply be dealt with in three days.

During a recent visit to HMP Belmarsh, a prison renowned for being saturated in heroin, I was amazed to see that the problem had all but disappeared. This was not thanks to the overzealous security department, but to do with the drug Buprenorphine, which trades under the name Subutex. It is now available to all prisoners at Belmarsh who wish to detox safely and free of pain. The drug is a substitution treatment that works by blocking opiate receptors to relieve withdrawal symptoms while blocking the actions of other opiates taken subsequently. Even the most hardcore addicts describe it as a miracle. The only reason Belmarsh still has a problem is that the ten-day course still falls far short of what is needed for a lasting effect.

Up until now little else has had any impact on the growing number of drug users in prison. For the sake of a few extra pounds, the Prison Service would do well to rethink the way it runs detox programmes. Subutex should be made widely available as soon as possible. Only then will they be seen to be going some way to putting the house in order.

In the meantime, the prison population will continue to rise and, worse still, so will the number of prisoners taking their own lives, with women like Jessica Adam, Emma Levey and Sarah Campbell becoming nothing more than statistics. The clock is ticking and we are all waiting.

John Shelley, HMP Whitmore

Racist institutions

Institutional racism is prevalent in the prison system and officers still actively contribute and condone their racist colleagues. The largest breeding ground for this bigotry is segregation units, especially those in high security prisons, where all prisoners are humiliated and belittled in any way possible, be this by the use of vigorous strip-searches, strip cells and other degrading behaviour. Staff in segregation units use all issues, be it race, creed religion or sexual orientation to abuse and upset victims of a corrupt prison system, and those who do not actively verbalise their views express them in different ways. They show their xenophobia with their British bulldogs and Union Jack tattoos, or their England or George Cross lapel and tie badges.

The Prison Service also actively discriminates against people from ethnic minorities by strongly regulating procedures for foreign nationals, limiting spending on the phone, not giving any alternatives to visits for foreign nationals who don't get them, limiting letters, not allowing them to speak on phones in their mother tongue.

Glenn P Wright RT3785, Close Supervision Centre, HMP Woodhill

Defend the right to protest

The attack on the Marks and Spencer pickets by Manchester City Council (See Manchester M&S picket under attack, page 4) is the culmination of over three years of constant demonstration against Britain's biggest corporate sponsor of Israel. The pickets, though, continue to attract supporters of the Palestinian people, including members of the Muslim community, despite constant Zionist abuse.

This threat to peaceful democratic protest has also been apparent in London where picketers have faced increasing confrontation not just from Zionist Betar, but also from the state. The position of the Metropolitan police was most clearly demonstrated on our successful Oxford Street Intifada day just before Christmas. Victory to the Intifada (VTI) members and supporters turned up to the M&S flagship store to find that the police were guarding the cordon outside the main exit and refused to allow the demonstrators to go in. The reason they gave was that they thought Betar supporters might be making an appearance on the day so they were reserving the prime spot for them! What clearer example is there to show that the police are far from being unbiased in such matters of protest? Despite this we took up position in front of the main entrance and told shoppers on the busiest shopping day of the year exactly what M&S stands for.

Sadly, though, not only was the real role of the police on display that day, but also the lack of support for the event by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Muslim Association of Britain and the rest of the left was evident. However, the pickets of M&S have continued



Stall at Marks & Spencer in Leicester attracted lots of support

weekly with growing support from both members of MPAC (Muslim Public Affairs Committee) and ISM (International Solidarity Movement) and plenty of individuals wishing to join regular action in support of Palestine.

Betar and its fascist friends have continued their acts of provocation and intimidation against picketers by hurling abuse and threats, while the police often stand by and watch. Betar also took a photo of one of the regular picketers, a Palestinian, printed it on leaflets and posters with the word 'Terrorist' plastered over his face, and then distributed them to members of the public. The purpose of such behaviour is intimidation and to try and cause a disturbance which will close the pickets down under the Public Order Act, but our supporters have remained resolute and Betar are finding it difficult to maintain their counter-demo. Pickets have also continued at M&Ss around London from Brixton to Camden. In London there have also

been monthly meetings about Palestine at the London School of Economics.

Leicester saw a large and successful day of action on 24 January against the city centre M&S which was attended by VTI members from around the midlands. More than 20 people participated and several members of the public told us they would join in any future event. Durham VTI has continued its weekly Saturday M&S pickets; there has been no sign of the National Front since their threat in November to start selling their racist filth in the town centre. M&S's recent sales were down 4% on the same period last year. We must build the pressure on them! The pickets are continuing around the country - join them and defend our right to protest! Contact us if you want to set one up in your area.

FRFI supporters have attended meetings of Unite against Fascism, Respect, European Social Forum, Manchester against Racism to assess what is happening on the ground. What is

quite evident is that it is impossible to debate anything of any substance since the hallmark of all these organisations is exclu-

sivity. Social democracy cannot tolerate open debate; it has to resolve every problem away from public eyes. Democratic political

discussion is ruled out in case it results in any challenge to the domination of the likes of the SWP and its Labour friends.

EVENTS

LONDON

Every Thursday Picket of M&S Oxford St (Marble Arch end) 6-8pm.

Picket of M&S Brixton, Saturday 21 February, 12-2pm (opposite Brixton tube).

Meeting on the Nepalese Revolution, Wednesday 18 February, 7pm in Room S78, St Clement's Building, London School of Economics, Houghton St, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn).

VTI meeting, Wednesday 25 February 7pm in Room D402, Clement House, London School of Economics, Aldwych, WC2 (Nearest tube Holborn). Contact: victoryintifada@hotmail.com or 020 7837 1688

MANCHESTER

Every Saturday Picket of M&S Market St, Manchester City Centre at 12 noon. Contact: victory_intifada@hotmail.com or 07816 547066

Anti-Imperialist Forum: Fighting Racism in Britain Sunday, 8 February, 2pm, Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, City Centre, Manchester. For more information, contact manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com

To contact Salford University FRFI Society, email salfordfrfi@hotmail.com

MIDLANDS

For further details contact: 07949 256 477

DURHAM

For information and venue details contact 07813 073 846

Every Saturday picket of M&S Silver St, 11.30-2.30pm.

Second Silver St Intifada: Day of Action against corporate sponsors of Israel Saturday 6 March together with Revolution Socialist Youth. Meet 12 noon outside M&S, Silver St.

FRFI Readers and Supporters Group Sunday 8 February, 2pm

Palestine Educationals: Sundays 15 February, 7 March, 14 March, all 2pm

Anti-Imperialist Forum: Building an anti-racist movement today Sunday 22 February, 1-5pm

Night of Rebel Music: ska, punk and drum & bass club night - DJs and live music. Mid-late February at Cafe Rock, Durham City. Pre-booked tickets only

GLASGOW

Pickets of Marks & Spencer. Saturday 7 February and Saturday 6 March. All at M&S Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow between 12-2pm

FRFI PUBLIC MEETINGS All meetings held at Woodside Halls, Glenfarg Street, Glasgow, just off Great Western Road near St Georges Cross Underground. All meetings start at 7.15pm

Wednesday 18 February: What is capitalism?

Wednesday 25 February: Iraq - occupation and plunder Thursday 4 March: What is imperialism?

Wednesday 17 March: Palestine: the struggle for justice and freedom.

Wednesday 24 March: What is socialism?

Wednesday 31 March: Cuba and anti-imperialism in Latin America.

Strathclyde University FRFI Society meetings. Next meetings: Tuesdays, 10 February, 9 March. All at Arbutnot Room, Level 8, Strathclyde University Union, John Street, Glasgow, 2pm.

DUNDEE

Marks & Spencer Picket: Saturday 21 February 12-2pm, Murraygate, Dundee.

FRFI Public Meeting No to imperialist plans for Palestine! Monday 29 March, 7.30pm Dundee University Tower, Room G3

All Scotland FRFI Anti Imperialist Forum Imperialism, war and occupation, Saturday 3 April 11am-3pm Partick Burgh Halls, Glasgow, Burgh Hall Street off Dumbarton Road near Partick underground.

Contact us! To contact FRFI in Scotland or to find out more about our events and activities Call: 07779 785 529 or Write to: Unit 111, 36 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 1DA Email: frfiscotland@yahoo.co.uk

Rock around the Blockade round-up office@ratb.org.uk www.ratb.org.uk

Defend the Cuban Revolution



Boycott Bacardi activists ended 2003 in style, dressed as bats at Uxbridge Magistrates' court, with banners and placards, to demonstrate against Bacardi's ongoing support for the counter-revolutionaries in the USA and the illegal US Blockade of Cuba. The reason for our presence was that Vinnie Jones was in court charged with assault of a fellow passenger on a flight and threatening behaviour towards the flight crew.

Vinnie Jones, the former footballer known as a thug on the pitch, now the hard man of British film where he is cast in gangster roles, has been the face of Bacardi in recent TV advertising campaigns in Britain. Vinnie Jones was found guilty of the charges levelled against him. Bacardi immediately issued a statement saying 'We do expect appropriate behaviour from people involved in the promo-

tion of our brands'.

This is a rich comment from Bacardi given its own behaviour, which is far from appropriate. Despite its advertisements portraying its Cuban roots for tropical Caribbean appeal, the Bacardi rum company is anti-Cuban and has been engaged for more than 40 years in clandestine attempts to overthrow the Cuban government by both violent and other means.

The message that the Boycott Bacardi bats brought to the public in December was that Bacardi continues in its age-old tradition of supporting thugs and we will ensure that Bacardi's past and present counter-revolutionary activities continue to be exposed. This is especially important in 2003, when the appeal begins for the Miami 5. These five Cuban men are in gaol in the US for trying to expose the sabotage and dirty

tricks orchestrated by groups such as the Cuban American National Foundation, founded and funded by Bacardi.

The counter-revolutionary activity of the media has been on the increase recently with articles condemning Cuba on its human rights record and arrest of so-called dissidents. This comes at the same time as US government ministers publicly accuse Fidel Castro of destabilising Latin America. Rock around the Blockade has been active in responding to such articles. Ensuring that the media is called to account is part and parcel of our struggle to tell the truth about Cuba and the revolutionary achievements that are never mentioned otherwise.

Over the next year, Rock around the Blockade will be raising money for a sound system for the Union of Young Communists in Cuba and pre-



paring a group of people to travel to Cuba on a brigade in 2005. They will offer this solidarity to Cuban youth and learn at first hand about how Cuban society operates. There are meetings around the country, stalls with petitioning and leafleting, fundraising social evenings and clubnights and activities with

the Boycott Bacardi campaign and the Free the Miami 5 campaign to take part in. We urge you to join Rock around the Blockade: £10 waged; £4 low waged; £2 unwaged. Cheques made payable to Rock around the Blockade and sent to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. You will receive our regular newsletter with updates of our activities and analysis of events in Cuba. Visit our website (www.ratb.org.uk), or subscribe to our egroup (viva.cuba-subscribe@yahoo.co.uk) and we welcome ideas and input to our work.

Get our recently released Rebel Music CD with revolutionary music and words for £5; the money raised goes towards material aid for Cuba.

Long live the Cuban Revolution and long live socialism!

EVENTS

Saturday 7 February Evening of politics, poetry and music to raise money for Cuban youth. 8pm onwards The Puzzle pub, Grays Inn Road, London WC1 (near Holborn)

RATB MEETINGS

Both at 7pm, London School of Economics, London WC2 (nearest tube Holborn).

Wednesday 11 February Room D302, Clement House, Aldwych Latin America and the fight against the Free Trade Areas of the Americas

Wednesday 10 March Room S78, St Clements Building, Houghton Street The Miami 5: the case for their appeal and the defence of Cuba

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name

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Clenched fist salute

Thanks a lot for the latest issue of FRFI. It's always a great pleasure for me to read FRFI and it's very informative and useful for my political experience here in prison.

Clenched fist salute to all of you and I say 'Thank you' to all of you who help prisoners like me to read FRFI. This is a great way to stay in touch with the world and revolutionary movements outside.

THOMAS MEYER-FALK
c/o JVA Bruchsal, Germany

Crisis in general practice

Full GP lists, more GPs retiring than entering the service and the new GP contract are all contributing to a looming crisis in general practice.

Between 1960 and 1963, Enoch Powell, then health minister - who became a leading racist anti-immigrationist - recruited medical staff from commonwealth countries to satisfy the economic needs of the moment. Thousands of doctors immigrated from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka from the 1950s to the 1970s. Within the next four years,

LETTERS write to
FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk
website: www.revolutionarycommunist.com and www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

Defend Travellers' rights

On Monday 12 January a Traveller camp in Bulkington, near Coventry was set to be evicted from land that was theirs by purchase and right. Nuneaton council wanted the Travellers out, alleging the caravan site was on greenbelt land. Over 90% of all requests by Travellers to live on purchased land are turned down.

The night before the eviction ditches were dug around the site and barricades piled by the main gate. A truck was overturned across the entrance to the camp and tyres were ready to burn. When a dozen or so bailiffs turned up around 60 Travellers and a handful of supporters formed a human barrier in front of the flaming barricades. Outnumbered, the bailiffs called in the police for back up. With a banner that read 'Stop ethnic cleansing' the Travellers marched to the line of police shouting 'Prison first!' and 'We'll fight for our land'. After the police decided not to risk going into the camp, a council spokeswoman promised the council would reconsider

making 150 people including 50 children homeless, without providing them any where to go as a community.

The Bulkington site is now safe from eviction until the conclusion of a judicial review brought by the Travellers to try to force the council to provide an alternative site if they insist on turning them off their own land. The Travellers argue that since their children have been attending school in the county for three years, they should be allowed to stay in the area and be willing to buy another piece of land if the council promises to allow them to live on it.

Racism in the Bulkington village towards the Travellers is common, with several local residents admitting to us that they wanted the 'Gypsies' out of their area, 'so they can go over the county border and be someone else's problem'. This prejudice is intentionally stirred up by the council and the police. After the failed attempt to evict the Traveller community the police told all local businesses to close early as the Travellers would try



to smash up their shops. The local residents who came out in support of the Travellers in the press were the farmers living next to the site who actually knew what they were really like.

The government resented the media attention the Traveller community won so much that the next community to be evicted, Meadowlands in Chelmsford, was

raided by 70 riot police and 70 bailiffs on 26 January. The Travellers tried to defend their home with barricades and non-violent tactics, but the police and bailiffs stormed their land with a bulldozer and started to beat people and set parts of the site alight. A child was badly hurt, as were a few of the activists trying to prevent the eviction.

This is ethnic cleansing pure and simple. The problem for the government is not that the Travellers are living on land they are 'preserving', but that they are living within their own community outside the confines of state control. The government will not be happy until all Traveller communities are split up, housed in bricks and mortar and their way of life, social ties and community economy is completely destroyed. Don't stand by while the government persecutes Travellers and whips up racist support - take action to show your support for the travelling community, come to their evictions, let the councils and bailiff firms know what you think. To get involved, contact nooneisillegal2003@yahoo.co.uk

MATT LEWIS
London

Union leader threatens workers

In January Shaun Brady, new leader of the rail union Aslef, threatened workers at the union's HQ with the sack. The office workers, members of the GMB, were being balloted on strike action over a dispute with their Aslef bosses. In a letter to staff, Brady threatened to bring in scab labour and use anti-union legislation to fire any striker after two months. The letter said: 'During the dispute Aslef will

advertise and employ alternative staff to cover the work'. The scabs would be employed on lower wages and individual contracts and all collective agreements and terms and conditions previously agreed with the GMB members would be rescinded. In addition Brady threatened to cut sick pay, withdraw flexitime, stop holidays and abolish child-care vouchers. Brady even threatened to derecognise the GMB union. Such

a vitriolic attack must have left even the most vicious multinational bosses green with envy! Typically, the GMB caved in and withdrew the threat of strike action.

This is just another incident that shows British trade unions are more like capitalist businesses than fighting organisations of the working class. They would rather ply their members with discount holidays, private health schemes

and credit cards than fight for their interests. Their leaders lap-up fat cat salaries. They don't want anyone rocking the boat. Now, it appears, they will even turn directly on their own workers to defend their own interests using every vicious, anti-working class bit of legislation they are supposed to be opposing!

JIM CRAVEN
Lincoln

Support Special Hospital inmates

The October 2003 edition of FRFI published what is sadly a rare article exposing some of the horrors of the Special Hospital system. Having spent many years in Ashworth, I desperately wanted to offer the public a glimpse into that system. My problem was how to sum up all I'd seen in those years of beatings, racism, torture, rape, murder and political collusion in just a few hundred words and without seeming to exaggerate. Since the inception of mental institutions, their inmates really have been the forgotten of society, hidden behind walls of concrete and ignorance and left to languish, lost, alone and abandoned. Rarely has society cared to look behind those walls. More rarely still has it seemed able to break through its own walls of fear and prejudice to acknowledge inmates' suffering and the evils meted out to them by their 'carers'.

I have never accepted that

prejudice is inherent in human nature - look how naturally children of all races and religions play together in the school playground. Prejudice is taught, and is maintained with misinformation.

Well publicised is the damage these prejudices do to society and individuals. Few, however, seem to question what they're told about psychiatric service users, nor stop to think of the damage done to sufferers by the relentless stigmatising they endure, not only in the press, but at the hands of writers, comedians and your own careless use of language and stereotypes.

It's a fact that many thousands of suffering people are so scared of admitting they are ill that they never seek help and support, leaving them alone and isolated. Hence 6,000 suicides in Britain every year. Prejudice costs lives. There are few groups who

genuinely try to redress the problem, like Survivors Speak Out. The main charities, Sane and MIND having long sold out to government finance and therefore policy. Few care that a 94-year-old woman has served 40 years in Broadmoor, that a man in his eighties in a wheelchair has been inside since 1939, that a deaf man was sectioned and imprisoned because psychiatrists hadn't noticed he was deaf but thought his temper outbursts and lack of communication were a result of his being mad. It is with true feeling that I offer my gratitude to FRFI for publishing my article. It is sad, however, that FRFI is alone on the left in being so supportive of prisoners and Special Hospital inmates.

So much has been done since the 1960s to combat race, sex and religious prejudice, however there remains much to be done. No real effort has been made to end what we might call 'mentalism'. You can help make a start by treating such words as 'psycho', 'nutter'

and 'loony' with the same distaste you would feel for 'paki' or 'nigger'. Don't dehumanise suffering people and don't allow others to. Society changes from within its own ranks. For many that process is long overdue. For many others, it's too late.

COLIN
London

Disgrace of Judas cons

After spending years in all the dispersal prisons, ghosted from Whitemoor in 1999 and Full Sutton in 2001 for a protest, I see the screws are still abusing prisoners.

What is most annoying in prison these days are a select few cons who let the side down by talking to screws as though they are friends. It should never be forgotten that we are on separate sides. Certain cons are always looking to score points like the classroom geek. This detracts from staunch cons who go through a lot of hassle in blocks and units.

I want to warn cons who are looking to move from dispersal to Cat Bs. You won't believe the amount of Judas cons sucking up to screws in these places. They are a disgrace. I won't get any parole from the system but at least when I get out I will be holding my head high.

To the Judas cons - who will remember you? To the staunch cons everywhere, your fight isn't going unnoticed.

MATT FITCHES AV5240
HMP Dovegate, Uttoxeter, Staffordshire
ST14 8XR

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today millions are out of work with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, laws like the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties is subjected to military occupation and brutal repression. The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. It has never defended the interests of the working class. The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. We oppose all discrimination against black people, immigrants, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
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http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

The backdrop to these developments is the fact that Labour cannot serve any more as a 'bourgeois labour party', in Lenin's terms. It can no longer play out its historic role which communists describe as opportunism – placing itself at the head of working class movements in order to behead them. It has become an open party of the ruling class whose former links with the working class have withered away to nothing. However, events have shown how necessary a new opportunist current is for the ruling class if social stability is to be maintained in imperialist Britain with the massive demonstrations against war on Iraq. Lenin showed that the growth of an opportunist current was inevitable in imperialist countries: we are seeing that historical necessity being played out today.

Two forces are central to these new opportunist alliances: the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and the Labour left. The goal of both alliances is the same: to reclaim the Labour Party from New Labour. Respect is attempting to do it from without, since its figurehead, George Galloway, has just been expelled from the Labour Party. Unite against Fascism is attempting to do it from within, with Ken Livingstone as its champion, cock-a-hoop at his recent readmission to the party of war and racism.

Both Livingstone and Galloway are challenging each other for the mantle of the leader of the Labour left. We should not, however, be fooled by their very public spat about who owns the 'Respect' trademark (Livingstone has threatened legal action against Galloway claiming Respect as his own because of the annual anti-racist events bearing that name in London, whilst Galloway dismissed this, saying: 'Mr Livingstone clearly doesn't know anything about self-respect, having just crawled back on all fours to the Labour Party'). Both are loyal to Labour, both are complete egoists, both are very rich, and both see the movements that they head as a means to further their very lucrative political careers. Galloway is determined to get on the European gravy train. Livingstone's ambitions too embrace Europe, but he has chosen to achieve them through his sponsorship of the European Social Forum event in London later this year.

SWP: sucking up to Galloway and Livingstone...

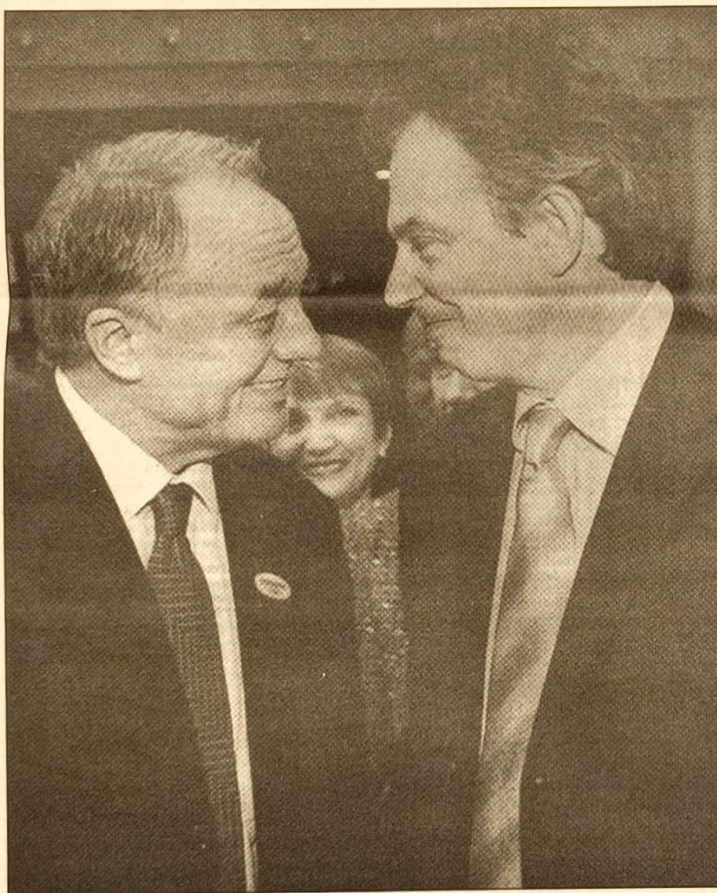
And what of the SWP? It dances attendance on both Galloway and Livingstone. Complete obsequiousness is the order of the day. That Livingstone has rejoined the Labour Party is not a problem, for as SWP leader Professor Alex Callinicos assures his readership: 'Of course in returning to the Labour Party he hasn't broken with the left altogether. There will be many issues on which we will be fighting side by side with him, against neo-liberalism, racism and war.' (*Socialist Worker* 17 January 2004). The SWP is not just a cheerleader, however. It has the apparatus both to run the coalitions, and, most importantly, to police them, to drive out any sign of revolutionary sentiment or anti-imperialist consciousness. This role is opportunism par excellence.

First Galloway...

How does it work? Very simply, it involves the SWP using the weight of

New left coalition for the Respectable

The past few weeks have seen the left give birth to two new coalitions to add to those it has spawned over the past few years. The personalities behind Respect (Respecting Equality, Socialism, Peace, Environmentalism, Community, Trade Unionism) and Unite against Fascism differ only in minor respects, since both represent the same opportunist political trend. What socialists need to assess are the conditions that have forced the left to create these alliances, and how we should relate to them over the coming period. BOB SHEPHERD reports.



Livingstone and Blair shake hands over Livingstone's welcome back to the Labour Party

numbers to suppress any semblance of democracy, prevent any open debate, fix key decisions in advance and expel those who attempt to challenge it. The way Respect was established shows this very clearly. First, Galloway set the terms for the movement: it was to be an electoral coalition to challenge New Labour. It would support left MPs who are 'fighting to reclaim Labour'. It would stand candidates in the 10 June European elections because 'there is no threat of a Tory victory' – which could jeopardise any future Galloway return to the Labour fold.

The SWP took its cue from this. There could be no attack on the tradition of Old Labour. Hence in a Socialist Alliance national council meeting on 17 January, the SWP and its allies voted down a number of motions proposed for consideration

at the founding convention of Respect. One of these called on Respect 'to make freedom of movement and open borders coalition policy.' This had to go, since Old Labour has always favoured immigration controls. A second motion tried to commit Respect candidates to be 'workers' representatives on a worker's wage.' Fancy Gorgeous George agreeing to that, with his three houses and £200,000 annual income! To drive the point home, the SWP also rejected motions calling for the Respect convention to be organised in an 'open, democratic and transparent way' with 'space for debate ... (for) different views, declarations and amendments'. The Declaration to serve as the foundation of Respect therefore excludes any demand which may prove anathema to Old Labour – for example, the withdrawal

of troops from Iraq or the right to a living minimum wage.

...then Livingstone

If the SWP gets to fawn on Galloway in Respect, it gets two bites of the cherry with Livingstone – first in the European Social Forum (ESF), and second in Unite against Fascism. In both these initiatives the SWP is playing the loyal ally of Livingstone, bolstering his prestige and reinforcing the idea that a section of the Labour Party and the TUC can play a progressive role in British politics.

Don't mention the war

The ESF has already been stitched up by Livingstone, the SWP and their trade union allies. The first assembly to organise the London ESF was held on 24 January. One announcement – not up for debate – was that there would be an organising committee with limited liability company status, so that no one would have to 'mortgage their house'. The platform at the meeting was a permutation of the usual line-up at these sort of events: SWP members, usually disguised as something else – left trade union leaders and so on. None of them mentioned the war, or imperialism – both were out of bounds. Alex Gordon declared the purpose of the London ESF was to strengthen the British trade union movement. Professor Callinicos was there, fresh back from jet-setting to the Mumbai World Social Forum. To prove how 'democratic' the process was, the organisers allowed a queue of people to come to the mike. The coincidence was that they were nearly all from the SWP...and so all supported whatever proposal had come down from above.

The SWP has also organised Unite against Fascism (UAF) with Livingstone. Its founding statement is a call to stop the possibility of the BNP winning seats in the local and European elections of 10 June: 'We believe that this dangerous situation requires a new and united response from all those dedicated to freedom and democracy. Now is the time for all of us to combine our forces and unite in a broad and common front against this common threat.' Some 60 MPs have sponsored UAF including the virulently Zionist Labour MP Louise Ellman.

To vote or not to vote New Labour

What does this mean in practice? Manchester Against Racism (MAR) has been set up as the local Unite Against Fascism branch by the SWP, its allies in the SA and Labour 'left'. Its launch rally was on 16 January, and it will focus on the fact that BNP leader Nick Griffin is standing in the European elections in the northwest. The main speaker was Tony Lloyd, Labour MP and former junior minister in the Foreign Office. With him were two local Asian Labour councillors. Their message, unchallenged from anyone on the platform, was the

need to get the vote out on 10 June, and to make sure there was no split vote that would let the BNP in. In other words: vote Labour, vote for state racism, vote to attack asylum seekers.

Chair of the meeting was long-time SWP member Colin Barker. Neither he nor fellow SWP member Weyman Bennett, who is now carving out a new career as UAF national organiser, had any problem with the vote Labour sentiment. The only challenge to this came from supporters of FRFI who heckled Tony Lloyd from the floor over Labour's attack on asylum seekers.

MAR spells out its pro-Labour sentiment in its website report on the defeat of the BNP in a local Manchester council election at the end of last year: 'The result showed that anti-racist campaigning brings results, the BNP were pushed into a very poor second place with 539 votes against a substantial 2,045 for the Labour candidate. This was a significant surge in Labour's vote from last May.'

Backing these three horses simultaneously pushes the SWP into a potentially absurd situation, given that Respect is about putting up candidates to challenge New Labour, and the UAF is about not splitting the Labour vote, New or otherwise. Imagine SWP members in Respect pushing a candidate in the Euro elections, while SWPers in MAR accuse them of splitting the vote. The upshot is that the SWP will justify anything to maintain the many threads that tie it to Labour, New or Old. It will provide the support for Galloway and Livingstone to further their political careers. It is the force that keeps the opportunists together. It will try to exclude all revolutionary and anti-imperialist sentiment from the coalitions it sets up.

The SWP is of course not alone in supporting the Labour left. The choice of two coalitions has presented difficulties to some, however. The pages of the *Morning Star* have seen a debate within the ranks of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). General Secretary Robert Griffiths wants the CPB to join Respect and reclaim Labour from without. CPB chair Anita Halpin and Scottish CPB chair John Foster want no part of Respect, but wish to reclaim Labour from within. Breaking with Labour as a whole is, of course, out of the question.

As we wrote in FRFI 176, our concept of what socialists should be doing now is completely different from and opposed to that of the rest of the left. We need to build a movement which stands with those fighting imperialism – in Palestine, Iraq, Latin America. Such a movement will champion the interests of the oppressed – asylum seekers, those fighting state racism in Britain. It will stand by socialist Cuba. It will be open and democratic. Above all it will demand an irrevocable break from Labour imperialism. ■