

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

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ANDREW STERN

ONE YEAR ON IRAQ IN RUINS

20 March 2004 marked one year from the launch of the British armed forces' twenty-ninth military intervention in the Middle East since the end of World War Two. Together with the US invasion force they are responsible for killing in one year over 10,000 Iraqi civilians and up to 6,370 Iraqi troops. The Royal Navy commenced shelling and burning down ports along the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in 1819. In six of the nine decades of its existence the RAF has bombed Iraq. This repeated use of violence against Middle Eastern peoples is intended to control them, control their resources and break any resistance. This time the resistance in Iraq, like the resistance in Palestine, is not being broken. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

The ruling Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) does not keep figures of Iraqi casualties. *The Independent's* Robert Fisk, unable to obtain reliable information, visited mortuaries. He concluded that in September 1,000 Iraqi civilians were being killed each week. Iraq Body Count estimates that during five months under CPA jurisdiction Baghdad alone had over 1,500 violent deaths. Using reports from 2003 it is estimated that Iraqi deaths from previously unexploded cluster

bombs dropped by US and British planes ran at 300 a month from May onwards. Infant mortality has almost doubled from 57 per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 103 in 2003. Safe water was available to 85% of Iraqis before the war, now it is accessible to 60%. Unemployment is put at 70% of the workforce. Assorted meat and vegetable prices have doubled or tripled, cooking gas has increased in price ten-fold, petrol is scarce, 15,000 Iraqi and Palestinian prisoners are held captive by US and British forces;

they have no legal rights. Desperate to portray the occupation as a success, sections of the media seized on an opinion poll conducted by Oxford Research International in February for the BBC which states that 60% of Iraqis say that life is better today than under Saddam Hussein. The poll sampled 2,500 people outside Baghdad.

On 17 January 2004 the number of US soldiers killed in combat since the start of the war reached 500. On 14 March 2004 the figure was 560 killed. This rate exceeds one US soldier killed in combat each day. Approximately 10,900 US soldiers have been removed from Iraq for medical treatment. 59 British troops have been killed in Iraq and approximately 2,200 have been evacuated for medical reasons. 37 soldiers from contingents supplied by 32 other countries to the occupation force have been killed. These are deaths and casualties in the service of imperialism.

Imperialist strategy

All talk of bringing democracy and freedom to Iraq and the Middle East, like the phoney mission to destroy weapons of mass destruction, throws

dust in the eyes of anyone who wants to understand the purpose of the war. The war is part of a US ruling class strategy to dominate the world and prevent the rise of any would-be contender to its power. This class moved quickly to assert its global dominance after the collapse of the Soviet Union. US military spending exceeds that of the next 25 biggest military spenders combined. In a context of growing economic crisis for international capitalism and with growing resistance to US domination in Latin America, the US ruling class is determined to prevent opposition turning an economic crisis for imperialism into a political crisis and to use force if necessary.

Specifically, the US ruling class has identified the European Union (EU), Russia and China as potential rivals. Control of the Middle East, with 60% of the world's oil reserves, is seen as crucial in maintaining their subordination. Assisted by Britain, the US has dominated the Middle East since World War Two. This domination is judged to be in peril. By occupying and controlling Iraq, the US and British states can reinforce their geo-strategic control over the Middle East and in partic-

ular target Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria to enforce compliance.

With the 2001 war on Afghanistan the US established military bases from the Gulf to the Caspian Basin, across Central Asia on Russia's southern flank to China's border. In the past two months US troops have been posted into Saharan African states. The US ruling class has established a global belt of bases for operations combined with an aerial reach that can take their warplanes from Kansas to Kazakhstan in 13 hours. Oil and gas fields and transportation routes are all guarded. These are preparations for war. They are intended to extend US global power by military means; they are predatory and not defensive moves. The United Nations (UN), providing a forum for the exercise of rival imperial, Russian and Chinese interests, was not going to be allowed to get in the way of US plans and was consequently brushed aside in the drive to war.

Whatever one may think of Prime Minister Blair's pose of evangelical sincerity, his sermons conceal a devotion to base financial calculations. British overseas assets are

continued on page 3

THE BUDGET pre-empting the Tories

The prime consideration behind Chancellor Brown's eighth budget was to prepare the ground for a Labour victory at the next general election, possibly as early as May 2005. With the Tories now led by a more competent and credible reactionary, Brown has to ensure that the coalition of forces that brought Labour to power in 1997 remains on board. Governing in the interests of banking and multinational capital, he has to keep the support of a majority of the professional, middle and upper working class. That is no longer an easy task. DAVID YAFFE reports.

Labour's credibility as in any way a progressive force in British politics has been finally laid to rest as a result of its shameless imperialist intervention in Iraq. In addition, the world economic situation has significantly deteriorated and Labour's room for manoeuvre is severely curtailed. Brown is constrained by Labour's neo-liberal economic agenda, his so-called 'prudent' fiscal rules to 'keep the debt-to-GDP ratio low and stable while balancing the current budget over the economic cycle' – the so-called 'golden rule'.¹ Borrowing to invest is permitted within these self-imposed rules as long as public debt is kept below 40% of GDP. The much lower income and corporation tax revenues resulting from the economic slowdown, together with the already announced spending plans for health and education needed to keep middle class voters on board, have pushed these rules close to the limit.

Little room for manoeuvre

This year the government has been forced to borrow £37.5bn, 3.4% of GDP, to finance its expenditure, £10bn more than Brown was expecting in last year's budget. This breaches the eurozone stability pact of 3% for the first time. Brown expects this borrowing to fall over the next years to £23bn in 2008-09, but, given his spending commitments and the neo-liberal dogma which prevents him raising income tax or corporation tax, this seems very optimistic. Brown's forecasts anyway leave much to be desired. Although he tells us that over the seven-year economic cycle he will have a surplus of £11bn on the current budget, so meeting his 'golden rule', this is smaller than the margin of error for forecasted borrowing in two years time of £19bn. His record is far worse than this. In 2001 he predicted a surplus of £124bn and as late as last year's budget a surplus of £45bn.

Unsurprisingly this year's budget was very tight. Besides the plans already announced, an extra £8.5bn on education 'tied to reform and results' needs to be found after the last education review left many schools with unprecedented budget cuts. There is a one-off payment to pensioners over 70 to head off the growing opposition to council tax rises, costing £475m. This will barely make any

inroads into pensioner poverty and no funds have been put aside for repeating the payment. An extra £669m by 2007-08 is being put aside for funding new childcare places, barely touching the problems facing millions of working parents.

In his speech Brown was keen to tell us that as a result of his prudence Britain can afford £6bn for its ongoing and additional (imperialist) commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and the north of Ireland. Having allocated defence the

from the announced merger of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise. How then did this differ from Tory plans? The Tories would use the savings to reduce taxes rather than spend them, as Labour claimed it would do, on 'front-line services'. Tens of thousands of workers are to lose their jobs and livelihood so that Labour can outmanoeuvre the Tories.

Tabloid-like pronouncements about cutting 'waste and bureaucracy' look attractive to some when written on paper.



Public sector jobs under attack by the Labour Government

largest increase for 20 years in the last spending review, he proposes further, unspecified, real term increases in the future. Labour knows its priorities.

The real growth in public spending has been 5% per year since 2000. It will rapidly fall to 2.7% after 2005. Outside health and education other departments' expenditure such as housing and transport will rise by only 1.4%, a fall in their spending as a percentage of GDP. No wonder that consideration of the Barker report on the appalling state of house-building in the UK was put off until after the election.

As a result of previously announced increases, taxation will rise from 37.8% to 40.5% of GDP, the highest level since the 1980s. This will not change as a result of this budget with the net effect of all tax measures to 2006-07 a cut of only £170m.

There is no more leeway and Brown, in order to meet his spending plans, has been forced to attack some of Labour's supporters.

Cutting jobs

The most noteworthy feature of this budget is the unprecedented attack on tens of thousands of jobs in the civil service in a pre-emptive strike to counter the Tory election strategy. Labour will seek to save some £20bn by 2007-08 from departmental running costs, using new technology and other 'efficiency' savings to cut at least 40,500 jobs in the civil service. The savings are already built into his expenditure plans. The job cuts are in addition to plans announced earlier in the week to disperse 20,000 civil service jobs from the South East to other regions. They were justified in terms of freeing resources from administration to 'front-line services', 30,000 out of a total 130,000 jobs, a staggering 23.1%, are to go from the Department of Work and Pensions, and 10,500 more

Indeed one union leader Kevin Curran, general secretary of the GMB union, was happy to go along with this when he said that Brown 'has bravely negotiated cuts in Whitehall departments that will ensure that public service investment reaches communities where it can most help individuals and families'. The reality is quite different as millions found out to their cost when at the receiving end of the Inland Revenue's failure last year to pay out tax credits promptly and accurately. Many other fiascos have been reported over the last few years in those civil service departments losing thousands of jobs, as workers have struggled to keep up with a multitude of tax, national insurance and other regulations imposed on them by Labour policies. These cuts are unacceptable and must be vigorously opposed. They reflect Labour's gross contempt for millions of public sector workers.

Mark Serwotka of the Public and Commercial Service Union was the only one to reflect the anger of many civil service workers when he called the budget 'a day of long knives for public servants across the UK'. Arbitrary cuts, he said, in vital public services are not the answer. Other union leaders were more equivocal. Brendan Barber, general secretary of the TUC, appeared not to take the cuts very seriously, as he thought the announcement of civil service job losses 'had more to do with shooting the opposition's fox than acting as a responsible employer'. Indeed he said that the 'steady-as-you-go Budget strikes the right note'. Dave Prentis, head of Unison, the biggest public sector union, warned that: 'Central government provides essential services that enable us to deliver at the local level. We would not want anything to happen to undermine the cohesion of public services.' Nevertheless, he went

on to say that: 'This is a win-win Budget for people and public services'. It seems highly unlikely that any fightback will come from this quarter.

Closing tax loopholes

Brown had been forced to attack sections of the middle classes in order to squeeze a little more tax revenues from his tax base. It seems these classes have become too enterprising. He has closed two major tax loopholes.

The zero rate of corporation tax on the first £10,000 profit for small companies to 'encourage entrepreneurs', has it seems been abused. 250,000 consultants, media freelancers and other self-employed people have registered themselves as companies, paying themselves in dividends instead of salaries and so avoiding income tax. This measure was budgeted to cost £20m in 2002-03 and

£265m in 2003-04 but as a result of such 'enterprise' it could be costing the government £1bn a year. This loophole has now been closed and a 19% tax will be paid on the distribution of small company profits in future.

The other tax loophole closed concerns inheritance tax and is designed to stop people giving away assets while continuing to enjoy the benefits of those assets, such as living in a house you have given to your children. Income tax will now be charged on the retained benefit. This will mainly hit the professional and middle classes living in the South East. In addition, in future, all tax avoidance schemes have to be disclosed to the Inland Revenue by accountants for investigation.

Labour's rich fat cat friends need not worry. Wealthy foreigners who live in the UK and pay no tax on their worldwide income or capital gains face only a consultation paper whose aim is fairness in the tax system, so long as reform does not damage the UK's competitiveness. So no problem there. Brown has also backed down over fat cat pensions allowing a new more generous lifetime limit for tax-free retirement savings of £1.5m rising steadily to £1.8m by 2010.

Labour knows how to treat its real friends.

Finally the poor will continue to be bullied into low-paid jobs. A £20 'work-search premium' scheme will be extended from lone parents in parts of the country to the sick and disabled, and to six areas of high levels of 'worklessness'. Anyone in a family receiving tax credits and not working will receive £20 a week if they join the New Deal and search for a job. There will also be a 'work-focused interview regime' for some sick and disabled people who claim benefit. 2.7m people claim incapacity benefit, nearly three times the official unemployment figure, and Labour wants to bully a significant section of them into work. A tight budget from a reactionary government.

1. This and other quotes come from Brown's budget speech 17 March 2004. For a discussion of the strategic considerations behind this and previous Labour budgets see 'The budget: making the poor pay' in FRFI 167 June/July 2002 or on our website www.revolutionarycommunist.com in the FRFI section.

2. Quotes from the *Financial Times* 18 March 2004.

Victory against the Terrorism Act

On 1 March 2004 the charges against six people accused of DHKP-C (Revolutionary Peoples' Liberation Party-Front) membership were thrown out. They had been arrested in December 2002 by the Metropolitan Police's Anti-Terrorist Branch, held and interrogated at Paddington Green police station for a week, then released on bail. They had been awaiting trial for 15 months.

Shortly before the trial the defence counsel noticed the Attorney General's written consent for the prosecution had never been given, which is a requirement under the Terrorism Act as the charges concerned the affairs of a foreign jurisdiction – in this case Turkey. In an attempt to cover this up the prosecution claimed

that membership of a foreign organisation and sending funds abroad to a proscribed organisation did not actually involve the affairs of any foreign jurisdiction! Although the defendants lost that particular legal argument they won the next one concerning abuse of process.

In March 2001 the Home Office proscribed 21 foreign organisations. The list included the DHKP-C. After the proscription order had been passed, the DHKC (Revolutionary Peoples' Liberation Front) London Information Bureau wrote to the Home Office, asking whether the DHKC was now banned. The Home Office replied that the DHKC had not been banned and as long as it did not break any laws it was to continue its work even if it involved propagating views that the government dis-

agreed with or even criticising 'friendly governments'.

When the defendants were charged in December 2002 the basis of the prosecution was the assertion that being a DHKC activist constituted DHKP-C membership, a position that clearly contradicted the Home Office's previously stated policy. The defence counsel successfully argued that arresting the defendants represented a breach of promise not to arrest, as outlined in the earlier Home Office correspondence, and was therefore an abuse of process.

All charges were dropped, leaving the defendants free to continue with the political work free from prosecution. This case has cost at least one million pounds – the war on (t)error doesn't come cheap.

Harry Walsh

website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk
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Iraq in ruins

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second only to those of the USA; two of the world's three biggest oil monopolies are British and Anglo-Dutch (BP and Shell) and the City of London is Europe's main financial centre. The British Labour government considers that in the event of growing inter-imperialist rivalry the interests of the British ruling class are best served at present in an alliance with the US, given its overwhelming military superiority. This 'special relationship' is used to elevate British interests relative to those of Germany, France and Japan. It is a risky strategy and real divisions exist within the British ruling class over whether to side with the US or EU in the event of their falling out, as they did over the war on Iraq. By pulling the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Polish and Ukraine governments into the war coalition the British Labour government was able to prevent its isolation in Europe and continue to play the role of bridge between the US and EU. French and German capitalism cannot be constrained to whatever the US and British ruling classes consider they can afford, consequently further confrontations will occur and a crisis of decision for the British ruling class will arrive. The prospect of a new Spanish government withdrawing its 1,300 troops from Iraq increases the pressure on the British government.

Coalition forced into retreat

Branded 'shock and awe' the assault started spectacularly enough. The explosive power and the display were intended to defeat the Iraqi army psychologically and materially without having to engage it on the ground. They were also warnings to any one else in the world considering defying US power. It took just three weeks to capture Baghdad. Pre-emptive war on the digital battlefield courtesy of the combination of electrical sensors, satellites, computers, missiles and guided bombs seemed irresistible: 'winning is keeping the target in constant sight'.* The resistance dispersed, moved out of sight of the imperialist armies and began to fight back. The occupation forces were joined in guerrilla wars of hide and seek. Thus far the head of the CPA Paul Bremer, US Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz and the US Middle East Commander General John Abizaid have all narrowly missed being killed by resistance attacks. Intelligence superiority has reverted back from its electronic forms to that which is passed from house to house and street to street.

While the imperialists can claim success with their opening salvos and infra-red thermal imaging cameras for use at night, the resistance has continued to land telling blows with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted along road sides and exploded by command wires, remote controls and mobile telephones. Additionally, the use of shoulder-held missiles has forced coalition helicopters to fly fast and low, thereby reducing their surveillance function. The mobility of the coalition forces has been reduced and in order to reduce casualties they are either being restricted to forays from bases or replaced with Iraqis. Repeated

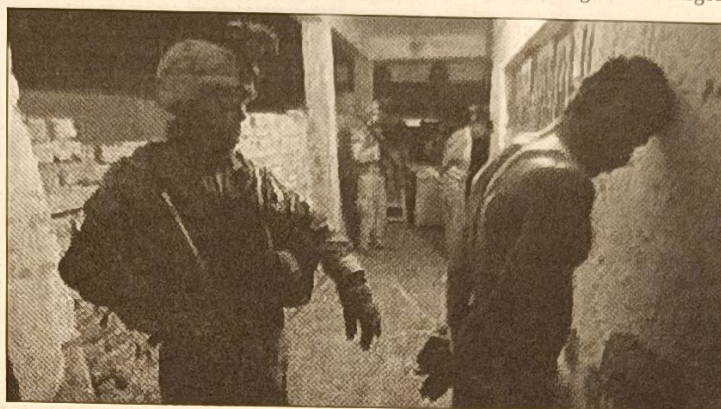
bombings of police stations, army bases, hotels and prestige sites have contributed to the growing and increasingly apparent ineffectiveness of the occupation armies. This is creating political problems for the imperialist states and jeopardising the realisation of the US ruling class's ambitions.

The US forces have cut the number of their encampments in Baghdad from 60 to 26, with a further reduction to eight planned: one to be in the centre of the city and the others on the outskirts. The US intention is to pass control of Baghdad's security to 9,000 Iraqi police with 10,000 more to be deployed by 2005. US troops have vacated town centres in Sunni areas, having failed to suppress the resistance. The US Army pretends it is winning, reporting that the number of armed clashes its forces are involved in has fallen from 50 a day in November to 20 a day in February. However, it is retreating to key installations, seeking to retain its strategic control while forsaking more territory and hoping that collaborators will fight for the occupiers.

Since November, over 600 Iraqi police appointed by the CPA have been killed. On 10 February a suicide car-bomber killed 50 people at a police station in Iskandariya, south of Baghdad, and the following day 47 people were killed at an army recruitment centre in the capital by another suicide car-bomb. Half of the 40,000 Iraqi police and soldiers the US and Britain hoped to train have deserted. There is evidence that

resistance fighters have infiltrated the police. The US has formed a secret police unit, Task Force 121, trained to target and assassinate Iraqi resistance, 'man-hunting' as US defence secretary Rumsfeld put it. This force is run by the US military and intelligence services with the help of Israeli advisers and includes Kurds, Shi'ite militiamen and senior intelligence agents from the former Ba'athist regime.

The British Army presents its occupation of the Basra region as a sophisticated and successful policing operation, distinct from the US effort. This will fool no one who has



US army arrest in Tikrit

ever been subject to British policing. In mid-February *The Independent* reported that the British military are investigating the deaths of 37 Iraqi civilians killed by British forces since President Bush declared the end of the war on 1 May 2003. Six of them are described as deaths in custody. Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price said he wanted to visit Basra to enquire about the deaths but was warned off: 'The Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, has told me that if I go I "will be killed."'

A shift in tactics

Resistance in Iraq has forced the Bush administration to have second

thoughts about taking on Syria, Iran and North Korea and caused opposition to the conduct of US policy within the US ruling class itself. Sections of the US establishment see the Bush presidency as needlessly provocative, expensive and creating too many opponents. Writing in the *Financial Times* on the 'war on terrorism' Martin Wolf expresses this view: 'Western policy must be guided by the aim of securing...co-operation from the Islamic world, however difficult that task may be...success even in limiting terrorism depends on the closest possible co-operation among the largest

number of countries. Given this, virtually all the rhetoric and much of the practice of the Bush administration have been nothing short of disaster. The administration might have secured support for the war in Iraq had it not first trampled on the sensibilities of its allies...The US cannot win this struggle on its own, or by military means alone.' President Bush and his neo-conservative cabal are either to be reined in or replaced.

The recent installation in the White House team of former US Secretary of State James Baker indicated the change of tactic. Baker represents big oil companies. He opposed a

unilateral war on Iraq; the big oil corporations feared it could destabilise the region – their fears are coming true. One of Baker's first tasks was to tour Iraq's main creditor nations, presumably to arrange debt write-offs in exchange for access to Iraqi oil. Among the countries he visited were France and Russia, both opponents of the war, whose companies had their Iraqi contracts torn up last year by the CPA. Now Russia's Lukoil has been invited to renovate oil assets on the Iraqi West Qurnah oil field. In March Shell and the French oil multinational Total, moored off Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, received the first oil pumped from Kirkuk. Among the banks offered future oil revenue in exchange for short-term credit to the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council is BNP Paribas. French fries must be back on the menu. This is how US capitalism wins friends and influences people.

Democratic Party contender John Kerry voices US ruling class discontent with the methods used by the Bush presidency and also serves to constrain the neo-conservatives' ambitions. However, Kerry does not represent an alternative strategy for the US ruling class, just an adjustment in the governance and style of it. Kerry voted for the invasion and has not called for an end to the occupation of Iraq. Indeed, he called for an additional 40,000 US troops to be sent to Iraq. Responding to the newly-elected Spanish prime minister's pledge to bring Spanish troops back from Iraq unless they were under UN command Kerry said: 'In my judgement, the new prime minister should not have decided that he was going to pull out of Iraq. He should have said this increases our determination to get the job done.'

The US and British governments claim some success in paving the way to democracy in Iraq by getting the Governing Council to agree an interim constitution on 1 March. The 15 November agreement on a constitutional committee and regional caucuses to elect an interim assembly was quietly shelved and we are now on the fourth blueprint for the future Iraq. After 30 June the CPA passes authority to the Governing Council and the CPA transforms itself, in the words of Paul Bremer, 'into the world's largest embassy... [with] thousands of American government officials from all our departments.' The new authority's first responsibility will be to invite the occupation forces to stay on. Elections are scheduled to take place before the end of January 2005. Major issues such as the degree of autonomy for the Kurds, women's rights and the status of Islam as a source of law are left unresolved. Ayatollah Sistani and his Shia political allies oppose giving the Kurds veto powers over an elected assembly. Iran, Syria and Turkey, all states established on the denial of Kurdish rights, have voiced their opposition to Kurdish autonomy in Iraq and have increased repression of their Kurdish populations.

Thus far this war has cost the British government over £3.6 billion, rising an additional £200 million a month. This year the US government intends to spend \$87 billion in Iraq, a sum over four times the size of the Iraqi economy. Iraqi oil production is now 1.9 million barrels a day compared with 2.8 million before the invasion. None of the major oil multinationals intends to operate in Iraq until there is security there. Iraqi resistance leaders have said that 'a united resistance will soon be in action'. This war has been a deadly folly. Get the British and all foreign soldiers out of Iraq now.

* Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*

Afghanistan – a little local difficulty

Timed to coincide with US Secretary of State Colin Powell's mid-March visit to Kabul and Islamabad, a US-led force of 13,500 troops launched the suitably dramatically named Operation Mountain Storm in search of Osama bin Laden, along the Afghan border with Pakistan. Across the border the Pakistan army entered the semi-autonomous province of South Waziristan. Al Qaida fighters would be caught between the 'hammer and the anvil', they said. Powell expressed satisfaction with the show: 'The action yesterday suggests that Pakistan has picked up the pace. We hope they continue to do that.'

Entering into the spirit of the performance, Pakistani agents reported Bin Laden's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, trapped in South Waziristan. In their enthusiasm the agents must have improvised, for next we learned that the slippery fellow had escaped down a mile-long tunnel. The capture of Bin Laden is a priority for Bush's presidential election campaign. Task Force 121, the team that found Saddam Hussein, has been drafted in.

During Powell's visit to Kabul, Afghan President Karzai said elections for a new president and parliament, scheduled for June, might be postponed because only 10% of 10.5 million voters had registered. His government's rule does not extend much beyond Kabul. US and NATO forces are confined to bases,

when they are not chasing ghosts in the wilderness. They ignore the opium trade in order to keep the allegiance of local warlords. Afghan opium is the source of 90% of the heroin consumed in Britain. Opium production accounts for half the Afghan economy and is worth sixty times the official exports to Pakistan, Afghanistan's main trading partner. The many manifestations of women's oppression continue, unchallenged by the government.

The US and NATO governments have no interest in developing Afghanistan. They want a strategically safe country, but this seems beyond them. US forces say they have engaged with re-grouped Taliban units. During January over 80 people were killed in fighting, including eight US troops; the largest single loss for US troops since the Taliban were driven from power in 2001. Between July and February some 550 people have been killed in fighting. The US organisation Human Rights Watch accuses US forces of using unprovoked lethal force to capture civilians. Along with the captives at Guantanamo Bay, the US holds civilians at bases in Bagram, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Asadabad. The captives are held incommunicado, with no tribunals, no legal counsel, no family visits and no legal protections. Prisoners are killed during interrogation.

Trevor Rayne



Afghanistan elections have been postponed

Inter-imperialist rivalry

Blessed are those who seek redemption – and who possess the world's eighth largest oil reserves. The world is being re-carved. British capitalism and its state carefully planned Prime Minister Blair's 25 March visit to Libya. Suddenly Colonel Gaddafi is a 'statesman' and 'courageous' – and Shell has contracts to search for oil and gas and renovate Libya's fuel facilities. Britain's biggest manufacturing company BAE Systems is negotiating civil airport services for Libya and the British Army will train Libyan soldiers at Sandhurst.

To counter US influence in Central Asia, China has initiated the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It held its first joint military exercise last year. This March France and China announced their first joint military exercises. Amid the manoeuvres the demon of war gets ready to ride again.

Five detainees released from US concentration camps in Guantanamo Bay

CAROL BRICKLEY

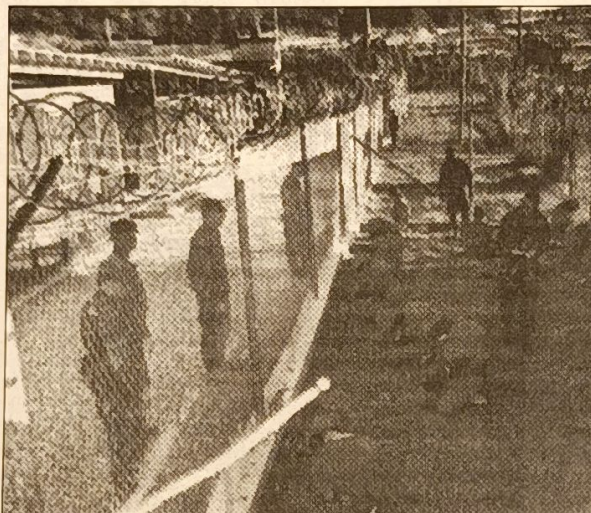
Detention without trial has long been the hallmark of tyrannical regimes. In apartheid South Africa the regime detained and tortured thousands of black people, mostly young men, in periods when the challenge to white racist rule was most fierce. In Chile thousands of supporters of President Allende were detained and tortured by the military junta of General Pinochet following the 1973 coup. In Ireland in 1971, Republicans were rounded up by the British Army and sent to internment camps.

The accounts of inhuman treatment, degradation and torture are similar for all these events, regardless of the geography, varying only in the severity of the treatment. In South Africa, detainees were beaten, electrocuted, hung or thrown out of windows; in Chile the mechanics of torture were cruelly similar. In the north of Ireland, the detainees described how their heads were covered with black hoods; they were deprived of food, water and sleep; they were made to stand against walls with hands raised and legs apart for long periods, some were threatened with being thrown out of helicopters. On 9 March five Guantanamo Bay detainees were released. Asif Iqbal, Rhuheh Ahmed, Shafiq Rasul, Terek Dergoul, and Jamal Al Harith were flown back to Britain; four of them were then questioned further by the police before they were released to tell the story of their two-year detention by the US in Guantanamo Bay concentration camps. They told the truth and it bore all the hallmarks of torture.

These detainees were picked up in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the aftermath of the USA's war in Afghanistan. The dogs of war were let loose across the region to round up suspected supporters of the Taliban and Al Qaida. The local warlords and drug traffickers had many scores to settle and were indiscriminate. It is clear from these detainees' accounts that thousands died in barbaric conditions. When they were handed over to the US authorities their rights continued to be violated in every respect:

- they were deprived of food, water, clothing and sleep;
- they were not told or were lied to about where they were, where they were being transported to and how long they would be held;
- they were physically assaulted and threatened;
- they were interrogated repeatedly (more than 200 times) for long periods;
- their families were denied information about their whereabouts and their well-being, and they were denied contact with their families;
- they received no legal or independent advice or representation.

All these points are the standard techniques used to demoralise and isolate prisoners ready for



Blind-folded, kneeling captives at Camp X-ray, Guantanamo Bay

interrogation. After months of abuse with no end in sight such prisoners will confess to anything, and will invent information to escape the worst excesses of their treatment. From beginning to end their human rights were violated. Even after they had been released, and the British had failed to find any reason to detain them further, the US was still claiming that they had been involved in terrorism and that they had not been tortured or badly treated in detention. The facts show the opposite.

610 men are still being held in Guantanamo concentration camps and no one knows how many others are held in camps across Asia, either by the US or by its local henchmen. The US argues that this is a war against terrorism and they have every right to intern their enemies for the duration of the war. This is not true. The detainees are being held outside any international treaty and in total contravention of international law.

Even a senior law lord described the process: 'The purpose of holding the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay was and is to put them beyond the rule of law, beyond the protection of any courts, and at the mercy of the victors... The [Guantanamo Bay] procedural rules do not prohibit the use of force to coerce prisoners to confess. On the contrary, the rules expressly provide that statements made by a prisoner under physical and mental duress are admissible "if the evidence would have value to a reasonable person", ie military officers trying enemy soldiers.' (Lord Steyn, FA Mann Lecture, November 2003)

The released Guantanamo Bay detainees have confirmed this. They confessed that they attended an Al Qaida meeting at a time when in fact they were in Britain. Ironically it was MI5, which had participated in interrogation sessions, that held the proof that their confessions were false - they had been extracted by torture: 'All the time I was kneeling with a guy standing on the backs of my legs and another holding a gun to my head.' (Rhuheh Ahmed)

Four other British men are still held in Guantanamo: two of

them, Feroz Abbasi and Moazzam Begg, have, in the words of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw 'been designated by the United States authorities as eligible to stand trial by the US military commissions being established to deal with the detainees'. In a lickspittle statement about the release of the five detainees issued on 20 February, Straw covered up the reality of British collusion in the unlawful detention and torture of these prisoners. He claimed that the UK government had been in 'frequent and regular contact' with the US about the nine detainees, visiting on six occasions to 'check on their welfare'. Did this include the occasions when MI5 was involved in the illegal coercive interrogations? It is no accident that it was Straw who allowed Chilean torturer and murderer General Pinochet to escape trial in Spain in 2000.

The British Labour government has made much of its 'reservations' about the military tribunals which are being passed off as courts of law and which can impose the death sentence. Those deemed 'eligible' for trial will have the US military as their interrogators, prosecutors, defence counsel, judges and executioners. Straw claims that there have been 'complex issues of law and security which both governments have had to consider'. But the reality is very clear: these courts are kangaroo courts designed to torture, murder and incarcerate Muslims. In the 1970s the Irish had a song which ran: 'Being Irish means you're guilty'. Today, 'being Muslim means you're guilty' and the British Labour government is once again complicit in this racist, murderous, barbaric process. These 'progressives' offer the good news that no British detainee will suffer the death sentence. So what about the other 606 detainees who will be subject to very unequal treatment? They can be left to rot in unmarked graves in Guantanamo Bay or in prison cells and concentration camps across the world. After 100 years as a bourgeois political party in the service of imperialism, Labour is racist to its core. ■

Ireland:

Peace charade continues as loyalists escalate attacks

PAUL MALLON

In the north of Ireland there is stalemate over the restoration of political power to the Stormont Assembly. The review of the Good Friday Agreement will continue. Further concessions will be demanded from the Republican Movement against a backdrop of continued state discrimination and loyalist violence and intimidation against Catholics. The concessions already made by the Republican movement are causing open friction within the nationalist community. Whatever the pace of 'progress' it will take more than a flying visit from British Prime Minister Tony Blair to resolve the inherent contradictions within the sectarian state.

The Stormont Assembly was suspended on 14 October 2002. This followed a widely-publicised police raid on the Sinn Féin offices at Stormont amidst allegations of an IRA 'spy ring' at the heart of the Assembly. Since then, there has been a 17-month wrangle and political manoeuvrings to re-establish Stormont rule. The fact that all

Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry following an attack in the loyalist Waterside area of the city. The attack was carried out by a group of loyalist thugs who made a series of anti-Catholic remarks, including 'You look like a fenian', before the brutal assault took place; it has since emerged that there have been a number of similar attacks in this areas of the city.

The activities of loyalist terror squads in the greater Lisburn, Lagan Valley area over the last four years have been exposed recently by a local Sinn Féin councillor in a detailed dossier. The list details over 70 serious incidents including gun, petrol and pipe-bomb attacks, arson and murder. Nine Catholic churches have been repeatedly targeted, as have Catholic businesses, many of which have been forced to close following repeated intimidation. In November 2003, a series of sectarian attacks against Catholics socialising in Lisburn City culminated in the murder of James McMahon. No one has ever been charged with the crime. Lisburn City is now effectively a no-go area for Catholics.

The leadership of the

Protestant while 11.5% are Catholic. The promise of the Good Friday Agreement to provide equality and peace for the nationalist people is being exposed as a sham.

There is now growing friction within the nationalist community over the concessions that are being made to support the Good Friday Agreement. Two councillors, Martin Cunningham and John Kelly, recently resigned from Sinn Féin in protest at the lack of democracy and debate over party policy. These resignations came at a time of increased pressure on Sinn Féin. In February the media was filled with coverage of an alleged IRA attack on leading dissident Republican Bobby Tohill in Belfast on 20 February. Whatever the truth of these reports it is inevitable that the Republican movement will come under pressures from within its constituency over the lack of political progress. ■

Political prisoners

The following is a list of all republican prisoners in Portlaoise Gaol affiliated to the New Republican Forum.

Name	County	Sentence
Tony Hyland	Dublin	25 years
Darren Mulholland	Louth	22 years
Liam Grogan	Kildare	22 years
Michael McKevitt	Louth	20 years
Paddy McDonagh	Louth	10 years
Kieran McDonagh	Louth	10 years
Alan Patterson	Dublin	9 years
Pascal Burke	Dublin	8 years
Ken Patterson	Dublin	7 years
Gerard Moyna	Antrim	7 years
Declan Carroll	Dublin	7 years
Richard Whyte	Kildare	5 years
Sean Mulligan	Down	5 years
Christy Dineen	Limerick	5 years
Sean Maloney	Kildare	4 1/2 years
Robert Brennan	Dublin	4 years
James Bullman	Limerick	4 years
Dalton McKevitt	Louth	3 1/2 years
Alan Browne	Louth	3 1/2 years
Niall Farrell	Louth	3 1/2 years
Eoin Quigley	Louth	3 1/2 years
Tony O'Hare	Louth	3 1/2 years

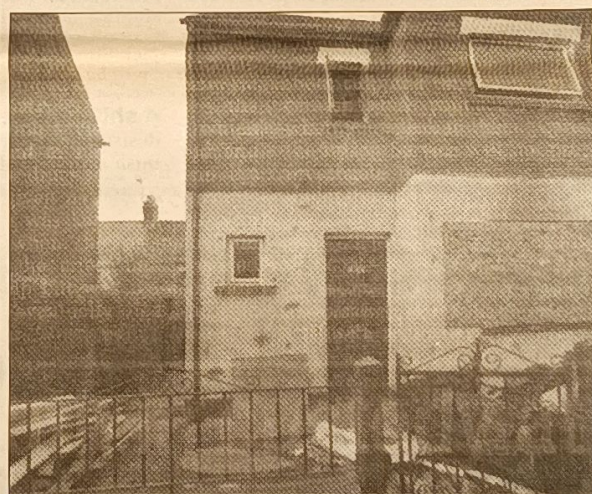
Messages of support can be sent to the prisoners at the following address: Portlaoise Gaol, Portlaoise, Co. Laois, Ireland.

The following is a list of all sentenced republican prisoners in English gaols.

Name	Sentence	Prison
Michael McDonald	30 yrs	Whitemoor
Declan Rafferty	30 yrs	Whitemoor
Fintan O'Farrell	30 yrs	Full Sutton
James McCormack	18 yrs	Full Sutton
Aidan Hulme	16 yrs	Long Lartin
Robert Hulme	16 yrs	Long Lartin
John Paul Hannon	14 yrs	Whitemoor
Noel Maguire	14 yrs	Full Sutton

Messages of support can be sent to the prisoners at the following addresses:

- Whitemoor Prison, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR.
- Full Sutton Prison, York, YO4 1PS
- Long Lartin Prison, Evesham, Worcs WR11 5T2.



Burnt home of a Catholic family after a loyalist arson attack

charges of spying against the arrested Sinn Féin officials have now been dropped through lack of evidence has received little press attention.

The dirty sectarian war being waged by the reactionary loyalist terror groups continues. Figures recently released by the Northern Ireland Office reveal the extent of the widespread terror campaign. In the twelve months to January this year loyalists were responsible for at least seven killings, 135 shootings and 41 bombings. In recent weeks the loyalists have continued their low-level terror campaign, inflicting misery on the Catholic community. On 11 March, a Catholic family in the staunchly loyalist town of Larne in County Antrim were forced from their home following a pipe-bomb attack in the middle of the night. Fortunately the bomb failed to explode. It is believed that the UVF carried out the attack.

The previous day a 13-year-old Catholic schoolboy was treated for cuts and bruises at

Unionist community has been silent about these attacks, and there has been little activity from the re-branded RUC, the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Lisburn and Larne examples are far from isolated incidents. In Newtownabbey the situation has been even worse. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement there have been six killings carried out by loyalist death squads. A campaign against Catholics in the South Antrim area peaked during the summer of 2002 when over 60 families were forced to flee their homes following loyalist attacks - but these are not deemed news worthy.

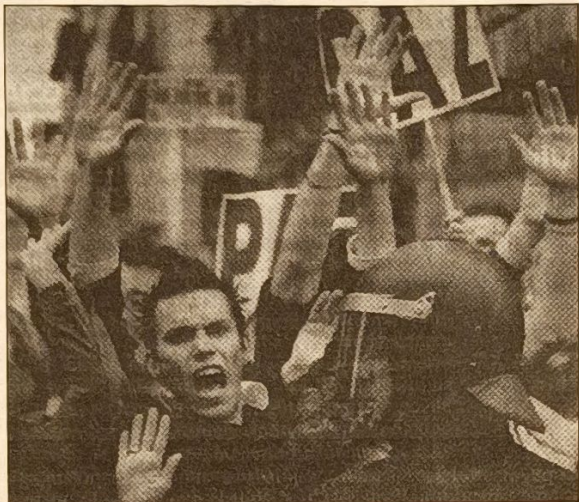
Northern Ireland is a sectarian statelet which cannot be reformed. Discrimination and sectarian violence are inextricably linked. In a damning indictment of the widespread institutionalised sectarian nature of the Six Counties a statistical breakdown of the Newtownabbey council workforce revealed that 88.5% is

Spanish people oppose war, terrorism and lies

JUANJO RIVAS & DANIEL MUELAS

March has been a month of death, grief, rage, social unrest and political punishment in Spain. On 11 March, exactly 911 days after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York, 12 bombs went off in Madrid, leaving 202 people dead and 1,500 injured. The effect on the population has been a reinvigoration of disgust at the war on Iraq, which was opposed by 90% of Spaniards. There was also immense anger at the government's handling of the crisis, which took place just three days before the general elections. The authoritarianism and blatant lies told by Aznar's People's Party (PP) led to them being voted out and to the completely unexpected victory of the social democratic Labour Party (PSOE), who won almost three million more votes than in 2000.

Despite its name, the PP is a bourgeois right-wing party. Most of its leading members have economic, ideological and family ties to the national-Catholic dictatorship of General Franco. Eight years of conservative government have deepened the process of total privatisation begun by the social democrats in the early 1990s. The remains of the public sector have been dismantled; there has been speculation on the housing market and regressive tax reforms. Two Basque newspapers have been closed down and the Basque party Batasuna banned. There have been cuts in social expenditure, protest has been



Demonstrators protested against the lies outside the PP headquarters in Madrid

criminalised and the rate of growth has been sustained by poverty pay at home and aggressive economic interventionism abroad.

Three episodes in the political life of the PP government have been especially controversial. Firstly, the 20 June 2002 general strike against reform of the labour market. Secondly, the manipulative and profit-hungry way in which the country's greatest-ever environmental disaster was dealt with (a massive oil spill on the coast of Galicia). Finally, Aznar's government's imperialist backing of the US/UK invasion of Iraq, together with repressive measures against the anti-war movement of a kind not seen since the time of Franco.

In the run-up to the general

election, an intelligence report was leaked to the right-wing press about the talks in southern France between two leaders of the Basque armed group ETA and the leader of ERC (Catalonian nationalists governing in coalition with the regional PSOE). Aznar's PP and its media launched a campaign to undermine all opposition and portray themselves as the only guarantors of democracy and the fight against terrorism. When, surprisingly, in February ETA declared a unilateral ceasefire in Catalonia, the PP saw a chance to escalate its propaganda in order to gain an absolute majority in parliament.

On 11 March bombs in rucksacks exploded on two trains coming into Madrid's Atocha station from working class dor-

mitory towns. At the same time three more blasts took place in trains at El Pozo and Santa Eugenia. Everything happened within minutes, between 7:39 and 7:42. Many people were killed in secondary explosions as they were trying to rescue the wounded from the first ones. Two more bombs failed to go off. The terrorist attack hit hundreds of students and workers from traditionally left-wing working class areas where the population includes many immigrants.

The government lost no time in blaming ETA and Basque separatism, although the armed group has never carried out such carnage and traditionally gives warnings when it plants bombs in public places. Representatives of Batasuna, the party banned for being 'the voice of ETA in the Basque Parliament', strenuously condemned the bombing and stated that it had nothing to do with their struggle; they were ignored. The Interior Minister Angel Acebes went further, pointing the finger at ETA as directly responsible and decrying anyone who dared to doubt it. The conservatives used ETA as a campaigning tool, aligning themselves with Bush's philosophy: whoever is not with us is with the terrorists. It was no coincidence that among the first people to be telephoned by Aznar were George Bush and his brother Jeb.

As early as 5pm on the day of the attack, all Spanish ambassadors received an official letter urging them to blame the Basque groups, although no evidence was provided. Meanwhile the people of Madrid

showed overwhelming solidarity with the victims, with student nurses offering help, taxi-drivers taking no payment for driving whole families to visit relatives in hospitals, and would-be blood donors queuing in their hundreds.

Three days of official mourning were called and the next day millions marched under the government slogan 'With the victims, with the Constitution, for the defeat of terrorism'. By that time the London office of *Al Quds Al Arabi* newspaper had released the e-mail in which Al Qaida claimed responsibility, and Aznar's government was about to watch the video from the organisation that admitted responsibility for the bombings. Their lies and prevarication in the face of this information caused public outrage.

Saturday 13 March was the 'reflection day', just before the Sunday election, when traditionally no political speech or demonstration is allowed. However, people organised spontaneously to deliberately disobey the law. About five thousand gathered around the PP headquarters shouting 'Liars', 'Murderers', 'We told you not to wage war', 'Your war, our dead' and 'You have chauffeurs, we have only local trains'. Over a million people spontaneously took to the streets in different cities and police charged demonstrators in Barcelona and Zaragoza. Madrid saw crowds stopping the traffic, banging kitchen pots and marching throughout the centre till dawn. The police decided it would be counter-productive to attack enormous numbers of furious demonstrators; however the Spanish media censored the rebellion, replacing the news with films and highlights of football matches – a futile exercise, as cable and satellite channels covered the demonstrations extensively.

Government hysteria was shown at its most extreme in

Pamplona where an off-duty policeman shot dead a baker who refused to put a sign in his shop saying 'No to ETA'. State forces baton-charged his memorial march in the Basque town of Hernani and a 60-year-old woman died of a heart attack.

The election had a 77.25% turnout and the PSOE got 42.64% of the votes, or 164 seats, against the 34.16% of the PP (125 seats). The PSOE leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero has promised the withdrawal of troops before 30 June if the UN doesn't take control of occupied Iraq. Contrary to the view of the right-wing press that the Spaniards yielded to the threat of terrorism and the election result was a sign of cowardice, the truth is that the people showed courage on the streets and at the polls. Aznar was punished for backing the onslaught on the Iraqi people. The Madrid attacks galvanised the strong Spanish anti-war movement, which could have a profound impact both inside and outside the country.

The PSOE is no more progressive than the PP. It supported the invasion of Yugoslavia; the Gulf War and the sanctions against Iraq. Its 14 years in government are famous for dirty tricks and corruption. At the moment it has rejected ETA's offer of dialogue. However it will bring the Spanish ruling class closer to the European imperialist bloc led by Germany and France, increasing the rivalry with US/UK imperialism in the international arena. Pulling 1,300 troops out of Iraq has no military consequences for the 127,000 strong US army, but has a political effect in strengthening the EU. Spain may now stop playing the strategic role designated by Washington and performed by Aznar of splitting European imperialism. This will increase capitalist rivalry and bring new contradictions in the future.

French government attacks Muslim population

NICKI JAMESON

The French Senate has voted by an overwhelming margin, 276 votes to 20, to approve legislation banning the Islamic headscarf or hijab and other 'conspicuous religious symbols' from being worn in French schools. The vote repeated a similar landslide in the lower house of the French Parliament, 494 votes to 36. Almost the whole French establishment has denounced the wearing of Islamic headscarves by young girls to school, with parliamentarians vying with one another for who can espouse 'secularism' the loudest. Ironically, only Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, has opposed the law, on the grounds that it is a cosmetic exercise and does not sufficiently confront the problem of immigration.

Both French women's groups and French Muslims, including women, are divided on their

approach to the ban. On International Women's Day, Muslim women marched both for and against the law.

The division of church and state in France, and the consequent introduction of secular education, are a legacy of the French Revolution of 1789, and, like the abolition of the monarchy, progressive developments that no socialist or communist can fail to support. However what Jacques Chirac's right-wing government is bringing in here is more in the tradition of persecution of believers of another faith than that of enlightened atheism.

The issue is not new. Muslim girls who insist on wearing the hijab have been sporadically expelled from French schools during the past 15 years. However the current debate occurs during a period of intense world conflict, centred on wars that are depicted as being between an enlightened and democratic 'west' and Islamic fundamental-

ism. Imperialist war abroad is mirrored in racism and racist legislation at home, as we have seen time and again in Britain. That France did not support the latest onslaught on Iraq is irrelevant, and in some ways has made Chirac even keener not to be seen as soft on Islam in France.

The law is a fundamentally racist one, and any rhetoric about protecting young girls from oppression must be seen as exactly the same hypocrisy that David Blunkett and previous British home secretaries have mouthed on such subjects as arranged marriages. The aim of the French government is to attack the already marginalised and impoverished urban French-North African community that for generations has suffered systematic discrimination in housing, employment and education, and whose young people, both men and women, are, in the absence of a credible left, turning increasingly to radical Islam.

South Africa: Social Movement Indaba condemns arrests of Anti-Privatisation Forum activists

Press Statement 21/3/04: The Social Movement Indaba (SMI) condemns the arrests of Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) activists that took place today in Johannesburg.

As the SMI was engaged in crafting a programme of action for social movements in the country, as part of a three-day SMI conference in Johannesburg, we received the reprehensible news about the arrests of 52 activists of the APF, including six children and innocent bystanders. The arrests happened around 11.15am in Pretoria Street, Hillbrow. Subsequent to that, 100 APF activists were attacked by the police outside Hillbrow Hospital. Once again, the brutal police force used violence and shot metal ball bearings, stun grenades and teargas injuring APF activists. Two injured comrades were taken to Johannesburg General Hospital.

Earlier in the day, police had unlawfully stopped APF activists from boarding buses from Soweto and Thembelille. These buses were going to join the action that was to take place at the opening of Constitutional

Hill. Other activists who had gathered at the Workers Library in Newtown were forced, under the threat of arrest, to submit to completely illegal finger-printing procedures by the police. We object strongly to such repressive tactics which were commonly used during the days of apartheid!

The APF and other movements associated with the Coalition against Water Privatisation, had earlier applied for permission to march to Constitutional Hill, to coincide with the opening of the Constitutional Court and the commemoration of Human Rights Day (Sharpeville Day). The march was to raise the collective voices of poor communities in protest at the huge gap between the stated protection and realisation of basic and constitutional human rights and the reality of those rights being denied to poor people.

In a direct manipulation of the relevant law (the apartheid-era 'Gatherings Act'), the police denied permission for the march – a clear indication that the state and its institutional agents are committed to repress-

ing social movements which disagree with state policies. The APF rightfully decided to go ahead with the protest. And yet, our rights to assemble, picket, dissent and freedom of expression, as enshrined in the constitution, were once again brutally ignored and attacked by the police force. Most hypocritically and ironically, the violence took place on Human Rights Day, also the day on which South Africa's new constitutional court was opened! This is happening when the poor and oppressed are being asked to celebrate ten years of democracy...

The Social Movement Indaba

- Condemns in the strongest terms the arrests of the APF activists.

- Demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all charges.

- Demands from the state an end to all forms of repression of basic human and constitutional rights.

For further information, contact African Liberation Support Campaign Network at nkexplo@yahoo.co.uk

Imperialist coup d'état in Haiti

These latest events can come as little surprise. Haiti has suffered a history of foreign-backed coups, imperialist plunder and meddling, despite being the first Caribbean country to have had a successful slave rebellion which overthrew the yoke of colonial oppression 200 years ago. Throughout the 19th century the fledgling republic struggled under a series of tyrannical and ineffectual leaders as the elite jockeyed for power. There were 22 heads of state between 1843 and 1915 when the US deployed soldiers and marines to protect US economic interests after it had created the professional military force, the Gard d'Haiti, to rule.

Repression and corruption

An election rigged by the military brought to power Francois 'Papa Doc' Duvalier in 1957. Papa Doc, distrustful of his military chiefs, disbanded the army and created his own rural militia – known as the Ton Ton Macoutes – to intimidate and murder on his behalf. During his 14-year dictatorial rule it is estimated that 30,000 Haitians were killed for political reasons by his regime. Papa Doc's son replaced his father in power in 1971 with a similarly repressive manner, and like his father enjoyed the support of the US ruling classes. He fled to France in 1986 after the Haitian masses revolted against their harsh conditions. Haitians approved a new constitution by popular vote and prepared for national elections.

These elections, however, came to a halt when armed paramilitary groups linked to Duvalier's Ton Ton Macoutes massacred several dozen voters shortly after the polls opened. General Prosper Avril, a former Duvalier aide, came to power and the Haitian people suffered yet more oppressive rule. The US, looking for stability to broaden business interests in Haiti, forced Avril to resign and began to lay a path for a 'moderate' to take control in Haiti. The country's first democratic elections finally took place on 16 December 1990 and saw the US's candidate, a former World Bank official named Marc Bazin, get 14% of the vote. Jean Bertrand Aristide, a progressive ex-Roman Catholic priest with wide support amongst the poor, got about 70%.

Imperialism sabotages reform

The US didn't allow his presidency to last long. Aristide was ousted from office in 1991 by General Raoul Cedras and the death squads of Louis-Jodel Chamberlain, one of the main leaders of the revolt that has just removed him from power. Strong support from the Haitian people forced the US to reinstate Aristide in 1994 amid promises of lifting the country out of the dire poverty that has left it the fourth poorest country in the world. Yet constraints by financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have impeded his programmes. In Haiti today:

- Life expectancy for the average male is 50 and female, 56.
- Formal employment is only 110,000 out of 8 million people.
- 23% of children under five suffer from severe malnutrition.
- Infant mortality is 91 per 1,000 live births

It was against this background of poverty that Aristide began to take progressive measures to remove some of the people's hardships. He refused to privatise state enterprises and invested in agriculture, public transportation, healthcare and education. Between 1994 and 2000 the government built more schools than had been built in Haiti in the previous 180 years. The government also pro-

On 19 February 2004 the democratically elected President of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was forcibly removed from office in a coup instigated by the US and French governments. Aristide was forced to the Central African Republic where he spent several days without recourse to friends, family or lawyers before finally being able to move to Jamaica. His presence back in the Caribbean has angered the US and the Haitian interim government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue who claim his presence in the region could raise tension in Haiti. So far Aristide has turned down an offer of asylum from Nigeria though Jamaican officials unofficially claim he will go to South Africa which has indicated it would accept the former leader. Unrest, political killings, looting and violence are now widespread across Haiti. ANDREW ALEXANDER reports.



US tanks on the lawn of the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince

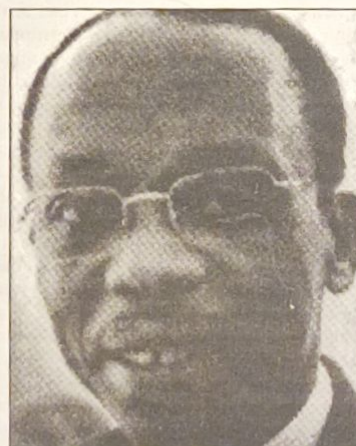
vided 70% subsidies for school books and uniforms and passed legislation on child labour. Most recently, on 7 February 2004, against IMF wishes, the minimum wage was doubled.

Despite these achievements Aristide was unable to create a clear split from neo-liberal interference and ultimately faced an unresolvable contradiction. His return from the US to Haiti and subsequent re-election to office was a result of compliance with multi-national interests. Aristide began to walk a tight-rope between concessions to the IMF and World Bank on the one hand and increased social expenditure on the other. As a result both the US and EU became increasingly concerned about Aristide's stance towards big business. He may have been going along with several IMF demands but not enough and not fast enough for the neo-conservatives in the Bush administration and the new right in Europe. Any sign of opposition to the neo-liberal agenda rings alarm bells in Washington, especially from Latin America where the Bolivarian revolution is becoming stronger, and even more so in the Caribbean where Cuban socialism provides an example of an alternative to the ruin of capitalism.

Ruling class organises opposition

The opposition, gathered under the loose banner of Group 184, has been systematically planned, organised and built up by Washington and Paris. The underlying strategy has been to

keep the people mired in poverty. For example, \$500 million in loans promised in 1994 were indefinitely frozen. This money, on which Haiti is still forced to pay interest, was designed to stimulate the economy. A US imposed aid embargo in 2001, froze humanitarian projects undermining basic humanitarian services related to water, housing and medical care.



Jean-Bertrand Aristide

If Aristide could be restrained from creating real social change then fermenting opposition to him would be made so much easier. The opposition comes from the minority of the Haitian people – the ruling class – particularly privileged students and businessmen such as the sweatshop magnate Andrew Apaid, who is one

of the main opposition leaders and a fervent supporter of the Bush administration.

Stunting social welfare programmes and blocking support for Aristide was the first phase laying conditions for a coup. The second was to create civil unrest in the country. This unrest was stirred up using arch-reactionaries from Haiti's past. One of these was Butteur Metayer, a former supporter of Aristide's party, who staged an insurrection on 5 February in the northwestern city of Gonaives. Metayer leads what is called the Cannibal Army. The Cannibal Army uprising was used as a pretext for former soldiers living in the Dominican Republic to cross over into Haiti. These men served in the military dictatorship of Raoul Cedras who overthrew Aristide in 1990.

Now working alongside Louis-Jodel Chamberlain, one of the main leaders of the revolt, whose Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH) massacred thousands of Aristide's supporters in the 1990s, is Guy Phillippe, a former Haitian military man who served as senior security official in the government of the last president Rene Preval. Phillippe was trained in the US and Ecuador. On 16 February Chamberlain's forces attacked the central plateau city of Hinche. Poorly armed Haitian police were no match for Chamberlain and his so-called New Army. Police abandoned their posts in a number of cities following this assault.

The final phase of the coup began on 24 February when the Group of 184 delayed replying to a US-brokered settlement that would have reduced Aristide's powers but allowed him to remain in office through his term. This move was calculated to allow the military wing of the uprising to seize more territory in the countryside while providing the illusion that the US was trying to calm and control the situation. The US tacitly approved this delay tactic by telling the Group of 184 to take more time to consider their proposal if needed. It was enough time to allow organised and armed gangs of thugs to take control over the countryside, move into the cities and capital Port-au-Prince where Aristide and his family were told by US diplomats backed by marines that they would not be able to protect them – unless of course they were to leave.

Inter-imperialist rivalry

Aristide's refusal to submit to international finance brought the first animosity not from the US but from France (who along with the US refused to attend the official 200th anniversary celebrations). Aristide demanded that France refund 90 million Franc-gold (currency of the times) that had been confiscated from Haiti by the French government between 1825 and 1885. The sum, adjusted for interest, equals approximately 20 billion euros. Needless to say the French had no intention of paying back such a large sum and began to push for Aristide's removal. France, with an eye to using unrest in Haiti to consolidate its influence in the region, was the first country to demand that Aristide 'respect the rule of law' and began to pressurise him to stand down. More importantly, the French also talked about sending troops to support a government of national unity and to oversee new elections. It is most likely this, more than anything else, that spurred the deployment of US troops into Haiti. It is not just Iraq which has brought these two imperialist powers into some form of conflict, but also an economic necessity to dominate in Latin America and the Caribbean. For the time being both countries have agreed to contribute troops to a UN multinational 'peace-keeping' force authorised by the Security Council. The French have pushed the Haitian issue and the US has responded. The power sharing initiative that has taken place is a tentative form of cooperation between the two imperialist powers to heal some of the wounds caused by the Iraq invasion. It is also an attempt to inject some life and validity back into the dead and obsolete UN. It is the first time since 1804 that French troops have marched into Haiti.

Cuba

A country's government need not be revolutionary to feel the wrath of imperialism. Neither Aristide's Lavalas Party or Michael Manley's government in Jamaica in the 1970s and 1980s were revolutionary but any sign of independence is anathema to imperialism and is crushed. Any progress can turn revolutionary and must be kept in check by the oppressor nations. Like Venezuela, Haiti has been the recipient of much aid from Cuban workers (for details see Cuba and Haiti – socialism or poverty, p10).

It is not charity that Cuba is giving to the Haitians. It is international solidarity with the oppressed and provides an example of what a socialist direction can achieve. In the present historical context it is the Cuban revolution that the imperialists are most intent on destroying. The forced removal of a progressive government in Haiti and the deployment of imperialist troops there has sent yet one more clear signal to Havana. ■

Palestine: Zionists open the gates of hell

The assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin on 22 March marks a new stage in the Zionist terror campaign against the Palestinian people. The spiritual leader of Hamas was a 67-year-old quadriplegic in deteriorating health. He had refused to hide from the Zionists despite an unsuccessful assassination attempt last year, and continued to maintain a very public routine including morning prayers at the mosque near his home. The missiles which ended his life killed seven others, including three bystanders running to his aid. **ROBERT CLOUGH** reports.

Yassin's death came days after he had said Hamas would halt attacks on Israel 'for an extended period of time' if Israel carried through 'a full and genuine withdrawal from the Gaza strip.' Hamas would however wait to see if the Gaza withdrawal was followed by a similar West Bank withdrawal. Huge demonstrations took place throughout Palestine in protest at the murder: 200,000 attended his funeral in Gaza. Hamas said that 'Sharon has opened the gates of hell and nothing will stop us from cutting off his head.'

Israel had renewed its threats to kill Yassin after he defended a suicide attack in mid-January which killed three soldiers and a security guard. He said then that Palestinians were being forced 'to choose between annihilation and defending ourselves' and that 'we see the world is just watching passively while Israel is slaughtering us and demolishing our homes. Hence we have no choice but to defend ourselves.' Continuing, he said that Zionist leaders 'think that every problem can be resolved with violence and that they could scare us. We are under occupation, and we demand freedom. Give us our freedom and we will stop.' The Zionists have already said that his successor as Hamas leader, Abdul Aziz Rantisi is a target for assassination. Forty years ago, the Zionists gave the Nazi mass murderer Adolf Eichmann a trial. But these racists have a quite different standard for Yassin and the Palestinian people: they make no pretence of conforming to international law in their dealings with people they regard as less than human.

US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice pointedly refused to condemn the killing: like Britain, the US has branded Hamas a terrorist organisation and banned it. Later



Israeli bulldozers destroying Palestinian homes in Gaza

statements back-pedalled and offered some criticism. Other Western leaders also shed crocodile tears. Jack Straw called the assassination 'unacceptable' and 'unjustified' and 'very unlikely to achieve its objective'. UN General Secretary Kofi Annan called it unlawful. The French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin said it would 'only fuel the cycle of violence.' But what is this 'cycle of violence'? In FRFI 177, we reported that in 2003, 882 Palestinians including 117 children were killed through Zionist military action compared to 91 Israeli dead. Between 1 January and 22 March this year, 167 Palestinians have been killed – but only 36 Israelis, almost all of them in just four suicide attacks. More and more Palestinians have been murdered each month: 30 died in January, 58 in February, and 79 in the first three weeks of March. Zionist actions during March include:

- On 7 March, an invasion of Nuseirat and Bureij refugee camps in Gaza left 15 dead, four children amongst them. Apache helicopters, tanks and armoured personnel carriers were used in an effort to shed as much Palestinian blood as possible whilst escaping world condemnation.
- The next day, two Palestinians were killed, both with the same name of Khalid Madi: one a 15-year-old killed working his family's farm in Gaza; the other a Salbit grocer. The Israeli army claimed that it was not even sure the shootings took place let alone that two Palestinians had been killed.
- On International Women's Day, 8 March, an Israeli army sniper in Jenin shot dead 23-year-old mother of three Dalal Al-Sabbagh as she sought to get her children away from a window where they were gathered looking at troops further down her street.

On 25 March, a motion to the UN Security Council condemning the Yassin assassination fell when the US once again used its veto. Britain abstained, underlining its continued support for the racist Zionist state.

The murder of Yassin has to be seen in the context of Sharon's declared aim of unilaterally withdrawing from Gaza (see FRFI 177). It is no part of Sharon's plan to allow Gaza a functioning administrative apparatus, or basic economic infrastructure, or any political leadership. Gaza is to be reduced to utter dependency through constant armoured incursions, assassinations, house demolitions and land destruction. It is to be driven back to the stone age. The Zionists continue to cleanse Rafah at the southern end of Gaza on the Egyptian border. Since the start of the Intifada, they have destroyed 1,650 buildings in the

line. According to the Commons International Development Committee, malnutrition rates in the Gaza and parts of the West Bank are as bad as those in sub-Saharan Africa; the committee says that Israeli measures are 'destroying the Palestinian economy and creating widespread poverty'.

The Zionists have ratcheted up their racist rhetoric to accompany their onslaught against the Palestinians. On army radio, Zionist defence minister Ze'ev Boim wondered recently 'What is it with Islam in general and the Palestinians in particular? Is it some sort of cultural deficiency? Is it a genetic defect? There is something incomprehensible in their continuing murderous behaviour.' Likud Knesset member Jehiel Haza responded 'There is something in their blood. It is genetic. I never conducted any research on this but there is no other explanation. You can't trust an Arab even after 40 years in the grave.' This is the racist culture that British Labour defends.

Sharon has promised more attacks

THE HUMAN COST OF THE INTIFADA

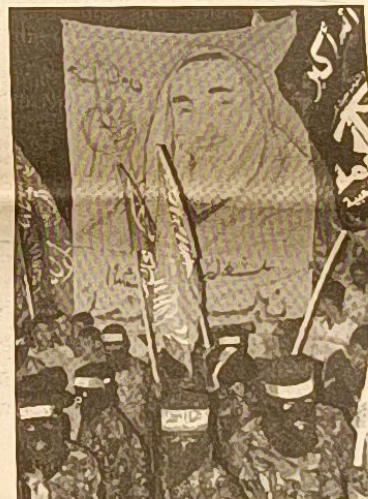
Since the start of the Intifada on 28 September 2000:

- 2,934 Palestinians have been killed, of whom 550 have been children under the age of 18, with 360 aged 15 or under;
- 38,500 Palestinians have been seriously injured, more than a quarter of whom have been children;
- 2,500 people have been permanently disabled;
- 25 medical personnel have been killed whilst on duty and 12 journalists;
- 308 have died in assassination attacks, 152 of them bystanders;
- 103 have died because ambulances carrying them for medical treatment have been delayed at one of the 750 checkpoints in the Occupied Territories.

(Palestine Monitor, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and other sources)

THE MYTH OF CHILD SUICIDE BOMBERS

On 24 March, Zionist TV crews broadcast pictures of a child they claimed the Israeli army had intercepted on a suicide mission. Initially the army said he was only 10 years old; later they revised this upwards to 14. In fact, as *The Independent* revealed, Husam Abduh is 16. Khalid Amayreh, a respected Palestinian journalist reporting for Al Jazeera, has found evidence that the whole event was a set-up. There is a question as to how TV cameras came to be at the checkpoint where Abduh was seized. Then there are his responses to interrogation: he said he wanted to reach paradise to 'meet the 72 virgins there', a statement which so completely conforms to racist stereotypes of Islam that it is suspicious in itself. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have very clear policies against the use of children as suicide bombers.



Hamas supporters after the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

camp, making 16,000 homeless. Invasions are now almost weekly and almost always result in destruction of Palestinian homes. The unemployment rate in Rafah is 80% and 75% of its population live on less than US\$2 per day, the UN poverty line. The unemployment rate in the rest of Gaza is between 60 and 70%, and at least 60% are on the poverty

on Palestinian political leaders. He can weather the criticism of the European Union, and he is banking on there being little opposition to his terror campaign from President Bush. In this he will be comforted that the likely Democrat contender for the presidency, John Kerry, has declared some solidly Zionist credentials which include now support for the construction of the apartheid wall. The Palestinian people are dangerously isolated: it is up to anti-imperialists in Britain to get out on the streets and actively oppose the Zionist terrorist campaign and British collusion with it.

Israel's apartheid wall

The International Court of Justice sat for three days from 23 February to decide on the legality of Israel's apartheid wall. Last December, the UN General Assembly voted to ask the court to give a ruling on the matter. 93 states voted in favour. Following the reference, 31 states joined with Israel in presenting submissions asking the court to reject the petition. Britain was amongst them; junior foreign minister Lady Symons explained to the *Jewish Chronicle* that the hearing would 'serve to politicise the court in a way for which it was not designed'.

Demonstrations in Palestine against the wall have been brutally attacked. On 25 February, Israeli soldiers used tear gas and live rounds on a protest at Beit Seira south of Ramallah. A later demonstration in Biddu against the wall was fired on; many were shot and four were killed, one from the effects of tear gas. On 9 March, the army signed an order for the confiscation of 11,000 dunums of predominantly agricultural land around the village of Beit Hanina north of Jerusalem – this approximates to four square miles.

If completed, the wall will de facto annex 50% of the West Bank to Israel. 16% of West Bank Palestinians – 400,000 in all – will be living in these annexed areas, and will face expulsion. The wall's total length will be 730km; its construction requires the confiscation of thousands of acres of Palestinian lands with devastating economic consequences for the population.

Jimmy German

Mordechai Vanunu to be released

Mordechai Vanunu is to be released on 21 April after serving 18 years for releasing Israel's nuclear secrets. Vanunu revealed the existence of the secret Dimona nuclear plant in the Negev desert to the *Sunday Times* in 1986 and exposed a nuclear weapons programme which had already constructed 200 warheads. He was lured to Italy and then kidnapped by Mossad agents. For two and a half years he was held in solitary confinement. He was denied access to newspapers and TV, and a light bulb was left on continuously in his cell. Amnesty International condemned his treatment as torture. The aim was to break him mentally and physically; in this the Zionists have completely failed, as Vanunu himself has said 'They did not succeed in breaking me all these years. They did not succeed in driving me insane'. The security service has tried to negotiate with Vanunu over his release since they are concerned he will lead a campaign against Israeli nuclear weapons, but he has sent them packing. The government has orchestrated a press and political campaign to discredit him in advance of his release with one political commentator Dan Margalit saying he should be assassinated. A government proposal to place him under administrative detention like thousands of Palestinians has been dropped for fear of a successful legal challenge.

'The fight goes on'

The miners' strike 1984-85

It is 20 years since the miners' strike, which pitted working class communities against riot police in running battles on the picket lines and saw striking miners facing the full force of the state in Thatcher's Britain. Yet, as we set out to show in *People versus State**, without the treachery of the official Labour and trade union movement itself, the ruling class alone could not have defeated the miners. We reprint here an edited version of the introduction to that book, which pays tribute to the courage and determination of the striking miners, traces the growing political consciousness of their struggle – and exposes the shameful and reactionary role played by those who claim to represent the working class. The lessons drawn from that strike in this article remain relevant to the struggle against opportunism today.



Striking miners behind the barricades in Yorkshire

The most heroic strike the British working class has seen for decades ended on 5 March 1985. The year-long miners' strike, the longest major industrial battle in British history, has changed the political consciousness of hundreds of thousands of people. The courage and determination of the striking miners, their families and communities will have a lasting impact on the working class struggle in Britain in the years ahead.

The strike may have ended but the dispute goes on. At a press conference on 3 March, soon after the union's national delegate conference had voted narrowly, 98-91, to return to work without an agreement, NUM leader Arthur Scargill said:

'Don't underestimate this union's ability to fight pit closures and job losses. This union will continue to fight, and if that means we have to consider taking action again then we shall do so...'

Scargill made it clear that the major reason for the return to work was the fact

'that the trade union movement in Britain, with a few notable exceptions, have left this union isolated. They have not carried out TUC congress decisions, to their eternal shame.'

'We faced not an employer but a government aided and abetted by the judiciary, the police and you people in the media. Our people have suffered tremendous hardship...'

Scargill himself vehemently opposed calling off the strike. The NUM

National Executive however was split 11-11 and did not recommend a course of action to the delegate conference. But, faced with many more miners being forced back to work by hunger, deprivation and debt, the delegates narrowly voted for an organised return to work without an agreement. The pressures which had built up against areas that wanted to continue had proved too great. But the dispute goes on.

Clashes continue with a National Coal Board (NCB) management determined to drive home its present advantage. Union officials are finding their union work restricted and that previous 'custom and practice' agreements have been dropped. Clashes between miners and scabs are widespread and many more miners are being sacked or sent home in a number of areas. While some have been reinstated, others are being sacked as more cases go through the courts. By 11 March, of the 766 miners sacked nationally, only 111 had been reinstated. The fight by the NUM to regain the initiative will be a long one – taking into account the continuing disputes and growing splits within the NUM itself. On 14 March three areas, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and South Derbyshire, agreed to challenge the authority of the NUM Executive on the continuing overtime ban and on the proposed ballot for a 50p levy on all members to help striking miners victimised as a result of the strike. There is growing pressure also to accept the 5.2% NCB pay offer – outstanding for the past two years – which is conditional on lifting the overtime ban and resuming 'normal working'. The dispute looks like being

bitter and long drawn out.

The miners' strike began as a struggle of the miners and their communities to defend their jobs – to halt pit closures. It inevitably became something much more fundamental because of the political and economic context in which it was taking place.

In the RCG Manifesto, *The revolutionary road to communism in Britain*, written some six months before the miners' strike began, we said:

'The growing economic crisis of British imperialism threatens the alliance that has tied the organised working class to the capitalist system in Britain. The attack on living standards, the growing unemployment and poverty is eroding the material conditions that have consolidated the political hold the labour aristocracy has over the whole working class. This process, while still in its early stages, has nevertheless led to a developing crisis within the Labour Party and trade union movement. This in turn has had its impact on the more radical elements of the new middle class and therefore on the British socialist organisations which draw their membership from such groups. Finally the more oppressed sections of the working class are increasingly demonstrating their independence from the traditional organisations of the working class. The split in the British working class in inevitably growing' (page 117)

For the miners' strike to take place at all, a split was necessary in the NUM, primarily between two distinct sections of miners. The one higher paid, with relatively secure employment, working in high-investment, high-productivity pits, especially in the Notts area. The other lower paid and/or under constant threat of redundancies, working in less productive pits. Creating such divisions in the NUM has been a conscious strategy of the NCB since 1974. It was a Labour government which introduced productivity deals and which allowed miners in high-productivity, high-investment pits to earn considerably more than those in less productive pits.

The second factor behind the strike is that the government picked the time and place of the dispute and was always determined to destroy the NUM under Arthur Scargill's leadership. It was relying on the deep divisions in the NUM to prevent any serious resistance to pit closures. And it was confident, having recently crushed the National Graphical Association, that the TUC would have no stomach for any real fight.

But from the beginning the striking miners and their leaders refused to allow their struggle to be limited by the narrow self-interest of better-off layers of the working class, either in their own ranks or their organisations and political parties.

So the less privileged miners – those with most to lose – dictated the terms of the strike. The better-paid and more secure miners (eg Notts) and the 'moderate' trade union leaders were prevented from imposing their

will in spite of support from the Thatcher government, NCB and Labour Party. This was the significance of the refusal to hold a national ballot.

The split in the NUM, a fundamental feature of the strike, was mirrored throughout the Labour and trade union movement as the strike progressed and workers were forced to take sides. It says much for the courage and determination of the striking miners and their communities that it took twelve months of bitter struggle, with very little support from the organised trade union movement, before Labour and trade union leaders were able decisively to undermine the strike.

Once it became clear early on that the opportunist forces – the so-called 'moderates' – within the NUM and in the Labour Party and trade union movement were unable to significantly restrict the strike, the full force of the state was brought in. A national co-ordinated police action was directed against the striking miners, involving 20,000 police with some 8,000 operational at any one time. This action was coordinated by Scotland Yard using massive computer-backed data-gathering. Road blocks, political questioning, beatings, illegal fingerprinting and photographing, snatch squads, phone taps, infiltrators and agents provocateur were used against the striking miners. Miners on picket lines were brutalised by baton-wielding police in full riot gear.

Alongside the police violence was the mobilisation of the courts and the law against the striking miners. General Sir Frank Kitson explained this process in his book *Low intensity operations, insurgency and peace-keeping*. Kitson said that the law is:

'just another weapon in the government's arsenal and it becomes little more than a propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public.'

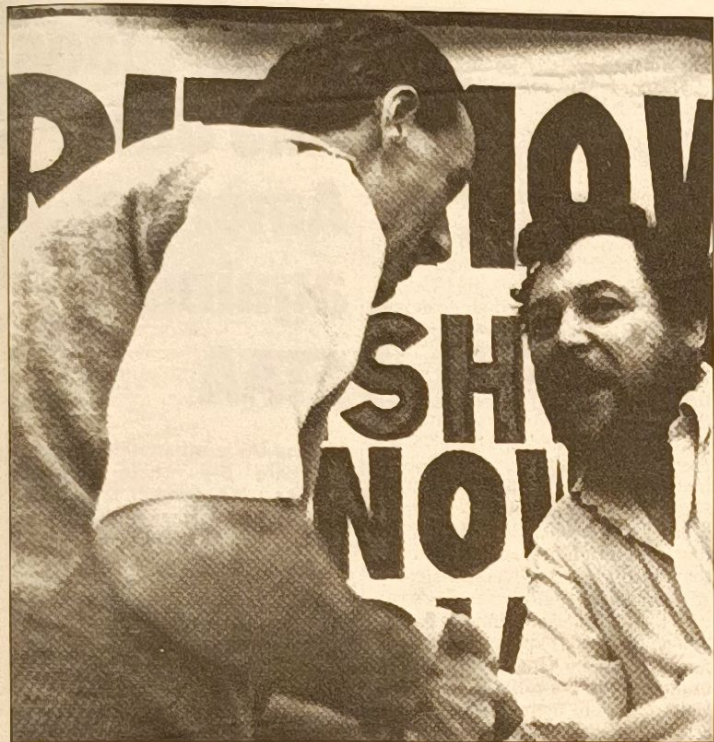
Kitson's views draw together years of experience of British strategy in counter-revolutionary violence against liberation movements throughout the world and, of course, in the Six Counties of Ireland from 1970-1972. This strategy was used during the miners' strike, with leading NUM militants arrested and political bail conditions used to bar striking miners from picketing or approaching NCB property. The right to picket, to protest effectively, became a 'criminal offence'.

While using its laws to attack the striking miners, the state used every means at its disposal to sustain the scab miners and their organisations – police protection and private business finance – offering bribes and other inducements to persuade miners to come back to work. This was accompanied by a propaganda barrage from the media and TV which daily became little more than a mouthpiece for the government and the NCB.

Faced with state repression, the miners responded on the same lines as the oppressed have responded everywhere. The lessons of Ireland, of Brixton and Liverpool 8 were very

* *The Miners' Strike 1984-5: People versus State*
David Reed and Olivia Adamson
(Larkin Publications 1985)
now out of print.

MINERS' STRIKE ANNIVERSARY



Kent miners' leader Malcolm Pitt greets recently released Irish political prisoner, John McClusky, at an Irish Solidarity Movement conference, organised by RCG, London 1984

quickly learned under such conditions. The miners built barricades, set them alight, overturned cars, hurled bricks and stakes in self-defence against the police. They were forced to go way beyond the legal, constitutional and peaceful methods of struggle so beloved by opportunists like Kinnoch, Murray, Bill Sirs and others.

James Anderton, Chief Constable of Manchester, blurted out at an early stage the ruling class approach to this, when he said mass pickets were: 'acts of terrorism without the bullet and the bomb'.

Such labels were part of the ruling class ideological offensive to isolate the miners from other workers, as dangerous 'extremists'. And, in particular, to try to isolate Arthur Scargill, the one major trade union leader who stood by his class.

Scargill made it clear he would rather go to prison than betray his class. He refused to condemn miners' 'violence' in defence of their jobs and communities. By doing so, he challenged not only the ruling class and its courts, but also opportunists like Kinnoch, Willis, Sirs and the rest.

The miners' strike was a political threat to the traditional Labour and trade union leadership. The opportunists, the staunch upholders of the old order, were terrified that their carefully built institutions, based on years of treacherous compromise with the ruling class, would be blown apart if the miners' strike continued outside their control. For this reason, throughout the strike the Labour Party and TUC leadership did everything in their power to dissociate themselves from the militant leadership of the NUM.

Kinnoch supported a national ballot and condemned the 'violence' of the miners' picket lines under the guise of 'condemning all violence... without fear or favour'. By sitting on the fence, he betrayed the miners. Willis did likewise, as did most trade union leaders. Both Kinnoch and Willis used the NUM/Libyan 'connection' to undermine the NUM leadership while remaining silent over the seizure of NUM funds by ruling class courts at the end of October. Kinnoch refused to speak at five NUM rallies organised at a crucial point in the strikes in early November and so it goes on. On the central issues of workers' democracy versus ruling class democracy, workers' violence versus ruling class violence and 'illegality' versus legality, Kinnoch and Willis sided with the ruling class.

With 'friends' like these, who needed enemies? Lenin's characterisation of the opportunists as the 'principal enemy', as 'better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie itself', was demonstrated time and again during the miners' strike. 'Without their leadership of the workers, the bourgeoisie could not remain in power'. Without their leadership of the workers, Thatcher and the NCB could not have driven the miners back to work.

Their lack of solidarity with the miners' strike must be contrasted with their solidarity with each other. When Willis was rightly jeered and booed at a South Wales miners' rally in November for his role in undermining the miners' strike, and a noose was lowered from the balcony above his head, almost every trade union leader came to his defence and attacked the miners for treating him that way.

The crisis of imperialism will inevitably lead to the disintegration of the Labour Party, as the social base of the labour aristocracy shrinks and its ability to control the working class movement is undermined. The miners' strike demonstrated that this development is inevitable.

During the summer of 1984, miners organised undercover hit squads to deal with scabs breaking the strike with police protection. Labour leaders such as Neil Kinnoch denounced these saying that 'violence is not part of British trade unionism'. The SWP joined in the condemnation, saying that hit squads 'can give trade union officials an excuse not to deliver solidarity' (*Socialist Worker* 11 August 1984) and then arguing that:

'We are opposed to individuals or groups using violence as a substitute for mass struggle. That's why we oppose planting bombs, assassinating politicians and criticise some of the miners' "hit squads"'. (*Socialist Worker* 24 August 1984)

The SWP has consistently opposed the violent resistance of the oppressed: in Ireland against British imperialism; the military struggle against South African apartheid; the uprising of black and white working class youth in 1981. The SWP position is driven by the need to preserve its alliance with the Labour and trade union left.

Perhaps the most politically decisive factor in the miners' strike has been the fact that, as the strike progressed, the most politically conscious miners and their supporters have recognised the need to ally themselves with the oppressed fighting British imperialism at home or abroad. That is, miners are starting to argue for an anti-imperialist standpoint in the British labour movement.

Very quickly the miners drew connections between their treatment and that of black workers in South Africa; the treatment of the Irish people in the Six Counties and that of black youth by the racist British police here at home. This was expressed dramatically in the headline of *The Miner* in July 1984: 'Belfast comes to Blidworth'. More recently Kate Whiteside, a member of the new national co-ordinating committee of the NUM Women's Action Group, relating her growing political involvement during the strike, said:

'Police [were] treating people rough: coming in at six in the morning and frightening the children. Suddenly I said "My God, that's been happening to blacks for years"'. (*The Guardian*, 19 February 1985)

It has been because miners have recognised that a defeat for their struggle would force thousands of them into unemployment and poverty that they have fought in such a determined and courageous way. Recognising what awaits them should they be defeated, they have, through the practical experience gained in a determined struggle against the British state, begun to see where their real interests lie and who are their real allies.

A victory in an outright sense for the miners, of the 1972/74 Saltley Gate kind, appeared unlikely throughout the strike because of the bitter split in the NUM and the growing split in the organised trade union movement. After the TUC Conference in September, such a victory became virtually impossible. It became clear that the split in the organised working class movement is not simply one between the trade union 'bureaucracy' and the rank and file but goes down deeper into the ranks of the working class. Key workers such as dockers, power and steel workers, lorry drivers and sections of miners themselves – on the whole the better-paid, more secure jobs – were scabbing on the miners' strike.

However, the year-long struggle itself represented a political victory. The lessons learned, the forms of struggle adopted, and the new organisations thrown up during the strike will have a lasting impact on the working class movement in this country.

The miners' strike has transformed political life for hundreds of thousands of people. The political gains of the strike are significant and if built on will lead to a lasting advance for the British working class movement. What are these gains?

First, the mining communities and hundreds and thousands of their supporters have come to understand the vicious class character of the British imperialist state as they have experienced its police, courts and prisons. Many now recognise the need for disciplined organisations to defend themselves against it.

Second, thousands of workers have come to know the character of the leadership of the Labour Party and trade union movement and realise that a new fighting movement can only be built after a decisive break with these leaders and the section of the working class which follows them.

Third, the mining communities, themselves forced to fight with the brick, the barricade and the petrol bomb against Thatcher's national riot police, have come for the first time to see allies in those fighting for freedom in the Six Counties of Ireland and in

black people forced to fight against the racist police state in Britain.

Fourth, perhaps the most important political development in the strike has been the critical and often leading role of the women in the mining communities in defending and sustaining the strike through organisation, demonstrations, street activities and defence of their relatives and friends in prison for supporting the strike.

The women's support groups in the mining areas and miners' support groups in the towns and cities are a major gain of the strike. Their work is still crucial to continue the struggle against victimisation of striking miners and to defend the imprisoned miners. At a Chesterfield rally in commemoration of International Women's Day on 9 March 1985, Scargill urged the women's support groups to rededicate themselves to the struggle even though the strike had ended.

'This is not the end. It's the beginning because you are part of this union and must remain part of the miners' union...'

'We've got to take this fight forward and step up the campaign. The women's support groups have got to take on a broader role.'

'You must become involved in the wider issues. Learn and understand that rate-capping affects each and every one of us and that the peace movement is absolutely important...'



Women played a leading role in building support for the strike

Scargill went on to demand of the Labour and trade union leaders that they stop equivocating on the demand for an amnesty for all miners victimised during the strike. He said: 'Those men who have been arrested and gaoled as far as I'm concerned are political prisoners. They've been gaoled because they fought for this union'. Scargill demanded that any future Labour government 'wipe clean' the stain against all those arrested.

Finally he launched a bitter attack on the union leaders, particularly those in the power industry, whom he said:

'should hang their heads in eternal shame for what they have done during this dispute. They can come forward with whatever arguments they wish but they will never be able to erase the fact that when the chips were down they supported Margaret Thatcher and turned their backs on the NUM'. (*Newsline*, 11 March 1985)

Scargill's speeches continually pose a way forward for the working class which goes beyond the traditional methods of struggle of the trade union movement. It would indeed be progress if the working class women who have been involved in the support groups took their experience into the movements for peace, against rate-capping, took a stand in solidarity with those fighting racism and with those fighting imperialism in Ireland, South Africa and throughout the world.

To become 'involved in the wider issues', they will have to fight many Labour Party and Communist Party members within the NUM and outside in the wider trade union movement for the right to exist and develop their work. For there are those who will not follow the path of these new class organisations and are intent on reasserting the deadly grip of traditional labour movement methods of organisation, negotiation and compromise.

The major organisations to the left of the Labour Party have without exception ignored the split in the working class which has deepened throughout the strike. In the case of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) they have attempted at every stage to cover up for it. *The Morning Star* reported on 9 March that:

'Scottish miners' leaders yesterday were greatly encouraged by positive support from Labour leader Neil Kinnoch in their campaign to get hundreds of sacked miners their jobs back.'

Kinnoch has in fact refused to support an amnesty for all miners sacked. The Vice-President of the NUM, Mick McGahey, a leading member of the CPGB, has already met Kinnoch and an invitation has been extended to Kinnoch and Willis to take part in the Scottish Miners' Gala later this year. The crucial lessons of the year-long strike are being thrown aside as some NUM leaders and officials are all too ready to build bridges with the opportunists who did so much damage to their strike.

Real communists oppose any attempt at reconciliation with such opportunists. Those advocating 'unity' with such forces are, as Lenin argued, 'objectively defending the enslavement of the workers by the imperialist bourgeoisie with the aid of its best agents in the labour movement'. Communists and socialists have to abandon their preoccupation with the privileged minority of the working class and their leaders and go down 'lower and deeper to the real masses'. That, Lenin said, is the 'whole meaning and whole purport of the struggle against opportunism'.

The bitter year-long strike has exposed the role of the organised trade union movement and has thrown up new class organisations of the kind that would be capable of taking the struggle of the working class forward. The work of women's support groups and the miners' support groups made a crucial contribution to the strike precisely because they were outside the control of Labour and trade union bureaucracies. If these support groups continue to carry out the work necessary to defend miners victimised and imprisoned during the strike, and take their experience into other working class struggles, then indeed the miners' strike 1984-85 will have 'brought a new dimension to British politics'.

David Reed
1985

Cuba and Haiti – socialism or poverty

Haiti is Cuba's closest neighbour in the Caribbean. The two countries share a common history of sugar plantations, slavery and colonial exploitation. Both have had wars and revolutions to overthrow their colonial masters. The revolution in Haiti in 1804 against the French established the world's first black republic. In Cuba the 19th century wars of liberation against the Spanish colonialists finally culminated in the revolution of 1959 that threw out the US imperialists and their puppets who had usurped the Spanish role. Yet the paths then taken by the two countries have been very different, as **JIM CRAVEN** reports.

In the late 1950s, conditions for the vast majority of both the Cuban and the Haitian people were appalling. Infant mortality in Haiti was 170 deaths per 1,000 live births and life expectancy was just 47 years. Cubans were marginally better off, with infant mortality at 60 and life expectancy 59 years. Only 3% of rural Cubans had running water; only 4% had meat to eat; health and education services were virtually non-existent.

Development or destitution

Nearly 50 years later, Haiti is now the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the fourth poorest in the world. According to UNICEF, 80% of the population live in poverty and 48% in absolute poverty. More than two-thirds of the workforce do not have proper jobs. By 2002 life expectancy had risen to just 49 years and infant mortality stood at 79 deaths per 1,000 live births. Meanwhile, in the same year Cuban life expectancy had risen to 77 years and infant mortality had fallen to less than seven per 1,000, comparable to the richest countries in the world. These indices are partly a product of Cuba's outstanding childcare system. In Cuba a doctor or midwife attends every birth and every child is inoculated against at least 13 diseases. In Haiti less than 25% of deliveries have skilled healthcare at hand and only about half the children receive any inoculations at all. Cuba has one doctor for every 195 people: the best ratio in the world. According to



US forces on the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti

UNICEF, Haiti has one doctor for every 1,250 people (some sources say one per 4,000!) and 90% of these are in the cities. Only 16% of the Haitian rural population have adequate sanitation and fewer than a third of the total population have access to safe drinking water.

In Haiti primary school attendance is little better than 50% and secondary enrolment is only 20%. As a consequence barely half the Haitian population is in any sense literate. Cuba on the other hand has one of the most successful education systems in the world. It is presently aiming to ensure higher education is available for the whole population.

The combined effect of lack of public health, hygiene and education is tragically illustrated by the extent of HIV/AIDS infection in Haiti. Over 6% of the Haitian population are infected, including at least 12,000 children. Over 200,000 children in Haiti have been orphaned through their parents dying from AIDS. In Cuba, thanks to early intervention, high quality health care and public awareness, the infection rate is less than 0.03%.

Cuban internationalism

There are 332 Cuban doctors working in Haiti alongside 200 other health workers. They work in every area of the country and have around three-quarters of the Haitian people under their care. In these areas infant mortality rates have dropped from 80 to 28. The Cubans have attended 45,000 births, carried out 59,000 operations and vaccinated 370,000 people. It has been estimated that the Cuban health workers have saved nearly 86,000 Haitian lives. There are 247 young Haitians studying at a School of Medicine created by the Cubans in Haiti and another 372 studying on free scholarships in Cuba. The Cubans have also

been assisting the Haitians with a radio based literacy programme that has so far taught 110,000 Haitians to read and write, with food, agriculture and veterinary programmes and with technical help for the sugar industry.

Similar countries – different revolutions

How did two countries so similar end up with such starkly different prospects of life for their people? The answer, of course, lies in their economic and social systems. After throwing out the French colonialists in 1804, Haiti was unable to make the transition to an independent state, given the development of economic and social forces at that time. In 1825 the French threatened to invade the country unless the Haitians paid them \$125 million. It has been estimated by Dr Francis St Hubert of the Haiti Restitution Committee that repaying that ransom has deprived the Haitian economy of \$21 billion at today's values. By such means, Haiti became a neo-colony of France and, more recently, of the United States. The imperialists have relied on a brutal Haitian elite to maintain their interest. This elite, which accounts for less than 1% of the population, owns more than half the country's wealth. Together they have continuously extorted wealth from Haiti and the Haitian people and prevented them building any society that even partly catered for the needs of the poor majority. In fact, despite tremendous US opposition, the Aristide government in Haiti did manage to make some improvements for the poor. Now even these small gains have been swept away by the US/French/Canadian-backed imperialist coup.

The lessons of history

At the time of the Cuban revolution many middle class members of the revolutionary movement felt it was enough to rid Cuba of the Batista dictatorship and establish an independent capitalist state free of imperialist influence. In the face of US threats, these people argued for compromise. It was the communist revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, Fidel and Raul Castro who understood there can be no compromise with imperialism. That way inevitably leads to renewed oppression and exploitation. The only way to defend the gains of the national revolution and ensure independence and social development for the people was to destroy imperialism and build socialism. That is what the Cuban people have been doing ever since. ■

Cuba leads 'the other America' against FTAA

The US is attempting to subjugate the whole of Latin America through the imposition of the so-called Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). This would give the US unlimited access to Latin American markets without Latin American countries being able to defend themselves against unequal trade by using trade barriers or tariffs. US multinationals would be free to buy up Latin American public sector assets. There would be little control of foreign investments. Foreign companies would gain patent and intellectual property rights to anything they took over. Laws aimed at protecting workers' rights or the environment could be scrapped if they stood in the way of US multinational expansion. The FTAA is a recipe for rising unemployment, the impoverishment of peasants and small farmers and the degradation of the environment.

When a smaller-scale version of the FTAA, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was piloted in Mexico in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmers went bankrupt as subsidised grain and beef from the US and Canada flooded the market; 1.3 million jobs were lost in agriculture. Meanwhile, half a million Mexicans ended up in sweatshop labour in new 'maquiladoras' on the border, simply assembling and returning components made in the US. Three quarters of the Mexican people now live in poverty.

But the people of Latin America are fighting back against the FTAA, led by Cuba – the only country to be excluded by the US from the FTAA proposals. Since 2002, Cuba has been warning of the dangerous consequences of the FTAA and mobilising against it.

Since then there have been some important victories with massive demonstrations by the poor at the Cancun meeting of the World Trade Organisation and the Americas Summit in Monterrey giving oppressed countries the backbone to stand up to imperialist demands. At the Third Hemispheric Forum of Struggle against FTAA held in Havana in January, delegates agreed to redouble their efforts to defeat the FTAA before the US deadline for imposition in 2005. Their final declaration, 'inspired by the revolt of the Bolivian people', called on the Latin American people to mobilise and demonstrate to force their governments to take a stand in defence of national sovereignty and pledged days of united action across Latin America.

Understanding the link between imperialist economic and military oppression, delegates also called for demonstrations on 20 March alongside those worldwide demanding an end to the occupation of Iraq.

The declaration ended: 'Our America is not for sale! Neither war nor free trade! Together let us build the other America that is possible!'

Juanjo Rivas

Miami 5 appeal – a step nearer victory?

On 10 March, the appeal of the Miami 5 opened at the 11th Circuit Court in Miami. 700-plus pages of evidence had already been presented to the three appeal judges by lawyers for the five Cubans who were arrested as 'spies' by the FBI in 1998 and are now serving sentences ranging from 15 years to life in federal prisons across the US. The lawyers are appealing against the findings of the original trial on a number of grounds including:

- Insufficient evidence linking Gerardo Hernandez to Cuba's shooting down of two 'Brothers to the Rescue' planes over Cuban waters in 1996 to justify a conviction for conspiracy to murder.
- Insufficient evidence against Antonio Guerrero and others to justify federal spying convictions.
- The prejudicial nature of the original trial being held in Miami, making it impossible for the defendants to receive a fair trial. Some exiles attended the trial in military uniform, making clear their membership of paramilitary groups. Jury members later admitted they had felt intimidated.
- Serious irregularities in gathering evi-

dence against the five, including illegal entry into their homes and illegal seizure of their computers; the seizure of personal papers making it impossible for them to prepare their defence adequately.

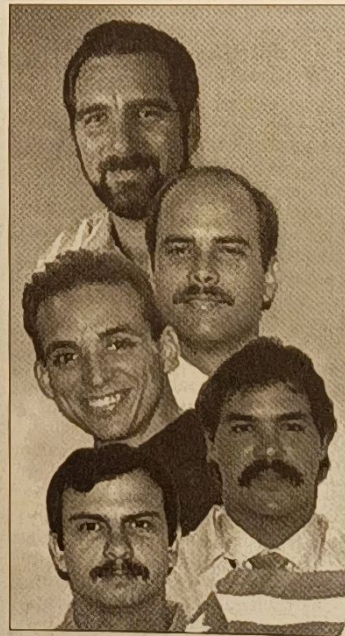
- Excessive sentencing on the basis of the charges brought for espionage which even in the prosecution case amounted to little more than 'a flea on a pimple of the US', according to Guerrero's lawyer, Leonard Weinglass. Even senior military officials testified at the trial that the data gathered by the five was neither secret nor classified.
- The fact that the original trial judge refused to allow the jury to consider a defence of 'necessity' – that the five Cubans were acting to prevent the greater evil of terrorist attacks on their country emanating from Miami's violent counter-revolutionary Cuban exile groups.

The judges will not present their ruling for several months. However, lawyers for the five men admitted they had been encouraged by the judges' line of questioning of the prosecutor, grilling her about the details of

the evidence linking Gerardo Hernandez to the 1996 attack on the Brothers to the Rescue plane. One pointed out that a murder conspiracy conviction required 'a plot to down planes in international airspace, not over Cuba after 25 incursions into Cuba's airspace by planes from a Cuban exile group in 20 months'. Paul McKenna, lawyer for Gerardo Hernandez, felt the government had been forced onto the defensive.

Meanwhile, the US continues its harassment of the families and supporters of the Five. It has continued to refuse visas to family members trying to visit the five men, or moved them suddenly to other gaols. It has also attempted to withhold solidarity funds sent to the US-based National Committee to Free the 5 by French and Spanish groups. Eventually the money was recovered and helped fund a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on 3 March. It read: 'Can you be imprisoned in the United States for opposing terrorism? Yes, if you oppose terrorism in Miami. Free the Cuban Five!' Meanwhile, regular mass demonstrations for the Miami 5 continue in Cuba, and around the world support for their cause is growing.

Hannah Callier



More information is available on www.freethethefive.org and www.ratb.org.uk

Venezuela

Private property or public wealth?

In March the Electoral Panel of the Venezuelan Supreme Court demanded that the National Electoral Council stop its investigation into the suspected mass falsification of signatures on petitions calling for a referendum on President Chavez's government. Shortly after, the Institutional Chamber of the same court contradicted the demand. Appeals will now follow. Thus the long campaign by the rich, sections of the middle class and other dupes reaches another impasse. ALVARO MICHAELS reports.

This campaign has been accompanied by the usual hysterical abuse against the government in the Venezuelan millionaire media. Kerry, challenger to US President Bush, has attacked President Chavez dubbing him 'detrimental to our interests', a supporter of 'narcoterrorists' and, in the usual US establishment McCarthyite 'red conspiracy' style, an ally of - God forbid! - Castro. The stakes are high and precisely how high can be seen from Venezuelan government investigations into the way the 'opposition' stole wholesale from the national oil corporation PDVSA when in power.

On 27 February the opposition 'Democratic Co-ordination' held a demonstration against the National Electoral Council's decision to review 1.48 million of the 3.4 million signatures claimed by the opposition, and if rejected would reduce the total to below the 2.43 million necessary for a vote. 1.8 million signatures have been certified so far. If the decision is upheld the government would retain its position until 2006. The demonstrators tried to force their way into a meeting of the G-15, leaders of the developing countries. Two demonstrators were killed and 21 injured, including six soldiers. Two armed attackers were arrested. President Chavez called this meeting a 'Seattle in reverse'.

Defeating privatisation

Minister of Energy and Mines Rafael Ramirez recently explained the damage done to the country by Chavez's predecessors' oil privatisation policy. Ramirez said 'the management

that was in control of PDVSA was...aligned with the interests of transnational oil companies which have always been in conflict with our national interests.' PDVSA devised a policy of directing wealth away from the state. Those who disapproved were pushed aside.

The priority was volume over price, selling oil below cost in order to subsidise Citgo, (a petrol station chain owned by PDVSA in the US), thereby subsidising the US economy. President Guisti was already privatising PDVSA piecemeal, through 'outsourcing'. The entire data processing system was turned over to Intensa, a joint-venture of US company SAIC, whose top executives are former CIA officials, ex-generals and ex-admirals. They controlled information about PDVSA deposits, production and capacity: information of great strategic value. Taken to extremes, in order to fill a tanker at the port one had to push a key on a computer in Caracas. They took all the passwords and codes and software, and copied them to Houston. The process of defeating the lock-out by oil executives and managers at the turn of 2003, intended to oust President Chavez, was made exceptionally difficult by this control of key systems. That shut down is estimated to have cost \$10 billion!

The planned full privatisation even included turning over port wharfs. This was stopped when Chavez's government came to power, just before the tanker fleet and the gas compression systems were to be handed over to private interests.

PDVSA managers systematically



President Chavez on his return after the first coup attempt

transferred overseas over \$10 billion in investments, through the purchase of or participation in refineries. Yet only 50% of these refineries use Venezuelan crude oil. The PDVSA was turned into a purchaser of crude, a trader, drawing off more money from Venezuela. Purchases made to maintain these refineries came to \$17 billion per year. On top of this the refineries long-term contracts were 'profitable' only due to the discounts in the oil billing. Long term discounts of between \$2, \$4 and \$6 per barrel. The whole financial structure was designed to bleed the country of its own oil revenues! The government of President Chavez asked for this information but the PDVSA always refused. The company was not even audited in the country. This has been stopped and the trader offices in Houston are to be closed.

World's largest oil reserves

Venezuela possesses proven oil reserves of 77 billion barrels. But in the Orinoco Oil Belt it has 1.2 trillion barrels of [extra heavy crude] oil. With the technology that currently exists, it could declare 275 billion barrels of

oil. That places it as the country with the largest reserves in the world!

The previous PDVSA management established control over Venezuela's resources by creating Strategic Associations wherein the PDVSA was a minority shareholder. Huge tax avoidance schemes were created and contracts that agreed royalty payments to the state of only 1% for up to 10 years, instead of the then 16.66%, now increased to 30%. They originally wanted 0%, but had to put it at 1% because the law did not permit it! These contracts are still in place and mean that heavy crude sold for \$6.80 per barrel provides the government with \$0.15 per barrel. This is unsustainable for Venezuela. Of 3m barrels per day, 500,000 are produced via associations paying 1% in royalties. No more oil is to be produced under these conditions.

So we see the immense wealth in question in Venezuela, the means previously taken to steal from the country and the significance of the steps President Chavez has taken to stop this robbery. No wonder the plunderers hate his government! ■

Argentina

How the ruling class deals with its debts

Having reduced the country to mass poverty by a decade of plunder and privatisation primed with dollars from the global banks, the ruling class now struggles to save its own skin. On the one hand it cannot attack the working class any more provocatively, on the other it cannot absolutely repudiate its debts to the banks. Finally, it has to keep on seducing the middle classes. Thus President Kirchner is now playing the patriot by keeping the IMF at bay whilst praying that a 70% currency devaluation and starvation wages will boost growth and exports, and so attract new investments from abroad.

During 2003 the gross domestic product rose 7% (beyond IMF hopes of 4%). This 'economic' recuperation is based on hunger and unemployment. The balance of payments has moved in to surplus. This 'bonanza' has reawakened the appetites of private creditors who, scenting money, want to renegotiate their debt repayments. They want the state to increase payments because of the

increased state budget surplus resulting from its spending cuts. The government won't adjust this '3%' surplus because it would 'compromise social and political stability'. The IMF is trapped, because 15% of its loans are to Argentina, and so it has to play the good policeman, pressing on behalf of private creditors.

The debtors' crisis arose in December 2001 after the collapse of the public accounts. Argentina unilaterally suspended repayments on bonds until now. In September 2003 Argentina announced a plan with the IMF. However, the new offer removed 75% of the nominal value of the old securities and was unanimously rejected by the creditors. Some demanded money or government property owned overseas. Others organised themselves into groups, demanding 65%, so spoiling the apparent IMF agreement with the Argentinean government. \$87.05bn (of the total \$178.74bn debt) is now up for re-negotiation.

Eventually, on 22 March, Argen-

tina repaid the IMF more than \$3bn, clearing the way for a fresh \$3.1bn loan. The government pledged to meet directly with the Argentinean bondholders and to let utilities raise rates as much as 35%.

The pickets movement

By 2002 up to half of Argentina's population actively participated in new movements ranging from factory occupations to democratic Neighbourhood Assemblies. Many formed alliances called *piqueteros*, after the poorest and most militant campaigners from the shantytowns. More than 25% of Argentineans are now unemployed, and remaining jobs are in poorly-paid service industries or the 'informal sector' (unregulated and ruthlessly exploitative).

The national pickets' movement resulted in drip-fed concessions from the government and middle class activists with their own agendas jumped upon it. Nevertheless, the election victory of the President Kirchner has forced the radical opposition to work

for a more coherent strategy. Kirchner has reduced by 252,000 the number of individuals receiving social support (\$51 a month for a worker with two dependants). On 16 March the 2,000 supporters of the Independent Movement of Retired and Unemployed (MIJD), demonstrated outside the Ministry of Labour, with 20 on hunger-strike. The workers had occupied the entrance to the Ministry in mid-February.

In February thousands of *piqueteros* from the MIJD arrived at Mar del Plata to participate in the Eleventh National Pickets' Assembly to create a common front against the government. The MIJD is one of the most determined groups. The mayor of the town sent 150 police to 'keep the peace'. Delegates from pickets' movements in all 23 provinces attended. It is this sort of pressure that makes it impossible for the government to repay the debts and slows down the vampire-like extortion of the international creditors.

Alvaro Michaels

Bolivia Working class prepares for indefinite strike

Five months into Carlos Mesa's presidency the patience of Bolivia's poor majority is wearing thin. Mesa's slight reforms to address the demands of the different social sectors that overthrew the administration of Sánchez de Lozada last October have failed. Since February there have been several strikes: of transport workers, medical professionals, teachers and students, with support from the national workers' union, the Bolivian Labour Central (COB). The COB mobilised thousands to march through La Paz on 17 and 25 March demanding increased salaries, the renationalisation of gas and oil, compliance with the promises given in October and rejection of the neo-liberal economic model. The COB will hold a broad 'emergency' meeting in the radical mining town of Huanuni on 7 April to prepare for an indefinite national strike if Mesa fails to initiate a dialogue between his cabinet ministers and the COB. The Coordination for the Defence of Gas is calling a national meeting in Cochabamba on 2 April to propose plans for popular action.

The increasing class divide manifested itself on the streets of La Paz on 17 March when employees of the ministries and banks threw tomatoes and water at demonstrating teachers. Later that day the COB's demonstrators were armed with sticks, stones and dynamite, but warnings came from the Church, Assembly of Human Rights and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) that demonstrations will lead to a military coup.

Bolivia is suffering a severe financial crisis, a lever for the imperialists to exert their power over the country. The World Bank and the IMF have made new loans conditional on the sale and export of gas to the US and Mexico. The so-called Group of Support agreed in Washington on 19 March to award just one third of the financial support urgently needed by Mesa's administration, conditional on the approval of new taxes.

The oil and gas transnationals (Repsol and Enron) are exerting their power to maintain absolute right of exploitation and sale, keeping all incomes and profits. These transnationals enjoy in Bolivia the highest profit rate in the world oil industry and lowest production costs. Bolivia pays international prices for its own gas reserves. Mesa's appointment of Antonio Aranzabar as Minister of Minerals and Hydrocarbons on 13 March ended attempts to reform this situation. Aranzabar oversaw the 'capitalisations' of Sánchez de Lozada's first presidency (1997) that awarded transnationals control over Bolivia's resources and, in 1994, signed a contract with Enron losing the state at least \$130 million.

It is clear that Mesa will not fulfil agreements made with the social organisations. One unanimous demand in October was the rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). On 22 March, Mesa started negotiations with the US for a free market treaty that also includes Peru, Colombia and Ecuador: a 'mini FTAA'. The Bolivian people's struggle to break the imperialist grip on their country continues.

Fiona Donovan

Respect for Labour

On 20 March, as part of a worldwide day of protest marking one year since the start of the war on Iraq, demonstrators trod the usual route between Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square in London on a demonstration called by the Stop The War Coalition (STWC). Organisers initially claimed 100,000 marchers, later revising this downward to 75,000. However, there were too few protesters to fill Trafalgar Square, the South African Embassy side remaining empty throughout the rally at the end. Furthermore, the march took less than an hour to leave Hyde Park, which makes the police estimate of 25,000 a rare approximation to the truth.

The fact is that the demonstration was much smaller than that which took place during Bush's visit to Britain last autumn, let alone the one before war started on 15 February 2003. What has happened? BOB SHEPHERD explains.

The left set the limits of the anti-war movement in December 2002 when Lindsey German, convenor of the STWC and leading member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), together with Jeremy Corbyn MP and other Labour lefts signed an open letter calling on Tony Blair 'to give a clear undertaking not to engage in military action against Iraq without the explicit authority of the United Nations and without an explicit decision of the House of Commons to do so.'

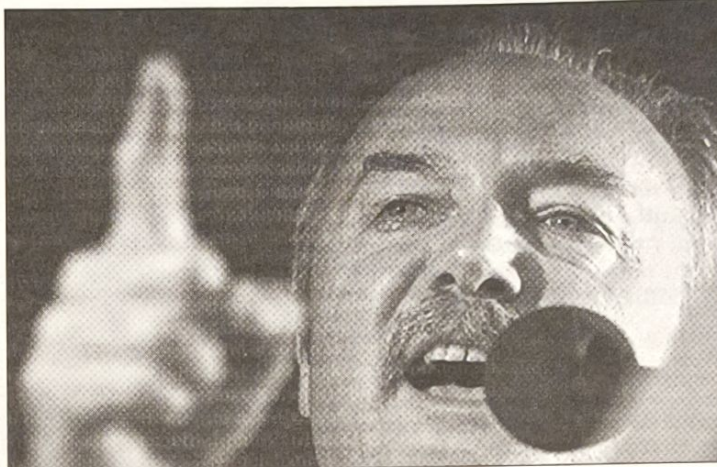
The letter was an attempt to create an alliance with Labour MPs who would not oppose a war in principle but who might be persuaded to vote against it if there was no UN agreement. The result was a fiasco. Those Old Labour MPs who might have made a difference – in particular Robin Cook and Clare Short – kept quiet. Even though they knew the war was illegal, even though they knew about dodgy dossiers and suspect intelligence, they refused to break ranks. Their belated resignation from the government came not through a sudden discovery of political principle, but personal pique – and it made no political difference. The war had already happened, the movement had been defeated. The left had proved incapable of building the mass opposition to the war into a force that would make British imperialism participation impossible. The Labour government was able to shrug off the challenge.

The results of the US-British invasion and the subsequent occupation of Iraq include tens of thousands dead. Blair has been shameless in his defence of the war, arguing that pre-emptive strikes against any state that British imperialism perceives as a threat to its interests are justified and that international law should be altered to legalise any such action. But the left has learned nothing from its failure. Instead it has extended its policy of allying itself with any force to its right through the establishment of electoral coalitions with the same 'left' Labour politicians and trade union leaders who have been on their platforms since before the war began.

Respect

Since we assessed Respect in FRFI 177 the coalition has been organising conventions to select candidates for local and European elections. The turnout for these conventions has been poor – in line with the attendance on 20 March. The Northwest 'Convention of the Left' in Manchester attracted 250 – less than half that anticipated. In Liverpool there were 50, in Brighton 80, and in Nottingham 60. 130 attended the All-London Convention. Such figures are not indicative of something new; they are not consistent with new forces being drawn into political activity. Those attending have been the same tired old forces that tried to build the Socialist Alliance – and which then ditched it when they found it was going nowhere.

The politics of Respect are old and tired as well. At its founding convention, the desire to play the electoral game was clear to see as 'respectable' politics overcame political principle. Amongst amendments that were debated and lost was a call for the abolition of the monarchy and opposition to immigration controls. In the debate on immigration controls, a leading SWP member argued that



whilst his organisation is 'in abstract and principle in favour of this, it is too advanced for the ordinary people we are trying to win, they would not understand it'. Instead Respect should focus on defending refugees from deportation – but even then only on a case by case basis.

The Anti-Nazi League

The SWP took this standpoint on immigration controls when it set up the Anti Nazi League (ANL) in the mid-1970s. Then too they voted down calls for opposition to immigration controls because that was the view of their left Labour MP allies of the time such as Sid Bidwell, Neil Kinnock, Peter Hain and Tony Benn. Sid Bidwell, a prominent 'left' MP of the time, had declared in relation to immigration 'there is sometimes a case for severe restrictions on entry'. He also signed a racist Select Committee Report calling for stricter controls on immigration from the Indian sub-continent. When a motion was put at its founding conference arguing that the ANL 'rejects the view that harmonious race relations can be constructed on the basis of immigration acts', ANL convenor Paul Holborow of the SWP responded: 'The ANL is too important to drive back into the straitjacket the majority of us have come from.' By focusing its attention on the major fascist organisation of the time, the National Front, the ANL covered up for the virulent racism of the 1974-79 Labour government, a government which defended apartheid South

Africa, used death squads against Irish Republicans, and sanctioned vicious police attacks on black and Asian people. Whilst the left called for a Labour vote in June 1979, many black and Irish people, fed up with Labour's racism and imperialism, abstained. In November 1979, a demonstration of 20,000 Asian workers booed Tony Benn when he tried to defend the record of the government of which he had been a part.

Fighting fascism?

Fast forward 25 years and the same arguments are being trotted out again. Once more the left are inflating the danger that the fascists present in order to preserve an alliance with the Labour left. Respect is only standing in the European and Greater London elections where, as George Galloway put it, 'there is no threat of a Tory victory'. On 13 March, the SWP and its allies ensured that the Socialist Alliance conference agreed that it should not stand candidates in the 10 June elections without the permission of Respect. This opens up the possibility of the left calling for a Labour vote where the BNP is standing candidates. But brutal and racist though the BNP is, Labour is far more dangerous because it has at its disposal all the forces of the state: the army, police, judiciary and prisons. What is clear is that Respect will not mount a challenge to the Labour Party itself. As George Galloway put it at the Northwest Convention of Respect, 'this is where Tony Blair has taken the Labour Party, into war

against its history, against its instincts!' If Labour's 'instincts' are against war, there is no need to break from it.

The fact is that Galloway's anti-war Labour Party is a complete fiction: the Irish people know this, as do the people of Malaya, Vietnam, Indonesia and those of many other countries which have suffered at the hands of Labour. Galloway's invention is important to him however because it keeps open the possibility of a return to its ranks in the future. The left however has no excuse in endorsing this – but, far from fighting to raise the political consciousness of the movement, the left has conspired to keep it at the lowest possible level. What it has created is a movement out of which numerous placemen hope to build their political careers and where personalities count for more than politics. Such a movement will not fight Labour racism, and nor will it be able to defeat fascism.

Real politics today

The STWC and Respect are not engaged in serious politics. If we look around us and see the appalling conditions that face the people of Iraq, the inhuman treatment of the Palestinian people, the promotion of this or that personality – whether it be George Galloway or Ken Livingstone – does not represent a serious response. Imperialist states are jockeying for position, testing each other's strength. France wants to extend its influence in the Caribbean and in Asia, Britain wants to make Gaddafi its own.

Millions of people in Britain know that the Labour Party has lied to them time and time again. Their political interests will not be met through some electoral charade, but through the forging of a real alliance with millions more who are fighting back against imperialism in the rest of the world: in Nepal, Iraq, Palestine, Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba. That is why the RCG calls for the building of a real anti-imperialist movement, one which champions the interests of the oppressed – asylum seekers and those fighting state racism in Britain, one which is open and democratic, and one which above all demands an irrevocable break from Labour imperialism. ■



Stop the War demonstration, 20 March 2004

Fighting poverty pay for nurses

5,000 nursery nurses have been on all-out strike across Scotland since 1 March. Having had no pay review for 16 years, these predominantly women workers have gone into battle challenging poverty pay conditions. The nurses have a starting wage of £10,000 per year, reaching £13,800 after 10 years' service. They are fighting for a wage of £18,000 – and that is still £7,000 less than the average male wage.

In the Scottish parliament, Scottish Socialist Party MSPs put forward a motion calling for support for the nurses. Speaking to it, one of the SSP

MSPs, Caroline Leckie, said 'I appeal to many people in this chamber who have a trade union history and support...all members know full well the duty of solidarity.' 70 Labour MSPs demonstrated their sense of solidarity by voting down the motion; only one Labour MSP supported it. Labour not only is the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, it runs the majority of local councils and has stuffed the employer's organisation – the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – with its supporters. Labour supports poverty pay for nurses.

The campaign in support of the nurses needs to take on the Labour Party directly – it cannot be limited to the basics of organising picket lines and fund raising. 'Go out to the people' was the slogan that FRFI adopted during the historic miners' strike. That same principle applies now to building support for the nursery nurses – and this means openly and directly challenging Labour and its role as a disgraceful employer. Wherever they are, socialists must not duck this or else they will undermine the cause of the nurses.

Michael MacGregor

Uncovering brutality in segregation units

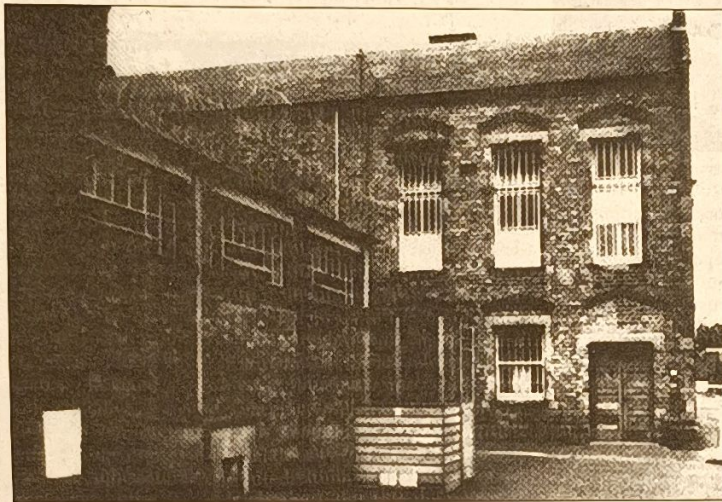
Towards the end of last year, I wrote in FRFI saying that, to my surprise, *The Guardian* newspaper had made me its prisons correspondent. Since then, some of you may have wondered what I've been getting up to. Well, here's a half-term report.

I write regularly for the paper. Some pieces have been highly critical of the Prison Service, in others I have focused on improvements. For example, I wrote a piece saying that the Scrubs was turning itself around from the cesspit that it had been. The staff there are on a charm offensive following the revelations of long-term brutality and torture, meted out by staff in the 1990s.

However, all the time, I've been looking out for the nasties in the system: 'to shine a light on the cockroaches' as a pal put it. But of course, it's not enough to *know* that staff brutality, racism and constant harassment still flourish in prisons; it's necessary to provide evidence or, failing that, enough allegations to make them take notice.

For more than 10 years, tales of brutality and oppression have been filtering out of Full Sutton. By the time you read this, *The Guardian* should have run a story on the place. Some of the evidence looks solid and difficult for them to explain away. The more evidence we can produce, the sooner we can stop these uniformed thugs in their tracks.

Therefore, if anyone has suffered, or witnessed suffering, at the hands of staff at Full Sutton, or any other prison, contact me and/or FRFI. Please remember the information must be accurate; the behaviour of some of these so-called officers is appalling enough, there is no need for embellishment. Please include the name of your solicitor if you have one and give your brief the authority to speak to me about the matter in hand. Finally, please state whether or not you want your name to be used.



In particular, if anybody has any information on the recent deaths of two prisoners in Full Sutton, please pass it on to me as a matter of urgency. The men were: Paul Gaye: taken on 28 January from a vulnerable prisoners' wing to York District Hospital, where he subsequently died. Then, on 12 March, Arif Hussain collapsed in his cell in the segregation unit. He was pronounced dead at 8.45 am. He had been taken to the seg following a visit during which he was said to have received and swallowed drugs. Prisoners in the seg have given us graphic accounts of how he was kept in a cell with no water, where the bag inside him burst and he cried and screamed out for help but was ignored, ridiculed and eventually died a horrific death.

I thank these prisoners for their courage in speaking out. In cases where the men have given their permission, their names have been passed on to the Humberside coroner and to the police, who are investigating both deaths. As much as it will go against the grain for many prisoners to speak to the police, the fact is that it must be done if we are serious about stopping this treatment. (You can ask to have your solicitor present when you speak to them.) Certainly, the Prison Service will not properly investigate that which is going on under their noses.

Eric Allison
The Guardian, 164 Deansgate,
Manchester M3 3GG

Eric Allison was joint author of *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, available from Larkin Publications at a special price of £5 plus p+p.

Scottish prisons attack rights

In February 2004, the administration at Glenochil Prison in Stirling-shire introduced card-free phones for prisoners based on a PIN number system. The system is identical to one that has operated in English prisons since the late 1990s. There is however one critical difference.

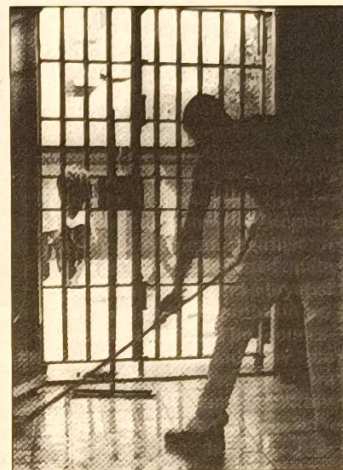
When the PIN phone system was first introduced in the English prison system, the Prison Service attempted to include a pre-recorded message at the beginning of each outgoing call. The message stated that the call was being made from a penal institution and was monitored and recorded.

An immediate legal challenge was mounted on the grounds that the pre-recorded message contravened Article 8 of The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which provides for right to respect for private and family life.

Before the legal challenge was properly heard, the English Prison Service abandoned the pre-recorded phone messages, clearly acknowledging that it was indefensible in the context of Article 8 of the ECHR.

On 9 February, the Governor of Glenochil Prison, Kate Donegan, informed prisoners that, regardless of the successful legal challenge against the pre-recorded phone message in the English Prison Service, the Scottish Prison Service had decided that it was legally empowered to use the message on phones in all Scottish prisons.

Kilmarnock Prison, operated by Premier Services, a private company, had used the pre-recorded phone message for a considerable period of time and had encountered no legal challenge, obviously encouraging the



Scottish Prison Service to use the message universally throughout the Scottish system.

On 16 February in reply to an inquiry from lawyers acting for prisoners at Glenochil, Assistant Governor Brian Ironside said the pre-recorded message was justified under the Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act and could therefore continue.

The fact is the Scottish Prison Service is currently in breach of Article 8 of The European Convention on Human Rights by its use of the pre-recorded phone message and in due course will be required to account for its actions.

In the meantime prisoners' contact with their families and friends here in Scotland is being deliberately undermined and eroded.

John Bowden, HMP Glenochil

Prisoners' Race Discrimination Unit fights for recognition

There are currently over 18,000 black and minority ethnic prisoners in this country's prisons and they are routinely treated less favourably than their white counterparts. To quote just one statistic from one prison – in March 2003 at HMP Belmarsh 83% of black prisoners were on basic regime, the lowest level of incentives compared to only 17% of white prisoners.

The Prisoners Race Discrimination Unit (PRDU) is a new national charity, designed to provide specialist advice and advocacy to prisoners with grievances and/or complaints of racial discrimination. We will assist all prisoners' irrespective of their location in England and Wales, conviction, colour, nationality, race or religious belief.

We have been obstructed in our attempts to provide this service. Individual prisons such as HMP Coldingley and Whitemoor have questioned the legal status of the PRDU in order to avoid answering questionnaires we have served on them in accordance with Section 65 of the Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976. This provides for persons who may have been discriminated against to question the respondent and obtain reasons for doing a relevant act or omitting to do a relevant act. In September 2003 we asked the Prison Service to recognise our status as a legitimate organisation working on behalf of prisoners; however, it refused to do so. On 10 February 2004 the PRDU wrote to the Prison Service, asking it to, amongst other things,

acknowledge the services that we provide.

Their response, received only after persistent telephone calls, stated: 'I am in the process of determining what authority Prison Service headquarters has to promote services offered by voluntary organisations. I am still, unfortunately, awaiting clarification of this.'

This is time wasting. A 1995 report by the Prison Service and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) says, under the heading 'Links with Outside Agencies': 'All establishments should secure membership of the RRMT [Race Relations Management Team] by a representative of the local/nearest REC [Race Equality Council] and/or other local ethnic minority/racial equality organisations'. The PRDU is unmistakably a racial equality organisation.

The PRDU is therefore seeking a fighting fund of £20,000 to take the Prison Service to the high court to challenge continued and further breaches of section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976 (as amended). Donations can be sent to PRDU, Room 12 Winchester House, 9 Cranmer Road, London SW9 6EJ. Make cheques/postal orders payable to the: Prisoners' Race Discrimination Unit. Further information on 07956 189 622

Any lawyers or prisoners currently taking race claims against the Prison Service are also encouraged to contact the PRDU.

Felix Martin

Overcrowded prisons

On 19 March, the prison population of England and Wales was 75,065 – an increase of 2,198 on the previous year's figure. The Certified Normal Accommodation (ie the number of prisoners who can be comfortably and decently held) was 66,668 and the absolute capacity was 75,291, just 126 more prisoners than actually incarcerated.

In February the number of prisoners had already reached 74,500; the Prison Service had begun talking about using police cells and the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, was discussing measures to ensure the figure did not go above 80,000 (nearly double the number in prison ten years ago). However, according to projections, his proposals are unrealistic and the prison population is likely to rise to over 87,000.

By early March, when the number passed 75,000 for the first time ever, the Prisons Minister, Paul Goggins, announced emergency measures to create an extra 800 prison places by lowering the number of places left free to allow movement between gaols by 300, and rushing through refurbishment being done on a further 500. This was followed by the announcement that everyone would be moved out of two women's prisons to make room for more male prisoners.

New prisons being built this year will provide another 1,500 places. These will rapidly be filled. This is a crisis that is not about to go away.

Nicki Jameson

Death in custody at HMP Eastwood Park

Kerry Lambourne was 20 years of age when she died in HM Prison Eastwood Park. She had a mental illness that made her management within the prison service difficult. Evidence was heard at the inquest that a prison nurse tried to obtain external treatment for Kerry but none was available. A behavioural support plan which he drew up was not followed. A keyworker was appointed who had no training for the role. Kerry's mood lowered in the weeks leading up to her discharge and on 24 September 2000 she was found with a ligature around her neck. She was placed in special accommodation, her shoelaces were removed and she was placed on 15-minute observation. A doctor visited her the following day and wrote in the records that the risk of self-harm remained high. He instructed that the 15-minute watch should continue. Later that day Kerry was transferred to the segregation unit and the 15-minute observations were stopped and she was given back her clothes, including her shoelaces. The next day she was found in her cell having

hanged herself using her shoelaces, attached to material that had been ripped from her duvet.

The jury found that Kerry had intentionally taken her own life, in part because the risk of her doing so was not recognised and appropriate precautions were not taken to prevent her doing so.

This is the first time that a jury has followed the approach suggested in the case of *R v HM Coroner for the Western District of Somerset and Another ex parte Middleton*, 11 March 2004. This provides a jury an opportunity to reflect in their verdict any failures that they feel have a clear and direct causal connection to the death.

The coroner indicated he would be writing to the Chief Inspector of Prisons with recommendations about the documentation used to identify the level of risk that a prisoner posed to him or herself and that a watch should never be eased without a suitable case conference with a senior medical officer, an officer, governor and keyworker in attendance.

Marcia Willis Stewart,
Birnberg Peirce & Partners Solicitors

Defend the Intifada

As Israel increases its offensive against the Palestinian population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, on the streets of Britain active solidarity with the Palestinian struggle faces increasing harassment by the British state.

On 4 March FRFI/Victory to the Intifada's regular Thursday picket of Marble Arch Marks and Spencer in London, police attempted to intimidate demonstrators by taking photographs of all participants and trying to engage supporters in conversation to obtain intelligence. The police singled out an Arab regular on the picket who they surrounded and provoked, accompanied by cheers from the Zionist counter-demo. VTI demonstrators and supporters directed loud chanting against police harassment and racism and the individual was eventually allowed to return to the picket. We were again served with a notice under Section 14 of the Public Order Act (1986) with a dubious regulation attached claiming that we could not use our megaphone as this would cause disruption, threatening arrest if we did so. Legal advice revealed that such restrictions could not be enforced through Section 14; we continued.

Section 14 permits the police to impose conditions on a static demonstration that restricts its duration, location and number of participants. They do not have the power to add other restrictions. Under challenge, the Met have now told us that the Public Assembly and Anti-



Pickers outside the Marble Arch branch of Marks and Spencer

Social Behaviour Act 2003 has updated the Public Order Act. It came into force on 24 January 2004 and reduces the number of people who need to be present for Section 14 conditions to be implemented, from 20 to 2! Nonetheless it does not add extra conditions on to the 1986 Act, so the senior officer on the scene can still only impose restrictions of number, location and duration.

More intimidatory measures were attempted on 18 March. The police told the picket that we could not attach banners or placards to council property, nor to the barriers that enclose us because they are police property, and that if we used the megaphone or drums the police would confiscate them. The demonstration was loud and lively despite these restrictions; placards, banners and flags were held and suspended between two trees that evidently don't belong to the council. A week

later, and more restrictions: no table within the barriers, no selling of newspapers, no collecting of money. But they conceded our right to use a megaphone. We kept the table in place, we sold newspapers and we collected money. We do not intend to allow our right to protest to be removed by the racists of the Metropolitan Police.

In Manchester the weekly Saturday pickets of Marks and Spencer continue despite the continuing attacks from the Labour City Council. Two picketers are awaiting an appeal at the Crown Court after they were found guilty of 'affixing placards to council property' and 'obstructing the highway' (FRFI 177). Manchester VTI is holding regular meetings as part of the campaign to defend the picket and the democratic right to protest and plan to meet Lib-Dem Councillor for the City Centre, Peter Rothery, who has expressed sympathy with the

campaign. The case of the Marks and Spencer pickets will be raised in an open council meeting on 31 March in the context of defending the right to protest in Manchester City Centre. VTI has support at this meeting from an animal rights group and individuals from Stop the War Coalition also victimised by council officials.

Another very successful picket of Marks and Spencer was held in Leicester at the beginning of March. For three hours the picket was busy with local people wanting to demonstrate their support for the Palestinian people and their opposition to the Zionist occupation, with many new people joining the protest. One elderly lady argued it was time to arm the Palestinians as the only way to stop the Zionist aggression and ethnic cleansing.

Durham VTI has continued its weekly pickets of M&S, culminating in the second 'Silver St Intifada' on 6 March, a lively

day of street theatre and music, held together with members of Revolution Socialist Youth. Educational sessions on the history of Palestine have continued, developing the understanding of those involved in the campaign, whilst a well-attended night of Rebel Music raised some much-needed funds to support the campaign's development. Monthly pickets of Marks and Spencer also continue in Glasgow and Dundee where FRFI is holding regular meetings to expose imperialist violence and plunder and explore the growing resistance movements across the world.

EVENTS

LONDON

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

Dayschool on Palestine

Saturday 8 May 12-5pm followed by an evening of music, politics and poetry
Phone 020 7837 1688 for venue

Meeting on the Palestinian Intifada

Wednesday 19 May 7pm
Room H102, London School of Economics, WC2

MIDLANDS

For further details contact
07949 256 477

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

Sunday 25 April, 2pm,
Cross Street Chapel, Cross Street, City Centre, Manchester
For more information contact
manchesterfrfi@revolutionarycommunist.com or 07816 547066

Night of Rebel Music
Friday 30 April, 8pm

Jabez Clegg, Portsmouth Street,
Near Manchester University

To contact Salford University FRFI Society,
e-mail: salfordfrfi@hotmail.com

DURHAM

For information and venue details
Contact 07813 073846

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

GLASGOW

Pickets of Marks and Spencer
Saturday 17 April and
Saturday 18 May
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 7 April: The politics and
economics of globalisation

Wednesday 14 April: Racism and
imperialism

Wednesday 21 April: The 'New
World Order'

Wednesday 28 April: Imperialism
and national liberation

Wednesday 5 May: The labour
aristocracy and opportunism

Wednesday 12 May: Organisation is
necessary

Strathclyde University FRFI
society meeting

Thursday 22 April at 1pm:
Debates Chamber, Level 6,
Strathclyde University Union, John
Street, Glasgow
Film showing: 'Injustice': the fight
for justice following deaths in
police custody.

All Scotland FRFI Anti Imperialist
Forum

Saturday 3 April 11am-3pm
'Imperialism, War and Occupation'
Partick Burgh Halls Glasgow
Burgh Hall Street of 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

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

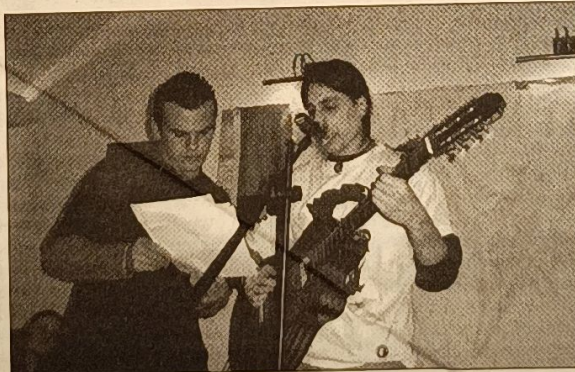
Defend the Cuban Revolution

In early February, Rock around the Blockade in London held a very successful fundraising evening with political speeches, poetry, rap, live music and video footage. We were honoured to have Manuel Rubido from the Cuban embassy in London who spoke about the Miami 5 and their struggle for justice and against the US blockade and illegal interference in Cuban affairs. A comrade recently returned from Venezuela showed a short inspiring video shot during a march and rally to celebrate the second anniversary of the successful return of Chavez after the coup. There was poetry inspired by Che Guevara, a beautiful rendition of Tracy Chapman's song *Revolution* and a Spanish singer songwriter played revolutionary songs on the guitar. Rap artists made the link between the struggle for socialism in Cuba and the struggle against racism and poverty in this country and the struggle for justice for the Palestinians.

London Rock around the Blockade members held a meeting about the FTAA and the struggles going on in Latin America to

block the advance of the FTAA. The speaker made the issues very clear by showing a map of Latin America and how the US aims to influence the continent. This meeting came just after the third Hemispheric Forum of Struggle against the FTAA held in Havana where 1,230 participants from 32 countries came together and concluded that there will be many alternatives for a better world and that the FTAA being offered by the US does nothing to benefit the people and everything to benefit the large US multinationals.

RATB members attended the North London Cuba Solidarity dayschool in March and took part in discussions. Of note was our intervention in the session about Venezuela, when too many speakers from the floor found reasons to criticise the Venezuelan situation and deny the revolutionary role of the Chavez government. As our comrade pointed out, there is no blueprint for a revolution, each situation will be different and what is happening in Venezuela is a movement being led by the oppressed in the interests of the majority. This



A fundraising evening in aid of Rock Around the Blockade

we must support.

On 10 March, the appeal hearing of the Miami 5 was heard by the Circuit Court in Miami. The Miami 5 - Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labaniño, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and Rene González - are the five Cubans arrested in 1998 on trumped-up espionage charges, sentenced to long sentences (between 15 years and life) by a politically prejudiced Miami court and dispersed to gaols around the US where they have been held for a long time

in solitary confinement. The Miami 5's only 'crime' was to maintain surveillance on the violent counter-revolutionary exile groups based in Miami and so prevent further acts of terrorism and sabotage against Cuba. Judgment on the appeal has been reserved and is not expected for several months. Rock around the Blockade will be holding events in support of the men nearer the time. In the meantime, the Miami 5 would appreciate letters of solidarity.

Write to:
Gerardo Hernandez Nordelo
#58739-004, US Penitentiary
Lompoc, 3901 Klein Boulevard,
Lompoc, CA 93436 USA

Ramon Labaniño (write to as
Luis Medina)
#58734-004, USP Beaumont, PO
Box 26030, Beaumont, Texas
77720-6035 USA

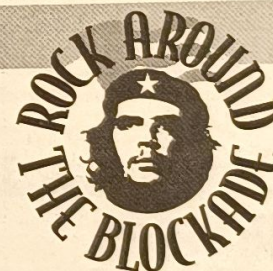
Antonio Guerrero Rodriguez
#58741-004 USP Florence, PO
Box 7500, Florence, CO 81226
USA

Fernando González Llort (write
to as Ruben Campa) #58733-
004, FCI Oxford, PO Box 1000,
Oxford WI 53952-0505 USA

Rene González
#58738-004, FCI McKean, PO
Box 8000, Bradford, PA 16701
USA.

If you are not already involved, we urge you to find out how you can help Rock around the Blockade and get involved in raising money for the Union of Young Communists for a sound system to take to Cuba in 2005 for recreational and political use, as well as helping to raise the profile of the Miami 5 at such a crucial stage of their resistance.

See box opposite for our next meeting in London. RATB members and supporters hold regular



stalls with petitioning and leafletting around the country and in London there is a fundraising social on 8 May and a club night planned for early July. To be kept up to date with news, views and information about Cuba, e-mail viva.cuba-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to join our e-group and you can receive our newsletter regularly by joining Rock around the Blockade (£10/£4/£2, cheques payable to Rock around the Blockade and sent to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX).

For more information phone 020 7837 1688 or e-mail office@ratb.org.uk

MEETING

Wednesday 21 April 7pm

60th anniversary
of the IMF and World Bank
and Cuba's resistance to
imperialist attack

Room H102, London School of
Economics, Houghton St, London WC2

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

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Return this form to: FRFI,
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Keep up the good work

Just a short note to let you know I am being transferred and to ask you to redirect any further issues of FRFI. I would also like to take this opportunity to say thank you to you all for the help and support you give to so many of us in the prison system. I always look forward to reading your paper and reading the facts about what is really going on all over the world. You are all truly unique people. Keep up the good work and thanks.

HARJINDER POONI XH1446

HMP Rye Hill, Willoughby,
Warwickshire CV23 8SZ

IN MEMORIAM

Rene Waller

3 April 1913-22 March 1999

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

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

IN MEMORIAM

June Taylor

12 June 1943-10 March 1997

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

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

Show some respect

Why don't you be a bit more positive and encourage Respect instead of sending e-mails out saying they have no hope? Agreed they may not be perfect but they basically have the right ideas and values. Why don't you try and put pressure on to try and urge for the smaller parties to merge. Just imagine if the Greens, Respect and all the small socialist parties merge to form a super-coalition – that is the only way we are going to have any say in future politics, so why don't you use your e-mail database to try and do that? Just imagine the media uproar, the publicity and the excitement of the country; that would get the 'disillusioned' interested in politics for sure.

COLIN MEINKE
colindmeinke@hotmail.com

FRFI argues that the way forward for socialists today is to build an anti-imperialist movement which gives explicit support to those fighting back against the ravages of US and British imperialism and

their allies. Such an anti-imperialist movement will also be anti-racist: it will stand in solidarity with those facing state racism in this country because they have been driven here by the economic destruction of their home country. We defend asylum seekers against the racist Labour government. We support those fighting police racism.

We would have no problem at all with Respect if it did these things. The point is that it does not. Neither Respect nor the Stop the War Coalition have taken an explicit standpoint in support of the Iraqi resistance. Respect has not taken up the cause of the Palestinian people and made clear its support for the Intifada. Stop the War does not support the Intifada. Respect, under the tutelage of the SWP, has refused to oppose immigration controls. Hence we cannot say that it has either the right ideas or the right values since they duck every critical question, the ones which would separate them from 'Old' as much as 'New' Labour.

We cannot see how a new movement will be built by the left putting its eggs into one electoral basket, a basket which is really like little more than Old Labour warmed up. Can you explain it to us? What is the mechanism? What is it about Respect that will make it succeed where Old Labour and its defenders failed in the past? Why is it making all these concessions? To be sure, George Galloway has championed the cause of the Palestinian people. Our question is, why is he not putting it at the centre of an anti-imperialist Respect? Can you explain this, since you clearly think we are missing the point?

You have been invited to our Marks and Spencer pickets. These pickets are the only regular concrete expression of any support in Britain for the Palestinian people. The rest of the left have given up on Palestine – it does nothing on the streets at all. Do you think this is good enough?

ROBERT CLOUGH
FRFI Editorial Board

Police harassment

On 20 January the British police were given new powers to stop, search and harass the public. The new powers are the first to be introduced under last year's Anti-Social Behaviour Act.

If you have ever been the victim of police stop and search the following will be all too familiar. The other night on the way home, my girlfriend and I were stopped by two officers. She was pushed to one side and the male officer began ordering me about before drawing his baton and threatening to hit me. He pushed me up against his car and searched my pockets, inside my waistband and everywhere else he saw fit. He

pulled out my wallet and took out my driving licence, writing down my address. At no point were we told why we were being searched or what they wanted.

Then the officer pulled out a wad of paper and started writing something. I asked him if he was going to arrest me for no reason. He didn't answer. Next thing I knew he was trying to hand me a piece of paper. I refused to take it without knowing what it was. My partner then took the paper from the officer and showed it to me. It said Fixed Penalty Notice and looked like a parking ticket. I had been fined £80 for disorderly behaviour under section 5 of the

Public Order Act. So this is the state of British justice: one policeman becomes accuser, judge and jury all at the same time and finds you guilty on the spot.

The small print on the back of the notice gave me two choices. Pay up within 21 days and you won't get a criminal record. If you have lots of cash you can buy your freedom. The other choice is to apply for a court date and have the case heard in front of a magistrate. If the court finds you guilty you are liable to pay a bigger fine, be liable for court costs and get a criminal record if found guilty.

I have sent of my tear-off court date request form and am awaiting my summons.

BARNABY MITCHELL
North London

No debate with the BNP

Any communist who, like me, may have considered a democratic debate with the BNP might consider the following.

Migration of populations is to a very large extent the product of imperialism and capitalism. The capitalists have long learned to use migrant labour to undermine the solidarity of the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie has always employed cheap labour to do its dirty work, both as low-pay slaves and canon fodder. They have moved populations around their

respective colonies and states of origin, from African slaves to Irish labourers. Labour is to the capitalist a raw commodity, a resource to be exploited. As communists, we presumably believe in sharing work tasks and the products of that labour. This will mean for us the collectivisation of distribution and an end to capitalist consumer products. This will mean, for example, collectivised transport and computing services. This egalitarian approach, which

reached its apex under Mao's flawed regime, would mean that economic migration, both involuntary and voluntary, would be greatly reduced. Where famines are recurrent, surplus foods would be supplied by more productive communities. For example, Europe could help feed Ethiopians and Uzbeks.

The BNP will not consider such a solution. They will see the problem in capitalist-racist terms, not economic. This will simply argue that deportation is the solution.

A COMRADE
Edinburgh

Act now for Palestine

Please turn on your TV and log on to english.aljazeera.net and every other news provider – see what Israel is doing. They're tearing up Gaza. They've killed 75 so far this month, five a couple of days ago, a seven-year-old girl yesterday and 11 people this morning. Please understand: Palestinians are not terrorists and Israel is not an innocent victim. Israel is conducting an illegal military occupation.

Hamas and Jihad actually had a self-imposed ceasefire last year and have said they will accept a two-state solution where Israel withdraws to the 1967 line. Palestinian resistance (including attacks on checkpoints, as they are military outposts) is largely legal and legitimate. If French tanks rolled into London, would you really condemn the children

as violent for throwing lumps of chalk at them? (The rocks they throw here are calcite and disintegrate on impact).

Arab TV reports things far more explicitly. They show it all – medical workers trying to save people, bodies with faces blown off, children shot in the head. Please understand the context of what is going on here. If you don't know about the occupation, find out. Try www.palsolidarity or the PSC site and follow the links.

The British government has not taken a stand against Israel and had refused to be involved in international proceedings against it. Please try to change this. Again, the websites have contact details for MPs and the media.

In the West Bank things are quieter so far. Jenin has been surrounded by the Israeli army for

a couple of days but there've been no serious incursions. There's been some tank fire at night and they've been messing up the electricity and telecoms. There was a shooting last night but people here regard that as normal. I sleep through the gunfire now. Things are worse in Nablus. They've wounded seven people already this morning and the incursions are pretty much nightly.

Israel is preventing anyone entering the Gaza Strip unless they are on a list of approved individuals from selected organisations. Protesters and aid workers cannot get in.

I've just heard the West Bank is sealed. Looks like I'm going nowhere soon.

If anyone wants to hear about the situation here (or has any media contacts who are interested) call me on 00972 66 259 217.

FAYE
West Bank, Occupied Palestine

Free Ishtiaq Ahmed

Ishtiaq Ahmed has been in prison since 1989, framed by Thames Valley police. Since the trial it has emerged that:

- One officer was disciplined for using brutality on witnesses to make them change their evidence – evidence caught on a police tape. A second officer was involved in the brutality, also caught on police tape, but was not disciplined.
- A witness, accused of offences including an axe attack, was bribed and brutalised to give false evidence against Ishtiaq. After doing so, all charges were dropped against that witness. This was also caught on video tape.
- The officer in charge of the case was caught perverting the course of justice and suspended.
- New information exists that paramedics were persuaded by police to change their evidence and lie in court.
- The officer who fabricated the principal witness evidence implicating Ishtiaq was disciplined. This new information has been disclosed after 14 years.
- The principal witness has admitted lying in court and has admitted on tape that Ishtiaq is innocent. She even named the person who had committed the crime on tape.
- Incredibly, on two occasions the Appeal Courts have agreed that although there is no reliable evidence against Ishtiaq, he should remain in prison.
- Many documents have been suppressed by the CPS with public interest immunity.

It seems as though, for the courts and legal system, being Asian is enough for the abuse against Ishtiaq to continue. If colour, race and religion are not a crime, then why is Ishtiaq still in prison? Justice, where are you?

Support our fight against injustice. Help us ask the Home Office why Ishtiaq, an innocent man, is still in prison after all these years. For more information contact Mr Imran, c/o Richard Leatham, Rowberry Morris Solicitors, 17 Castle Street, Reading. Tel (0118) 9585611.

JUSTICE FOR ISHTIAQ AHMED
FOUNDATION

LONDON SOCIALIST FILM CO-OP

Sunday 18 April

El Norte (The North)

Gregory Nava, US/Guatemala 1983
Followed by discussion led by
Len McClusky, National Secretary
of the TGWU

Sunday 16 May

Life and Debt

Stephanie Black, US/Jamaica 2001

The Tobin Tax

Anita Hodgson, GB, 2002
Followed by discussion led by Dr Derek
Boyd of University of East London and
David Hillman of War on Want

Both screenings 10.30am for 11am at
Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square,
London WC1 (nearest tube Russell
Square). Not wheelchair accessible.
Admission: £6/£4 concessions.
Membership £2.

Justice for UK detainees

Belmarsh prison is

Britain's Guantanamo

Sunday 4 April 12 noon-2pm
Protest against the interments at
Belmarsh prison. For information
call Estella 020 7586 5892

Annual James Connolly/ Bobby Sands march

Saturday 15 May, central London
Organised by Wolfe Tone Society.
Tel: 020 8442 8778 e-mail:
wts@brosna.demon.co.uk

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!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 020 7837 1688. Website:
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**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Blunkettwatch

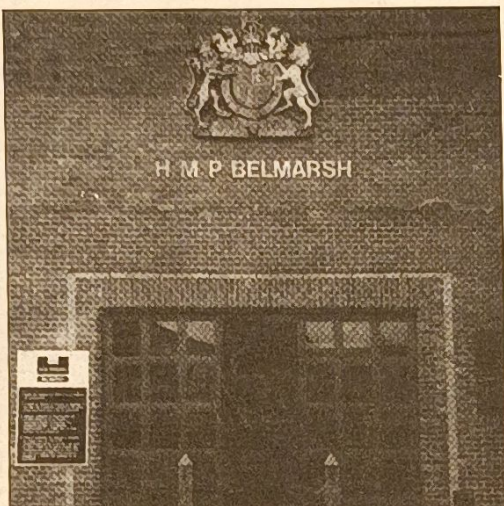
Anti-terrorism

In February Blunkett announced a new plan to 'pre-empt' terrorist attack by extending the provisions of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA), rushed in following 11 September 2001.

ATCSA meant that Britain opted out of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which outlaws imprisonment without trial, in order to implement indefinite detention for foreign nationals suspected of terrorist activity. Twelve men remain interned in Belmarsh and Woodhill prisons without charge or trial, despite a ruling by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) that one should be freed because he has become severely mentally ill as a result of his imprisonment. The secretive SIAC tribunals are constructed as to be strongly weighted in favour of the government, yet even so SIAC also ruled that another man should be released because the evidence against him was 'wholly unreliable and should not have been used to justify detention'. The Home Secretary appealed unsuccessfully and the man has now been freed. Prior to the appeal, Sir Brian Barber, a lay member of SIAC, resigned in protest at Blunkett's behaviour and at earlier court judgments giving him 'such wide discretion as to make his powers virtually unaccountable'.

The latest proposals go even further and include possible internment for British citizens as well as foreign nationals. Any trials will be in camera without a jury, with M15-approved judges and heavy vetting of defence lawyers.

All this is virtually certain to become law, particularly following the attack on Madrid; however the publicity surrounding the announcement of the proposals followed a predictable pattern, with the most contentious element widely publi-



cised, attacked by civil liberties groups and then withdrawn, leaving the remainder of the proposals intact. (See FRFI 177 on Civil Contingencies Bill.) Controversy centred on the suggestion that the standard of proof required in a criminal trial would be reduced from 'beyond reasonable doubt' to 'on the balance of probabilities'. It is important that the standard of proof has not been weakened, but in a context where detention with no trial is firmly on the agenda, the victory may be a Pyrrhic one.

Asylum seekers and immigrants

The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Bill was passed to the House of Lords on 3 March 2004. Its measures include:

- a new criminal offence of arriving in the UK without valid immigration documentation
- additional powers to arrest, enter, search, seize documents and take fingerprints for immigration officers, whose powers are already extensive
- electronic monitoring of people subject to immigration control
- a requirement for carriers to pro-

vide documents on passengers to immigration officers

- the power for immigration officers to cancel leave to enter the country if the purpose of entry is different to that stated.

The most talked-up part of this Bill was, however, the proposal to 'unify the immigration and appeals system into a single-tier appeal Tribunal with no right of appeal from, nor statutory review of, the Tribunal's decision by the higher courts'. The story of Jacqueline and Thelma Konan (see separate article) graphically illustrates the importance for asylum seekers of appeal and review procedures. For now, a deal has been stitched up by the Lord Chancellor to amend the Bill and head off confrontation between the state and judiciary, but this clash is certain to resurface.

Blunkett and Blair have also made it clear that within the European Union movement is a two-tier affair, with more freedom for the citizens of richer nations. Measures are being introduced so that anyone from the poorer states in Eastern Europe that have recently joined the EU must obtain a 'worker's registration certi-

cate' and prove they can support themselves prior to coming to Britain. They cannot simply come here, like other EU citizens, with the aim of seeking work on arrival.

Attacking the youth

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act came into force on 20 January. Most of its measures are designed to introduce yet more repression of the working class, particularly the young, to criminalise entire communities and to give greater powers to a larger and more all-pervasive policing force, which consists of not just ordinary police officers, but private security street wardens. These wardens can now give on-the-spot fines for offences such as riding a bicycle on the pavement (£30), being drunk and disorderly (£40) or buying alcohol for a minor (£40).

If the police or street wardens have 'reasonable grounds for believing that any members of the public have been intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed as a result of the presence or behaviour of groups of two or more persons in public places' and that 'anti-social behaviour is a significant and persistent problem in

the relevant locality', they have the power to then disperse any group of people from the area. The actual group assembled does not have to have actually done any intimidating; the 'constable in uniform' just has to have 'reasonable grounds' to believe their presence will do.

Inhumanity

Surpassing even the usual inhumanity of this government, David Blunkett has appealed to the High Court against the outcome of a judicial review won last year by freed framed prisoner Michael O'Brien. Michael, who was wrongly imprisoned for 11 years for the murder of a Cardiff newsagent, challenged the sick policy whereby framed prisoners released on appeal and awarded compensation are then asked to repay some of it to cover the cost of their keep while in prison. This is the stuff of those once futuristic films in which dissidents are tortured and charged for the electricity.

If Blunkett and the government lose this appeal, they have indicated that they will appeal to the House of Lords. Of course, using all the various channels of appeal open to you is fine when you are Home Secretary. ■

Konan and the barbarians

A High Court judge has condemned the Home Secretary's unlawful detention of one-year-old Thelma Konan and her mother Jacqueline.

Mrs Konan fled Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, in February 2001 after police came to arrest her for a second time, due to her involvement with the opposition Republican Assembly party (RDR). In October 2000 the RDR had been excluded from presidential and legislative elections and in January 2001, following political unrest, Jacqueline Konan was arrested and detained for three days in conditions the high court accepted 'were singularly unpleasant'. She was released when it was realised she was pregnant, but on 27 January she learnt gendarmes had come to her home to rearrest her. This led to her decision to flee the country with a false French passport which she posted back to the owner as agreed. She claimed asylum in Britain five days later. On 18 April 2001 she gave birth to Thelma, whose father, Theodule Duranty, was a French national living in Britain.

A few days before Jacqueline's asylum hearing in June she learnt that a relative, Captain Fabien Coulibaly, had been arrested, accused of plotting a coup. Her claim was re-

jected by the Home Office, which didn't believe that membership of an opposition party could lead to persecution, that the father of the child was Duranty or that he was French.

In November Jacqueline's appeal was dismissed. The adjudicator thought her account of the arrest of Coulibaly 'too vague', the account of gendarmes coming to her house was fabricated to 'enhance her claim' and her use of a false passport 'indicated a degree of planning coupled with a determination to enter the UK dishonestly inconsistent with a genuine need for protection from persecution.'

Jacqueline's solicitor wrote to the Home Office enclosing a letter from her mother, dated 5 March 2002, which said that Jacqueline's life would be in danger were she to return. A fresh claim for asylum was made. The Home Office ignored this letter, on the grounds it was in French and a translation not provided, and did not accept that a fresh claim had been made. On 10 June 2002 the Konans were detained 'on the grounds that their removal from the UK was imminent'.

A judicial review was lodged on 24 June. Although the initial deten-

tion was lawful, its continuance for six months after the lodging of that application contravened Articles 5 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as the Immigration Service's own Operational Enforcement manual.

Thelma's health suffered while incarcerated at Harmondsworth Detention Centre and they were moved to the only other centre that could accommodate families: Dungavel, Scotland. A bail application was refused on 4 September. On 25 September another fresh claim was submitted after Captain Coulibaly was assassinated. Konan's solicitors wrote 'the country is being plunged into civil war... opposition members are being killed in Abidjan and other cities by gendarmes loyal to the government.' The Home Office 'was not persuaded' and bail was again refused.

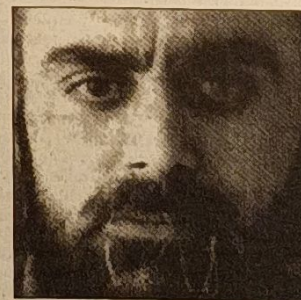
In November 2002, after Jacqueline had featured on the BBC's Woman's Hour, and Lord Avebury had written to the Home Office, confirming the story of Coulibaly and the 'existence and status' of Duranty, Immigration Minister Beverly Hughes finally accepted that they did exist and that there was an attempted coup on 19 September. However, she

insisted that Jacqueline had fabricated the relationship between her and Coulibaly as 'information relating to...[his] death [is] widely available on the internet'. These websites must have crashed on 14 October, when Hughes had been 'not persuaded' about their existence. On 23 December 2002 an adjudicator finally granted bail, with the Home Office still objecting. By May

2003, the Home Office had accepted the human rights claims and that a fresh asylum claim had been made, which if rejected, would attract a fresh right of appeal, and agreed to pay costs. The government now accepted that the relationship with Duranty was true, and hence that three-year-old Thelma had rights of entry and residence and could stay in the UK with her father. Jacqueline's new asylum claim was then refused, but in October 2003 her appeal was granted. Damages will now be awarded.

Charles Chinweizu

Kurds' desperate fight against deportation



Farooq Haidari

Labour's racist immigration policies have driven three Kurdish asylum seekers fleeing persecution in Iran to take desperate measures. Farooq Haidari, Fariborz Gravindi and Mokhtar Haydari went on hungerstrike in Glasgow on 19 February, sewing up their lips to show their determination to die rather than be deported. The Scottish Executive refused to intervene to put pressure on an indifferent Home Office. The men ended their hungerstrike on 18 March but have vowed to fight on. All three are clear they face death if returned to Iran. 'Definitely killed', said Farooq Haidari. 'We came from persecution, prison and torture. There is no chance to go back.'